Do I Sound Like a Broken Record? A Comparative Analysis of Music Playlists in Portuguese Commercial Radio Stations

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SUMMARY

Radio is all about intimacy and words (Balsebre, 1994). Since radio's significant shift from verbal to musical content, songs have been able to create a special bond between broadcasters and audiences across the world. Nevertheless, selecting songs is far from being an innocent choice; it is part of a cultural framework (Ala-Fossi, 2005; Gjerdingen & Perrott 2008). Recently, scholars explained radio's alliances with the music industry and the adaptation to audiences' preferences (Kaplan, 2013; Uimonen, 2017), thus arguing that the music in radios' playlists is far from diverse, especially on stations owned by the private sector. This article draws upon the premise that a more comprehensive approach towards this topic is needed.

Inspired by previous studies on commercial radio musical policies (Uimonen, 2011; Hellman & Vikko 2019), this research makes use of a methodological tool to characterize music diversity in the two most popular Portuguese commercial radio broadcasters. After two weeks of observation, in March 2020, the authors of this article analysed 2366 song entries, concluding that the general policies for the playlists seem to be similar: a typical predominance of international

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singers/bands, male artists and English-spoken songs, including the overwhelming presence of worldwide labels associated to the majority of the songs. However, these national broadcasting stations seem to have their own set of artists, especially when it comes to Portuguese singers/bands. Future research should aim at analysing artists' and broadcasters' views on this cultural framework, as a way to expand the possibilities of understanding this complex and decisive topic within radio broadcasting and music industries.

Keywords: radio; music; playlists; Portugal; policies

Introduction

Radio has long been perceived as the medium generating the most personal relationship with its audience (Balsebre, 1994; Starkey, 2011; Street, 2017). This phenomenon of identification grants the radio the status of the most intimate medium (Paéz, 2011; Author, 2015). The more personality that is evident in the person on the air, the bigger is the opportunity for listener identification with that personality, and radio hosts have generally always shared their individual character and personal taste, namely in musical author shows.

Identification means relatability and familiarity, meaning that, when tuning into the radio, the majority of listeners are looking for something that sounds familiar to them; either a story that they can all relate to or a song that triggers familiar memories. Most radio listeners prefer a low degree of surprise when they tune in with the goal of spending time listening to music. They would rather listen to a list of famous popular songs, as opposed to discovering new tunes; or as Adorno (1945) placed it, radio reinforces "the commodity of listening". This identification standard is created by several elements related to the nature of the medium, some of them being: i) the fact that radio personalities are rarely elevated to the status of stardom; ii) the way radio consumption takes place, that is, mainly in a car environment or using headphones, enhancing a surround deep listening; and iii) because music, the core element of nowadays radio airplay, is extremely relatable, generating powerful levels of likability and passion.

One of radio's main features, considered to be its strength when attracting new audiences, is its commuter-friendly characteristics, especially when driving - a flexible, adaptable and reliable medium that is key in keeping company in travel traffic situations. In such contexts, listeners expect the radio playlist[1] to fit their personal taste, current interests and even their daily mood. Music in radio is the main agent of positive appraisal for listeners (Ruth *et al.*, 2016: 2). Therefore, radio stations support the creation of their playlists in market research, in order to correspond to

trends, and thus reach a broader audience, ultimately ranging across gender, genera-tion and social gaps. But are commercial radio stations offering a musical spectrum as diverse as the audience they are aiming at reaching?

In this paper, we will reflect on a Portuguese case study, which is rather unusual and has not yet been extensively analysed by scientific research. The radio market share in Portugal is, since the past decade, nearly monopolised by only two privately-owned radio broadcasters, *Rádio Comercial* and *RFM*, which together obtain more than 40% of the radio audience share[2] in Portugal since 2012 (Cardoso *et al.*, 2017), a circa 10-million inhabitants country with more than 350 national, regional and local stations. These two stations are the top of mind choice for almost 2 million people, captivating audience levels that cannibalize audiences in the radio industry.

By actively listening to these stations, we observed that there seems to exist small differences between the two stations in terms of programming strategies and production means. This exploratory analysis has raised the question of diversity as a starting point for further research: how similar is the broadcasting experience for listeners of the two most-listened to radio stations in Portugal? Being our object of study two radio stations structured according to the music format, our main goal will consist of evaluating differences and similarities in *Rádio Comercial* and *RFM*'s musical programming, in order to understand whether these two players are competing for market share by offering a very similar product to their audiences. Inspired by previous studies on commercial radio musical policies (Uimonen, 2017) including a methodological approach to characterize music diver-sity in radio (Hellman & Vikko, 2019), this research ultimately aims at identifying how the two most popular Portuguese commercial radio broadcasters manage their music playlists.

Theoretical framework

Since radio's significant shift from verbal to musical content, which in Portugal took place in the late 1990's, music has become one sound way of attracting audiences across different generations, genders, social and economic backgrounds. Scientific research has also been monitoring this phenomenon, thus exploring "radio's alli-ances with the music industry and its transformation of musical genres to formats and audience tastes to products" (Kaplan, 2013: 759).

Being public service broadcasters the exception, musical programming in commer-cial radio stations is well known for its level of repetition, generating little product differentiation among musical radio stations. Radio policies towards playlists seem to play exhaustively songs that are considered "hot" and "trendy" in the present mo-ment. Contemporary musical hits strategies look upon providing listeners with play-

lists that will keep up their momentum with familiar songs that they can quickly, as in a matter of seconds, recognize – and eventually sing along.

