WIDR-FM: A Program Analysis of an Alternative Music Format

Michael A. Finn

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WIDR-FM: A PROGRAM ANALYSIS OF AN
ALTERNATIVE MUSIC FORMAT

by

Michael A. Finn

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
Department of Communication

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
December 1991
This study examines the Alternative Music Format (AMF) of station WIDR-FM, Western Michigan University from a programming perspective. The study reviews literature related to AMF programming, and provides information related to listener and non listener patterns of radio interest from two self-report questionnaires. The purpose of the study is to provide reliable information on this most unique format plus recommendations in order that future managers, programmers and music directors can make informed decisions for future managerial and program changes.

The major results of this study indicate that the AMF does not promote effective listenership among the WIDR-FM audience. Also, there were no appreciable differences among listeners and non listeners relating to music type. Specifically, listeners were more interested in listening to radio than the particular music played.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express appreciation to Dr. Richard Gershon, Dr. Paul Yelsma, and Dr. Jules Rossman for their generous assistance throughout this thesis research.

Special thanks are also given to those students who took part in the survey.

Michael A. Finn
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WIDR-FM: A program analysis of an alternative music format

Finn, Michael Andrew, M.A.
Western Michigan University, 1991
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................................ ii

LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................................................... iv

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................. 1
   Background to the Problem .......................................................................................... 2
   Significance of the Problem ......................................................................................... 2
   Statement of the Problem ............................................................................................. 3

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ................................................................................. 4

III. METHOD ....................................................................................................................... 8
   Notes ............................................................................................................................... 11

IV. RESULTS ..................................................................................................................... 12
   Notes ............................................................................................................................. 20

V. CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................... 21
   Listenership ................................................................................................................. 21
   Programming ............................................................................................................... 22
   Degree of Professionalism .......................................................................................... 24

APPENDICES

A. Questionnaire Cover Letter ...................................................................................... 25

B. Questionnaires ............................................................................................................ 27

C. HSIRB Approval ........................................................................................................... 37

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................................................................. 39
# LIST OF TABLES

1. WMU Enrollment Compared to Respondents Who Completed Either Questionnaire .................................................. 13
2. Percentage of Listeners for Weekday Times ........................................... 13
3. Percentage of Listeners for Times by Class Rank .................................. 14
4. Music Type: Most Liked/Disliked ........................................................... 15
5. Listener and Non Listener Music Ratings Comparison ............................ 18
6. Reasons for Not Listening to WIDR-FM from Results of the Non Listener Questionnaire.............................. 19
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Student operated radio at Western Michigan University (WMU), Kalamazoo began through a student council proposal in the early 1950s as Western Inter-Dorm Radio (WIDR) with non-salaried student volunteers. The music format of WIDR was Top 40 in the 1960s, and evolved during the mid 1970s to "a more progressive, new music (Alternative) origin in efforts to increase listenership" (Cerny, 1985). This listenership increase was seen as necessary due to an increase of other Top 40 stations in the market, more students living off campus out of the transmitter range, and expanding ownership of FM receivers. The WIDR radio station was converted to FM in 1975. In August 1983, the transmitting power was increased from 10 to 100 watts by an option granted by the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) (Cerny, 1985).

An Alternative Music Format (AMF) for broadcast radio can be defined as music that would not be heard on any other format in any other context, or "Music that other stations wouldn't touch" (Routt, McGrath, & Weiss, 1978). This unique format covers the musical spectrum of known formats and includes "known" as well as "unknown" artists, but it does not include top forty or commercially recognized musical works. The AMF also features obscure album cuts (old and new) and beginning artists that might not otherwise have an outlet for new material.
Background to the Problem

The Federal Communication Commission (FCC) in 1971 decided that educational radio was to provide a quality service, but was not to duplicate commercial radio, opening the door to any format that could be construed as different from commercial. This FCC decision was not necessarily a mandatory one, but it clearly set a goal for educational radio to try and reach. WIDR-FM expanded on this idea in an effort to attract listeners from the mainstream programming found on commercial formats.

The present WIDR-FM Constitution (WIDR Board of Directors, 1991) states that WIDR is to provide:

1. An educational co-curricular training experience for students interested in the fields of broadcast management, sales, production, programming, and announcing.

2. A service to the WMU community by programming news, information, and special events relevent to the concerns of WMU students.

To date, no empirical studies have been conducted of the student volunteer operated station. If a large percentage of the student audience is attracted, why do they listen, and what opinions do those students have about this unique format? If the student audience does not listen, then why don't they listen? Is it because of the AMF format, or are there other reasons?

Significance of the Problem

The significance of this study lies in its information concerning the use of a college radio station in general, and the use of the AMF programming format in particular. Specifically, the WIDR-FM station has a unique programming format which
has not been studied. This study should help to provide greater insight into the radio
listenership patterns of an AMF station serving the student population at Western
Michigan University.

