

Optimizing Radio Broadcasting in the Digital Age: Effective Planning and Management Strategies

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Abstract

Radio stations are undergoing a radical shift, moving from old-school linear broadcasts to a complex cross-platform convergence model. While most studies focus only on technology, this research digs into the "human-side" of management, exploring how planning strategies can bridge the gap between traditional FM roots and modern digital demands. Through in-depth case studies at Radio Istara and M Radio Surabaya, we found that true optimization is not just about moving resources around like a spreadsheet; it is a total rethink of how a station engages its crowd. Our findings show that by integrating tools such as podcasts and social media, radio is shedding its old, "passive" skin and becoming a highly interactive medium. This study provides a novel conceptual framework for broadcasters who wish to balance digital content creation with operational grit. By focusing on this balance, we demonstrate how local radio can maintain its unique soul and remain financially viable in an era in which global streaming giants are trying to take over the airwaves

Keywords: Radio Operations, Media Combination, Planning and Management, Digitalization, Participatory Communication.

INTRODUCTION

This study departs from the premise that radio is not merely an industry in technical transition but a medium undergoing mediamorphosis (Fidler, 1997). In the context of Surabaya's broadcasting, the shift from analogue to digital is not just a change of tools but a radical change in the communicative contract between the station and its listeners. We argue that "optimization" in this digital era is a form of media convergence (Jenkins, 2004). where corporate management strategies must negotiate with the participatory culture of the digital audience. Therefore, the problem is not just "how to survive financially," but how to maintain a communicative identity when the boundaries between the broadcaster and the audience have blurred.

We must be clear about this: radio is struggling. We are not just talking about technical changes; we are seeing a situation where radio has to fight to stay visible in a world dominated by social media algorithms (Harliantara, 2025). The old ways of managing a station simply do not apply anymore. Why? This is because the way our listeners in cities like Surabaya engage with audio has changed forever. Traditional FM stations are now forced to compete with global platforms such as Spotify and TikTok (Alhassan et al. 2024; Darvish, 2023). If management does not move toward a real convergence model, they will find themselves broadcasting to an empty room.

In our view, people often make the mistake of thinking that convergence is only about buying new equipment. It is much more than that of the previous study. This is a metamorphosis (Fidler, 1997). This requires a kind of organizational flexibility that is difficult for old-school broadcasters to accept (Dhamayanti, 2022)). Planning is not just about spreadsheets. It is about finding the station's identity and making it work on a small smartphone screen. We need to stop just "pushing" content and start listening to what the audience is actually asking for (Sunarsa et al., 2020).

When we look at the research available today, it feels a bit repetitive. There is a strong focus on budgets and technical tools. Most studies treat the radio as a machine. (Mizutani-Tiebel et al., 2022; Byeon et al., 2023). However, what about the communication side? We believe that the current scholarship is missing a significant point. We have not sufficiently examined how management choices actually change the human connection between the studio and the listener. Radio is treated as a corporate task, not as a way to create meaning. This is why many stations lose their "soul" when they try to go digital.

This study attempts to address this gap. Based on the conceptual tension described above, this study formulates the following two central research questions:

1. **RQ1:** How have private radio stations in Surabaya redefined their communicative planning to navigate the structural transition from linear broadcasting to a convergent media ecosystem?
2. **RQ2:** How does the "visual turn" in digital radio broadcasting transform the professional identity and communicative practices of radio presenters?

We are not here to give polite advice. Our goal is to build a practical framework for management in a digital world that is moving very fast.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media Convergence and Mediamorphosis: A Theoretical Framework

To understand how radio stays alive today, we lean on two main ideas: media convergence and what we call mediamorphosis. We do not see Jenkins (2020) work as merely a technical manual for digital tools. To me, it is about a massive cultural shift. It is about how audiences move like water across different platforms, forcing radio to stop being a "box in the corner" and start being a hybrid network. In the stations we studied, this means that radio is not just audio anymore; it is a mix of video, social feeds, and live interaction. (Jensen, 2022).

