

“Digital Radio is the medium of the future; analog medium should also co-exist” – From the Discussion at WAVES 2025

“Good content, collaborations, cross platform promotions augur well for Radio”

‘Radio Reimagined: Thriving in the Digital Age’ - Enriching panel discussion at WAVES 2025

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A panel discussion on the subject ‘Radio Reimagined: Thriving in the Digital Age’ brought together global experts to engage in an insightful discourse at WAVES 2025 today.

The esteemed panellists included the pioneer of commercial radio Jacqueline Bierhorst, Digital Radio Mondiale (DRM) Chairman Ruxandra Obreja, Vice Group Leader of DRM Alexander Zink, ex-CEO of Prasar Bharati and Co-Founder of Deep Tech for Bharat Shashi Shekhar Vempati and noted broadcast technology expert Ted Lavery. Nisha Narayanan, Director & COO of Red FM moderated the conversations with expertise and led to throwing lights on the factors influencing the radio broadcasting industry.

‘Digital Radio is the medium of the future, but analog should also co-exist’

Jacqueline Bierhorst feels that digital radio is likely to be the primary format in the future, as it offers advantages like better sound quality, more reliable transmission, and the ability to integrate multimedia elements. “While analog radio remains relevant in some contexts, particularly for simpler communication and in areas with limited digital infrastructure, the shift to digital broadcasting is ongoing and expected to continue”, she opined. Cost saving happens by switching from analog to digital, they informed.

However, Jacqueline Bierhorst and Alexander Zink noted that broadcast is an important backing point needed during exigencies like terrorist attacks, floods etc., when digital networks may not always work. DRM Chairman Ruxandra Obreja noted on this point that it is important to preserve analog radio in India which reaches out to 600,000 villages. In case of exigencies, undoubtedly broadcast radios are more likely to reach out to a larger population, remarked the experts. “The challenge is to introduce new technologies, without disrupting the old ones”, noted Ruxandra Obreja.

The new 5Cs of radio communication

Jacqueline Bierhorst mentioned the classical 5Cs namely, Conciseness, Clarity, Confidence, Control and Capability, and juxtaposed them with the new 5 Cs essential in the era of a thriving digital radio infrastructure. These are: **Coverage, Content, Consumer Devices, Car, Communication**. She advised to make sure that the radio network is covering the right areas where listeners are based.

Measurement of listenership is an important step to take concerted efforts for enabling the sector to prosper. Ted Lavery spoke about radio playing Apps in Europe, like Radioplayer and Radio FM, that offer features that can be

used to measure listenership, without infringement of privacy. Such programmes and apps, sample surveys and listening diaries can be used to analyse hotspots of radio listenerships in India as well, he advised.

Good content, collaborations, cross platform promotions work well

‘Content is King’ – the experts agreed on this success mantra for the sector. Nisha Narayanan flagged the issue faced by private FMs of high license fee for varied contents. As a result, they end up mostly catering popular music which has a lower licence fee than other categories of content. The Red FM COO agreed on the need for bringing variety in content for private FMs.

Speaking about the value of good, useful content, Jacqueline Bierhorst highlighted the success story of British digital radio station Absolute Radio which grew and earned revenue throughout the 70s, 80s and 90s while engaging in various educational and promotional activities that benefit their audience.

Digital radio has to offer more than the audio content - it has visuals and text applications that is advantageous for growing audience base, Alexander Zing reminded of this yet another aspect of Digital Radio.

Ted Laverty urged that an ecosystem needed to support the spread of radio listenership. Making low-cost devices, having favourable platforms like android are some of the measures he stated. In addition to existence of external hardware components, diversity of content is also important as it helps to address different sub-groups of listeners.

Climate Change and Digital Radio

Digital radio can achieve significant energy savings by using more efficient modulation techniques and enabling single-frequency networks. However, switching off FM stations is not possible. Though some European countries have tried complete switch off of FM stations and complete digitization, it is not the holy grail, said Ruxandra Obreja. She suggested that it is important to inventorize the needs of commercial radio stations while speaking with the Government for policy interventions.



Radio Industry in India – scope for strengthening the ecosystem

Ruxandra Obreja mentioned that public policies in Europe have leveraged the reach of digital radio. Having radio in cars, mobile phones, easy availability of radio sets in the market are important steps in that direction. A digital radio consortium should be built up in India, opined the experts.

Ruxandra Obreja stated that India is a driving force in digital radio. Digital to Terrestrial Radio is important and so is digital to mobile. “Prasar Bharti has a reach to nearly 90 crore population. India is a golden goose in this field, plus points being billions of mobile phone users in India. Important to build on these plus points”, she added.

Shashi Shekhar Vempatti stated that India is the biggest market for radio, and referred to the medium as the original public good. He highlighted the need for coordinated public action for the sector. “Radio is not going anywhere. Radio consumers in India come from a broad cross section of society”, he stated while charting out the advantages of the sector in the country. Policy interventions may include sequence of stipulations like certain categories of devices must have radio. AI powered devices as well as passive devices like traditional radio should exist side by side.

With climate change being an important determinant of public policies, it is important to preserve traditional devices. Ted Laverty urged for scaling up of the ecosystem for radio in India, using schemes like 'Make in India' for incentivizing radio device manufacturers.

The experts agreed that digital radio is the way forward in India and elsewhere and urged that commercial stations with Common Transmission Infrastructure in big cities to form a platform for collaboration.

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