

Mapping and Measuring Listening in Public Communication Settings

Tariq Choucair 

Digital Media Research Centre, Queensland University of Technology, Australia

Correspondence: Tariq Choucair (tariq.choucair@qut.edu.au)

Submitted: 11 March 2025 **Accepted:** 13 May 2025 **Published:** 23 July 2025

Issue: This article is part of the issue “When All Speak but Few Listen: Asymmetries in Political Conversation” edited by Hernando Rojas (University of Wisconsin – Madison) and William P. Eveland, Jr. (The Ohio State University), fully open access at <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.i493>

Abstract

Scholars have made advancements in how to interpret, with detailed measures, the different characteristics and levels of distinct listening practices used by individuals when they are deliberating (Scudder, 2020, 2022). However, listening is not only a practice that occurs directly, but also a broader phenomenon that occurs across the public sphere (Bächtiger & Parkinson, 2019; Ercan et al., 2019). Public discourse occurs across hybrid media systems (Chadwick, 2017) in complex discursive exchanges (Maia et al., 2023) as networks of publics interact (Bruns, 2023). Such complexity imposes challenges for research to properly understand listening at a macro level. In this article, I present how to map and measure listening at this broader level. I reconstruct the discussion on listening as a normative foundation for political communication, from which we derive three key listening elements: attentiveness, openness, and responsiveness. I outline how listening is measured in direct interactions, to then explain how it can be assessed in public communication and mediated interactions, from the perspective of who listens, who is (or is not) listened to, and the actual listening acts.

Keywords

deliberative democracy; deliberative system; digital publics; listening; political communication; public sphere

1. Introduction

Decades after the rise of liberal democracies, free speech is increasingly invoked as an absolute right, often to resist regulation and deflect concerns over speech harm, content manipulation, and digital platforms' governance (Balkin, 2017; Ricknell, 2020). This trend is exemplified by Elon Musk's 2022 takeover of X (previously Twitter) and Mark Zuckerberg's 2025 rollback of Meta's fact-checking program in the US—both moves justified as commitments to “free expression” (Jarral, 2025). They illustrate an emphasis on

unrestrained speech that overshadows concerns about the quality of public discourse and the conditions necessary for meaningful democratic communication. It seems like the perfect time to shift the focus from speech and reclaim another equally important but often overlooked element of communication: listening, which is much less addressed in public communication. A conception of democracy that has been described as deliberative, discursive, or dialogical demands not only the negative right to free speech but also the positive right to be heard. As Chambers (1996) suggests, beyond ensuring that individuals have the space and opportunity to speak, productive public discourse also requires that they are listening, responding, and engaging with one another's views. While listening cannot be enforced in the same way as free speech, it can be valued and integrated as a political framework for political cultures and institutions, and in the making of meanings and opinions in the everyday life of civil society (Scudder, 2020).

Important theoretical developments have been made to better understand what listening is, what it means for democracy, its normative value, and what can be expected from it (Bickford, 1996; Dobson, 2012, 2014; Morrell, 2018; Scudder, 2020). More recently, studies have identified ways to detect and measure listening in political discussions (Esau & Friess, 2022; Scudder, 2022). This is important because a detailed analysis not only helps identify where and how listening occurs but also informs how to foster more frequent and higher-quality listening practices. However, scholars have drawn attention to the indirect, mediated, and complex nature of the political and media systems in which listening occurs (Dreher, 2009; Ercan et al., 2019; Hendriks et al., 2019; Lacey, 2013). Despite this, there is still a lack of measurement strategies to systematically map democratic listening practices and their characteristics across different times and settings. The performative nature of public communication means that listening—at least in its democratic sense—often leaves observable traces in the discourses. Analysing institutional discursive practices, media coverage, and policy shifts, for instance, can show whether certain voices are being acknowledged, considered, or dismissed (Dreher, 2009). The question shifts from whether listening occurs in direct interactions to how public institutions, media actors, and political elites engage with the voices and claims that emerge from different communities, as well as how citizens act in listening practices (Hendriks et al., 2019). Drawing on recent efforts to develop methods for analyzing political discussions from this broader perspective (e.g., Bächtiger & Parkinson, 2019; Maia et al., 2023), this article connects media and communication studies with listening and democratic theory, showcasing how we can study macro dynamics of listening in the public sphere(s). I derive from the listening literature three listening elements: attentiveness, openness, and responsiveness. I then show how to assess them from three observation points: the perspective of who listens, the perspective of who is (or is not) listened to, and the listening manifested in discourse.

2. Listening as a Normative Foundation for Political Communication

As with many concepts in the social sciences, “listening” can have different meanings and evoke different expectations (Witkin & Trochim, 1997). In this article, I approach listening from a discursive, political, and normative perspective. I follow the idea that listening is a fundamental act in defining the contours of democracies, determining who is included and who is excluded from political systems, regulations, broad-reaching discourses, and politically empowered spaces (Bickford, 1996; Dobson, 2014; Dreher, 2009; Scudder, 2020). Yet, some specific delineations are worth revisiting, as different democratic traditions construct varying expectations of what it entails.

The communicative turn in democratic theory has emphasized that legitimacy and epistemic validity are constructed through intersubjective processes of communication. Listening is particularly significant in this perspective, since the legitimacy of decisions and validity of ideas depends not just on participation but on how voices are engaged in discourse. The communicative turn is proposed as a normative foundation opposing domination, coercion, and manipulation. It provides a way to navigate deep conflicts and pluralism not by erasing differences, but by creating a space where diverse perspectives can engage in discourse, testing and justifying their claims through open dialogue rather than force, thereby allowing legitimacy and validity to emerge from mutual understanding rather than from power dynamics (Chambers, 1996). This framework proposes a practical rationality, meaning that reason is constituted through communicative action, where validity claims are tested and justified in a shared discursive space. It is rooted in real-world communication and social interaction rather than in abstract, individual reasoning or fixed, universal principles, and is not imposed by an external authority (Dryzek, 1990; Habermas, 1981/1984, 1981/1987). This rationality is fundamentally tied to communicative processes through which individuals both discover and form a common will (McCarthy, 1981, pp. 326–327). It reflects a discursive and democratic mode of reasoning that emerges through communication processes where individuals engage in discourse to co-construct shared understandings and opinions, rather than through instrumental calculation or authoritarian imposition (Dryzek, 1990, p. 9).

At the heart of this discursive perspective of politics is listening, though it is not always explicitly discussed. As Scudder (2022) argues, deliberation depends fundamentally on listening, which is a constitutive element of the deliberative process itself. Since, for deliberative democrats, the legitimacy and validity of norms are tied to the communicative processes that produced them (how a majority becomes a majority; Habermas, 1992/1996), they are directly dependent on the presence and quality of listening. Because communication itself is the foundation of rationality and legitimacy, listening is essential, as it enables the truthful reciprocal exchange in the first place: “Absent interlocutors hearing and understanding those with whom they disagree, we simply do not have a deliberative democracy” (Morrell, 2018, p. 237). Listening in discourse is the opening of a shared space where meaning and understanding can emerge, making communication possible. It is the constitutive condition of intersubjectivity itself, the process whereby individuals do not merely proclaim words but co-create the very horizon of rationality and mutual recognition through language: “Listening enacts the communicative act of deliberation....In listening to a fellow citizen, you call the deliberative act into existence” (Scudder, 2020, pp. 81–109). Listening, therefore, is not merely a prerequisite for deliberation but its very foundation (Scudder, 2020), as it is through listening that reasons are exchanged, modified, and ultimately legitimized in the public sphere.

