

Individual Media Dependency Types and Their Relationship to Podcast Advertising Engagement

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Abstract

Podcasting is not a new vehicle, but interest and investment in advertising via this medium has been growing recently along with the growth in popularity of podcasts. Is there a relationship between an individual's media dependency, their overall podcast use, and their engagement with advertising that appears on podcasts? If so, marketers would have a better idea of the type of ways people depend on their phones that may lend them to be better targets for advertising over podcasts, and/or ones they should avoid. Using Ubiquitous Media Dependency and Calder and Malthouse's Engagement framework as theoretical bases, globally we find that those individuals exhibiting Action and Social 1 dependencies tend to dis-engage with advertising over podcasts; moreover, the interaction of these two dependencies significantly increases perceptions of advertising's interference with podcast content. Additionally, users of specific podcast genres display other relationships between various dependency types, usage, and ad engagement. Results/implications are discussed.

Keywords: Advertising, Advertising Engagement, Media Dependency, Podcasting, Media Engagement

Introduction

Podcasting is not a new media vehicle, but interest—and investment—in advertising via this medium has been growing recently along with the growth in popularity of podcasts (IAB, 2025). Is there a relationship between an individual's smartphone dependency, their overall podcast use, and their engagement with advertising that appears on podcasts? This research aims to answer that basic question, and develop additional findings from that initial framework with regard to podcast types. If so, marketers would have a better idea of the type of ways people depend on their phones that may lend them to be better targets for advertising over podcasts, and/or ones they should avoid, as well as some insights into content types and genres of favorable vs. unfavorable podcasts in terms of potential ad-related success.

This initial study examines possible connections between the use of podcasts, individual media dependency, and engagement with advertising on podcasts from a theoretical framework connecting Calder and Malthouse's conceptualization of engagement (2008), Ball-Rokeach's Individual Media Dependency theory (1985) and podcast advertising.

Literature Review

Podcasting

Podcasts were essentially born in 2000, when Dave Winer and Adam Curry adapted RSS web syndication protocol commonly used for blogs and news and such to be able to deliver audio files (Quirk, 2015). The term "podcasting" was first used by Ben Hammersley in an article for *The Guardian* (Quirk, 2015), a melange of "iPod" (due to the then-common practice of using iTunes to catch and sync podcasts to users' devices) and "broadcast" (McClung & Johnson, 2010). The medium has grown in user base relatively steadily since (Bottomley, 2015). 2014 saw the true crime "Serial" phenomenon that garnered much public attention and was "perhaps a sign that we had reached the tipping point for a medium in maturity" (Berry, 2015, p. 171). In May 2022, Nielsen reported podcast audiences had increased 40% over the three years prior; with 51% of the users reporting beginning listening to podcasts within the last two years, the growth commensurate with—crucially—higher levels of audience "engagement" (Nielsen, 2022). Other distinctives of the medium include mobile consumption, with mobile devices outpacing computers for podcast usage as of 2015—a modality that gives audio podcasts an advantage over visual media due to its inherent flexibility in terms of situational appropriateness or ability to consume, e.g., while driving, doing chores or the like (Quirk, 2015), and self-selection/focal control of content by consumers (Haygood, 2007). Indeed, driving, working, and relaxing were the activities most reported while listening to podcasts by a U.S. sample (Vilceanu et al., 2021).

Pivoting from the underlying personal control of content exposure inherent to podcasting as a format/vehicle (Haygood, 2007), a number of Uses-and-Gratifications-based studies have been conducted on podcast use predictors and engagement, finding factors such as learning new things

(Craig et al., 2023; Vilceanu et al., 2021), escapism (Craig et al., 2023), entertainment (Vilceanu et al., 2021; Craig et al., 2023; McClung & Johnson, 2010), multitasking (Perks & Turner, 2019; Perks et al., 2019; Vilceanu et al., 2021), parasocial relationships (Schlütz & Hedder, 2022; Perks & Turner, 2019; Vilceanu et al., 2021), and social opportunities/support and connections with other listeners (Pavelko & Myrick, 2020; McClung & Johnson, 2010; Perks & Turner, 2019), including parasocial relationship potential (Moe, 2022; Vilceanu et al., 2021). The Uses-and-Gratifications approach is utilitarian in nature and assumes users are a) goal directed with regard to their behaviors, b) active media users, and c) aware of their own needs and thus select media to gratify those needs (Rubin & McHugh, 1987). Accordingly, Perks et al.'s (2019) Podcast Uses and Gratifications scale contains four factors: Social Engagement, Controlling Edutainment, Storytelling Transportation, and Multitasking. Making a distinction between problematic impulsive- and psychological-based notions of dependency/smartphone addiction, and those that are more utilitarian in nature, and thus in line with other scholars such as Ball-Rokeach et al. (1984), Stafford et al. (2010), and Grant et al. (1991) (among others), Carillo et al. (2017) have connected this goal-oriented Uses-and-Gratifications paradigm to the Media System Dependency tradition, including Individual Media Dependency and subsequent notions of ubiquitous media use, positing "in line with the core assumptions of Media System Dependency (MSD) theory... technology dependency has an unexplored facet that is goal-oriented in nature" (p. 322). Additionally, Carillo et al. (2014) noted that with the death of the traditional mobile phone in favor of the smartphone, there was also a corresponding shift from the use of devices that merely support or interface with external data systems to those that function as "complex multi-purpose, multi-context ubiquitous media systems that encapsulate various functions and provide fluid information access across a variety of channels and devices" (p. 2). In other words, they note that nature of information access itself becomes more utilitarian, driving device adoption (Kim & Han, 2011) and with digital devices enabling a move from merely participating in market arrangements to creating them per the user's demands (Cochoy et al., 2017). In concert with the mobile-first nature of podcast consumption, this makes ubiquitous media system dependency an appropriate framework through which to examine podcast usage.