Statement of the Problem

Comments from students at large, students who have worked at the AMF
station, and faculty advisors suggest that the listenership patterns of WIDR-FM are not
as strong as they could be. If the station is not reaching the interest of the student
population, could the Alternative Music Format selected by WIDR-FM be largely
responsible? This study examines student listenership patterns related to scheduling of
programs and the application of the AMF. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the
following questions:

1. What percent of the students enrolled at WMU, Kalamazoo campus, listen
to WIDR-FM?

2. Do listenership patterns vary according to time of day and/or scheduling
during the week?

3. Do listenership patterns vary according to class rank?

4. What music types are most and least favored by listener and non listener?

5. Do peak listening times correspond with the particular music played during
those times?

6. Why do students not listen to WIDR-FM?
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE


A number of sources is available for understanding the history and development of college radio. Pittman (1986) provides detailed information on early college instructional radio programs at the State University of Iowa between 1925 and 1930, where radio was used for classroom training. J. R. Greene (1984) details the use of a college radio station by Speech Communication students to gain experience by reading public service messages on the air. Kiewe (1987) identifies use of the college radio station as a model, where preparation for specific operations is handled in broadcast workshops, and the student is given opportunities for applying skills.
pertaining to radio production. It was not until the 1970s that college radio moved into the alternative format arena.

According to the FCC, "The purpose of educational radio stations is to provide a quality service which does not duplicate commercial radio services" (FCC, 1977, p. 5). It would follow, then, that the educational radio station music format would be different from that of commercial radio if the FCC concept is to be followed. But, that has not been the case, as Clift and Lee (1977) write, "Profiles do not match the concepts for non-commercial broadcasting set forth by both Congress and the FCC" (p. 7). Clift also states that a systematic plan is not in place for diverse audience programming, and asks the question, "Who is non-commercial FM serving? Is it alternative programming to minority needs?" (p. 7). However, Clift does not commit himself to a specific format to supply those alternative programming needs.

This paper is concerned with a specific aspect of the broadcast operation; the Alternative Music Format (AMF), its place in the education process, and its appeal to college students who listen.

The first AMF for broadcast radio evolved during the mid 1970s (Routt, 1978). Before the label AMF was used, the entire radio station was characterized as a particular format station (Johnson & Jones, 1972), and in some areas it is still known that way. The literature clearly shows that the radio station and the music format became intermixed with Adult Popular music stations, Conservative music stations, Top-40 stations, Country and Western, Classical, Religious, Middle of the Road (MOR), Album Oriented Rock (AOR), and Progressive (Hesbacher, Clasby & Anderson, 1976; Johnson & Jones, 1972; Kahn, 1982; and Routt et al., 1978).
Alternative radio (and an AMF) was recognized by Routt et al., (1978) as having begun in North Texas, 1975, when 100,000 watt KCHU was initiated with a combination of:

Rare Texas blues records, a live Charlie Parker broadcast, music from India blended with readings from esoteric magazines, 50's rock'n'roll antics of Screamin' Jay Hawkins', a rare classical recording of Enrico Caruso, a feminist talk program, a 12-tone music program, poetry, a program from the gay community of North Texas, and an interview with a Flamenco guitarist (p. 267).

One of those in charge of the radio station remarked that KCHU aims to reach "anybody with brains, those who are dissatisfied with existing media and need an alternative voice" (Routt et al., 1978, p. 272). This particular station operated financially on a membership system, and ultimately failed, but the Alternative Music idea survived.

To support the interest in development of Alternative Music, E. Greene (1989) writes about two students from the State University of New York at Albany radio who were "wined and dined" at a three day music industry conference in New York City by the major record companies, similar to the promotional events afforded to commercial radio announcers. Greene explains:

College radio is now a big-time player in the music industry and it's being treated that way. Ten years ago college stations were virtually ignored by the major labels...but now, with evidence showing that college airplay has a substantial impact on record sales, the labels are devoting great resources to persuading student staffs that their records deserve to be played (p. A27).

Greene reports that most record labels now have staff just to handle music considered for college stations with the AMF. For example, Atlantic Records has the largest department of 12 people. How did this Alternative Music and college radio come about? Greene explains:

The students who shaped college radio's alternative format, during the late 1970's and early 1980's punk and new-wave movements, are
now the record-label talent signers and promotion people, the trade
magazine writers and editors, and the commercial-radio
programmers. They are interested in and understand offbeat, new
music (p. A28).

Greene also suggests that "not all bands want to break out of the college and
commercial alternative radio market for fear of losing creative control" (p. A29). An
example of college radio success is the band U2, an Irish group known world wide,
whose beginning success is attributed to support of student disc jockeys and music
directors (E. Greene, 1989). Clearly, the AMF needs further examination to
determine why some students listen and others don't. But, whether this particular
format serves current programming needs of the WIDR-FM audience is less clear.
Consequently, this becomes the basis for this study.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

This project examined the AMF of WIDR-FM from a programming perspective by surveying a representative sample of Western Michigan University students. Only students currently (Winter 1991) enrolled and attending classes at the WMU Kalamazoo campus were included in the sample which consisted of listeners and non listeners.

