



RADIO ON-AIR-PERSONALITIES AND THE TECHNICALITIES FOR PRIMACY OF SIGNIFICATION

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Abstract

Since the deregulation of broadcasting in Nigeria, the citizenry has had to contend with the emergence of on-air personalities who lack the creativity and technicalities of the profession. NBC's pressure for local content production has compelled pluralistic broadcasting stations in the country to hire content staff in compliance with the order. In proffering solution to the complaints from audiences, ombudsmen, neutral observers and scholars, this paper reviewed corpus literature on the technicalities required of on-air personalities, particularly on Nigerian radio, and recommends them alongside periodic capacity training for such broadcast practitioners to ensure effective communication and optimum performance.

Keywords: *Radio on Air, Primacy of Signification, On-Air-Personalities*

INTRODUCTION

Since the deregulation of broadcasting in Nigeria on the 24th of August, 1992 through Decree No. 38 (now deemed an Act of the National Assembly) promulgated by the Federal Military Government with the establishment of NBC to regulate the entire industry (NBC, 2016), the nation's broadcast landscape has continued to witness, among other broadcast-centric contentious issues, the proliferation of public, commercial and community broadcastings that have as their immediate consequence the emergence of a new breed of broadcast operatives who, arguably, exhibit little or no knowledge of the creativity and technicalities which, as a composite whole, connote the gimmicks of broadcast presentation. Today in the country, there are many and varied ownerships of broadcasting stations, especially radio, which competitively coexist while beaming contents for the appreciation of the same Nigerian audience. In doing so, the readily manifest challenge is not just the availability of technical and creative staff for the stations but also the quality of such operatives and their performance index. Equally, as applied to all show businesses, there is also the presence of volunteers and guest artistes, who as usual are curious rather than cautious of the nitty-gritty requirements of the trade, because they are lured into the profession of on-air personality by

excitement, energy, talent, creativity and personal satisfaction, and have given no attention to requisite training. Ezaka (2018) informs that some on-air personalities have only good voice, an enchanting style of presentation and engaging personality as their qualifications for the profession, but generally lack the necessary training for effective communication.

However, this set of people are normally deployed to shoulder the responsibilities of on-air personalities because, apart from being cheap to be recruited for program production, the pressure of local content in broadcast programming makes them the more useful. NBC (2006) has insisted that “every terrestrial free-to-air station attains a local content minimum of 70 per cent” (p. 42), in order to promote and sustain Nigeria’s diverse cultures, mores, folklores and community life. This implies that broadcasting stations should, while being conscious of their global identity, act locally so as to promote the nation’s cultural heritage in line with international best practice.

Already, audience feedback, ombudsman reports and research findings on the content of broadcast pluralism in developing countries including Nigeria particularly emphasize low on-air proficiency on the side of broadcast announcers, disc jockeys and presenters. For instance, an ombudsman of Comparative Theatre and Media Arts at University of Calabar, Nigeria, Prof. Edde Iji, while noting that information industries are the bedrock of creative cultural industries, has revealed that poor outings of anchors, announcers and presenters have brought about de-artification of the arts with regard to the added devaluation of aesthetics, culture and cultural heritage or identity, which altogether, according to him, can be regarded as a collateral damage to broadcast content (Iji, 2019). Again, in an interview during the writing of this paper, an Associate Professor of Mass Communication at Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria, Kenneth Adibe Nwafor informed that though the majority of the radio programs on radio stations within Abakaliki Metropolis, appear to be hosted by esteemed on-air personalities, the realities on ground especially during phone-in programs are evident that some hosts lack the wherewithal to moderate satisfactorily, “perhaps because they do not have the voracious knowledge required to be practitioners in broadcasting as a multi-disciplinary field” (personal communication, September 18, 2023). He went on to insist that as on-air personalities, radio hosts should endeavor to know a little about everything.