Podcast Advertising

Further, looking at podcasts as an advertising vehicle, although industry ad spending began rather slowly (e.g. McGowan, 2010), podcast ad revenues grew 26.4% year-over-year from 2023 to 2024, reaching more than \$2.4 billion and continuing a longer-term acceleration (IAB, 2025). Accordingly, large monetary investments in podcasts, hosts/producers, podcast serving platforms and associated media coverage have helped grow attention to podcasts as a vehicle for advertising (e.g. Steele, 2020a; Steele, 2020b). The mode for number of ads in a typical audio podcast episode is seven, with a range of anywhere from one to 12 total ads (Wolf, 2025). Ad skipping is purportedly less prevalent among podcast users vs. other digital vehicles (Webster, 2024) which is supported by recent findings by Vilceanu et al. (2021) and Moe (2022). When ads are skipped, however, some industry

sources postulate a serial placement effect such that mid-roll ads (those that occur in the middle of the podcast) are skipped less often than pre-roll ads that appear at the beginning of the show (BloodyFM Blog, 2025). The ads at the end of shows are purportedly skipped most often (Lobel, 2024). 66.9% of the ads in podcasts are host-read instead of being pre-recorded spots; this has been increasing over the last few years (Ferreira, 2025; Osgood, 2022). Brooks et al. (2022) found users preferred host-read to prerecorded ads; accordingly, Moe (2021) and Moe (2022) found host affinity positively influenced ad perceptions in addition to host-read advertisements being skipped less, with this effect more pronounced for comedy and true crime shows. Mirroring a common phenomenon from the social media influencer (SMI) literature (Kim, 2022; Farivar et al., 2021), podcast users' parasocial relationships with hosts has also emerged as a factor in podcast use (Schlütz & Hedder, 2022; Vilceanu et al., 2021; Perks & Turner, 2019) with greater usage associated with greater parasocial relationships (Tobin & Guadagno, 2022). These parasocial relationships have also been found to be associated with engagement, trust, and brand recall; these effects were increased in host-read ads (Brinson & Lemon, 2022). Brinson et al. (2023) found that parasocial relationship perceptions contributed to greater brand information-seeking intentions for host-read ads.

In an age where attention spans are supposedly on the decline, podcasting seems to go against the grain in this respect, especially True Crime and longer-format discussions with public intellectual types/genres, and perhaps Comedy (Van Driel, 2022; Becker, 2024; Heshmat et al., 2018; Fisher, 2024). Correspondingly, audiences are often termed to have greater levels of "engagement" (Nielsen, 2022). For example, recent research found that engaged listeners of a cricket-focused podcast not only also heavily consumed other media vehicles related to cricket, but about half of the survey respondents financially supported the podcast hosts through Patreon (English et al., 2023). Similarly, Shaw et al. (2022) found that audience engagement in a podcast on menopause was driven by narrative communication effects though the perceived openness, authenticity, and relatability of hosts, and perceptions of audience members' identification with hosts. McClung and Johnson posited that the heavier the user, the greater their support of podcast advertisers (2010) while Tobin and Guadagno (2022) found a positive association between "social engagement" (including discussing podcasts with others and engaging with podcast-related content via social media) and podcast usage. Accordingly, scholars have posited that smartphone dependency and ubiquity is related to podcast usage (e.g. Lee & Chan, 2007; Groselj & Blank, 2024; Li et al., 2022). Further, utilizing the Calder and Malthouse (2008) engagement framework, Fisher (2024) found that both podcast usage as well as certain motivation-based engagement experiences were associated with both positive and negative podcast advertising outcomes, depending on the engagement mode and the genre of podcast. Tobin and Guadagno (2022) found that smartphone addiction was negatively associated with podcast usage, but smartphone addiction is operationalized differently than smartphone dependency, as it involves one's smartphone and its relationship to creating disturbances to daily life

activities (Kwon et al., 2013) rather than UMD's focus on more utilitarian aspects of everyday life.

To summarize, existing research grounded in a Uses-and-Gratifications approach assumes podcast users are goal-oriented in nature; this approach has been linked to the individual media dependency/ubiquitous media dependency traditions. Further, podcast users are often considered "engaged" which has potentially positive effects for advertisers. Thus, applying media engagement theory and individual media dependency could provide an answer that is germane to advertisers, as research on how advertising works and is engaged with in podcasting by listeners is relatively nascent (Taylor, 2024).

Media Dependency

Media Dependency Theory was first proposed in a 1976 paper by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur where they argued that questions around what effects, or what degree of effects, media had on the public were not the right questions or the right conceptualization, instead advocating looking at the dependencies audiences may have or develop on the media. They postulated that a more holistic view was needed, one in which media was seen as serving some function for members of a society, and one that examined "the interrelationships between audiences, media, and society" (1976, p. 5). These functions (and corresponding interrelationships and dependencies) would vary somewhat according to the nature of the society and a given individual's place within it. In other words, it is the interrelationships between audiences, media and society "which most directly determines many of the effects that the media have on people and society" (1976, p. 5).

According to Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur's theory, in a modern complex society, audiences would rely on media for several functions, and this reliance would increase under two conditions. The first is when a society's complexity increases, due to the segmentation of the individual as a cog in the wheel of the industrial or social machine he or she participates in as it were, which has the effect of removing them personally from the larger social system. Thus, as a given society grows more complex, the media fulfil more unique and central needs for audiences, including "information gathering, processing, and delivery" functions (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976, p. 6) as the individual is less involved in a wide range of societal activities and thus less heterogeneous insofar as the activities and communities with which they have direct personal contact. The second is when a "relatively high degree of change and conflict is present in a society" (1976, p. 7), as importance of media increases due to the need to construct new social frameworks to deal with such change (it is interesting to note that the latter effect "is a joint consequence of the reduced adequacy of their established social arrangements and the media's capacity to acquire and transmit information that facilitates reconstruction of arrangements" [1976, p. 7]). These interrelationships and dependencies then have three types of effects on audiences: cognitive, affective, and behavioral (which can themselves then feed back into the system and cause social change).

