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Aesthetic Gaffes: Perspectives of the Radio Media Professional and Production

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Abstract

This study explores the phenomenon of aesthetic gaffes in radio media, examining the perspectives of both radio media professionals and production teams. Aesthetic gaffes refer to mistakes or oversights in the creative and technical aspects of radio programming, such as sound design, music selection, and narrative structure. Through the uses and gratification theory, this paper identifies common aesthetic gaffes in radio production, including inconsistencies in audio quality, ineffective use of sound effects, and poorly crafted narrative arcs. The findings highlight the importance of attention to detail, creative vision, and technical expertise in producing high-quality radio content. This study contributes to the understanding of radio aesthetics and provides practical insights for radio professionals seeking to improve their craft.

Keywords: radio aesthetics, aesthetic gaffes, radio production, sound design, narrative structure

1. Introduction:

Radio media has long been a vital platform for entertainment, information, and education, with millions of people worldwide tuning in to various radio programs daily (Henderson, 2007; Keith, 2011). However, despite its widespread popularity, radio media is not immune to mistakes or oversights in its aesthetic aspects, which can compromise the listening experience and undermine the credibility of radio media professionals and productions (Barnes, 2013; Fisher, 2012). These mistakes, or aesthetic gaffes, can be subtle yet significant (Barnard, 2013).

Aesthetic is a Greek word, which means 'perception'. It can be described as the factor, as well as elements that appeals to the

senses which guides human beings or individuals in judging issues. This is why we have individual differences as to how people see and give interpretation to situations. Aesthetic gaffes, defined as mistakes or oversights in the aesthetic aspects of radio programming, can take many forms, from jarring audio transitions and poorly balanced sound levels to awkward silences and confusing narrative structures (McLeish, 2005); including audio imperfections, inconsistent sound design, poor pacing and timing, inadequate audio mixing, and lack of attention to detail (Crisell, 2006; Chantler & Stewart, 2011). These mistakes can have serious consequences, including audience disengagement, damage to

professional reputations, and financial losses (Eastman, 2009; Hetsroni, 2012). Most radio media professionals and program producers lack aesthetics in the disposition of their duties.

Despite the salience of aesthetic quality in radio production, there is a lack of research focusing specifically on aesthetic gaffes and their impact on radio professionals and production (Lacey, 2013). This study aims to address this gap by exploring the types, causes, and consequences of aesthetic gaffes from the perspectives of radio media professionals and production teams. It also seeks to provide a deeper understanding of aesthetic gaffes in radio media and identify strategies for prevention and mitigation.

2. Radio and Aesthetics

Crisell (2006) opines that radio has been and is still a vital medium for mass communication. It is a powerful mass medium used in education and communication; for the purposes of disseminating information, imparting instruction and giving entertainment (Ihechu, Okugo, & Dike, 2018). With its widespread reach and accessibility, radio provides a platform for entertainment, education, and information, catering to diverse audiences and demographics (Hendy, 2000). In other words, radio, effectively, spreads information to a heterogeneous audience thereby saving time, energy, money and manpower. As a medium, radio has metamorphosed over the years thereby adapting to technological advancements and changing listener habits (Lacey, 2013). Today, radio continues to play a crucial role in shaping cultural narratives, influencing public opinion, and providing a voice for marginalized communities (Barnard, 2013).

Aesthetics refers to the nature of beauty, taste, and art. It entails how we experience and appreciate beauty, harmony and balance in various forms of art, design, and everyday life (Kant, 1790; Adorno, 1970). Zettl (1990) defines aesthetic as the study of certain sense perceptions and how those perceptions can be most effectively clarified, intensified, and interpreted through a medium such as radio for specific recipients. Akpan (1987) sees aesthetics as that aspect of communication presentation that generates feelings in the respondents.

Radio and aesthetics are intimately connected, as the sonic qualities of radio programming can significantly impact the listener's experience (Crisell, 2006). Aesthetics in radio refers to the creative and artistic elements that contribute to the overall sound and style of a program, including music, sound effects, voiceovers, and audio mixing (Fisher, 2012). Effective radio aesthetics can engage listeners, convey emotions, and create a sense of atmosphere (Chantler & Stewart, 2011). Conversely, poor aesthetics can detract from the listening experience, causing listeners to tune out (Hetsroni, 2012). Radio producers and DJs use various aesthetic techniques to craft a unique sound and style, including audio processing, editing, and mixing (Barnes, 2013). The careful selection of music, sound effects, and other audio elements can also contribute to a program's aesthetic appeal (Keith, 2011).

