

# **FM RADIO REVOLUTION IN PAKISTAN**

A case study - By Dr. Ahsan Akhtar Naz\*

## **Abstract**

### **Introduction**

Pakistani society is shifting towards change. Media is playing a vital role in this social change. In this regard, FM channels are being considered as more effective medium. These channels are running under the control of Pakistani Government.

Now, these are spreading far and wide from metropolitans to towns. Due to this mass acceptance, these channels are acting as leverage of media revolution.

The government regulatory authority PEMRA is regulating these channels. PEMRA has issued many licenses to cross media groups, businessmen, advertising agencies, public universities, etc.

This analysis is about the popularity of these channels and examines the quality of different programs. This covers maximally the quality of different programs. Covering maximum aspects of FM radio channels in Pakistan as well as focusing on the freedom of information and public right to know. Some details of PEMRA's efficiency in four years have also been discussed. The relevant bodies can improve the role of these FM channels. A task is also added for previous, about FM channels in Lahore .

### **Introduction**

Social scientists are feeling that Pakistani society is converting into information society, gradually. The majority of Pakistani population is economically poor .The governments have not paid proper attention towards education. As a result, they can't gain education properly. Despite all these things, the Pakistani society is in process of change slowly, because media is influencing on it. Like other low literate societies of world, the radio's role in Pakistani society is also very significant. Radio's role as an effective source of information, education and entertainment is always acknowledged in this country .For time being, TV was replaced in urban areas but recent FM radio channels boom proved to be the resurgence of radio in Pakistan . So, there is immense need to study this valuable and effective contribution of FM radio channels.

Method (A case study)

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### **What is FM?**

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The majority of people don't know about the specification of FM radio. Richard Weiner explains:

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"FM (frequency modulation) means the encoding of carrier waves, such as the sound wave or audio signals of a radio or TV stations, by the variation-modulating-of its frequency resulting in little or no static and high fidelity of original sound in reception. FM radio stations, from 88 to 108 megahertz, in the VHF Band (30-300 MHz) produce reception superior to that of AM or amplitude modulation stations, particularly of music in the high frequency range." 1

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### **History**

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#### **A historian says:**

"Frequency Modulation (FM) was first introduced in the 1930s but languished until 1960s, because few radio sets could receive FM and few homes had high fidelity sound systems that could take advantage of FM's improved sound quality. Most of the FM stations simulcast the same material broadcast on AM, and the same companies as AM stations owned FM stations. FM began to develop faster after the Frequency Control Commission (FCC) Limited AM /half of the American radio audience listens to FM programs. There are about 7,700 FM stations in the United states ."2

#### **Another information is:**

"There are 5,591 commercial FM stations and 1,961 non commercial FM stations." 3

It means, there are two radios for every person in the United States . The industry, as whole, sells more than 11 billions dollar per year of ad time (Broadcasting & Cable yearbook 1997).

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### **IT'S USAGE**

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The early FM stations were devoted mostly to classical music and required special FM sets. Today most radio sets have AM and FM bands and over simulating.

In 1963, FM station owners were stimulated to develop new formats to compete with existing AM stations.

In 1960,s changes in the radio industry and its audience led to the eventual development of FM radio as a successful commercial medium. Radio continued to grow, along with the boom in pop music. AM license were becoming difficult and expensive to obtain, whereas, licenses for FM stations were much easier to obtain. 4

According to another described history of FM radio channels in the United States :

"FM came about as a result of the work begun in 1923 by inventor and innovator Edwin Armstrong. By 1935, Armstrong demonstrating his technology, as well as stereo radio, to his financial benefactor, David Sarnoff. But RCA rejected this potential competitor to its AM domain to focus on television instead. So, Armstrong turned to GE, and together they put the first FM radio station, W 2XMN, on the air in 1939. The war interrupted diffusion of FM, however, and at the end of the war, the FCC rededicated the part of the broadcast spectrum that had been used for FM to the hot new medium-television. This effectively rendered half million existing FM radio useless. FM was slow to recover.

In 1961, in an attempt to help FM compete more strongly with AM, the FCC approved FM stereo broadcasts.