Individual Media Dependency (IMD) is an outgrowth of Media Dependency Theory detailed by Ball-Rokeach in 1985, where she postulated the origins and determinants of the media-system dependencies of individuals and the factors at play, and is a micro-level approach as opposed to Media Dependency's more macro-level analysis (Skumanich & Kintsfather, 1998). Ball-Rokeach (1985) thought that the larger the range of media roles in a society and level of exclusivity of those roles, the more the individual would develop dependency, with understanding, orientation, and play the primary motivational dimensions underlying individuals' media behaviors. "Understanding" includes ideas about the social environment as well as the self. "Orientation" has to do with taking action or inaction, and "Play" can fulfil social needs as well as solitary ones.

Ubiquitous Media Dependency (UMD) is thus an outgrowth of the IMD paradigm and primarily conceives of media dependency as having to do with how one uses one's smartphone. This makes a particularly germane operationalization of individual dependency due to a) the relative ubiquity of smartphones and b) the fact that smartphones are often used to listen to/watch podcasts, with 69% of respondents indicating they use their phones to get podcasts, increasing 157% from 2014 to 2018 (Winn, 2021). UMD has recently been shown to be related to various gratifications sought when using social media via mobile devices in emergencies among Gen Y users in China (Li et al., 2019); mediated by media environment, activity on personal social networks, and media systems activity when examining use of young mothers' parenting-related Facebook pages in Malaysia (Lau et al., 2021); associated with COVID-19 vaccine uptake intentions in Pakistan (Ma et al., 2023); and used to explain differing mediators between genders among problematic social media users in China (Liu et al., 2020).

Engagement and Advertising

Podcast audiences are frequently described as "engaged" (e.g. Nielsen, 2022). But what is engagement? Higgins' (2006) experience framework distinguishes elements of engagement that contribute to engagement strength from hedonic elements, or simple "liking"-- in other words, the pleasure or pain of an experience is actually somewhat separate from its motivational aspect, and it is the motivational portion of the overall experience that is more related to engagement per se (these two things together creating perceptions of value). Building on these ideas and similarly drawing a distinction between simple affect or "liking" and engagement, Calder and Malthouse write that it is "engagement with a TV program that causes someone to want to watch it, to be attentive to it, to recommend it to a friend, or to be disappointed if it were no longer on the air" (2008, p. 2). They equate engagement with "a sense of involvement, of being connected with something... a fundamental insight [is] engagement comes from experiencing something like a magazine or TV program in a certain way" (2008, pp. 2-3, emphasis added). Rather than thinking of engagement as, for example, what happens when a viewer views or a reader reads, even if frequently, it is engagement that actually causes a person to want to view or read in the first place in pursuit of some personal goal (e.g. self-improvement, entertainment, knowledge and understanding); that is, what commonly is proposed to be "engagement" is

actually better understood as consequences or outcomes of the present concept of engagement; engagement has more to do with the motivational force aspect of the prospective/current experience. Among the ramifications Calder and Malthouse (2008) draw for marketers is the fact that taking into account engagement of media could potentially change the traditional calculations and decisions involved in media buying, for example, as well as how engagement with brands themselves can be enhanced through high-level engagement indicative of new media. These engagement experiences and motivations have an evident relationship to at least four popular podcast types: longer format conversations with public intellectuals (aka Long-Format Conversational), True Crime, Comedy, and News & Politics.

Recent research in the digital realm has found that engagement is related to continuation of branded app use (van Berlo, et al., 2023), satisfaction with a food delivery app (Lubbe, 2022), affects behavioral intentions in different types of sponsored Facebook posts (Sheiner et al., 2021), and that engagement of social media platforms is related to engagement with advertising on social media; this engagement then led to positive effects on ad evaluation and purchase intention (Ulya & Alversia, 2020). The Calder and Malthouse (2008) engagement conceptualization has also been used to provide a theoretical framework to help explain use of Alexa devices (Jones, 2022). Though largely positive, all findings with regard to engaged users' relationship to advertising are not always so (e.g. Fisher, 2024), for example, Wang and Calder (2006) postulated a transportation effect would likely result in a negative experience as the ad interrupts the transportation engagement.

Additionally, Calder and Malthouse (2008) developed two advertising-specific engagement concepts and corresponding multi-item scales, Ad Attention (the medium engenders more attention and engagement to ads, e.g. "I like the ads as much of the rest of the content in podcasts," "Podcasts have ads about things I actually care about") and Ad Interference (that is, the ads interfere with engagement, e.g. "I make a special effort to skip over and avoid listening to/looking at ads," "I hate the inserts they put in podcasts"). These two Ad Engagement measures are investigated in this study (see Appendix A).

Theoretical Connections

Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur's (1976) and Ball-Rokeach's (1985) Media Systems Dependency theory and Individual Media Dependency frameworks provide a bridge to Calder and Malthouse's (2008) ideas on Media Engagement, as a number of concepts from both areas seem to map on to each other, making theoretical reconciliation possible. As mentioned, Dependency asserts a more holistic view rather than a simpler media effects approach is needed, looking more at interrelationships between audiences and media sources. Through cognitive, behavioral, and affective effects due to these interrelationships, media contributes to what society looks like, how it is understood, what it feels like and what behaviors are socially acceptable and valued or not valued – essentially, rather than media having direct effects, media needs to be examined insofar as it

engages with the public on both a macro and micro level.