We also find Fidler (1997) take on media morphology very relevant here. He argued a long time ago that old media does not just die off when something new comes along; it evolves. We see the optimization of radio as this exact kind of evolutionary survival. Management today is not just about keeping the transmitter running. That's the old way. Now, it is about building a "communication brand" that lives everywhere on TikTok, YouTube, and FM radio. In this study, we treat planning and management as the actual tools that broadcasters use to survive evolution. (Marwan Walid Mohammad, 2022).

Digital Transformation in Radio Management

Looking at how other stations adapt, we can see that the digital world is not just moving; it is sprinting. For example, Cilegon Pass FM (2020) and V Radio Jakarta (Dhamayanti, 2022). Their results mirror what we see on the ground: strategic planning is no longer a dusty document sitting in a drawer. It is a living pillar of survival. These studies show that "content quality" has become a moving target. You cannot simply "broadcast" anymore. Management must pivot every day to keep up with an audience that lives through their smartphones. (He et al., 2024; Li, 2023)

However, here is what really gets me: the whole identity of the broadcaster has been flipped. If you look at Muara AM or Sip FM Banyuasin, there is a clear, undeniable link between the creativity of the staff and the audience retention. In our opinion, the "announcer" has been reinvented from scratch. They are no longer just a "voice" in a booth anymore; they are "content creators" (Bazlutckaia et al., 2024). Today's radio talent needs to be just as natural on a TikTok live feed as they are behind a professional microphone. It is not just about being professional; it is about not becoming obsolete in this digital chaos.

Participatory Communication and Audience Interaction

Honestly, "participatory communication" is far more than a fancy academic buzzword. It is a loud, messy, and often painful overhaul of how radio actually works. We have noticed this trend consistently: if a station cannot amplify local voices or even spark a basic two-way conversation, it is basically dead on arrival (Sikdar, 2020; Sharma, 2021) We are finally moving away from that rigid, "top-down" broadcasting hierarchy. Now, digital tools have turned the average listener into a 'prosumer.' They are not just passive ears anymore; they are actively getting their hands dirty in the content creation process.

From where we stand as researchers, this flips the entire management script. You cannot simply hide in a quiet office, plan a show in a vacuum, and pray it works. That era is over. It doesn't work. Today, one has to stare at raw data analytics, grab real-time feedback by the throat, and build "open" programming that actually forces people to participate (Krause & Fletcher, 2023). It is a brutal fight for attention in a market that is noisier than it has ever been. The simple truth? If you are not interactive, you have already lost the war for relevance.

Research Gaps

The problem is that, even though we have some great case studies, there is a massive wall between management efficiency and communication theories. We have noticed that most researchers are obsessed with the technical side of gadgets and staff training, but they forget why we do radio in the first place. We want to break this cycle. Our study attempts to examine the entire picture. I am not just talking about budget tweaks or HR manuals; I am looking at how we can optimize those administrative "dry" parts without losing the heart of what radio is its social and communicative soul. We need to find a way to stay efficient in a converged world without becoming cold, corporate machines.

Digital Capabilities and Organizational Resilience

We have come to realize that keeping a radio station alive is not just about luck; it is about what we call "organizational digital capabilities" (Harliantara, 2025). Let us be clear: this is not just about teaching announcers how to use a new app. It's much bigger. It is about whether the management has the guts and vision to bake technology into the station's DNA. We believe that real resilience in this industry does not come from just "reacting" when things go wrong. It comes from being proactive in spotting a digital shift before it hits you like a wave. Our goal in this study is to show that connection: how cleaning up the administrative side (optimization) actually protects the unique, human voice of broadcasting in this messy convergence era.(He et al., 2024)

METHODOLOGY

For this study, we decided to adopt a qualitative approach, specifically using a descriptive case study design. We did not want to just look at charts; we followed (Robert K. Yin, 2017) logic because we needed to get our hands dirty and witness how radio management actually fights for survival in its natural habitat. This is not a theoretical exercise for me; it is about watching a high-speed digital transformation happen right on the streets of Surabaya.

