

COMMUNICATION CRITERIA FOR TOPIC SELECTION IN RADIO JOURNALISM AND THE MANIFESTATION OF JOURNALIST'S SKILL

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Abstract. *This paper examines the communication criteria that guide topic selection in radio journalism and how a journalist's professional skill is demonstrated through this process. Radio, as an auditory medium, imposes unique constraints and opportunities: no visual support, real-time delivery, and a direct emotional bond with the listener. Therefore, choosing a topic is not merely an editorial decision but a communicative act that determines whether the message reaches, engages, and influences the audience. The study identifies four core communication criteria: relevance to the target audience's needs and interests, timeliness and urgency, compatibility with the audio format (clarity, rhythm, emotional tone), and ethical suitability (avoiding harm, respecting privacy). Each criterion demands specific journalistic skills – audience analysis, news judgment, audio storytelling techniques, and moral reasoning. The paper also shows that a skilled radio journalist does not simply pick any interesting topic but transforms ordinary subjects into compelling auditory narratives through sound design, pacing, and direct address. The conclusion offers practical recommendations for training radio journalists and evaluating their topic selection competence.*

Keywords: *radio journalism, topic selection, communication criteria, journalist skill, audience orientation, audio storytelling, news values, ethical reasoning.*

Introduction. Radio has survived the rise of television, the internet, and podcasting. Its resilience stems from a unique communicative feature: intimacy. Unlike any other medium, radio speaks directly to the individual in private spaces – car, kitchen, workplace, bedroom. The listener imagines a one-to-one conversation, even though millions may be tuned in. This intimacy places a heavy burden on the journalist. Every word, every pause, every intonation carries meaning. And the first, most crucial decision that shapes this intimate encounter is the choice of topic [1].

Choosing a topic for a radio story is fundamentally different from selecting a subject for a printed article or a television segment. In print, the reader can re-read, skip, or pause. In television, visuals can compensate for weak narrative. But radio has no second chance. If the topic does not capture the listener's attention in the first few seconds, the dial turns. Moreover, radio's temporal linearity means that the audience cannot easily go back. Thus, topic selection in radio journalism is not a routine editorial step; it is a strategic communication act that directly determines the effectiveness of the entire broadcast [2].

Communication criteria refer to the standards and principles that help a journalist evaluate potential topics from the perspective of how well they will be received, understood, and remembered by the listening audience. These criteria go beyond traditional news values (such as impact, novelty, or proximity). They incorporate the auditory nature of radio, the psychological state of the listener, and the practical constraints of time and sound. A topic that works perfectly for a newspaper may fail completely on radio because it lacks aural texture, requires visual explanation, or demands too much cognitive effort from a passive listener [3].

At the same time, the journalist's skill is most visible in the topic selection phase. An inexperienced reporter might choose a topic that is worthy but dull, or sensational but irrelevant. A skilled radio journalist knows how to find the audible angle, the human story behind the statistics, the emotional hook that pulls the listener through the narrative. Skill manifests not only in picking the right topic but also in shaping it – breaking it into digestible segments, anticipating listener questions, weaving sound bites, and matching the tone to the time of day and the station's identity [4].

This paper has two objectives. First, to define and explain the key communication criteria that should guide topic selection in radio journalism. Second, to show how these criteria require specific professional skills and how a journalist's mastery becomes evident in the process. The methodology includes a review of radio production literature, analysis of exemplary radio programmes (BBC, NPR, Deutsche Welle, and Uzbek national radio), and insights from interviews with experienced radio editors. The main part first elaborates the four communication criteria, then discusses the corresponding journalistic skills, and finally illustrates how skill manifests through examples. The conclusion offers training recommendations.

Main Part. Communication criteria for topic selection. Four criteria stand out as particularly relevant for radio journalism. The first is listener relevance. Radio audiences are not passive containers; they are active individuals with specific needs, worries, and daily rhythms. A topic is relevant if it addresses a question the listener is already asking, solves a practical problem, or speaks to an emotional state. For morning drive-time programmes, topics about traffic, weather, and quick news updates work best. For midday shows, deeper features or interviews on health, family, or work issues attract listeners. For evening broadcasts, cultural and analytical content suits a reflective mood. Relevance also varies by station format – news radio, music radio with talk segments, community radio, or educational radio. Skilled journalists research their audience through call-ins, social media feedback, and audience surveys. They do not assume that what interests them will interest the listener [5].

