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Social Relevance and Innovation in Public Radio

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Abstract

Since its founding, National Public Radio has been denied steady funding by the government and has therefore been focused and reliant on its audience for funding. This study explores National Public Radio's (NPR) efforts to appeal to audiences by staying relevant and innovative in the face of changing technology and new media. The study content analyzes five years of news media coverage of NPR stations for news values and key messages. Out of 1,853 articles that were analyzed, about 23 percent were related to the stations' efforts to remain socially relevant and innovative. Those articles were then examined using descriptive analysis to identify prevalent themes within social relevance and innovation. Six themes emerged from the descriptive analysis. These themes are related to innovation (strategizing, investments and future journalism, and online strategies) and social relevance (audience and diversity, activism, and social media). These six themes were then interrelated to reveal a linear relationship of a social relevance and innovation movement based on NPR's methods and stages of change, from formulating strategies to actively participating in the community. Results indicate an audience-centered priority and a continued commitment to act in the public interest. Potential implications of the results and directions for future research are discussed.

Introduction

The news media, from newspapers to television, is ubiquitous. Though differing in style and form, the news media industry is generally united by an overarching mission to spread and disseminate information, epitomize free speech, and strengthen the public sphere. However, media is constantly changing. With the arrival of the digital age and freer access to content, new media enables the news media to articulate diverse, disparate views to a geographically dispersed population. Digitization has made the world increasingly interconnected and the modern age of journalism includes the

common citizen as a storyteller. An Iranian doctor told a story using his cell phone, recording a video of a woman named Neda Agha-Soltan being murdered on the streets of Tehran (Shattuck, 2010). The changing nature of media also enhances the ability of people to undertake collective action — exemplified by the Arab Spring and marches in Ferguson and Baltimore, kindled by the Twitter hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. Journalism and storytelling play an important role in the United States, acting like a "mirror" to society with the potential to influence its audience.

Since the radio boom after World War I, public radio has played an important role in society. The medium was regarded as one of the most reliable, quick, and efficient sources of news (Waldman, 2011). Radio waves reached Americans in their homes and in their cars across the country. Within a matter of minutes, the radio delivered emergency alerts, presidential speeches and special news events, such as the Scopes "Monkey Trial" (Waldman, 2011). In the early 2000s, hours of local news programming rose, and in 2010, public radio stations deployed more than 1,400 staff members to 21 domestic and 17 foreign bureaus — more than any broadcast television network. Public radio has demonstrated an unprecedented commitment to reporting local and regional stories, filling a gap left by the commercial sector. Though popular, it is also criticized, as some argue public radio has focused narrowly on serving affluent, well-educated, and white communities — all groups reportedly underserved in the commercial sector. Yet others argue public radio has done more for its audience than television or commercial radio (Waldman, 2011).

National Public Radio (NPR) was founded with the mission to provide a non-commercial source of culture and information to the public while promoting personal growth, respecting differences, and celebrating experiences (Mitchell, 2005). Through the nature of its mission and guidelines, NPR is held to higher standards (McCauley, 2005; Mitchell, 2005). To date, there are over 900 NPR stations across the United States with two-thirds of the stations licensed to or affiliated with colleges or universities (NPR, 2017).

As changes in the media landscape upended traditional news industry business models, the industry endured substantial job losses, primarily in the newspaper sector. The ramifications of the competitive pressures that followed created gaps in coverage and less accountability in local reporting. Radio stations were affected as well.

As former CBS President Mel Karmazin explained, the subsequent commoditization and homogenization of content was felt at his company and many other large companies that "abandoned what had made these radio stations enormously successful" (Waldman, 2011, p. 62). That missing element, Karmazin said, was producing local content (Kennard, 2010). Research conducted by Usher (2012) reveals NPR as one organization that trended toward homogenization of content. In fact, NPR shifted in the 1990s away from localized content, a move that is "difficult" and "expensive" to rebuild, according to Richard Towne, formerly general manager of NPR affiliate KUNM (Dorroh, 2008).

This paper examines how NPR stations have been covered in the news media to understand how public radio stations have stayed relevant and innovative as they face the challenges presented by the changing media landscape. This paper first looks at the history of NPR before delving into an analysis of relevant news media coverage of NPR stations, followed by an analysis of news articles related to social relevance and innovation. The themes identified based on this descriptive analysis will be presented and the paper will conclude by discussing the results and limitations of the study, as well as suggesting directions for future research.

