

<https://doi.org/10.53656/str2025-1s-10-ana>

## **ANALYSIS OF THE RADIO INDUSTRY IN BULGARIA 2024 – PROGRAMS, AUDIENCE AND RADIO MARKET RESEARCH**

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**Abstract.** This study examines current data from 2023/2024 for the radio industry in Bulgaria. The author briefly traces the history of radio as a medium and its emergence and development in Bulgaria. The most important radio groups in the country are listed, along with information on their programming characteristics, coverage and ownership.

Here is the information about the audience for the 20 most preferred radio stations in Bulgaria, differentiated by age, gender, and location. The age groups that are the focus of the research are 16 – 74 years old, 25 – 54 years old, 16 – 44 years old, 35 – 54 years old, and 55 – 74 years old – men and women in total, and separately. Data on listening to radio stations is presented throughout the country and separately in major cities such as Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Burgas, Ruse, Veliko Tarnovo, Stara Zagora, and Pleven.

Data for the radio advertising market size in 2023 – 2024 are presented and analyzed, and forecast data for its development in 2025 and 2026 are presented.

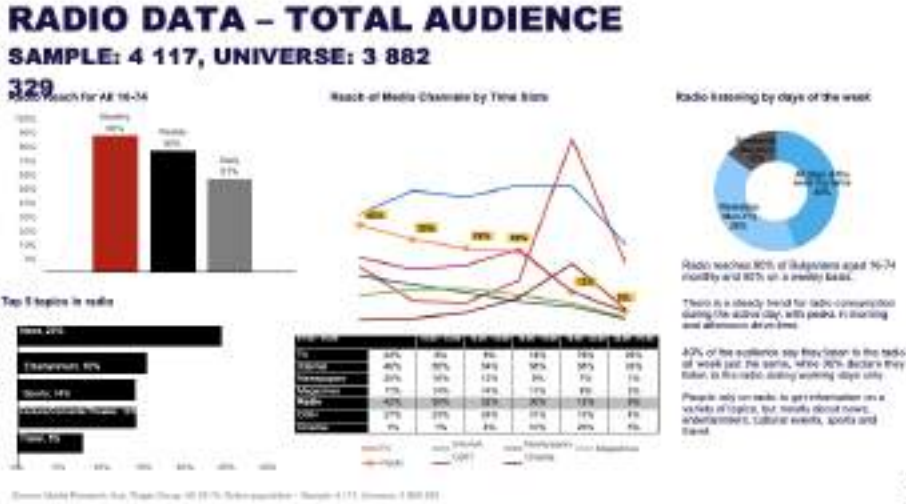
*Keywords:* radio industry; audience; radio stations; advertising market; media industry

### **Introduction**

The radio industry in Bulgaria 2024 is a large and very competitive media industry that creates a professional and quality product and content that is preferred by a large number of listeners, trusted by advertisers, very effective as an advertising medium, and generates serious income as a business.

Radio is a **major media industry** because it attracts huge audiences daily, weekly, and monthly; in different time zones, it is the preferred medium, providing its listeners with various topics of interest to them.

Radio is a **highly competitive** media industry. “In the past decades, globalization has increased competitiveness considerably, and enterprises that are increasingly operating in a borderless manner are facing many challenges regarding their competitiveness.” (Krushkov, Zayakova-Krushkova 2024)



**Figure 1.** Data on radio audience 16 – 74 years old, media coverage by hours, preferred hours for listening to radio.

*Source:* Media Research Hub, target audience: All 16 – 74, internet users, sample: 4,117; population: 3,882,329

