

Trust in Pod: Listener Trust of News Content Heard on Different Genre Podcasts

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Abstract

There are several news podcast programs for listeners to choose from, but other genre podcasts (e.g., comedy, true crime, history) also include news in their content. This study measures listener trust in news content aired in different genres. The findings indicate most listeners trust content heard on news podcasts, which may relate to an increase in available news programs, as well as an overall increase in podcast listenership. The research also shows some listeners trust news heard on non-news podcasts. This may relate to interest in alternate sources for news and the storytelling formats used in the programs. When examining the trust of news content based on genre, news heard on comedy, news, and history podcasts are more likely to be trusted by listeners. The majority of gratifications associated with listening to podcasts based on the various genres are similar, with minimal differences seen among certain genres. Discussion of AI and its influence on trust in news heard on podcasts is also addressed.

Keywords

listener trust; news; podcast; podcast genres; podcast news; podcasting; trust in news; uses and gratifications

1. Introduction

Podcasts are more popular than ever, and the range of genres is vast with everything from comedy to true crime to health and fitness. Yet, when it comes to podcasts from news organizations, only 20% of Americans listen to these programs. However, the same research indicates most podcast listeners report hearing news on podcast genres other than news programs. What’s more, most listeners expect the news they hear on podcasts—regardless of genre—to be accurate or trustworthy (Shearer et al., 2023).

Previous studies have focused on trustworthiness and news podcasts. For instance, audiences are inclined to trust content from news podcasts when it comes from a host they feel connected to, and that bond can be enhanced when the podcaster engages with listeners (English et al., 2023). Others suggest if a listener's political association is in line with the podcast content, they are more likely to interpret the news as unbiased and objective (Whittle, 2023).

There is a collection of research about listener trust of content heard on news podcasts; yet, based on new findings indicating listeners expect news aired on podcast genres to be accurate, it's important to expand the focus. Specifically, this study is designed to do this by concentrating on five areas of interest: (a) trust in news heard on non-news podcasts; (b) trust in news heard on news podcasts; (c) genres for relaying trustworthy news content; (d) why people listen to podcasts based on genre; and (e) a call to action concerning artificial intelligence (AI) and trust in news on podcasts.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Podcast Evolution and Listenership Today

What is a common presence in our daily existence dates back to the early 2000s. Initially developed using RSS technology, which enabled users to share audio files on the web, it evolved into what we know as podcasting. In 2004, former MTV video jockey Adam Curry partnered with RSS developer, Dave Winer, to create a new RSS technology, iPodder, that enabled users to download audio files to their iPods (Affleck, 2005). The appeal was notable with the *New Oxford American Dictionary* selecting podcast as the word of the year in 2005. However, growth was initially slow-going, but the 2014 debut of the real-life murder mystery podcast, *Serial*, fueled listener attention and set the stage for a continual rise of interest in podcasts (Bishop, 2014; Dredge, 2014).

Over two-thirds of Americans report listening to a podcast in the past 12 months, half of whom tuned in within the past month, and about a third within the last week. The heightened activity is seen among both genders with females having a greater interest in true crime podcasts than their male counterparts. Listener preference also varies by race with African Americans showcasing a greater preference for podcasts about ethnicity, finance, sports, and health (Shearer, 2023). When examining appeal among all listeners, study findings indicate comedy, society and culture, and news to be the most popular genres (Edison Research, 2024a). Other preferred genres include government and politics, science and technology, self-help, game shows, and sports (Edison Research, 2024a; Hadad, 2024). Common format approaches heard on podcasts include interviews, deep reporting, and commentary. The more in-depth interview style used by Joe Rogan, host of the popular *Rogan Experience*, has been described as "putt[ing] guests at ease, allowing them to share their thoughts and ideas in a way they might not be able to in other interviews" (Keating, n.d.). Deep reporting, where the focal point is a detailed analysis of a particular topic, is frequently put to use on true crime and history podcasts, and the commentary approach can be often heard on political-related podcasts (Stocking et al., 2023).

