

News/Talk Radio & The Oversaturated News Cycle



Dave Van Dyke

Bridge Ratings has been annually monitoring the consumption patterns of News/Talk radio and this is the first year we are able to publish part of the latest trending related to this historically important radio format.

When we research the "News/Talk" format, we are focusing on talk radio stations that deliver programming that is topical and generally covers a range of topics germane to the current news cycle.

While there are elements of information related to News stations, for the sake of this discussion, News-only stations are not included.

The State of Talk Radio

In recent months and years, questions have been raised by industry experts as to the general ratings malaise of the News/Talk format's consumption trends and the possible faltering interest of by today's radio listener. While there are exceptions to this, audience shares for the format have been slipping lately.

News/Talk/Information (most of which is syndicated talk shows) remains one of the most popular broadcast radio formats among Americans, second only to country music.

However, one thing that stands out about this latest study is listener **FATIGUE** with News/Talk radio. More specifically, Talk radio topics and the frequency with which they air.

While there is a perceived softening of the News/Talk radio format, it continues to do well as evidenced by these 6+ audience share trend stats from Nielsen:

News/Talk	2011	2012	2013	2014
August	10.4%	9.5%	8.9%	8.5%
September	10.5%	9.9%	9.0%	8.8%
October	10.6%	10.4%	9.5%	-

While remaining strong overall, audience shares are off. Is this a function of

seasonality or other environmental drivers?

The lower shares of listening for Talk radio may also be attributed to its aging audience. Many industry analysts are aware of this and as in the past as with most other radio formats, News/Talk is finding itself in the position of considering how to move the demographic appeal of the format younger, even as that younger target is finding other sources for the news information they are interested in.

Nonetheless, this latest Bridge Ratings study takes a more holistic view of consumption of news on Talk radio comparing listener preference with news cycles.

Shrinking Favoriteness & News Cycles

Bridge has been trending News/Talk radio preferences since 1999. As in most of our studies of radio listening, not only do we seek out overall format reach (also known as cume ratings) but also format preference, i.e. a station or format's "**Favoriteness**" ("Which station is your favorite, the one you listen to most?")

Favoriteness has historically revealed passion and acceptance for a radio station or format and has been a solid guiding light as to a radio station's popularity through listener support.

For the benefit of this study, we have been trending not only radio station consumption patterns for favoriteness and reach, but also the quantity, quality and exposure of news cycles which have grown increasingly shorter as technology has fed significant reductions in consumers' attention spans and need for information immediacy.