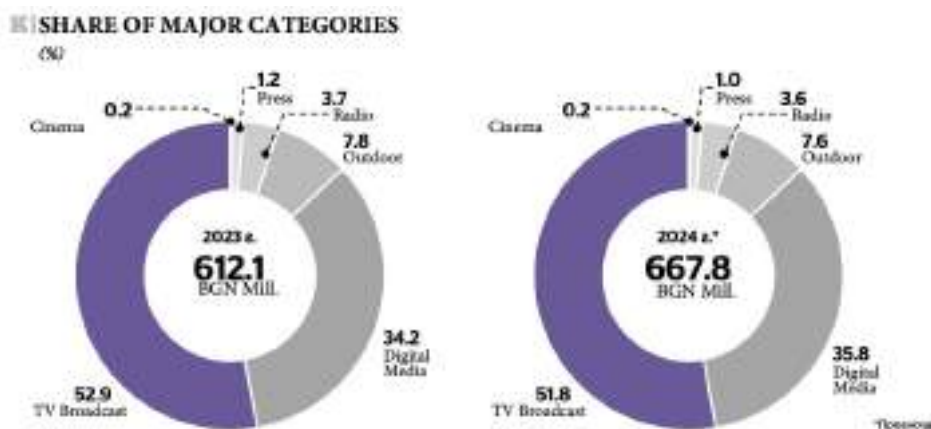
According to data from the Union of Electronic Media in Bulgaria, here are 104 licensed radio programs that are broadcast terrestrially.

According to data from the National Statistical Institute, by 2024, 73 radio operators in Bulgaria created and distributed radio programs.<sup>1</sup>

Radio broadcasters create a **professional and quality product and content** that is preferred by many listeners. As can be seen from Fig. 1, it is listened to on a monthly basis by 90% of the country’s population. This means that over 5 million Bulgarians within a month have turned on their radios and chosen and listened to one of the dozens of Bulgarian radio stations. Against the backdrop of thousands of internet radio broadcasts, access to which is free and unlimited; against the backdrop of streaming platforms for audio content, including music, podcasts, recorded programs; against the backdrop of social networks, all kinds of devices for “uploading” and listening to musical content, e-books and countless websites with serious and entertaining content (while the digital transformation has brought about numerous benefits (Gantchev 2024)), the fact that so many people choose the radio means one thing – that in Bulgaria radio programs are made professionally and meet the needs of the Bulgarian radio audience.

The radio industry is **trusted** by advertisers; very **effective** as an advertising medium and generating **serious revenue** as a business.

**The subject** of this study is the radio industry in Bulgaria.



**Figure 2.** Net revenue from the sale of advertisements in various types of media for 2023 according to data from the Bulgarian Association of Communication Agencies, published in the newspaper “Capital” – Business Report November, 2024

**The subject** of the study is the state of the radio industry by 2023 – 2024, including an analysis of the programs of public radio stations and the main commercial radio groups in Bulgaria, as well as other local radio stations; presentation of basic sociological data on the size and specifics of the radio stations’ audience and data on the radio advertising market in the country. “In today’s developed world, when making a retrospective analysis, it can be concluded that the reason for the differences in the development of different economies in the world is new technologies, innovations, and the intellectual property behind them.” (Aleksandrov 2024)

### Research methodology

The present research material, as an approach, methodology and identification of the need for summarized information for the radio industry, is based on the analysis of:

A. Audience data for radio stations in Bulgaria, presented by Media Research Hub. The study was conducted with the support of the Austrian company Talk

Group, which operates in 24 European countries and is an established supplier of high-quality market research panels. The data are for four stages of the study on the territory of Bulgaria, representativeness – all Internet users aged 16–74. Methodology – quantitative research through an online survey conducted in the period October 2023 – July 2024. The sample includes 4,117 respondents, corresponding to a population of 3,882,329 people.

B. Public data from the annual report of the Bulgarian Association of Communication Agencies regarding the net income for 2023 of the advertising market in Bulgaria and the corresponding forecasts for its development over the next two years;

C. The author has over 30 years of experience creating and managing commercial and public radio organizations, monitoring and analyzing radio programs in Europe and the USA, participating in international conferences, and undergoing numerous trainings and consultations with radio experts.

### **1. Definition of radio, its origins and development**

At the heart of the radio industry is radio, which as a medium, from its inception in the early 20th century to the present day, enjoys an extremely high level of audience attention. Radio is and remains the cheapest and most accessible means of mass information on the planet. Radio waves reach practically every point on Earth. And probably for this reason, more than 40,000 radio stations currently broadcast their programs worldwide.

We call radio the technology that enables the transmission of audio content by modulating radio waves.

Radio is also an organization that creates and distributes a radio program.

Radio is also a business, a large creative industry, based on the relevant audience that is attracted through the radio program created and which in turn is the subject of interest from advertisers who invest in radio their advertising budgets and expect effectiveness in their advertising messages for the goods and services they produce.