Although deliberative theorists and other democratic thinkers who engage with them broadly agree that legitimacy and validity are rooted in communicative processes, there are different expectations of what listening entails and the specific role it should play in democratic discourse. From a Habermasian perspective on communicative action, listening involves a genuine openness to incorporating and critically evaluating the reasons of others in a dialogical space. In other words, deliberative listening means being willing to validate and be validated in a process that seeks shared understanding or agreement. This dynamic distinguishes deliberation from mere strategic confrontations, as the goal is not simply to persuade or impose a view but to construct a common ground. The legitimacy of norms can be understood in normative terms as tied to their justification through inclusive and non-coercive deliberation, where all affected individuals have the opportunity to participate as free and equal interlocutors (Habermas, 1983/1990). In a condition in which all

actors are “equally and fully capable of making and questioning arguments,” with no restrictions of participation, free from domination, strategizing and deception, “the only remaining authority is that of a good argument” (Dryzek, 1990, p. 15). But this perspective has been complexified with a broader account of both conflict and different types of communication other than traditionally “rational” ones.

In constructing the place of listening in conflictive, unequal, and unbalanced democracies, Bickford (1996) criticizes deliberative perspectives that rely on consensus or that separate too narrowly strategic and communicative actions. Such approaches would overlook the inevitable presence of conflict, power differences, and the complexities of political life. For Bickford, democracy is not realized through rational deliberation aimed at agreement. The normative construct for Bickford is located in the listening practices themselves that allow communication and togetherness. This type of listening has a dimension of continuation, “the underlying guide of keeping the field of action open, to act in a way so that future action is possible, so the field of freedom is maintained or expanded” (Bickford, 1996, p. 170). Although proposing a distinct normative core—not consensus, but listening—Bickford’s emphasis on listening does not fundamentally oppose the core intersubjective and communicative orientation of deliberative democratic theory. Meaningful deliberation requires precisely the kind of intersubjective openness that Bickford defends (Scudder, 2020, p. 82). Consensus can’t legitimize a decision if there is no proper listening in the process that formed the consensus—it is the quality of the communicative process that grounds democratic legitimacy.

Recent theoretical work and empirical studies have advanced in connecting critical perspectives on listening, such as Bickford’s, with deliberative democracy scholars like Habermas and Dryzek. A key contribution is Scudder’s theory, which argues that the fundamental democratic force of deliberation is uptake—the process of “giving due consideration to the arguments, stories, and perspectives” that citizens share in deliberation (Scudder, 2020, p. 20). Crucially, uptake is dependent on listening, which enables recognition and fair consideration of others’ contributions. By listening, listeners recognize “that the voice of the speaker is relevant to their own thinking and behavior” (Scudder, 2020, p. 86). This emphasis on listening as a prerequisite for democratic uptake closely aligns with Bickford’s argument that the “presence of listening” is a defining feature of democratic discourse. And importantly, listening does not require embracing the speaker’s preferences or affirming their perspective—its value lies in the openness to being impacted by what is heard (Scudder, 2020, p. 87). In this way, Scudder brings listening theories insights into direct conversation with deliberative theorists by demonstrating that listening is what enables deliberation to fulfil its normative commitments. Listening does not demand agreement but instead requires participants to acknowledge the relevance of others’ perspectives within the deliberative space. Uptake, as the democratic force of deliberation, depends on a form of listening that does not reduce engagement to persuasion but instead centres on the ethical and political obligation to recognize others as legitimate contributors to the democratic process. As she argues, “*in listening to our fellow citizens, we perform a willingness and desire to take up what they have to say,*” and “*in listening, we acknowledge that they have a rightful say in the decisions we make collectively*” (Scudder, 2020, p. 107).

3. Listening Elements

Before moving to how we can map and measure listening, it’s important to identify its core elements by drawing on both the previous theoretical discussion and applied studies that model listening in practice. This

means an attempt to identify what exactly listening requires, what exactly is listening made of. In this article, I conceptualize listening as a process involving attentiveness, openness, and responsiveness to what others say within both direct and mediated social interactions. In this section, we reconstruct the field of listening research by engaging with a range of authors to demonstrate why these three elements are fundamental to understanding and evaluating listening. Two key resources here are: (a) the differentiation made by Scudder (2020) of the auditory, ilauditory, and perauditory listening acts; and (b) the differentiation of the cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions of listening made in communication and listening competency research (Bodie, 2016; Worthington & Bodie, 2018). While both are valuable, I opt not to adopt exactly such typologies. Instead, drawing on both normative theories and applied communication studies, I propose attentiveness, openness, and responsiveness as core components that provide a shared terminology across different authors. This framework better supports empirical investigation by bridging normative democratic theory (e.g., Bickford, Dobson, Scudder) with research on listening practices.

In communication research, listening conceptualisation evolved from cognitive perspectives to more complex accounts that take into consideration its affective components (e.g., motivation and attitude), and its behavioural characteristics (e.g., verbal and nonverbal responses; see Worthington & Bodie, 2018). However, the cognitive dimension remains fundamental; listening requires mental engagement, as most sounds we hear are not cognitively processed—that is, they are not comprehended, understood, or retained for future use (Worthington & Bodie, 2018, p. 5). While we hear multiple sounds, multiple voices, or in a more political context, multiple perspectives and ideas, we actually only pay attention to some of them in the first place. Attention is an activity of selection and is not random. As Bickford (1996) argues, social, cultural, and economic forces shape what we notice and what we ignore. These forces can hinder the kind of listening that democratic politics demands (p. 93). Democratic listening requires an intentional effort in attention to hear the speaking and thinking of others (Ercan et al., 2019, p. 25). Attention is thus the “the beginning of involvement” (Rost, 2024). While cognitive research on listening also highlights other components like memory (retention), comprehension, and inference-making (see Worthington, 2018), these are primarily internal processes. They are essential for processing information efficiently and accurately, especially in educational or instrumental contexts. Attention, on the other hand, is not merely a precursor to other cognitive operations, but a normative gesture that signals recognition to the presence and perspectives of others.

Attentiveness in listening is the focus on and the recognition of a speaker’s words, signals, and expressions. It is the process of being present in the act of listening, ensuring that the speaker’s expressions are received, and thus establishing a shared, intersubjective, communicative space. Multiple theories related to listening have given special focus to attention—from Aristotle to Bickford, and more recently Scudder. Attention is a form of focused awareness, a minimal but essential engagement with others that allows collective life (Bickford, 1996). Importantly for Bickford, political listening is not about empathy or compassion. Drawing from Aristotle, for Bickford it is a kind of “interactive attention” that acts as a political bond even among those who are unequal, divided, or in conflict. It is a form of attention that makes politics possible in the face of conflict and disagreement. The act of paying attention itself acknowledges the political presence of the other and thus begins to constitute the communicative tissue of a functioning democracy.

