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ABSTRACT

POLICY AND CULTURE IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A CULTURAL POLICY
ANALYSIS OF THE US COMMERCIAL RADIO INDUSTRY

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This dissertation undertakes a critical cultural policy analysis of the 1996 Telecommunications Act and subsequent federal government policies, initiatives and mandates affecting the U.S. commercial radio industry. The intellectual traditions of political economy of communication are employed to assess the consequences of historic telecommunications reform on the creation and availability of radio programming. The financial activity and programming practices of radio stations are compared across multiple radio markets, diversified by geographical region, ownership structure, size and musical format. The central analysis of these data sources spans six years, from January 1995 to December 2000. This dissertation puts forth two major findings: First, the U.S. commercial radio industry experienced massive consolidation both locally and national, changing the manner by which radio is managed. Second, programming on independently owned or small group stations is significantly more diverse than programming on large, super group radio stations. Given these findings, this dissertation proposes several policy recommendations to foster cultural variety and to democratize citizen access to media.

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