Research Subjects: Istara and M Radio

We put our focus on two local heavyweights: Radio Istara FM and M Radio Surabaya (MRS). Why these two? They are the ultimate survivors. Istara is a local legend, a station that invented the contemporary music scene in this city. They have had to make a massive pivot, moving from traditional FM to hybrid streaming powerhouses. Then, there is M Radio, which is the heartbeat of the city's youth. They are fast, loud, and live almost entirely on TikTok and Instagram.

Surabaya is our "digital lab." The competition is brutal. While we were in the field, we realized that these stations were not just copying what they saw in Jakarta. They are tailoring everything for the 'Suroboyoan' listener, who values raw, direct talk over fake corporate polish. Istara represents the "legacy" headache of managing modernization costs (CAPEX), while M Radio shows a world where the line between a DJ and a social media influencer has totally vanished.

The Informants and Data Crack

We selected informants at Radio Istara and M Radio using purposive sampling. The criteria were twofold: (1) individuals holding strategic managerial roles (Station Managers and Program Directors) who handle "top-down" planning, and (2) broadcasters/digital content leads who execute "bottom-up" audience engagement. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the data, we employed source triangulation by cross-verifying the interview results with direct field observations in the studios and an analysis of the stations' social media interaction logs.

We did not waste our time on surface-level discussions. We used purposeful sampling to sit down with the people who actually hold the keys to the station's future. Between October and December 2024, we spent a lot of time (60 to 90 minutes per session) with six key people: two Program Directors (the content architects), two Station Managers (who manage the money), and two Digital Content Directors (the glue between the booth and the phone screen).

To make sense of the mess, we used the Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana (2014) model. However, we did not just follow the book like a robot. We stripped the data down, mapped it into a custom matrix to find the "hidden" patterns, and tied it all back to convergence theory. We cross-checked everything (triangulation) by comparing what they told me in the interviews with the cold.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Our findings suggest that optimization at Radio Istarsa and M Radio is not a purely economic act but a re-spatialization of the broadcast studio itself. The studio has evolved from a closed acoustic space into a "live theater" (visual broadcasting). This aligns with the theory of communicative action, where the goal of management planning is no longer just "reach" (number of listeners), but "resonance" (depth of interaction). By transforming presenters into "social influencers," these stations are effectively managing their human capital transformation to survive digital disruption.

To provide a clearer conceptual framework for this transformation as suggested by the reviewers, Table 1 summarizes the three pillars of Communicative Optimization derived from our analysis:

Table 1. The Communicative Optimization Framework in Digital Radio

Pillar	Focus	Key Transformation
Operational	Workflow & Content	From linear, ephemeral broadcasts to a Cross-Platform Content Matrix .
Professional	Human Resources	From "Invisible Voices" to " Visual Influencers " (The visual turn).
Economic	Monetization	From selling airtime/spots to Omnichannel Advertising (Trust-based).

Source : author's own elaboration (2026)

Strategic Planning as a Response to Media Convergence (Answering RQ1)

From what we saw in the field, it is clear that radio has stopped being a "single-box" operation. It has evolved into a multi-platform ecosystem. We noticed that planning is no longer about filling a 24-hour linear schedule; it is about creating a "content pool" that gets redistributed everywhere. This is exactly what Jenkins, (2004) talked about, but seeing it in Surabaya makes it much more real.

At the stations WE studied, the priority is now "Hybrid Programming." A morning talk show is not just audio anymore; it is a YouTube livestream and a series of TikTok clips happening all at once. In our opinion, this is the true definition of "Optimization" in 2025. This is what Fidler (1997) called *mediamorphosis*, where the station's very bones are rebuilt to handle multichannel chaos.

Radio Istara is a prime example. Their management built a literal factory for content repurposing. Their Program Director told me something fascinating: every prime-time show *must* produce at least three digital products: a highlight for the livestream, a short clip for social media, and a podcast summary. This is not just a technical chore; it is a total rethink of what a "radio program" is. It is no longer a fleeting sound in the air; it is a permanent, searchable digital asset.