Many engineers and scientists participated in the creation of the radio: Michael Faraday, Andre-Marie Amper, Alessandro Volta, Georg Ohm, Werner von Siemens, James Clark Maxwell, and Alexander Graham Bell.

The first demonstration of radio transmission was made by Nikola Tesla in 1893.

On May 7, 1895, Alexander S. Popov demonstrated the first working radio receiver. At the same time, the Italian Marconi also achieved radio signal transmission.

On this date, International Radio Day is still celebrated today, which is why we can assume that this is the date on which radio became a scientific fact.

### **2. Radio in Bulgaria**

The beginning of radio broadcasting in Bulgaria was established in 1929, when a 60-watt radio transmitter was built in the Engineering Workshop in Sofia. In the

month of November, the words “Hello, hello, this is Radio Sofia!” were heard for the first time.

On January 25, 1935, Tsar Boris III signed a decree regulating and declaring state property radio broadcasting in Bulgaria.

The Bulgarian National Radio (BNR) was the only radio organization in Bulgaria until 1990. It created and broadcast several programs – informational and musical (Horizont), informational and educational (Hristo Botev), musical (Orpheus), and educational (Znanie) – as well as regional radio stations in Plovdiv, Varna, Stara Zagora, Shumen, and Blagoevgrad.

After 1989, on January 16, 1991, the Voice of America program from Washington began to air in Sofia at 97.60 MHz. The first officially licensed private Bulgarian radio station was Radio FM+, launched on October 15, 1992, followed by Radio Express and Radio 99.

The process of licensing radio stations in Bulgaria has been developing since 2001, when radio stations began broadcasting initially in large cities and subsequently in smaller ones after the adoption and coming into effect of the Radio and Television Act.

Today, three national radio programs are broadcast in Bulgaria – Horizont, Hristo Botev, and Darik Radio, about 15 radio networks with coverage in larger cities, and about 40 local VHF radio stations. All of them, in addition to being on the air, are also on the internet. “Most organizations in the modern economy, even those outside the creative and innovation sectors, own so-called business identifiers such as a website and domain name.” (Papagalska 2024)

### **3. Description of currently operating radio stations by group, with their main program characteristics**

According to the Radio and Television Act, radio operators in Bulgaria are public and commercial according to the purpose of their programs; national, local, and regional, including radio chains, according to their coverage and with a polythematic and specialized profile according to the characteristics of their programs.

In order to more precisely determine the program characteristics of the radio stations on the air in Bulgaria by 2024, we will use, in addition to the criteria specified in the Radio and Television Act, the terms used in Europe, the USA and Australia, characterizing the programs of the radio stations according to their format.

Format radio stations are those that create their programs based on their chosen characteristics of their core audience that they are trying to attract.

These characteristics are the most different, as the most useful is the age range – programs are created for a young audience aged 15 – 25, for adults aged 25 – 40, 35 – 55, over 60, etc.

Another criterion is the style of music broadcast. Here, the variations are numerous—pop, rock, dance, jazz, classical music, country, etc.

There are news formats, which also have dozens of varieties, depending on the emphasized news topics.

As well as many other formats and sub-formats.

Below we will list the main radio formats:

Contemporary Hit Radio (CHR) – main audience 15 – 25 years old.

*CHR-pop*

*CHR-rhythmic*

*CHR-dance*

*Other CHR formats are sub-formats of the above, with a similar target audience.*

Adult Contemporary AC radio/ designed for the modern adult/-main audience of 25 – 40 years old.

*Adult Contemporary- radios broadcasting contemporary music in various styles – pop, rock or rap music.*

*Hot AC is a subformat between CHR and AC format.*

*Modern AC*

*Soft AC*

*AC – Oldies*

*AC – Romantica*

*Other AC formats include subformats, including classic rock AC, rhythmic AC, and a variety of different language AC formats.*

Oldies radio hits for adults and “nostalgia” music formats for an audience over 45 years old.