3. Sound Design and Audio Production

Sound design and audio production are crucial elements in radio media aesthetics, as they create an immersive sonic experience for listeners. Sound design involves crafting and editing audio elements, such as music, sound effects, and FX, to enhance the narrative, mood, and atmosphere of a radio program (Dohl, 2017). Audio production, on the other hand, encompasses the technical

aspects of recording, editing, and mixing audio to achieve high-quality sound (Huber, 2017).

Effective sound design and audio production in radio media aesthetics can:

- Create a sense of presence and intimacy,
- Enhance the emotional impact of a story or message,
- Guide the listener's attention and engagement.

(Crisell, 2006; Bernard, 2013; McLeish, 2005)

4. Music and Radio Programming

Music selection and programming involve choosing songs, artists, and genres that resonate with the target audience, while also considering factors such as tempo, mood, and flow (Keith, 2011). Effective music programming can:

- Create a sense of continuity and coherence,
- Evoke emotions and moods,
- Establish a brand identity for the radio station.

(Crisell, 2006; Barnard, 2013; Hendy, 2000)

Radio programming also involves designing a cohesive schedule that balances music, talk, and other content to engage and retain listeners (McLeish, 2005). This includes considering factors such as:

- Format and genre,
- Tempo and pacing,
- Host and presenter styles, and
- Advertising and commercial content.

5. Radio Storytelling and Narrative

Effective radio storytelling involves crafting a compelling narrative that leverages the unique sonic capabilities of radio, such as:

- Using sound effects to create immersive environments,
- Employing music and silence to evoke emotions and mood, and
- Crafting dialogue and voiceovers to convey character and plot.

(Dohl, 2017; Barnard, 2013; McLeish, 2005)

Radio narrative can take many forms, including:

- Documentary and factual programming,
- Fiction and drama,
- Personal and reflective storytelling.

(Hendy, 2000; Crisell, 2006; Keith, 2011)

6. Radio Branding and Imaging

Radio branding involves developing a distinctive sound and visual identity for a radio station, including:

- Jingles and audio logos,
 - Voiceovers and promos,
 - Music and programming formats
- (Keith, 2011; McLeish, 2005; Crisell, 2006)

7. Technical Aspects of Radio Production

Key technical aspects of radio production include:

- Audio Recording and Editing: This is using software and hardware to capture and shape audio signals.
- Audio Processing and Effects: This is applying techniques such as equalization, compression, and reverb to enhance or alter audio.

- **Mixing and Mastering:** This is balancing audio levels, panning, and depth to create a cohesive mix, and preparing audio for broadcast.
- **Radio Transmission and Broadcasting:** This is simply understanding the technical part of broadcasting such as frequency modulation, amplitude modulation, and digital transmission.

(Huber, 2017; Dohl, 2017; McLeish, 2005; Hendy, 2000)

8. Grammar Element in Radio Media

To the average radio listener, the radio professional (presenter/On-Air Personality) is grammatically infallible. The listener believes that the presenter is well educated and intellectually efficient. While the radio media professional is allowed to use sensationalized or clichéd writing style that prioritizes grabbing attention over accuracy or nuance, great care should be taken to avoid grammatical and lexical lawlessness.

It is important to state here that no one, except the British Monarch, has the license, be it poetic, journalistic, papal, professorial, or linguistic, to alter the basic rules of English (Nduagu, 2025). Even though the radio media professional tries to employ journalese – which is the style of language and writing used by journalists, he/she must ensure to employ:

- ❖ Concise and direct language
- ❖ Objective tone
- ❖ Use of active voice
- ❖ Simple sentence structures
- ❖ Avoidance of complex vocabulary
- ❖ Emphasis on clarity and readability
- ❖ Simple correct English

English grammar plays a crucial role in radio media, as it enables effective communication, clarity, and engagement with listeners. Here are some ways English grammar is used in radio media:

- a) Radio presenters and announcers use proper grammar to convey information, news, and messages in a clear and concise manner.
- b) Radio scripts, including commercials, promos, and news bulletins, rely heavily on proper grammars, punctuation, and syntax to ensure effective communication.
- c) Radio presenters use proper grammar, diction, and pronunciation to deliver content in an engaging and professional manner.
- d) Radio storytellers use narrative techniques, such as verb tense, point of view, and dialogue, to craft compelling stories that capture listeners' attention.