Subsequently, selecting specific songs for certain shows and their time frames is no innocent choice, it is a "cultural framework" of how songs are meaningful for audiences (Barnes, 1988; Ala-Fossi, 2005; Gjerdingen & Perrott 2008). Moreover, the same frame of thought goes for repeating those songs, to a point that it cannot be referred to as performing according to the musical identity of a station, rather as programming a station to be playing familiar hits anytime a listener tunes in throughout the day.

According to the most recent market research figures (Marktest, May 5th, 2020), Portuguese privately owned commercial broadcasters *Rádio Comercial* and *RFM* - first and second place, respectively, on the list of most listened-to stations - together collect 48.2% of audience share in the radio industry. In a universe of 8,563,501 Portuguese individuals above 15 years old, 80% of them tune in to radio every week (weekly reach), and 54.5% listened to their selected radio stations the previous day (cumulative audience). Therefrom 1,540,145 people listened to *Rádio Comercial* and *RFM* the previous day, corresponding to circa one third of all individuals that listened to at least one radio station the day before. Knowing that Portugal records 355 broadcasting operators across the country (ANACOM, 2020), the fact that about 30% of radio listeners choose to consume two stations that somehow sound alike is certainly impactful and worthy of investigation. Summing up almost half of the radio audience in the country, *Rádio Comercial* and *RFM* both correspond to the Adult Contemporary (AC) music format, a broadcasting model that has been succeeding in attracting radio audiences worldwide.

AC is a form of radio-played popular music ranging from the 1960s until the present day in a variety of genres, such as pop, rock, soul, rhythm and blues, in varying degrees of easy listening songs (Browne & Browne, 2001). Nonetheless, a format is no more than a very general framework for radio stations, meaning that "a common format does not mean that the stations are duplicates of, or substitutes to, each other" (Hellman & Vilkko, 2019). Rather, format fragmentation and within-format differences represent an industry practice (Chambers, 2003). Accordingly, both Portuguese broadcasters can be representing the same format, and still be perceived as performing in different programming configurations. AC radio stations can achieve both considerable flexibility and fragmentation, hence expanding their listenership (Berry & Waldfogel, 2001). This degree of resilience may even explain the format's dominance in the industry's market (Polinsky, 2007).

But even within a certain level of flexibility in the way the AC format is represented, there seems to occur a considerate degree of similarity between *Rádio Comercial*

and *RFM*. A broad musical universe is available within the adult contemporary music format, but user experience and exploratory observation tells us that a portion of these stations' playlists are made out of common songs, or at least transmit an analogous sonority that may induce the feeling that both broadcasters play the same: "More important than what the station is broadcasting, is what the station is presumably broadcasting" (Uimonen, 2011: 176).

By principle, diversity has generally been connected with the requirements for public service broadcasting. However, authors argue (MacFarland, 2009; Uimonen, 2017) that new ways of consuming and listening to music, such as Spotify and YouTube, are challenging radio stations to promote difference and innovation:

> ever-narrower radio formats are not necessarily in sync with two population segments: Those who listen to multiple radio formats rather than to a single favorite station to achieve the variety they desire, and those who are aware of the vast variety of available music that is never given radio airplay, who listen to cassettes and CDs that they program for themselves. (MacFarland, 2009: 39)

In light of this theoretical evidence, and on the grounds of common sense listener experience observation, we will reflect on how diverse music playlists can be when growing in market share is at stake. Privately owned broadcasters have more robust financial targets, thus there is an economic inclination to include in musical playlists mainly songs that perform positively when tested in market research focus groups. Listener-based popularity in songs played in the radio has hence driven the way commercial radio playlist policies are executed. For this reason, their music programming strategies might not be leaving enough room for innovation and quality assurance, being likability - or "mass likability", as the goal is to please as many listeners as possible, across different age, gender, social and economic backgrounds - the main criteria for musical selection.

> Programming underscores the production of predetermined playlists, often according to designated formats. It conceives of audience tastes as products to be delivered to marketers and pays little attention to emergent meanings on the reception end. It follows the logic of neoinstitutional theory in attending to questions of rationalization and standardization. (Kaplan, 2013: 773)

According to a number of studies, it was suggested that songs produced by very well-known artists, belonging to the concept of "superstars", have been identified as more prone to airplay success, as the "superstar factor" seems to be extremely relevant for their likability performance (Adler, 1985). Subsequently, as only a relatively small number of artists and their products are able to gain access to broad audiences, regular music consumers minimize their search by simply choosing art-

ists who are already popular (Interiano *et al.*, 2018), thus generating less diversity in their portfolio of featured artists in case the broadcasters' strategists are not actively pursuing it.

Since format radio became a worldwide media blueprint, a tendency for the stream-lining of broadcasting content in radio stations arose, thus reducing the diversity of music genres and songs being represented. Music selection and programming are now based on the outputs of the station's business strategy, rooted on the identifica-tion of consumer segments through market research studies investigating music preferences of radio audiences via surveys and focus groups of listeners' music tastes (Uimonen, 2017), aligned with the experience of in-house music editors and programmers (Schramm, 2008). This quantitative method process in music selec-tion might be generating a standardized process in music programming with little variation in the music playlists of the most successful radio stations (Ahlkvist & Fisher, 2000), such as *Rádio Comercial* and *RFM*.

Hellman & Vikko describe the concept of musical diversity as "a multidimensional concept requiring a multi-measure methodology, or indicators that cover various dimensions and components of diversity" (2019: 14); this line of thought drove the research team to apply a mixed quantitative-qualitative analysis of both station's playlists. This methodology will be relevant for understanding the level of repetition of their playlists, thus reflecting on the degree of similarity and diversity present in the most listened-to broadcasters in Portugal. More on the methodology selected for this case study will follow next.

