# But First, A Word from Our Sponsor: Engagement with Podcasts and their Advertising

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Calder and Malthouse (2008) developed operationalizations for different media engagement experiences. Using an SEM-based approach, we examine various podcast engagement types, usage, and advertising engagement to see how these constructs are related. Globally, we find different engagement experiences are associated with both positive and negative outcomes for advertising engagement, regular usage is associated with less ad interference, and certain engagement experiences are associated with more regular podcast usage. Multigroup analysis then reveals more particular relationships between specific engagement experiences, usage and ad outcomes for the True Crime, Comedy, and Long-Format Conversation with Public Intellectual podcast genres.


*Keywords: podcasting, engagement, advertising, podcasts*

Podcasting is not a new phenomenon, but has only fairly recently begun to attract the attention of academics and marketers. Some postulate that the strength of the medium may be due to the propensity of the format to be associated with high levels of engagement (e.g. Perks et al., 2019; Siu, 2022; Nielsen, 2022). But what is engagement? In contrast to other scholars and practitioners who may tend to focus more on the effects of the various ideas proffered of what constitutes engagement, Calder and Malthouse (2008) have attempted to focus on the concept of engagement itself, conceptualizing engagement as the sum of the motivational

forces consumers experience when using a media vehicle. Prior research has shown users experiencing specific engagement types in different media can have positive—and sometimes negative—effects on advertising encountered within that media (e.g. Calder et al., 2016; Malthouse et al., 2007; Calder et al., 2009). Engagement with podcasts and their associated advertising has yet to be studied in this regard. Is podcast use associated with this unique conceptualization (and operationalization) of engagement, and how does engagement with podcasts impact engagement with advertising on the medium? Do certain engagement experience types better predict advertising engagement on podcasts and podcast usage? How is usage related to advertising engagement? Does engagement with podcasts and their associated advertising vary by type of podcast listened to or watched? This research aims to answer those questions; the results give indications as to the modes of engagement that may offer advertisers the best chance at reaching customers in the medium by looking at genre and audience characteristics in terms of how they engage with podcasts.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

**Podcasts**

The birth of podcasts can be traced back to 2000, when developers Dave Winer and Adam Curry adapted a then-new syndication technology, RSS ("Really Simple Syndication"), to be able to direct users to audio files as well as text-based web pages (Quirk, 2015). Soon after, the term "podcasting" was thrust into the public consciousness by journalist Ben Hammersley in an article for The Guardian (Quirk, 2015), a melding of the terms "iPod" and "broadcast" (McClung & Johnson, 2010). Podcasts as a medium have enjoyed relatively steady growth, even given public perceptions to the contrary (Bottomley, 2015). It was not until the attention given to the success of the true-crime podcast series Serial in 2014 that popular and academic discourse began to catch up to reality, with 2015 beginning a so-called "golden age of podcasting" where the Serial phenomenon was "perhaps a sign that we had reached the tipping point for a medium in maturity" (Berry, 2015, p. 171). In May 2022, Nielsen reported that the podcast user base had increased by 40% over the previous three years, and that 51% of this base said they started listening to podcasts within the last two years — this growth occurred along with an increase in what Nielsen termed "engagement" (Nielsen, 2022).

Along with primarily mobile consumption (Quirk, 2015), another particular distinctive of the podcast format is their implicit on-demand quality; like other forms of so-called internet-based "new media," users often utilize subscription functions of podcast-catching applications and thus select content they are interested in, underlying an element of consumer focal control (Haygood, 2007) also inherent to the format.

Much early research on podcasts has centered on their use in educational settings (e.g. Matava et al., 2013; Fietze, 2009). Moreover, in an age where attention spans are reported to be on the decline, some of the most popular podcasts are of the "long form" variety, where shows can easily run longer than two hours, and many shows deal not with simple amusement or "low" content, but rather relatively complex social, scientific, and political phenomena that often require more effort and nuance to understand. The popularity of the public intellectual figures (and their podcasts) inside and around the formerly so-called "Intellectual Dark Web" (Weiss, 2018) are good examples of both of these elements (long-format conversations with public intellectuals). What explains the popularity of this medium, especially given the fact that it would seem to be "outdated" in multiple senses? Applying media

engagement theory (Calder & Malthouse, 2008) to the phenomenon may offer some answers, especially for those working in the marketing space, as not much is presently known about the podcast phenomenon in terms of advertising effectiveness, placement strategy, format, and overall engagement of podcast-borne marketing activity in general compared to other more traditional channels.

Three of the most popular genres or types are examples of the Longer-Format Conversational show (often hosted by and/or featuring interviews with public intellectuals and experts in various subject matters), True Crime (i.e. "accounts of actual homicides presented in a more narrative, stylized format than traditional news" [Pavelko & Myrick, 2020, p. 151, citing Durham, Elrod, & Kinkade, 1995], and Comedy. As of March 2023, four Long-Format Conversational/Public Intellectual podcasts (e.g. The Jordan B. Peterson Podcast, Freakonomics Radio, Huberman Lab, On Purpose) were among the Top 25 most popular global pods according to Chartable.com, with five shows on Spotify's top 25 U.S. charts in this area (Spotify has exclusive deals with some of the more popular podcasters, like "The Joe Rogan Experience"); six "True Crime" shows appear in the Chartable top 25 (e.g. "Crime Junkie," "My Favorite Murder," "Dateline NBC"); Spotify also lists six such shows in its top 25, including "The Deck Investigates," while for Comedy, Spotify's top 25 lists three shows (e.g. "Distractible") and Chartable four (e.g. "Smartless," "Conan O'Brien Needs a Friend," "Fly On The Wall with Dana Carvey and David Spade") (*Podcast charts & rankings,* 2023; Spotify, 2023).

