

**Radio Broadcasting and New Information and Communication Technologies:  
Uses, Challenges and Prospects**

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## Introduction

Radio broadcasting, while essentially primarily European at its origin, has encountered exceptionally favourable conditions in Senegal and has thus become established over time as not only the most popular means of communication and of disseminating information, but also – due to the oral tradition of the society – the preferred medium of cultural expression among the people. Radio – originally an instrument of colonial government – subsequently came to be used in a variety of ways, gradually taking on a range of “missions” linked to different political, economic and cultural challenges integral to Senegal’s development. The need to consolidate the colonization process strengthened radio’s place at the heart of France’s overseas military-administrative apparatus, which took advantage of the strategic power of “short wave.”

Constraints related to political independence and the requirements of national development subsequently gave radio a popular foothold, thus solidifying its vital importance as a major means of informing and educating the population. In assigning it a major role within the national information system, the authorities provided radio with a unique niche left vacant by the dramatic development of a dynamic but highly elitist written press and the later introduction of television, with its overly urban orientation.

The appearance of local radio stations (private commercial stations, as well as community-based and associative stations) during the 1990s signaled profound breaks with traditional radio and with the national information system. As a result of frequency modulation (FM), broadcast and listening quality improved, producing major strides toward greater professionalism.

Above all, however, the use of new information and communication technologies (NICTs),<sup>1</sup> particularly the telephone (fixed and cellular) and multimedia computers, allowed for the emergence of more user-friendly radio and signaled the advent of greater democratization in radio communication.

Moreover, as a result of the Internet and the satellite radio broadcasting prototype, *WorldSpace*, a growing number of broadcasters have been exploring new visual media – sonic and written – in an attempt to conquer increasingly supranational “virtual communities.” With NICTs, radio, in particular, found new opportunities for expansion and broadcasting using digital and analogue media.

One of the notable consequences of the melding of NICTs and radio has been the emergence of a “new alternative communication paradigm,” a tangible symbol of the people’s desire to appropriate<sup>2</sup> a technology for disseminating information and culture – a technology with which they feel increasingly identified. Thanks to the telephone (fixed or cellular), listeners moved from being passive consumers to active participants in the new social, cultural and

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<sup>1</sup> We borrow the definition of NICTs from Alex Mucchielli (1998): “the various modern devices and applications, such as cable, satellite, the online network and telematic applications that facilitate the circulation of ideas and create a link between data and human beings.”

<sup>2</sup> Appropriation is used to mean “the capacity to access ICTs and to perpetuate their use.”

political changes unfolding before them. Another effect can be seen in the recent changes within Senegalese society – changes that testify to the gradual evolution of Senegal and its people toward the information and communication era.

The present study examines radio's use of NICTs – at various levels and through different modalities – and analyzes the impact of these different uses on the daily activities of the media, both in regard to listeners and to the role of radio technology within the information system and in Senegalese society as a whole. To this end, both documentary analysis and surveys have been utilized. In addition to academic studies, reports, press files and the testimony of experts and historians in the field of radio and ICTs, use has been made of the gray literature available at educational institutions in the field of communication. These include CESTI (Center d'Etudes des Sciences et Techniques de l'Information) at the University of Dakar, NGOs (such as ENDA) and other specialized institutions, such as the Institut Panos. In addition to recent surveys on radio and ICTs, we also conducted, between June and July 2001, a survey of RTS (Radiodiffusion et Télévision Sénégalaise), private commercial radio stations (*Sud FM*, *Walfadjiri FM*, *7 FM*, *Radio Nostalgie*, *Radio Dunya FM*, *Soxna FM*, *Diamano FM* and *Radio Energie FM*), community-based radio stations (*FM Santé Dakar*), and associative stations.<sup>3</sup> This survey examined: the extent to which stations are equipped with ICTs (fixed and mobile telephone, computers and web sites); the modalities and the degree to which ICTs are being used by these stations; the impact of these technologies on daily tasks; and, finally, the constraints stations face in using these different tools.

Radio broadcasting, itself – regarded as an ICT<sup>4</sup> and whose development shares many similarities with NICTs, particularly the Internet – is an integral part of the analysis undertaken in this study.