The subjects for this project were selected through a convenience sampling procedure. In order to insure a broad cross-section of the student population, twelve academic departments were selected from which individual classes were purposefully identified by the researcher, who wanted to obtain a sampling of courses from the 100 to 500 levels of study. Instructors teaching these classes were selected on the basis of their perceived willingness to have students complete the questionnaires during classroom time. In the study, 389 students in 7 classes participated in completing the questionnaires.

There were two questionnaires in this project, one for listeners of the student operated campus radio station, and one for non listeners. The questions that were the same on both questionnaires consist of eight demographic questions, one question on the number of radio stations that students listen to, and one question on the rating of music types in order of importance to the student. All other questions on both questionnaires were different.

The researcher determined how the questionnaires were distributed in the classroom by asking students who had ever listened to WIDR-FM to complete the
listener questionnaire, and students who had never listened to WIDR-FM to fill out the non listener questionnaire. A letter was attached to each questionnaire explaining the anonymity of individual answers. Three hundred eighty nine questionnaires were distributed, and 389 were satisfactorily completed.

The first set of research questions on the listener questionnaire was concerned with the times of day during the week and week-end that the student listened to the radio station for at least 15 minutes at a time (in the past three months) during particular time blocks, 6 to 9 a.m., or 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., for example. The time blocks used in this questionnaire were the units of analysis for the times a student listens, and they closely resemble standard dayparts used by commercial radio stations. There are other questions on the listener questionnaire that reflect peak listening times, but they are identified by program name in order to determine program identity and acceptance.

A series of descriptive questions in the listener questionnaire was designed to determine: how many students rated the campus radio station as excellent, good, average, fair, or poor; how long one listens at a time; what is liked most and least from music variety, announcer, hours of operation, and special events; what is remembered most about the station from the same options; and what activities, free time, sports, or work the student is most involved in while listening. Thirteen choices of music types were offered, including an "other" category, for questions that ask what kind of music is liked or disliked most. This large group of choices is offered in the unique format used at this particular station. Because the station is student operated by volunteers, a question was included that asked if the subject had ever worked for the station: more than a year, less than a year but more than one semester, for one semester, sat in a few times, and never. Three yes and no
questions covered special events to determine if the subject were aware that the station conducts such special events. Three open ended questions asked: what kinds of programs would be listened to if they were offered, what changes would the student like to see at the station, and how many different radio stations the student listens to. Questionnaire results were analyzed with the use of percentages for comparisons between select variables.

Because the station is on the air 24 hours per day during most of the semester, the largest block of questions on the listener questionnaire pertains to the music format by program name instead of specific times the student listens. All questions that pertain to program names offered responses of: always, frequently, sometimes, rarely, and never. The questionnaire also asked the student to rate music types preferred most by number from Heavy Metal, Rhythm & Blues, Rock/Progressive, Country & Western, and other. The final portion of this questionnaire asked standard demographic questions of age, racial/ethnic group, class level, enrollment status, sex, college residence, overall GPA, and major of study.

The non listener questionnaire was much shorter with several forced choice questions that asked if the student had ever listened to the campus student operated station; if the student had ever heard of the campus student operated station; had ever read about the student operated station in the school newspaper; had ever heard of the station Alternative music format, or was familiar with any Alternative radio. Ten options, including other, are offered as reasons why the student does not listen to the campus student operated station. Most of these options were taken from answers that were given when the question, “Why do you not listen to WIDR-FM?” was asked impromptu of students at will while the questionnaire was being developed.
This non listener questionnaire had three open-ended questions that seek to determine what kinds of programs the student would listen to if they were offered; what changes the student would like to see in a student operated station; and one very direct question of why the student doesn't listen to the student operated station. The music type preference rating question is included to enable a determination of how different the music preferences of a non listener may be from a listener. The non listener questionnaire concludes with the same demographic questions as the listener questionnaire.

1It should be noted that the first question on the non listener questionnaire asked if the student has ever listened to WIDR-FM? Those students who marked the yes response were considered as non listeners because they did not ever listen to WIDR-FM for at least a 15 minute period during the previous three months.

2The 15 minute block of time is considered a standard unit of measure for broadcasting and related services.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

A total of 389 questionnaires was completed by students of WMU during the first weeks of Winter term (January), 1991. Of the 389 completed questionnaires, 129 were listener questionnaires and 260 were non listener questionnaires reflecting a 33.16% listenership of those surveyed. The sample, which was 59.9% female, 40.1% male, with a mean age of 21 years, was reduced from the seven Racial/Ethnic Group demographic options on the questionnaires to three groups for representative comparison with the Winter term enrollment (Boyle & Green, 1991) of WMU (see Table 1). This table provides a comparison of the student enrollment of WMU and students who completed both the listener and non listener questionnaires in January 1991 when the questionnaires were completed. It is interesting to note that responses to the listener and non listener questionnaires were evenly distributed in various grade levels of freshmen 22.14%, sophomore 21.09%, junior 28.13% and senior 27.6%. The graduate level is not represented fairly at .52% in the survey compared to 16.2% enrolled, and full-time students taking part in the survey far outweigh part-time by 96% to 4%.