Having in mind this conceptual and theoretical framework, this research is rooted in the following Research Questions (RQ):

RQ1: what type of variables could be included in a methodological tool to ob-serve commercial radio playlists' policies?

RQ2: how similar is the musical selection output on both playlists?

RQ3: how are playlists related to other forms of listening to music, such as Spotify?

RQ4: is it possible to determine a relation between the time period (morning, afternoon and night) and the music genre played?

RQ5: what is the impact of Portuguese artists/bands and of songs performed in Portuguese on both playlists?

RQ6: what kind of artists or bands are favoured by these radio playlists?

Methodology

Although music is the major element in commercial radio stations, far too little attention has been paid to it among radio researchers until recently. The methodology adopted for this study is based on the theoretical framework stated by the studies considered above. In addition, the concept of "flow experience" – "the ideal balance between the challenge of a task and the skill required of the individual, which leads to a particularly fulfilling mental state" (Ruth *et al.*, 2016: 2) - provides a rationale for the importance of analysing music playlists not only as a series of songs played as a sequential directory, but also as a sensorial stream practice that can enhance audience and promote fidelity.

Through a non-probabilistic sample, after two weeks of observation and more than 2000 song entries, our goal was to determine common features between *Rádio Comercial* and *RFM* – the two most popular national wide stations in Portugal, both owned by private companies – in their playlist structure and development. To that extent, we analyzed both stations' lists of songs according to the following variables: featured artists, song's release year, position in hourly playlist, artists' genre, artists' number of years in activity, producer/label, international scope and song's language. These variables were analyzed taking into account a sample of 2366 song entries played in *Rádio Comercial* and *RFM* in the timeline May 4th to May 17th, 2020.

In order to reflect on the radio stations' policies and strategies, we adopted a mixed quantitative-qualitative analysis of radio playlists. Having in mind the above mentioned time framework and universe of study, the research team has thus selected three periods of observation, thus respecting the so-called radio "drive time" when audiences traditionally privilege radio as their media of preference, consistently coincident with the beginning and ending of typical working hours. This has been often highlighted in previous research (Obercom, 2017):

   i)   Time range morning show: 6 am - 10 am, narrowing to 7-10am in this analysis;

   ii) Time range afternoon drive time: 5pm - 8 pm narrowing to 5-7pm in this analysis;

   iii) Time range evenings: 10pm - 1 am narrowing to 10-12pm in this analysis.

Every two weeks, the list of songs to be broadcast, as well as their rotation criteria, are reviewed according to focus groups ordered by the stations and performed by market research companies (Bonnin & Jannach, 2014). Therefore, by analysing 14 days of data, the sample will not be impacted by this rotation transition on the playlists.

Each song was analysed by the researchers, according to multiple cross check information in several online databases including *Wikipedia*, *Last FM*, *All Music Guide*

and artists' online websites or social media accounts. The categories of observation were as it follows:

- **Artist profile:** singer (including DJ); band; collaboration between singers/ bands;
- **Artist/Band gender:** male; female and mixed (if it includes, at least, one male or female musician);
- **Songs' release year:** concerning the year the song was publicly available;
- **Music genre:** song's generic musical category. The team decided to simplify this variable, choosing only direct categories: pop, rock, soul, reggae, R&B, etc. Yet highly subjective, the exception was the "pop-rock" style, which was considered a specific genre even if it includes two categories, because a great deal of songs was broadly described as such in all sources consulted;
- **Initial year of activity:** singer' and band's first year of musical activity. Regarding collaboration songs, this category was defined as "not applicable";
- **Label:** company in charge of the production and commercialization of the song. In some cases, more than one label was identified;
- **Scope:** geographical context of a song's diffusion (national/international/ both);
- **Language:** predominant language in the song.

Before we head to the core task of analysing the data collected, a note about the Portuguese legislation on radio regulation. As this paper focuses on a Portuguese case study, our goal with the two last variables mentioned above (scope and language) is to compile findings about the number of Portuguese songs, and of songs performed in Portuguese, with airplay in commercial playlists in Portugal, in order to draw conclusions on how local their processes of selection are.

For this reason, the Portuguese law on radio regulation and music quota was examined. The third section of the law that regulates radio as a public space medium in Portugal (Republic Diary, Law nr. 54/2010, 24th December) is exclusively dedicated to the broadcasting of Portuguese music. Compulsory quotas for all Portuguese broadcasters are stipulated in article 41 of the legislation mentioned: the musical programming of radio programmed services must fill a minimum variable quota of 25% to 40% with Portuguese music. Article 43 clarifies that these quotas correspond to music composed or interpreted in Portuguese by citizens of the European Union. In addition, article 44 emphasizes the need to update musical references within the Portuguese music quota by stipulating that at least 35% of the Portuguese music transmitted must have been released in the last year (Author *et al.*, 2016).

Music is one of the essential elements of radio programming, being one of the distinguishing factors of radio compared to other media. Let us now proceed with the

analysis of the data set that will provide this study with food for thought on what the patterns of similarity and diversity in Portuguese commercial broadcasters' music playlists are.

Data analysis

As described above, the research team implemented a methodological tool to observe how commercial radios prepare their playlists, in order to determine how similar or different their playlists are. According to several criteria, this analysis will not only present general data provided by the sample (n= 2366) but will also state each broadcaster's approach on specific variables.

