



Sin Fronteras: Fulfilling the Vision of Populist Radio

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Will the Real Community Please Stand Up?

- Carnegie Commission vision (1967) vs. the subsequent reality of public broadcasting—media-based education for “the people” or for the educated?
- What vision of education—the well-nourished, placid listener or one who can talk back?
- What vision of “Latino”—sleeping giant or a convergence of diverse waves of migrantes?
- What model for listeners’ encounter with community radio: marketplace? celebration? summit meeting?
- Getting the vision right is, of course, the 1st step forward. No surprise—Radio Bilingue got it right!

How To Confront the Challenge of Latino Diversity

- Well, of course, go beyond the standard vague notion of “regional Mexican” format or narrow-casting
- Identify, address, and engage diverse communities within the Latino service population—a formidable task!
- At least 6 major audience segments in San Joaquin Valley: settled farmworkers, newly-arrived young migrantes, indigenous communities, Tejano/as, Latino community elites, bilingual and English-dominant youth
- The challenge has been to create a “virtual agora”. It’s not easy for all of these groups to feel recognized, appreciated, and to converse with each other

What We Did Right in Evaluation Research for Radio Bilingue

- We understood that survey research was not just metrics but a way for listeners to make their voices heard by station management and producers
- We avoided the serious problems of sample bias in standard audience research which made key communities (e.g. recent migrants, indigenous families) invisible
- We went beyond funders' obsession with size of audience,, and number of messages delivered to find out how listeners felt, and what they told others about what they heard
- We contained the cost of evaluation so as to make it possible to do sound research affordably

Useful methodologies for “hearing” community voices

- Interviewing the “hard to sample” listeners by going to where they go: the local tianguis, but also low-rider shows, parks, and malls.
- Interviewer teams with a bit of diversity, able to easily establish trust
- Gathering rich demographic and socioeconomic detail on survey respondents (to be able to report what different “communities” think)
- “Listening” avidly--by posing open-ended questions and capturing detailed and specific answers

Examples of Useful Evaluation Findings, Food for Thought

- Over more than 20 years of research Radio Bilingue's most loyal audiences are the "hardest to reach"—most notably indigenous migrants (in the US and in Mexico)
- Even fairly conservative middle-aged listeners appreciate Radio Bilingue's programming on sexuality and STD's
- Public service announcements produced by Radio Bilingue's volunteers and youth interns consistently are more appealing than those produced in national PSA campaigns or by service agencies
- There's substantial secondary audiences as listeners talk to others in their social networks about what they heard

But Challenges Remain in Aligning Funding with Community Priorities

- No surprise--immigration remains a leading concern. But few funders have much wanted to directly support coverage of developments in this realm.
- Although major health funders have fixated on delivering “outreach” information on diseases such as diabetes and STD’s, none have been enthusiastic about addressing issues such as anxiety and stress among low-income Latino families
- Nor have the major health funders wanted to confront the vexing problems Latino immigrants say they encounter in navigating a byzantine health care maze

Ongoing Challenges And New Opportunities

- Language diversity continues to increase—more new indigenous migrants, segmented assimilation, and non-Spanish speaking Latinos
- Scalability. Community radio on a national and transnational stage. Virtual and actual communities
- An already higher-than-expected cellphone market penetration among young migrante while smartphone usage and Internet connectivity are rapidly increasing
- Low-power radio's important role in farmworker communities (Radio Movimiento--Oregon, Radio Conciencia--Florida) and Radio Satelite Bilingue has contributed a lot to their development

Some Closing Questions for Panelists

- What kind of information do news and public affairs most need to hear from diverse “communities” (i.e. audience segments) and how can they best hear it?
- What level and kind of support is needed to train and sustain citizen journalists—e.g. to do investigative reporting? To do effective editorials?
- What’s needed to convince funders to provide support to the sort of “citizen journalist” work we’ve heard about today—especially as part of educational investments in youth career orientation and 21st century skills development?
- As Internet-based social networking continues to evolve and access expands, what will be the best models for combining broadcast and interactive communication to respond to communities’ interests and needs?