(Crisell, 2006; McLeish, 2005; Keith, 2011; Dohl, 2017)

9. Time Element in Radio Media

Radio program professionals and producers must consider the fact that time is a very essential factor in production and should count it worthwhile to have background knowledge of it. There are two (2) types of time:

- Objective Time – that is the clock time, and
- The Subjective or Psychological Time.

(Peple, & Onah, 2022)

How effective or otherwise time is used in a program will make for the beauty of such program, as radio programs are always

supposed to run with time. Here are some key aspects of the time element in radio media:

- i. Radio programs have limited time slots, requiring content creators to carefully plan and pace their content.
- ii. The pacing and tempo of radio content can greatly impact the listening experience. A well-balanced mix of fast-paced and slow-paced segments can keep listeners engaged.
- iii. The timing of content, such as news updates, commercials, and music, can affect listener engagement and retention.
- iv. Unintentional silences or “dead air” can be detrimental to the listening experience, making it essential to minimize these moments.

(Keith, 2011; Fisher, 2012; Eastman, 2009; Henderson, 2007; Crisell, 2006)

10. Addressing the Shared Challenges between the Radio Media Professional and Radio Media Producer

- ✓ **Attention to Detail:** Both the professionals and productions should recognize the importance of attention to detail in preventing aesthetic gaffes.
- ✓ **Communication:** Effective communication between team members and stakeholders is crucial in identifying and correcting mistakes. They must receive and incorporate feedback from listeners, peers, and managers.
- ✓ **Quality Control:** Regular quality control checks can help detect and prevent aesthetic gaffes.
- ✓ **Continuous Improvement:** Both professionals and productions should strive for continuous improvement, learning from mistakes to refine their craft. Keeping up with the latest industry developments, technologies, and best practices should be top priority.

Theoretical Footing

The study explores the uses and gratification theory for this endeavor since the bottom line of this theory is that media do not do things to people, rather people do things with media. Specifically, the objective or purpose for this theory, according to Burgeon, Hunsaker and Dawson (1994), is to explain how individuals use mass communication to gratify their needs as they stay up late at night to listen to local news or programs. In their own view, Baran and Davis (2001) conclude that audience members actively seek out the mass media to satisfy individual needs, such as learning, passing time, killing tension, relaxation and for mere excitement.

Members of the audience are not docile. They influence the effect process by selectively sieving the plethora of messages and retaining the ones that meets their individual needs, thus, the quality of program determines whether or not audiences would watch, listen, read or tune off.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Aesthetic gaffes in radio media can have significant consequences, comprising the listening experience, damaging professional reputations, and undermining the credibility of radio stations This study has provided a comprehensive examination of aesthetic

gaffes from the perspective of radio media professionals and production teams.

The findings highlight the importance of attention to detail, effective communication, and continuous quality control in preventing aesthetic gaffes. Radio media professionals and production teams must prioritize aesthetics, recognizing its critical role in engaging in retaining listeners.

By acknowledging the potential pitfalls of aesthetic gaffes and implementing strategies to prevent them, radio media professionals and production teams can enhance the listening experience, maintain professional standards, and ensure the long-term success of their stations.

Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the significance of aesthetics in radio media, emphasizing the need for vigilance and creativity in crafting high-quality audio content that resonates with listeners.

Recommendations for future research include exploring the impact of aesthetic gaffes on listener engagement and retention, as well as examining the role of technology in preventing and mitigating aesthetic gaffes

By prioritizing aesthetics and striving for excellence in radio media production, professionals can create engaging, informative, and entertaining content that captivates audiences and sets their stations apart in a crowded media landscape.

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