Table 1 shows the first evidence towards a pattern of similarity regarding the number of songs played on a specific day in three different periods of observation:

Table 1   Number of songs played throughout the period of observation
Tablica 1. Broj reproduciranih pjesama tijekom istraživanog razdoblja

	RFM	*Rádio Comercial*	**Total**
May 4	87	78	**165**
May 5	86	79	**165**
May 6	86	78	**164**
May 7	89	73	**162**
May 8	64	77	**141**
May 9	89	109	**198**
May 10	108	93	**201**
May 11	88	75	**163**
May 12	90	71	**161**
May 13	88	76	**164**
May 14	85	66	**151**
May 15	63	78	**141**
May 16	85	110	**195**
May 17	103	92	195
Total	**1211**	**1155**	**2366**

The number of songs played is similar in both broadcasters. During weekends (May 9th, 10th, 16th and 17th), talk shows have generally less presence on radio programming, so both stations dedicate more hours to music airplay. Even when specific

time periods are considered – an hourly data analysis – the number of songs played is again quite approximate. In addition, both stations broadcast typical morning shows – *Manhãs da Rádio Comercial* and *Café da Manhã* (*RFM*) – thus privileging conversation between hosts during this period, as well as taking listeners on air. Then, in afternoons and evenings, programming is less occupied by words and more by music. On weekends at night (including *RFM* on Fridays), broadcasters provide listeners with special DJ sets of house and dance music.

As suggested by consulted bibliography, playlists in commercial radios are often criticized by their recurrent repetition of songs. Taking this argument forward, our research approach proposes new mathematical taxonomy to measure this investigation topic. The Repetition Rate (RR) intends to systematize, in an overall sample, the percentage of songs that were in fact played more than once (RR = repeated songs/total songs played). Table 2 presents additional insights to this rationale:

Table 2   Number of songs played throughout the days of observation
Tablica 2. Broj reproduciranih pjesama tijekom istraživanog razdoblja po danima
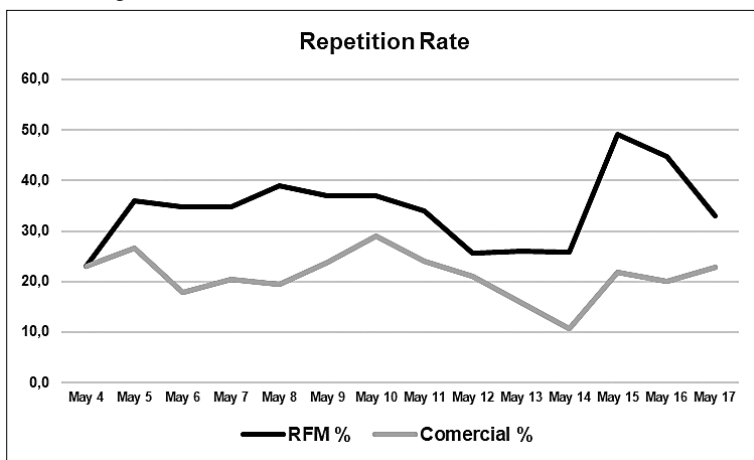
In this specific variable, broadcasters seem to differ. *RFM* has a higher Repetition Rate than *Rádio Comercial*, with the exception of the first day of observation. In the majority of the targeted days, *RFM* played more than one-third of repeated songs. As for *Rádio Comercial*, the level of repetition was only close to *RFM*'s on May 9th. The RR mean equals 27,9%, higher than *Rádio Comercial* (22%) and lower than *RFM* (34%).

The next observation item seeks to identify how broadcasters use songs in their playlists. Three different types of songs were classified: i) exclusively played by
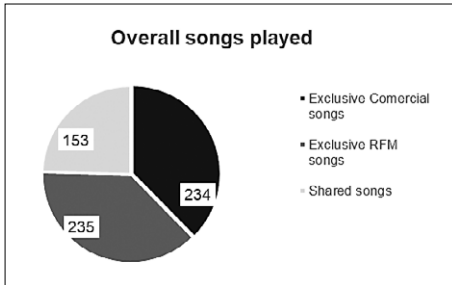
Graph 1   Songs' presence in the general playlist
Grafikon 1. Prisutnost pjesme u općoj top listi pjesama

RFM; ii) exclusively played by *Rádio Comercial*; iii) and songs that were played by both (Graph 1).

RFM and *Rádio Comercial* typically use a specific group of songs, which were labelled as "exclusive", even if this finding does not suggest that broadcasters perceive these artists for them to become exclusive. However, it is clear that the number of shared songs in the global playlist is limited (approximately 25%).

In a pursuit for sample characterization, which includes both stations' playlists, as well as repeated songs, the team registered 2366 song entries. The first variable – Artist Profile – suggests that the majority of artists are individual singers (1308), followed by songs in duet or collaboration (587) and bands (471). Table 3 deepens this topic a little further through a comparison between broadcasters.

Table 3   Distribution of the artists' profile in the sample
Tablica 3. Raspodjela profila pjevača u uzorku

	RFM	*Rádio Comercial*	**Total**
Singer	638	670	**1308**
Band	180	291	**471**
Collaboration	393	194	**587**
Total	**1211**	**1155**	**2366**

With regards to gender, Table 4 points out another similarity. There is a massive presence of male artists (1384), comparing to female artists (522) and songs performed both by male and female (mixed, 460). Women are just 22% of the total sample; if we add the "mixed" category, we could argue that the presence of female singers does not surpass 42%.

