



# **How NPR is Building a Diverse Millennial Audience (...or trying to)**

**Gwynne Villota**

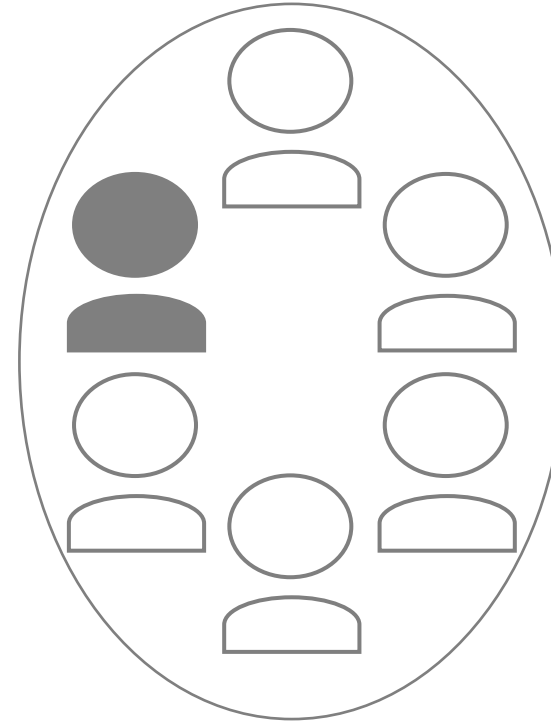
**The Quirks Event, Brooklyn  
2019**

# NPR Background

**NPR is an independent, non-profit media organization that was founded on a mission to create a more informed public. Every day, NPR connects with millions of Americans on the air, online, and in person to explore the news, ideas, and what it means to be human. Through its network of member stations, NPR makes local stories national, national stories local, and global stories personal.**

- ✓ 100 million monthly users across broadcast, web, and podcasts
- ✓ Nearly 1,100 signals broadcast our content every week, and 98.5% of US adults live within the coverage area of an NPR station signal
- ✓ 34 bureaus worldwide, 17 domestic and 17 international

# What didn't I say on the previous slide?



*“...to create a more informed public...”*

# For those who know us, we are loved

We are widely seen as the **leading media brand** when it comes to: credible, high-quality, smart, and inspirational

We **tie for number one** on other metrics such as: influential, honest, trustworthy, valuable, distinctive, approachable, and innovative

But we have had steady brand awareness for years

We are a “quiet” brand, allowing our content to speak for itself and our audience to be our brand ambassadors

**We didn't know if  
young, diverse audiences  
don't like  
our content, or if  
these audiences  
don't know  
our content.**

# Goals & Methodology

**Goal:** • To understand the appeal of select shows in NPR's existing portfolio with younger and ethnically diverse listeners

**Methodology:** • In all, we surveyed 4,400 people:

- Light or Non NPR users currently, but all open to NPR
- All currently listen to some spoken word audio, whether news radio, podcasts, or audio books
- All age 18-44
- 800 Black and 800 Hispanic

• Each respondent was assigned to one of eight test cells to listen to a ~10 minute clip from one of eight programs

• The respondent evaluated the sample clip on a number of criteria; criteria the same across programs

# What we learned

# (Some) of our content *does* work with these demographic targets

- The sample responded positively to several existing, and even well-established, programs
- The stronger performers had:
  - A lighter, more playful tone
  - Engaging content that gave people something to talk about with friends





# Targeting specific races may be an outdated strategy

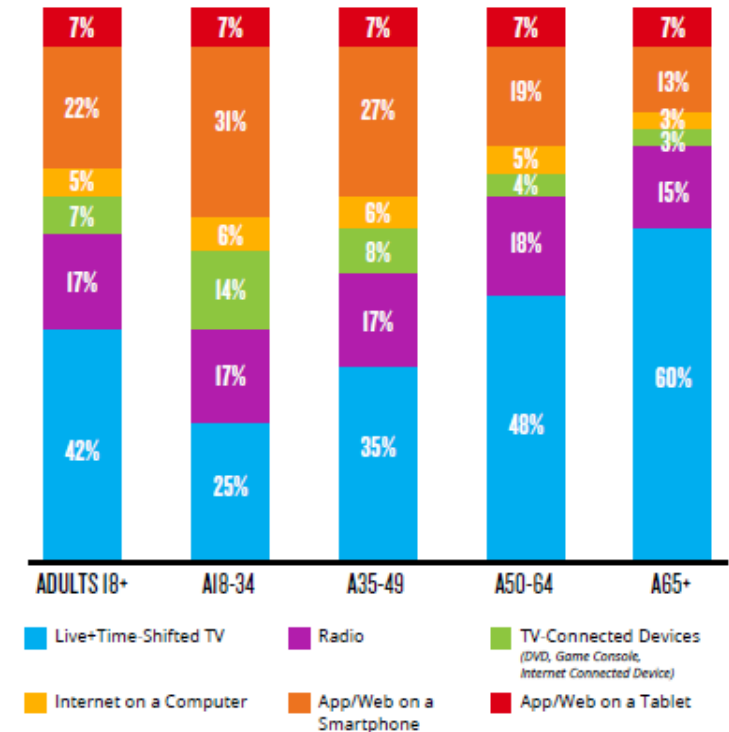
- Consistent with earlier qualitative work we'd done, even the target demographic did not rate one of the demographically-targeted shows highly
- We've also observed other media companies dropping strategies that seen as "limited" to a particular race
- Millennials want media to reflect the world around them



**We were reassured about radio usage, and were able to further focus our target demo**

- Even among this demographic, radio is still the most commonly used spoken word platform, at 64%. 50% listen to podcasts.
- Consistent with previous research, it is clear that people 18-24 are not ready for news, particularly in-depth news.

Q2 2018 SHARE OF DAILY TIME SPENT BY PLATFORM  
BASED ON TOTAL U.S. POPULATION



# Our competition is heavily used among this target

- While by design this sample doesn't use us frequently, they are using close competitors, begging the question, "Why not us?"
- We have insights work to do here, and presumably also marketing



# What we are doing about it

# Action Plan

1. Shared results with our “Storylab” team
2. Formed a “New Audience Working Group” to identify and tackle plausible next steps
3. Shared results with show teams
4. Building case for targeted marketing investment for top-performing shows

# Challenges

- Cross-functional teams
- Limited staff time
- Limited marketing budget
- Prioritizing shows
- Internal politics/favorites
- Tension between appealing to potential new audience and keeping existing audiences happy

# How might this apply to you?

1. Data helps! But be prepared for surprises.
2. Don't assume that current product doesn't work for younger, more diverse audience – it may be lack of awareness and/or the wrong marketing mix.
3. While a cross-functional team may slow things down, it also breaks down “us vs. them”
4. Figuring out what's not working is relatively easy. Fixing it is hard work. Be prepared.