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THE IMPACT OF BROADCAST LOCALISM ON DELAWARE  
VALLEY NEWS AND TALK RADIO

by  
Brian Nicholas

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
May 20, 2010

Thesis Chair: Suzanne FitzGerald, Ph.D.

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## ABSTRACT

Brian Nicholas  
THE IMPACT OF BROADCAST LOCALISM ON DELAWARE VALLEY  
NEWS AND TALK RADIO  
2009/10  
Suzanne FitzGerald, Ph.D.  
Master of Arts in Public Relations

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of Broadcast Localism on news/talk radio in the Delaware Valley to determine how it might impact the future of the medium as a viable public relations tool. A non-scientific snowball survey of 19 Delaware Valley public relations professionals was used to forecast the likely impact of localism on radio. In addition, in-depth interviews with Delaware Valley radio executives were conducted to learn what impact localism might have on the radio industry.

This research collected and quantified primary data from public relations professionals using surveymonkey.com. Interview responses were collected as qualitative data and sorted by response using surveymonkey.com. This research supported the hypothesis that localism would have a negative impact on radio; however, it did not support the hypothesis that it would negatively affect radio's viability as a public relations tool.

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To my mother Candy and my father Dwight, who taught me the value of dedication, determination, and hard work. Ten years ago, I would have never imagined I could achieve this. From each of you I learned a lifetime of lessons that will stay with me forever. I would not be the person I am today without your guidance. Your love and support has shown me nothing is impossible with enough effort.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ii
<b>CHAPTER</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
<b>I. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
Statement of the Problem	3
Purpose of the Study	5
Hypothesis	5
Assumptions	6
Delimitations	6
Significance of Study	6
Methods	7
Summary	7
Glossary of Terms	8
<b>II. Overview of Literature</b>	<b>10</b>
Defining the Scope of Localism	10
Political Motivation and Freedom of the Press	13
Fair and Balanced: Why Talk Radio Tips Right	19
The Consolidation Paradox	24
Technology and the Future of Broadcasting	28
Summary	32

III. Data Needed	34
Data Sources	34
Data Collection	36
IV. H1 Findings	37
Interview Responses	37
H1 Results	42
H2 Findings	42
Survey Results	42
Demographic Information	55
Cross Tabulations	58
H2 Results	61
V. Summary	62
H1 Findings	62
H2 Findings	63
Conclusion	64
Recommendations for Future Research	64
Evaluation	65
References	67
Appendices	69
Appendix A: Survey Questions	69
Appendix B: Interview Questions	74

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Impact of free speech on job performance	43
Figure 2: Government regulation essential to protecting free speech	44
Figure 3: Figure 3 Government's right to regulate speech	45
Figure 4: Withhold information from the public	46
Figure 5: News/talk radio a valuable tool	47
Figure 6: Frequently use talk radio as a PR channel	48
Figure 7: Public has the right to know all sides	49
Figure 8: Public has a right to influence radio content	50
Figure 9: Prevalence of satellite radio in the future	51
Figure 10: Support Broadcast Localism	52
Figure 11: Would use news/talk radio if Broadcast Localism were law	53
Figure 12: Political affiliation	55
Figure 13: Gender	56
Figure 14: State in which respondent currently works	57
Figure 15: Public has the right to influence radio content and political affiliation	58
Figure 16: Would endorse Broadcast Localism and political affiliation	59



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Political affiliation radio stations held by the 5 of The largest radio conglomerates	20
Table 2: The long term implications of Broadcast Localism	54
Table 3: The long term implications of Broadcast Localism and political affiliation	60

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or of abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or of the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.*

*--First Amendment, U.S.  
Constitution*

The marriage of free speech and commercial radio is one marred by government regulation. Many of the requirements imposed by the federal government have sought to control broadcast content over the airwaves through message censorship and licensing requirements.

During radio's infancy, the airwaves resembled the Wild West, clogged with a cacophony of over-lapping messages and competing signals. Citing safety concerns for ships at sea, President William H. Taft signed the Radio Act of 1912, the first official regulation of the airwaves. Later, the 1927 Radio Act laid the foundation of the Federal Communications Commission and established the basic premise for the majority of future regulation by stating that the airwaves were public property.

For a 41-year period of radio history from 1948 to 1987, one such form of regulation existed as the Fairness Doctrine. It required broadcast license holders, as stated

in the 1974 Fairness Report, to provide coverage of vitally important controversial issues of interest in the community and to provide a reasonable opportunity for the presentation of both sides of those issues. One major tenet of the Fairness Doctrine that existed until 2000 was the personal attack rule, requiring a license holder to provide airtime to allow a person attacked by a member of the station to defend himself or herself.

It had an opposite effect. Many broadcasters adhered to the tenets of the Fairness Doctrine by simply avoiding the broadcast of controversial content. The FCC formally repealed the act in 1987, citing concerns that it no longer served the public interest and possibly caused a “chilling effect” on speech. One year later, the D.C. Court of Appeals upheld the power of the FCC to do so.

During the 1990s, numerous attempts were made to re-instate the Doctrine; however, all were repelled through threats of presidential veto. Recent attempts to revive the Doctrine have been promulgated under the pseudonym “broadcast localism.”

This researcher seeks to demonstrate how the long-term effects of the Doctrine will negatively impact the future of radio and through that, the future of public relations. This researcher aims also to foster a larger understanding of notion of the importance of free speech to both radio and public relations. This thesis further hopes to qualify why any such re-introduction of a form of the Fairness Doctrine would be devastating to news/talk radio and by proxy, public relations.

## Statement of the Problem

The reinstatement of any form the Fairness Doctrine, either by the traditional model or the proposed broadcast localism initiative, will have a detrimental effect on the media's ability to effectively convey information to the public. Through that, any such initiative will inhibit the ability of public relations professionals to adequately perform their duties to their client.

This statement is based on two concepts. One, many public relations professionals view radio as effective tool for the mass dissemination of information. Two, effective public relations or public affairs requires that a client's position or point of view be presented in the best possible light to the public. If the FCC required radio stations to evenly portray all sides of an issue, it would force PR practitioners to constantly "play defense" and make it very difficult for them to provide any sort of positive spin for their client.

Traditionally, support or opposition to the Fairness Doctrine played along party lines with Republicans opposing the measure and Democrats supporting it. Democrats argue that talk radio today contains a markedly conservative bias and that transparency in broadcasting is necessary for fostering effective public debate. John Samples states in his *Broadcast Localism and the Lessons of the Fairness Doctrine*, "History has shown little reason to believe that only the speech of conservatives or Republicans will be restricted by a revived Fairness Doctrine." Samples further hypothesizes that the motives for reinstatement are more concerned with curtailing political debate than they are with serving the public interest.

While some Democrats believe that transparency makes for better radio, conservatives argue that it has the polar effect of “chilling speech.” Either way, there is a valid argument to make that in today’s hyper-litigious climate many radio stations will avoid the issue entirely by simply abandoning news or talk formats in favor of music formats.

The proposed reinstatement also fails to account for changing technologies in the form of internet radio, podcasts and satellite radio. Because of the variety of content available on the internet, it is arguable that information on an opposing viewpoint is just a mouse click away.

Further, subscribers to paid forms of media like satellite radio and some podcasts must actively seek out and purchase content. How will this new adaptation of the Fairness Doctrine account for that? Should someone who is willing to pay to hear Rush Limbaugh speak have to listen to an opposing viewpoint? If a person chooses to hold a one-sided viewpoint, isn’t that his or her inherent right?

There are two other minor problems worth noting. Traditionally, the balanced perspective portions of the Fairness Doctrine only required the presentation of two viewpoints. How does localism account the wide variety of opinions held by the public? Finally, who decides what is controversial enough to merit presenting multiple points of view?

## Purpose of the Study

The researcher will conduct this study to determine what impact the reinstatement of a form of the Fairness Doctrine might have on Delaware Valley news and talk radio. In addition, this study will also examine how such a measure might change the way public relations practitioners conduct business.

## Hypothesis

The researcher will test the following hypotheses:

H1: It is expected that introduction of broadcast localism or another form of the Fairness Doctrine will have a detrimental effect on Delaware Valley news and talk radio stations.

Samples (2009):

The Federal Communications Commission is proposing to manage broadcast speech by imposing localism requirements, including content requirements and advisory boards to oversee managing stations (p.1).

H2: If a version of broadcast localism becomes law, it is expected that the “chilled speech” on talk radio would have a ripple effect on the ability of public relations professionals to effectively service their clients.

Asp (2007):

The principal task of the media in a democracy is to contribute to *free and autonomous opinion formation* in society (p.32).

## Assumptions

This researcher assumes that all interviewees were open, well informed and truthful with their responses on the subject. This researcher further assumes that any responses to survey questions in the survey were answered honestly and truthfully by the requested parties and not by some other agent.

## Delimitations

This study will not examine any radio formats other than news and talk radio. It will not examine radio stations operating outside of the Delaware Valley regions encompassing the cities and counties in New Jersey that lay south of Philadelphia. Further, it will not examine locales outside the City of Philadelphia and its bordering counties and New Castle County, Delaware. For the purposes of this study, Cecil County, Maryland will not be included in the Delaware Valley. This study will not involve any forms of media other than radio, with the exception of the internet and only as it directly pertains to radio.

## Significance of Study

This study provides important information about how the re-introduction of the Fairness Doctrine, under the guise of localism, might affect both radio and public relations. Given the current political climate and the renewed interest in the Doctrine, it is crucial that the ramifications of this measure are made clear. This study will demonstrate how members of both the radio and public relations industries might react to localism and how its introduction will morph those industries. The results of this study are significant

because they will demonstrate that both radio and public relations function better with minimal government interference.

## Methods

This thesis will use in-depth interviews of radio executives to determine the impact of broadcast localism on the Delaware Valley. This researcher will also conduct a snowball survey of area public relations professionals to determine how such a measure might change the business of public relations.

## Summary

This researcher intends to forecast the long-term impact of localism on both radio and public relations. This researcher, through expert opinion, will attempt to detail the likely outcomes of further regulation of radio content and to a greater degree, how such legislation will affect the field of public relations.

This thesis challenges the current belief that localism will adequately serve the public interest provisions set forth by the 1927 Radio Act. This researcher predicts that given today's advances in technology, localism will have the same "chilling effect" on speech that the Fairness Doctrine did. Further, any introduction of localism initiatives will deteriorate the quality of talk radio programming and could possibly force the majority news and talk radio stations to abandon their format favor of the safer harbors of all music programming. This type of paradigm shift will signal the end of radio as an effective public relations medium. Chapter two of this thesis will report the secondary research on localism and its impact on news and talk radio.



## Glossary of Terms

Note: All definitions were extrapolated using Merriam-Webster's online dictionary and Wikipedia.

Radio Act of 1912—Set the precedent for regulation of wireless communication by the U.S. government.

Radio Act of 1927- Created the Federal Radio Commission, the precursor to the Federal Communications Commission.

Communications Act of 1934—Established the Federal Communications Commission as the license granting body for radio frequencies.

Telecommunications Act of 1996—Removed many of the previous regulatory barriers in entering radio and relaxed licensing restrictions. It is credited with deregulating radio.

Fairness Doctrine-- A tenet of licensed broadcasting that ensures a reasonable opportunity for the airing of conflicting viewpoints on controversial issues.

FM- A broadcasting signal using frequency modulation of radio waves.

AM—a broadcasting signal using amplitude modulation of radio waves.

Terrestrial Radio—traditional AM and FM radio.

SDARS—the official FCC term for satellite radio services such as XM/Sirius satellite radio.

Voice Tracking-- the process of a disc jockey prerecording his or her on-air "patter." It is then combined with songs, commercials, and other elements in order to produce a product that sounds like live radio.

## CHAPTER II

### Overview of Literature

From radio's beginning, through its golden age in the forties and fifties, and into the present, it has remained an extremely popular medium for news and entertainment. Arbitron, the company charged with tracking radio ratings and listenership states that over 90 percent of people over the age of 12 listen to radio each week. In 2006, that translated to an average of 19 hours per week per person. The Center for American Progress notes that aside from country music formats, news/talk radio is the largest format in the United States, garnering an estimated 50 million listeners each week, (Halpin and Lloyd 2007).

Since its decline in 1987, politicians in Washington have attempted to revive the long-dead notion of the Fairness Doctrine, arguing that the public is entitled to a broad spectrum of ideas presented on an equally balanced playing field. All of attempts were shot down by the threat of Presidential veto. After the election of President Barack Obama, many in the political world have indicated a revival of the spirit of "1960s liberalism" and with that, a renewed interest in broadcast fairness.