This sample is representative of the enrollment at Western Michigan University during the first weeks of Winter term (January), 1991 as can be seen by comparing total student enrollment with those who completed either the listener and non listener questionnaires.

In Table 2 a comparison of dayparts (refers to a universally accepted breakup of the broadcast day into various parts for programming purposes) reflects the
distribution of listener volume during weekday times, from the 129 completed listener questionnaires.

Table 1
WMU Student Enrollment Compared to Respondents Who Completed Either Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Caucasian American</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Additional Minorities</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WMU</td>
<td>86.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>52.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>90.89</td>
<td>5.99</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>59.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2
Percentage of Listeners for Weekday Times

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>6/9 a.m.</th>
<th>9/12:30</th>
<th>12:30/4:30</th>
<th>4:30/7:30</th>
<th>7:30/11</th>
<th>11/2</th>
<th>2/6 a.m.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>51.6%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results of the survey show in Table 2 that listenership patterns do vary according to time of day. It can be seen that the 7:30/11 p.m. time slot shows the greatest percentage of listenership. This may be due, in part, to that time when students have the most free time. The 4:30/7:30 p.m. slot is the second largest percentage of listenership. It can also be seen that the 2/6 a.m. slot reflects the smallest listener volume.
In Table 3 the percentage of listeners is broken down by class rank according to dayparts.

Table 3

Percentage of Listeners for Times by Class Rank

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Times</th>
<th>Freshmen</th>
<th>Sophomore</th>
<th>Junior</th>
<th>Senior</th>
<th>Grad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6/9 a.m.</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>30.77%</td>
<td>30.77%</td>
<td>30.77%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/12:30 p.m.</td>
<td>5.26%</td>
<td>10.53%</td>
<td>52.63%</td>
<td>31.59%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30/4:30</td>
<td>2.44%</td>
<td>14.63%</td>
<td>41.46%</td>
<td>39.02%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:30/7:30</td>
<td>4.17%</td>
<td>10.42%</td>
<td>35.42%</td>
<td>47.92%</td>
<td>2.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30/11</td>
<td>4.84%</td>
<td>11.29%</td>
<td>43.55%</td>
<td>38.71%</td>
<td>1.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/2 a.m.</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>19.23%</td>
<td>46.15%</td>
<td>26.92%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/6</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
<td>41.67%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat. Morn.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23.08%</td>
<td>53.85%</td>
<td>23.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat. Aft.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18.75%</td>
<td>43.75%</td>
<td>37.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat. Eve.</td>
<td>3.03%</td>
<td>15.15%</td>
<td>51.52%</td>
<td>30.30%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun. Morn.</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
<td>31.25%</td>
<td>37.50%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun. Aft.</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun. Eve.</td>
<td>3.85%</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
<td>53.85%</td>
<td>3.85%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When these percentages are broken down by class level, it becomes clear that juniors and seniors listen more in almost all time slots than freshmen and sophomores including week-end listening times. It is interesting to note that freshmen did not
listen at all during the Saturday morning and afternoon dayparts. In general the 7:30/11 p.m. and 4:30/7:30 p.m. were the most listened to dayparts.

Table 4
Music Type: Most Liked/Disliked

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Music Type</th>
<th>Most Liked</th>
<th>Most Disliked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Metal</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythm &amp; Blues</td>
<td>17.05%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country &amp; Western</td>
<td>.78%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jazz</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classical</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy Listening</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive</td>
<td>24.03%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gospel</td>
<td>.78%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Band</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>.78%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Contemporary (Rap)</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Music played during the week at all times was at the discretion of the announcer within the accepted rules of the AMF. During the week-end at WIDR-FM, programming in block form was in effect. Specific music categories were aired during designated hour blocks. For example, Saturday evening from 7 to 8 p.m. was Rhyme, Rhythm and Razzmatazz, a heavily modern Rhythm & Blues hour. The 8 to
9 p.m. segment was Quiet Storm, an hour of slow love songs. The 9 to 11 p.m. bloc was Industrial Wastezone, a program of heavy metal music. The Sunday evening blocks were WIDR World from 8 to 10 p.m., a program of music from other cultures and other nationalities, and from 10 p.m. to Midnight was In Fear of Abstractions, a program of free form experimental music. Peak listening times were the same during the week and week-end at WIDR-FM. However, the particular music that was played at peak listening times was different. There seems to be no correlation between the types of music played and peak listening time. It would appear that listeners are more interested in listening to radio than the specific music played. Therefore, WIDR-FM is not building audience largely according to format, but rather by time of day.

