Listening to Public Radio Listeners

An Audience-defined Audience Analysis

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Goals

• To learn about the ways members of Northwest Public Radio talk about the quality of life in the Pacific Northwest
• To use that knowledge to guide decisions about programming
Assumptions

• Listeners to public radio have a strong sense of ownership of their local stations as well as the national programming

• The best way to make decisions about programming is to address listener-defined interests and needs

• Focus group interviews are subject to problems, including a lack of quantifiability, domination of the conversation by vocal members, and selective interpretation by the study leaders
Guidelines for the study

• Listeners would define and prioritize the issues
• The process would be visible to all the participants as well as the larger public radio audience
• The process would give listeners the chance to express their ideas fully
• The process would preserve the language with which listeners speak about the issues
• Listeners, not researchers, would define the structure of their subjective interpretations
• The research process would be enjoyable for participants
Phase 1

- Starting late December, 2007, an IRB-approved open-ended survey was posted on the Northwest Public Radio Web site, and was promoted on the air.
- Listeners were asked to write their answers to the following questions:
  - What makes Quality of Life good in the PNW?
  - What threatens this quality of life?
  - What are the big issues in your state?
  - What other problems are facing your state or province?
  - What trends do you see that might lower the quality of life in your community?
Phase 1

- 40 subjects filled out surveys within one week
  - The answers were detailed, nuanced, and diverse
- 40 verbatim statements from the population of statements created by listeners were deliberately sampled by the researcher

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Development</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Environmental Resources</td>
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<td>Social/people</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>Social/resources</td>
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Phase 2

• Using a flash based program (http://www.hackert.biz/flashq/home/), participants rank-ordered the 40 statements, first into agree/disagree/neutral piles.
Phase 2

- Participants then sorted the statements into categories to represent finer degrees of agreement, disagreement, and neutrality.
Phase 2

• Once completed, the participant was invited to change the position of any statement
Phase 2

• Participants were invited to explain why they placed the statements in the strongest disagree and strongest agree columns, and to answer some background questions.
Analysis

- Data from the 28 completed online statement sorts were analyzed, with subjects comprising the columns, or "variables" and statements representing the rows, or "sample"
- Centroid factor analysis and judgmental rotation was used to find the best fit to the data
- Three factors were extracted
- Factor loadings were used to create a factor array representing a weighted average sort for each factor
Profiles of listener orientations

- The “Dispassionate but Concerned” held unsentimental and level-headed concerns for the challenges facing the Pacific Northwest’s limited natural resources. Members rejected individual-level explanations for problems such as illegal immigrants and nonlocal landowners.

- The “Pick Yourself Up by your Bootstraps Rugged Individualists” viewed people as the most important natural resources in the Pacific Northwest. They viewed community involvement, person-to-person connections and support, and individual responsibility as keys to good living.

- The “Think the PNW is Special? It is Not!” group emphasized the universal nature of problems facing the Pacific Northwest while rejecting the notion of a unique Pacific Northwest culture. Its members acknowledged challenges posed by illegal immigration, grid-locked cities, and irresponsible local governments.
Follow-up

- The listener profiles were circulated among the NWPR staff in charge of the “Our Northwest” grant.
- Through discussion, the staff determined that the “Impassioned but Concerned” group was most likely to appreciate content generated as a result of the grant.
- The “Our Northwest” Web and on-air content was informed by the understanding of listener interests and priorities developed through this project.
Follow-up

Web page visitors are invited to take a quick survey to determine where they fit into the listener profiles, and are invited to help further define the factors at http://nwpublicmedia.typepad.com/our_northwest/-learn-about-yourself-your-neighbors.html
Conclusions

- Public radio listeners want to have an impact on programming
- Research methods that preserve public radio listener issues, priorities, and words are crucial
- Listening to public radio listeners encourages engagement with the public radio station, and encourages station responsiveness to listener agendas
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