

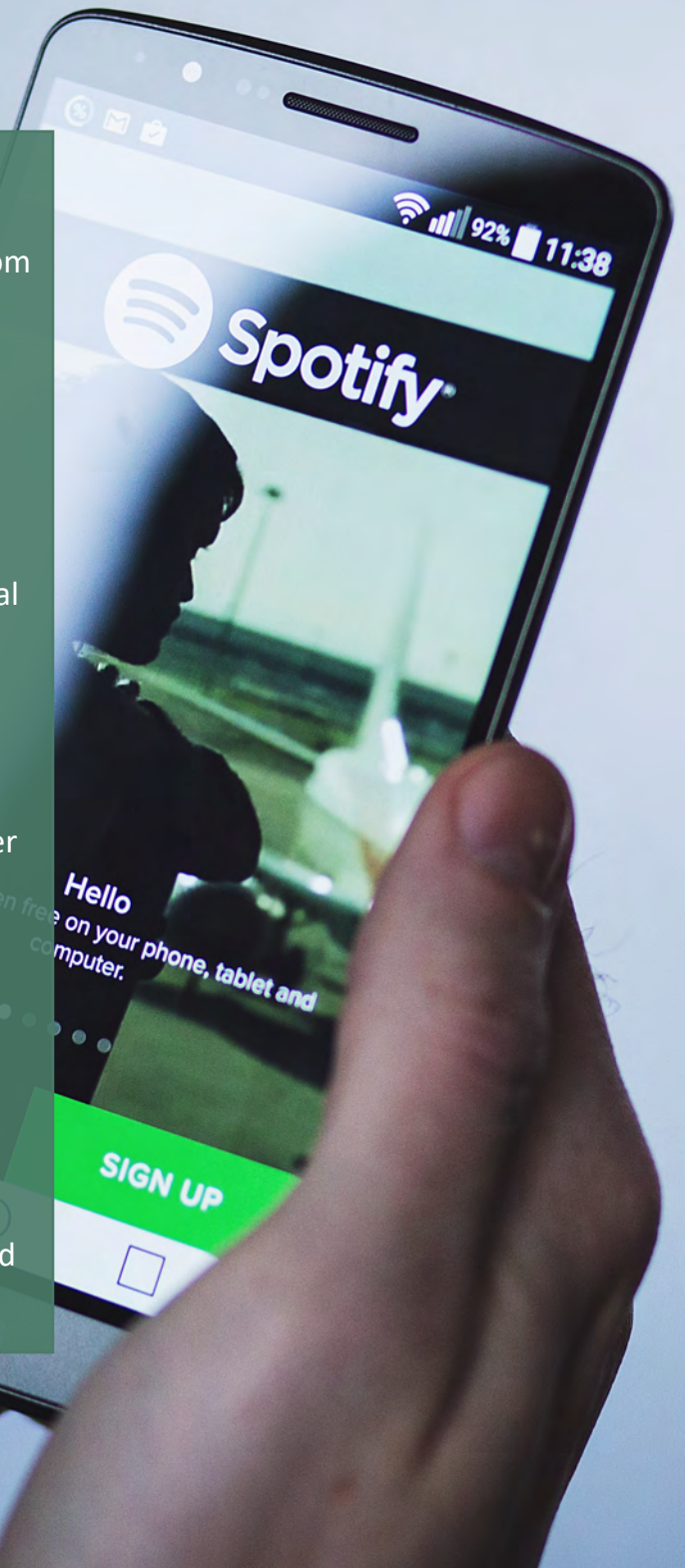
LIVESTREAM

Music on the Radio

How do you spend your time when it comes to listening to music? There is now a very wide choice of sources available, from digital tracks to radio, from streaming to listen again. Even vinyl is making a comeback. And then there are video channels too, both online and on TV.

There are many more opportunities to hear and discover music than in the days when your parents were growing up. For generations, music could be found on just a few radio stations (local and national BBC, and local independent or commercial). There were several popular television shows featuring music and live acts; then you had to buy physical copies of your favourites in record shops.

With the revolution in digital technology, the former gatekeepers who controlled access to music now have huge competition. We can tune into radio stations from across the world via the internet, or apps on our mobiles. And we can make our own programmes (or podcasts); anyone can become a producer now. But radio isn't always the first place we go to in order to hear new music. Thanks to streaming services, we can hear new tracks, emerging artists and be introduced to work we wouldn't otherwise have discovered. So do we need to turn to radio to listen to music anymore?



KEY IDEAS

Music has been at the heart of radio since the medium was invented and it still embodies several key characteristics today (Chignell, 2009, p.33). The music has been chosen not by the listener, but by the station. They do this using playlists: a selection of songs that are carefully chosen to reflect a specific genre of music (pop, grime, hip hop, classical and so on). Each station has a target audience in mind, based on their age range and music interests, and the music is designed to appeal to them, and keep them listening. Radio listening is still mainly live, although there is the option to 'listen again' online. This creates a sense of community with other listeners and the presenters, what we call 'co-presence'. The presenter or DJ introduces or talks about the songs, and this context gives an added meaning to the music.

With changes in technology, music radio faces increasing competition from streaming services, as listeners look for other ways of finding music. However, there are some similarities between what a radio programme does and how services like Spotify work. Streaming services are also keen to keep you listening, and they do this by suggesting more songs for you to listen to. It's a bit like having friends who recommend new or different bands, what Dubber calls 'social discourse' (2013, p.99).

The DJ provides a similar function. Some stations, such as BBC Radio 1 and 1Xtra have specialist shows, where the presenter has wider knowledge and experience and their role is to introduce you to music you might not know.

Perhaps the key difference is in the 'liveness' of radio, characteristics that convey a real-time connection, a sense of daily events unfolding against a backdrop of favourite tunes and perhaps a little chaos and unpredictability which livens up the programme.

KEY READINGS

Chignell, H. (2009). *Key concepts in radio studies*. London: Sage.

Dubber, A. (2013). *Radio In the digital age*. Cambridge: Polity.

McLeish, R. & Link, J. (2016). *Radio Production*. 5th ed. Burlington, MA: Focal Press. Available from: bit.ly/2WMMVbfN.

Starkey, G. (2014). *Radio in context*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. Available from: bit.ly/2VMuYSd.

ACTIVITIES

1. Listen to a breakfast show as it goes out live on a radio station (commercial or BBC).
 - i. List all the key ingredients included in the show (music, features, competitions etc)
 - ii. Why are breakfast shows generally the most popular radio programmes on a station?
 - iii. What does the presenter(s) add to the programme?
 - iv. Does anything unpredictable happen or perhaps go wrong?
2. Now compare and contrast by listening to a playlist on a streaming service.
 - i. What do you gain from listening to music in this way?
 - ii. And what is different from listening to a radio show?
3. Can you come up with an app that brings together the best of a live radio programme and the advantages of streaming music playlists? How would it work?