*Oldies*

*Oldies Hits*

*The 80s and 90 s CHR*

*Nostalgia*

Radio with news, comments, analyses, sports

News / Comments

News / Information

News / Business

Sports

Talk, Analysis and Comments, Interviews

Agricultural

Political

Economic and Financial

Radio by music style

Rock formats

*Modern Rock*

*Active Rock*

*Alternative rock*

*Classic Rock - classic rock*

*Heavy metal*

Country Music Formats

*Country*

*Hit Country*

*Classic Country*

*Ranchera music*

Urban music formats

*Urban*

*Urban AC*

*Urban Oldies*

Jazz formats

*Smooth Jazz*

*Traditional Jazz Format*

*Classical Jazz Format*

Other music formats

*Traditional music formats*

*Religious formats*

*Classical music*

*House, techno, club music*

Student and school radios

Radios are generated by artificial intelligence because “Artificial intelligence simulates human behavior or thinking and can be trained to solve specific problems.” (Pacheva 2024)

The majority of radio stations in Bulgaria are small and medium-sized enterprises. “According to data from the Executive Agency for the Promotion of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises in 2021, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) accounted for 99.81% of the total number of enterprises in Bulgaria.” (Takov 2024).

The main radio groups in Bulgaria as of 2024 are<sup>2</sup>:

**BNR**

Two national programs – Horizont and Hristo Botev – are polythematic and public.

The BNR has nine regional radio stations – polythematic and public – in Sofia, Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, Burgas, Varna, Shumen, Blagoevgrad, Kardzhali, and Vidin.

**Radio play media**

**RADIO 1**

<http://www.radio1.bg/>

Program profile: specialized for audiences over 35 years old, format – Adult Contemporary AC

Coverage: 38 cities

Radio license holder:

Radio 1 Ltd.

**RADIO 1 ROCK**

<http://www.radio1rock.bg/>

Program profile: specialized, for an audience over 35 years old, format – Rock music.

Coverage: 4 cities

Radio license holder:

Bulgarian Radio Company Ltd.

**BG RADIO**

<http://www.bgradio.bg/>

Program profile: polythematic

Coverage: 24 cities

Radio license holder:

Metroradio Ltd.

**RADIO ENERGY**

<https://www.radioenergy.bg/>

Program profile: specialized, for an audience from 20 to 45 years old, format Adult Contemporary AC

Coverage: 34 cities

Radio license holder:

R-22 Ltd.

**RADIO CITY**

<http://www.city.bg/radio>

Program profile: specialized for audiences up to 30 years old, CHR format.

Coverage: 10 cities

Radio license holder:

Radio and Television City Ltd.

**RADIO NOVA**

<http://www.radionova.bg/>



Program profile: specialized for audiences up to 30 years old, format – club music.

Coverage: 1 city

Radio license holder:

Radio Contact Bulgaria Ltd.

#### RADIO NOVA NEWS

<https://www.radionovanews.bg/>

Program profile: polythematic.

Coverage: 8 cities

Radio license holder:

RTE NET Ltd.

#### RADIO VERONICA

<http://www.radioveronika.bg/>

Program profile: specialized, for an audience from 20 to 45 years old, format – folk and traditional world music.

Coverage: 8 cities

Radio license holder:

Radio Tangra Ltd.

#### AUTORADIO

<http://www.city.bg/radio>

Program profile: specialized for audiences up to 30 years old, CHR Dance, rhythmic.

Coverage: 6 cities

Radio license holder:

RTE NET Ltd.

#### **United Group**

##### RADIO VITOSHA

<https://www.radiovitosha.com/>

Program profile: specialized for an audience from 20 to 45 years old, Hot AC format.

Coverage: 17 cities

Radio license holder:

Vitosha Agency Ltd.

##### RADIO VESSELINA

<https://www.radioveselina.bg/>

Program profile: polythematic, Ethno Pop Music format.

Coverage: 26 cities  
Radio license holder:  
Radio Vesselina Ltd.

RADIO THE VOICE  
<https://www.thevoice.bg/>  
Program profile: specialized, for audiences up to 30 years old, CHR format.  
Coverage: 6 cities  
Radio license holder:  
Radio Express AD

RADIO MAGIC FM  
<https://www.magic.bg/>  
Program profile: specialized, for audiences over 35 years old, AC format  
Coverage: 3 cities  
Radio license holder:  
Agency Atlantic Ltd.