Similarly, Engagement theory postulates that activities rise to the level of engagement (beyond simple “liking”) when certain motivations are present that have to do with understanding behavior in a primary sense, as well as what behaviors are valued by society and how those goals are pursued—according to Higgins (2006) and Calder & Malthouse (2008), an action is more engaging not only when a person overcomes resistance to perform it and is toward a goal that is worthy of pursuit, but also when it is done in a manner that society deems to be a positive, whether that is in a simple “utilitarian” sense and/or one that “makes one smarter” and able to converse on an important subject. Sun et al. (2008) found that “stronger cognitive and affective involvement predicted Internet dependency” (p. 424), perhaps supporting notions of a relationship between Engagement and Dependency, insofar as involvement is related to both concepts.

As another example, one of Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur’s prime cognitive effects of media systems dependency is the “creation and resolution of ambiguity” (1976, 9), where media contributes to and then resolves ambiguity through continuous feeding of information. Calder and Malthouse discuss “engagement as a sense of involvement, of being connected to something” (2008, p. 2). Essentially, one learns more about society and social roles, relevant schemata that contribute to meaning, and their overall social construction through media when media dependency is present, and therefore are more involved and connected to media. Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur also postulate “attitude formation” as a cognitive effect (1976) which seems connected to Calder and Malthouse’s notions of the “Utilitarian” experience, which purportedly shows one how to do things, gives good ideas, helps make up one’s mind and make decisions, and to “do things the right way” (2008, p. 11).

Similarly, part of the “behavioral” effects discussed by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur are “activation” effects that follow from attitudinal effects where “audience members do something that they would not otherwise have done as a consequence of receiving media messages” (1976, p. 16), as well as developing strategies of action and engaging in altruistic economic behaviors. These ideas would seem to have some connection to the “Community Connection Experience” (Calder & Malthouse, 2008) of Engagement where media users subsequently enjoy conversing and the input from other users, again, related to the idea of “digital closeness” discussed earlier, again with Long-Format Conversational content (as well as potentially True Crime, News & Politics, and even Comedy) serving as a good example in terms of, say, motivating oneself to positively change their behavior after listening to a psychology lecture with a prominent, popular figure, and thus creating a stronger connection to others in the same digital community in addition to those in proximate physical communities through better relationships. Recent research by Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández (2019) used Dependency as a theoretical framework to explain social media influencers effects on brand engagement and behavioral intention (but did not use the Calder and Malthouse (2008) framework as their basis for Engagement specifically).

In short, podcasts could be a media type that provides a bridge between Dependency and Engagement, though extant research and published conceptual papers have yet to explore these connections and their ramifications in a marketing environment. Further, research on different types / genres of podcasts and their relationships to these measures have yet to be studied. Based on the literature reviewed above, the following are proposed:

H1: There is a relationship between media dependency and advertising engagement (a) globally, and more specifically among users of (b) Long-Format Conversational (c) Comedy (d) News & Politics and (e) True Crime podcasts.

H2: There is a relationship between podcast usage and the advertising engagement measures (a) globally, and more specifically among users of (b) Long-Format Conversational (c) Comedy (d) News & Politics and (e) True Crime podcasts.

H3: There is a relationship between the various media dependency measures and podcast usage (a) globally, and more specifically among users of (b) Long-Format Conversational (c) Comedy (d) News & Politics and (e) True Crime podcasts.

Method

A random representative sample was drawn consisting of 3250 email addresses of currently enrolled students (from a master list of publicly available student email addresses) at a large public university in the mid/southwest in March 2021. The sample was used to recruit 219 initial responses from self-described current podcast users. Data was captured via Qualtrics for this ethics-approved study with appropriate online consent obtained; a drawing for a \$50 Visa card was offered as an incentive. Edison Research reports this age group is well-represented among podcast users, with 56% of listeners aged 12-34 (Aslam 2023); college students have been used as respondents for other recently published research with regard to podcasting (Brooks et al., 2022; Craig et al., 2023). After examining the data and removing those cases with missing data on the UMD and Ad Engagement measures, the final dataset consisting of 206 participants was used to analyze results, with a corresponding response rate of 6.3%; the median time to completion was 12.26 minutes.

Sample Description

The mean age of respondents was reported at 25.15 (SD = 9.00) years. Classification was reported as 19.4% freshman (n = 40), 14.6% sophomore (n = 30), 13.6% junior (n = 28), 18.0% senior (n = 37), and 34.5% graduate student or other (n = 71). Gender was reported as 34.5% male (n = 71), 61.7% female (n = 127); 1.9% non-binary or other (n = 4); four respondents did not answer or preferred not to say (2.0%). Participants reported listening or watching podcasts for a mean of 1.90 days per week (SD = 2.00) and a mean of 3.89 episodes per week (SD = 5.56) over a mean of 276.20 weekly minutes (SD = 552.47), or just over 4.5 hours weekly. Additionally, a majority of respondents said they listened to audio podcasts

more often at 64.5% (n = 109) while 18.3% reported viewing video podcasts more often (n = 31); 17.2% of participants said their use of video vs. audio podcasts was about the same (n = 29). The type of podcasts typically listened to/watched, based on a genre segmentation used by Nielsen (2018) along with additional categories for “True Crime” and “Longer format cross-subject conversational shows featuring public intellectuals like Sam Harris, Dave Rubin, Joe Rogan, Bret & Heather Weinstein, Jordan Peterson, Eric Weinstein, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Douglas Murray, Ben Shapiro, Maajid Nawaz, Eric Weinstein, and Gad Saad, among others” (aka “Long-Format Conversational”) and estimated minutes listened for each on a weekly basis are below in Table 1. Respondents were able to select multiple categories and then typed the typical number of minutes they spent each week using each type.