There are, of course, different levels of attentiveness. One may listen with surface-level awareness, merely acknowledging that words are being spoken, or one may engage in deeper attentiveness, actively tracking

meaning, tone, and context to fully grasp the speaker's intent and perspective. A fully attentive listener devotes effort to truly hearing others, understanding that listening is the only means of accessing another's perspective—as Scudder (2020, p. 116) puts it, “The attentive listener gives time and energy to the listening act, trying her best to hear what the other person is saying and to understand what he means by what he says.” But such deep attentiveness is not conditional to the existence of listening—although it is important in normative terms, a minimal attentiveness level guarantees that the listening has occurred. As Bickford (1996) points out, attention does not demand emotional alignment or deep personal investment; especially in deeply conflictive contexts, even minimal, strategic, or grudging attention can be enough to affirm the speaker's presence and sustain the political space where voices are recognized and contested.

But attention alone does not fulfil the democratic potential of listening (Scudder, 2020). Listening is also affective; it entails a willingness to engage with the other (Bodie & Jones, 2018). From a political and normative perspective, beyond merely acknowledging what is said, there must be some level of dispositional stance of the listener toward what is being heard. We refer to such disposition or willingness as openness—an openness to receive another's perspective, even when it challenges one's own views or assumptions; an openness to hear things one may not like (Dobson, 2014). Democratic listening requires a disposition of receptivity, an acceptance of the possibility of being affected by what one hears. Openness is also related to the seriousness that Scudder (2020, p. 115) calls for: “The serious listener recognizes the stakes of the listening act—that they could disagree with their fellow citizens and thus not get their way—and listens nonetheless.” This seriousness ensures that listening is both critical and discerning, preventing uncritical acceptance while also avoiding outright dismissal.

As with attentiveness, openness also can vary in levels. One may be open but simultaneously reluctant to engage in the act of listening, acknowledging an ethical commitment to hearing others while feeling the discomfort to do so (Bickford, 1996). At high levels, openness can mean a deep consideration of another's perspectives, as a readiness to change its own perspective or idea. But, as with attentiveness, a deep openness is not conditional—a minimal openness already ensures that listening has occurred. Listening does not demand such readiness to change ideas, but it does require a readiness to recognize another's words as relevant to the shared communicative space (Bickford, 1996; Scudder, 2020). Importantly, the openness to what will be heard also implies some level of openness to where that interaction will lead to (Scudder, 2020, pp. 115–116).

When shifting from viewing listening as an internal cognitive process to seeing it as a communicative activity—an action directed toward another—communication research has begun to study it by examining the observable actions that listeners take while listening (Bodie, 2018). While we recognize that listening can occur without an overt response—as internal acts of listening may not always produce immediate or visible reactions—our focus here is on public communication and macro-level dynamics, where the presence or absence of responsiveness becomes a key indicator of whether listening has taken place. In such contexts, listening manifests not only in an internal, cognitive process, but also through some form of reaction from listeners, indicating that listening has, indeed, occurred. Listening, as any other intersubjective act, is contextual by nature. The existence of listening may demand different things in different contexts. In interpersonal settings, listening can occur even without an immediate or explicit response. A person may listen reflectively, processing what has been said over time. But in institutional contexts, for instance, responsiveness is often the only way to verify that listening has taken place. The absence of any

response—whether through words, actions, policy shifts, or even symbolic gestures—can indicate to who is (or is not) listened to that the act of listening failed.

I am not treating responsiveness here as necessarily demanding forms of acknowledgement, uptake, or agreement, but rather as a broader understanding of “response”: anything that indicates that what was said has been received in some meaningful way. Scudder (2020, 2022) argues that focusing on responses risks assessing what listening “might have brought about,” rather than the act of listening itself (Scudder, 2020, p. 133). I acknowledge this concern and see its relevance in certain contexts, but in the realm of public discourse, I take a different view. Because listening, like speech, is part of an intersubjective activity, the actor who is (or is not) listened to is just as integral to the listening act as the listener. Therefore, in analyzing communication at the societal level, the presence or absence of responsiveness, and what type of responsiveness has taken place, is not merely a secondary effect or a follow-up of listening but a crucial element in determining whether listening has taken place at all, as it is through some form of response, however minimal, that the act of listening is made perceptible for who is (or not) listened to. Building on Bickford’s (1996) notion of continuation, responsiveness plays a key role in sustaining the field of action, ensuring that communication remains open-ended rather than closed-off. Responsiveness does not necessarily imply any change of opinion or endorsement, but rather a basic recognition that the communicative space is still active. As Scudder (2020, p. 137) herself notes, “To know whether a listener has really acted in listening, the speaker must judge the credibility of the listening act,” which only occurs through the reaction (response) of the listener. Thus, in public communication, to respond (understood broadly) is integral to listening because it affirms the possibility of continued interaction.

4. Mapping and Measuring Listening in Direct Interactions

Listening is challenging to measure. If we consider that it occurs “in the minds of the receivers,” it’s then an internal process that cannot be directly observed (Esau & Friess, 2022, p. 3). Even though listening is understood differently across various fields, it is rarely, if ever, directly measurable (Bodie & Worthington, 2018). However, this does not mean it cannot be investigated. A wide range of methods—both observational and self-reported—have been developed to assess different aspects of listening in practice. As seen in the previous section, listening encompasses multiple elements.

Reflecting this complexity, communication literature has approached listening through cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions (Worthington & Bodie, 2018), building different methodologies to investigate each of them. Accordingly, in democratic listening studies, different aspects of listening are typically assessed through the direct observation of listening interactions and self-reports from both listeners and those being (or not) listened to.

Common assessments of the cognitive dimension of listening are usually measures of attention, memory (retention), comprehension, and inference-making or interpretation. Research uses tasks like selective attention and recall to evaluate how well individuals focus, retain, understand, and interpret messages (Worthington, 2018). The affective dimension involves motivation, attitudes, beliefs, and emotional responses, typically assessed through self-reports that capture willingness to listen, emotional engagement, and perceived listening competence (Bodie & Jones, 2018). The behavioural dimension, in contrast, focuses on outward indicators—observable actions and responses like eye contact, nodding, paraphrasing, and questioning—that demonstrate attentiveness and engagement during interactions (Bodie, 2018).

In the realm of political discussions, one key approach used in the literature is to observe discursive indicators that indicate listening presence and quality (Choucair & Maia, 2024; Esau & Friess, 2022; Steenbergen et al., 2003; Steiner, 2012). In such approaches, authors emphasize that the way people respond to each other in communicative exchanges makes evident important signs of democratic listening—for instance, whether interlocutors acknowledge, respect, or build on others' statements in a meaningful way. Esau and Friess (2022, p. 3), for example, operationalize reciprocity, an adjacent and “more observable” concept than listening. They assess the quality of replies in online discussions, specifically whether they are on-topic, respectful, and reasoned. Their study distinguishes between simple replying, which lacks deliberative quality, and reciprocity which meets deliberative norms of coherence, respect, and justification. The second is an indicator of listening because it reflects discursive engagement with the original message, demonstrating not only acknowledgement but also a thoughtful response that considers the perspective presented by the other. In the same path, Choucair and Maia (2024) build on this by identifying three ways to measure reciprocity in online discussions: structural reciprocity, which tracks interaction patterns; behavioural reciprocity, which examines whether users engage with others; and discursive reciprocity, which assesses how discourses respond to previous points. Their discursive measure specifically speaks to listening as it assesses whether responses incorporate, contest, or build upon previous arguments. The point in doing so is that incorporating content from previous arguments (a form of uptake) demonstrates that a participant has processed and considered another's perspective, a proxy for genuine listening. Steenbergen et al. (2003) and Steiner (2012) use respect as a discursive proxy for listening. In the first version of the Discursive Quality Index developed by Steenbergen et al. (2003), by showing respect to other groups, demands, and counterarguments, interlocutors are signaling that they listened to, or are willing to listen to, such groups, demands, and counterarguments. In another version of the Discursive Quality Index, Steiner (2012) is more directly concerned with listening by naming a specific variable as respectful listening, which evaluates whether a speaker ignores arguments and questions of others, does not ignore but distorts them, or engages with them in a correct and undistorted way (Steiner, 2012 p. 269).