The second criterion is timeliness and urgency. Radio is a medium of “now.” Even recorded features are experienced as immediate. Therefore, a topic must have a clear reason to be aired today rather than tomorrow or next week. This does not mean all topics must be breaking news. A historical anniversary, a seasonal change, or a newly released report can also be timely. The journalist's skill lies in finding the “news peg” – the current event or date that makes the topic feel urgent. For example, a feature on mental health can be pegged to World Mental Health Day or to a recent study. Without a peg, the same content sounds random and loses impact. Radio journalists cultivate a constant awareness of the calendar and the news cycle, always asking “why now?” [6].

The third criterion is audio compatibility. A topic must be expressible through sound alone. Not every story works on radio. Topics that rely heavily on visual details (e.g., a painting's colours, a sports play's choreography) or on complex numerical tables are difficult to translate. However, a skilled journalist can find audio substitutes – the sound of a painter's brush, the roar of a stadium crowd, a narrated graph. More importantly, a topic should have “sonic texture” – natural sounds, human voices with emotion, places with distinctive acoustics. Topics that offer interviews, ambient recordings, or archival audio are radio-friendly. Conversely, abstract policy debates with no human voices or concrete sounds risk becoming boring. The criterion of audio compatibility pushes journalists to think not only about what they will say but also about what listeners will

hear. This requires audio literacy – the ability to imagine a story in sound before recording begins [7].

The fourth criterion is ethical suitability. Radio’s intimacy amplifies both positive and negative messages. A topic that humiliates an individual, invades privacy without justification, or spreads panic can cause disproportionate harm. Moreover, radio can reach vulnerable listeners (children in the car, elderly people at home) who may not have a chance to change the channel quickly. Therefore, journalists must apply a heightened ethical filter when selecting topics. The criterion includes asking: does the topic respect the dignity of people involved? Does it avoid gratuitous graphic details? Could it trigger distress for trauma survivors? If a topic fails this criterion, no amount of newsworthiness justifies it. Skilled journalists learn to replace harmful frames with constructive angles – for example, reporting on a suicide prevention hotline instead of describing suicide methods. Ethical suitability is not censorship; it is responsible communication [8].

Manifestation of journalist’s skill. Having defined the criteria, we now examine how skill manifests in applying them. Skill in listener relevance shows through a journalist’s ability to anticipate audience questions. A novice might present a story about a new tax law by reading official statements. A skilled journalist would start with a concrete example: “Imagine you earn five million sums a month. Next month, you will have forty thousand sums less in your pocket. Here is why...” Skill manifests in the choice of angle, the language level (simple, clear, conversational), and the use of analogies from daily life.

Skill in timeliness manifests through speed and accuracy. A skilled radio journalist can produce a timely piece within hours while still verifying facts. They have a network of sources ready, pre-recorded “evergreen” content that can be updated quickly, and the ability to write for the ear under deadline pressure. Moreover, they know when to delay – if information is incomplete, they have the courage to wait rather than broadcast speculation.

Skill in audio compatibility manifests through creative sound design. A journalist who picks a seemingly non-audible topic – say, a budget report – can add the sound of a cash register, a phone ringing (representing a taxpayer’s call), or a financial expert’s voice explaining in simple terms. The skill is in “translating” the abstract into the audible. This also involves pacing: alternating narration, actuality, and silence to give the listener breathing room. A skilled radio journalist thinks like a composer, not just a reporter.

Conclusion. Topic selection in radio journalism is far more than an editorial routine. It is a communication act that determines the success or failure of the entire broadcast. The four communication criteria – listener relevance, timeliness, audio compatibility, and ethical suitability – provide a systematic framework for evaluating potential topics. Each criterion demands specific professional skills: audience analysis, news judgment, sound design, and moral reasoning. A skilled radio journalist does not merely select topics but transforms them into auditory experiences that engage, inform, and respect the listener.

The findings have practical implications. First, radio journalism training should include dedicated modules on topic selection criteria, not just reporting and editing techniques. Second, editorial meetings should use these criteria as checklists, discussing each proposed topic against listener relevance, timeliness, audio compatibility, and ethical suitability. Third, newsroom leaders should evaluate journalists not only on the quality of their final pieces but also on their skill in choosing and framing topics.

Recommendations for further research include cross-cultural comparative studies of topic selection criteria in different radio systems (public vs. commercial, developed vs. developing countries), as well as experiments measuring how variations in topic selection affect listener retention and understanding. Additionally, as radio converges with podcasting, the criteria may evolve – longer formats allow more complex topics, but the intimacy remains.

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