Table 4   Distribution of gender in the sample
Tablica 4. Raspodjela po spolu u uzorku

	RFM	*Rádio Comercial*	Total
Female	234	288	**522**
Male	700	684	**1384**
Mixed	277	183	**460**
Total	**1211**	**1155**	**2366**

The following observation criteria deals with songs' release year. As suggested by three different statistical concepts, evidence shows identical data: release year amplitude is very approximate between the two stations (*RFM*: y = 1965-2020; *Rádio Comercial*: y = 1979-2020). The most common value (mode) is the year 2019 in both samples and the mean is the same year as well ($\bar{x}$= 2014). However, both stations typically play recent songs, which is one of their particular features. Graph 2 clearly states that the two stations focuses on very recent songs, mostly released from 2018 onwards (60% of the total):
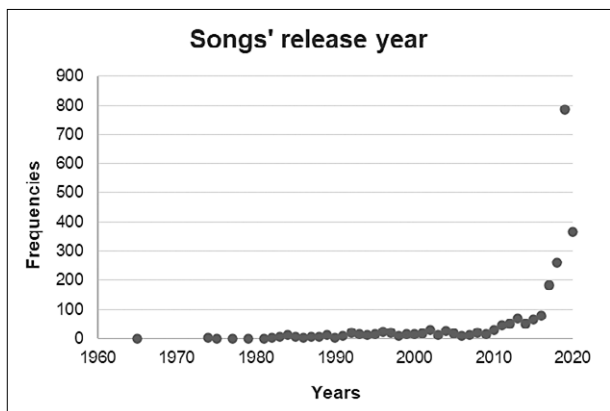
Graph 2   Songs' release year
Grafikon 2. Godina u kojoj je pjesma izdana

For this research, it was also important to comprehend the artists' profile in their careers. Ranging from not recent to recent artists, this analysis presents three sorts of professional trajectories: active; inactive; deceased. As mentioned in the description of the methodology used, the research team decided to consider "not applicable" (N/A) songs produced in collaboration, featuring singers and/or bands. The rationale behind this decision is that it would be difficult to determine with consist-

Table 5   Distribution of artists' career status in the sample
Tablica 5. Raspodjela statusa umjetnika u uzorku

	RFM	*Rádio Comercial*	**Total**
Active	773	913	**1686**
Inactive	34	37	**71**
Deceased	11	11	**22**
Not applicable	393	194	**587**
Total	**1211**	**1155**	**2366**

ency the careers' starting point of more than one artist/band. Having this in mind, Table 5 highlights the following distribution:

This category shows that *RFM* and *Rádio Comercial* tend to play songs from active singers/bands (71%). Inactive and deceased artists are seemingly identical, which adds insights of identical policies in this regard.

The following variable, music genre, is consistent with a typical feature of *RFM* and *Rádio Comercial*. As such, pop (1388), rock (243) and pop-rock (184) clearly dominate the musical genres with the highest airplay. Taking into account commercial musical radio programming strategies for audience growth, those are the genres that overwhelmingly dominate the sample (77%). Table 6 clarifies this approach regarding strategic music genres:

Table 6   Distribution of music genre in the sample
Tablica 6. Raspodjela glazbenog žanra u uzorku

	RFM	*Rádio Comercial*	**Total**
Pop	682	706	1388
Rock	98	145	243
Pop-Rock	89	95	184
Electronic dance music	117	51	168
R&B	48	32	80
Reggaeton	32	0	32
Soul	31	49	80
Hip Hop/Rap	28	25	53
World Music	26	22	48
Country	25	3	28
Reggae	16	8	24
Rap	10	1	11
Folk	9	12	21
Funk	0	6	6
Total	**1211**	**1155**	**2366**

Even if similarities between the two stations' playlists are starting to come to light, we would like to highlight two frames of thought that can contribute to identify differences. Firstly, *RFM* plays the reggaeton genre and *Rádio Comercial* sprinkles its playlist with funk songs. Secondly, because of the specificity of music programming on weekends, there is a significant presence of electronic dance music, particularly in *RFM*.

Even though this research did not focus on how stations respect legal quota for Portuguese music, as mentioned in the theoretical approach of this article, it was also relevant for the team to check the scope of artists present in the playlists: whether exclusively from Portugal, from abroad (international) or both, suggesting partnerships and collaboration between Portuguese and foreign musicians (Table 7).

Table 7   Distribution of geographical scope in the sample
Tablica 7. Raspodjela geografskog područja u uzorku

	RFM	*Rádio Comercial*	**Total**
Portugal	214	278	**492**
International	959	864	**1823**
Both	38	13	**51**
Total	**1211**	**1155**	**2366**

International artists are heavily present in both playlists (77% of the total). There seems to exist reduced openness to Portuguese singers and bands, which confirms some of the commonsense arguments related to this subject. However, we can argue that *Rádio Comercial* provides more airplay to Portuguese musicians (24%) compared to *RFM* (18%, approximately).

Consequently, measuring how relevant is the Portuguese language in both playlists is also relevant. Bearing in mind previous criteria, chances are no good for this correlation. However, Table 7 sums up the general grasp of data:

Table 8   Distribution of songs predominant language in the sample
Tablica 8. Raspodjela dominantnog jezika pjesme u uzorku

	RFM	*Rádio Comercial*	**Total**
English	890	838	1728
Portuguese	295	310	605
Spanish	26	7	33
Total	**1211**	**1155**	**2366**

On the one hand, as a cultural specificity of Portugal, it is not unusual to listen to Portuguese singers or bands performing in English. On the other hand, also due to cultural and linguistic relationships of proximity with the Portuguese speaking countries (e.g. Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, and so on), it is also common to listen to artists from those countries singing in Portuguese. On a theoretical point of view, this could expand possibilities of listening to more Portuguese music. However, the above-mentioned data does not figure that possibility. English language is almost omnipresent in the playlists (73%) and there is little opportunity for Portuguese-based songs (26%, approximately). Although broadcasters slightly differ, Spanish songs in Portuguese stations are also available, thus suggesting another platform of closeness for broadcasters as well.