2.2. News Content on Podcasts

People are increasingly accessing news on digital media (Bird, 2023; Sang et al., 2023; Schneier, 2020; Whittle, 2024). Research suggests listeners who tune in to news podcasts may be more engaged and more likely to

take part in political action (Bird, 2023; Park, 2017). Park (2017) identified three concepts used in citizen news podcasts from Korea—carnivalism, engaging journalism, and counter-public sphere. Either of these may threaten the listenership of mainstream news media and be used to draw attention to news stories that may have otherwise been ignored. Sang et al. (2023) emphasized the unique nature of podcasts and their relevance in relaying niche news topics across the globe, and in a study surveying those who listen to a popular podcast about cricket, English et al. (2023) found audiences to be highly engaged, they formed connections with the show hosts, and viewed program content to be trustworthy.

In an examination of award-winning and shortlisted news podcasts, Lindgren (2023, p. 716) identified a trend where journalists drew in listeners with narrative journalism by becoming “an important story character in their own right.” In a study designed to broaden understanding of what was known as an “emerging media phenomenon,” Skalický (2023) interviewed podcast news hosts and editors and found the shows target younger audiences and reveal the processes of how the stories were produced to enhance audience trust. Rae (2023) suggests the way in which something is said plays a key role in the influence of political content. Using informal and casual language, such as that used by Joe Rogan, enhances intimacy and creates a sense of comfort. In an analysis of 40 podcast episodes from news organizations aired during the Covid-19 pandemic, Nee and Santana (2022) found most episodes incorporated personal elements in the content such as first-person voice, character development, and the inclusion of personal opinions as a part of the story. The study highlighted how experimenting with formats during the pandemic led to a blend of traditional journalism and storytelling that appealed to wider audiences, particularly younger listeners.

Whittle (2023) found most users tune in to podcasts associated with traditional media outlets, and these same listeners also find cable television news to be trustworthy. Funk and Speakman (2022) found mainstream news podcasts such as those from NPR and *The New York Times* generally emphasize professionalism and objectivity. Politically conservative podcasts rarely use the word conservative, but otherwise, the language is similar to mainstream podcasts, which makes them indistinguishable. Another investigation found listeners trust news heard on podcasts less than content from traditional media. However, news podcasts were viewed as a more reliable source when compared to online news and digital satirical content. The study also suggests listeners value storytelling techniques that create a sense of immersion and intimacy (Whipple et al., 2023).

Scholars have also examined podcasts associated with major events such as the Black Lives Matter movement. Miller et al. (2022) argued major issues can give rise to the availability of daily news podcasts and, in turn, can create an increase in opportunities for daily discussions. The findings underscored the role of podcasts in reinventing audio reporting with more detailed storytelling during times of social and political unrest. Bratcher (2022) examined how podcasts help shape personal and political identities among young adults with findings indicating participants view podcasts as a significant source of information when compared to traditional media and online news.

2.3. Uses and Gratifications

The uses and gratifications approach dates back to the late 1950s when Katz (1959) called for scholars to turn their attention toward investigating what people do with media rather than what media does to people. The approach is taken from the perspective of audience members and seeks to understand why individuals use media and the gratifications they seek and receive (Littlejohn et al., 2021). Used over the years to examine

audience use of traditional media, it was Ruggiero (2000) who noted the approach to be suitable for digital media based on the active role people played in selecting media sources.

From as early as 2007, uses and gratifications have been used to study motivations associated with podcasts (Johnson, 2007). When examining motivations among college students, Chung and Kim (2016) identified podcasts to be a medium for both entertainment and education. McClung and Johnson (2010) concluded listeners tune in as a form of entertainment, socialization, and to take control of their media experience. Markman (2011) investigated why people produce independent audio podcasting. The findings suggested five motivations: (a) interest in technology and media; (b) passion for the subject matter they cover; (c) interaction with their audience and the broader podcasting community; (d) personal enjoyment and self-expression; and (e) potential for monetization. Perks and Turner (2019) found podcasts offer a supply of engaging content that travels with listeners, enabling them to be productive in various physical and intellectual ways. The same study suggests the gratification associated with listening to podcasts—enjoyment—is based in part on the connections listeners form with both the hosts and the podcast community. Craig et al. (2023) studied motivations among younger audiences and found they varied by podcast genre, with entertainment and escapism as predictors for a positive perception of podcasts. Also, Whittle (2023) identified convenience and socialization among the motivations for listening to daily news podcasts,

3. Research Questions

Research indicates most people hear news content when they listen to podcasts—even when it is not a news podcast (Shearer et al., 2023). This study seeks to further explore this finding by focusing on listener trust in the news people hear on podcasts. Specifically, the research questions are as follows:

RQ1: How much do listeners trust news content heard on non-news (e.g., comedy, history, true crime) podcasts?