Although the cues identified by reciprocity and respect in discussions provide strong evidence of the presence (or lack of) listening, they do not capture all its forms. Listening in direct interactions will not always leave traces observable in the discourses (Scudder, 2022, p. 177). In other words, listening can occur without an immediate and observable response. Measures of reciprocity, for instance, do not account for cases where individuals listen but choose not to respond, process information without verbalizing engagement, or remain silent due to power imbalances. To address these issues, Scudder (2022) presents a structured and systematic approach to measure listening in deliberation—the Listening Quality Index—that considers both self-reported and discursive directly observable elements, thus approaching listening from the perspective of who is (or is not) listened to, who listens, and how the communication has actually unfolded. Each of the perspectives—the discursive observable elements, the self-reported perspective of the speaker, and that of the listener—has its own limitations, but combined can offer a framework to assess listening in direct political discussions.

Yet, the challenge of measuring listening in direct interactions does not map onto the macro dynamics of listening in the same way. In public discourse, listening operates through mediations, structures, and networks that shape whose voices are heard, how they are amplified, and how they are responded to within broader political and communicative processes. Unlike in direct interactions, where silence or lack of response can obscure whether listening has occurred, public listening leaves more observable traces. Scudder (2022) critiques measures that assume listening is only evidenced by responsiveness, noting that a

failure to respond does not necessarily indicate a failure to listen. However, when certain voices are persistently excluded from media agendas, policymaking, or public debate, the absence of responsiveness over time can signal systemic failures in listening at a societal level. While individuals in direct interactions may listen without responding, public listening is more readily assessed through patterns of engagement, amplification, and exclusion in discourse.

5. Mapping and Measuring Macro and Mediated Listening in Public Communication

In political communication processes, expressing an argument (or an opinion, a story, or any form of contribution to a political discussion) can occur both directly by saying something to someone or indirectly, by saying something assuming an audience, through processes of mediation by traditional and/or new digital media platforms (Chadwick, 2017; Maia, 2012). The same applies to listening—it can occur directly by listening to someone or indirectly, for example by reading, absorbing, or interpreting discourses made by someone via the mediation of news outlets, digital platforms, etc. Political interactions unfold in a complex, unstructured network of publics (Bruns, 2023), contemporaneously highly online, where different speakers and listeners—whether individuals or communities—overlap, cluster, fragment, and shift dynamically. Encounters with differing perspectives (and thus opportunities for listening) in this environment can take many forms—for example, a heated exchange in a subreddit with users responding to each other's comments in long threads; or watching a YouTube video discussing a given topic; or reading a news article that presents diverse viewpoints. Such moments of mediated listening often involve engaging multiple senses (Scudder, 2020, pp. 90–91)—seeing, hearing, and reading—as individuals absorb others' input across various platforms.

The public sphere is active in creating, changing, and developing listening to evolving media technologies, which, as Lacey (2013) shows, have enabled publics to engage attentively and anticipatorily with diverse voices beyond their immediate environment. It is still a challenge in current listening studies to understand whether findings from structured, small-scale participatory settings can be meaningfully extended to the more complex and diffuse dynamics of public communication, where listening takes place across numerous, overlapping sites (Hendriks et al., 2019). Rather than focusing solely on either individual perceptions or institutional responsiveness, we need a multidimensional lens that captures how listening is distributed across audiences, speakers, and discourse itself. In what follows, we lay out a framework that enables this by bringing together distinct analytical entry points and core elements of listening to guide empirical and methodological inquiry.

To study listening in complex public communication settings, I propose an integrative framework that connects three core elements of listening—(a) attentiveness, (b) openness, and (c) responsiveness—with three observational perspectives—(a) the listener's perspective, (b) the perspective of the actor who is (or is not) listened to, and (c) the observable manifestations of the listening act itself. This approach builds on previous literature that conceptualizes and measures listening's internal dimensions, interactional perceptions, and discursive traces, but brings them together in an analytical model. The following sections examine each of the three listening elements showing how they can be studied and assessed from each of the three perspectives. We conclude with a comparative summary that highlights empirical pathways for analyzing listening in complex communicative settings.

5.1. Attentiveness

5.1.1. Attentiveness From the Perspective of Who Listens

Attentiveness is the foundational gesture of listening: the act of giving focus to a speaker's words, signals, and expressions. From the perspective of the listener, attentiveness involves the allocation of attention to specific voices, actors, groups, discourses, or channels. In mediated settings, attentiveness can be indirectly observed through consumption patterns and engagement metrics. Audience research offers a useful entry point here, particularly large-scale media surveys such as the Reuters Institute digital news report and Pew Research Center's media studies, which track which platforms people consume news from, their preferred sources and formats, and news consumption habits (Newman et al., 2024; Shearer & Mitchell, 2021). While not designed explicitly as listening studies, these surveys provide important clues about whether and what citizens are listening to in terms of political content, and where attentional gaps may exist. Listening scholars can take insights from these types of studies to, for example, assess which media sources and platforms are more or less listened to, mapping listening patterns across different publics and identifying disparities in whose voices are being heard and through which channels.

Another fruitful approach for studying attentiveness is selective exposure research, which investigates how individuals make choices about which media content to consume, and which to avoid, based on their preexisting attitudes and beliefs. As discussed in Section 2, attentiveness is not a neutral or random process; it is shaped by social, political, and economic factors (Bickford, 1996), and by the choices potential listeners make. Selective exposure research, often situated within media effects and political psychology, studies if and how people may opt to listen to the sources they agree with and avoid or ignore those they do not agree with (e.g., Stroud, 2010). Cognitive dissonance theory suggests that individuals are motivated to avoid information that contradicts their beliefs because such dissonance is uncomfortable, while consonant information is reassuring (Festinger, 1957). Selective exposure can occur to avoid discomfort with disagreement, but it can also emerge as a more strategic act, as individuals may intentionally avoid listening to perspectives that challenge their beliefs. Scholars use survey-based measures such as individuals' stated political orientations and reported exposure to specific content, experimental designs, and digital trace data to determine whether individuals disproportionately attend to ideologically consonant content. While these studies also do not often frame their findings in terms of democratic listening, they offer useful methodological tools for understanding how attentiveness is selectively distributed. They also highlight that attention is not only shaped by structural factors but also by strategic or affective acts of avoidance.