Literature Review

HISTORY OF NPR

A group formed by Lyndon Johnson to define the public broadcasting system called The Carnegie Commission on Educational Television delivered the groundwork for the Public Broadcasting Act in 1965. This act led to the creation of a nonprofit, noncommercial, and independent enterprise to provide news and educational programming (Avery, 2007). Its aim was to aid the "public interest" – a factor notably absent in commercial broadcasting. The Carnegie Commission wrote: "The goal we seek is an instrument for the free communication of ideas in a free society" (Chapman & Ciment, 2015, p. 256).

The commission believed the industry should serve as a voice that would "arouse our dreams," "satisfy our hunger for beauty," and become "our Lyceum, our Chataqua, our Minsky's and our Camelot" (Carnegie Commission on Educational Television, 1967, p. 4). NPR proved the vision of the commission possible — with stories spanning from its radio adaptation of Star Wars to its award-winning coverage of the Persian Gulf Wars and

revolutionary political reporting by Cokie Roberts, Linda Wertheimer, and Nina Totenberg.

NPR accomplished these feats despite the state of the American public radio system, which, unlike its European counterparts, lacked guidelines and a unified sense of purpose. It has developed its process through trial and error, relying on audience research to help determine how many people were listening, who was listening, and why they chose to listen. This helped public radio "fuse its programs more snugly to the values, beliefs, and attitudes of the people who tuned in (and pledged their financial support) most often" (McCauley, 2005, p. 6).

The mid-1900s brought with it an era of unprecedented inflation and unemployment, leaving many Americans feeling lost and without direction. Yet at this time, America's public radio audience experienced a remarkable growth. McCauley (2005) describes the individuals who drove this growth, mostly students and professors at universities, as closely resembling ABC's *thirtysomething* cast members who longed for the sense of idealism, community, and innocence they felt in the days of their youth. American public radio soared as its leaders realized this highly educated, socially conscious and politically active audience was attracted to their brand of broadcasting.

McCauley (2002) notes, "Success has not come easily, though, because the promise of a steady supply of funds from the U.S. government — free from the taint of government influence — was never fulfilled" (p. 65). Without public funding, public radio was forced to look to the private sector. Political and financial pressures pushed NPR into niche marketing or "narrowcasting" — explaining how NPR maintained its audience over the years. In the 1970s and 1980s, NPR's audience consisted of highly educated and well-off individuals who had been previously underserved by commercial stations (Giovannoni, 1995; Kigin, 1998).

Public radio is a key player in the United States public service sector. It serves the public interest by offering under-produced content in commercial media, such as educational programming and local news (Waldman, 2011). Sabir (2013) argues that Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) began with the radio and remains the cheapest and easiest way to carry information. PSB was first defined by John Reith, the first director general of the BBC, as an institution of education, information, and entertainment (p. 228). Most importantly, he notes that PSB aids democracy by giving value to citizens who wish to engage in policy-making processes and political discussions.

Public radio continues to be vibrant and relevant in the lives of many Americans. Yet, public radio today is not the same as it was years ago. A shift from traditional spatial emphasis based on cities, counties, and regions has evolved to a social conception of community characterized by shared interests, tastes, and values (Stavitsky, 1994). This move to globalization could be accounted for by an increase in competition with commercial media. To survive, both must cater to local and global needs (Mckinsey & Company, 1999). Despite increasing commercialization in media, public broadcasting demonstrates a commitment to social worth and is "the last best hope for socially purposeful media acting in the public interest" (Raboy, 2003, p. 46).

Lessig (1999) says new media provide unprecedented opportunities for freedom and information, but warns that freedom from state control will be replaced by a more sinister style of corporate control. Unlike state control, corporate control is structural, intended to "maximize the possibilities for efficient profit-taking rather than effective uses" (p. 76). New media also poses the challenge of coming up with an effective, marketable strategy for the changing media landscape, which Meikle and Redden (2010) note is one of new media's pitfalls – outlets often make no notable plans regarding how they plan to adapt to the digital environment. Within this complication lies another: digital information is mobile and easily manipulated. In a democracy, it is journalism's role to prevent such misinformation and manipulation, and to lead citizens to make informed judgments (Lazaroiu, 2012).