### Defining the Scope of Localism

At times, it is difficult to ascertain the exact definition of broadcast localism because a variety of different measures has been proposed by both members of Congress and President Obama's Chief Diversity Officer, Mark Lloyd. One consistent

tenet according to Harry Cole and Patrick Murck in their *The Myth of the Localism Mandate: A Historical Survey of How the FCC's Actions Belie the Existence of Governmental Obligation*, is that "licensees must air programming that is responsive to the interests and needs of their communities of license." How is "community" defined? Does the FCC mean the total listening area of a station or to the community from which the signal originates? Cole and Murck argue that the definition is vague and go on to state, "When the Commission refers to localism it is referring to this obligation--the required airing of some kind of responsive programming directed specifically to a station's community of license," (Cole and Murck 2007) .

Historically, the roots of localism are laid out in the Communications Act of 1934, the same document that helped lay the foundations for both the FCC and localism in its former version, the Fairness Doctrine. The 1934 Act states in section 307(B) "The Commission shall make such distribution of licenses, frequencies, hours of operation, and of power among the several states and communities as to provide a fair, efficient, and equitable distribution of radio service to each of the same." Cole and Murck believe that this statement does offer the legal basis for localism, but it never explicitly mandates any of these powers. They believe that it is merely interpreted from the FCC's broad range of powers. According to Cole and Murck (2007):

The concept of localism derives from Title III of the Communications Act," both from the general "public interest, convenience and necessity" standard which appears in Sections 307(c) and 309(a) of the Communications Act of 1934 ("1934 Act") and also from Section 307(b), which explicitly requires the Commission to "make such distribution of licenses, frequencies, hours of operation, and of power among the several States and communities as to provide a fair, efficient, and equitable distribution

of radio service to each of the same. As a preliminary matter, the fact that the Commission refers generally to a monolithic Title III rather than citing specific statutory language indicates that there is no particular statutory basis for any government-imposed broadcast localism requirement. According to the Commission, the concept of localism "derives" from that broad authority. In other words, localism is not spelled out anywhere, but somehow springs up from the totality of the statute, or as some penumbras and emanations from the "public interest, convenience and necessity, (p.2-3).

The FCC has circled the waters of a localism declaration since the 1934 Act but has never explicitly charged radio stations with adhering to specific guidelines. In 1941, the FCC alluded to an obligation in this statement: (Cole and Murck 2007)

With the number of radio channels limited by natural factors, the public interest demands that those who are entrusted with the available channels shall make the fullest and most effective use of them. If a licensee enters into a contract with a network organization which limits his ability to make the best use of the radio facility assigned him, he is not serving the public interest. . . . The net effect [of the network practices disclosed by the investigation] has been that broadcasting service has been maintained at a level below that possible under a system of free competition, (p.6-7).

The FCC considers broadcast license holders to be trustees of the airwaves and with their lease of a particular frequency comes an obligation to provide programming that pertains to the general good of the local population. The FCC's *Broadcasting and Localism Consumer Fact Sheet* states that defines localism as:

Broadcast radio and television are distinctly local media. Are licensed to local communities, and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has long required broadcasters to serve the needs and interests of the communities to which they are licensed. Congress has also required that the FCC assign broadcast stations to

communities around the country to assure widespread service, and the Commission has given priority to affording local service as part of this requirement. Broadcast “localism” encompasses these requirements, (p.1).

In addition, the FCC requires that broadcasters maintain certain technical parameters to ensure that members of the community can, in fact, receive the service. The FCC also requires that each broadcast station maintain a public file, keep its main studio in or near the community of license and that calls from the citizens in the community be toll free.

What troubles Cole and Murck is that the FCC has not laid out concrete guidelines to determine what would constitute “local programming,” Cole and Murck (2007) contend that creating such a definition would be difficult in the best of circumstances, citing difficulties in determining what types of programming could be considered local and what issues are of local importance. Does the broadcast of local weather and traffic reports count? How much programming is necessary to consider the public interested fulfilled? At what point does the obligation end?

#### Political Motivation and the Freedom of the Press

With its roots in the First Amendment to the Constitution, the freedom of the press is a deeply-held American value and according to Kent Asp, essential for the existence of Democracy. He argues in the 2007 issue of *Nordicom Review* that democracy is based on two fundamental democratic values: the sovereignty of the people and the free exchange of ideas. Therefore, politics and political maneuvering

are time-honored traditions of the American governmental system. At the crossroads of politics and the free exchange of ideas sits the press.

Asp argues that the two major functions of the media are to inform the citizenry and to scrutinize the government. He feels that it is the duty of the news media to “keep the holders of power under surveillance and scrutinize their actions to enable citizens to form an opinion of their ruler’s performance.” The proposed localism legislation would in fact take that simple principle and reverse it by ensuring that the government scrutinizes the media, (Asp 2007). The media has long been referred to as “the fourth estate” and Asp believes that media is a central element to liberalism. He believes that the media only functions effectively if it is completely autonomous from government. Asp (2007) asserts:

The media should be autonomous in relation to the objects of their scrutiny. That the press should be independent of the state and its representatives is a fundamental premise in the classical liberal ideology...As I see it, the media’s function as fourth estate does not have to do with content of officials’ policies or political statements, whether they concern what their parties have achieved or the police they intend to carry out in months and in years to come. We should make a clear distinction between the media’s scrutinizing role and their duty to inform, (p.36-37).

Asp’s basic premise is that the relationship between media and government functions like the system of checks and balances between the three branches of American government and that in order for the media to effectively monitor the government, it must sever this relationship.

Asp however does note that mass media must be viewed as a “vital part of the democratic infrastructure,” (Asp 2007). He claims that a free and open press is

essential for the function of a productive democratic society because mass media that is free of government regulation allows for better flow of ideas and information.

Further, mass media is essential to democracy because it is essential to the electoral process. Mass media provides the platform by which the electoral process is held. Asp (2007) further argues:

In contemporary democracies the performance of mass media is crucial. If free opinioned-formation is a necessary prerequisite to democracy, free and independent mass media are a necessary prerequisite to free opinion-formation. The media are a vital part of the democratic infrastructure. They provide information to voters, while they also provide platforms for their parties and candidates who compete for voters' support. If the media do not fulfill their communicative functions, elections cannot fulfill their functions as mechanisms of democracy, (p.47).

Many critics of localism argue that the move to resurrect the Fairness Doctrine under this new moniker many be politically motivated. John Samples, in his 2009 policy analysis of broadcast localism, contends that during the lifespan of the original doctrine, the public message was one of enhanced public debate. In reality, the Fairness Doctrine was used a tool for controlling political critics, especially during the Nixon administration, (Samples 2009). Political leaders managed speech in order to suppress views that they expected would complicate their efforts at achieving their political goals. Those in favor of localism might believe the days of the Fairness Doctrine had a positive impact on the number of speakers on radio. Their argument was that if one opinion was stated, a second, balanced opinion had to be heard as well, thus encouraging a richer public debate. In reality, Samples indicates the Doctrine was really only used to repress dissent. Ultimately, Samples (2009) argues, "The



localism/Fairness Doctrine push would make broadcasters subservient to politics in the end.”

It’s interesting to note that after the Fairness Doctrine was repealed, many news directors climbed out from behind the sandbags and the amount of opinion-oriented radio programming rose in the U.S. Thomas Hazlett and David Sosa found in their 1997 work, *Was the Fairness Doctrine a “Chilling Effect”?* *Evidence from the Post deregulation Radio Market* states, “The elimination of the Fairness Doctrine led to more information programming on radio stations.”

John Samples ultimately believes that renewed interest in localism stems from the political posturing of a new administration with an ambitious agenda. Samples argues that a new localism initiative will be used as nothing more than a tool to leverage a “raw political advantage” over those in charge of managing speech. In his opinion, localism will ultimately seek to smother minority opinion while offering a megaphone to the majority. All accomplished under the “guise of equality,” Samples (2009) laments:

The history of the Fairness Doctrine indicates the wisdom of denying political leaders the power to manage speech. Political leaders seek to continue to hold power and to advance their policy goals. They have little interest in public debates about their policies or their continuance in office. It is folly, therefore to give them control over political speech. It is also folly to expect the public officials will truly aim at fairness or localism when they regulate speech. Political leaders are likely to manage speech for their own political ends rather than the public good. Broadcast localism, like the Fairness Doctrine, is likely to do significant harm to freedom of speech, (p.11).

In 2003, FCC Chairman Michael Powell spearheaded a “localism and broadcasting” campaign aimed at strengthening the ties between the community and broadcasters. This initiative was perhaps the first true attempt to define what localism entails. As of right now these are only voluntary guidelines, but could be enforced if legislation were passed. One of the major pillars to the proposed localism initiative is the creation of community advisory boards and localism task forces. According to Samuel J. Sauls and Danny Greer, in their 2007 article *Radio and Localism: Has the FCC Dropped the Ball*, the major duties of these task forces would include:

- Conducting studies to measure localism and the efficacy of the Commission’s localism rules,
- Organize a series of public hearings on localism,
- Advise the Commission on recommendations to Congress relating to the licensing of thousands of additional low-power FM radio stations,
- Make recommendations to the Commission on how the Commission can promote localism in television and radio,
- Advise the Commission on legislative recommendations that would strengthen localism, (p.40-41).

If the measure passed, radio stations in every U.S. market would be required to meet with community advisory boards and take programming direction from these boards. The purpose of this piece is to ensure that radio stations air programming that is in the best interests of the community. These boards would contain leaders from all segments of the community would meet on a determined basis to decide what issues are of local interest, (Samples 2009). They would have the power to the direct radio stations to air such programming or run the risk of losing their license.

Attorneys John Pelkey and Daniel Margolis, writing in May 2008 issue of *Broadcasting and Cable*, believe the advisory boards could be helpful in the early stages at gauging listener reaction to current programming; however, they assert that their utility would not last long.

Pelkey and Margolis (2008) fear that the boards “would degenerate into a forum on entertainment programming and preferences;” put otherwise, the power of these boards may extend beyond the realm of talk radio and into music, where the boards would be allowed to dictate what types of music were “in the public interest.” This could be extremely dangerous to variety of formats found on the radio dial and might lead to a radio “whitewashing” where hip-hop, pop or heavy metal formats are removed from the airwaves at the request of an advisory board.

If this were allowed to happen, Pelkey and Margolis (2008) argue that radio stations would essentially be “abdicating control” to advisory boards and with the threat of denial of license renewal hanging over their heads, many radio stations would be forced to surrender their programming decisions to the boards. In turn, the boards could use this newly discovered power to bully stations into covering or supporting their own niche causes or interests.

Pelkey and Margolis speculate on the legality of such a measure arguing that editorial discretion is an inherent right to broadcasters covered by the First Amendment and Section 326 of the Communications Act, which states that programming decisions are at the discretion of the broadcaster and without any outside influence from government.

Perhaps what is most interesting about the notion of using community advisory boards ensure “local interest programming” is that a good majority of radio stations already provide local programming because that is what listeners find interesting.

Harry Cole and Patrick Murck (2007) agree, contending:

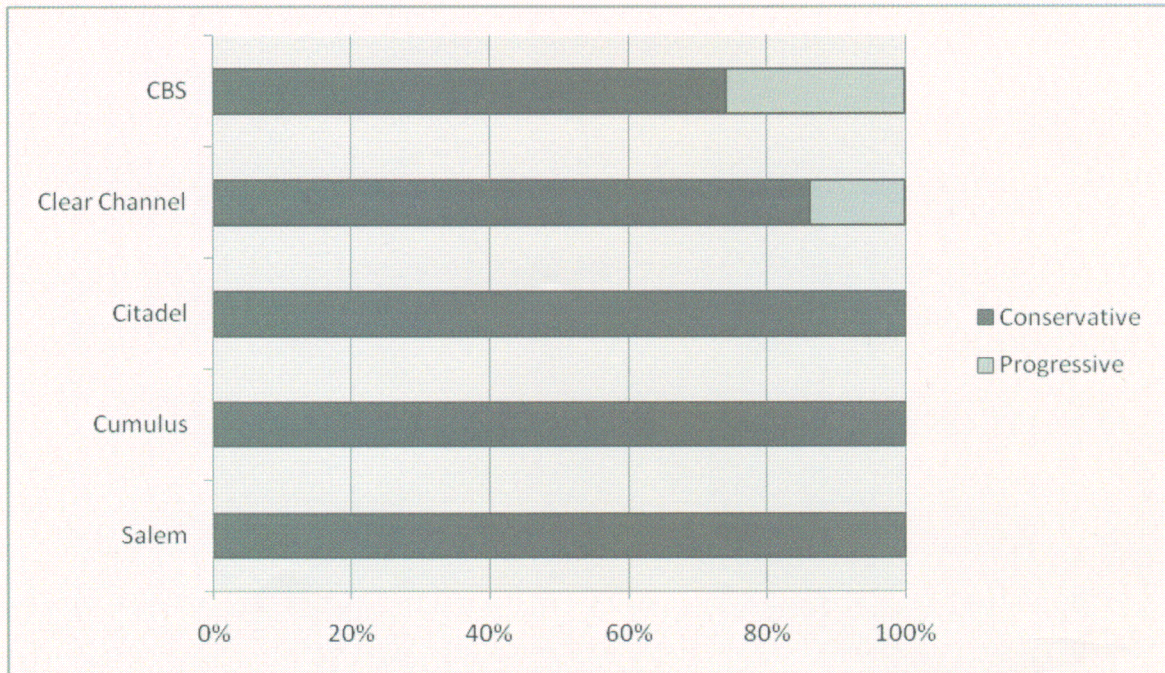
It is important to recognize that many broadcasters do provide locally oriented, issue-responsive programming. That, of course, is one of the hallmarks of American broadcasting. But they do so not because of some FCC-imposed localism obligation, but rather because that is what they believe to be the best way to attract and serve their audiences and thereby succeed in the competitive marketplace. The fact that the Commission has been unable or unwilling since its earliest days to define and/or enforce any such obligation is immaterial to such broadcasters, and that is as it should be, (p.22).