**Predictors of podcast use and conventional engagement.** Recent studies have found factors such as entertainment (Vilceanu et al., 2021; Craig et al., 2023; McClung & Johnson, 2010) multitasking (Perks & Turner, 2019; Perks et al., 2019; Vilceanu et al., 2021), learning new things (Craig et al., 2023; Vilceanu et al., 2021), escapism (Craig et al., 2023), parasocial relationships (Schlütz and Hedder, 2022; Perks & Turner, 2019; Vilceanu et al., 2021), and social opportunities/support and connections with other listeners (Pavelko & Myrick, 2020; McClung & Johnson, 2010; Perks & Turner, 2019) to be among drivers of podcast use. Perks and Turner (2019) found evidence of parasocial relationship building with hosts, as connections with them as well as other listeners were mentioned as part of the experience of enjoyment of podcasts, as did Vilceanu et al. (2021), while Pavelko and Myrick investigated how perceived social support among "My Favorite Murder" listeners encouraged openness about mental health (2020). Vilceanu et al. found that driving, working, and relaxing were most often reported by a U.S. sample while listening to podcasts (2021).

**Podcasts as an advertising vehicle.** From relatively slow beginnings (e.g. McGowan, 2010), according to the Interactive Advertising Bureau, more than $1 billion was spent on podcast advertising in 2021, with revenues growing faster in this area than in the internet advertising market in general (72% vs. 35% year-over-year) (IAB, 2022). According to MRI-Simmons, more recent U.S. data indicates the average age of those who have listened to podcasts in the last 30 days is 39.6 years, with 1.9 children in the household and relatively small differences among racial groups when it comes to podcast listenership; they are slightly more likely to be male (index 107) vs. female (index 94), with those in the 25-34 age group 70% more likely to be podcast users vs. the overall national sample (2020). They are also 66% more likely to have completed a graduate degree, well-represented in the $100k - $249k (index 137) and $250-$499k (index 160) household income groups, with a relatively high average HHI of $137,100; social media users are 19% more likely to be podcast listeners vs. the national average (MRI-Simmons, 2020). Advertising has increased along with listenership, with Statista reporting that as of the fourth quarter of 2019, the average number of ads in podcasts was 3.2, up from 3.1 in the preceding

quarter (Statista, 2019). The Interactive Advertising Bureau reported in 2021 that 55% of ads in podcasts here host-read ads rather than pre-recorded, increasing from 35% and 40% in the two previous years (Osgood, 2022). Snell reported that Apple Podcast app data reveal "most people listen to most episodes of a podcast, and only a small percentage skip the ads" (2019), a finding echoed by Vilceanu et al. (2021) and Moe (2022). Crucially, McClung and Johnson postulated heavier users tended to be supportive of podcast advertisers (2010). Perceived relationships and familiarity of hosts seems to impact advertising perceptions. Brinson and Lemon found the parasocial relationship listeners had with podcast hosts was related to trust, brand recall, and engagement, especially among host-read ads (2022); this affinity with the host positively affecting advertising perceptions was also noted by Moe (2021) and Moe (2022), who also found evidence that host-read advertisements were skipped less often than other types of ads, with the effect stronger for true crime and comedy podcasts. Brezbaruah & Brahmbhatt (2022) found Indian podcast users' attitudes toward ads were significantly impacted by informative and entertaining ads; those with a "credible" ad value framework did not have a significant effect on ad attitudes.

### Engagement As a Motivational Force

Media engagement in this unique conceptualization is based on Higgins' (2006) work on engagement, its distinction from simple "liking" or hedonic experiences, and its relation to motivational strength to perform actions. Calder and Malthouse (2008), working from Higgins, posit that it is "engagement with a TV program that causes someone to want to watch it, to be attentive to it, to recommend it to a friend, or to be disappointed if it were no longer on the air" (2008, p. 2). They equate engagement with "a sense of involvement, of being connected with something… a fundamental insight [is] engagement comes from experiencing something like a magazine or TV program in a certain way" (p. 2-3, 2008). They go on to state that engagement is essentially an outgrowth of an experience, something that stands out from the ordinary state or stream of experiences, but one that is not only memorable or outstanding but rather one that involves, for example, a "*Talking About and Sharing* experience" with someone else though building a social relationship (2008, p. 3)--that is, it is the sharing of the experience with another that elevates an experience to the level of engagement—"it is more about what the content does for the consumer more than what the consumer likes about it per se… [it is] the sum of the motivational experiences consumers have with the media product" (p. 5). Additionally, they then describe the motivational factors (and operationalizations) that make up different engagement experience types, including "Talking About and Sharing," "Utilitarian," "Makes Me Smarter," "Credible and Safe," "Timeout," "Inspirational," "Positive Emotional," "Entertainment" and more (in addition to negative Avoidance experiences that are so delineated) (p. 10-16). Altogether, Calder and Malthouse delineate (and suggest operationalizations for) 16 different engagement experience types, including two advertising-specific engagement experiences, "Ad Attention" and "Ad Interference" (2008).