## **The Context: From State-Run Radio to Independent Radio**

### ***The birth and growth of radio***

As with many African nations, the beginnings of radio in Senegal are intertwined with the implementation, in 1911, of the French West African Radiotelegraph Network, which served as its foundation. This network was succeeded, in 1932, by the TSF colonial station of Dakar, which was operated by a primarily European military staff. However, this could not yet be considered “mass” broadcasting, since private use of the TSF station at the time made it inaccessible to many. At that stage, radio was, practically speaking, a system for transmitting coded messages of a strictly governmental and military nature. Thus, it met the classic profile of a technology “foreign” to Senegal and its inhabitants.

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<sup>3</sup> These are part of ARPAC: *Radio Oxy-Jeunes* (Pikine), *La Côtère FM* (Joal), *Radio Penc Mi* (Fissel), *Radio Niani FM* (Koupentoum), *Radio Jiida* (Bakel), *Radio Jeeri FM* (Keur Momar Sarr), *Radio Gaynaako FM* (Namarel) and *Radio Awagna FM* (Bignona).

<sup>4</sup> Because it is a “modern medium that facilitates the circulation of ideas and brings together people and data,” radio can also be considered to be an “information and communication technology” (ICT). See Muchielli (1998).

Radio, in the modern sense of the term, did not appear until 1939, on the eve of World War II, with the creation of the station *Radio Dakar*, which, while continuing to carry out a specialized military function, began disseminating the first news bulletins.

Until 1957, however, and despite rare productions in “vernacular languages,” there were no truly Senegalese radio stations. Radio within French West Africa – such as Radio Saint-Louis, which merely relayed dispatches emanating from the Agence France Presse (AFP) and broadcasts of Radio Paris – carried no coverage of events shaping the political life of Senegal during that period. Moreover, the few radios available on the market were sold on a preferential basis to heads of provinces and private advisers to the governor.

Thus, one can see initial similarities between radio and the Internet. As Sagna states (2001:5-6), “The overwhelming majority of broadcasts were, in conception, inspired by a French perspective, in terms of both their content and their form of dissemination. The audience was limited primarily to the European population and to what would have been referred to, at the time, as sophisticates, while geographically the focus was urban – specifically Dakar.” Moreover, in 1952-53, 27 of the 32 establishments marketing radios were located in Dakar, “a figure comparable to the 12 (out of a total of 13) Internet providers located in Dakar.” (Sagna 2001: 6). Finally, between 1960 and 1964, the number of radios increased from 125,000 to 180,000, due to the elimination of the radio tax in 1962 (Dia 1987: 165). Starting in 1962, radio consolidated its audience, thanks to the 150 collective listening centers established in the seven administrative regions of the country, designed to ensure the population access to entertainment and education.

### ***The beginnings of modern radio broadcasting***

Created out of the needs associated with World War II, *Radio Dakar* performed unevenly and had an infrastructure that was of poor quality. Beginning in 1946, however, efforts were undertaken to develop a system for disseminating information via the radio. This “first” in the field of radio impelled the authorities, in 1952, to create in Saint-Louis, which at the time was the administrative center of Senegal, an information service and a radio broadcasting center, thus inaugurating the beginning of local productions.

While radio saw significant developments as an information broadcasting technology following World War II, its accessibility remained limited. The medium was still directed strictly at French speakers: 90-95% of broadcasts were in French and their content was geared far more to engendering “community spirit” than to representing and promoting local culture and civilization. This was true despite the fact that local programs (historical accounts, in particular) were broadcast in local (Wolof, Pulaar, Soninké) or African (Mossi or Bambara) languages.

### **SORAFOM and the challenges facing the national channel, Radio Inter-AOF**

Colonial authorities in Senegal were quick to grasp the strategic importance of radio in political, social and cultural change. The development of the media was indicative of the distinct backwardness of Senegal – as well as of the other French West African colonies – compared to the English colonies. The opinion of the native populations had come to be of concern to government officials and members of Parliament in Paris, and both in France and in the colonies, the importance of information would become acutely clear. Hence the establishment of the Société de radiodiffusion de la France d’Outre Mer (SORAFOM).

The *Service des PTT du Sénégal*, which had a monopoly on radio broadcasting, gave way to a national radio broadcasting service, under authority of SORAFOM. Thus, Radio Dakar became Radio Inter-AOF and gained a national presence. As a result of this institutional shuffling, radio was transformed into a genuine information tool with an increasingly defined role, run by true professionals.