Finally, we turn to a very crucial analysis item. Regardless of other possible explorations of this topic, namely in an economic point of view, the research team has tried to understand how record companies – named commonly "record labels", or just "labels" – are presented in the sample, in a comparative approach. It is often observed that companies implement commercial agreements to produce songs and grant them radio airplay. We concluded that the majority of song entries just has one label associated to them (74%). The rest includes, at least, two companies that contribute to the production process of that song. It seems that companies prefer to work on their own; notwithstanding, it was clear that large companies establish partnerships with each other. In doing so, Table 9 provides these insights in *RFM*.

Table 10 presents the general data of songs' labels in *Rádio Comercial* playlists.

The sample includes 270 companies: 142 in *Rádio Comercial* and 128 in *RFM*. In order to simplify this analysis, the team narrowed the sample to present the most represented labels. According to the data collected, three large companies dominate the playlist share.

Warner Music Group (WMG) is an American record label conglomerate founded in 1958. Based on the data provided by Statista, WMG was ranked 4th in the music

Table 9   Distribution of most represented music labels in the *RFM* sample
Tablica 9. Raspodjela izdavačkih kuća u uzorku s postaje RFM

		RFM	
Label	**Solo**	*Partnerships*	**Total**
Warner Music Group	282	178	460
Universal Music Group	241	157	398
Sony Music Entertainment	123	21	144
Total	**646**	**356**	**1002**

Table 10   Distribution of most represented music labels in the *Rádio Comercial* sample

Tablica 10. Raspodjela izdavačkih kuća u uzorku s postaje Rádio Comercial

Label	Solo	Rádio Comercial *Partnerships*	Total
Universal Music Group	192	82	274
Warner Music Group	165	62	227
Sony Music Entertainment	99	30	129
Total	**456**	**174**	**630**

market share in 2018 (16,5%). WMG takes over the *RFM* sample, including Atlantic Records (representing artists such as Pink, Alec Benjamin and Alicia Keys, for instance) and Parlophone (Coldplay, Queen, Radiohead, for example) that more expressively dominated the playlist. In the *Rádio Comercial* sample, WMG is ranked second.

Universal Music Group (UMG) is a very similar company, with specific links to the French musical market (Vivendi) and the Chinese one (Tencent). Placed in the second position in the *RFM* sample, and in first in *Rádio Comercial*, UMG is associated with Capitol (Sam Smith, Calum Scott and Katy Perry, for example), Interscope Records (Lady Gaga, Avicii, Imagine Dragons, …) and Polydor Records (James Morrison, Snow Patrol, The Rolling Stones, …). According to Statista, UMG owns the biggest market share in the world (29,8%).

Sony Music Entertainment (SME) completes the so-called "big three" companies that dominate not only the market share worldwide, but also the playlist sample analyzed in this study. Also an American based music conglomerate, SME integrates labels such as Columbia Records (Train, Aerosmith and Beyoncé, for example) and Epic Records (Black Eyed Peas, Pearl Jam and Shakira, …), the most common in both samples. Statista informs that SME is the third best-placed company in the record label market share (19,9%). Although these companies operate mainly in the US market, their massive presence worldwide is justified by constant partnerships with national companies, and that also happens in Portugal.

Discussion

After carefully examining the categories included in the methodological tool to analyse radio playlists, it is probably significant to address specific questions that

emerged with the observation of how different variables relate to each other. In addition to those reflections, Research Questions (RQ) will then be acknowledged.

To start with, RQ 1 is pivotal for this research. According to the existent literature on the study of radio playlists, as well as to new additions performed by the team, the following categories of observation were used: artist profile; song title; gender; song's release year; music genre; artist/band initial year of activity; label(s); artist/band geographical origin; songs' language.

As suggested by this article's title, there are more similarities than differences when it comes to evaluate how playlists are constructed. This is the most suitable way to answer RQ2. Hence, the number of songs is close together between the two broadcasters (*RFM*: n=1211; *Rádio Comercial*: n=1155), the Repetition Rate (RR) is divergent, though (*RFM*: 34%; *Rádio Comercial*: 22%). Yet close in selecting their parameters for playlists, the type of songs differs: only 24,6% (622) of the overall songs played is common, which suggests that each radio tailors its own approach to musical content.

Regarding the artist profile, few differences were found: mostly singers (especially men), although *RFM* often plays collaboration songs between artists and bands. The general grasp of data within songs' release year is identical, both in terms of mode (year 2019) and mean (year 2014). The typical career status of artists is active, in both samples, and the most common music genres are both pop, pop-rock and rock. *RFM* provides more airplay to electronic dance music, especially during its weekend programming privileging clubbing friendly genres.

When geographical scope of songs is concerned, divergences are indistinct – mostly international bands and singers –, which highlights English as the most common listened to language in radio. In this sense, Portuguese artists and music are rare in both playlists, but *Rádio Comercial* slightly provides more airplay to musical content made in Portugal, making it sound more relevant in the overall playlist. In terms of label management, most of the songs are owned by the so-called "big three" companies worldwide: Warner, Universal and Sony.

Concerning RQ3, on the possible relationship between playlists and most frequently played songs on Spotify, no evidences were found in the analysed time frame. In both cases, only one song was found that is common in both lists (top 10)[3].