New media, with its ability to supersede the linearity of the journalistic process and passivity of the audience, has served as a tool for political movements around the world. Unconfined by its medium, NPR has been reinventing itself "as a multiplatform force," Dorroh (2008) writes (p. 25). Notably, she documents how NPR has worked toward showing an audience a story rather than simply telling it. The organization has focused on making its website easily accessible across multiple screens, providing simplicity in the aesthetics, refraining from text-heavy formats for easy viewing on smartphones, and including features that extend beyond news to incorporate music and visual components. In the summer of 2008, NPR launched a set of programming tools to allow viewers to interact and share their content easily. These tools, known an application program interface (API), were used to create widgets, including a podcast player and an interactive world map linking the stories of NPR's affiliate stations. Through the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, NPR was given $1.5 million to train hundreds of editorial staff to develop and hone their digital storytelling skills (Dorroh,

2008). Maggee's (2013) content analysis study on *All Things Considered* found NPR's "style and sourcing" changed to suggest technological and online developments.

INNOVATION AND SOCIAL RELEVANCE

In past decades, overall radio listening has declined in America, with the largest gap attributed to listeners who possess advanced degrees. However, this regression is attributed to less commercial radio use while public radio is growing stronger than ever (Bailey, 2000). The importance of public radio is rising to higher levels among highly educated listeners, partly because of its ability to evolve and remain relevant and engaging.

To keep up with audience engagement and the increase in communication channels, public radio stations are looking at strategic changes within their organizations to redefine structures and cultures (Evans, 2015). In the last decade, NPR, which boasts about 32 million listeners in the U.S. on a weekly basis, went through a drastic change in its structure — an ambitious 400-person retraining plan to develop a digital strategy (Usher, 2012, p. 74). This restructuring effort was in response to the previously-mentioned grant NPR received from the Knight Foundation in 2008 to expand into digital news (Fest, 2007). At first, journalists were resistant to learn digital skills, but when NPR executives didn't place a "top-down approach" or a "significant quantifiable production requirement", journalists, free to do things their own way, developed web exposure. Conflicts did not emerge between web and radio (Fest, p. 76). Through a series of interviews with NPR's executives, Usher (2012) learned that this change, which led to conditions of ambiguity, guided NPR to innovation. This effort, he says, has helped NPR secure a sound future (p. 66).

Usher (2012) reveals how NPR's structure changed from a managerialist approach to something more "inclusive of diverse perspectives" (p. 68). To evolve this way and to overcome resistance to change, journalists need to feel that online work will become a part of their professional identity (Robinson, 2009). NPR's strategy revolves around the thesis that it is "disrespectful of the modern news consumer to insist that your news is available in only one form in only one platform" and its vision indicated a flattening of hierarchies (Usher, 2012, p. 72). NPR's ability to be innovative has been recognized across the United States (Bond, 2011; Doctor, 2011). While NPR programs are just radio shows, they are also the "tip of the iceberg of innovations in a soundwork industry" (Hilmes, 2013, p. 181).

This study draws on news media coverage relating to social relevance and innovation in NPR stations to help illuminate the role of NPR stations and examine the efforts of NPR stations have made in keeping up with the changing media landscape. More specifically, it seeks to explore NPR's coverage in the news media. Therefore, the following research question is proposed: How do news media portray NPR stations' work to innovate and stay relevant to their audiences?

Methods

This study used descriptive analysis to examine news media articles relevant to NPR stations' social relevance — if a reference for example were made about audience participation or tools for an interactive map — and innovation-related messages — which can range from online journalistic ventures to new mobile apps and internet channels. Based on the analysis, this study identifies prevalent themes, explores relationships among them and draws conclusions about NPR's efforts to innovate and stay socially relevant.

INNOVATION AND SOCIAL RELEVANCE

Twelve NPR member stations were included in this study. They include American Public Media/Minnesota Public Radio (MPR), the flagship National Public Radio member station for Los Angeles and Southern California (KCRW), San Diego Public Radio (KPBS), KPCC (Southern California Public Radio), Public Media for Northern California (KQED), Houston Public Media (KUHF), North Country Public Radio (NCPR), Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB), Chicago Public Media (WBEZ), Boston's NPR news station (WBUR), Miami, Fort Lauderdale and South Florida's NPR news station (WLRN), and New York Public Radio (WNYC).

These stations were selected based on Evan's (2015) research on public radio and organizational change, as they were widely viewed by radio professionals and experts as "innovative." Such stations, representing various regions of the country, have made noticeable efforts in adapting to a more competitive media environment.