Meanwhile, M Radio Surabaya has gone "digital-first." They have moved away from the old, frequency-limited model. At Istara, we watched them use a "Content Matrix" to dismantle a single artist interview. They treat one interview like raw material: the audio goes to FM, the video goes to YouTube, and the "killer quotes" are extracted for Instagram Reels. It's a transition toward what we call an 'ubiquity model.' (Rothfritz et al., 2025)

This matches Jenkins (2004) idea that convergence is both a corporate and consumer process. At M Radio, the show does not end when the mic is cut. The audience keeps it alive in the comments, creating a never-ending cycle of engagement. For managers, this means that they must stop spending money only on better transmitters and start investing in cloud storage, video editing suites, and massive data pipes.

During our time at M Radio, we also noticed the announcers are essentially "influencers." They are the bridge. This dual role forces the station to budget for professional cameras and high-speed synchronization tools. In the Surabaya landscape, optimization is no longer about a rigid hierarchy; it is about a flexible, network-oriented team that can pivot as fast as the Internet. (Kipkosgei et al., 2020).

The Multi-Platform Operational Workflow

When we stepped into the studios of Radio Istara and M Radio, we realized that program optimization was not just a fancy term; it was a brutal overhaul of their daily grind. The old, slow, linear way of doing things has disappeared. Previously, it was just prep, talk, and go home. Now, the workflow is a fast-moving "cycle." At Istara, for instance, the process starts long before the mic is even turned on. They are constantly hunting for what is trending on social media, making sure that the

FM broadcast is not just a lonely island but part of a bigger online conversation.(Hase et al., 2023).

Inside the booth, we saw that the workload had basically tripled. It is chaotic but organized. Presenters are not just "voices" anymore; they are jugglers, managing live FM talk while simultaneously engaging with people on WhatsApp and Instagram Live.(Prasetyo, 2025). M Radio Surabaya takes this even further with their "digital content team." It is fascinating to watch: while the presenter is talking, the content crew is busy "stealing" high-quality video clips, editing them on the fly, and dumping them onto TikTok and Instagram as "micro-content" before the show is even over.

This entire cross-platform mess requires a very specific type of discipline. Optimization here means ensuring that whatever happens on the FM airwaves does not just disappear it has to be amplified and replicated across the web. From our observations, radio studios in Surabaya aren't just radio studios anymore; they have evolved into multimedia "war rooms." This complexity is the reality of media morphosis (Fidler, 1997). If you want to stay in the digital lives of your listeners, you have to be everywhere at once.

Challenges in Maintaining Communicative Identity (Answering RQ2)

Moving to digital is not just about better gear; it is a total identity crisis for everyone involved. Our interviews revealed a brutal clash between traditional broadcast ethics and this new, desperate pressure to "go viral." People love to talk about budgets, but we think the real monster hiding under the bed is the skills gap. A broadcaster cannot just have a "face for radio" in 2025. You must be a vocal pro, a visual performer, and a social media influencer, all wrapped into one. As Bazlutckaia et al. (2024) pointed out, being a professional today means being good at surviving change. If you cannot pivot, you are basically invisible.

We found a fascinating paradox at both Istara and M Radio: we are losing the exclusivity of audio. Radio was always the "theater of the mind." Now? It's being dragged into "visual transmission." The hosts at M Radio were very honest with us they felt this weird new pressure to perform for the eyes. Now, their facial expressions or even their choice of outfit can matter just as much as how their voice sounds on air.

This "visual revolution" has turned the whole idea of a presenter upside down. It is not just about learning how a camera works; it is a deep psychological shift. (Crilley & Chatterje-Doody, 2020 ; Watson, 2024)These "invisible" storytellers are now

being forced to be "opinion leaders" on screen. Over at M Radio, we discovered that they even put "visual presentation" into the official staff evaluations. The studio is not just a booth anymore; it is a "live theater" where your lighting and background are part of the story you are telling.

Yes, this significantly affects the budget. This kind of physical mediamorphosis Fidler (1997) demands a massive CAPEX, the kind of money no station manager was even thinking about five years ago. You have to rebuild the entire studio for the cameras. To keep the lights on, management is now forced to sell "omnichannel" packages by bundling FM ads with TikTok posts and streaming shout-outs.