Understanding in detail listeners' attention can entail many other approaches and methodologies, especially new studies interested in how people engage with digital content. Attention is increasingly difficult and fragmented in contemporary media systems, where platform designs, often driven by commercial imperatives, are purposefully engineered to capture and monetize user attention through continuous engagement and emotional stimulation, using for example the affordances of "scrollability" (Lupinacci, 2021; Searles & Feezell, 2023). This often occurs at the expense of deeper, sustained listening, as engagement with content becomes increasingly quicker and superficial, in a model of interaction that values volume and velocity. To study listeners' experiences of attention in such settings, past studies used qualitative methods like interviews and ethnography with social media users (Lupinacci, 2021); and surveys about individual information consumption habits, which often reveal tendencies toward scanning rather than deeply

engaging with full content (American Press Institute, 2014). Many recent methods allow quantizable investigation of attention given to digital content. Web usage mining studies, using large-scale data like clickstreams, can analyze for example dwell time (the time users spend on a given webpage), viewport time (the time users spend viewing specific portions of a given page), mouse cursor tracking, and session metrics (Lagun & Lalmas, 2016; Vermeer & Trilling, 2020). Eye-tracking studies, another example, can assess attentional focus when individuals consume specific information (Duchowski, 2017; King et al., 2019). It adds granularity to attentiveness studies by showing what parts of a media artefact are drawing attention, and for how long.

Beyond assessing the attentiveness of broad audiences, one different and interesting possibility is to focus on the perspective of specific listeners who hold central positions within complex public discourse networks. An example is research on how journalists listen to their sources. Craft and Vos (2018) analyzed journalists' testimonials and comments about their own listening practices, showing they are shaped by ethical and professional judgments about who deserves attention. The authors reveal that after the 2016 US election, journalists recognized their failure to listen to key public voices—particularly rural and working-class voters—due to biases toward elite, coastal perspectives. This failure wasn't just logistical but reflected deeper issues in newsroom culture and source selection. Similarly, other influential actors could be examined. To whom do social media influencers listen to? What do they pay attention to? Although much research has been done on these actors, they are not yet connected with the scholarly debate around listening.

5.1.2. Attentiveness From the Perspective of Who Is (or Is not) Listened To

Attentiveness can also be assessed from the speaker's perspective—namely, whether they perceive their words, arguments, or identities as receiving attention. The speaker's feeling of being heard by the listener is a key component of the listening act (Scudder, 2022). This is especially salient for marginalized groups and communities, who often report feeling overlooked or invisibilized in public discourse. Attentiveness is not just a cognitive event but a form of recognition—a sign that one's presence and perspective matter—perceptions of being ignored can reflect not just individual grievances but deeper systemic exclusions. Extensive research has shown how invisibility can deprive individuals, particularly those from minority groups, of a sense of belonging and the necessary psychological resources to develop positive possible selves (Fryberg & Townsend, 2008).

Empirical studies capturing perceived (in)visibility—for example, through interviews, focus groups, or ethnographic methods—can show how different actors interpret whether others are paying attention to them. People's sense of receiving attention is shaped by a wide range of cues, including media and state representation and inclusion, even in interactions they did not directly participate in. Beyond the feelings of being heard by traditional media and the centre of the political system, listening also occurs in digital environments. Users can, for instance, express frustration with platform algorithms that determine their visibility, shaping their perception of whether their voices are receiving attention—in other words, their perceptions of how the platforms are affecting their experience of being listened to by their networks (e.g., Duffy & Meisner, 2023).

5.1.3. Attentiveness in Discursive Practices

Scholars in media studies and political communication have long explored the visibility of different actors in public debates, investigating whose perspectives gain traction and whose are marginalized (e.g., Barvosa, 2018; Ferree et al., 2002; Maia et al., 2023). Methodological approaches include content, discourse, and narrative analysis, which can be used to assess the extent to which different social groups, political actors, or specific communities receive attention in news media, social media, and other public arenas. Attention in a macro approach to listening manifests in the way voices, claims, experiences, and demands are recognized within broader public conversations—what voices and claims are represented, or silenced, in public communication. This includes both what is said and what is omitted. A key concept here is silence. Silence is ambiguous in the listening process in direct conversations, as it is a condition to let the other speak, but at the same time can mean a withdrawal from the conversation (Bickford, 1996; Scudder, 2020). But in macro and mediated processes of listening, silence more often “mute[s] a whole array of differences of belief and politics, identity and desire” (Dreher, 2009, p. 446). It is possible to study language also by examining the language that is never uttered (Sweeney, 2012, p. 146). The presence or absence of specific voices in relevant discursive spaces (such as news media stories, parliamentary discourse, highly shared pages, accounts, and online channels, etc.) is frequently framed as a voice problem, but we gain a lot if we also frame it as a listening problem (Dreher, 2009).

When a voice is visible in public communication, it’s because someone has given it attention and listened to it in the first place. As Entman (1993, p. 53) famously argued, by giving salience to specific voices, claims, demands, and arguments and obscuring others, framing determines “what is made more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences.” This process of selection and omission not only highlights certain perspectives but also silences others, effectively giving the contours of attention in public communication. The presence of specific actors or claims in news coverage, legislative debates, or viral online content signals attentional investment. Conversely, patterns of omission—whose voices are consistently absent or misrepresented—offer a critical lens for diagnosing failures of attentiveness. Quantitative and qualitative content analysis can identify the frequency and distribution of actors in media narratives and unpack how attention is structured: Are dissenting voices cited? Are minority perspectives ignored? These methodologies allow scholars to study attentiveness not just as a cognitive act but as a socially distributed phenomenon.

5.2. Openness

5.2.1. Openness From the Perspective of Who Listens

Openness refers to a dispositional stance—a willingness to receive and engage with what another says, even when that perspective challenges one’s assumptions or values. In mediated communication, as with measures of listening in direct interaction, openness can be studied through motivational and attitudinal research, including willingness-to-listen scales and other self-report instruments (Bodie & Jones, 2018). These capture individuals’ disposition toward encountering dissonant perspectives and their perceived ability to engage with them. With more details about how individuals listen to mediated discourses, audience studies have been investigating how they engage with content for decades, although often with research questions not directly addressing democratic listening (see Gray, 2017; Jensen & Rosengren, 1990; Lindlof, 1991). These studies often investigate how individuals interpret, internalize, and contest content

they have contact with. Reception analysis, for instance, focuses on how audiences interpret media messages within their own social and cultural contexts, often using in-depth interviews and direct observations (Jensen & Rosengren, 1990). Openness can then be assessed through such forms of qualitative interviews and focus groups, where participants reflect on how they engage with other viewpoints. In these methods, researchers can explore how people describe their emotional responses, cognitive dissonance, and strategies for interpreting challenging content.

5.2.2. Openness From the Perspective of Who Is (or Is not) Listened To

Openness also involves how speakers perceive the receptivity of their audience. This perception shapes whether individuals and groups feel they are taken seriously. When speakers feel that their perspectives are dismissed, caricatured, or selectively acknowledged, they often report a breakdown in openness—even when their message appears to be heard. Media outlets may invite participation while subtly limiting the range of perspectives that are taken seriously. The experience of being tokenized or instrumentalized—where voices are included superficially or tokenistically—can indicate a lack of true openness. Studies examining how people feel about their representation in public discourse and the media offer valuable insights into this dimension of listening (Dreher, 2009). Articulating the concept of listening across differences, Dreher also argues that media can facilitate a more receptive and transformative engagement with diverse perspectives, moving beyond simply allowing people to speak to ensuring they are truly heard and understood (Dreher, 2009).