CONTENT

U. S. newspapers included in this study were limited to publication dates from January 1, 2010 to December 31, 2014. The stations' names were used as the search syntax in the LexisNexis database. The search resulted in 3,321 articles, which were reviewed and deleted if they did not contain content relevant to the station. Other deleted articles included wedding announcements, obituaries, classifieds, duplicate articles, story indices, and online directories. After an initial round of sorting and sieving for relevant pieces, 1,853 articles remained that provided some content about one of the NPR stations selected for this study.

These articles were then examined for the presence of one of two key variables: innovation and/or social relevance. An article is considered innovation-related if it mentions any present or future changes or new directions that may discuss the development of new services (like Twitter campaigns and live video streaming) and products (including newsfeeds, Internet channels, blogs and mobile apps). An article is considered social relevance-related if it describes how a particular NPR station provided a service to the larger society. Of the 1,853 reviewed articles, 81 were specific to one of the two key variables in this study: social relevance and innovation. Subsequently, the 81 articles were analyzed qualitatively.

Statements extracted from the analyzed articles were arranged in an Excel file and grouped in categories based on common qualities and similar messages. These statements were reviewed several times. In the first review, keywords were identified with subheadings to suggest rudimentary themes. Subsequent reviews allowed for replacing makeshift categories and underdeveloped themes. This permitted an increasingly comprehensive list to develop for prevalent themes. Themes were sorted depending on what channels were involved, such as music or social media, and what forces may have driven efforts to fruition—whether the desire to create new information sources, bolster new forms of reporting, or attract an audience. The themes were then organized and separated into the broader categories of either social relevance or innovation.

Not all 81 articles were included with statements in the Excel sheet and even after themes were created, repetitive quotes and articles that were not noteworthy or relevant were removed. By the second round of coding, I was able to determine the data had reached a level of saturation. Themes were then linked to each other to establish relationships based on speculation between and among each article based on the level of action taken or about to

be taken by the station, with ideas as the most basic level and outreach being one of the latter stages.

Results

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

Six themes emerged relating to social relevance and innovation. **Tables 1** and **2** summarize these themes and provide examples for each theme.

Themes dedicated to innovation shown in **Table 1** include "strategizing," "investments and future journalism," and "online strategies." The first theme listed—"strategizing"— includes statements about developing solutions to public radio's challenges, whether that's finding new ways to stay relevant, attract an audience, raise funds, or distribute and develop new programming. The "investments and future journalism" theme includes efforts to bolster and fund new forms of reporting. The "online strategies" theme describes new information sources such as newsfeeds, Internet channels, blogs, and mobile apps.

Theme 1: Strategizing. Before any efforts are made, a station must be aware that changes and new directions need to be made. For example, KQED was reportedly "looking for ideas, whether new ways to distribute and share content, raise money or allow KQED's audience to 'engage more deeply with the content and with others.'" KQED President John Boland said in a telephone interview that "the goal is to help KQED reinvent itself in an era where its television ratings have been steadily declining and its radio audience is flat."

A prevalent element in this category is identifying how to overcome challenges and allow for further growth. An article about MPR written by St. Paul Pioneer Press article summarizes this as how to "engage a wide range of people" and create "new approaches to public challenges." Some of these challenges include exploring new ways to share content and improve programming, such as through collaboration with sister stations or outside news organizations to pool resources.

Theme 2: Investments and future journalism. Collaborations with stations often led to funding ventures. For instance, KPCC received $3 million "to produce in-depth, local coverage on subjects critical to communities and the

Strategizing	• "Engage more deeply with the content and with others" • "Encouraging audiences to procreate and raise a new generation of listeners" • "Explore new ways to share content and to mix local and national news"
Investments and future journalism	• "A new $3 million online journalism venture 'created to produce in-depth, local coverage on subjects critical to communities and the nation'" • "A project to develop new forms of reporting" • "'Medium's audience, distribution, revenue, and content are finally coming together,' said Jake Shapiro, the chief executive of PRX. 'All of us are feeling like we're at the beginning of a flourishing new ecosystem around podcasts.'"
Online strategies	• "New service … allows passersby to access the creators of the city's public art and give them feedback" • "A new immigration blog written and hosted by journalist Leslie Berestein Rojas" • "The feature will generate custom downloadable playlists for users who punch in the topics that interest them and the amount of time they want to listen"

Table 1. Summary of innovation themes.

nation." Other funds were less specific; all that was reported was that a station had acquired funds for "a project to develop new forms of reporting." A handful of stations were quick to identify that new directions for journalism included podcasts. In an article concerning WBEZ Chicago, Public Radio Exchange (PRX) Chief Executive Jake Shapiro declared podcasts were in demand. "All of us are feeling like we're at the beginning of a flourishing new ecosystem around podcasts," he said. Another new direction was a commitment to local journalism, or "community news coverage," as one article mentioned. Methods to cultivate more instantaneous news coverage were also mentioned: WBUR hoped "to set up an area where civic journalists can cover cases by live-blogging or by cell phone."