Table 1: Reported podcast type typically listened to/watched and minutes listened/watched, ordered by relative popularity

Podcast Types I Typically Listen To/Watch	Percentage	N	Minutes Listened/Watched Per Week, M (SD)
Longer format cross-subject conversational shows featuring public intellectuals	45.6%	94	89.39 (123.38)
Comedy	42.7%	88	82.25 (123.79)
News and politics	38.3%	79	73.72 (87.84)
True crime	34.0%	70	61.65 (66.83)
TV, film, popular culture	28.2%	58	75.17 (131.57)
Society and culture	22.8%	47	44.27 (61.90)
Education	21.4%	44	61.12 (127.56)
Music	20.4%	42	95.63 (215.23)
Religion and spirituality	20.4%	42	39.88 (39.73)
Technology	17.5%	36	55.06 (164.71)
Health and living	17.5%	36	43.80 (64.07)
Science and medicine	15.5%	32	32.08 (51.19)
Sports and recreation	15.0%	31	114.17 (194.35)
Games and hobbies	12.1%	25	76.03 (113.13)
Business	11.7%	24	27.57 (32.76)
Arts, literature	11.7%	24	26.50 (30.80)
Government	10.2%	21	46.33 (131.57)
Kids and family	4.9%	10	38.75 (83.44)
<i>Note: Percentages utilizing each type/genre based on a total sample N of 206. The resulting percentage indicates the proportion of the sample which indicated usage of each type/genre.</i>			

Measures

The current study used UMD measures taken from a study on smartphone dependency by Carillo et al. (2017), who, in turn, based their measures on TV dependency scales by Grant et al. (1991) and Grant (1996) (see Appendix A). The constructs were measured via a series of multi-item semantic differential scales with “1 - not at all helpful”-“5 - extremely helpful” anchors, with three items each. They included Self (e.g. “Gain insight into why you do some of the things you do”), Social 1 (having to do with keeping up with what’s happening in the world, e.g. “Stay on top of what is happening in the community,”), Solitary (e.g. “Unwind after a hard day or week”), Social 2 (having to do with personal interaction with friends, e.g. “Give you something to do with your friends”), Action (e.g. “Figure out what to buy,” “Decide where to go for services such as health, financial, or household”), and Interact (having to do with interactions with others in general or enculturation, e.g. “Think about how to act with friends, relatives, or people you work with”). All of the three-item media dependency measures displayed good reliabilities (Self: Cronbach’s α = .790, Keeping up with what’s going on (Social 1) = .868, Solitary = .850, Personal Interaction (Social2) = .829, Action = .834, General Social Interaction (Interaction) = .795) and these were retained for analysis.

For the two ad engagement measures (five-point Likert-type with “1 – strongly disagree” and “5 - strongly agree” anchors), both scales initially showed excellent reliabilities (Ad Attention Cronbach’s α = .867, Ad Interference α = .889), however, analysis showed a slight improvement to .890 after removal of the final/7th item on Ad Interference (“The ads in podcasts are so similar in style they blend together”) so this scale was thus constructed with the remaining six items (all six items were retained for Ad Attention). The means and SDs for the resulting five-point scales are displayed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: 5-point scale means, standard deviations, and Cronbach’s alphas

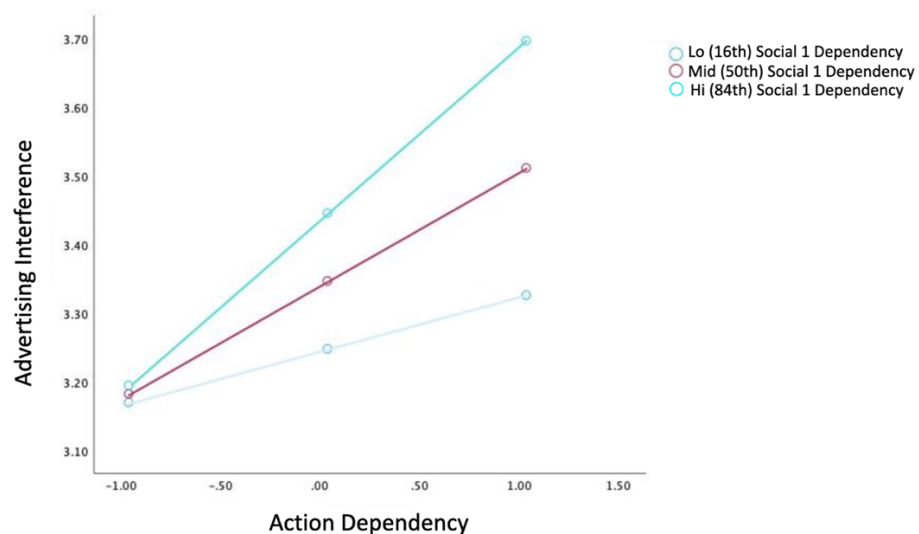
Scale	Mean (SD)	α
UMD Self (3 items)	2.89 (1.08)	.790
UMD Social 1 (3 items)	4.03 (0.94)	.868
UMD Solitary (3 items)	4.05 (0.94)	.850
UMD Social 2 (3 items)	3.02 (1.12)	.829
UMD Action (3 items)	3.96 (0.99)	.834
UMD Interact (3 items)	3.08 (1.06)	.795
Engagement/Ad Attention (6 items)	1.98 (0.82)	.867
Engagement/Ad Interference (6 items)	3.38 (0.91)	.890
<i>Note: UMD = Ubiquitous Media (i.e. Smartphone) Dependency. Please see operationalizations derived from Carillo et al. (2017) and Calder & Malthouse (2008) in Appendix A.</i>		

