

The Future of Radio in the Digital Age

- Departure from Old Media as Practiced in the BBC's Radio Strategy -

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(Summary)

Japan's radio broadcasting celebrated the 90th anniversary in 2015. Radio, however, is called "old media," and how to stop the decline in the number of listeners has become a big issue. From a global point of view, radio is still regarded as one of the major media and is enjoyed by the public on a daily basis. However, it is a worldwide trend that listening hours are on a decline. With a wide variety of media to choose from, people now spare less and less time for radio listening. In response to this, broadcasters in Europe are exploring the future prospects for radio. For example, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) is promoting the digitization of radio services across the board. However, as digitization so far has hardly proven effective for increasing the number of listeners, many countries are hesitant about spending a large amount of money for capital investment. Against this backdrop, the BBC, a public service broadcaster in the United Kingdom, is expected to lead the radio industry in Europe. In 2013, BBC Radio marked a record high number of listeners. One of the factors behind its success in developing new listeners is its "multichannel" and "multimedia" strategy taking advantage of digitization. The BBC has 10 nationwide channels, each of which focuses on specific target listeners and offers a wide range of distinctive content for them. For young people who are not accustomed to listening to radio, the broadcaster films a part of radio programs and uploads the video on the Internet so that they can "watch" radio shows. It also started a service that allows listeners to download radio shows to their mobile devices and enjoy them whenever and wherever they like. The BBC is taking a lot of trial and error to develop new listeners as well as to foster a radio culture. Many of the Japanese broadcasters are having difficulty in designing long-term strategies on radio. A clue to transform the conventional radio to a "new radio" with new allure that is multilaterally integrated with the Internet shall be found in the ongoing efforts of the BBC and other overseas radio stations.