In fact, the majority of U.S. radio stations do offer local programming during certain day parts, especially morning and afternoon drive when listeners are most likely to tune in for news, traffic and weather.

**Fair and Balanced: Why Talk Radio Tips Right**

A simple scanning of the dial in most radio markets reveals one evident fact. Conservative talk radio dominates the airwaves. A 2007 analysis by The Center for American Progress, in conjunction with Free Press, discovered that of all the new/talk stations owned by the top 5 largest commercial station owners in the country, 91 percent of total weekday programming was conservative, while only 9 percent was progressive.

Table 1: Political affiliation of talk radio stations held by 5 of the largest radio conglomerates



Source: Center for American Progress

John Halpin and Mark Lloyd found in their 2007 work *The Structural Imbalance of Political Talk Radio*, a joint venture by The Center for American Progress and Free Press, a huge imbalance in the amount of conservative versus progressive talk radio, (see Fig 1.). A content analysis of the talk programming of some of the nation's largest broadcasters found that Clear Channel devotes the largest majority of airtime to progressive talk radio with 229 total hours per week. Compare that to 1,387.5 hours of conservative talk every week on their stations. CBS devotes 26 percent of its airtime to progressive talk; however, it only amounts to 24 hours per week. Halpin and Lloyd also discovered in their research that Rush Limbaugh,

arguably the nation's most listened to talk host, was broadcast 440 hours per week across the stations of these five companies. It amounts to nearly nine times more airtime than the nearest progressive competitor, (Halpin and Lloyd 2007).

Halpin and Lloyd argue that two major factors have led to the conservative slant, the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine and consumer demand. From a regulatory perspective, Halpin and Lloyd believe that Fairness Doctrine is still law. They base this argument on two facts. The FCC did not repeal the doctrine but instead announced in 1987 that they would no longer enforce its regulations. Second, the Supreme Court in 1989 only upheld the FCC's decision. To date, the Court has "never overruled the cases that authorized the FCC's enforcement of the Fairness Doctrine," (Halpin and Lloyd 2007). They assert that a fair number of legal experts feel that the Supreme Court still possesses the right to enforce it again. In their mind, Halpin and Lloyd feel that the basic pillars of the Fairness Doctrine are still in existence, but only on paper.

Scholar Alan G. Stavinsky disagrees. Writing in his 1994, *The Changing Conception of Localism in U.S. Public Radio*, he argues that the FCC moved away from the Fairness Doctrine/localism issue in 1992 when the relaxed radio ownership rules were released. The new rules increased the number of stations that a broadcaster was permitted to own. In addition, the Commission also relaxed regulations regarding local marketing agreements (LMAs), which allowed station owners to lease airtime to other broadcasters. He contends that this shift in operating procedure signaled that the Commission had officially given up on broadcast fairness.

The second major argument put forth regarding the conservative slant of political talk radio is that it a conservative slant is what the market demands. Simply, that station owners nationwide air more conservative programming because the country as a whole has a more conservative viewpoint. Halpin and Lloyd argue that this notion is bunk. They cite research by the Pew Research Center that finds differently. Pew reports that the political scope of talk radio listenership is 43 percent conservative, 23 percent liberal and 30 percent moderate.

Halpin and Lloyd made a simple comparison of national political demographics. They show a strong correlation between political viewpoint overall and political viewpoint of the average talk radio listener. Nationally, the United States is roughly 36 percent conservative, 21 percent liberal and 35 percent moderate. In their mind, Halpin and Lloyd believe that any argument about market demand is invalid based on this simple fact. With such a diverse audience already listening to political talk radio, how is it possible that any one group's interests are adequately served when 91 percent of weekday talk radio programming has conservative overtones? According to their research, "the market solution has clearly failed to meet audience demand," (Halpin and Lloyd 2007).

As further evidence of this fact, Halpin and Lloyd cite radio markets where progressive talk radio is a success. In those markets that have a history of ratings and revenue success with progressive talk, conservative talk radio still dominates those markets at rates of three or four to one. Despite a proven demand for progressive talk, many station owners prefer to air programs of a more conservative nature. However,

Halpin and Lloyd admit that the balance of political talk radio has greater equality in certain markets such as New York and Chicago.

Either of these reasons aside, Halpin and Lloyd argue that simply reinstating some form of the Fairness Doctrine will accomplish little in the way of returning balance to the airwaves. Ultimately, they feel that a dynamic shift in the balance of the airwaves will only be achieved if the FCC and the government fervently enforce the public trustee elements of the Communications Act of 1934.

One of the ways they propose reinstating balanced airwaves is through ownership diversity. Diversity in ownership is essential for ensuring that broadcast content retain its local flair. Halpin and Lloyd argue that the FCC must work toward fostering diversity among ownership, with particular regard to women and minorities. A content analysis of more than 10,000 licensed commercial radio stations across the U.S. found that stations owned by minorities are less likely to air conservative programming and more likely to air progressive programming. Halpin and Lloyd believe that minority and female owners tend to be more in tune with the needs of the local community and therefore can be good stewards of localism.



## The Consolidation Paradox

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 blew the doors off the radio marketplace eliminating many of the ownership restrictions of the past. The initial hope was that by removing the “barriers to entry” in the radio marketplace would create more diversity among ownership. It had a polar effect and led to massive consolidation in radio broadcast ownership. Presently, five major broadcast companies, CBS, Clear Channel, Citadel, Cumulus and Salem control a majority of the national radio marketplace. After the 1996 Act, Clear channel went from owning 40 stations nationally to over 1,200, while many other radio groups purchased several hundred stations nationwide, (Halpin and Lloyd 2007). In fact, many scholars point to the Telecommunications Act of 1996 as the major reason both the current state of radio and through that, the renewed interest in localism.

It is important to note that the idea of consolidation is not a new paradigm. According to Stavinsky (2007), broadcasters as early as the 1920s sought loose affiliations with national services in order to provide a more “global” source of news and information to their listeners. Prior to the passage of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, many public and university radio stations created simple networks amongst themselves to offer a great degree of service to the public.

In their 2007 report, *Radio and Localism: Has the FCC dropped the Ball?* Samuel Sauls and Danny Greer assert consolidation’s detrimental effect on radio. Consolidation has led to a proverbial “whitewashing” of the airwaves. In an effort to increase revenue, many of the big five radio stations have elected to broadcast the

same playlists, contests and imaging across several different markets. This has led to a “homogenization” of radio. As proof of this fact, Sauls and Greer offer the testimony of a listener during a broadcast localism hearing on July 21, 2004.

The individual stated: (Sauls and Greer 2007)

Where the community once received its news and public affairs programming from a number of different outlets, media conglomerates now seek ways to reuse, recycle and repurpose the same editorial content for broadcast on all of their radio and television stations, to print in their newspapers and to post on their websites, (p.42).

This leads Sauls and Greer to wonder, “At point does consolidation come at the expense of localism? The same speaker at the 2004 hearing testified the ills of voice tracking, he or she stated that it provided, “no local flavor, no local input, no local coverage and no local connection. It is axiomatic that these practices do not serve local communities.”

Sauls and Greer further cite a statement made by U.S. Representative David Price (D-North Carolina) in 2003. Price, a proponent of localism believes that broadcasters should be solely responsible for the day-to-day programming of their local stations and that such programming should fit the needs of the community. He believes that instead of distilling programming down to two or three ownerships in a market, ownership should be diverse and local because it breeds competition for better content. Price stated (Sauls and Greer 2007):

Viewers and listeners have told us in overwhelming numbers how much they value this local orientation and want it encouraged, not smothered. Localism is partly about who owns television and radio stations, but it is also about how broadcasters determine their programming. Programming that adheres to their community standards—not the standards of some reality producer in L.A., or some Dixie Chicks-basing political operative in Washington, (p.42)

Steven J. Tepper, Associate Director of the Curb Center offers a dissenting opinion of consolidation and localism. He argues that despite a long held fear by social scientists, some semblance of localism will always exist because it is part of human nature. He asserts in his 2004 paper, *Notes on Localism, an art industries policy forum*: (Tepper 2004)

Research might show that in most dimensions (political, social, identity, economic) consolidated radio stations are undermining, or at least not supporting, the idea of localism. That does not necessarily mean that localism is in decline. In fact, citizens might rely more on other sources to forge their local identity and sense of place, such as local newspapers, clubs and associations, and sports leagues...Citizens often find new ways to support old customs, habits and preferences. If people are inclined toward local connections, they will find new ways to stay connected as local media (newspapers and radio) become more nationally owned and operated. As a substitute for radio, for example, citizens may search for local information through a community listserv or through increased personal contacts, (p.2).

In Tepper's view, consolidation is not a threat to localism because the citizens of a community will always seek out new ways to stay connected to the area. Other researchers would probably feel that his viewpoint is tenuous at best because it does not account for the decline of other truly local forms of media, such as newspapers

and public access television. Both of which have seen a steady decline in readership/viewership over the past two decades.

Perhaps the largest consensus among researchers is that consolidation is the biggest crime ever heaped upon radio. Halpin and Lloyd argue in *The Structural Imbalance of Political Talk Radio* that the continued deregulation and conglomeration of radio will only further erode the medium and will not to serve the interests of the public. In essence, they blame consolidation as one of the major reasons for the political imbalance of radio. Halpin and Lloyd (2007) argue:

The economics of radio station ownership changed in this period as a result of consolidation. Large, non-local owners aired syndicated programming on a wider scale across national holdings. Advertising on local stations was marketed and sold by national firms, undermining the ability of local owners to compete. Many sold their stations. The number of locally-owned, minority-owned and female-owned stations was constrained—and the very different programming decisions these owners make were less visible in the market. In short, the removal of ownership limits created artificial economies of scale for syndicated programming (dominated by conservative talk) (p.8).

Halpin and Lloyd further assert that consolidation led to a breakdown in enforcement of the major provisions of the “public trustee concept of regulation, from pro-forma licensing policies, longer license terms and the elimination of clear public interest requirements,” (Halpin and Lloyd 2007). Among their major concerns is the change in licensing requirements, prior to 1996 license renewal required that a station engage with the local community to determine if the community’s needs were being met.

Today the renewal process takes place, as Halpin and Lloyd put it, “by postcard, a stamp in corner of a scrap of paper.” (Halpin and Lloyd (2007) In their

view, this does not and should not replace the previous requirements for local interaction. They argue that without such a policy in place, broadcasting will “move to the lowest common denominator of syndicated programming,” (Halpin and Lloyd 2007).

Their other major complaint about licensing renewal stems from the time frame. Originally, stations were required to renew their license every three years. After 1996, this moved up to eight years, presumably out of convenience for all parties involved. They argue that the increase in time between renewals leads to a decrease in the amount of public interaction with the station.

Halpin and Lloyd assert that three things must happen in to restore balance to the airwaves. They propose local and nation caps on ownership rights, arguing that national ownership by any given company should not exceed five percent of the total number of stations. Second, they propose greater accountability with regard to radio licensing. License terms should not exceed three years and broadcasters should be required to demonstrate that their content fits the public interest. Finally, their proposal would require broadcasters who fail to meet these standards to pay a fee to support public broadcasting on a sliding scale.

### Technology and the Future of Broadcasting

Throughout the course of history, new technologies have remained both friend and foe to their predecessors. Sometimes a new technology signals the end of an era, such as the transition from Morse code to the telephone. With other technologies, a

new gadget or technology often sounds a warning call to its predecessor, signaling that the time has come to evolve or fade into obscurity. Some feel that recent developments in broadcasting have moved terrestrial radio to the edge of a precipice. Others feel that the post deregulation age of radio lead to numerous cost savings practices by terrestrial broadcasters. Some scholars argue that techniques such as voice-tracking, multi-market contests and multi-market playlists have lead to the homogenization of the medium and thus advancing technology has had more of a detrimental impact to localism than the end of the Fairness Doctrine.