**BTV Media Group**

N-JOY  
<http://www.njoy.bg/>  
Program profile: specialized, for an audience from 20 to 45 years old, CHR format  
Coverage: 32 cities  
Radio license holder:  
Radio C.J. Ltd.

BTV RADIO  
<http://btvradio.bg/>  
Program profile: polythematic, with informational focus  
Coverage: 8 cities  
Radio license holder:  
BTV Media Group EAD

JAZZ FM  
<http://www.jazzfm.bg/>  
Program profile: specialized, for an audience over 35 years old, format – jazz music  
Coverage: 1 city  
Radio license holder:  
Radio C.J. Ltd.

**CLASSIC FM RADIO**

<http://www.classicfm.bg/>

Program profile: specialized, for audiences over 35 years old, SOFT AC format

Coverage: 1 city

Radio license holder:

Radio C.J. Ltd.

**BULGARIA ON AIR**

<https://www.bgonair.bg/p/radio>

Program profile: polythematic

Coverage: 34 cities

Radio license holder:

Investor.bg AD

**Darik Radio – national commercial radio operator**

**Local radio stations**

**RADIO KATRA FM**

<http://www.katrafm.com/>

Program profile: specialized, for an audience from 20 to 45 years old, CHR format.

Coverage: Plovdiv

Radio license holder:

Katra Ltd.

**RADIO BUMERANG FM**

<http://www.bumerangfm.net/>

Program profile: polythematic, Hot Adult Contemporary format

Coverage: Burgas

Radio license holder:

Bumerang FM Ltd.

**RADIO ANTENNA**

<http://radioantenna.fm/>

Program profile: specialized, for an audience from 20 to 45 years old, Hot Adult Contemporary format

Coverage: Sofia

Radio license holder:

Radio Station Ltd.

**RADIO RHYTHM+**

<http://www.ritamplius.com/>

Program profile: specialized, for an audience from 20 to 45 years old, Ethno

Pop Music format

Coverage: Kyustendil

Radio license holder:

Rhythm Plus Ltd.

**RADIO DOBRUDJA**

<http://radiodobrudja.com/>

Program profile: polythematic, format - informational

Coverage: Dobrich

Radio license holder:

Dobrudja Spectrum Ltd.

**RADIO BELLA**

<http://www.radiobella.com/>

Program profile: polythematic

Coverage: Petrich

Radio license holder:

Om – Ilievi Ltd.

**4. Data from the study on radio stations in Bulgaria in 2024, presented by Media Research Hub, implemented with the support of the Austrian company Talk Group (Austria)**

4.1. Audience of radio station in Bulgaria by age and gender, shown in Fig. 3:



fied in the study. Here we notice a change in the ranking, which is precisely related to the focus on a narrower audience by year.

Advertisers want to obtain data not only on the audience by age but also by other criteria – profession, marital status, income, etc. In the indicated figure, we see data on the preferences of male managers/entrepreneurs, which is important when choosing a radio station to advertise goods and services aimed at such a specific audience.

### 4.3. Audience of radio stations in the major cities of Bulgaria:

## RADIO RANKINGS

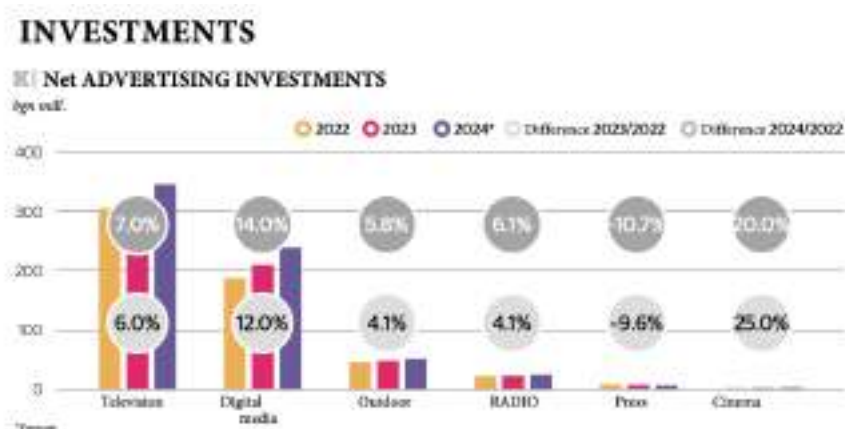


Figure 4. Radio station audience data by age: all 16 – 44 years old, all 35 – 54 years old, all 54 – 74 years old, audience: Managers/entrepreneurs