Research on public consultation processes, participatory governance, and user feedback systems provides a methodological avenue for assessing perceived openness. These include ethnographic and participatory studies that explore how speakers interpret their experiences when listened to by institutions and organisations. Ethnographic studies and participatory research approaches explore how specific communities experience, or fail to experience, being listened to in political processes (for a comprehensive discussion on this topic, see, for example, Couldry, 2010). In digital communication, openness is also affected by platform governance choices: Social media algorithms that amplify harmful or polarizing content may reduce perceived openness by distorting how different perspectives are presented and engaged with. When dissent is met with hostility or ridicule, users may retreat, not because they were ignored, but because they felt unwelcome—a breakdown in openness rather than attentiveness.

5.2.3. Openness in Discursive Practices

Discursively, openness can be observed by examining how dissenting views are framed, engaged with, or resisted in public communication—how the public sphere accommodates differences. It manifests to the extent to which discursive spaces and actors demonstrate a willingness to receive, and engage with, other's perspectives. For example, the specific framing of other's perspectives can signal degrees of openness—whether an opposing perspective is caricatured and dismissed, selectively engaged with, or taken seriously as a legitimate contribution to collective sense-making. Again, as Scudder (2020) and Bickford (1996) argue, openness does not require acceptance of another's argument but does demand recognition that it holds relevance within the communicative space. Specific methods include frame, discourse, and content analysis of public debates, media coverage, or online interactions. For instance, discourse that critically engages with opposing perspectives—paraphrasing, interpreting, or contextualizing them—suggests

a willingness to take them seriously. Conversely, selective or distorted engagement often signals a breakdown in openness. If dissenting perspectives are tokenized or only engaged with in hostile terms, it points to a low-openness communication environment, even if surface-level attentiveness is present.

In highly conflicted contexts, however, it is not easy to encounter openness towards opposing perspectives, especially if considering interactions (even if mediated) between opposing groups directly and not the reporting on them. Empirical studies of listening in polarised contexts show that openness is not a binary condition but varies across different discursive practices. Hendriks et al. (2019), for example, identify four modes of listening—enclave, alliance, adversarial, and transformative listening—each illustrating different degrees of openness in the public sphere. While some modes, such as enclaving listening, reinforce homogeneity, others, such as transformative listening, reveal opportunities for change and engagement across differences.

5.3. Responsiveness

5.3.1. Responsiveness From the Perspective of Who Listens

Responsiveness captures the outward manifestation of listening—a reaction, acknowledgement, or engagement that signals to the speaker and to others that listening has occurred, making the listening act socially perceptible. From the listener's standpoint, responsiveness is the moment of externalization—when internal cognitive and affective listening translates into an observable act. In mediated environments, this may take many forms: commenting on a post, resharing content, sending feedback, or even reframing one's position in response to what was heard. In surveys and interviews, responsiveness can be assessed through self-reported intentions and behaviours: Did the listener feel moved to act, reflect, or respond? Did they report changing their thinking? At an institutional level, responsiveness is particularly visible in decision-making processes—when a listener (e.g., a politician, platform moderator, editor) demonstrates that a particular perspective has shaped an outcome, policy, or position. Studies on journalistic responsiveness (e.g., Craft & Vos, 2018) examine how media actors acknowledge or incorporate citizen voices into coverage. Similarly, research on public feedback systems, like participatory budgeting or consultation responses, can measure how listener-actors (e.g., governments and institutions) indicate that input has been considered—even if not adopted. In digital communication, responsiveness can also be measured through digital trace data; accessing users' digital responses, even if just reactions, helps us understand what they have listened to.

5.3.2. Responsiveness From the Perspective of Who Is (or Is not) Listened To

The credibility of the listening act is often judged by the speaker based on the responses they receive, making responsiveness a key indicator in the perception of whether listening has occurred. Perceptions of responsiveness can be studied through qualitative interviews, focus groups, or surveys that assess how individuals evaluate the presence, absence, or quality of responses from specific institutions or situated contexts. Do speakers feel that their concerns were addressed? Do they believe that any action or acknowledgement followed their input? Focusing on specific types of interaction, social media research has investigated how users interpret responses—such as likes, shares, or comments—as indicators of being listened to, demonstrating how the feeling of being heard can have different triggers in complex digital

media environments (e.g., Dvir-Gvirsman, 2025). When performing specific case studies, scholars can consider reactions from platforms and organisations such as algorithmic amplification and symbolic responses (e.g., platform badges, policy statements, or public apologies) which affect whether speakers feel they have been heard. Importantly, responsiveness is not uniformly expected across all settings. In deliberative encounters, participants may anticipate discursive engagement. In broader public communication, indirect signs—like thematic uptake or agenda setting in media or political discourse after public demonstrations—may be interpreted as responses. Conversely, persistent silence, especially after visible claims or demands, is often interpreted as a refusal to listen.

5.3.3. Responsiveness in Discursive Practices

As an intersubjective act, listening manifests through communication. Responsiveness can be traced directly in public discourse—when public actors or institutions engage with, quote, or respond to claims, demands, or stories, they signal that they are listening—even if they ultimately reject the position. Content and discourse analysis are thus powerful tools to identify responsiveness in public communication. One useful approach is tracing how arguments evolve over time and across communicative spaces (Maia et al., 2025)—fine-grained measurements on the level of the communicative interactions themselves (Bächtiger & Parkinson, 2019; Maia et al., 2023). If certain claims or narratives resurface with modifications that address earlier criticisms or insights, this suggests a form of discursive listening. If previously ignored concerns become central to media coverage or political debate—especially with language that references prior claims—this suggests a discursive response.

For instance, Wahutu (2023) employs content analysis of 800 news articles from Kenya, Rwanda, and South Africa to examine how narratives about the Darfur atrocities were constructed and responded to over time. The study identifies the patterns of thematic continuity, adaptation, and intertextuality in media coverage, showing how African journalism fields engaged with (or not) different voices. By analyzing how the sources were quoted to shape the narrative, the study showed that African journalists played a counterintuitive role in silencing certain African voices, despite the expectation that they would amplify local perspectives (Wahutu, 2023, p. 823). This aligns with the idea that responsiveness in public communication is not simply about whether voices are included but also about how they are inserted in the narrative, engaged with, or dismissed. Wahutu (2023, p. 825) notes that Sudanese sources were central to the coverage across all three countries, but when challenging or supporting their statements, journalists predominantly relied on American and English voices rather than other African sources.

By applying similar discourse-based methodologies, it is possible to trace how public narratives evolve over time and across communicative spaces. More than which sources are mentioned (which is a sign of attentiveness), a how they are framed (which is a sign of openness), a responsiveness-based analysis of public communication can examine whether dominant actors put different perspectives in conversation. In macro-level contexts—where back-and-forth dialogue has another temporality—responsiveness is the very act through which listening becomes publicly recognizable and politically consequential. The challenge remains in distinguishing between superficial responsiveness and genuine engagement, but this is precisely where fine-grained discourse or content analysis, focusing on related concepts such as coherence and respect, can be incorporated (Choucair & Maia, 2024; Esau & Friess, 2022).

5.4. Summary of Listening Elements and Observational Perspectives

The preceding sections outlined how the three elements of listening manifest across three observational perspectives. This structure integrates normative theory with empirical research, offering a framework for analyzing macro and mediated listening in public communication. We now present a summary table (Table 1) that distils the conceptual distinctions and links them to methodological approaches found in existing scholarship. This table is not exhaustive but illustrative of the variety of research strategies that can be employed.

Table 1. Elements of listening across observational perspectives.