Calder and Malthouse have integrated this "engagement"-centric approach to media in general to advertising that exists within the media, finding a relationship between engagement types and advertising perceptions and engagement, and have suggested further study in different types of media (2008). For example, they cite research by Malthouse, Calder, and Tamhane (2007) that shows audience members who engage with magazines in a "Utilitarian" or "Make Me Smarter" mode of engagement tend to score ads in the magazine higher on standard copy testing measurements, indicating better effects for the brand due to the ad, and further cite research by Calder, Malthouse, and Schaedel (2009) that

shows engaged website users tend to be more positive of ad sponsors and more likely to click on the ad (2008) — in short, "the research indicates that consumer have experiences with ads in the same way that they have experiences in editorial content" (p. 26) and that often this results in positive perceptions of advertising. Calder et al. (2016) also found positive associations with certain engagement experience types and television advertising measures. However, citing studies by Wang and Calder (2006), Calder and Malthouse (2008) posited sometimes engagement (specifically a transportation experience) can result in negative outcomes for advertised brands as well. Among the ramifications they draw for marketers is the fact that taking into account engagement of media could potentially change the traditional calculations and decisions involved in media buying, for example, as well as how engagement with brands themselves can be enhanced through certain high-level engagement types indicative of new media: "*if a media vehicle helps engage consumer experiences, the ad is a better contact...if new media and new technologies can be used to engage consumers more, advertising should move in this direction*" (2008, p. 30). Thus, from the Calder, Malthouse and colleagues line of research (as well as others noted above, e.g. Brinson and Lemon, 2022; Moe, 2022) a general sense of engagement's association with positive advertising effects and effectiveness seems to be evident.

In addition to podcast use in general, it is also possible certain podcast types or genres, like "True Crime" or longer-format shows and episodes focusing on discussions with public intellectuals on a variety of topics, are even more popular with those with high levels of engagement; moreover, different engagement experience types could be more or less relevant for users of different types of podcasts. How these engagement experiences, types of podcasts, usage, and effects on advertising may interact and relate to one another isn't currently understood.

**Rationale**

Though podcasting has been examined in educational and medical settings, there has been less attention paid to the format in a marketing/advertising perspective until recently, and research is still nascent in this area. Additionally, while prior research on engagement has focused on other media formats, podcasting has yet to be examined in this context. Following Calder and Malthouse's admonition to study the engagement phenomenon and its relationship to advertising perceptions and engagement in different formats and media (2008), the current study seeks to sheds more light on the relationship between the podcasts medium, podcast user engagement levels, and how listeners of podcasts as well as specific types of shows engage with advertising. To our knowledge, this psychological/motivational engagement concept, its relationship to usage levels, and how usage relates to advertising engagement in any medium has not yet been investigated.

**RQs and Hypotheses**

H1: Podcast engagement will have a positive relationship with advertising engagement measures.

RQ1a: Is engagement related to podcast usage?

RQ1b: Does podcast usage mediate the relationship between podcasting engagement and advertising engagement?

RQ2a: Does type or genre of podcast listened to affect the relationship between podcast engagement and advertising engagement?

RQ2b: Does type or genre of podcast listened to affect the relationship between podcast engagement and usage?

RQ2c: Does type or genre of podcast listened to affect how usage mediates podcasting engagement and advertising engagement?

## METHODS

A randomly selected, representative sample of 3250 student email addresses from a large public university in the mid/southwest was procured and an IRB-approved survey was fielded to them consisting of 32 measures and multi-item scales. This population represents a large percentage of the age bracket with the highest podcast usage rates in the U.S. according to Edison Research (56% of those aged 12-34) (Aslam, 2023), and follows other recent research in this area (e.g. Craig et al., 2023; Brooks et al., 2022). Items included demographics, social media and other media type usage, podcast-related usage measures and various engagement measures including advertising-related measures. A drawing for a $50 Visa gift card was offered as an incentive to those who completed the survey and agreed to supply a contact email address. After removing largely incomplete responses, 217 surveys with a median completion time of a little over 12 minutes comprised the initial dataset for a response rate of 6.7%. The mean age of respondents was 24.97 (SD=8.89). 35% (n=75) were male, 62.6% (n=134) were female, while 2.4% (n=5) indicated they were non-binary or preferred not to say. Among those that answered, current academic classification was fairly even among undergraduates (Freshman: 20.3%, n=44; Sophomore: 14.7%, n=32; Junior: 14.3%, n=31; Senior: 17.5%, n=38) with graduate students well-represented (32.7%, n=71). Media platform usage was measured via 7-point semantic differential scales where 1 is "never" and 7 is "very frequently"; the top platform type reported was streaming services like Netflix or Hulu ($M$ = 5.52, SD=1.68) followed by YouTube (M = 5.27, $SD$ = 1.69), Instagram ($M$ = 4.94, $SD$ = 2.13), Snapchat ($M$ = 4.21, $SD$ = 2.44), Books (physical or digital) ($M$ = 3.87, $SD$ = 2.10), Facebook ($M$ = 3.55, $SD$ = 2.15), TikTok ($M$ = 3.42, $SD$ = 2.55), News websites ($M$ = 3.35, $SD$ = 1.79), Twitter ($M$ = 3.27, $SD$ = 2.23), LinkedIn ($M$ = 2.14, $SD$ = 1.59), and Clubhouse ($M$ = 1.02, $SD$ = .21).