RQ2: How much do listeners trust news content heard on news podcasts?

RQ3: How likely are listeners to trust news content heard on different genre podcasts?

RQ4: What gratifications do podcast listeners of different genres associate with podcasts?

4. Methodology

4.1. Recruitment

The names of the top 20 podcasts listed on the iTunes directory, a popular online resource where individuals can locate a list of podcast programs, was compiled on July 24, 2024. A search for fan group pages associated with the 20 podcasts was then conducted on the social media outlet, Facebook. Each podcast name was entered into the appropriate search bar, and relevant groups were then documented. Fan groups with fewer than 150 members and those without an administrator contact option were excluded. A request was then sent to the administrator, the person(s) responsible for overseeing the group page, asking for permission to post a

request message with a link to the study survey. Upon receiving the go-ahead, researchers created a survey post on each corresponding group page. Next, using the search terms “podcast” and “podcasting,” researchers continued to search for participants on Facebook specifically for podcast-related groups. Similar to before, groups without administrator access and those with fewer than 150 members were excluded. A request was sent to the associated administrators for permission to post the survey message. Once confirmed, survey requests were posted on the corresponding group pages.

Next, a search for the same top 20 podcasts was conducted on the social media outlet, Reddit. Only groups with more than 150 members were documented. All results from Reddit allowed access to the group’s moderators (those who oversee groups on Reddit). Moderators were asked permission to post a survey message on their corresponding group page. When granted, the researchers posted a survey message. A search for “podcast” and “podcasting” was also performed on Reddit. Similar to before, only groups with more than 150 members were documented, and a moderator(s) was contacted to seek permission to create a survey request post. The researchers posted request messages on the approved group pages. Finally, one of the researchers posted a survey request message on her personal Facebook page.

4.2. Survey

After confirming consent to complete the anonymous study survey, participants were directed to a filter question asking how often they listen to podcasts. Individuals who selected “I do not listen to podcasts” were directed to demographic questions and other relevant inquiries. Based on genres from Edison Research (2024a), participants were asked to select the types of podcasts they prefer. Next, they were asked how long they have listened to podcasts, and based in part on Craig et al. (2023) and Chan-Olmsted and Wang (2022), individuals were asked to indicate the reasons they listen to podcasts. Using a 5-point Likert scale, participants were next asked to rate what they believe to be the level of trustworthiness of news content they hear on non-news podcasts (e.g., true crime, comedy, history). This was followed by an open-ended question asking listeners to explain their selection of trustworthiness. Only those who said they listen to news podcasts were asked to rate what they believe to be the level of trustworthiness of news they hear on news podcasts. This was followed by an open-ended question asking listeners to explain their selection. The questionnaire ended with varying demographic questions. Responses were collected from 1,102 participants between July 24, 2024, and August 4, 2024.

5. Findings

5.1. Demographics

The majority of those who answered the survey fall between the ages of 25–44 with 43.9% being between 25–34 and 36.6% between 35–44 years old. Other age groups include 18–24 (5.5%), 45–54 (10.8%), 55–64 (2.3%), and 65 or older (.5%). The respondents were 58.8% female, 35.5% male, 3.9% binary, 1.1% chose not to say, and .6% selected other. Over two-thirds are white/Caucasian (86%), 5.2% are Hispanic or Latino, 2.8% selected other, 1.8% preferred not to say, 1.4% are African-American, 1.4% are Asian, and .1% are Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. In terms of the highest level of education, most participants have a bachelor’s (38%) or graduate degree (29.6%), 10.8% have an associate’s degree, 14.8% reported completing high school, 5.7% selected other, and 1.1% preferred not to say. When it comes to household income, 26.1%

earn more than \$120,000 per year, 22.3% make between \$60,000–\$89,999, 21.3% earn \$30,000–\$59,999, 18.2% make \$90,000–\$119,999, 5.9% preferred to not say, 5.5% selected \$0–\$29,999, and .8% chose other. A total of 35.3% of participants are male; 59.0% are female; 3.9% are non-binary; 1.1% prefer not to say, and 0.6% are other.