In 1962,it imposed a partial freeze on the allocation of new AM licenses, making the freeze permanent in 1968.And from 1963 to 1967 to FCC put this 'no duplication rule' into action. Until that time, most FMs were part of AM/FM combos, wherein two stations simultaneously broadcast identical content. The AM licensees were content just to keep the FM stations out of the hand of potential competitors.

Under the no duplication rules, holders of an AM and an FM license in the same market were forced to broadcast different content at least 50% of the time. The AMs were already successful, so the content was changed on the FMs, typically to rock and roll, which attracted a growing audience of portable transistor radio's listeners. In 1945, there were 50 FM stations on air, in 1960 there were 785, in 1965 there were 1,300.By the mid-1970s FM had 70% of the audience and 70% of radio ad revenues. Today more than 75% of the total radio audience listens to FM radio. 5

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### **FM Radio channels in Pakistan**

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Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) started first set up of FM as 'FM Gold' in 1994.PBC used its own studios and staff for FM Gold. In Lahore , Karachi and Islamabad from 7:00 AM till 1:00 PM. as experimental transmissions. After this, in 1996, PBC started FM 101, as an independent FM channel. In private sector, FM radio channels were introduced in second regime of the Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto (1993-1997).

According to David page et al.

"A similar lack of transparency also surrounded the award during Benazir Bhutto's second administration of contracts for Pay-TV and commercial FM radio to Javed Pasha, a friend of the Prime Minister's husband (Asif Zardari). In 1995, the contract to establish the country's first commercial FM stations in Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore was awarded to Mr. Pasha without any tendering process or legislative enactment. All these contracts were challenged in Pakistani courts, though for many years no judgment was given in any of these cases." 6

President Farooq Leghari promulgated the Electronic Media Regulatory Authority Ordinance just before the February 1997 elections. This ordinance, known as EMRA, offered a much more liberal future for the electronic media in that it made the award of licenses for broadcasting the prerogative of a new authority chaired by a retired judge of the Supreme Court, with a majority of government members. 7

The ordinance also struck a liberal note in its declared objective to enlarge the choice available to the people of Pakistan in the media for news, current affairs, religious knowledge, art, culture, science, technology, economic development, social sector concerns, music, sports, drama and other subjects of public and national interest. But practically, the government of Pakistan did not allow transmitting news and current affairs programs to any private radio channel.

Soon afterward, General Pervez Musharraf, the President of Pakistan, promulgated Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) Ordinance, 2002 with some amendments. The main objective was described in PEMRA's first report in 2002 that:

".....What we needed was a homemade model that conformed to our own people's socio-cultural conditions, their sensitivities, their tastes and preferences, their felt needs and above all, our national imperatives." 8

An independent corporate body namely PEMRA has been established with effect from 1 st March, 2002 in order to:

- "1- Improve the standard of information, education and entertainment.
- 2- Enlarge the choice available to the people of Pakistan in the media for news, current affairs, religious knowledge, art, culture, science, technology, economic development, social sector concerns, music, sports, drama and other subjects of public and national interest.
- 3- Facilitate the devolution of responsibility and power to the grass roots improving the access of the people to mass media at the local and community level.
- 4- Ensure accountability, transparency and good governance of optimizing the free flow of information." 9

These are four objectives of PEMRA. In its ordinance's article 18(1) this was mentioned under the topic of "Prohibition of Broadcasts" that:

"18(1) The Authority, or an officer so authorized by the authority, may, giving reasons in writing, prohibit any broadcaster from re-broadcasting or re-broadcasting any programming,

if the Authority, or as the case may be the officers is of the opinion than such particular program is likely to create hatred among the people or is prejudicial to the maintenance law and order or is likely to disturb peace and tranquility or endangers national security or is violator of the terms and conditions of the license." 10

These are ethical responsibilities of license holder. If he/she will violate, PEMRA has power to suspend or cancel the license.

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### **The Listener ship of FM Radio channels in Pakistan**

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After the start of FM radio channels, various types of research have been conducted to analyze the effects of these channels on Pakistani society.