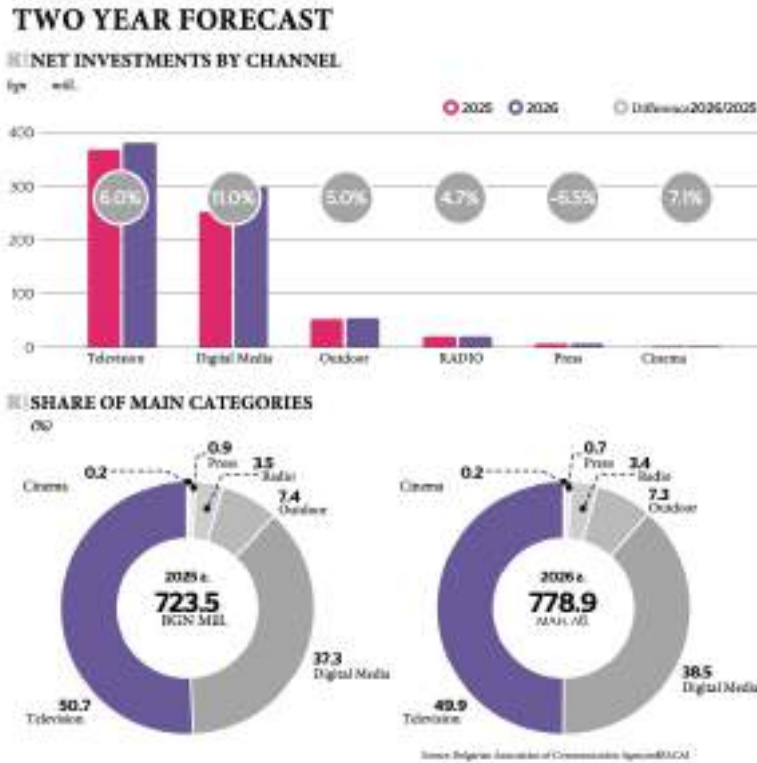




**Figure 7.** Net advertising investments by channels (comparison) – 2022-23-24 according to data from the Bulgarian Association of Communication Agencies, published in the newspaper Capital – Business Report November 2024.

**5.3. Forecast for the development of the radio market in 2025 – 2026.**

Fig. 8 presents a forecast for the development of the advertising market in Bulgaria in 2025 – 2026, reported by radio channels. The expectations are more than optimistic. In 2025, the market will reach 723 million BGN, and in 2026, it will reach 779 million BGN, with radio advertising spending increasing by between 5% and 7%.



**Figure 8.** Net advertising investments by channels (comparison) – 2025 – 2026 according to data from the Bulgarian Association of Communication Agencies, published in the newspaper “Capital” – Business Report November 2024

### Conclusion and Lessons

Despite the development of Internet-based digital media, social networks, artificial intelligence, and the variety of technical means of entertainment, education, information, and entertainment, traditional media remains an essential factor in modern society. “An essential part of the competitiveness system is continuous improvement and adaptation to changing market conditions” (Tsankova 2024).

Complete transparency in terms of ownership, clear editorial policy, credibility, professionalism, audience trust, and compliance with the rules determine the place of traditional media in people’s daily lives. The effectiveness of advertising goods and services in these media is a consequence of the presence of a huge audience,

which is attracted and retained thanks to compliance with all specified standards for the creation and distribution of quality content.

Radio as a medium has its rightful place among the traditional media. It has changed a lot in recent years, and now, in addition to air frequencies, it can be preferred in the internet environment, through applications and websites, and through podcasts and streaming platforms. “This technology transfer additionally stimulates the further development of the industry.” (Nachev, Tomova, Konstantinov, Spasova 2024). However, what is important is the content created by the thousands of professionals who create radio programs daily. Because their creativity, curiosity, and commitment are what make radio the preferable media. Distribution techniques are the complement without which the program cannot reach its listeners, but they are secondary. People and their creativity and professionalism are important.

#### NOTES

1. nsi.bg.
2. According to data from ABRO /Association of Bulgarian Radio and Television Operators/.

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