5.2. Listening Habits

Among those surveyed, 23.2% listen to 1–2 podcasts per week, 38.7% listen to 3–4 podcasts per week, 36.7% listen to more than 5 podcasts per week, and 1.4% do not listen to podcasts. Regarding the number of years of listening to podcasts, 3.9% have listened for 1–2 years, 27.9% have listened for 3–5 years, 45.9% have listened for 6–10 years, and 22.2% have listened for more than 10 years. The four most popular podcast genres are true crime (91.8%), comedy (80.5%), history (52.0%), and society and culture (45.3%). See Tables 1, 2, and 3 for more.

Table 1. Average number of podcasts per week.

| On an average week, how many podcasts do you listen to? | Count | Percentage |
|---|-------|------------|
| 1–2 | 253 | 23.2% |
| 3–4 | 421 | 38.7% |
| 5 or more | 400 | 36.7% |
| Total | 1,089 | 100% |

Table 2. Time listening to podcasts.

| How long have you been listening to podcasts? | Count | Percentage |
|---|-------|------------|
| 1–2 years | 41 | 3.9% |
| 3–5 years | 293 | 27.9% |
| 6–10 years | 482 | 45.9% |
| More than 10 years | 233 | 22.2% |
| Total | 1,049 | 100% |

Table 3. Types of genres listened to by participants.

| Genre | Count | Percentage | Genre | Count | Percentage |
|---------------------|-------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------------|
| True crime | 971 | 91.8% | Government | 140 | 13.2% |
| Comedy | 852 | 80.5% | Sports | 121 | 11.4% |
| History | 550 | 52% | Other | 96 | 9.1% |
| Society and culture | 479 | 45.3% | Arts | 94 | 8.9% |
| News | 391 | 37% | Technology | 87 | 8.2% |
| TV and film | 337 | 31.9% | Health and Fitness | 80 | 7.6% |
| Science | 249 | 23.5% | Religion and Spirituality | 74 | 7% |
| Fiction | 218 | 20.6% | Leisure | 53 | 5% |
| Education | 180 | 17% | Business | 43 | 4.1% |
| Music | 177 | 16.7% | Kids and Family | 20 | 1.9% |

Note: Results based on 1,058 survey respondents.

In relation to RQ1, just under 40% of those who hear news content on non-news podcasts (e.g., comedy, true crime, history) either strongly agree or somewhat agree that the news content is trustworthy. Close to a third neither agree nor disagree, 23% somewhat disagree, and about 7% strongly disagree (see Table 4).

Table 4. Trust in news heard on non-news podcasts.

| I trust the news I hear on non-news podcasts (e.g., true crime, comedy, history) | | |
|--|-------|------------|
| | Count | Percentage |
| Strongly agree | 53 | 6.2% |
| Somewhat agree | 286 | 33.5% |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 262 | 30.7% |
| Somewhat disagree | 196 | 23% |
| Strongly disagree | 57 | 6.7% |
| Total | 854 | 100% |

Note: Non-news podcasts may contain news content, they are not identified as a news podcast.

In terms of RQ2, among those who listen to news podcasts, over two-thirds strongly agree or somewhat agree that the news content is trustworthy. A little more than 20% neither agree nor disagree, and about 13% either somewhat disagree or strongly disagree that the news content on news podcasts is trustworthy (see Table 5).

Table 5. Trust in news content heard on news podcasts.

| I trust the news I hear on news podcasts (e.g., <i>The Daily</i> , <i>Pod Save America</i> , <i>Fox News Rundown</i>) | | |
|--|-------|------------|
| | Count | Percentage |
| Strongly agree | 50 | 15.2% |
| Somewhat agree | 164 | 49.7% |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 72 | 21.8% |
| Somewhat disagree | 34 | 10.3% |
| Strongly disagree | 10 | 3% |
| Total | 303 | 100% |

Note: News podcasts are identified as news programs.