	Who Listens (Listener Perspective)	Who Is (or Is not) Listened to (Speaker Perspective)	Listening Act (Discursive Perspective)
Attentiveness	<p>Q: What media, voices, or perspectives are individuals paying attention to?</p> <p>What to assess: Media consumption habits, selective exposure, attention metrics (e.g., dwell time, eye-tracking), digital trace data, and ethnography</p>	<p>Q: Do individuals or groups feel their perspectives are receiving attention in the public sphere?</p> <p>What to assess: Perceptions of (in)visibility, feelings of being overlooked, and marginalized groups' accounts of attention received</p>	<p>Q: Whose voices, claims, and perspectives appear (or are omitted) in media and political discourse?</p> <p>What to assess: Visibility/invisibility in discourse, presence or absence in media narratives, salience of claims, content analysis, framing, and discursive silencing</p>
Openness	<p>Q: Are listeners willing to engage with others?</p> <p>What to assess: Attitudinal studies (e.g., willingness-to-listen scales), qualitative interviews, audience reception studies, and emotional engagement</p>	<p>Q: Do speakers feel their views are taken seriously or meaningfully engaged with?</p> <p>What to assess: Perceived receptiveness, experiences of tokenization, misrepresentation, or exclusion from meaningful engagement</p>	<p>Q: To what extent do public discourses allow space for challenging or dissonant perspectives to be acknowledged as legitimate contributions?</p> <p>What to assess: Framing of dissenting views, quality of engagement, inclusiveness of discursive space, analysis of interpretive frames, and typologies of listening modes</p>
Responsiveness	<p>Q: How do listeners respond after receiving a message (e.g., behaviour, policy shift, public comment)?</p> <p>What to assess: Self-reported behavioural changes, feedback, policy change, digital engagement (e.g., shares, comments), and institutional reactions</p>	<p>Q: Do speakers feel they have received acknowledgement, action, or meaningful response?</p> <p>What to assess: Perceived acknowledgement or disregard, speaker evaluation of response credibility, and emotional or symbolic feedback in media/platforms</p>	<p>Q: Are dominant discourses, narratives, or policies, adapted in response to others' contributions?</p> <p>What to assess: Tracing intertextual responses, thematic uptake, policy or narrative adaptation, longitudinal media analysis, and evidence of discursive uptake or narrative shifts</p>

This comparative structure allows researchers to select entry points that align with their research goals—whether they seek to understand listening from the perspective of participants, assess public perceptions, or analyze communication patterns at scale. Importantly, it also supports multi-method research: For example, triangulating survey data on attentiveness with discourse analysis of media visibility or combining interviews with specific groups with content analysis of how their voices appear in public debate.

6. Conclusion

To enhance the quality of political discussions, we need to focus on the patterns, dynamics, and forms of listening. The expanded and multiple spaces that gather and amplify voices also need their listening counterparts (Ercan et al., 2019) to ensure that communication is actually occurring. The sharp contrast between an overwhelming abundance of communication (Ercan et al., 2019) and the persistent lack of listening in democratic life (Dobson, 2012) can be precisely what prompts both researchers and the public to recognise the need to return to listening—especially as its absence often surfaces in growing resentment and frustration. But to help with this shift, the field of political communication needs to contribute with methodologies and empirical studies that speak to the complexity of the current informational and political systems. The mediated characteristic of listening in these settings adds challenges to the listening acts. The responsibility of who is supposed to listen is diluted, and without the proper possibility to direct back-and-forth to solve misunderstandings, it is usually harder to properly grasp the context, the intent, and the meaning of what is listened to. This highlights the need to move beyond viewing listening as a purely internal cognitive act, and instead approach it as a discursive and observable practice shaped by interaction and context. Rather than treating listening as an unobservable cognitive process, a discourse-based approach allows us to assess its manifestations in public communication. By combining different methodologies showcased particularly in media and communication studies, we can advance the understanding of macro listening practices.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express sincere gratitude to the reviewers and editors for their careful reading and valuable comments and suggestions, which significantly improved the quality of this article. Special thanks are also extended to Kate FitzGerald for her thoughtful input and careful language review.

Funding

This research was funded by the Australian Research Council through the Australian Laureate Fellowship project Determining the Drivers and Dynamics of Partisanship and Polarisation in Online Public Debate.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

References

- American Press Institute. (2014). *The personal news cycle: How Americans choose to get their news*. <https://americanpressinstitute.org/personal-news-cycle>
- Bächtiger, A., & Parkinson, J. (2019). *Mapping and measuring deliberation: Towards a new deliberative quality*. Oxford University Press.
- Balkin, J. M. (2017). Free speech in the algorithmic society: Big data, private governance, and new school

- speech regulation. *UC Davis Law Review*, 51, 1149–1210. <https://lawreview.law.ucdavis.edu/archives/51/3/free-speech-algorithmic-society-big-data-private-governance-and-new-school-speech>
- Barvosa, E. (2018). *Deliberative democracy now: LGBT equality and the emergence of large-scale deliberative systems*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108688079>
- Bickford, S. (1996). *The dissonance of democracy: Listening, conflict, and citizenship*. Cornell University Press.
- Bodie, G. D. (2016). Listening. In M. Powers (Ed.), *Oxford research encyclopedia of communication*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.279>
- Bodie, G. D. (2018). Measuring behavioral components of listening. In D. L. Worthington & G. D. Bodie (Eds.), *The sourcebook of listening research: Methodology and measures* (pp. 123–150). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119102991.ch6>
- Bodie, G. D., & Jones, S. M. (2018). Measuring affective components of listening. In D. L. Worthington & G. D. Bodie (Eds.), *The sourcebook of listening research: Methodology and measures* (pp. 97–122). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119102991.ch5>
- Bodie, G. D., & Worthington, D. L. (2018). Measuring listening. In D. L. Worthington & G. D. Bodie (Eds.), *The sourcebook of listening research: Methodology and measures* (pp. 21–44). Wiley. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781119102991.ch2>
- Bruns, A. (2023). From “the” public sphere to a network of publics: Towards an empirically founded model of contemporary public communication spaces. *Communication Theory*, 33(2/3), 70–81. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtad007>
- Chadwick, A. (2017). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*. Oxford University Press.
- Chambers, S. (1996). *Reasonable democracy: Jürgen Habermas and the politics of discourse*. Cornell University Press.
- Choucair, T., & Maia, R. (2024). Different dimensions of communicative exchanges in online political talk: Measuring reciprocity through structures, behaviors, and discourses. *International Journal of Communication*, 18, 1582–1610. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/21235>
- Couldry, N. (2010). *Why voice matters: Culture and politics after neoliberalism*. Sage.
- Craft, S., & Vos, T. P. (2018). Have you heard? US journalistic “listening” in cacophonous times. *Journalism Practice*, 12(8), 966–975. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2018.1513339>
- Dobson, A. (2012). Listening: The new democratic deficit. *Political Studies*, 60(4), 843–859. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2012.00944.x>
- Dobson, A. (2014). *Listening for democracy: Recognition, representation, reconciliation*. Oxford University Press.
- Dreher, T. (2009). Listening across difference: Media and multiculturalism beyond the politics of voice. *Continuum*, 23(4), 445–458. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304310903015712>
- Dryzek, J. S. (1990). *Discursive democracy: Politics, policy, and political science*. Cambridge University Press.
- Duchowski, A. T. (2017). *Eye tracking methodology: Theory and practice*. Springer.
- Duffy, B. E., & Meisner, C. (2023). Platform governance at the margins: Social media creators’ experiences with algorithmic (in)visibility. *Media, Culture & Society*, 45(2), 285–304. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437221111923>
- Dvir-Gvirsman, S. (2025). The meaning of like: How social-media editors and users make sense of social media engagement. *Journalism Practice*, 19(5), 1017–1034. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2023.2228782>
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>
- Ercan, S. A., Hendriks, C. M., & Dryzek, J. S. (2019). Public deliberation in an era of communicative plenty. *Policy and Politics*, 47(1), 19–35. <https://doi.org/10.1332/030557318X15200933925405>