Table 4 identifies the music program format according to the type most liked and disliked of music that WIDR-FM plays. In this table, the most liked music type was clearly Progressive at 24.03%, with Rock second, 21.7% and Rhythm & Blues third, 17.05%. It is interesting to note that the Alternative category is sometimes considered under the broader heading of Progressive instead of by itself. This is the case in the Broadcasting Yearbook, a major industry publication. Therefore, when the respondent selected Progressive they may have been expressing a preference for Alternative3.

The table further shows that a large percentage of respondents, 37.1%, selected Heavy Metal as a most disliked music type that WIDR-FM plays. They did not rate Rock or Rhythm & Blues as disliked at all. The second and third choice for most disliked was Country & Western, 25.5% and Urban Contemporary (Rap), 11.6%. It is clear that what an announcer plays is not always reflective of what the audience wants.
Students completing both questionnaires were asked to rate music types. Table 5 contains a comparison of the results. The rating of music types comes from both questionnaires, from four options: Heavy Metal, Rhythm & Blues, Rock Progressive, and Country and Western. These were rated in order of importance to the student filling out the questionnaire by placing a "1" next to the music type preferred most, a "2" for second place, and so on. This comparison was not necessarily from music that WIDR-FM played, but common music types for rating in order to determine if discernible patterns existed among non listeners.

The non listener results were very close to the listener results in the ratings of these four music types. It can be ascertained that there were no appreciable differences between the listeners of WIDR-FM and non listeners.

Table 6 provides the reasons why students do not listen to WIDR-FM. The results were obtained from the non listener questionnaire, completed by 260 of the 389 students taking part in the survey.

The results show that nearly half claimed to already have a favorite radio station, and the 36.06% who never heard of it may reflect those Freshmen who had not previously been on the WMU campus. One further point which may reflect directly on the Alternative Music Format is the result that nearly 20% said that they had heard about WIDR-FM's music and they didn't like what the station played. This reflects badly on WIDR-FM when students will decide not to listen based solely what they've heard from others. This has important implications for any further promotion strategy that WIDR-FM might wish to adopt.
Table 5
Listener and Non Listener Music Ratings Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Music Type: HEAVY METAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Listener</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non Listener</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Music Type: RHYTHM &amp; BLUES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Listener</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non Listener</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Music Type: ROCK PROGRESSIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Listener</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non Listener</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Music Type: COUNTRY AND WESTERN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Listener</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non Listener</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6
Reasons for Not Listening to WIDR-FM
from Results of the Non Listener Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>CLASS LEVEL</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>FR</td>
<td>SO</td>
<td>JR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.81%</td>
<td>I already have a favorite radio station.</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>23.33</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.06%</td>
<td>Never heard of it.</td>
<td>40.91</td>
<td>27.27</td>
<td>17.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.72%</td>
<td>I haven't been a student here long enough to know about it.</td>
<td>57.69</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>9.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.52%</td>
<td>I've heard about their music, and I don't like what they play.</td>
<td>26.53</td>
<td>20.41</td>
<td>28.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.17%</td>
<td>Can't pick it up, my radio is out of range.</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>27.78</td>
<td>22.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.77%</td>
<td>I don't know anyone who works there.</td>
<td>17.65</td>
<td>29.41</td>
<td>23.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.78%</td>
<td>Other people said they don't like it.</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>16.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.80%</td>
<td>Sometimes it isn't on the air when it's supposed to be.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.80%</td>
<td>Don't have a radio.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The students who completed the listener and non listener questionnaires were combined for the purpose of sample representation.

The study also revealed that 34.9% of the students live in a residence hall, 2.6% a Fraternity/Sorority House, .52% in married housing, 42.7% live off campus, 9.1% live at home with their parents, and 8.5% own their own home. Ages for the study range from 17 to 60 years.

It should be noted that a difference is implied between alternative as a music type and alternative as a music category.

The 12 music likes/dislikes options from music that WIDR-FM played is not offered to non listeners. The four choices for rating is offered to both listener and non listener because it does not necessarily have to do with music that WIDR-FM played.

The pre-selected options for not listening to WIDR-FM shown in Table 6 are arranged in the order they were selected, and some students selected more than one option as their answer.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Listenerness

Only 33.16% of students surveyed at WMU have ever listened to the Alternative Music Format (AMF) of WIDR-FM. It is clear that the AMF does not promote effective listenerness. It is also clear that the radio listener will only listen to what sounds pleasing and good to that listener. A brief glimpse of what is pleasing to the listener comes from the Liked and Disliked results found in Table 4. Here, Progressive, Rock, Rhythm & Blues, and Jazz are all listed before Heavy Metal as Most Liked, while Heavy Metal, Country & Western, and Urban Contemporary (Rap) are listed as Most Disliked. The listener is quite certain in the kinds of music that are pleasing and sounds good.

