



Advercasting: The Effectiveness of Podcast Ads

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Introduction

Podcast listeners are on the upswing as are podcast series options. Today's American listeners equal approximately 90 million monthly listeners (Midroll, 2019) who can choose amongst 750,000 shows and more than 30 million episodes (Winn, 2019). One reason for the large variety of podcast content is due to the lack of broadcasting regulations that are not mandated for podcasters (Henning, 2017). Moreover, the majority of podcasts are free of cost, portable, convenient, entertaining, educational and have a storytelling quality that listeners crave. Henning (2017) states that podcasts also serve as a new business model for various organizations due to the prevalence of advertisers clamoring to get their messages into podcasts.

This growth in podcast popularity has numerous implications for advertisers. Midroll conducted a survey about podcast listening habits where more than 150,000 active podcast listeners answered questions about their advertising preferences, regardless of medium. Results indicated that more than 50% of survey participants either sometimes or always avoided ads on television, billboards, radio and digital yet, 81% of participants revealed they are sometimes or always attentive to podcast ads (Midroll, 2019). What's more is that a majority of these listeners purchased a product due to an ad they heard on a favorite podcast. This current study aims to extend the research on podcasting and advertising by exploring how advertising is perceived by listeners in terms of how they interact with ads, their advertising preferences, and their feelings of reliability between ad messaging and specific podcast content.

Previous research has been conducted about podcasts with advertising as a key ingredient in the articles, including advantages of podcast advertising for brands (Brands, 2005), more active listeners who are more likely to support brands that engage in podcast advertising (McClung & Johnson, 2010), and how independent podcasters use advertising for financial gain (Markman & Sawyer, 2014). This study differs in that its goal is to unveil the effectiveness of podcast advertising. While advertising industry publications, like *AdWeek* and *AdAge*, overflow with podcast advertising musings, this article will add to the academic literature within advertising and broadcasting, that is just beginning to expand.



Method

In order to address the research questions an online survey was administered to college students from two large southwestern universities. This study is specifically interested in examining podcast behavior and attitudes from young adults. College students have grown up with digital technology and, as such, are an important user segment for new media technology research. Students completed the survey to fulfill part of a class requirement or for extra credit in a course.

Respondents were screened based on frequency of podcast use on a scale ranging from *daily* to *never*. If respondents selected *never*, they were thanked for their time and no additional information was recorded. This resulted in a final sample of $N = 388$. Typical level of podcast completion was examined on a scale from *just the beginning of the episode* to *the entire episode*.

Demographic questions consisted of classification (*freshman/first year, sophomore, junior, senior, and graduate student*), gender (*male, female, prefer not to answer*), political ideology (*liberal, lean liberal, moderate, lean conservative, conservative, do not know, and prefer not to answer*), racial/ethnic affiliation (*American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, White or Caucasian, Other, and prefer not to answer*), age, and major.



RQs

RQ1: How do listeners respond to advertising in podcasts (skip, watch, support, call-to-action variables)?

RQ2: Where do listeners prefer advertising in a podcast (beginning, middle, end)?

RQ3: What type of promotional messages do podcast listeners prefer?

RQ4: How do listeners feel about advertising message congruency within podcast content?



Results

The sample ($N = 388$) consisted of predominantly females (63.4%) and upperclassmen with 3.9% freshman, 21.1% sophomores, 42.8% juniors and 32.2% seniors. The majority of participants were Caucasian (55.9%) followed by Latino (24.7%) and African American (12.4%). The age of the sample ranged from 18 to 59, with a mean age of 21.53 ($SD = 3.34$). Additionally, 34.8% identified as first-generation college students.

RQ1: How do listeners respond to advertising in podcasts (skip, watch, support, call-to-action variables)?

Support the companies with ads in podcasts = 33.2% neither agree, nor disagree

Skip the ads = 26% agree; 25.5% strongly agree

Listen/watch the ads included in podcasts = 22.4% somewhat agree

RQ2: Where do listeners prefer advertising in a podcast (beginning, middle, end)?

Pre-roll (ads before the podcast content begins) = 51.3%

Mid-roll (ad breaks during the podcast content) = 16%

Post-roll (ads after the podcast content has concluded) = 32.5%

RQ3: What type of promotional messages do podcast listeners prefer?

Sponsorship messages: Moderately effective = 38.1%

Mentions of products/services discussed by host: Moderately effective = 39.2%

Pre-recorded ads: Slightly effective = 31.4%

RQ4: How do listeners feel about advertising message congruency within podcast content?

Want the ads to match podcast content: Agree = 31.7%

Host is promoting product too much: Somewhat agree = 24.5%

Prefer for ad to be unrelated to podcast content: Neither agree, nor disagree = 32.7%

Advertisements add credibility to the podcast content: Agree = 29.6%

Host is trying to sell me something: Somewhat agree = 26.5%