The internet revolution and the introduction of Sirius and XM Satellite radio in 2001 forced radio to go on the offensive, searching for ways to remain local. In 1998, Sirius and XM gained the right to be the only two licensed providers of “clean-signal” (satellite) programming. In 2004, Sirius reached a subscriber base of 500,000 listeners and by the middle of 2005, XM had gained over 4 million subscribers (Hilliard and Keith 2005). The only refuge still available to terrestrial radio was localism in the form of local news, weather, sports and traffic reports. The National Association of Broadcasters petitioned the FCC in 2004 to prevent Sirius and XM from providing local content citing the following reasons (Sauls and Greer 2007)

1. Local terrestrial commercial broadcasters are the bastion of localism and provide their communities with an invaluable service;
2. Satellite radio could draw listeners away from commercial broadcasters;
3. Commercial broadcasters are so broke that if they lose listeners, the whole system of free over the air radio will die and everyone will hate you (p.43).

Suals and Greer admit that this is an outsider's point of view. They also note that advocates of technology argue an opposing view. They believe that increased competition from SDARS might actually lead to an expansion in the amount of local content.

The FCC found no validity in the NAB's argument and in 2004 XM launched a series of new channels that provided local weather and traffic information for twenty-four major U.S. markets at the same time, Sirius began to offer live broadcasts of major sporting events nationwide to its listener base.

Terrestrial radio's homogenization is one of the major reasons for the hard fought battle with satellite radio services (SDARS). Writing in their 2005 work, *The Quieted Voice: the Rise and Demise of Localism in American Radio*, Robert Hilliard and Michael Keith argue that many terrestrial broadcasters are moving to more homogenized content in order to compete with SDARS when in reality the most effective way to combat satellite is to move in the opposite direction towards localism. They cite a 2003 report by the investment research firm Stifel, Nicolaus and Company (Hilliard and Keith 2005) which states:

XM and Sirius were both doing so well that neither company needed any further equity investment to succeed. Another conclusion was that one of the keys to satellite radio's success was content superior to the homogenized programming, commercial clutter and censorship found in terrestrial radio stations (p.175).

According to Hilliard and Keith, the report likens the impact of SDARS on terrestrial radio to a slow-bleeding wound. It noted that satellite radio "will likely siphon off terrestrial radio's high income demographic listeners and steal an appropriate share of

the national advertising dollars.” At the time, the report conceded that satellite radio’s only drawback was its lack of locally oriented programming.

Radley Balko of the Cato Institute offers a dissenting point of view, arguing that if diversity in programming is a goal of radio, then terrestrial broadcasters should welcome Sirius and XM with open arms. Balko argues that increased competition only leads to an increase in quality of programming. In his 2004 article, “All Politics is Local: How Broadcasters Want to Silence Satellite Radio,” in Cato’s *Techknowledge* newsletter he asserts (Balko 2004):

There’s no consumer interest in preventing a new technology from competing with traditional radio coverage of local news, weather and sports. The biggest argument against the new FCC ownership regulations was that when giant multinationals control programming, local programming suffers. Here’s an opportunity to expand the number of players in local radio programming, which would give consumers more options, which would compel the industries dinosaurs to deliver better service, or lose market share. There’s really only one reason to ban satellite radio providers from delivering local coverage---to protect the existing radio industry from competition, (p.2.)

Ultimately, Balko believes that the NAB’s 2004 posturing to the FCC was really just an attempt to protect their turf. In Balko’s view, the posturing is unjustified.

During their research for their book, Hilliard and Keith (2005) conducted a focus group of radio professionals. A consensus opinion of that group found:

While all agreed that new technologies could affect local radio, not all agreed that they would do so negatively; some felt that the increase in generic network programming provided through satellites or voice tracking might encourage listeners to seek a return to local programming. Others conceded that while technology may have an effect, the key to local programming will still be content (Hilliard and Keith, 2005).



Overall members of the panel agreed that localism is the key to winning the battle against SDARS. One member of the panel argued that technology, when used properly could be a major asset to the cause of localism, citing the notion of using the radio station website to provide supplemental content to the broadcast.

Gregory Newton, in his 2004 essay “Localism in Radio,” argues that satellite service providers do offer a localism in a different form, music programming. He believes that the FCC’s approval of SDARS was a nod toward localism because the wide array of available satellite channels offers a plethora of available programming choices. Newton (2004) states, “many program interests go unfulfilled by traditional terrestrial radio because the audience for a particular type of music or information is simply too small within the service area of a single station.” By his view, local does not have to mean geographically local but could instead refer to a particular set of interests. He states, “the technology can aggregate widely separated audiences in a fashion that does not serve traditional localism but surely adds to content diversity.

## Summary

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact reasoning for the change in the state of radio. The evolution of the medium, a shift in the political climate, and technological advances are all factors in the decreased level of localism in modern American radio. As most current research suggests, one need only turn on the radio to discover the airwaves lack a local flavor. What is inconclusive is whether it will take legislation or a shift in the attitudes of radio programmers to shape the future of radio. Currently more research is needed to ascertain the likely impact localism will have on news and talk radio in the

Delaware Valley region. Chapter three will detail the methods this researcher will use to study this issue in greater depth.

## CHAPTER III

### Data Needed

This study will attempt to forecast the impact of Broadcast Localism on Delaware Valley news and talk radio.

This study will use quantitative and qualitative data to extrapolate a consensus opinion among radio professionals and public relations practitioners of the impact that broadcast localism might have on radio in the Delaware Valley region. It will also examine how changes within the industry might alter the effectiveness of radio as a public relations medium. This researcher will ask research subjects to offer a comparison of the Fairness Doctrine to broadcast localism in order to forecast what tenets of the defunct Fairness Doctrine might return under the guise of localism. This researcher will ask respondents to offer their opinion on the possible impact that new technologies might have on public relations.

### Data Sources

The first piece of qualitative research for this study will be obtained through an in depth interview of six Delaware Valley radio professionals that are considered experts in the industry. An attempt will be made to find experts from a wide range of radio disciplines, i.e. programming, management, sales, on-air etc. The subjects will be asked a series of questions, with each response requiring a detailed answer. Interviews will be conducted either through email or in person to obtain a written record.

Interview subjects will be selected through a non-scientific volunteer sample and no two subjects will be employed by the same organization. They will not be previously exposed to the interview questions. However, the subjects will receive prior notice of the topic so that each individual may adequately prepare his or her thoughts for in depth questioning. No subject will be compensated for his or her time. Each subject may choose to remain anonymous. If they choose to remain anonymous, they will be called by their title and a number.

This researcher will also conduct in depth interviews of practicing public relations professionals in order to examine how “chilled speech” on the airwaves might impact the field of public relations. This study will use a purely volunteer sample of public relations professionals practicing within the Delaware Valley region. The subjects will be asked a series of questions, with each response requiring a detailed answer. Interviews will be conducted either through email or in person so that a written or oral record of the interview can be obtained.

Subjects will not be previously exposed to the interview questions. However, they will receive prior notice of the topic of this interview so that they may adequately prepare their thoughts for in depth questioning. Each subject may choose to remain anonymous. If he or she chooses to remain anonymous, then that person will be called by their title and a number. No subject will be compensated for his or her time.

This researcher seeks to make a correlation between the introduction of localism and detriment of radio as an effective public relations medium. This researcher hopes to demonstrate that any introduction of the tents of localism, community advisory boards,

equal time or governmental intervention will negatively impact radio, public relations and free speech. This researcher also hopes to forecast how new technologies such as satellite and internet radio might factor in to the localism equation.

#### Data Collection

All data collected and tools implement will be conducted between February 3, 2010 and March 3, 2010.

## CHAPTER IV

### H1 Findings

H1: It is expected that introduction of broadcast localism or another form of the Fairness Doctrine will have a detrimental effect on Delaware Valley news and talk radio stations.

### Interview Responses

This researcher conducted in depth interviews with four members of the radio community through both the internet and in person. All members interviewed were employed radio executives working within the Delaware Valley region. All respondents chose to remain anonymous; however, they worked for Millennium Radio New Jersey, WDEL-Fm, WILM news radio and WHYI-fm respectively. Each interviewee was asked ten questions to gauge their reactions to broadcast localism, infringements of free speech and the importance of local content in station programming.

Question one: Limitations of free speech would adversely impact my ability to perform my job.

All respondents agreed that radio stations should consult the community on broadcast content because it makes for better radio. Almost all felt that, the government should not mandate this, but that a smart radio station should perform this task anyway.

Respondent two said:

I do not believe the FCC should require radio stations to consult directly with the community on broadcast content, but a smart

local radio station should already be doing that. Our radio station is engaged in the community in a variety of ways: station personnel are visible in the community as the sever in community-related organizations. But, almost more importantly, our local talk shows all for the community to choose what topics they want to discuss simply by calling us on the air.

Question two: Government regulation is essential to protecting free speech.

Respondents felt that radio would always remain a major fixture in public information and felt that internet radio was not a major player. One believed to call internet radio “broadcast” was a misnomer, he or she believed it was instead “narrowcast” because it focused solely on the small group and did not, in most cases reach a large audience. Respondents felt that internet radio (as well as blogs and websites) come and go on a whim. Respondent three felt that traditional radio, was a “pillar of the community,” believing that names and faces may change but a good station builds a solid reputation within a community.

Question three: The government has no right to regulate speech.

Respondents were split on whether or not their stations have an obligation to contact concerned parties in the incidence of personal attack by a member of their staff with one responding yes and three responding no. Respondent one believed that it was the responsible thing to do. The other respondents felt that a station had no legal obligation to contact a member of a concerned party; however, they believed it was the “responsible” thing to do.

Question four: Withholding information from the public is sometimes necessary

All respondents stressed the importance of the relationship between local content and local advertising revenue. They felt that stations focused on the community would have an easier time gaining revenue. Respondent two strongly stated this relationship nicely. He or she stated, "I would imagine that business owners would be more inclined to advertise if they believed a radio station is engage with its community (who are potential clients for that business). So being a local radio station should result in increased advertising revenue." Respondent four agreed stating, "Revenue goes where the ears are."

Question five: News/Talk radio is a valuable tool used in performing the functions of my job.

Each respondent agreed with the idea that limitations to free speech will negatively affect the future of radio leading to a possible shift in programming and the downfall of news/talk radio as a viable medium for information. Respondents felt that radio is a business like any other and should not be subject to regulation by a government body. In their view, radio stations should be permitted to program content that they believe best speaks to the interests of their customers. Ratings and balance sheets should determine what a radio station airs, not the government. Respondent two stated:

I am wary of the government limiting free speech in any form or fashion. Talk radio is able to provide a real-time, free flowing discussion of issues. Any limits on that would be detrimental not just to the radio station, but to the community as a whole. The beauty of radio is, if you don't want to hear what someone is saying, you can change the channel or turn off the radio.



Respondent four strongly argued, “If you look at limitations to speech, I feel it causes stations to pull in their oars. I think eventually you get the lowest common denominator of radio.”

Question six: I frequently use News/Talk radio as a channel.

Each interviewee stated that would follow the tenets of localism (Community advisory boards, relaxed requirements for low-power FM’s etc.) if required by law, however, all felt that they already had some form of local programming on their airwaves. All agreed that localism would have a negative impact on radio because it counteracts the very nature of live radio. Respondent four stated that low-power FM is irrelevant because the internet is already a low-power FM.

Question seven: From a public relations perspective, the public has a right to know all sides of an issue before making a decision.

Respondent three believed the government should not influence programming at the “granular” level. Respondent two stated that while he or she did not agree with localism, most radio stations should not have a difficult time complying because they are already local by their very nature. Stations that rely strictly on satellites for broadcast content will have the hardest time adapting.

Question eight: From a News/Talk radio perspective, the public has a right to influence the content of local radio stations.

All respondents felt that FCC should not expand the equal time rule to include all broadcast content citing difficulty with station monitoring and that it flouted the “live,

local, late breaking” aspect of news/talk radio. Respondent four believes that forcing stations to provide equal time will make programming less spontaneous because stations will have to table hot topics for a few weeks while they line up guests for both sides of an issue. By the time they are able to broadcast that topic, it will have become moot. “One of radio’s strong suits is, the notion that if you disagree, you are free to pick of the phone and add your opinion to the broadcast,” respondent two stated.

Question nine: I believe satellite radio services such as Sirius and XM Radio will be more prevalent in the future.

Respondents also believed equal time would destroy what it is trying to achieve. It will create polarization around an issue instead of dialogue. Respondent four went on to state, “The liberal community formed Air America and it failed. I just do not believe that sort of message resonates with the public. The problem lies in that politics has become too polar. There’s not enough dialogue, just partisanship.” Respondent three agreed stating, “Been there, tired that. It did not work. Conservative radio has worked and liberal radio has not. The FCC should not force an agenda down anyone’s throat. Let the market guide.”

Question ten: I would support Broadcast Localism if it becomes law.

All respondents said they would comply with any FCC requirements if forced to do so; however, they believe it would be a struggle to stay competitive in a market so watered down with regulation.

## H1 Results

H1 was supported because the qualitative data showed that respondents agreed that broadcast localism will have a detrimental effect on news/talk radio. Each respondent believed that the government had little place in broadcast media and that any such effort to regulate traditional broadcast radio would create a shift in programming away from news/talk formats. All respondents felt that too much regulation of radio moves radio away from its true objective and “waters down” a station’s ability to provide up to the minute information to the public. Further, respondents felt that the free market is (and should be) the largest determining factor in broadcast content.