Even the students who do not listen to WIDR-FM are consistent with the listeners in music tastes. This is clearly reflected in the Music Ratings (Table 5), showing only 7.27% rating Heavy Metal as a first choice among listeners; 5.78% among non listeners, for example, while more than 65% listeners and 79% non listeners rated Rock Progressive as a first choice, with Rhythm & Blues second. This may very well reflect the influence of commercial broadcasting on those who took part in the survey, and although WIDR-FM would like to introduce students to new avenues of musical tastes with the Alternative Music Format, the fact remains that Rock Progressive was overwhelmingly the first choice among those surveyed. People will consistently listen to what they like on their radio.

21

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In order for WIDR-FM to increase listenership, adjustments to the AMF would have to take place. This does not suggest that the AMF should necessarily be replaced with a commercial format, but simply that selections aired within the AMF, especially during the week, more closely reflect the likes of the population that WIDR-FM seeks to serve. Until everyone involved in the WIDR-FM operation more closely understands the wants and importance of the listener, the 33.16% listenership result is unlikely to change.

Programming

The Alternative Music Format leaves the programming door wide open. This could be the program director's coveted dream or worst nightmare, depending on the reason behind the particular program selection. In the case of college radio where the commercial element including listener demographics is not usually a factor, the AMF can be a means for at least a few students to become familiar with new and diverse material. However, if the programming intention is to increase listenership, the diversity of the AMF does not accomplish that objective. At WIDR-FM, the bulk of the programming week (the individual aired musical selections) is at the discretion of the announcer on duty. Therefore, if a particular volunteer happens to like Heavy Metal music, for example, or if the announcer has a number of friends who listen to Heavy Metal music, then that may be the most of what is played during that announcer's time on duty. This may run contrary to the original intention of the AMF format and alienate those who do not have a penchant for this particular type of music. This is a problem at WIDR-FM where the staff is unpaid volunteers. Also, by leaving music selections for most of the programming week at the discretion of the announcer, it is questionable as to how well the WIDR-FM Constitution (WIDR
Board of Directors, 1991) is being followed. It should be remembered that this Constitution seeks to provide an educational co-curricular training experience in broadcasting and provide a service to the WMU community. What can be the value of the training experience/service if a major segment of the student population of WMU does not listen to WIDR-FM?

A logical solution might be to program within the AMF more closely to the likes and dislikes of music types from the listener questionnaire (Table 4), and music ratings comparison from listener and non listener (Table 5), in the belief that people tend to listen more often when you play what they want to hear. Among listeners of WIDR-FM, Progressive, Rock, Rhythm & Blues, and Jazz were clearly most favored in that order, while Heavy Metal, Country & Western, Urban Contemporary (Rap), and Progressive were most disliked. By comparison of the listener and non listener in rating music in order of importance, both rated Rock Progressive as first, Rhythm & Blues second, Heavy Metal third, and Country and Western fourth out of the choices given.

Table 6 reveals a clear problem with respect to the ability of WIDR-FM to effectively market its services, where almost 20% said that they had heard about WIDR's music and didn't like what they play. More than 36% said they never heard of WIDR-FM, and more than 20% said they had not been a student here long enough to know about it. This should be seen as an important challenge to the Promotion/PR department of WIDR-FM, and it should cause close scrutiny of the present AMF by management, programming and announcers alike.

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Degree of Professionalism

An area that is possibly most difficult for the college radio station student volunteer is that of becoming, or sounding like, a professional. The student volunteer must realize that the listener compares the college radio station announcer with other radio station announcers. This is evident in results from the listener questionnaire where 28.6% said that the announcers were what they liked least about WIDR-FM, and only 6.2% said that the announcers were what they liked most about the station. Clearly, students who have listened to WIDR-FM expect the WIDR-FM student announcers to sound like, or be as good as, other radio announcers. Given that WIDR-FM is operated by non paid student volunteers, this desired professional result is certainly worth striving for.

Finally, responses from the open-ended questions show that most students want to support a WIDR-FM with less extreme in music tastes and more of a sound similar to other radio stations. Students asked for new Alternative music while at the same time said that they never listen to any of the programs by name. This suggests one of two things: (1) students on the air are not consistently promoting programs by name, or (2) listeners do not tune in often or long enough to hear the program promotion. Also, students are asking for more variety while at the same time saying that what they like least about WIDR-FM is the music variety. This may suggest that the WIDR-FM audience does not understand the concept of the Alternative Music Format. It also may suggest that the announcers have done little to educate their listeners to that concept, or that the variety that is played on the air is too diverse from the variety the listener expects. Again it would seem clear that listeners are more interested in listening to radio than the specific music played on WIDR-FM.
Appendix A

Questionnaire Cover Letter
Dear Student

Your participation in completing the attached questionnaire will be valuable in the examination of WIDR-FM radio.

Please do not put your name or ID number on the questionnaire, your answers are totally anonymous. Your participation cannot in any way affect your class grade.

Please read each question carefully, and answer as honestly as you can. Thank you very much.
Appendix B

Questionnaires
Please check the period(s) during which you have listened to WIDR-FM (in the last three months) for at least 15 minutes at a time:

____ Weekday mornings 6 to 9 am.
____ Weekday mornings 9 am to 12:30 pm.
____ Weekday afternoons 12:30 pm to 4:30 pm.
____ Weekday afternoons 4:30 pm to 7:30 pm.
____ Weekday evenings 7:30 pm to 11 pm.
____ Weekday evenings 11 pm to 2 am.
____ Overnight from 2 am to 6 am.