Results

Hypotheses

H1a predicted a relationship between the various media dependency types and ad engagement on a “global” (overall) level, individual podcast genres/types notwithstanding. Two types demonstrated significant correlations with Ad Interference: Social 1 ($r = .141$, p [two-tailed] = .043) and Action ($r = .177$, p [two-tailed] = .011). Thus, the greater the levels of media dependencies of these two types among listeners, the greater the chance that advertising in podcasts would be engaged with negatively in the sense that the listener feels the advertising is interfering with their enjoyment. On the other hand, Ad Attention was positively associated with the Self dependency type ($r = .143$, p [two-tailed] = .040) indicating those using devices to better understand themselves and their situations tend to be more engaged with podcast ads. To check for interaction effects among the two identified dependency types on Ad Interference, a moderation analysis using Hayes PROCESS 4.2 Macro (Hayes, 2022) Model 1 was then performed with Ad Interference as the DV, Action and Social 1 as the predictors and weekly usage as a covariate to control for usage in the model. The resulting model was significant ($F[4, 201]=2.7184$, $p = .031$, $R^2 = .051$), with Action significant as a predictor ($b = .170$, $p = .0283$). None of the other predictors in the model were significant, although the overall interaction term between Action and Social 1 approached significance ($b = .0865$, $p = .0941$). Further examination of the conditional effects of the mean-centered focal predictors revealed that the interaction was indeed not significant at the 16th percentile of Social (-1.03, $b = .078$, $p = .3177$) but was at the 50th (-.03, $b = .1645$, $p = .0298$) and 84th percentiles (.97, $b = .2509$, $p = .0153$); examination of profile plots revealed the increasing strength of the interaction of Action on Ad Interference as Social 1 increases (see Fig. 1). Thus, Action and Social 1 significantly interact to create increasingly larger effects on Ad Interference as Social 1 dependencies increase.

Figure 1: Interaction effects of Action and Social 1 dependencies on Ad Interference



For listeners/users of current Long-Format Conversational shows featuring public intellectuals (H1b), Ad Attention engagement was correlated with

UMD Solitary ($r = .214$, $p = .038$ [two-tailed]), indicating that those using these types of podcasts to unwind and relax make good advertising targets. For Comedy users (H1c), Social 1 was significantly negatively correlated with Ad Attention ($r = -.206$, $p = .027$ [one-tailed]), and Social 2 was correlated with Ad Interference ($r = .213$, $p = .045$ [two-tailed]), indicating users with these types of dependencies make particularly bad targets for advertisers on Comedy shows. For News & Politics users (H1d), Self ($r = .224$, $p = .048$ [two-tailed]) and Action ($r = .218$, $p = .027$ [one-tailed]) were both correlated with Ad Interference, while Social 1 was negatively correlated with Ad Engagement ($r = -.212$, $p = .030$ [one-tailed]). For the True Crime users (H1e), Action was correlated with Ad Interference ($r = .248$, $p = .038$ [two-tailed]), while Solitary was positively correlated with Ad Attention ($r = .223$, $p = .032$ [one-tailed]). Thus, all hypotheses in this series are supported.

The H2 series predicted a relationship between between podcast usage and the advertising engagement measures. Globally (H2a), a bivariate correlation analysis revealed no significant correlations between any of usage measures (weekly minutes using podcasts / number of episodes per week / number of days using podcasts per week) and either of the two advertising engagement measures. For Long-Format Conversational show usage and ad engagement (H2b), regular usage (number of days per week) was correlated negatively with Ad Interference ($r = -.245$, $p = .020$ [two-tailed]), as was total minutes using podcasts per week ($r = -.197$, $p = .029$ [one-tailed]). Conversely, Ad Attention was positively correlated with both of these measures: regular usage at $r = .218$ ($p = .020$ [one-tailed]) and total podcast minutes at $r = .216$ ($p = .019$ [one-tailed]). H2b is supported. For Comedy users (H2c), none of the usage measurements displayed significant correlations with either ad engagement measure. For News and Politics listeners/watchers (H2d), both regular usage (episodes per week) ($r = -.236$, $p = .021$ [one-tailed]) and number of minutes using this type of podcasts weekly were negatively correlated with Ad Interference ($r = -.269$, $p = .015$ [one-tailed]), thus, more usage of News podcasts leads to less interference. For True Crime users (H2e), both overall weekly minutes spent with podcasts ($r = .306$, $p = .005$ [one-tailed]) and weekly minutes spent with Comedy type podcasts in particular ($r = .231$, $p = .030$ [one-tailed]) were positively associated with Ad Engagement, thus more usage is associated with better ad outcomes for these users. H2b, H2d, and H2e are thus supported.

The H3 series sought to ascertain the existence of a relationship between media dependencies and podcast usage. Globally, overall weekly minutes spent using podcasts displayed significant positive associations with Self ($r = .128$, $p = .034$ [one-tailed]) and Solitary dependency types ($r = .121$, $p = .042$ [one-tailed]) (H3a). For users of Long-Format Conversational shows (H3b), the Solitary dependency type was also associated with total weekly podcast minutes ($r = .229$, $p = .014$ [one-tailed]). For Comedy users (H3c), number of podcast minutes per week with Comedy podcasts specifically was associated with the Solitary dependency type ($r = .282$, $p = .014$ [two-tailed]). For News & Politics users (H3d), number of days per week using podcasts was also negatively correlated with UMD Solitary ($r = -.207$, $p =$

.037 [two-tailed]) but positively with total number of weekly podcast minutes overall ($r = .359$, $p = .022$ [two-tailed]). For True Crime (H3e), weekly minutes using this type of podcast were negatively associated with Social 2 ($r = -.229$, $p = .031$ [one-tailed]). Thus, all hypotheses in this series are supported.

Discussion

First, in addition to support of the notion that podcast audiences are “engaged” (e.g. Neilsen, 2022), the results of the H1 series lend support for the proposed theoretical connection of individual media dependency and engagement, and specifically engagement in the advertising on podcasts. The main takeaway at this stage is that in general podcast advertisers should perhaps avoid shows with audiences that are media/smartphone dependent via the Action and/or Social 1 modes, as the deleterious effect of the individual constructs—and more importantly, their interaction—on the sense that advertising is interfering with their enjoyment of the podcast is evident, and compounded when both dependencies are present. When considering the items that make up these constructs, Action includes items dealing with making decisions on services, finance, health, purchasing and entertainment — in short, it seems to be a utilitarian-related concept or dependency. For Social 1, the items relate to keeping up with current events on multiple levels, local as well as worldwide, primarily revolving around information and staying “on top of things” – that is, it is more of a notion of keeping up with the world rather than personal social interaction, which is more indicative of the “Social 2” dependency measure. While Wang and Calder’s (2006) notion of a “transportation” effect adversely impacting ad engagement may seem more readily applicable to a “True Crime” show or audio play, it may be at work for certain shows among users with these dependencies as well.