- Esau, K., & Friess, D. (2022). What creates listening online? Exploring reciprocity in online political discussions with relational content analysis. *Journal of Deliberative Democracy*, 18(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.16997/jdd.1021>
- Ferree, M. M., Gamson, W. A., Gerhards, J., & Rucht, D. (2002). *Shaping abortion discourse: Democracy and the public sphere in Germany and the United States*. Cambridge University Press.
- Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Stanford University Press.
- Fryberg, S. A., & Townsend, S. S. M. (2008). The psychology of invisibility. In G. Adams, M. Biernat, N. R. Branscombe, C. S. Crandall, & L. S. Wrightsman (Eds.), *Commemorating Brown: The social psychology of racism and discrimination* (pp. 173–193). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/11681-010>
- Gray, J. (2017). Reviving audience studies. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 34(1), 79–83. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295036.2016.1266680>
- Habermas, J. (1984). *The theory of communicative action: Reason and the rationalization of society*. Beacon Press. (Original work published 1981)
- Habermas, J. (1987). *The theory of communicative action: Lifeworld and system—A critique of functionalist reason*. Beacon Press. (Original work published 1981)
- Habermas, J. (1990). *Moral consciousness and communicative action*. MIT Press. (Original work published 1983)
- Habermas, J. (1996). *Between facts and norms: Contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy*. MIT Press. (Original work published 1992)
- Hendriks, C. M., Ercan, S. A., & Duus, S. (2019). Listening in polarised controversies: A study of listening practices in the public sphere. *Policy Sciences*, 52(1), 137–151. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-018-9343-3>
- Jarral, F. (2025, February 24). The big idea: What do we really mean by free speech? *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/feb/24/the-big-idea-what-do-we-really-mean-by-free-speech>
- Jensen, K. B., & Rosengren, K. E. (1990). Five traditions in search of the audience. *European Journal of Communication*, 5(2), 207–238. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323190005002005>
- King, A. J., Bol, N., Cummins, R. G., & John, K. K. (2019). Improving visual behavior research in communication science: An overview, review, and reporting recommendations for using eye-tracking methods. *Communication Methods and Measures*, 13(3), 149–177. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19312458.2018.1558194>
- Lacey, K. (2013). *Listening publics: The politics and experience of listening in the media age*. Polity Press.
- Lagun, D., & Lalmas, M. (2016). Understanding user attention and engagement in online news reading. In P. N. Bennett & V. Josifovski (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Ninth ACM International Conference on Web Search and Data Mining* (pp. 113–122). Association for Computing Machinery. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2835776.2835833>
- Lindlof, T. R. (1991). The qualitative study of media audiences. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 35(1), 23–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838159109364100>
- Lupinacci, L. (2021). 'Absentmindedly scrolling through nothing': Liveness and compulsory continuous connectedness in social media. *Media, Culture & Society*, 43(2), 273–290. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443720939454>
- Maia, R. C. M. (2012). *Deliberation, the media and political talk*. Hampton Press.
- Maia, R. C. M., Choucair, T., Hauber, G., & Santa Inês, L. (2025). Deliberative theory for re-focusing the concept, measurement, and analysis of substantive reasons in political discussions. *Constellations*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12795>

- Maia, R. C. M., Hauber, G., & Choucair, T. (2023). *The deliberative system and inter-connected media in times of uncertainty*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- McCarthy, T. (1981). *The critical theory of Jurgen Habermas*. MIT Press.
- Morrell, M. E. (2018). Listening and deliberation. In A. Bächtiger, J. S. Dryzek, J. Mansbridge, & M. E. Warren (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of deliberative democracy* (pp. 237–250). Oxford University Press.
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Robertson, C. T., Ross Arguedas, A., & Nielsen, R. K. (2024). *Reuters Institute digital news report 2024*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism; University of Oxford. <https://doi.org/10.60625/RISJ-VY6N-4V57>
- Ricknell, E. (2020). Freedom of expression and alternatives for internet governance: Prospects and pitfalls. *Media and Communication*, 8(4), 110–120. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v8i4.3299>
- Rost, M. (2024). *Teaching and researching listening* (4th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003390794>
- Scudder, M. F. (2020). *Beyond empathy and inclusion: The challenge of listening in democratic deliberation*. Oxford University Press.
- Scudder, M. F. (2022). Measuring democratic listening: A listening quality index. *Political Research Quarterly*, 75(1), 175–187. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912921989449>
- Searles, K., & Feezell, J. T. (2023). Scrollability: A new digital news affordance. *Political Communication*, 40(5), 670–675. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2023.2208083>
- Shearer, E., & Mitchell, A. (2021). *News use across social media platforms in 2020*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2021/01/12/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-in-2020>
- Steenbergen, M., Bächtiger, A., Spöndli, M., & Steiner, J. (2003). Measuring political deliberation: A discourse quality index. *Comparative European Politics*, 1, 21–48. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.cep.6110002>
- Steiner, J. (2012). *The foundations of deliberative democracy: Empirical research and normative implications*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139057486>
- Stroud, N. J. (2010). Polarization and partisan selective exposure. *Journal of Communication*, 60(3), 556–576. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2010.01497.x>
- Sweeney, M. (2012). Listening rhetorically to textual silence: Intimate partner homicide media coverage. *International Journal of Listening*, 26(3), 146–158. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10904018.2012.712472>
- Vermeer, S., & Trilling, D. (2020). Toward a better understanding of news user journeys: A Markov chain approach. *Journalism Studies*, 21(7), 879–894. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2020.1722958>
- Wahutu, J. S. (2023). Making African suffering legible: Co-constructing narrative of the Darfur atrocities. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 28(4), 818–836. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612221082062>
- Witkin, B. R., & Trochim, W. W. K. (1997). Toward a synthesis of listening constructs: A concept map analysis. *International Journal of Listening*, 11(1), 69–87. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1932586xijl1101_5
- Worthington, D. L. (2018). Modeling and measuring cognitive components of listening. In D. L. Worthington & G. D. Bodie (Eds.), *The sourcebook of listening research: Methodology and measures* (pp. 70–96). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119102991.ch4>
- Worthington, D. L., & Bodie, G. D. (2018). Defining listening: A historical, theoretical, and pragmatic assessment. In D. L. Worthington & G. D. Bodie (Eds.), *The sourcebook of listening research: Methodology and measures* (pp. 3–17). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119102991.ch1>

About the Author



Tariq Choucair (PhD) is a postdoctoral researcher at Queensland University of Technology's Digital Media Research Centre (DMRC). He investigates online political talk and deep disagreements, especially about political minority rights, and methods for analyzing these discussions, with an emphasis on computational methods, artificial intelligence, and large language models.