## H2 Findings

H2: If a version of broadcast localism becomes law, it is expected that the “chilled speech” on talk radio would have a ripple effect on the ability of public relations professionals to effectively service their clients.

## Survey Results

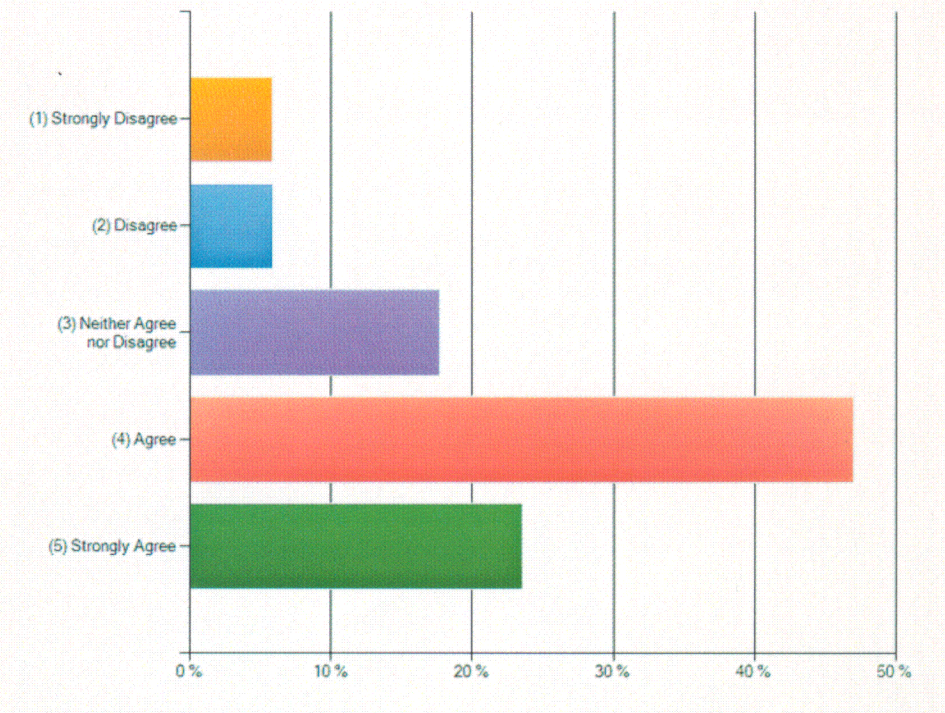
Seventeen surveys were completed using a snowball method in which respondents were asked to pass the survey to several other qualified respondents. Qualified respondents were public relations professionals practicing within the Delaware Valley

region. Only one person did not complete the entire survey. So these results were not included.

Respondents were asked to offer their opinions and forecast the likely impact that broadcast localism might have on the field of public relations. All responses were anonymous and the IP address of respondents was not logged to ensure anonymity.

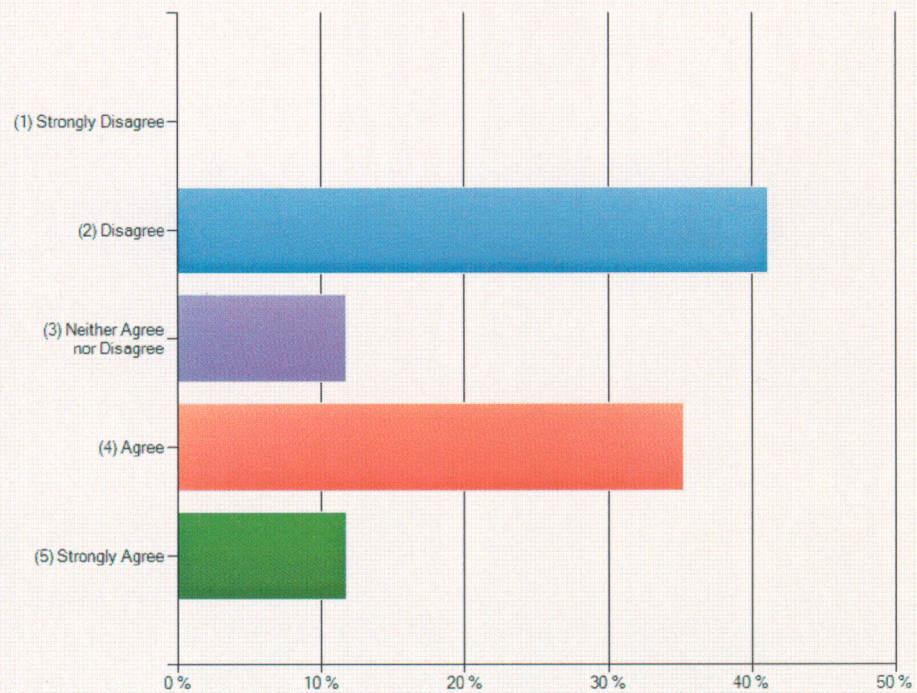
Concerning general free speech issues, seventy percent of respondents either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the government has no right to regulate free speech. Seventeen percent neither agreed nor disagreed and twelve percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 1: Impact of free speech on job performance



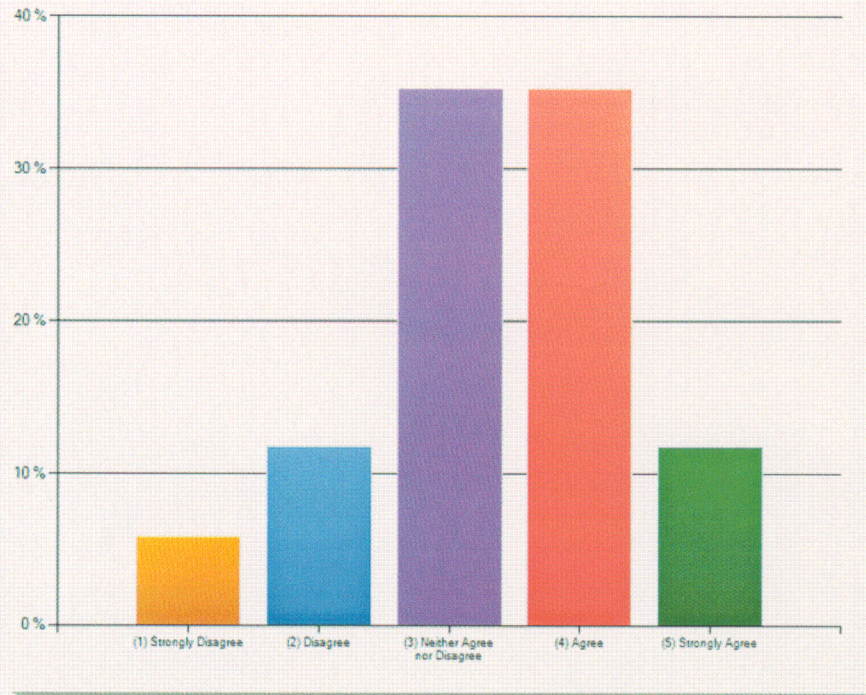
Most respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that limitations to free speech would have an adverse effect on their ability to perform the functions of their job. Data reveals this was a key issue for most respondents; however roughly twelve percent dissent believing free speech to have little impact upon their job function.

Figure 2: Government regulation essential to protecting free speech



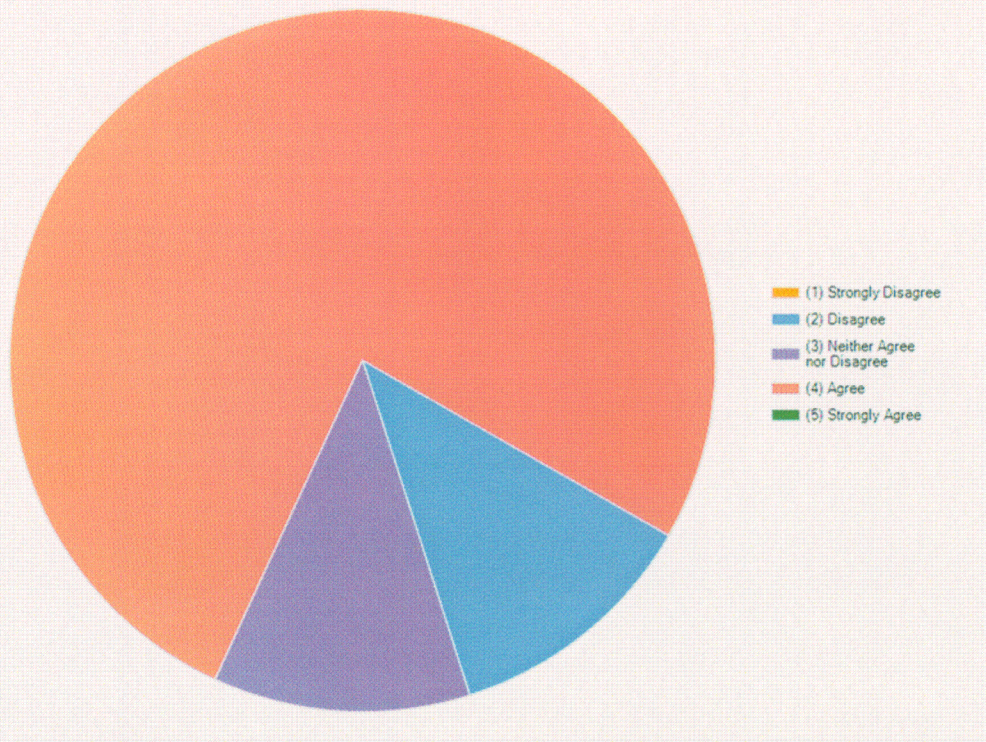
Respondents indicate that forty percent believe that government regulation is essential to protecting free speech. Forty percent of respondents also disagreed with the statement.

Figure 3: Government's right to regulate speech



Respondents (42%) agree with the government's right to regulate speech. Only 11 percent of respondents disagreed with the statement.

Figure 4: Withhold information from the public



Respondents overwhelmingly feel (75%) that it is sometimes necessary to withhold information from the public to perform the essential functions of public relations.

Figure 5: News/talk radio a valuable tool

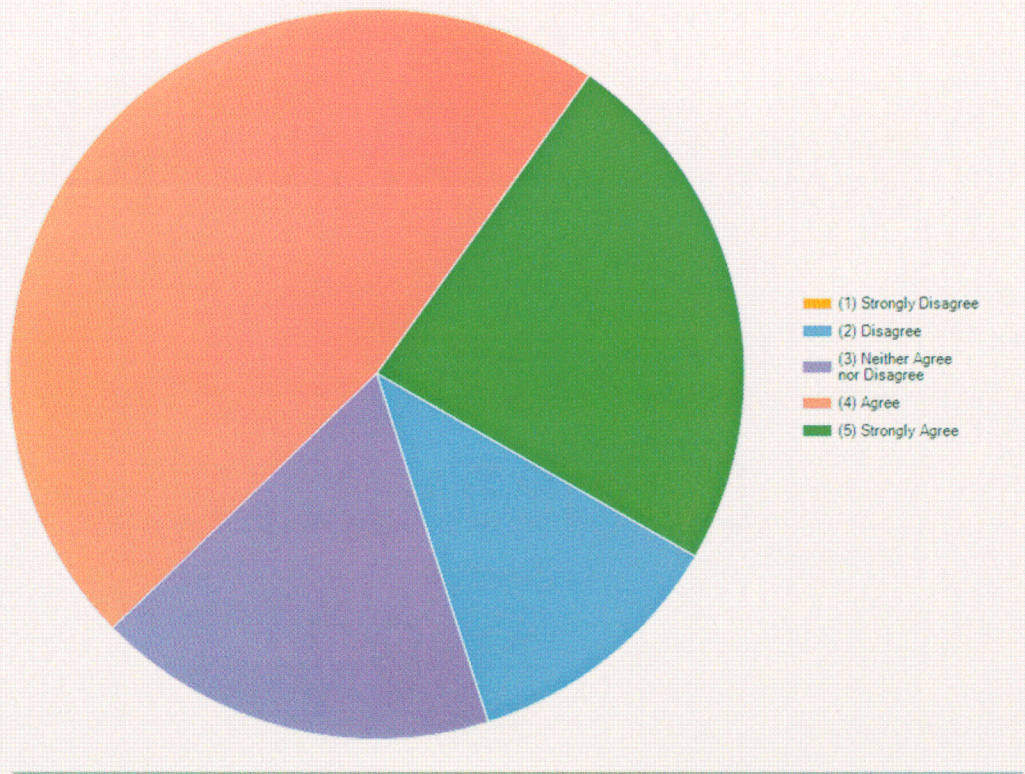
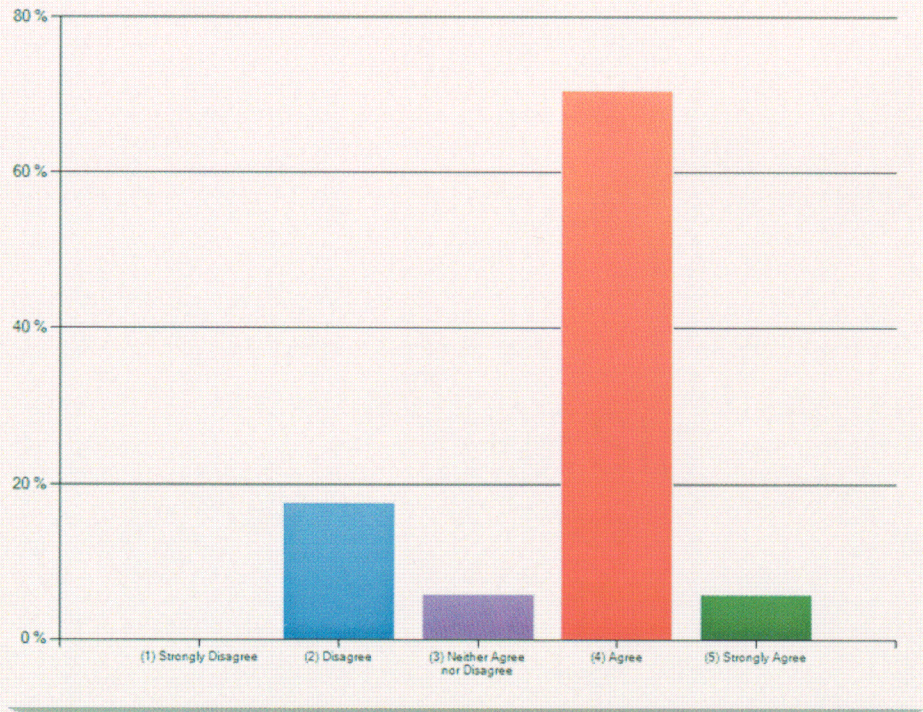