But for me, the most striking part is the "cultural resistance." I will never forget one senior presenter at Istara who told me, quite bluntly, that after twenty years of being just a "voice," having to worry about studio lights feels like learning a different profession. This "visual anxiety" is a massive barrier. It's a crisis of self. Management cannot just throw a manual at them; they have to act like talent managers, coaching people on personal branding and how to stay charismatic on camera.

We did see a brilliant "fix" at M Radio: they're pairing up "digitally savvy" interns with the veterans. It is a fair trade: the kids handle the tech, and the seniors teach them how to tell a story. This "human capital transformation" is the only way to ensure that the heart of radio does not get blinded by the studio lights.

Re-theorizing Optimization: From Managerial to Communicative

We've come to the conclusion that real optimization in radio isn't just about fixing the budget; it's about a total shift from being "managers" to being "communicators." (Kanayama, 2020). We have to stop thinking about a "mass audience" and start building an "audience community." This is not just a nuance; it is the whole game. By using social media for real-time talk, stations in Surabaya have finally cracked the code of two-way communication with the public. We have moved from passive listeners to active participants. In our opinion, any management plan that does not put interactive content at its heart is doomed to fail in today's cutthroat market.

In Surabaya, this transition is real. People are not just sitting there listening to music anymore; they are part of the show. WhatsApp and Instagram have completely blurred the line between producers and consumers. We argue that a radio station is only truly "optimized" when it turns its listeners into a thriving digital community.

Management must stop viewing platforms such as TikTok and YouTube as competitors. They are amplifiers. Istara and M Radio have figured this out: they use these tools to project their local voices to the world. This is how they create a sense of belonging that global giants like Spotify or YouTube Music can never touch. Radio's "secret weapon" is the human-to-human connection. If that is not in your strategic plan, you are missing the point.

Another significant shift we noticed was the move toward data-driven programs. The days of relying on "gut feeling" or old-school surveys are over. In Surabaya, management is obsessed with social media analytics. At M Radio and Istara, listener behavior is monitored in real time. They know exactly which morning show segment got the most shares on Instagram or which podcast actually kept people listening to.

This creates what we call a "quantified feedback loop." This allows for a level of precision that has never been seen before. If a topic flops digitally, management kills it and pivots the next day. This is "agile management" borrowing a trick from the software world to survive in the media. At the end of the day, optimizing radio is a hybrid job: you keep the human soul of communication alive, but you use the brutal power of digital data to ensure that people are actually paying attention.

Comparative Perspective: Digital Adaptation in the Global Context

To determine whether our findings in Surabaya hold water, we decided to examine how other regions are handling this mess. Our collaboration with researchers at Inonu University opened our eyes to the fact that Indonesia and Turkey are in the same situation. In both Turkey and Indonesia, radio is not just fighting technology; it is fighting for the soul of the listener who is being pulled toward on-demand digital services.

What we found from the Turkish experience especially in big cities that feel a lot like Surabaya is that success depends on "cultural affinity." Spotify can give you all the music in the world, but it cannot give you local flavor. In both countries, the secret sauce for local radio is high-level localization and real-time social conversations. The "visual broadcasting" trend we see at Istara and M Radio is already a massive mainstream movement in Turkey's private radio sector.

This comparison proves that the digital headache radio stations face is a global problem. But there's a catch: optimization only works if you have strong "social networks." In Turkey, the radio stations that survive are those that actually help the community. It's the same here. Our "communication optimization" framework

shows that staying alive is not about having the flashiest gear; it is about remaining a reliable partner for your listeners.

Linking the management styles in Surabaya with the academic insights from the University of Inonu makes it clear that Jenkins (2020) media convergence is a global reality. However, while the problem is global, the solution must be local. You must speak the language of the people on the street, whether that street is in Surabaya or Malatya.

Strategic Monetization: From Airtime to Omni-channel Advertising

Let us be real about money. One thing that gets ignored in all this talk about radio optimization is the death of the old business model. After spending time at Radio Istarsa and M Radio, it is obvious that selling "airtime" as we knew it is over. In a market flooded with digital options, a 30-second spot on FM frequency does not cut it. You have to sell the entire ecosystem. Both stations have had to pivot hard toward what I'd call "omnichannel advertising."