In mid way 2000s, Blankson (2005) has bemoaned a situation in neighboring Ghana where radio program presenters had resorted to the competition of who has the ability to anchor programs with the best of British and American accents with the immediate tragic outcome of misinforming their listeners by mispronouncing already familiar native and dialectal names and words. According to Isaac Blankson, already cited, such practice is an act of deliberately causing the extinction of indigenous languages. In reaction to such slavish imitation of Western and Caribbean Island’s artistic presentation and representation, Iji (2019), while accepting that culture is dynamic, argues persuasively that if Nigerians must have environmental impact assessment for proper ethical and moral policy and professional orientations in establishments and organizations for the provision of services to guarantee public safety, it is also important to introduce cultural impact assessments in such creative cultural industries as radio, television, film, etc to ensure wholesomeness in content production and consumption. According to him the unhealthy practice of “Americanization, Chinanization, or Koreanization” of the nation’s broadcast content production and consumption patterns have diffused throughout its food-consumption and fashion-conscious industries, as widely seen in ladies fashion, hair colorations or designs, proudly adorned by our distinguished ladies, and even gentlemen in Bob Marley’s hair dreadlocks, all in Rastafarian styles, as currently mass-produced even in Nigeria and other parts of Africa. According to him, “the extent to which the adoption and adaptation of the foreign cultures, in dressing, eatery and make-ups are adversely downgrading and devaluing African and Nigerian cultural heritage and cultural identities” (Iji, 2019, p.26).

Similarly, Pepple and Onah (2022), while drawing on the findings of the study they conducted among radio audience members in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, have berated some broadcasting stations in Nigeria for being castigated by listeners and viewers for lack-luster performance and poor aesthetics quality on the side of program hosts. Asemah, Nkwam-Uwaoma and Tseggyu (2017) confirm that the human voice of on-air personalities is yet another crucial aspect of radio and television aesthetics, but regret that the greatest problem that is associated with

on-air personalities is lack of training. They explain that most people, who today speak on radio either as presenters, announcers or newscasters are untrained personnel. While citing Hyde (1998), they explain that because they lack the requisite training, they most often massacre some scripts, even when professionally prepared, “at the altar of poor grammar, wrong pronunciation, inappropriate intonation and artificial articulation” (p. 129). According to them, even some announcers who work hard and possess outstanding skills nevertheless pollute the air, mainly on radio and television talk and interview shows, and accordingly, they maintain, it is common place to hear presenters on radio and television unsuccessfully trying to mimic intonations of white people, while situations where certain voices like manly baritones are required, for instance in drama, end up being chorused out inefficiently in tenor. Again, in what appears to be an identification of the problem, Zhang (2021), observes that among the challenges facing contemporary broadcasting stations in developing nations are weak on-air personalities and program hosting, divergent choice of audience, broadcast media reform and the emerging era of artificial intelligence (Alam et al., 2025).

Quite often, corpus literature emphasizes the theoretical background and educational qualifications for an on-air-personality with only weak scratches or none at all on such issues of importance as the technicalities and other interpretative requirements which on-air personalities need to arm themselves with in order to perform efficiently. While this, arguably, does not represent a false sense of importance, it simply indicates a gap in development scholarship on the side of the creative department of broadcasting, which has to be bridged. As a professional practice that entails the audible communication of information for audience appreciation on radio, announcing and presentation are the basic responsibilities of radio on-air-personalities. Although the on-air-personality may be an expert about a specific subject, it is possible that he may not present information involving the subject convincingly for the appreciation of the audience without the necessary technical aid and, indeed, technicalities.

On the premise of document theory that permits sourcing data from existing extant literature to solve the problem under study (Buckland, 2018), this paper, therefore, examines those technicalities, which have to be harnessed to achieve the much needed proficiency and ethical competence (Hemberg & Hemberg, 2020) of the on-air personality in broadcast program presentation, especially in the context of Nigeria’s evolving digital and pluralistic broadcast environment. To do this, the paper attempts, first and foremost, a disambiguation of the term on-air personality.

Explanation of Radio On-Air-Personality

Asemah et al. (2017) inform that on-air personalities are the category of broadcast practitioners that do a lot of talking. They, however, exempted them from the announcers’ corps because, according to them, “they do not perform the same function as an announcer” (p. 108). In their explications, they insist that while an announcer gives a lead-in to content, be it music or otherwise, on-air personalities are the actual disc jockeys, or the hosts of the programs themselves, adding that they (on-air personalities) have varying personas, but in general, in line with the position of Planetary Group (2016), they appear to talk too much and with some exuberance so as to keep their audience at home involved in their presentation. Owuamalam (2007) explains radio on-air personality as an aspect of communication that deals with speech and its presentation. He adds that on-air personalities project vocal qualities of speaking in order to pronounce words and generate meaning that can be shared commonly between them and their audience. As the source, he maintains, on-air personalities must ensure that there is commonality of codes between them and the audience, the receiver, in the communication process, more so as it is the understanding of the used codes that determines the effectiveness of the communication.