____ Saturday mornings ______ Saturday afternoons
____ Saturday evenings ______ Sunday mornings
____ Sunday afternoons ______ Sunday evenings

As a program service, how do you rate WIDR-FM Radio? (please circle one)
Excellent   Good   Average   Fair   Poor

When you listen to WIDR-FM, how long do you usually listen at a time: (circle one)
Less than an hour    An hour or more    Two or more hours

What do you like most about WIDR-FM: (circle one)
Music Variety   Announcers   Hours of Operation   Special Events

What do you like least about WIDR-FM: (Circle one)
Music Variety   Announcers   Hours of Operation   Special Events

What do you remember most about WIDR-FM?
Music variety   Announcers   Hours of Operation   Special events
What activities are you mostly involved in when you listen to WIDR-FM?

Study  Free time  Sports  Work

What kind of music do you like most that WIDR-FM plays? (please check one)

___ Heavy Metal  ___ Rhythm & Blues  ___ Rock  ___ Country & Western
___ Jazz  ___ Classical  ___ Easy Listening  ___ Progressive  ___ Gospel
___ Big Band  ___ Experimental  ___ Urban Contemporary (Rap)
___ Other________________________

What kind of music do you dislike most that WIDR-FM plays? (please check one)

___ Heavy Metal  ___ Rhythm & Blues  ___ Rock  ___ Country & Western
___ Jazz  ___ Classical  ___ Easy Listening  ___ Progressive  ___ Gospel
___ Big Band  ___ Experimental  ___ Urban Contemporary (Rap)
___ Other________________________

Have you ever worked for WIDR-FM: (circle one)

More than 1 year?  Less than a year, but more than one semester? For one semester?  Sat in a few times?  Never

Are you aware of the annual event, WIDR-FM "Barking Tuna Festival":

YES  NO

Are you aware of WIDR-FM "New Music Nights":

YES  NO

Are you aware of the annual event, WIDR-FM "WIDR Week":

YES  NO

What kinds of programs would you listen to on WIDR-FM if they were offered?___________________________________________________

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What changes would you like to see in WIDR-FM?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

How many different radio stations do you listen too? ____________________

The following pertains to the **WEEKDAY FORMAT** of WIDR-FM. Please circle the response that most closely reflects how often you listen to the following programs:

**Program Names:**

**Sunny Side Up, 6:10 am:**
- Always
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**Bits and Pieces, Noon:**
- Always
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**Bottoms and Tops, 8: pm:**
- Always
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**Midnight Hour, 11 pm to 2 am:**
- Always
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**Graveyard, 2 am to 6 am:**
- Always
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

The following questions pertain to the **SATURDAY FORMAT** of WIDR-FM. Please circle the response that most closely reflects how often you listen to the following programs:

**Program Names:**

**Alternate Route, 9 to 11 am:**
- Always
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**Uptempo, 11 am to 1 pm:**
- Always
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**Hip Hop House, 1 to 3 pm:**
- Always
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**WIDR International, 3 to 4 pm:**
- Always
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

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Shrinkwrap, 4 to 7 pm:
Always Frequently Sometimes Rarely Never

Rhyme, Rhythym & Razzmatazz, 7 to 8 pm:
Always Frequently Sometimes Rarely Never

Quiet Storm, 8 to 9 pm:
Always Frequently Sometimes Rarely Never

Industrial Wastzone, 9 to 11 pm:
Always Frequently Sometimes Rarely Never

Forté, 11 pm to 2 am:
Always Frequently Sometimes Rarely Never

The following questions pertain to the **SUNDAY FORMAT** of WIDR-FM. Please circle the response that most closely reflects how often you listen to the following programs:

Program Names:

Triumphant Tunes, 6 to 8 am:
Always Frequently Sometimes Rarely Never

Gospel Explosion, 8 to 10 am:
Always Frequently Sometimes Rarely Never

Raggae Review, 10 am to Noon:
Always Frequently Sometimes Rarely Never

Salsa, Noon to 2 pm:
Always Frequently Sometimes Rarely Never

Blues Power, 2 to 4 pm:
Always Frequently Sometimes Rarely Never

Birdland, 4 to 6:30 pm:
Always Frequently Sometimes Rarely Never

Bright Moments, 6:30 to 8 pm:
Always Frequently Sometimes Rarely Never

WIDR World, 8 to 10 pm:
Always Frequently Sometimes Rarely Never

In Fear of Abstractions, 10 pm to Midnight:
Always Frequently Sometimes Rarely Never

Soundscape, Midnight to 2 am:
Always Frequently Sometimes Rarely Never
The following questions pertain to the public service portion of the WIDR-FM format. Please circle the response that most closely reflects how often you listen to the following programs:

**News/Weather, 6:50, 7:50, 8:50 and 11:50 am, and 4:50 pm weekdays:**
- Always
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**Art Chart, 7:10 and 11:10 am, and 10:10 pm weekdays:**
- Always
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**Kalamazoo Night Life, 7:50 am, and 5:10 pm weekdays:**
- Always
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**Campus Communique, 8:10 am, and 2:10 pm weekdays:**
- Always
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**Outward Bound, 8:30 am weekdays:**
- Always
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**Concert Calendar, 9:10 am, 3:10 and 9:10 pm weekdays:**
- Always
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**Sports Department, 9:50 am, and 5:50 pm weekdays:**
- Always
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**Sports Corner, 11:40 am weekdays:**
- Always
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**Missing Menagerie, 11:30 am, and 6:30 pm weekdays:**
- Always
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**Public Affairs, 7 pm weekdays:**
- Always
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Please rate the following types of music in order of importance to you. Place a “1” next to the music type you prefer most, a “2” for second place, and so on.

- Heavy Metal
- Rhythm & Blues
- Rock/Progressive
- Country & Western
- Other

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What is your age? _____

What is your Racial/Ethnic Group?

___Afro-American/Black
___American Indian or Alaskan Native
___Caucasian-American/White
___Mexican-American/Chicano
___Asian-American, Oriental, or Pacific Islander
___Puerto Rican, Cuban, or Other Hispanic Origin
___Other

What is your class level at WMU?

___Freshman ___Sophomore ___Junior ___Senior
___Graduate or Professional Student
___Special Student ___Other/Unclassified

What is your enrollment status at WMU?

___Full-Time Student ___Part-Time Student

What is your sex? ___Male ___Female

What is your current college residence?

___College residence hall ___Fraternity or Sorority House
___College Married Student Housing ___Off-Campus Room or Apt
___Home of Parents or Relatives ___Own Home ___Other

What is your overall GPA? _____________

What is your major? __________________________________________

Thank you for filling out this survey questionnaire.
WIDR, 89.1 FM NON-LISTENER QUESTIONNAIRE

Have you ever listened to WIDR-FM? ___YES ___NO

Have you heard of WIDR-FM? ___YES ___NO

If yes, where did you hear about this station?_____________________

Have you read about WIDR-FM in the Western Herald? ___YES ___NO

Please check as many reasons that may apply, for why you do not listen to WIDR-FM:

___Never heard of it.
___Don’t have a radio.
___Can’t pick it up, my radio is out of range.
___I’ve heard about their music, and I don’t like what they play.
___I already have a favorite radio station.
___Other people said they don’t like it.
___Sometimes it isn’t on the air when it’s supposed to be.
___I haven’t been a student here long enough to know about it.
___I don’t know anyone who works there.
___Other____________________________________

Have you heard “Alternative Music or Alternative Radio”? ___YES ___NO

Have you ever listened to any “Alternative” radio? ___YES ___NO
What kinds of programs would you listen to on a student operated campus radio station if they were offered_____________________

__________________________________________________________________________

What changes would you like to see in a student operated campus radio station_________________________________________

How many different radio stations do you listen too? ______________

Please rate the following types of music in order of importance to you. Place a “1” next to the music type you prefer most, a “2” for second place, and so on.

___Heavy Metal ___Rhythm & Blues ___Rock/Progressive ___Country & Western Other__________________________________________

Why don’t you listen to the student operated campus radio station?_________________________________________________________
What is your age? __________

What is your Racial/Ethnic Group?

___ Afro-American/Black
___ American Indian or Alaskan Native
___ Caucasian-American/White
___ Mexican-American/Chicano
___ Asian-American, Oriental, or Pacific Islander
___ Puerto Rican, Cuban, or Other Hispanic Origin
___ Other

What is your class level at WMU?

___ Freshman  ___ Sophomore  ___ Junior  ___ Senior
___ Graduate of Professional Student
___ Special Student  ___ Other/Unclassified

What is your enrollment status at WMU?

___ Full-Time Student  ___ Part-Time Student

What is your sex?  ___ Male  ___ Female

What is your current college residence?

___ College residence hall  ___ Fraternity or Sorority House
___ College Married Student Housing  ___ Off-Campus Room or Apt
___ Home of Parents or Relatives  ___ Own Home  ___ Other

What is your overall GPA? __________

What is your major? _________________________________________

Thank you for filling out this questionnaire.
Appendix C

HSIRB Approval
Date: January 7, 1991
To: Michael Finn
From: Mary Anne Bunda, Chair
Re: HSIRB Project Number: 91-01-06

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research protocol, "An Examination from a Management Perspective of the Alternative Music Format of the Student-Operated Campus Radio WIDR-FM," has been approved under the exempt category of review by the HSIRB. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the approval application.

You must seek reapproval for any changes in this design. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

cc: Shirley Van Hoeven, Communication

Approval Termination: January 7, 1992
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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