Figure 5 indicates that 71 percent of respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that news/talk radio is an effective public relations tool. No respondent strongly disagreed.

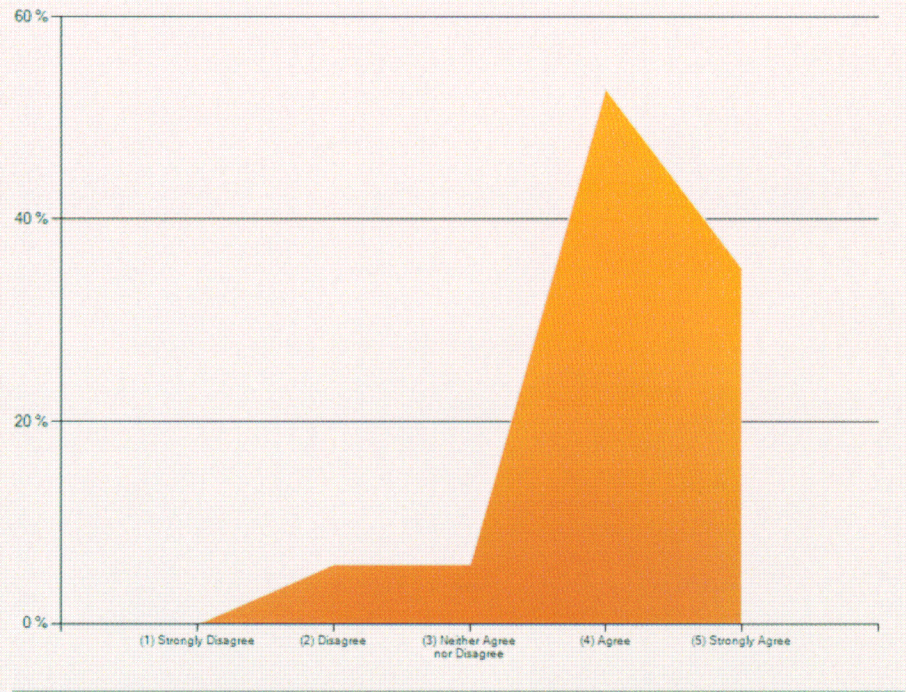


Figure 6: Frequently use talk radio as a PR channel



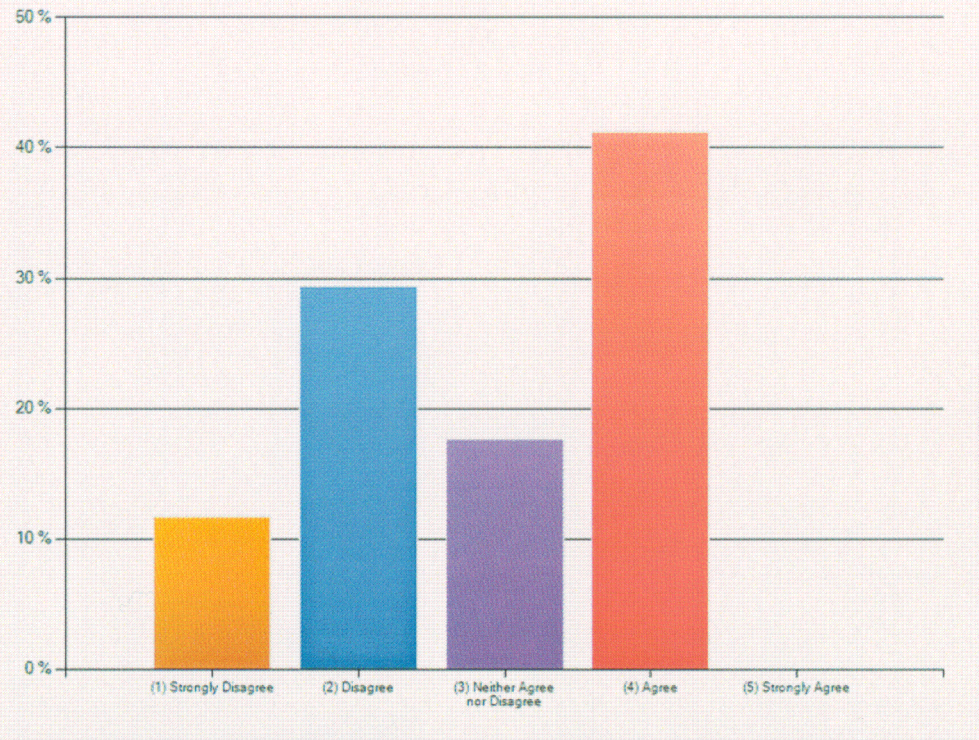
Seventy percent of respondents frequently use news/talk radio as a public relations channel. Only seventeen percent disagreed.

Figure 7: Public's right to know all sides



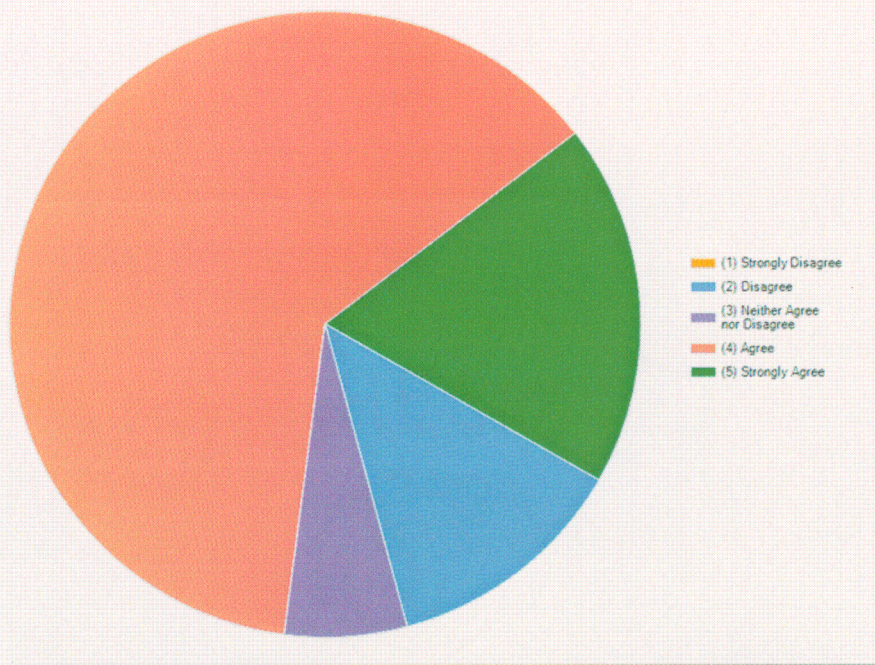
The majority of respondents (88%) believe that the public has a right to know all sides of an issue before making a decision. Most felt a responsibility to adequately inform the public about an issue. No respondent strongly disagreed.

Figure 8: Public has a right to influence radio content



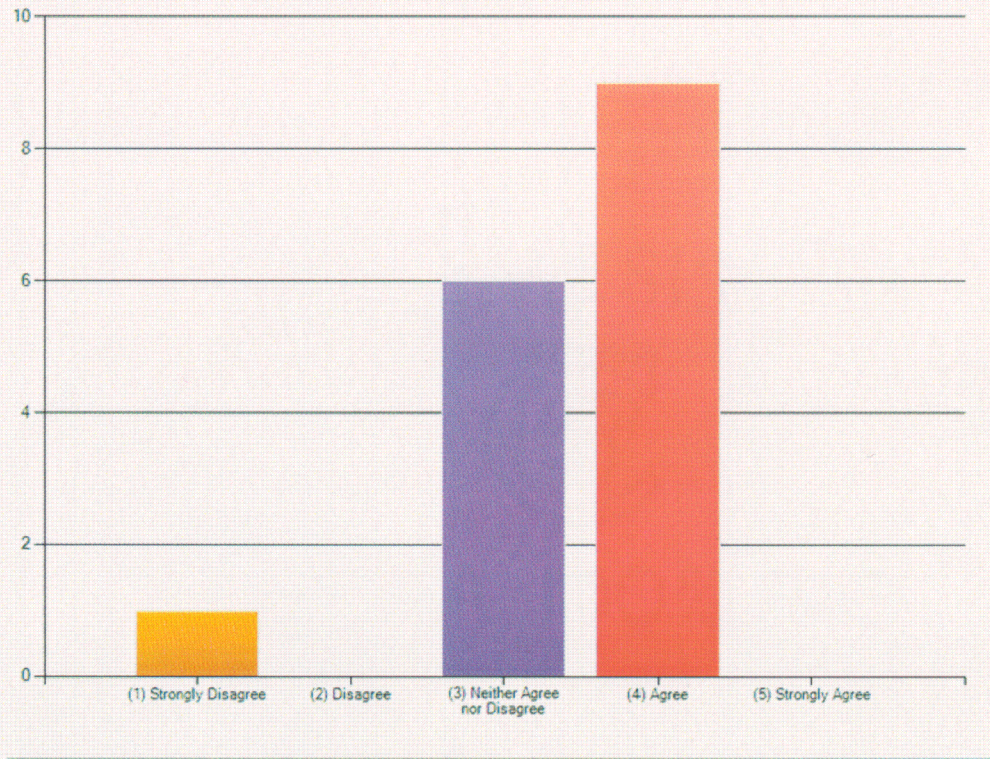
Respondents were split in their responses with 41 percent “agreeing” that the public has the right to influence radio content and 41 percent of respondents “strongly disagreed” or “disagreed” with the statement.

Figure 9: Prevalence of satellite radio in the future



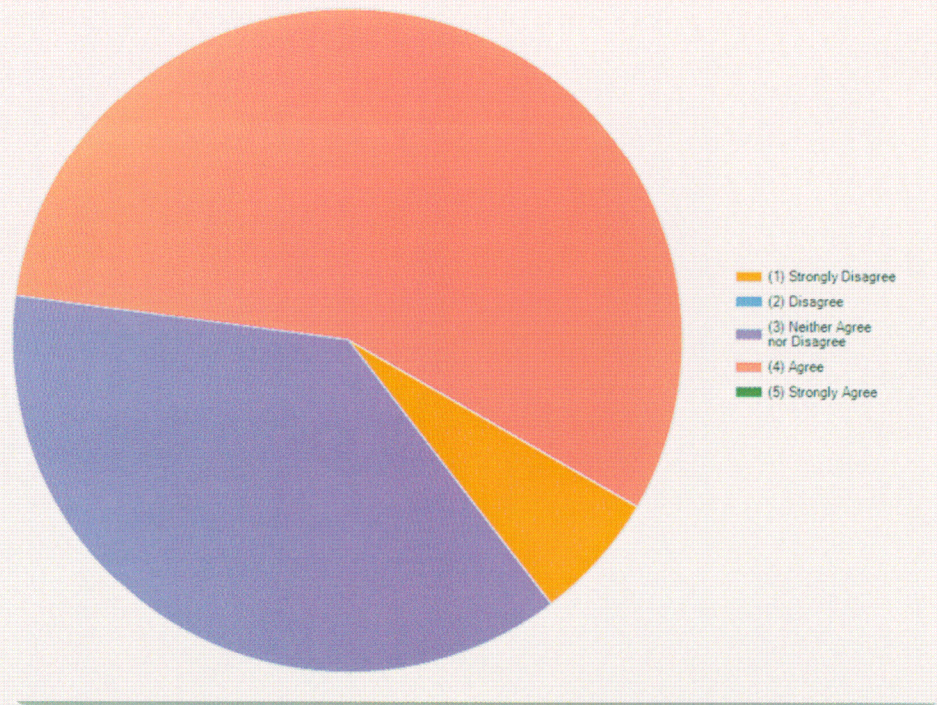
Most respondents feel that satellite radio services such as XM and Sirius will be more prevalent in the future. Sixty two percent agreed with the statement while eighteen percent strongly agreed.