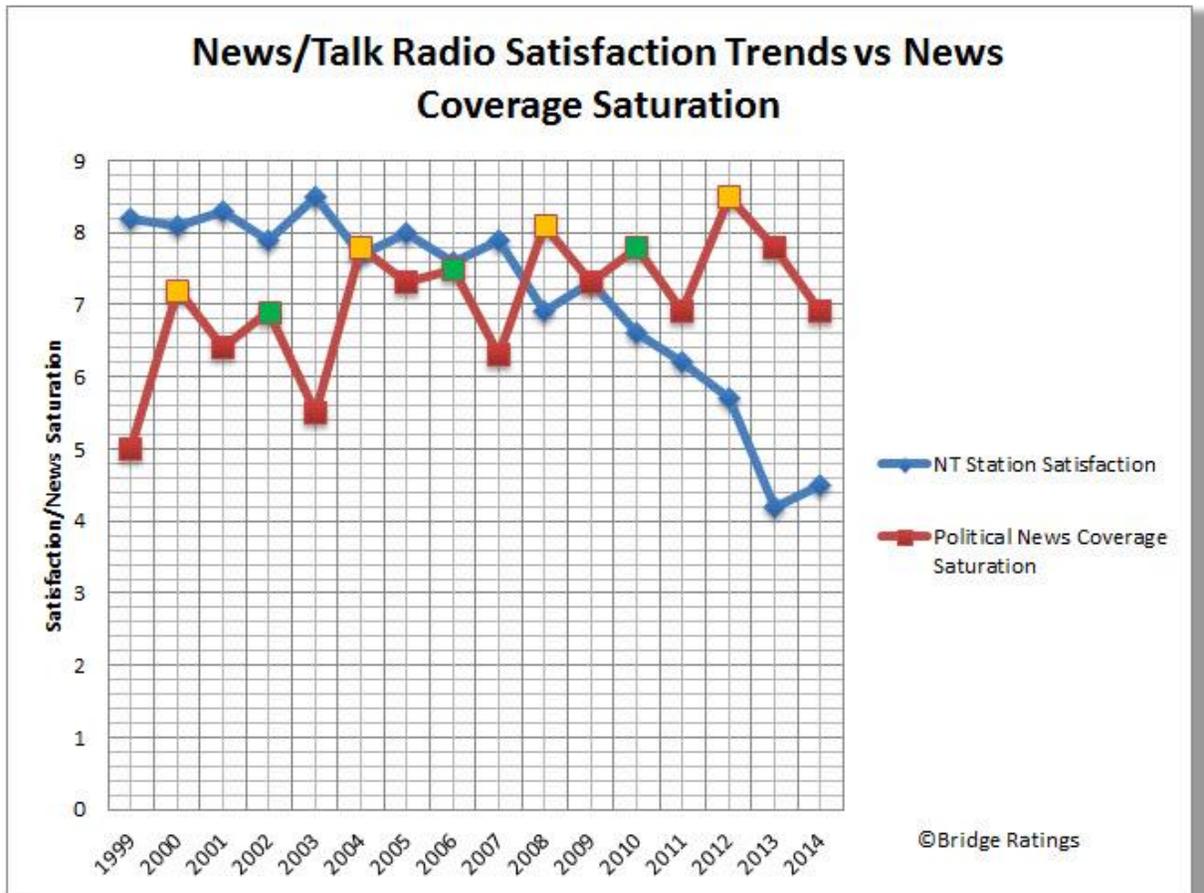
The very nature of news cycles in this new technology age is fueling fatigue simply because content is being sought after, found and consumed at a faster pace. The cycle of consumption is also accelerating.

One thing is very clear: as time (and access to information) has progressed over the last 15 years, news information has become oversaturated, particularly in the political news coverage arena.

Consumers have access to as much of this information as they can stomach and as frequently as they want it, when they want it. Oversaturation of news information is impacting people whether it be through social interactions, social media or their traditional media consumption.

As the trending chart below reveals, political news coverage saturation spikes approximately every two years which is aligned with the political election seasons.

The amount of information available through a variety of media sources increases during these political times and is powered by a steroid-infused elevation of coverage.