On-air personalities are equally described as microphone personalities and members of the category of broadcast talent that physically feature on programs, without assuming roles in representative dynamics (Zettl, 2009; Ezaka, 2018). They are actually the performers who exhibit their real personalities to the audience as they practically involve themselves in a station’s programs. They are contrasted to actors, which are a variant category of broadcast talent that assume roles, as fictional characters, by way of acting. As applied to urban-contemporary

radio in particular and contemporary radio broadcasting in general, announcers, besides running continuity chores, often cross borders to present and host other programs, and this attribute actually dismisses any envisaged distinction between them and other broadcast content staff. Thus, it is apposite, in the paper's understanding, to infer that radio on-air personalities are mainly announcers, presenters, disc jockeys and other program hosts who have the duty of either speaking or reading scripts for audience appreciation. They particularly read various texts from program scripts, render news reports, identify stations and moderate discussion and panel programs by interacting with guests (discussants and panelists) and contributors to programs (Mohd Pauzi & Shahadat Hossen, 2025).

In Nigeria, on-air personality has become a prestigious social activity that draws participation and membership from persons, who have the desire to address issues that affect and interest the majority of people in both rural and urban communities. The profession is people oriented, it is designed to identify with the audience, whose interest is to be served and provided with the desired experience, through the use of an appropriate code that can satisfy its feelings and expectations. It follows that the choice of words, their collection and arrangements as sentences, in a specific order, should be paramount in a bid to satisfy the needs of the identified audience. What this means, according to Owumalam (2007), is that in practice, a radio on-air personality should be creative, calm, and work under pressure, and as well be eloquent in communication, while exploring all possibilities to carry his listeners along. He, the announcer, does not only make use of concrete words that can aptly form mental pictures of the facts and convey the process messages, but also makes his sentences short, simple and clear so as to be easily understood by the audience, bearing in mind the transient and ephemeral features of broadcast content. The audience should not be subjected to any mental stress, in order to ascertain the meaning of expressions; otherwise there could be tendency for the on-air personality to run the risk of losing them in the course of the program.

Accordingly, on-air personality, as a profession, depicts the presentation of a preconceived script, designed to deal with a subject matter, which is to be shared between a program host and an audience. It is, in the main, a communication scenario, in which the announcer/presenter tries to influence the opinion and behavior of an audience, to conform to a pre-determined objective. As content staff, on-air personalities are links that share experiences on issues and events between stations and their audiences, especially during broadcasts, at a specific time and channel. The information they disseminate directs attention and interest to a particular purpose, which in turn is designed to be satisfied by a program. It is so with the continuity announcer, presenter, news readers, disc jockeys, and indeed other types of on-air personalities, often found in the program department.

On-Air Personalities' Technicalities for Primacy of Signification

The next task of this paper is to define and clarify the term "technicalities for primacy of signification", especially as it not only relates to but also demands of radio on-air personalities, and suggest them for use on radio stations in such emerging democracies as Nigeria. To begin with, Merriam Webster Dictionary defines technicality, which is the singular form of technicalities as "a detail meaningful only to a specialist". Equally, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Contemporary English defines technicalities as "details of a system or process that you need a special knowledge to understand". Owumalam (2007) explains technicalities of on-air personalities as the intricacies and mode of performance required by such content staff as announcers, presenters and disc jockeys to meet the desired objective for their participation in a broadcast program. He, however, adds that it is the nature of a program to be presented that determines what an on-air personality does in presenting it. However, this paper is neither interested in such extreme definitions nor in reviewing their historical antecedents in Nigeria or elsewhere. A more limited and modest concern is to project a working definition within which that aspect of broadcast operations that has been occurring in the past one decade and beyond can be understood and appreciated. Thus, technicalities have been broadly seen as the presentational resources required by on-air personalities to achieve meaningful presentation. It has to do with the detailed general knowledge, broadcast literacy, voice quality and manner of delivery on the side of on-air personalities, especially in their quest for primacy of signification. Primacy of

signification, as suffused in the term, is hereby explained to mean the best in the generation of intended meaning as it relates to on-air personalities' performances on radio (Ezaka, 2019; Ekwuazi, 1991). The implication is that in contrast to its other semantics, it is, in the main, the best, concrete and intended meaning of a program presentation as a communication process that leads to effective communication. However, technicalities and presentational resources, as they relate to our context, shall henceforth be used interchangeably. Some of them are discussed below:

The first technicality is content, and this simply explains that what the on-air personality says must be related to the topic of the program. It is disastrous for an on-air personality to dwell on facts not in any way related to the topic or theme being explored by his program. Such poor content emerges from a presenter's improper understanding of the topic and the type of facts it needs for its development. Besides knowing a little about everything, it is also appropriate to choose a topic which one knows much about instead of the one on a popular saying if you are not completely knowledgeable of its detailed connotations. In fact, attention should be paid to relevant details, particularly as a demonstration of the presenter's maturity, experience and communicative capability.. Secondly, there must be proper organization of the repertoire used for presentation by on-air personalities. This involves the arrangement of the repertoire by giving organized details to it, while the relevant conventions and proper format for radio as the medium must be taken cognizance of. It is equally advisable that the program be segmented ranging from introduction to conclusion in order to ensure proper distribution of facts of the program. The third presentational resource at the disposal of the on-air personality is expression. This concentrates on how the repertoire is presented. The good presenter is one whose expression is so captivating that a listener wishes to go on listening. A properly articulated language style presupposes a choice of appropriate words and the use of no more words than are necessary to convey the intended meaning (Ibe, 2003). Good expression also means being able to make sentences that allow your ideas to be understandable, and that does not subscribe to ambiguity and the use of difficult words. The topic of the program's edition should be treated interestingly and convincingly, using ideas that are real to life. Again, the language should not only be grammatically correct but also suit the audience. The audience should determine complexity or simplicity of expression. If, for instance, it is a program that has the audience as children, then the expression should show low level of vocabulary and simplicity of expression. It should particularly be clear, with no ambiguity, vagueness and improper use of words. Thus, simple English is usually preferred since the aim is primarily to be understood, and so impenetrable, pretentious and highfalutin expression must be avoided. Though permitted in order to make the language informal, excessive use of slangs and colloquialism should be avoided, while over worked expressions, clichés, jargons and other un-English statements are to be repudiated (Rahman, Hossain, et al., 2025).

Since microphone voices are adjudged beautiful when they strike between the middle and low registers, and are never laid-back, shrill, unclearly deep or annoying (Asemah et al., 2017). A radio on-air personality must exhibit a lot of confidence and self-assurance that would enable him to talk scripts and not reading scripts. Talking scripts makes a presentation to be conversational more so as the presenter becomes less tensed or hesitant, while phrasing and pacing flow naturally and sound sincerely. These are essential qualities that make a voice to be appealing to the audience. Similarly, microphone personalities should maintain an erect position that allows elbows and forearms rest on the table in order to facilitate proper breathing. While the hands should be kept away from the face, it is advisable that hands should not be cupped under the chin as this will restrict movement of the jaw or simply distract the facial muscles (Rashed et al., 2025). The jaw, the facial muscles and the lips must all have free movement when speaking (Alam et al., 2025), and most importantly, the microphone should be spoken to as one would speak to a friend sitting nearby.

As often the case in news reading, sentences which can be carried on a single breath without forcing the breath and speaking together ideas which are thought of together are spoken at a time. Depending on the house style, the stroke (/) is used to indicate short pauses, two strokes and more are used for longer pauses, while dots (...) are used for still longer pauses. Furthermore, stressing is done to give emphasis where necessary, and this can

be done in several ways (Hossen et al., 2023). However, the bottom-line is to give the word an added importance. The commonly used style is to speak the word with slightly more force than the words surrounding it. Another way is to lengthen the pronunciation of the word. The same principle can be applied to phrases, in which case those to be stressed are spoken with slightly more force or they can be lengthened. Equally noteworthy as applied to news reading is correct pacing, which helps to make a presentation sound interesting. One attribute of correct pacing is variation. A presentation that has the same pace all through will definitely sound dull and monotonous, while the one that is done with variation is likely to hold interest.