Thus, in general, advertisers may want to avoid shows that have a high level of these types of media-dependent listeners or viewers and/or take caution when sponsoring shows with a preponderance of these types of content due to the deleterious effects of them on ad engagement. This could, however, be ameliorated in a couple of ways. First, thematic relatedness of the ad or product or brand with the show may offer a better chance at success. Brooks et al. (2022) found that thematic relatedness or congruency between product and podcast type or subject was associated with better perceptions of ads on the show. It might also help to make sure such sponsorships involve host-read ads rather than prerecorded spots, taking advantage of the parasocial relationships listeners tend to develop with hosts as noted above (Brinson et al., 2023; Schlütz & Hedder 2022; Perks & Turner 2019; Vilceanu et al., 2021) and thus the information presented may possibly be considered more “relevant” in the Action and Social 1 veins. On the flip side, as engagement in the form of Ad Attention was positively associated with the Self dependency type, this indicates that those using devices to better understand themselves and their situations would tend to be more engaged with podcast ads. Therefore advertisers may want to target shows with content related to this dependency. Additionally, for podcasts in general, overall weekly minutes spent using podcasts displayed significant positive associations with the Self and

Solitary dependency types. With Self (e.g. “Gain insight into why you do some of the things you do”) and its association to Ad Attention, this may indicate that Self-dependent users tend to use podcasts more, with downstream effects on positive forms of ad engagement. This indicates a possible mediation effect of usage in this relationship that could be investigated, especially as the results of H2a would indicate usage is not significantly associated with ad engagement globally in a direct sense (individual types/genres notwithstanding). For users demonstrating a Solitary dependency, this measure has to do with unwinding and relaxing, and thus those types of users could be expected to at least be associated with greater levels of frequency/repetition to ad messages on podcasts.

For current listeners/users of longer-format conversational shows featuring public intellectuals (“shows that often discuss various aspects of society, culture, history, government, news and more in longer formats, often hosted by or including public intellectuals or figures”), Ad Attention engagement was positively correlated with the Solitary dependency type, indicating that those using these types of podcasts to unwind and relax make good advertising targets. Additionally, regular usage (number of days per week) was correlated negatively with Ad Interference ($r = -.245$, $p = .020$ [two-tailed]), as was total minutes using podcasts per week ($r = -.197$, $p = .029$ [one-tailed]). Conversely, Ad Attention was positively correlated with both of these measures: regular usage at $r = .218$ ($p = .020$ [one-tailed]) and total podcast minutes at $r = .216$ ($p = .019$ [one-tailed]). Thus, regular and heavier users and/or those driven by a Solitary dependency would make best ad targets for these types of shows.

For Comedy users, the Social 1 dependency was significantly negatively correlated with Ad Attention ($r = -.206$, $p = .027$ [one-tailed]), and Social 2 was correlated with Ad Interference ($r = .213$, $p = .045$ [two-tailed]), indicating users with these types of dependencies, that is, those most dependent on smartphones to keep up with events/news in the larger world and to interact with others, respectively, make particularly bad targets for advertisers on Comedy shows. No usage measurements were associated with ad engagement, and number of podcast minutes per week with Comedy podcasts specifically was associated with the Solitary dependency type. Therefore, advertisers may target those using devices to relax and unwind simply due to their volume of podcast usage and thus possible frequency of ad exposure.

For News & Politics users, Self and Action dependency types were both correlated with Ad Interference, while Social 1 was negatively correlated with Ad Engagement. Advertisers would thus want to avoid those listeners of News & Politics-oriented podcasts that tend to use smartphones to plan activities, decide where to go for services, figure out what to buy—in other words, for essentially utilitarian purposes (Action), and to get to know themselves and help them solve problems (Self), as well as those that use their phones to stay on top of what’s happening in the community, country, and world (Social 1). On the other hand, both regular usage (episodes per week) and number of minutes using this type of podcasts weekly were negatively correlated with Ad Interference, thus, more usage of News

podcasts leads to less interference. Heavy and consistent users dependent on their phones in other ways than above could be better targets.

For the True Crime users, the Action dependency, that is, indicative of those dependent on their phones for utilitarian purposes of planning and purchasing, was correlated with Ad Interference, while Solitary, that is, using phones to relax and unwind, was positively correlated with Ad Attention. Thus the latter types of users would make good ad targets while the former would not. Again, both overall weekly minutes spent with podcasts and—curiously—weekly minutes spent with Comedy type podcasts in particular were positively associated with Ad Engagement, thus more usage is associated with better ad outcomes for these users. Thus, targeting users that are both True Crime and Comedy listeners would be a positive for advertisers.

The results of the H3 series in particular tend to lend support for the notion of media dependency (Ball-Rokeach, S. J., & DeFleur, 1976) and individual media dependency (Ball-Rokeach, 1985) as explanatory frameworks for media use, insofar as some of the individual dependency types were indeed found to be associated with usage. As mentioned, the results also provide some evidence for the connection of Individual Media Dependency and Engagement, with Action and Social 1 both related to the ad engagement measures globally. Future research should examine more specific engagement types (e.g. Calder et al., 2016) and their relationship to UMD measures. Further, more research on UMD types and advertising and associated interactions could be investigated according to other types or genres of podcasts or even particular podcast vehicles (e.g. video vs. audio, specific platforms, etc.) to shed some more light on these effects, as well as investigating more traditional advertising variables like purchase intention, attitude toward the brand, and attitude toward the ads, as Moe's (2021; 2022) recent line of research has done.