In terms of RQ3, when examining the relationship between listeners of different podcast genres and the level of trustworthiness of news heard on podcasts, regardless of genre, there is a statistically significant relationship among those who listen to comedy podcasts. That is, listeners of comedy podcasts are about 30% likely to strongly agree or somewhat agree news content heard on podcasts is trustworthy. Slightly less than half are likely to neither agree nor disagree, and about a quarter are likely to somewhat disagree or strongly agree. Similarly, there is a statistically significant relationship between those who listen to history podcasts and the level of trustworthiness of news content heard on podcasts. Similar to comedy listeners, about 30% are likely to strongly agree or somewhat agree that news content heard on history podcasts is trustworthy. Slightly less than one-half are likely to neither agree nor agree, and about 20% are likely to either strongly disagree or somewhat disagree. About 75% of those who listen to news podcasts are likely to strongly agree or somewhat agree that news content heard on news podcasts is trustworthy. Slightly over 10% are likely to neither agree nor disagree, and about 13% are somewhat likely to disagree or strongly disagree news content on news podcasts is trustworthy (see Tables 6–8).

Table 6. Relationship between comedy podcast listeners and trust in news heard on podcasts.

| Comedy podcast listeners | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------|
| | Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree | Total |
| Count | 31 | 178 | 327 | 130 | 44 | 874 |
| Percentage | 4.4% | 25.1% | 46.1% | 18.3% | 6.2% | 100% |

Notes: Chi-squared test; statistical significance (p -value) = .00162; sample size = 874.

Table 7. Relationship between history podcast listeners and trust in news heard on podcasts.

| History podcast listeners | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------|
| | Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree | Total |
| Count | 29 | 122 | 226 | 66 | 30 | 429 |
| Percentage | 6.1% | 25.8% | 47.8% | 14% | 6.3% | 100% |

Notes: Chi-squared test; statistical significance (p -value) = .00838; effect size (Cramér's V) = .125; sample size = 874.

Table 8. Relationship between news podcast listeners and trust in news heard on podcasts.

| News podcast listeners | | | | | | |
|------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------|
| | Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree | Total |
| Count | 156 | 98 | 42 | 29 | 17 | 342 |
| Percentage | 45.6% | 28.7% | 12.3% | 8.5% | 5% | 100% |

Notes: Chi-squared test; statistical significance (p -value) = .0000390; effect size (Cramér's V) = .171; sample size = 874.

In relation to RQ4, almost all of the 1,056 respondents said they listen to podcasts for entertainment (95.7% or 1,029). Close to three quarters said they tune in for information (74.1% or 779), followed by passing the time (62.2% or 654), relaxation (58.6% or 616), education (53.3% or 560), and escape (37.6% or 395). The remaining reasons include habit (34% or 357), social interaction/companionship (22.1% or 232), convenience (21.8% or 229), and 4.9% or 51 individuals selected other reasons they listen to podcasts (see Figure 1).

There are overlapping genres and reasons why people listen to different genre podcasts. Entertainment, information, education, and relaxation are the top four reasons people listen to comedy, society and culture, true crime, TV and film, arts, science, fiction, and government podcasts. People listen to sports, education, business, health and fitness, and religion and spirituality podcasts for the same four reasons. Entertainment, information, education, and passing the time are the top four reasons people listen to news, history, leisure, and technology podcasts. Entertainment, information, pass the time, and education are the top four reasons people listen to music and kids and family podcasts. The fourth most popular reason people listen to kids and family podcasts (education) is tied to escape. The fourth most popular reason people listen to religion and spirituality podcasts (relaxation) is to pass the time (see Table 9).