Figure 10: Support Broadcast Localism



Data indicates that approximately fifty percent of respondents would support Broadcast Localism if it became law. Thirty-seven percent were neutral.

Figure 11: Would use news/talk radio if Broadcast Localism were law



A majority of respondents (56%) would still support the use of news/talk radio despite the restrictions of broadcast localism. Only six percent, or one respondent, felt that her or she would not use news/talk radio as a channel if broadcast localism became law.

Table 2: The long-term implications of Broadcast Localism

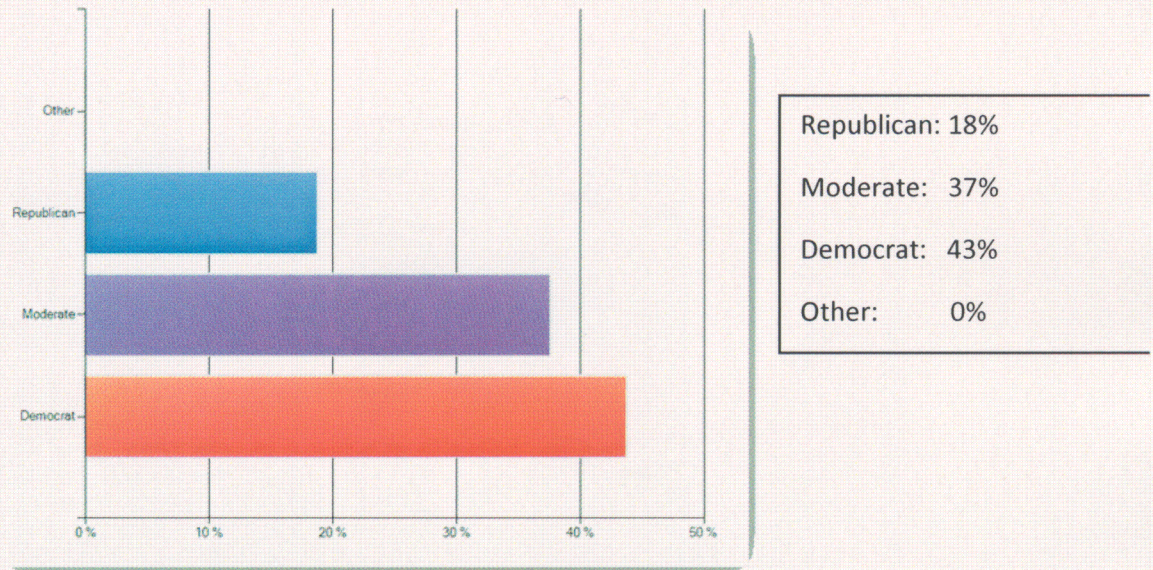
Respondents were asked to forecast how they thought the radio industry might change if broadcast localism became law. Respondents were allow to choose more than one answer.

<b>Easier licensing</b>	<b>15 %</b>
<b>Forced balance of programming</b>	<b>46%</b>
<b>A shift towards satellite radio advertising</b>	<b>61%</b>
<b>Loss of advertising revenue</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>Limit radio's effectiveness as a PR tool</b>	<b>38%</b>
<b>Give community activists undue influence</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Complicate the potential for lost revenue for small stations</b>	<b>46%</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>0%</b>

**Author's Note:** Only one respondent chose to answer the optional question 15, in which respondents were given the opportunity to add any additional thoughts. That respondent stated, "Broadcast Localism would be an infringement of free speech and would be another step closer to socialism."

## Demographic information

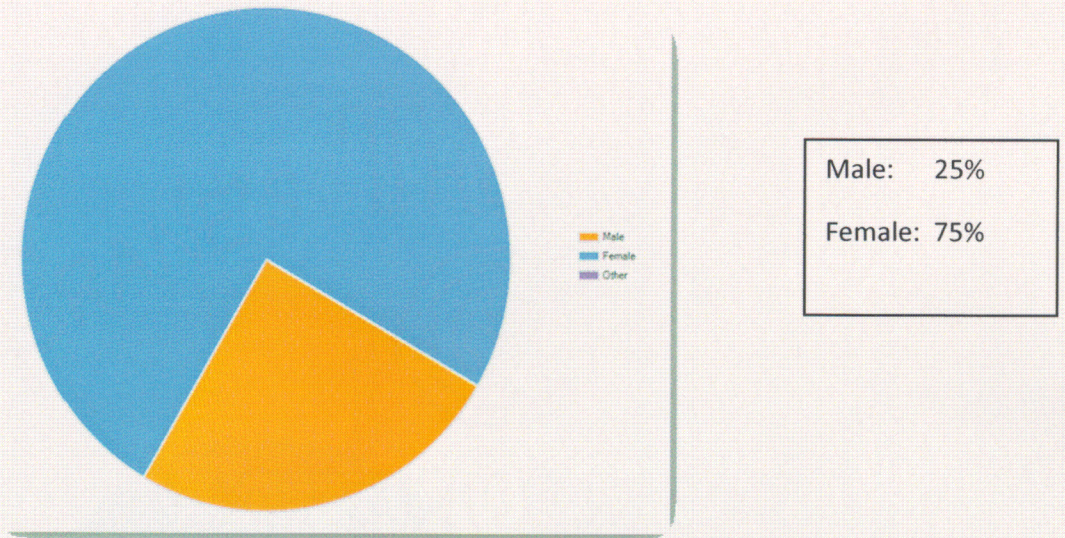
Figure 12: Political affiliation



The majority of respondents were Democrats with Moderates coming in second.

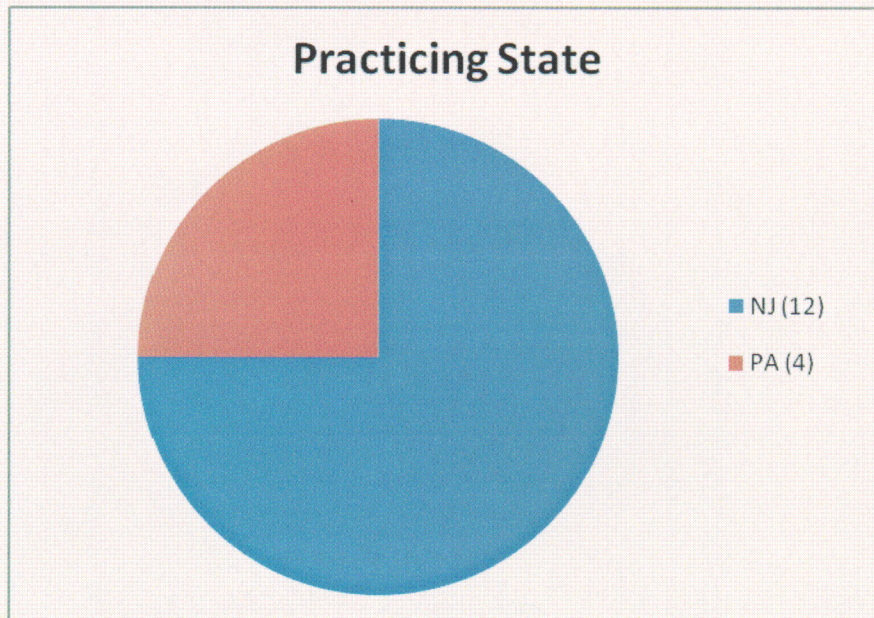


Figure 13: Gender



The majority of respondents (75%) identified themselves as female.

Figure 14: State in which respondent currently works

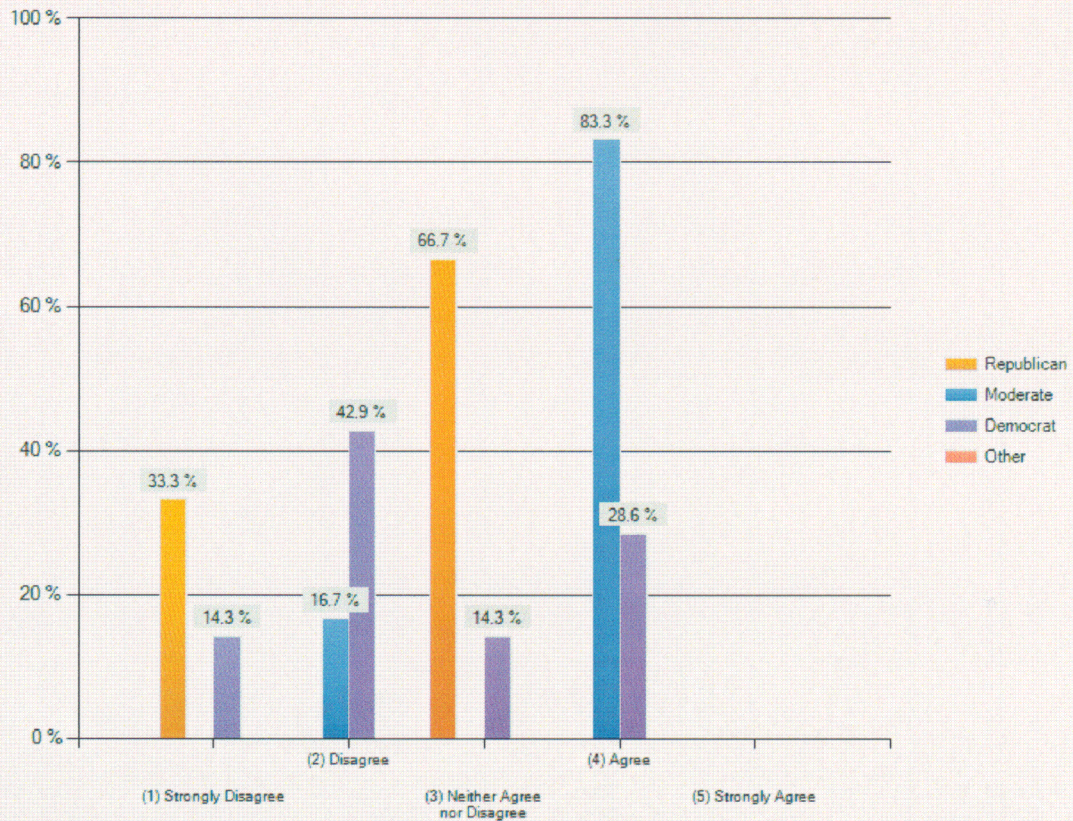


The majority of respondents practice public relations in New Jersey. The remainder of respondents were based in Pennsylvania.

## Cross Tabulations

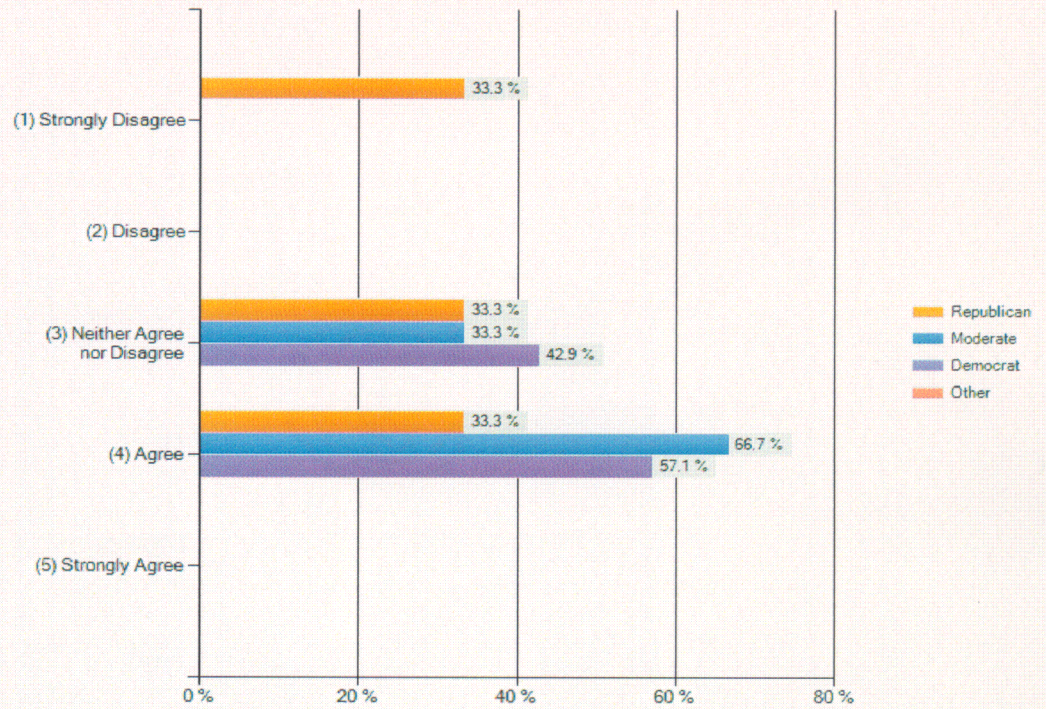
This researcher cross-tabulated several of responses with the respondents political affiliation to determine whether or not politics plays a role in the respondents point of view on broadcast localism.