Theme 3: Online strategies. Once strategies and investments were made, online strategies were implemented, such as newsfeeds, music and audio

services, internet channels, blogs, and mobile apps. MPR created a new interactive audio service where passersby can "access the creators of the city's public art and give them feedback". Successes resulted from some of these innovations. For example, when WBEZ "began putting its shows on SoundCloud," it experienced "large audience spikes." Efficiency was also accomplished, as when KCRW created a new digital music-submission system that allows users "to create and submit profiles with songs and biography information" for DJs to "share music within the interface," it speeded up "the whole process." Other innovative strategies included an immigration blog by KPCC, liveblogging by WBUR's OpenCourt project, and custom downloadable playlists called 'Discover' on the WNYC mobile app.

The "audience and diversity" theme illustrates successes, efforts, or strategies of NPR stations to attract or involve the audience in its programming. The "activism" theme includes a station's participation in projects, movements, campaigns, awareness programs and other collaborative efforts, such as audience participation and showcasing opportunities with other news organizations and stations. The "social media" theme includes the engagement of a station on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, to share content or promote the station.

Theme 4: Audience and diversity. Many articles related to social relevance and innovation focused on audience. In fact, "audience and diversity" was the largest category that appeared among the themes. This category revealed an audience-centered approach for several stations: MPR wanted to develop "new audiences," KPCC sought "a more diverse audience," and KCRW desired that its content be delivered "to as wide an audience as possible." A few stations like MPR and WBEZ went a step further with plans for how they hoped to expand or reach such an audience: MPR "attempt[ed] to make classical music more popular among young people" and WBEZ took part in the ad campaign "Interesting People Make Interesting People" that "[encouraged] audiences to procreate and raise a new generation of listeners."

Some stations were already working to attract audiences by engaging with them to provide greater accessibility of journalism and on an introspective and intellectual level. While WBUR "gives online viewers a front-row seat to see the legal system at work," WBEZ "investigates and answers questions as voted upon by listeners and digital/online users." WNYC asked its audience to share their stories and opinions in a variety of subjects, from how they came to care about political issues to what their desired type of music programming was.

Audience and diversity	• "Efforts to attract a more diverse audience" • "Station investigates and answers questions as voted upon by listeners and digital/online viewers" • "Gives online viewers a front-row seat to see the legal system at work"
Activism	• "The Miami Herald worked with WLRN 91.3 FM to have print reporters prepare and provide news for the local station" • "MPR staff chose 15 finalists who were then professionally recorded" • "The New York Times and WNYC are collaborating to create an interactive map of bird-watching spots throughout the five boroughs as part of Bird Week, a celebration of avian life in the city"
Social media	• "Emphasis on audience participation via Twitter" • "Campaign will also include a Facebook application that will help users determine how interesting they are and what type of WBEZ content might appeal to them" • "The obligatory #Wits hashtag — has grown into such a vital part of the 'Wits' experience, each show now opens with an hour-long 'Tweet-up,' where the crowd engages in a sort of virtual happy hour"

Table 2. Summary of social relevance themes.

Theme 5: Activism. To further engage an audience, stations remained relevant by maintaining a presence in the community. Such participation could be showcased at various venues, as was the case for KQED, which promoted Read Across America, and MPR, which chose finalists from dozens of submissions to be professionally recorded and showcased at Fitzgerald Theater. Yet participation could also be shared from the comforts of one's own home, as WNYC put together a 'SmartBinge' campaign to liken "listening to podcasts to binge-watching popular shows through online services like Netflix, Hulu and Amazon Prime."

This theme also captures participation between NPR stations and other media outlets. *The New York Times* and WNYC, for example, celebrated Bird Week, a series that revered avian life in the city, by collaborating to creating an interactive map of bird-watching spots throughout the five boroughs. In another collaborative project, *Miami Herald*'s print reporters helped prepare and provide news for the local station WLRN.