Radio Istarsa is a perfect case study. They have stopped just "selling ads" and started selling influence. You buy an FM spot, but you are also buying a social media endorsement from a presenter the audience actually likes, plus visual branding on a YouTube livestream. They capitalize on the one thing Spotify cannot touch: raw trust. The managers at Istarsa were very clear with me: clients now obsess over social media engagement metrics far more than old-school FM reach numbers. This means that the sales team cannot just be "salespeople" anymore; they have to be data experts.

M Radio handles it differently by turning their announcers into "radio opinion leaders" for Gen Z. They are not just a station; they are a creative agency. They do not just play ads; they build content for clients. By moving their revenue away from simple spots and toward digital production and live events, they prove that surviving in Surabaya's cutthroat market is about being a "content factory."

What really struck me is how radio is winning on "brand safety." The Internet is a mess of bots and fake news, but local radio is human-verified. The manager at Istarsa told me that local brands prefer a real person someone they know recommending their product over some faceless, automated Facebook algorithm.

Consequently, management is shifting toward "native advertising" ads that blend so well into the show that you barely notice them. This forces the sales and creative teams to talk to each other. Optimization here is not about stuffing more

commercials into an hour; it's about jacking up the "value per minute" by leveraging the emotional bond between the host and the listener.

In Surabaya, Istarsa and M Radio have stopped selling seconds and started selling "proximity." During our time at M Radio, we saw clients get way more excited about "live activation" like an announcer using a product live on a YouTube stream than any pre-recorded ad. They have turned their audience into a high-value community. They can charge a premium because they offer something a global algorithm cannot: a local, human soul.

CONCLUSIONS

This study makes one thing very clear: optimizing radio in this digital chaos is more than just buying new gear. It is a total rebranding of what a radio station is. From what we have seen at Radio Istarsa and M Radio Surabaya, survival depends on moving away from being just "audio providers" and becoming cross-platform brands. It is about merging old-school operational grit with the fast-paced demands of a digitally savvy crowd.

We identified three main pillars that support this. First, the operational pillar requires turning slow, linear workflows into a "content matrix" where a show is not just a fleeting sound but a permanent digital asset. Second, the professional pillar is a bit more painful; it forces presenters to step out of the shadows of being "invisible voices" (theater of the mind) and into the spotlight as "visual influencers" (live event). Third, the economic pillar shows that you can actually make money if you stop selling just airtime and start selling "trust" across every platform.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the field of Communication Management by proposing the framework of "Communicative Optimization." We conclude that the survival of traditional media in the digital age depends on its ability to function as a community-centric hub rather than as a one-way transmitter. This research underscores that while technology changes the "vessel" of communication, the human-centric need for local companionship remains the most valuable asset of radio.

Limitations and What's Next

Of course, we have only scratched the surface here. This study focuses on the private radio scene in Surabaya. State-owned stations or rural community radios likely face a completely different set of struggles than their private counterparts. Future research should explore this, especially within Indonesia's diverse broadcasting landscape. WE also have not crunched the hard numbers on ROI or listener retention yet, which is a job for the big data experts.

Then, there is the elephant in the room: Artificial Intelligence (AI). As AI voices and automated production improve, we need to ask what "human-centric" radio even means anymore. We suggest that future researchers spend more time in the "control rooms" to see how the next generation of managers balances cold algorithms with the raw, messy energy of a live human being behind the mic.

Practical Tips for the Industry

If you are running a station today, here is our advice:

1. Audio is heart, Digital is skin: Keep the storytelling high-quality, but ensure it looks good on a screen.
2. Train for "Hybrid Talent": Stop looking for just "voices." Look for storytellers who can edit videos and manage communities.
3. Trust Data, but keep your Soul: Use analytics to understand the crowd, but do not let a spreadsheet tell you how to be human.
4. Collab or Die: Partner up with local creators and influencers. Radio does not have to be a lonely island; it should be the hub of the local creative scene.

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