

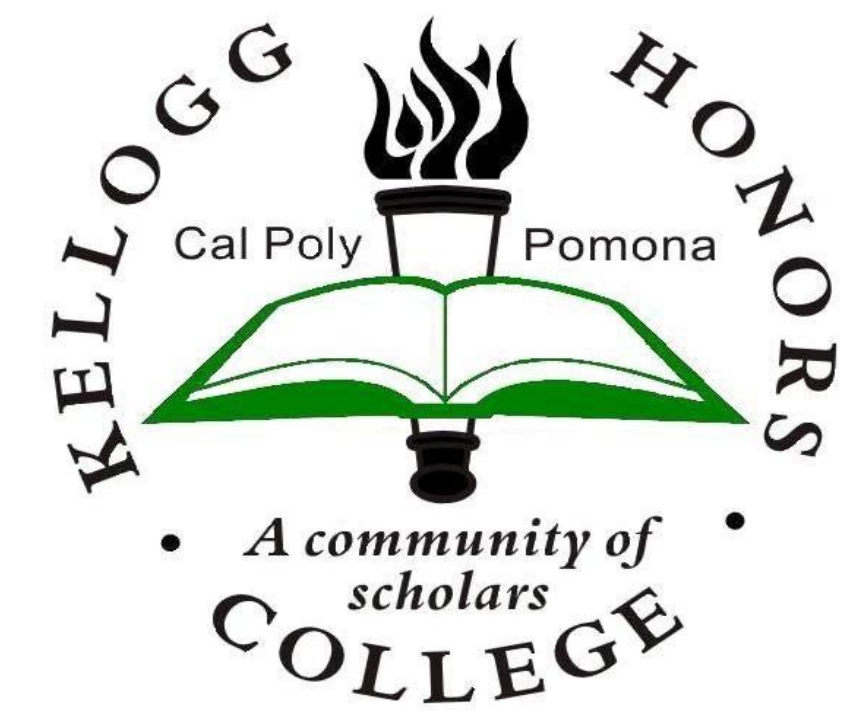
# Social Relevance & Innovation in Public Radio



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## Abstract

This capstone explores NPR's efforts to attract an audience in the face of changing technology and new media. This study content-analyzed five years of news media ( $N = 1,853$ ) coverage on NPR stations for content related to social relevance and innovation. Results show that about 23% ( $N = 81$ ) of the articles were related to social relevance and innovation. A descriptive analysis of the resulting articles identified six themes, three related to social relevance and three related to innovation. The study describes how the themes reveal a linear relationship of NPR's methods and stages of social relevance and innovation movement. Results indicate an audience-centered priority and a continued commitment to act in the public interest.

## Emergent Themes

Table 1

*Summary of innovation themes*

1: Strategizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Engage more deeply with the content and with others.”</li> <li>“Encouraging audiences to procreate and raise a new generation of listeners.”</li> <li>“Explore new ways to share content and to mix local and national news.”</li> </ul>
2: Investments and future journalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“A new \$3 million online journalism venture ‘created to produce in-depth, local coverage on subjects critical to communities and the nation.’”</li> <li>“A project to develop new forms of reporting.”</li> <li>“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.’”</li> </ul>
3: Online strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“New service ... allows passersby to access the creators of the city's public art and give them feedback.”</li> <li>“A new immigration blog written and hosted by journalist Leslie Berestein Rojas.”</li> <li>“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.”</li> </ul>

Table 2

*Summary of social relevance themes*

4: Audience and diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Efforts to attract a more diverse audience.”</li> <li>“Station investigates and answers questions as voted upon by listeners and digital/online users.”</li> <li>“Gives online viewers a front-row seat to see the legal system at work.”</li> </ul>
5: Activism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“The Miami Herald worked with WLRN 91.3 FM to have print reporters prepare and provide news for the local station.”</li> <li>“MPR staff chose 15 finalists who then were professionally recorded.”</li> <li>“The New York Times and WNYC are collaborating to create an interactive map of bird-watching spots throughout the five boroughs as part Bird Week, a celebration of avian life in the city.”</li> </ul>
6: Social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Emphasis on audience participation via Twitter”</li> <li>“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.”</li> <li>“The obligatory #Wits hashtag – has grown into such a vital part of the ‘Wits’ experience, each show now opens with an hourlong ‘Tweet-up,’ where the crowd engages in a sort of virtual happy hour.”</li> </ul>

## Key Findings

- Emerged themes are closely related to one another
- NPR operates as a form of public service.
- NPR stations are working to build a viewership by embracing the digital age.
- NPR stations' priority is to involve the audience in its programming (e.g., forums).
- NPR stations' social relevance and innovative efforts reveal that public radio today continues to act in the public interest.
- While the study reveals NPR stations are making strong efforts to engage with the audience, future research need to determine whether these efforts have been successful.

Figure 1

*Relationship among themes*