Collaboration, in the case of WNYC, also extended to local public schools as the station worked on a site called SchoolBook.org to offer news and data on the city's public schools system.

Theme 6: Social media. WNYC's 'SmartBinge' campaign encouraging listeners to send tweets about listening to WNYC podcasts emboldened the Twitter hashtag "#SmartBinge is the new black." Social media was used to create a community for a station's listeners. MPR used Twitter as a "virtual happy hour" where participants tweeted missives before, during, and after each performance to a live public radio show that called Wits through the use of the hashtag #Wits, which proved to be a "vital part of the 'Wits' experience" as each show now opens with an hour-long 'Tweet-up.'

Social media was also used as a tool to further connect audiences back to their stations, as shown in WBEZ's Facebook application to help determine audience interests and what type of WBEZ content might appeal to them.

Such computer-mediated technologies were also used as a reporting tool, as WBUR made a Massachusetts courtroom accessible as a "Twittering, Facebooking free-for-all" and invited its audiences to take part in the social media storytelling process. The station re-tweeted compelling, court-related tweets from personal Twitter accounts for this Open Court project.

Discussion

This study aims to examine the movement of social relevance and innovation at NPR stations through its news media coverage. Results show that only about 23 percent ($N = 81$) of the articles reviewed were related to this effort. While these themes are individually described, they are closely interrelated. The following figure illustrates the relationship among these emerged themes.
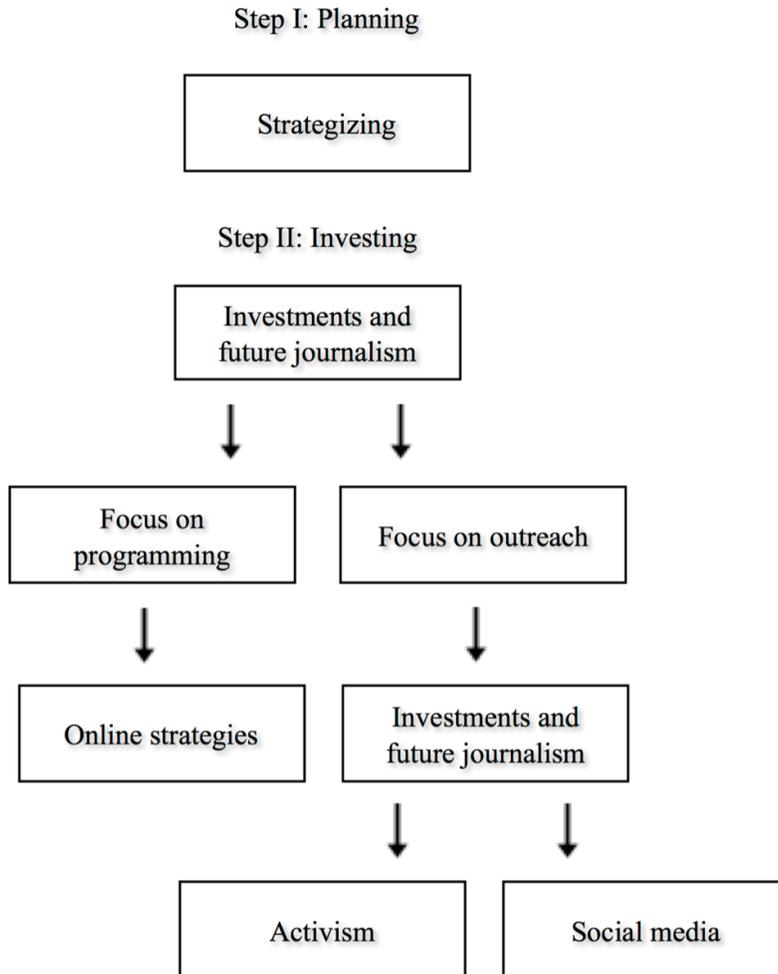
Step I: Planning

Strategizing

Step II: Investing

Investments and
future journalism

Focus on
programming

Focus on outreach

Online strategies

Investments and
future journalism

Activism

Social media

Figure 1. Relationship among themes.

Articles about the stations often alluded to efforts to strategize, invest, and look to the future. Some articles implied a station was involved in an earlier stage of incorporating change, such as vocalizing ideas and visions to attract an audience, while other articles revealed stations had already incorporated changes in programming and online strategies to cultivate an audience.