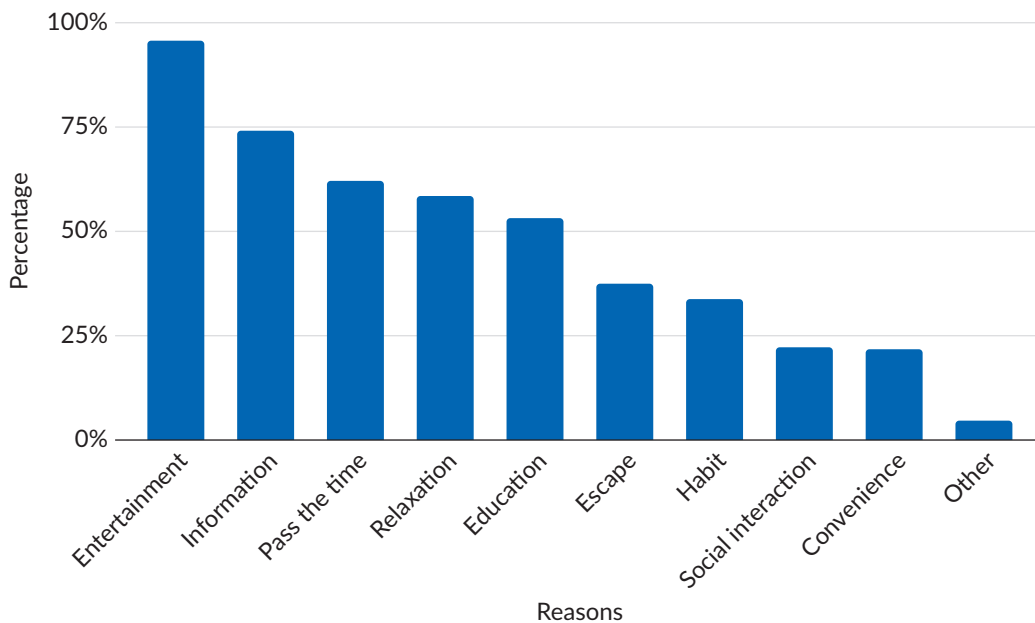


Figure 1. Why people listen to podcasts.

Table 9. Top four reasons people listen to podcasts based on genre.

| | |
|---------|--|
| Genres | Comedy, society and culture, true crime, TV and film, arts, science, fiction, and government Sports, education, business, health and fitness, and religion and spirituality |
| Reasons | 1. Entertainment 2. Information 3. Education 4. Relaxation |
| Genres | News, leisure, history, and technology |
| Reasons | 1. Entertainment 2. Information 3. Education 4. Pass the time |
| Genres | Music and kids and family |
| Reasons | 1. Entertainment 2. Information 3. Pass the time 4. Education |

Notes: Education as a reason for kids and family podcasts is tied with escape; relaxation as a reason for religion and spirituality podcasts is tied with passing the time.

6. Discussion

6.1. Trust and News Content

Findings from this study expand on Shearer et al. (2023) by indicating that people exhibit a noticeable level of trust in the news content they hear on non-news podcasts (e.g., comedy, true crime, history). This may, in part, reflect a continuing shift toward the use of alternative sources for news content. That is, similar to how we use

social media, some people may perceive the source as reliable—even if it is not from a news organization (Kang et al., 2011; Karlsen & Aalberg, 2021). Study findings indicate a similar connection between the podcast host and listener trust. One participant stated: “I trust the podcast personalities more than a big news corporation.” Another wrote, “I feel like I can better vet who I am getting info from and learn their sources and resource habits to verify their findings in podcasts.”

Trust in news content heard on news podcasts remains high, and more people are tuning in to news podcasts more than previously noted (Shearer et al., 2023). This may be based on the overall rise in podcast listenership (Edison Research, 2024b) coupled with the popularity of news shows. Of the top 20 iTunes podcasts used for this research, eight were news or new-related shows. Some programs are associated with individuals (e.g., Tucker Carlson or Ben Shapiro) who are viewed as trustworthy among certain audiences. Still others are digital extensions of traditional media (e.g., Jon Stewart, Rachael Maddow, or *The New York Times*) which, among listeners, may already be established as reliable. For example, one person stated, “I listen to these people every day and understand what they believe better.” Someone else said, “The podcast I listen to is put together by *The New York Times*. Hence, I believe their source.”

Aside from news podcasts, comedy and history shows are more likely to be useful for relaying news content. Listeners tend to trust news they hear on comedy podcasts, which may, in part, be based on the primary element of comedy—storytelling. Story details, even from a comedic standpoint, can heighten the perceived trust and credibility of a program host. Plus, humor helps to break down difficult concepts and makes them easier to understand (Park, 2017). An informal conversation style (Rae, 2023) coupled with the immersion of one’s voice in a story can elevate a listener–show–host connection (Jorgensen, 2021; Rae, 2023). Similarly, when news is heard on history podcasts, listeners are more likely to trust what they hear on the digital airwaves. The narrative style heard on history podcasts can transform dry subjects into compelling stories. Many shows are hosted by historians or enthusiasts with deep knowledge of the subject matter, and they often invite experts to provide additional insights, lending credibility to the content. They also cite their research and provide listeners with resources so they may further delve into the topics discussed (Picard & Marsillo, 2018).