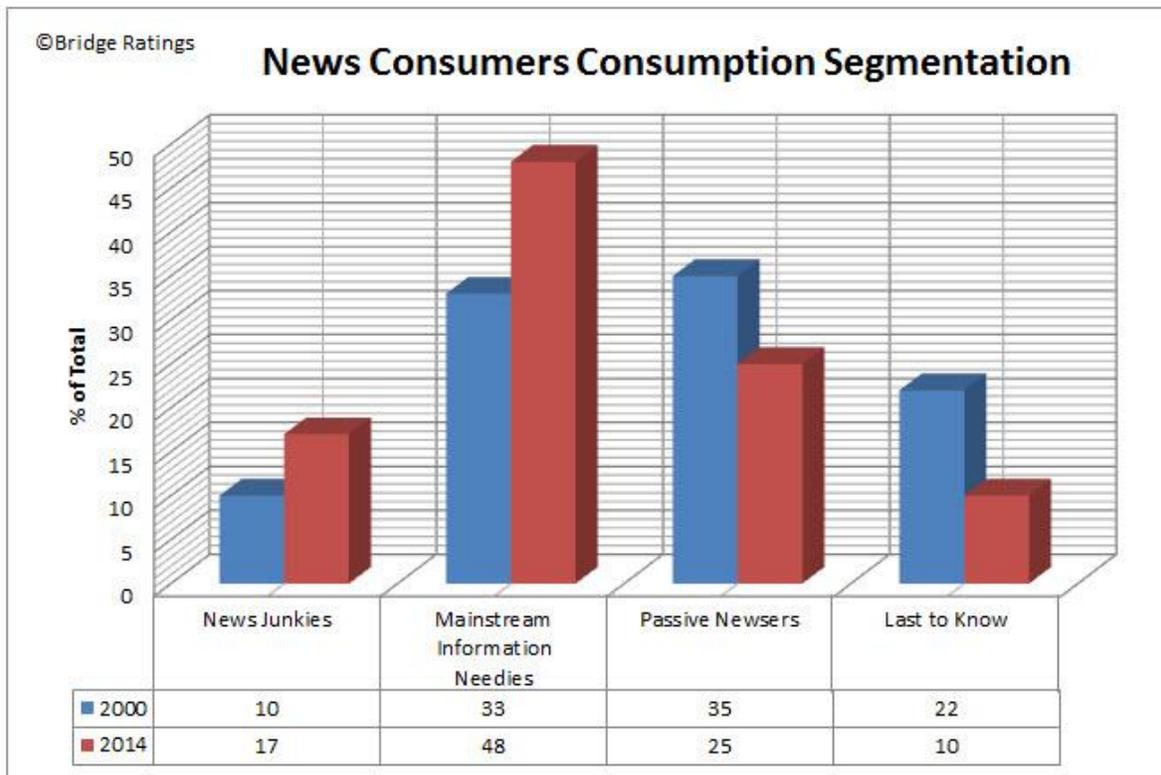


And it's everywhere.

The results of this study show that as time and technology progress, oversaturation of available news coverage increases and radio station satisfaction (Favoriteness) weakens.

Weakening satisfaction is directly tied to volume and tone of the way information is delivered.

And prolonged oversaturation is fueling fatigue among many listener segments in both all news consumption segments.



News Consumer Segmentation

Technology and availability of hard news/political news is impacting News consumption segments.

While hunger for news information has shifted to the more proactive consumer segments, at the same time a large population segment grows weary.

Through our on-going analysis there are four population segments relative to news consumption.

a) **News Junkies** - consume hard news at the highest rate among all consumers, will seek out news updates the most frequently and rarely get enough, source news from multiple sources - from corporate (network) news organizations to the blogosphere. This segment contributes a significant number of quarter hours of listening to Talk Radio.

b) **Mainstream Information Needies** - the Plurality among information consumers, are plugged into news information daily through multiple sources but tend to get the majority of their news input from corporate sources and have significantly increased their use of technology to consume news. While fans of Talk radio, fatigue in the Mainstream Information Needies segment is growing rapidly and is likely a primary

reason for reduced time-spent-listening to Talk radio.

c) **Passive Newsers** - Remain interested in hard news or political news but at a slower consumption rate than most consumers and rarely actively seek out information unless the story is significant or affects them personally. Heavy info grazing from this segment creates shorter time-spent-listening occasions as they seek out less caustic sources of news.

d) **Last to Know** - Segment has been contracting over the last 15 years as technology invades most individuals' lives. Have minimal interest in the hard news/political sphere; experience the highest degree of burn-out which leads 30% of this segment to disengage intentionally.

The significance of this chart is the growth since 2000 in the first two (heavy) consumption groups and the retreat seen among those who consider themselves less and less interested in hard news or political news. The growth of the first two groups is being fueled again by technology.

What Can Be Done?

Bottom line: technology is affecting almost every aspect of our lives and consumption of media ranks high among most impacted areas. Information associated with hard news has reached overwhelming levels for many Americans and oversaturation magnified by the increasing percentage of negative subject matter is affecting how people are using media, in this case Talk radio.

The message seems clear: oversaturation, ever-shortening of news cycles and repetition of hard news with too-little updated information, is wearing thin on consumers who are seeking alternative sources for information that is fresh, entertaining and positive.

News radio and Talk radio can take advantage of this atmosphere by adjusting its programming to be additive or complementary to all of the resources available to its potential audience.

Understanding the consumption patterns is a good start. Acting on that knowledge by working with on-air talent writers and producers will help deliver a clear vision of audience need and where radio fits in with that need.

There are services available to news and talk stations that provide real-time information about what topics are trending with local listeners. These tools should be part of every news room to better appreciate immediate consumption topics. The secret is in how to use those tools so listeners see the information as complementary to what they already know.

Radio has become one of many pieces in the media landscape puzzle. This role has become uncomfortable for broadcasters but should be seen as an opportunity to

reinvent, develop and serve their communities during a time of rich information flow and a vast funnel of information to consume.

Curation can be defined as the process of analyzing and sorting content and presenting it in a meaningful and organized way around a specific theme. To capture the consumption behaviors of today's news consumer, it would be in radio's best interest to pay more attention to the curation of news topics.