**Podcast Use and Type**

Base podcast usage was measured by a ratio-level "About how many total episodes of podcasts do you listen to or watch in a single week?" item along with the number of days per week spent listening to podcasts (regular usage). Genre was measured via a typology provided by Nielsen (2018) following other academic research in podcasting (e.g. Craig et al., 2023) along with special categories of "True Crime" and "Longer format cross-subject conversational shows featuring public intellectuals."

**Engagement Measures**

Relevant engagement experiences were measured utilizing published multi-item scales (Calder and Malthouse, 2008). Adapted to fit the podcast medium, these items utilized five-point Likert-type scales where 1 is "strongly disagree" and 5 is "strongly agree" as anchors. Engagement experience types included Talking About and Sharing (e.g. "Listening or watching this podcast gives me something to talk about"), Utilitarian (e.g. "Podcasts give good tips and advice"), Makes Me Smarter (e.g. "Even if I disagree with information in this podcast, I feel l have learned something valuable"), Time-out (e.g. "Podcasts are an escape"), Inspirational (e.g. "Podcasts inspire me in my own life"), Positive Emotional (e.g. "Some podcasts touch me deep down"), and Entertainment (e.g. "Podcasts are definitely entertaining"), along with Advertising Attention (e.g. "This podcast has ads about things I actually care about") and Ad Interference (e.g. "I don't like the number of ads on podcasts").

When asked, "What best describes your podcast use," 11.1% of respondents (n=24) indicated "I have never listened to or watched podcasts," 6.0% (n=12) indicated "I used to but not now," 48.4%

(n=105) characterized their usage as "every once in awhile," 17.5% (n=38) indicated "somewhat regularly," while 17.1% (n=37) indicated "very regularly" (note those participants that indicated they had not used podcasts were subsequently excluded from path analyses/hypothesis testing). Among those currently reporting using podcasts, the mean number of days of the week of reported usage was 2.28 (SD=2.01); the mean number of episodes reported was 4.75 (SD=5.73), indicating a rather large variance in the data on these measures. Respondents reported more audio usage in general (64.2%, n=115) vs. video (18.4%, n=33) vs. "about the same for both" (17.3%, n=31). Longer format cross-subject conversational shows featuring public intellectuals and Sports and recreation both averaged more than 100 minutes weekly for our sample. There were also relatively large standard deviations for each type measured overall, indicating a great deal of spread in the distribution on this measure in a fairly uniform manner (see Table 1 below).

Table 1
*Podcast Type and Minutes Listened*

| Type | Percentage | N | Mean Minutes Per Week, SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| True crime | 35.0% | 76 | 75.83, 67.023 |
| Longer format cross-subject conversational shows featuring public intellectuals | 45.6% | 99 | 104.34, 126.35 |
| News and politics | 38.7% | 84 | 87.52, 90.05 |
| Comedy | 43.3% | 94 | 79.04, 100.32 |
| TV, film, popular culture | 28.8% | 62 | 68.98, 97.24 |
| Music | 19.8% | 43 | 84.97, 157.92 |
| Education | 21.2% | 46 | 52.95, 54.35 |
| Religion and spirituality | 19.4% | 42 | 52.50, 47.53 |
| Technology | 17.1% | 37 | 40.91, 45.31 |
| Arts, literature | 11.5% | 25 | 43.00, 48.66 |
| Society and culture | 23.0% | 50 | 52.04, 63.56 |
| Sports and recreation | 14.7% | 32 | 122.26, 191.13 |
| Business | 11.5% | 25 | 38.57, 32.53 |
| Science and medicine | 15.7% | 34 | 44.74, 60.58 |
| Government | 10.6% | 23 | 73.48, 150.12 |
| Health and living | 17.1% | 37 | 49.38, 64.45 |

| Games and hobbies | 12.0% | 26 | 98.42, 117.43 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Kids and family | 5.1% | 12 | 60.57, 93.13 |