RQ4 established a possible relationship between periods of a day and music genres. Regarding the predominance of certain music genres within the specific time periods, reduced differences were found. *Rádio Comercial* typically plays the same song genres in the morning, afternoon and evening: pop, rock and pop-rock. *RFM* includes electronic dance music more often in the morning and afternoon (third and second place, respectively); however, pop songs are the most popular throughout the time slots analysed. In fact, EDM is at the bottom of choices in *Rádio Comercial*.

One of the most common features of radio, regardless the type of broadcasting and programming, are newscasts close to the top of the hour. So, if we speculate that audiences are somehow concentrated around this time frame, probably it is important to maintain such groups after news are presented. This speculative approach developed into two different perspectives in our study objects. In *Rádio Comercial*, taking into account the 10 most repeated songs, 7 of them are typically played in the top of the hour. This proves that the selection of playlists does not ignore this specific period and its possible relevance. In *RFM*, we also observed a considerable degree of coincidence, although only 4 out of 10 were found.

Concerning the relevance of Portuguese singed songs in the playlist (RQ5), the overwhelming presence of English language in the sample strikes the results obtained. However, we should pay close attention to the time frames when Portuguese songs are typically played, and their ratio in the overall played songs. According to Table 11, although the mean is close between broadcasters (*RFM* – 23,9%; *Rádio Comercial* – 26,9%), there are attenuate differences. As stated by the standard deviation values, *Rádio Comercial* consistently plays songs performed in Portuguese throughout the day, as opposed to *RFM* – in the evenings this percentage drops even more (18,2%).

Table 11   Percentage of songs performed in Portuguese in the sample during the day
Tablica 11. Postotak pjesama na portugalskom jeziku u uzorku tijekom dana

Time period	*RFM*	*Rádio Comercial*
Morning	26,0%	28,2%
Afternoon	27,5%	27,0%
Night	18,2%	25,6%
$\bar{x}$ (mean)	23,9%	26,9%
σ (standard deviation)	4,1	1,1

Still in RQ5, regardless the language of the song, it should be also included in this observation the presence of Portuguese artists (singers/bands). Following Table 12, playlist policies maintain some degree of proximity. *Rádio Comercial* tends to play more songs by Portuguese artists (over 4%) and keeps a level of consistency in this item, as stated by the standard deviation.

Finally, according to RQ6, the concept of "privileged" used in this research refers to two angles: 1) artist/band more frequently played during the observation period; 2) the overall number of songs that each artist/band has in the sample. Table 13 presents the results of the first perspective.

Table 12   Percentage of Portuguese artists in the sample during the day
Tablica 12. Postotak portugalskih umjetnika u uzorku tijekom dana

Time period	*RFM*	*Rádio Comercial*
Morning	22,7%	26,5%
Afternoon	23,4%	24,5%
Night	16,5%	23,6%
x̄ (mean)	**20,9%**	**24,9%**
σ (standard deviaton)	**3,8**	1,5

Table 13   Artists/bands most frequently played in the sample analyzed (top 10)
Tablica 13. Glazbenici/bendovi koji su najzastupljeniji u analiziranom periodu (top 10)

	RFM		Rádio Comercial	
Rank.	Artist/band	Frequency	Artist/band	Frequency
1	Matt Simons	33	The Weeknd	33
2	Imagine Dragons	31	Maroon 5	31
3	The Weeknd	31	Coldplay	27
4	Lewis Capaldi	29	Dua Lipa	26
5	Avicii ft. Chris Martin	27	Ed Sheeran	26
6	Fernando Daniel	26	Giulia Be	25
7	Karol G. ft. Nicki Minaj	26	Bárbara Tinoco	24
8	Dan ft. Shay	22	Lewis Capaldi	24
9	James Arthur	22	Imagine Dragons	23
10	Lady Gaga	22	Sam Smith	21

Although frequency of repetition seems quite similar (*RFM*: $y = 22\text{-}33$; *Rádio Comercial*: $y = 21\text{-}33$), only 3 out of 10 artists/band coincide: Imagine Dragons (band); The Weeknd (singer) and Lewis Capaldi (singer). As for *RFM*, the most played artists are singers (5), songs in collaboration (3) and bands (2). The sample that refers to *Rádio Comercial* is quite different: singers (7) and bands (3). Nonetheless, in terms of gender, data are similar: two female singers in *RFM* and three in *Rádio Comercial*.

Table 14 presents the number of songs associated to artists/bands in the sample.

This variable also presents differences in programming. Only two artists are common: Coldplay and Ed Sheeran. *Rádio Comercial* entitles Coldplay to be broadcast in 15 different songs in its overall playlist, which is the highest number in this table. Globally, *RFM* presents a top 5 including four singers and one band; *Rádio Comercial* has a more balanced track, with three bands and two singers. In terms of gender, there is

Table 14   Artists/bands with highest number of songs in the sample (top 5)
Tablica 14. Glazbenici/bendovi s najvećim brojem pjesama u uzorku (top 5)

	RFM		Rádio Comercial	
Rank.	**Artist/band**	**Frequency**	**Artist/band**	**Frequency**
1	Ed Sheeran	9	Coldplay	15
2	Coldplay	6	Ed Sheeran	11
3	James Arthur	6	Imagine Dragons	8
4	Sam Smith	6	Bruno Mars	6
5	Bryan Adams	5	Maroon 5	6

no sign of female artists in this top 5. If we look into the labels that are most repre-sented, there is further evidence that the data previously provided by Statista seems accurate. The "big three" companies massively command the radio broadcasting mu-sic market; however it is Universal Music Group (UMG) that leads this sample, re-gardless its second position as worldwide music label. In this study, and particularly in this top 5 featuring 10 artists, six of them are controlled by labels associated with UMG (Ed Sheeran, Maroon 5 and Imagine Dragons – Interscope; Sam Smith – Capi-tol; Bryan Adams – A&M Records); three are associated with Warner Music Group (WMG): Coldplay – Parlophone; Bruno Mars – Atlantic Records; and finally Sony Music Entertainment (SME) is represented with James Arthur (Columbia Records).