The modality (video vs. audio) of these and the other relationships examined in this paper could also shed further light, especially in the overall parasocial relationship (PSR) area, as mentioned. Perhaps more importantly, outside of perhaps particular types (e.g. Long-Format Conversational shows, True Crime, and the News & Politics genre) the present results around the H2 series do not present much evidence for a straightforward global connection between usage and ad engagement in podcasts, meaning that a user could be perhaps engaged in podcasts as a media vehicle, and thus a good ad contact, without necessarily actually using podcasts a great deal – or that usage mediates the dependency – engagement relationship in some cases, as noted. This points toward engagement perhaps being a different overall construct than volume of usage, again in line with the Calder and Malthouse (2008)/Calder et al. (2016) line of thinking of media engagement as more of a motivational force experience, one somewhat more independent of hedonic experiential elements vs. other notions of engagement.

Finally, the fact that for Comedy users, the Social 2 dependency type (“Give me something to do with friends” “Be a part of something without having to be there” – in short, using a smartphone to be social with friends) was

correlated with Ad Interference was somewhat in line with the “transportation” effect noted in previous engagement research (Wang & Calder 2006), though it also perhaps calls into question the notion of parasocial relationships positively affecting advertising in a global context, with some of the traditional parasocial literature finding links between social and task attraction and the development of parasocial relationships (Rubin & McHugh, 1987). The possible moderating effect of parasocial relationships on podcast ad perceptions, especially among different types or genres, should thus be investigated further. For example, research has shown uncertainty reduction as a driver of parasocial interactions (Perse & Rubin, 1989); podcast types and dependency modes indicative of this use/gratification could engender better ad results. Recent research has also shown a moderating effect of product involvement in the parasocial relationship of followers of social media influencers which then has downstream effects on credibility perceptions and eWOM (Balaban et al., 2022), thus involvement in the subject or type of show could moderate the audience-host relationship. The results also show positive prospects for advertisers among regular Long-Format Conversational public intellectual podcast users and those with a Solitary (relaxing, passing time) dependency due to the positive effect on ad engagement, which is in line with other engagement-related research (e.g. Calder et al., 2016; Calder & Malthouse 2008; Calder et al., 2009).

Why would genre-based differences arise? Interestingly, Swales’ (1990) foundational work in genre theory postulates a goal-directed element as a major element of the notion of what constitutes different genres or types. Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen (2005) posit that in the digital world, conceptualizations of genre should also include considerations of the medium itself as well as the fact that users are actively involved in navigation of digital texts. Thus, in the podcast realm, goals and dependencies would interact to create different downstream effects on advertising perceptions (in addition to other variables).

The study has limitations. Self-reported survey data could have issues with bias in terms of social desirability and other reporting issues impacting veracity and measurement. The cross-sectional nature of the data also means causal claims or inferences must be provisional, pending experimental approaches; accordingly, this is a suggestion for future research. Finally, though college students have been used as respondents for other recently published research with regard to podcasting (Brooks et al., 2022; Craig et al., 2023) and the age group comprises a relatively large portion of the podcast public (Aslam, 2023), utilizing students as subjects does potentially limit generalizability; future research should also examine populations past their formative years to ascertain if such patterns still hold, perhaps utilizing a Generational Cohort Theory approach. Additionally, the timeframe in which the data was captured may lend itself to potentially different types/levels of engagement due to lagging aftereffects associated with COVID-driven media use and associated topics. The researcher recruited current podcast listeners so the podcast-specific scales used would make sense to participants, but those who are new to the format may have different relationships to the advertising especially if their usage levels

are markedly lower than the sample, which reported a healthy mean of 3.82 episodes/week.

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Appendix A - Multi-item scale statements

Ubiquitous Media Dependency/Self - Not at all helpful - Extremely Helpful anchors ("On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "not at all helpful" and 5 is "extremely helpful," please indicate the response that best reflects your opinion for each of the following when it comes to how helpful your smartphone is.")

Gain insight into why you do some of the things you do

Imagine what you'll be like when you grow older

Observe how others cope with problems or situations like yours

Ubiquitous Media Dependency/Social 1 - Not at all helpful - Extremely Helpful anchors

Stay on top of what is happening in the community

Find out how the country is doing

Keep up with world events

Ubiquitous Media Dependency/Solitary - Not at all helpful - Extremely Helpful anchors

Unwind after a hard day or week

Relax when you are by yourself

Have something to do when nobody else is around

Ubiquitous Media Dependency/Social 2 - Not at all helpful - Extremely Helpful anchors

Give you something to do with your friends

Have fun with family or friends

Be a part of events you enjoy without having to be there

Ubiquitous Media Dependency/Action - Not at all helpful - Extremely Helpful anchors

Decide where to go for services such as health, financial, or household

Figure out what to buy

Plan where to go for evening and weekend activities

Ubiquitous Media Dependency/Interact - Not at all helpful - Extremely Helpful anchors

Discover better ways to communicate with others

Think about how to act with friends, relatives, or people you work

with

Get ideas about how to approach others in important or difficult situations

Engagement/Ad Interference - Strongly disagree - Strongly agree anchors
("On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is "Strongly disagree" and 5 is "Strongly agree," please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements:")

The number of ads makes it harder to listen to/view podcasts.

I make a special effort to skip over and avoid listening to/looking at ads.

I am annoyed because too many of the ads on podcasts have too much going on.

All too often the ads in podcasts are dull or boring.

I hate the inserts they put in podcasts.

Sometimes the ads in podcasts are overdone or even weird.

Engagement/Ad Attention - Strongly disagree - Strongly agree anchors

I like the ads as much as the rest of the content in podcasts.

I listen to/watch most of the ads in podcasts.

I like how colorful the ads are in podcasts.

I respond to ads from podcasts more often than most other sites or media I use.

Podcasts have ads about things I actually care about.

I value the coupon codes and deals in podcasts.