## CFA/Measurement Model

According to Calder and Malthouse (2008), the engagement experience measures used previously "have been shown to have good psychometric properties" (p. 17), thus confirmatory factor analysis procedures were done to find evidence for a valid measurement model prior to hypothesis testing and RQ exploration via a path analysis. There was a small number of missing values among the dataset on the engagement factors, with a high of 1.4% of cases on some variables (well below Hair et al.'s [2006] 10% cutoff for removal). Little's MCAR test was not significant for all engagement measures ($x^2$=1668.150, d.f. = 1628, $p$ = .239), indicating missing data was completely at random; "MCAR data are less likely to introduce serious bias, regardless of the method chosen to deal with missing observations" (Musil et al., 2002). Following Gaskin (2011), a full dataset was thus obtained using regression imputation through AMOS; regression-based imputation techniques have been shown to provide better estimates than mean substitution or listwise deletion (Musil et al., 2002). All indicators for seven engagement factors and the two ad-related factors (Ad Attention and Ad Interference) were input as a first-order model with covariances between each latent factor. Initial model fit statistics did not consistently indicate good fit utilizing conventional cutoff values ($x^2$=2280.277, d.f.= 1289, $p$ < .000; PCMIN/DF = 1.769; TLI = .866; CFI = .874; RMSEA =. 060; PCLOSE = .000; SRMR = .0647). The calculated chi-square value was significant indicating poor model fit; however, large sample sizes can make the chi-square test alone inadequate to assess fit (Byrne, 2005). The PCMIN/DF of 1.769 is considered good, however, per Hu and Bentler (1999); The TLI and CFI should be closer to .9 to reach conventional cutoff levels for good fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999). The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was .060 indicating relatively good fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999; Byrne [2005] cites Browne & Cudeck, 1983 as stating RMSEA less than .05 is indicative of a well-fitting model); however the PCLOSE was significant, indicating poor fit. The standardized RMR of .0647 indicated moderate fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999; Byrne [2005] posits SRMS less than .08 indicates a well-fitting model). All items loaded on their respective theoretical factors to a significant degree, however, examination of standardized factor loadings showed a number of items loading on their respective latent factors at less than .69 (Talk4, Util1, Util6, Util7, Smart3, Timeout1, Timeout2, Timeout8, Ent1, Ent5, AdAtt2, AdAtt6, AdInterf2, AdInterf7); these were removed from the model per Knekta (2019) and Gaskin (2011). Modification indices also indicated improved fit by covarying a few sets of related error terms, and these were allowed as they were all on the same factor and made theoretical sense (e.g. measuring the same construct); thus these proceeded in a stepwise fashion following Gaskin (2011). The resulting model rendered much better overall fit statistics ($x^2$=967.578, d.f.= 615, $p$ < .000; PCMIN/DF = 1.573; TLI = .932; CFI = .941; RMSEA =. 052; PCLOSE = .338; SRMR = .0454).

Next we examined the standardized residual covariance matrix. Though some scholars (e.g. Gaskin, 2011) recommend a rather liberal .4 cutoff for removal of those factors exhibiting a pattern of standardized residual covariances across other factors, others (Byrne, 2010, citing Joreskog & Sorbom, 1993) recommend a cutoff of 2.58; thus we looked for factors displaying residuals greater than 1.0. This

resulted in removal of AdInterf1 (residuals exceeded cutoff across 8 other items), AdInterf6 (10 items), Timeout7 (9 items) and Util3 (8 items). The resulting model fit statistics improved ($x^2$=730.565, d.f.= 480, $p$ < .000; PCMIN/DF = 1.22; TLI = .944; CFI = .952; RMSEA =. 049 [90 CI: .042, .056]; PCLOSE = .570; SRMR = .0420) and now all displayed great or good fit according to traditional cutoff values (Byrne, 2005; Hu and Bentler, 1999). As Calder and Malthouse (2008) proposed individual engagement experiences would be part of a larger overall engagement construct, a second-order model was tested with all seven engagement factors loading on an overall "positive engagement" factor which then was allowed to covary with the advertising-related latent factors. The resulting model also displayed good/great fit ($x^2$=834.255, d.f.= 506, $p$ < .000; PCMIN/DF = 1.649; TLI = .930; CFI = .937; RMSEA =. 055 [90 CI: .048, .061]; PCLOSE = .117; SRMR = .0522); however, a chi-square difference test ($x^2$=103.69, d.f.= 26, $p$ < .000) revealed the first-order model fit significantly better. Still, the second-order model's fit indices provide empirical evidence to support Calder and Malthouse's (2008) theoretical notion of an overall "positive engagement" construct.

## Tests of Normality and Outliers

Skewness values for all observed indicators were all between -2 and 2 and thus consistent with normality (Lomax & Hahs-Vaughn, 2012). Kurtosis values were also all between -2 and 2 and consistent with normality as well (Lomax & Hahs-Vaughn, 2012). However, total multivariate kurtosis was well above the 5.0 threshold (Byrne, 2010, citing Bentler, 2005) at 233.277, and a critical ratio of above 1.96 (34.727) indicating possible multivariate non-normality. Further examination of the dataset for outliers via Mahalanobis distance then proceeded. Following Kline (2016), Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), and Pituch and Stevens (2016), seven cases with a CDF for a central chi-square and an associated p-value (p1 column) of less than .001 were thus dropped to satisfy multivariate normality.

The Engagement factors explain a good amount of variance, with squared multiple correlations ranging from .751 (Makes Me Smarter) to .899 (Positive Emotional), as well as reliability measures with McDonald's omegas ranging from .836 (Talking About and Sharing) to .970 (Makes Me Smarter). McDonald's omega is preferred over Cronbach's alpha due to the latter's assumption of essential tau-equivalence (Hayes & Coutts, 2020). Additionally, Advertising Attention ($M$ = 2.00, $SD$ = 1.15) and Ad Interference ($M$ = 3.28, $SD$ = 1.42) displayed good reliabilities as well (Omegas of .846 and .861, respectively). Average variance extracted for all factors was greater than .5, ranging from .618 for Timeout to .764 for Inspiration, indicating convergent validity. Maximum shared variance was less than average variance extracted for all factors except Timeout (MSV=.696, AVE=.618), indicating some possible trouble with discriminant validity on that particular item. However, as Timeout is among the engagement measures that are all part of a higher order "Positive Engagement" construct in theory, this does not seem to create issues in this particular case. In addition, all factors displayed composite reliability measures well above the conventional .7 cutoff.