Entertainment, regardless of show genre, is the top reason why people listen to podcasts. This makes sense given the same has been found throughout the years (Craig et al., 2023; McClung & Johnson, 2010; Perks & Turner, 2019; Swanson, 2012). People also tune in to access information, for relaxation, to pass the time, and for educational purposes. However, the motivations for listening to podcasts are almost the same for all genres. Perhaps we have entered an arena somewhat like radio or TV where the variety is endless, but the reasons for tuning in are not nearly as diverse.

Unlike previous studies, fewer listeners had reported tuning in because of convenience. Arguably, this is due to advances from when podcasting was a novel idea. Today, we access almost everything we need from our mobile phones—a far cry from viewing an MP3 as convenient. Also, while the idea of connecting with podcast hosts is still apparent, social connections may also be associated with fellow listeners as noted by Perks and Turner (2019), and as evidenced by the highly-populated fan groups used for this study. Overall, maybe podcasting, and its “not so newness,” is entering the socialization realm of what we have seen with television programs. For example, fans of the podcast *My Favorite Murder* self-identify as Murderinos (Van Driel, 2022), similar to how viewers identified as TV characters from *Sex and the City* by claiming to either be a “Sam,” “a Carrie,” “a Miranda,” or “a Charlotte” (Mason, 2023).

6.2. Special Note: Trust in Podcast News Content and AI

The study findings confirm listeners believe news to be reliable if they hear it from a person or an organization they trust. However, with AI at the forefront of our lives, we should investigate how this technology will change our perception of trust. Also, how would we then identify trust? As seen below, AI news technologies are already in our newsrooms:

RadioNewsAI helps your news team get more done, faster. Generate AI News Anchors for your radio station, based on your own local source for news, weather, traffic and more. Rewrite stories, automate updates and deliver it with a trusted station voice. (RadioNewsAI, n.d.)

When we hear news on podcasts—on all genres—can we really trust what we hear, and more importantly, do we know who is talking? It is imperative to investigate podcast news content and the use of AI. We primarily consume podcasts with only our ears, that is, we do not typically rely on visuals, and given our sense of trust with those we hear on the airwaves, any nuances indicating the use of AI in programs may or may not be noticed.

7. Limitations and Future Research

This study is based on a convenience sample which does not represent the total number of podcast listeners. The data was gathered shortly before the 2024 US presidential campaign, which might have impacted the study findings. This study measures trustworthiness based on the program genre and does not fully take into consideration the podcast host, and the connection between listener and host. Thus, further examination of the credibility of news content based on the program host would be beneficial. In addition, a combined analysis of podcast host, program genre, and news trustworthiness may also shed light on how listeners decide to trust or distrust news content. In terms of future research, it would be helpful to focus on a more diverse population as program preferences differ by demographic variables. Also, gaining a deeper understanding of the gratifications associated with each genre using qualitative methods may offer greater insight. Finally, this is an exploratory study that will ideally serve as a springboard for future trust and podcast news content research.

8. Conclusion

Most podcast listeners trust news they hear on news podcasts, and some listeners trust news they hear on non-news podcasts. Reasons for this may include an overall increase in podcast listenership, the growing number of news podcasts, and storytelling approaches used in podcasts. In terms of genres trusted for news content, comedy, news, and history podcasts are more likely to be seen as providing trustworthy news content. Motivations for listening to the different podcast genres are mostly similar, with minimal variations among certain genres. The interpretation of news heard in different genres of podcasts is especially significant since listening to podcasts may be associated with increased concentration, creating mental imagery, building connections, enhancing understanding, and creating habits (Fitzgerald, 2024). These findings, when combined with trust in news content heard on different genre podcasts, afford podcasters an opportunity to impact listener behavior in terms of prompting people to learn more about news issues. This is especially significant considering tuning in has been shown to alter listener opinions about the news.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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