

DEMOGRAPHIC HIERARCHY OF RADIO STATION FORMATS
IN FIVE GREAT LAKES STATES

An Abstract of
A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of Geography
Western Illinois University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Eric Alan Anderson
July 1987

MAP
HE
8696
.AS2
1987
C.2

ABSTRACT OF

"Demographic Hierarchy in Radio Station Formats
in Five Great Lakes States"

The five states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin were served by nearly 1200 commercial radio stations in late 1983. The geographical distribution of these stations' formats reflects cultural and demographic variations across the landscape. This study focuses on three demographic variables which seem to affect format distribution: (1) population density, (2) median household income, and (3) percentage of the population aged 10 to 34. Based on county data, the locations of 14 particular format categories were compared to the medians of the three demographic variables ("population characteristics") of counties where they were found in 1983.

A hierarchical list of formats was made based on the variables described above. The locations of metropolitan areas had the most striking impact on the distribution of particular formats. Black, Progressive, Religious, Talk, and "Other" (including ethnic, jazz, and classical) stations were most associated with urban areas. Country/Western, Diverse, and Multi-format stations tended to be more closely associated with rural counties. The income and age cohort characteristics of these formats generally reflected their degree of urbanization.

A detailed case study of the Saginaw-Bay City-Midland market in Michigan revealed other geographical patterns in the dynamics of format use. In that market, stations in "core" positions (i.e., nearest the population centers) changed their formats relatively little, while "peripheral" stations changed often in response to the variations in

market share claimed by "core" stations. "Peripheral" stations seemed more likely than "core" stations to try to reach a regional market; "core" stations often had a local focus, catering exclusively to the profitable population centers.