## Multigroup: Configural, Metric, and Scalar Invariance

Configural, Metric, and Scalar Invariance between those participants that indicated they currently listened to or watched True Crime, Long Format Discussions With Public Intellectuals, and Comedy podcast types were then examined in preparation for multigroup analyses to answer RQ2. These were chosen due to their on-face qualitative difference in genre as well as the fact that they were the three greatest usage types reported among respondents. Support for configural invariance was not initially evident due to relatively poor model fit measures on TLI and CFI when estimating all three

groups without constraints, though other measures (RMSEA, PCLOSE, SRMR) remained good or acceptable ($x^2$=2191.743, d.f.= 1440, $p$ < .000; PCMIN/DF = 1.522; TLI = .816; CFI = .842; RMSEA = .045 [90 CI: .041, .049]; PCLOSE = .988; SRMR = .0767). Examination of factor loadings across these three groups indicated low loadings on most indicators of the Utility engagement construct and most of the Timeout engagement across the three groups; these factors were thus dropped for the multigroup analysis (following Calder et al.'s [2016] admonition that not all experience types are applicable to all media situations and dropping from the analysis those that do not apply to the current study). In addition, the Smart2, PostitiveEmotional1, and Entertainment4 indicators were dropped due to relatively low factor loadings. The resulting model indicated good model fit across groups and thus configural invariance ($x^2$=800.724, d.f.= 609, $p$ < .000; PCMIN/DF = 1.315; TLI = .919; CFI = .935; RMSEA = .035 [90 CI: .028, .041]; PCLOSE = 1.0; SRMR = .0667). Evidence for metric invariance was found via a non-significant chi-square difference test ($p$=.963) between the unconstrained and fully constrained ($x^2$=831.119, d.f.= 655) model across the three groups where regression weights were constrained. Scalar invariance was evidenced by a non-significant difference in the three models ($x^2$=65.624, d.f.= 90, $p$=.975) when intercepts were constrained under a multi-group analysis.

**Path Model (Hypothesis Testing and RQs)**

**H1: Podcast Engagement Types and Advertising Engagement**. A path model was constructed to test relationships among podcast users between the seven engagement experiences, podcast usage, and two advertising engagement experiences. When looking at usage in terms of number of episodes per week, overall model fit was very good ($x^2$=602.795, d.f.= 412, $p$ < .000; PCMIN/DF = 1.463; TLI = .934; CFI = .945; RMSEA = .050 [90 CI: .041, .058]; PCLOSE = .500). The direct path from the Talking About and Sharing experience to Advertising Attention was significant ($p$ = .020), with a Beta of -.338, as was the path from Entertainment Experience to Advertising Interference ($p$ = .045) with a Beta of -.386. None of the other direct paths from the podcast engagement measures to either of the advertising measures were significant. While the negative relationship between Entertainment and Ad Interference was in the expected direction (that is, those engaging through an Entertainment mode experience less interference due to ads), the negative relationship between Talking About and Sharing to Advertising Attention is in the opposite direction than expected. Therefore there is only support for H1 for users experiencing in a specific engagement type (Entertainment).

**RQ1a: Engagement and Podcast Usage.** When looking at podcast usage in terms of number of episodes listened to or watched per week, none of the paths between the engagement measures and usage were significant at the conventional $p$ = .05 level. When looking at podcast usage in terms of number of days per week using podcasts (regular usage), however, global model fit remained very good ($x^2$=594.865, d.f.= 412, $p$ < .000; PCMIN/DF = 1.444; TLI = .937; CFI = .948; RMSEA = .049 [90 CI: .040, .057]; PCLOSE = .579) and significant positive paths were found between the Talking About and Sharing ($p$ = .029, Beta = .256) and the Timeout ($p$ = .031, Beta = .335) experience types, while the Makes Me Smarter ($p$ = .057, Beta = .231) closely approached significance. These results indicate those engaging with podcast in a Talking About and Sharing, Makes Me Smarter, and Timeout ways tend to be more regular users.

**RQ1b: Mediation of Usage Between Podcast Engagement and Advertising Engagement.** Tests of specific indirect effects through the use of bootstrapping (2000 samples) from the engagement experiences to advertising engagement through usage revealed no statistically specific indirect effects in

terms of weekly number of episodes nor days of the week listened. However, when looking at usage in terms of number of days of the week listened, the path from regular usage to Ad Interference was significant (*p* =.024, Beta = -.218) and, crucially, negative. For number of episodes listened to, the path from usage to Ad Attention approached significance (*p* = .097) with a positive Beta (.138). Thus, regular usage has an inverse relationship with Ad Interference, that is, the more a user listens/watches on a days-per-week basis, the less likely they are to experience interference with their podcast enjoyment due to ads. Similarly, overall usage in terms of number of episodes listened to/watched seems likely to benefit users' Ad Attention experiences. None of the other direct paths from either usage condition to either advertising experiences were significant.