Such developments allowed Radio Inter-AOF to serve as the major link for French radio broadcasting in Africa, expressing, at the same time, Paris's concept of radio as "a coherent unit" capable of serving as a link between the country where it was being established and the mother country. Until the adoption of the parent act of June 23, 1956, radio broadcasting was strictly "metropolitan."

In 1957, however, the colony's information service was placed under the Ministry of the Interior and Information, headed for the first time by a Senegalese.<sup>5</sup> This period was characterized by the willingness of the authorities to make radio more accessible to Senegalese and to make information broadcast by radio more African. As part of the same initiative, Decree 59-12 of June 3, 1959 placed radio broadcasting under the direction of the department that was part of the Ministry of Information, Radio and Press. Thus, radio was assigned new missions: "to make others around the world familiar with Senegal and the Senegalese people, to open new horizons to the people of Senegal, and to keep them informed of the activities of the government."

### ***Radio in the post-independence era***

As of March 1, 1960, the Ministry of Information was replaced by the Ministry of the Interior and of Radio Broadcasting. Two years later, the information component was placed under an autonomous ministry. This change led to the birth of national and international channels of Radio Sénégal, at a time when the enabling act No. 6524 of February 9, 1965 consolidated the monopoly of State-run radio in broadcasting and information dissemination.

With the advent of television, national radio broadcasting came under the purview<sup>6</sup> of the Office of Radio and Television Broadcasting of Senegal (*ORTS*). Article 3 of this law sets forth the State's monopoly in the following terms: "public dissemination throughout the national territory in the form of radio or television broadcasting, constitutes a State monopoly assigned to ORTS."

The establishment of the Office of Radio and Television Broadcasting of Senegal (*ORTS*), which followed the creation of national television in 1973, began a period of major change for Senegalese radio:

At the institutional level, the State monopoly over radio and television was consolidated and strengthened, acquiring the status of "State media"; and at the sociocultural level, audiovisual information became a new component in the audience environment, with a consequent disruption of cultural habits and practices.

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<sup>5</sup> This refers to the attorney, Mr. Valdiodio Ndiaye.

<sup>6</sup> Law 73-51 of December 4, 1973.

The appearance of television led, above all, to adaptations in the cultural role and mission of radio, through programming, while the impact of television – still far from reaching a mass audience – remained limited.

In 1972, a survey (Bureau Organisation et Méthode/IUT 1972) revealed that “radio listenership is particularly strong,” thus confirming the medium’s central place among the population. This widespread audience for radio, representing both domestic and foreign stations, which attract a significant audience, created the conditions for genuine competition with Radio-Sénégal.

### **Radio Sénégal and competition from foreign stations**

In parallel with the redeployment of Senegal’s national radio broadcasting to serve rural populations, radio listening – above all in Dakar – experienced significant competition from certain foreign stations. According to a 1972<sup>7</sup> survey of 2,733 Dakar residents, more than half of the audience of *Radio-Sénégal* (50.48% of the sample) also listened to foreign radio stations, including a number of African stations -- *Radio Gambie* (33.10%), *Radio Guinée* (28.55%), *Radio Mauritanie* (26.27%) and the commercial station *Radio-SYD* (19.61%).

For these stations as a whole, particular types of broadcast appear to account for the audience interest. *Radio Guinée*, for example, is listened to, above all, for its news (50%), while *Radio Gambie* and *Radio-SYD* draw listeners primarily for their musical programs (84.58% and 90.09%). No discernible trend was identified for *Radio Mauritanie*, with its audience attracted by both its news (30.54%) and its musical programs (34.13%).

*Radio-SYD* and *Radio Guinée* represent two extreme examples, demonstrating the particular interest of Senegalese listeners in certain stations during 1970-72. *Radio Guinée* attracted primarily young listeners (20-25 years of age) – mostly schoolchildren and older students – seeking “more complete news and more detailed political content.” Conakry’s *Voix de la Révolution* symbolized their revolutionary ideal.<sup>8</sup> *Radio-SYD* constitutes an example – at the same time paradoxical and original – of competition in radio listenership. While the audience of this pirate station<sup>9</sup> is relatively small (only 19.61%), its most ardent Dakar listeners are primarily Senegalese (88.4%, as compared to 1.6% of Gambian origin), consisting mostly of young people (55.2% are 20-25 years of age), attracted principally by the musical programs (90.09%).

Thus, at the time radio was being positioned to serve rural populations, competition from foreign stations was presenting itself as a new phenomenon in Senegal’s radio listening

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