Figure 1 is a conceptual framework that illustrates a process, based on my speculations, by which NPR stations aim to be socially relevant and innovative. The initial stages would include ideas of a particular goal or

avenue to reach that goal. This stage reveals the beginning of a process, such as identifying a funding source or detailing a budget, that allows for such changes to be implemented. From that point on, NPR stations may have different approaches.

Second down the chain in **Figure 1** is "investments and future journalism," a broad category that demonstrates stations are engaged in a process of becoming increasingly innovative or relevant to their audiences. This section branches off into two venues, programming and outreach, by which a station can create such a change. From the "programming" branch develops the theme of "online strategies," revealing a focus of programming through the Internet.

On the other "outreach" side of the diagram, the "audience and diversity" category does not imply courses of action have been taken, but recognizes a need to work more closely and connect with the community. This category identifies both general and specific means by which a station may attempt to do so. Such an approach and focus manifest through two other themes, "activism" and "social media," which take a station's efforts one step further by providing concrete and clear visualizations of efforts of the station to work more closely with the community and noting what avenues the station used to accomplish such feats.

Of all the themes studied, the most prevailing and established theme is "audience and diversity." Based on my descriptive analysis, NPR stations' top priority, in line with NPR's mission and vision, centers on its audience. However, it is unclear whether news articles contain bias, as it is common knowledge that NPR stations are dependent on their audience's financial contributions. These news articles could be echoing such a sentiment through documenting and highlighting stations' efforts to address its audience. Yet, it is also possible that NPR stations have demonstrated a commitment to its public, who provide the stations with financial stability and are central to shaping NPR's future.

By utilizing social media, conducting online forums, and embracing new journalistic avenues such as podcasts, NPR stations reveal they are not only innovating, but remaining engaged and relevant in the digital age. Although news articles reference no notable plans for how stations will attempt to adapt in the years to come, NPR's strategies—which include mobile apps, online streaming, and liveblogging—reveal how stations hope to attract or are attracting an audience. According to my descriptive analysis, one of the stations embodying social relevance and innovation is KCRW, whose reliance

on new products, including a "customized playlist on Pandora or Spotify to an iTunes stream," stems from a duty to reach the "increasingly fragmented world of online radio." This finding also indicates that NPR stations are aware that to continue to thrive, they must respect and embrace the technological advances that change the ways news is delivered, consumed, and shared. NPR stations' social relevance and innovative efforts reveal that modern public radio is still taking steps to act in the public interest.

While analysis shows NPR's efforts to engage and remain relevant to its audience, it neither speaks to audience needs nor addresses if those needs are being met. To address those needs, interviews with audience members should be conducted. This study, solely relying on the analysis of news content without audience feedback, cannot adequately measure to what extent NPR stations are remaining relevant.

This study is also limited in that it has not taken news coverage data from all NPR stations. Results therefore cannot truly be representative of all the news articles published about all NPR stations. Having selected stations that were found to be the most "innovative", results of this study therefore may be skewed, possibly illuminating NPR stations as more innovative and socially relevant than in reality.

Another limitation lies in the framework of interconnected themes in **Figure 1**. While it presents a useful perspective about the process NPR stations could use to stay relevant, **Figure 1** has not been substantiated by enough direct evidence, but rather through conjecture.

A fourth limitation of the study is the date range placed on these articles, which don't encompass articles written before or after the dates selected on LexisNexis. It is possible that articles that did not fit my selected timeframe would reveal an increasingly lacking or fruitful case about stations' programs and services that could alter results.

A more central limitation is that it is unclear whether news articles adequately capture NPR stations' efforts in the areas of social relevance and innovation. It is possible that newspapers, many of which are choking under budget cuts, are unable to follow or cover trends and changes in NPR.

Future research is needed to provide a comparison between all NPR stations and its competitors to comparatively measure success. Thus, further research should determine whether the finding of this study reveals a triumph or a loss for NPR. Is 23 percent a step towards the future or a sign that NPR lags behind?

Research is also needed to to determine whether NPR stations are getting sufficient coverage in the news media, particularly in newspapers, and whether such coverage accurately portrays NPR. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe content depicting NPR's efforts to be innovative and socially relevant typically would not go untold or unnoticed, as the nonprofit maintains a large presence in the country and in the world.

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