**RQ2a: Does type or genre of podcast listened to affect the relationship between podcast engagement and advertising engagement?** A multigroup analysis utilizing the amended measurement set (five engagement experiences) described above was then carried out. Overall model fit measures for the path model remained either acceptable/good (e.g. CFI, TLI) or excellent (e.g. PCMIN/DF, RMSEA, PCLOSE) ($x^2$=1010.921, d.f.= 774, *p* < .000; PCMIN/DF = 1.309; TLI = .916; CFI = .921; RMSEA = .034 [90 CI: .028, .040]; PCLOSE = 1.000). For long-format conversational shows featuring public intellectuals, the path from the Talking About and Sharing experience to Ad Interference was significant (*p* = .038, Beta = .397). For True Crime listeners, the path from the Talking About and Sharing experience to Ad Interference was also significant (*p* = .031, Beta = .609) and stronger. For Comedy listeners, the path from Talking About and Sharing to Ad Interference was also significant (*p* = .027, Beta = .396); in addition, the Entertainment experience path to Ad Interference was significant (*p* = .005, Beta = -.461) and negative, and the path from Talking About and Sharing to Ad Attention was significant (*p* = .05, Beta = -.358) and negative. This indicates those experiencing Comedy shows through an Entertainment experience type actually have a better experience with the advertising than those experiencing through a Talking About and Sharing mode. Also, though the path was significant for all three groups for Talking About and Sharing to Ad Interference, a chi-square test ($x^2$=.028, d.f.=2, *p*=.867) between the unconstrained model and a model constraining those particular structural weights revealed no significant difference between the Beta weights among the groups; still, these effect sizes are all solidly in the moderate range according to convention (Cohen, 1988).

**RQ2b: Does type of podcast listened to affect the relationship between engagement and usage?** The multigroup analysis detected a significant path for True Crime users on the Makes Me Smarter engagement type (*p* = .015, Beta = .653) with a moderate effect size to number of episodes watched/listened to on a weekly basis, whereas our global model revealed no paths reaching conventional significance levels on this measure of usage. For days of the week spent listening/watching podcasts, the Talking About and Sharing (*p* = .05, Beta = .297) and Entertainment (*p* =.046, Beta = .261) experiences were both significant contributors for Long-Format Public Intellectual Conversational show usage; For Comedy shows, Entertainment experience types showed a significant (*p* = .011, Beta = .339) relationship with days of week spent with podcasts. For the Entertainment paths on this measure, a chi-square test ($x^2$[1]=.366, *p*=.545) did not reveal a significant difference for the two groups. True Crime shows showed no significant paths between the experience types and days of the week listened/watched.

**RQ2c: Does type of podcast affect how usage mediates engagement and ad engagement?** Tests of specific indirect effects through the use of bootstrapping from the engagement experiences to

advertising engagement through usage showed no statistically significant indirect effects through usage in terms of number of episodes listened to weekly for any of the three groups. However, in terms of number of days using podcasts weekly (regular usage), for the True Crime group, the Positive Emotional ($p$ = .019, Beta = -.895), Inspirational ($p$ = .011, Beta = -1.106), Makes Me Smarter (p=.005, Beta = 2.988) and Talk About and Sharing (p=.036, Beta = -1.139) experiences all had a significant indirect effect through usage to Ad Interference, indicating True Crime advertisers should focus on Positive Emotional, Inspirational, and Talking About and Sharing experience metrics for those with high levels of regular usage, and avoid those experiencing Makes Me Smarter-type engagement when using podcasts, especially those with more regular usage, as that seems to amplify these engagement types' impact. For Long-format conversational and Comedy shows, there were no statistically significant indirect effects through usage in terms of days of the week listened. For paths from usage to the ad engagement measures on number of weekly episodes, there were no significant paths for any of the three groups. For paths from usage to ad engagement on days of week listened, there was significance to both Ad Attention ($p$ = .008, Beta = .335) and Ad Interference ($p$ = .004, Beta = -.369) for the Long-Format Conversation/Public Intellectual group; there were no significant paths for the other two groups. The negative direction for Ad Interference and positive for Ad Attention underscores the effect of regular usage on positive ad engagement for regular users of long-format conversational shows with public intellectuals.

## DISCUSSION

Following Calder et al.'s finding that context matters when it comes to measuring engagement and that a flexible approach is needed to better predict consumer behavior (2016), we find certain specific engagement experiences are more salient than others when it comes to user podcast engagement and effects on advertising perceptions, especially when considering different genres. Moreover, we also were able to unpack some of the dynamics surrounding how the different engagement experiences not only may affect advertising engagement and perceptions directly, but also the role that these experience types play in predicting usage, and then usage's role in predicting advertising experiences/perceptions.