According to a research, FM 100 increased the radio listening habit in Lahore from 40.45% to 82.02% in 1998, during its first three years of transmission. FM 100 has gained immense popularity in a short span of time in the major cities of Pakistan i.e. Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi and Islamabad as it provides services in these cities .In Pakistan, the music played, the dialogue and language used by the DJs (disk jockeys) the conversation between call and show hosts. 11

#### **According to Gallup Survey of Pakistan :**

FM 100 was more popular channel among the metro FM listeners. Among the listeners nearly 86% said they listen to FM 100. In cities, towns and villages within the transmission reach of FM 100 Islamabad, FM 100 was the most preferred channel among the FM listeners. 12

A research reveals the percentage of FM 100's listener ship; in 1995 this was 90%, in 1996-88%, in 1997-75%, in 1998-86%, in 1999-90%, in 2000-87%, in 2001-68%, in 2002-85%. 13

On this basis of its popularity FM 100 competed with alien culture successfully and promoted a qualitative national music in masses. In its popularity, some other characteristics were also involved like easy tuning system, listeners oriented programs, access to all classes of society, listeners participation during programs, 24 hours transmissions, multi types of musical programs, modern and innovative styles of anchor persons etc. According to majority listener's opinion, FM 100 is a trendsetter radio channel in FM revolution in Pakistan .

But with the passage of time, many new FM channels have participated in this process.

Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC)'s FM channel 101 was started on FM 100's style on 1 st Oct, 1998 . This channel captured the listener ship of FM 100 to some extent.

This was suggested in a research thesis that for the improvement, FM 101 should transmit its programs 24 hours, more educational programs, live calls should be increased, sound system and comparing style should be improved, young talent shows, road shows, old songs, information and religious programs should be increased. 14

Media sources believe that FM radio channels are now on the verge of transmission and these are focusing on communities and localities. These channels are now moving towards localized set-ups offering specialized services for different target audiences. For this purpose, PEMRA has issued 55 FM radio broadcast licenses till 10 th , Jan, 2005. 15

The advertising professionals are also keeping an eye the introduction of FM channels is a major break-through. These channels are very cost effective, normally coverage areas with a range of 25-30 Km and are popular for excellent noise free reception in nation wide vast areas. These channels offer much lower charges for target audience belonging to different age groups, communities, professionals and traders. 16

PEMRA has also issued FM channel licenses to public universities. University of Peshawar and University of the Punjab are running successfully their channels. Particularly, FM 104.6 of Punjab University has played very effective role for the earthquake effects in Muzaffarabad, Azad Kashmir. This role was very much appreciated by the public, the government as well as international media. This channel is being run by the Institute of Communication Studies .

Another channel FM 103 is gaining popularity among Lahore 's public. Some trends of it were very new and attractive, for them. FM 103 started to broadcast BBC's Urdu service new bulletins. The anchorperson's accent and style was more localized. The caller's interaction was also more frank. Beside this, violating the PEMRA's rules, FM 103 introduced to broadcast its own investigative news bulletin. These bold steps were unbearable for higher authorities. So, on 12 th November, 2004 authorities raided on the channel's office, confiscating equipment and brining transmission to a halt.

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According to a magazine's report:

“..... On November 9, the Civil Lines Police Station registered a case against five people for staging a protest demonstration and disturbing order on the premises of the government owned Punjab Institute of Cardiology (PIC) .....” 17

This case was registered the two under section 16 of the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance. This event reveals that the government's PEMRA can't afford the free flow of information against

its claims. While airwaves in Pakistan have been privatized and FM radio stations are allowed in all provinces, the Tribal Areas have been kept out of the loop and the result is that with no 'legal radio' allowed, 'illegal radio' is alive here. It has learnt that many extremist groups are running their illegal FM channels for propaganda against US and Pakistani forces in the Tribal Areas Pakistani Government can't control them.

### **Conclusion**

This in detail account of FM radio's revolution reveals during next four years that in near future, further channels would be started. This development is very hopeful. In different towns and cities, these channels would be provided maximum communication facilities, guidance and entertainment to common public. These channels will upgrade the taste of low literate and illiterate people of Pakistan .

### **Suggestions**

- PEMRA should encourage new FM radio channels to minimize bureaucratic complications.
  - PEMRA should allow broadcasting local news bulletin to town based FM channels.
  - The license holders should strictly follow the rules and regulations of PEMRA.
- The license holders should set the agenda of FM radio programs for Islamic moral teachings, patriotism, social welfare and guidance.
  - The advertisers should pay more attention towards FM channels to establish them economically.
  - The listeners should record their feedback regularly about FM programs.

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