Figure 15: Public has a right to influence radio content and political affiliation



The majority of respondents who identify themselves as moderate (88%) believe that the public has the right to influence to content of news/talk radio. No Republican respondent “agreed” with the statement. Democrats were split in their response with some “agreeing” and others “disagreeing”

Figure 16: Would endorse Broadcast Localism and political affiliation.



The majority of respondents who identify themselves as “Moderate” (66%) would endorse Broadcast Localism if it were law. Fifty one percent of “Democrats” would also endorse Broadcast Localism. “Republicans” were evenly split across all categories.

Table 3: Long-term implications of Broadcast Localism and political affiliation

Answer Options	Republican	Moderate	Democrat	Other	Response Percent
Easier licensing	1	0	1	0	15.4%
Forced balance of programming	1	2	3	0	46.2%
A shift of advertising towards satellite radio	3	1	4	0	61.5%
Loss of advertising revenue	0	0	3	0	23.1%
Limit the effectiveness of the medium as a tool for PR	0	3	2	0	38.5%
Give community activists undue influence	0	0	2	0	15.4%
Complicate the potential for lost revenue for small stations	0	3	3	0	46.2%
Other (please specify)	0	0	0	0	0.0%

The majority of “Republican” respondents felt that Broadcast Localism will cause a shift towards satellite radio. Democrats agreed. The majority of “Moderate” respondents feel that Localism will limit radio’s effectiveness as a PR tool and will create a greater loss of revenue for smaller stations.

## H2 Results

H2 was generally not supported by the findings, most public relations professionals would endorse broadcast localism and would still view broadcast localism as a viable medium for public relations.

Respondents, however, did all agree that the nature of radio would change if broadcast localism became law indicating that it would have both positive and negative effects on news/talk radio.

Overall, respondents believe that news/talk radio is a viable enough medium for public relations that they would not abandon it if drastic changes in regulation occurred because of broadcast localism legislation.

## CHAPTER V

### Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine what impact broadcast localism might have on news/talk radio in Delaware Valley and to forecast the likely affect that an impingement on free speech would have on radio's viability as an effective PR medium. This research concludes that broadcast localism would likely have a negative impact on news/talk radio and would cause some broadcasters to consider switching to other formats. At the same time, this research concludes that the restrictions of localism are not weighty enough for public relations professionals to abandon talk radio as a medium for dissemination.

### H1 Findings

H1 was supported because the data revealed the majority of respondents felt the proposed restrictions of localism would make programming a news/talk station extremely difficult. While all respondents said they would comply with any sort of restrictions placed by the FCC, each felt Localism would have a "chilling effect" and make it hard to compete for revenue.

While the majority of respondents felt that stations should consult with the local community on programming matters; very few felt their community involvement should

result from an FCC mandate. In their view, radio stations are a “pillar of the community” and provide a local service in the form of traffic/weather reports and local news.

In their view, radio is a business. Some restrictions on speech are necessary in order to provide a sense of order to the airwaves, however, beyond those basic limitations; any further restriction on programming will place undue stress on a station’s ability to make money. Localism will destroy the very thing that it is trying to achieve. They believe that providing one hundred percent balanced, truly local programming is boring and will drive away listeners.

## H2 Findings

H2 was generally not supported. Findings from a survey of public relations professionals find that some respondents (38%) view the restrictions on speech as negative. At the same time, 68 percent believe the restrictions of Localism are not great enough for them to abandon radio as a PR channel.

Eighty-eight percent of respondents felt that the public does have some right to influence the content of their local radio station. Of those respondents that agreed with the statement, all identified themselves as either “Democrat” or “Moderate.” The majority of respondents felt that Localism could have both positive and negative effects. Most respondents (61%) felt that Localism would cause a greater shift towards satellite radio. Respondents were not asked if they felt the shift was in listenership or advertising revenue.



## Conclusion

Radio is arguably the last truly local broadcast medium. It is the first place people turn for local traffic reports, local weather and to discuss local issues. It is the only form of media that people use the word “my” when describing. No one says “my local news station” or “my local newspaper.” People feel a connection to their local radio station; it is “their station.”

Public relations professionals may disagree, but the restrictions that Broadcast Localism will place on news/talk radio will have a detrimental effect on those stations’ ability to deliver broadcast content. It will destroy what it is trying to create. Many stations will be forced to switch to music formats if they are unable or unwilling to comply with the Localism requirements. That exodus to music formats will decrease the number of stations broadcasting news/talk content therefore decreasing the diversity of news/talk programming on the airwaves.

## Recommendations for Future Research

This research study comprised a narrow population of people. Survey results were non-scientific due to the low number of responses. Demographically, conservatives and men were underrepresented in this study. A larger sample that considered demographics would produce better results. Future studies should examine national attitudes and the sample should be politically proportional to the U.S. population.

The implications of Broadcast Localism affect more than just news/talk radio formats. Future research should examine how restrictions on speech might influence

music formats, television news and the internet. All respondents in this study were employed in either radio or public relations. It would be interesting to compare their viewpoint on localism to that of the general public.

## Evaluation

This researcher set out to determine what sort of impact Broadcast Localism might have on news and talk radio in the Delaware Valley and whether or not any of the restrictions of Localism would impact the way in which talk radio is used as a public relations channel.

Data analysis of surveys and in-depth interviews reveals the negative impact of Broadcast Localism. The results of in-depth interviews with four radio professionals revealed that Localism would have a negative impact on radio programming and the business of radio.

On paper, Localism seems like a good idea; however, technological advances such as podcasting and satellite radio have already complicated terrestrial radio's ability to remain competitive in the market place. The unnecessary restrictions of Localism will place strain on terrestrial radio's ability to provide quality content to listeners while still turning a profit.

When radio stations begin to lose money, they must raise advertising rates to cover their loss. Higher airtime rates will make radio less affordable for many local businesses and many public relations campaigns. Even though many PR professionals

will still see radio as a viable channel under these new restrictions, some PR campaigns may no longer be able to afford to harness the power of radio for those campaigns.

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## Appendix A

Survey posted on SurveyMonkey.com for public relations professionals in the Delaware Valley. Distributed via the snowball method.

## Survey Questions

Thank you for taking the time to complete the following survey. Your participation is appreciated. Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. Completion should take less than ten minutes.

1. Limitations of free speech would adversely impact my ability to perform my job?

(1)—Strongly Disagree (2)—Disagree (3)—Neither Agree nor Disagree  
(4)—Agree (5)—Strongly Agree

2. Government regulation is essential to protecting free speech.

(1)—Strongly Disagree (2)—Disagree (3)—Neither Agree nor Disagree  
(4)—Agree (5)—Strongly Agree

3. The Government has no right to regulate speech.

(1)—Strongly Disagree (2)—Disagree (3)—Neither Agree nor Disagree  
(4)—Agree (5)—Strongly Agree

4. Withholding information from the public is sometimes necessary.

(1)—Strongly Disagree (2)—Disagree (3)—Neither Agree nor Disagree  
(4)—Agree (5)—Strongly Agree

5. News/talk radio is a valuable tool used in performing the functions of my job

(1)—Strongly Disagree (2)—Disagree (3)—Neither Agree nor Disagree  
(4)—Agree (5)—Strongly Agree

6. I frequently use news/talk radio as a channel.

(1)—Strongly Disagree (2)—Disagree (3)—Neither Agree nor Disagree

(4)—Agree (5)—Strongly Agree

7. From a public relations perspective, the public has the right to know all sides of an issue before making a decision.

(1)—Strongly Disagree (2)—Disagree (3)—Neither Agree nor Disagree

(4)—Agree (5)—Strongly Agree

8. From a News/Talk perspective, the public has the right to influence the content of radio stations.

(1)—Strongly Disagree (2)—Disagree (3)—Neither Agree nor Disagree

(4)—Agree (5)—Strongly Agree

Please read the following paragraph and familiarize yourself with the basic tenets of Broadcast Localism before proceeding.

What is broadcast localism? Broadcast radio and television are distinctly local media. They are licensed to local communities, and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has long required broadcasters to serve the needs and interests of the communities to which they are licensed.

Congress has also required that the FCC assign broadcast stations to communities around the country to assure widespread service, and the Commission has given priority to affording local service as part of this requirement. Broadcast “localism” encompasses these requirements.

As components of the initiative, the FCC:

- created the Localism Task Force (“LTF”);
- indicated that the FCC would increase its efforts to facilitate the licensing of low power FM stations, which provide highly local service; and
- stated that the FCC would start a formal proceeding, through a Notice of Inquiry (“NOI”), on broadcasting and localism



The Localism Task Force will:

- (1) conduct studies to determine the nature and extent of “local” service being provided by broadcasters;
- (2) organize public hearings on broadcast localism around the country;
- (3) make recommendations to the Commission on how the agency could best promote localism in radio and television; and
- (4) advise the Commission on how Congress might change the relevant laws to enhance localism.

Source: FCC Localism Consumer Facts Sheet

9. I believe that services such as Sirius and XM Satellite radio will be more prevalent in the future.

- (1)—Strongly Disagree (2)—Disagree (3)—Neither Agree nor Disagree  
(4)—Agree (5)—Strongly Agree

10. I would support Broadcast Localism if it becomes law.

- (1)—Strongly Disagree (2)—Disagree (3)—Neither Agree nor Disagree  
(4)—Agree (5)—Strongly Agree

11. I would endorse the use of News/Talk radio as a form of external communication if Broadcast Localism becomes law.

- (1)—Strongly Disagree (2)—Disagree (3)—Neither Agree nor Disagree  
(4)—Agree (5)—Strongly Agree

12. Please respond to the following statement (check all that apply), "If Broadcast Localism becomes law, the long term implications for public relations would be..."

Easier licensing

Forced balance of programming

A shift of advertising towards satellite radio

Loss of advertising revenue

Limit the effectiveness of the medium as a tool for PR

Give community activists undue influence

Complicate the potential for lost revenue for small stations

Other (please specify)

13. Please offer any additional thoughts you have on the subject.

#### Demographic Information

This is the final part. Please answer the following demographic questions. Thank you for taking a few minutes from your schedule to help with this research

1. How would you characterize your political affiliation?

Republican      Moderate      Democrat      Other

2. What is your gender?

Male      Female      Other

3. What state do you currently work in?

(Alphabetical listing of states)

## Appendix B

Interview questions given to five Delaware Valley radio executives.

## Interview Questions

Your input is very valuable to this research. Please read the following paragraph to familiarize yourself with the basic tenets of broadcast localism and then answer the following questions completely to the best of your ability.

What is broadcast localism? Broadcast radio and television are distinctly local media. They are licensed to local communities, and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has long required broadcasters to serve the needs and interests of the communities to which they are licensed.

Congress has also required that the FCC assign broadcast stations to communities around the country to assure widespread service, and the Commission has given priority to affording local service as part of this requirement. Broadcast “localism” encompasses these requirements.

As components of the initiative, the FCC:

- created the Localism Task Force (“LTF”);
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- (2) organize public hearings on broadcast localism around the country;
- (3) make recommendations to the Commission on how the agency could best promote localism in radio and television; and
- (4) advise the Commission on how Congress might change the relevant laws to enhance localism.

Source: FCC Localism Consumer Facts Sheet

1. What sort of news/talk content do you feel most appeals to listeners and why do you hold this view?

2. Do you think the FCC should require radio stations to consult directly with the community on broadcast content? Why?
3. Rapid advances in technology and the internet have opened the door to broadcasting by members of the community, allowing for unregulated speech on blogs, websites and internet radio. Given that there have been few attempts to regulate internet radio, why do you think there is such a major focus on traditional local radio?
4. Do you feel that your stations have an obligation to contact concerned parties when a member of your air staff personally attacks a public figure on-air? Why or why not?
5. How do you think broadcast localism will impact local advertising revenue?
6. In what ways do you believe that limiting free speech on the airwaves might impact the future of radio?
7. If the FCC required you to adhere the major tenets of broadcast localism (Community Advisory Boards, relaxed licensing requirements for low power FM stations), How would you react?
8. If the FCC expanded the equal time rule to include all content on news/talk radio, how would you react?
9. Could your station remain competitive under the broadcast localism requirements?
10. Is there anything further you wish to add?