Overall, the "Talking About and Sharing" experience type showed a negative influence on ad attention engagement (Beta = -.338), while the "Entertainment" engagement showed a negative association with Advertising Interference (Beta = -.386), indicating those experiencing podcasts in an Entertainment vein would be a positive for advertisers; they should avoid those who engage with podcasts for talking about/sharing purposes. The "Talking About & Sharing" (Beta = .256), "Makes Me Smarter" (Beta = .231), and "Timeout" (Beta = .335) engagement types seem to have the greatest ability to predict usage in terms of number of days of the week listened, indicating these measures may be useful in predicting future gains in impression rates; regular usage is then generally associated with better outcomes for advertising engagement (though again, avoiding listeners experiencing a "Talking About & Sharing" engagement would seem to be ideal for advertisers). It is also important to note not all the associations between engagement and advertising have been found to be positive in the Calder, Malthouse, and colleagues line of research. For example, Wang and Calder (2006) noted that users experiencing a "transportation" effect, like that that could occur in a "Talking About and Sharing" experience, could have a negative effect on advertising perceptions based on interruption of narrative flow. On the usage side, the "Timeout" finding in particular roughly corresponds with Craig et al.'s (2023) study on college students' motivations for podcast use and usage, where entertainment motives

were found to significantly influence usage rates. Additionally, greater usage/listenership is associated with better outcomes in terms of less interference of enjoyment due to ads and possibly greater ad attention experiences. Thus, in general, advertisers may want to specifically avoid those experiencing podcasts in the "Talking About and Sharing" mode, as that was shown to have more probable direct negative repercussions for advertising engagement, and focus on the "Entertainment" experience as well as those engaging in the "Makes Me Smarter" and "Timeout" experiences as a precursor for usage, which then has positive impacts on advertising engagement perceptions.

Things are little different when it comes to specific genres or types, however. For example, the results show some interesting and sometimes counterproductive effects along individual paths for True Crime users. On the one hand, the direct path from the "Talking About and Sharing" engagement type has a s significant positive relationship to Ad Interference (Beta = .609) for this genre; True Crime listeners have a positive significant relationship with "Talking About and Sharing" and number of episodes used, but not on number of days per week (e.g. "regular") usage, therefore we see True Crime listeners experiencing shows in this mode using in more of an irregular "binge"-type pattern; this raw usage then translates to more Ad Interference. More regular usage, however, is associated with more Ad Attention and less Ad Interference (Beta = -1.139); since "Entertainment" engagement is associated with more regular use, the greater the percentage of these types of listeners, the better the vehicle for advertisers. True Crime producers and advertisers should focus on Positive Emotional and Inspirational experience audience metrics and avoid those experiencing Makes Me Smarter-type engagement when using podcasts, especially those with more regular usage. Advertisers on Long-Format Conversational shows should be considering regular usage as paramount (the more of a daily listener the better), as that usage pattern has positive effects on advertising engagement, and again, while "Talking About and Sharing" has a significant direct relationship to Ad Interference (Beta = .397), it has a positive relationship with regular usage (Beta = .297); regular usage is then associated with more Ad Attention (Beta = .335) and less Ad Interference (Beta = -.369). Thus it seems that advertisers targeting users of these shows would do well to target the more regular users experiencing the shows in this way or shows with a very high percentage of regular users, or simply focus on "Entertainment" experiences as the best possible targets due to their greater levels of regular usage which contributes to less Ad Interference/greater Ad Attention. These findings could support prior research by Brooks et al., (2022) and Moe (2022) that posited a positive relationship with host-read ads, perhaps via parasocial relationships with the host, in line with Brinson and Lemon's (2022) and Moe's (2021) conclusions. Additionally, Schlütz and Hedder (2022) found that hosts that shared details about their own lives, were considered competent, authentic, and unpredictable were associated with greater parasocial relationships with listeners, which was then associated with listener behaviors and attitudes, thus, advertisers may also want to consider hosts that exhibit these qualities. For Comedy, things are a little more straightforward. The "Talking About and Sharing" experience is associated with more Ad Interference and less Ad Attention, while "Entertainment" engagement experiences are associated with less Ad Interference as well as more regular usage. Thus, advertisers on these shows should focus on those experiencing more "Entertainment" engagement and not those who enjoy talking about what they heard on podcasts with their friends.

**Limitations and Future Research Directions**

This study used a sample of college students (both undergraduate and graduate) that may not be representative of other groups or podcast users in general, though as noted this group does exhibit relatively high usage statistics. While sufficient, in general, SEM-based analyses require large sample sizes and those in the present research could have been larger owing to the smaller effect sizes noted as well as the number of measured factors. Besides other populations of interest and other types/genres of podcasts, now that we can see usage has some effect on advertising engagement measures, replicating this study controlling for usage may help isolate the effects of engagement on advertising. More traditional advertising-related measures, like attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intention (among others), could be investigated as well, in line with Moe's (2021, 2022) line of research. Type of ad and congruency of ads/products with show types should be investigated as well. For example, Brooks et al. (2022) found that congruency, that is, thematic relatedness between podcast subject and advertised product, improved consumer perceptions of ads. They also found that host-read ads were preferred by listeners more than pre-recorded ads (Brooks et al, 2022). In addition, it would be fruitful to measure ad engagement by the type of ad factor (e.g. host-read vs. pre-recorded) as well as how engagement and ad type relates to more traditional advertising related measures (e.g. PI, $A_{ad}$, $A_{brand}$). This congruency could possibly help eliminate some of the transportation effect interruption noted in Wang and Calder (2006).

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