Another technicality could be found in making an honest assessment of one's radio personality by deciding which facets are the attractive ones, cultivate and develop them for the individual's radio self. Perhaps, you are a good joke-teller, or a natural rhymers, or perhaps you have a genuine interest in finding out about people and their jobs, whatever it is you must decide. It could be your girlfriend, your wife, or your best friend will be very honest with you and tell you which parts make a typical type of yourself and listen to it honestly and try to make up your own mind. All this points to the fact that your voice helps you to project your personality and you need to make the best of it. Those who do not have a natural deep voice have to work twice as hard, and those with a thin high voice, even harder still, but with a little training you can practice and lower your voice slightly.

Finally, there should be a judicious use of on-air personalities' presentation aids. One of such aids is proper cueing-up of songs. Before the start of a program, the on-air personality should always arrange the songs in the order in which he is going to use them. He should use the pre-listen button somewhere on the console in front of him to 'pre-hear' or pre-fade listen' with the aid of the headphone. He can pre-listen to the songs from the vault, turntables, cartridge and digital compact disc players. Compilation of songs is often done as presented below:

Artiste	Album Caption	Cut (Track)	Title
Freddie McGregor	Free Love	C2	Hard to get
Mavin Gaye	Let's get it on	C10	Sexual healing
Lil Kim	No time	C6	Fake one

Typical song compilation documentation

The second aid is to avoid talking-over-records. The introduction of a very tight-format radio led to the necessity to get as much music in the hour as possible, so as to make room for the patter. Thus, on-air personalities started to talk over the instrumental lead that introduces the vocalists. Contemporary on-air personalities have cottoned on, and it is now standard practice for most Top-40 DJs and some MOR (Middle-of-the-Road) ones. There is also an aid known as record matching with delivery. For instance, when a presenter goes for a back announcement, he tries to match his delivery to that of the discs. He does not scream into a quiet smooch disc, instead he makes his voice to take on the softer tones suited to the record artist. If it is a transition from fast discs to a slow one, and he may want to use a 'down short' jingle which will take him from a slow to a fast record. It is advisable that an on-air personality listens to his station's jingles to see how they can be used in this way. A presenter can sometimes vary his presentation, and break up the format, by playing two records together without saying anything in between them. This is called a non-speech segue, and knowing the beginnings and ends of songs is of utmost importance in attempting to do this.. He can front-announce the first song and back-announce the second, and can change it yet again, by starting the second song intro under the end of the first one. This is another effect but nevertheless when it works it can sound very good. By the time an on-air personality has worked in his stingers, jingles, sound-effects, self-idents, station-idents, and segues, he really has quite a lot of work to do. By the way, self-ident jingles are another way of saying a program host's name and letting his listeners know who he is without actually saying it himself. Echo and sound-effects, as presentation aids, add finesse to a presentation, especially when judiciously used. According to TopLine (2013) sound effects generally help to generate a feeling of repose, bliss and sweet contentment that add to *audience experience*.

There are also phasing and other electronic tricks, including phase distortion that takes place when two recordings are played back simultaneously but with very slight differences between the speeds. As they come and go together the signals add and subtract to give the sort of 'outer space' whooshing noise on the signal (Balya, 2008). She also notes that editing techniques, as a specialized skill which will be carried out mostly by a qualified skilled engineer, can be useful to an on-air personality who has the understanding and the ability to do it himself. He can find it most useful when making up little productions at home. Such editing operations can help from time to time in making up a loop of a rhythm section sound without any recourse to digital process. Accordingly, with the skills of editing and operating mastered, a presenter can now put his mind to the ways of using them to aid his program presentation.

Conclusion

On-air personality, as a profession, deals with speech and its presentation, and harnesses the ingenuity of its various categories of practitioners, including announcers, presenter and disc jockeys that use words, in particular, to represent the station in its relationship and interaction with the audience. This requires strict adherence to the canons of grammar, diction and phonetics as often applied to the expression of thoughts, ideas and feelings in broadcast presentation. The paper recommends that apart from ensuring a commonality of codes, between the announcer and the audience, for a universal meaning to emerge, there should be concerted efforts to ensure that words are concretely used and pronounced, so that their implied meaning – the primacy of signification is achieved for audience comprehension. Also recommended is that there should be informed adequate knowledge and proper application of requisite technicalities to enhance role performance of the various on-air personalities, which in turn helps to secure the desired mood and emotions in the audience. It is at this point that effective communication can be said to have been actualized.

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