Final remarks

This study is grounded on the consistent assumption that the selection of songs in radio playlists does not come out as an innocent strategy. As several studies point out, radio playlists, especially in national broadcasters, are also a cultural barometer. Lee (2004) has studied top chart dynamics but focusing on a different topic; Lee investigated changes in musical diversity by examining the number of songs of dif-ferent genres entering top 10 charts each year and found out that song diversity de-clined significantly in all genres between 1992 and 2002. In a more recent study, Ordanini & Nunes (2016) investigated song dynamics in the US Billboard Hot 100 singles chart between 1974 and 2013 and, consistent with Lee's research, found a similar decline in the number of songs in both the top 10 and top 100 from 1974 until about 2003 (the "winner-takes-all" effect). In the aftermath, however, the trend was reversed, as the number of songs making the chart increased steadily after the launch of legitimate online music sellers, such as iTunes. The exact opposite pattern was observed for artists: authors concluded that this overall pattern reflected a tran-

sition from fewer blockbusters produced by more superstars to more blockbusters released by fewer superstars (Interiano *et al*., 2018), which is somehow compatible with the general in this paper.

Like bookstores, which also organize their shelves randomly, radio broadcasters do not survive without songs, especially those more likely to promote musical content and artists. As this research sought to explore how diverse the two most listened-to Portuguese stations are in terms of audience targeting, it is now secure to claim that small differences were observed. Even if *RFM* and *Rádio Comercial* use a very particular strategy – having their own "exclusive songs" –, they do not differ when it comes to other routes of investigation: artists are typically international; Portuguese artists lack representation; and English-spoken songs are widely popular, especially when it comes to the pop, pop-rock and rock music genres. When scrutinizing media in the search for evidence on how music is relevant for huge audiences, we learned that diversity (gender, genre and language wise) is not a priority for commercial broadcasters. For Portuguese artists, it should be a baffling experience to continuously observe such dynamics.

Future research in this matter should be able to replicate the methodological tool proposed in this paper, in order to determine if results tend to replicate over time. In addition, it would be interesting to observe how close or distant stations are from the so-called "one-hit wonders", meaning, songs that represent particular situations of growing mediatization of musical artists, who over time fade out progressively in terms of stardom effect. This is actually a pertinent concept, taking into account that the majority of songs played are fairly recent (not older than three years).

To conclude, and for scientific purposes, it would be significant to evaluate how media professionals justify business approaches identified in this study, namely what kind of strategies are held to advocate for the inclusion of certain song in a national broadcaster. From an economic point of view, we believe that conducting in-deep interviews with artists and labels to compare perspectives, and fully understand how playlists are edified, would be a compelling future route of investigation.

ENDNOTES

[1] In the past years, it has become evident to the general public that radio stations support their musical shows on pre-designed songs' lists. Broadcasters' programmers typically employ a predetermined playlist in accordance with their station's designated music format.

[2] The variable "share" consists of the percentage of radio listeners tuned into a given station at a given time.

[3] Available charts during this study's time framework: https://spotifycharts.com/regional/pt/weekly/2020-04-10--2020-04-17; https://spotifycharts.com/regional/pt/weekly/2020-04-03--2020-04-10.

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Zvučim li kao pokvarena ploča? Komparativna analiza popisa pjesama na portugalskim komercijalnim radijskim postajama

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SAŽETAK

Intimnost i riječi ključni su elementi radija (Balsebre, 1994). Otkad je glazbeni sadržaj zamijenio usmeni na radiju, pjesmama se stvara posebna veza između postaja i publike diljem svijeta. Unatoč tomu, odabir pjesama sve je samo ne nedužan. Riječ je o dijelu kulturnog okvira (Ala-Fossi, 2005; Gjerdingen i Perrott 2008). Znanstvenici su nedavno objasnili savezništvo radija i glazbene industrije te prilagodbu sklonostima publike (Kaplan, 2013; Uimonen, 2017), pri čemu su ustvrdili da radijski popisi pjesama nisu nimalo raznoliki, posebno na postajama u privatnom vlasništvu. Ovaj se članak temelji na pretpostavci da je potreban sveobuhvatniji pristup ovoj temi.
U ovom istraživanju, koje je nadahnuto prijašnjim istraživanjima o glazbenoj politici radijskih postaja (Uimonen, 2011; Hellman i Vikko 2019), upotrebljava se metodološki alat za opis glazbene raznolikosti na dvjema najpopularnijim portugalskim komercijalnim radijskim postajama. Nakon dva tjedna opažanja u ožujku 2020. autori članka analizirali su 2366 pjesme i pritom zaključili da pri sastavljanju popisa pjesama vrijedi isto načelo: uglavnom prevladavaju međunarodni pjevači/sastavi, muški izvođači i pjesme na engleskom jeziku, a većina je pjesama povezana s međunarodnim diskografskim kućama. Međutim, čini se da te nacionalne radijske postaje puštaju i vlastite izvođače, osobito kad je riječ o portugalskim pjevačima/sastavima. Buduća istraživanja trebala bi se usmjeriti na analizu stavova izvođača i postaja o ovom kulturnom okviru. Time bi se proširila mogućnost razumijevanja ove složene i presudne teme u radijskoj i glazbenoj industriji.

Ključne riječi: radio, glazba, popisi pjesama, Portugal, politika