



Podcast brand safety & suitability report

Listeners have spoken. Podcasting offers brands a safe and effective environment.

Podcasting is a haven for debate, humor, and, sometimes, a dash of controversy. That colorful honesty is what many listeners love. But, as the popularity of podcasting soars, some marketers worry podcasts are too hot to touch. Like a juicy true crime podcast, there's a lot more to this story.

Podcasts boast engaged audiences and influential hosts in the media's most intimate environment, all high on marketers' wish lists. But there's also controversial content, plus lightning-rod hosts and guests. With concerns over brand safety and content suitability running high, podcast advertising vexes some marketers.

That leads to a key question: If an ad runs on a racy show, will it alienate consumers and cast the brand in a negative light? Some podcasts tackle complex topics, and hosts may be colorful and spontaneous. But consumers don't punish podcasts — or their brand partners — for that kaleidoscope of issues and opinions. That's what they love about podcasts.

Three-quarters of listeners

said controversial content did not affect their purchase decisions.

Toss out those preconceived notions.

New research shows audiences respond favorably to almost all podcast genres and topics, and that glow extends to the brands that support them.

They listen intently, with **80% listening through brand messages.**

There are lines listeners don't want to be crossed,

like racist or cruel commentary. **61% of listeners say racism is unacceptable.**

We know myths about podcast marketing run rampant, and to get to the truth, we queried Audio executives about podcasts and brand suitability concerns. Then, we surveyed 6,000 frequent listeners for their opinions.

Without revealing too much too soon, we'll say: Rest easy and jump in. Podcasts offer a broad set of creative options and content.

Now, it's time to learn facts.

Fact or fiction

A person with curly hair and glasses is shown in profile, wearing a black hoodie and listening to a podcast. A microphone is visible in the foreground.

1

There's no way to know if listeners are listening to ads — or skipping them entirely.

FACT

Not only do podcast listeners tune into ads, but they are also highly engaged and respond favorably.

80% of consumers say they listen through ad breaks, and 37% can quickly recall the messages they've heard.

Listeners also think favorably about companies that support their favorite shows.

2

Some podcast genres are not brand-safe.

FACT

Listeners are open to all podcasts, including some that may veer into controversial territory, such as true crime, comedy, and sports betting. Audiences said they choose podcasts for positive, uplifting experiences.

WHY DO LISTENERS TUNE IN?

57% want to be entertained

55% want to be informed

54% listen to learn new things

Controversial topics won't hurt their view of brands either. Listeners like a good debate and intense conversation, highlighting the quality and intent of the podcast audience.

3

Stick to advertising in podcasts that are suitable or relevant to your brand.

FACT

Listeners don't think about genres or content verticals. They discover intriguing titles, seek out hosts, or try recommendations from family and friends.

If you stick to "safe" genres, you could miss out on valuable audiences. Consider this: True crime attracts young female listeners, a prime audience for many ad categories. If a brand avoids true crime, it's missing out on those women with buying power who often control household spending. If you look for shows that appeal to your target audience, you can bundle them across a network and increase reach and scale.

It's worth noting that listeners do care about ad style and suitability. They want relevant ads to feature a similar tone, formality, and believability. For the most part, advertisers deliver. Three-quarters of consumers said brand spots fit well in the titles they heard.

4

Host-read ads are more valuable and brand-safe than producer-hosted or produced ads.

FACT

There's no denying influential hosts are a massive draw. Some marketers play it safe by limiting their spots to a few hosts to protect their integrity, but listeners disagree with this approach.

With a well-produced, contextual ad, you can't go wrong.

Nine in 10 listeners said they felt the same or positively about a brand after hearing a podcast ad, including host-read and produced spots.

Whether consumers hear a host-read or produced ad, about 90% said ad placement in hot-button genres like true crime, news, and comedy doesn't negatively impact their brand perception.

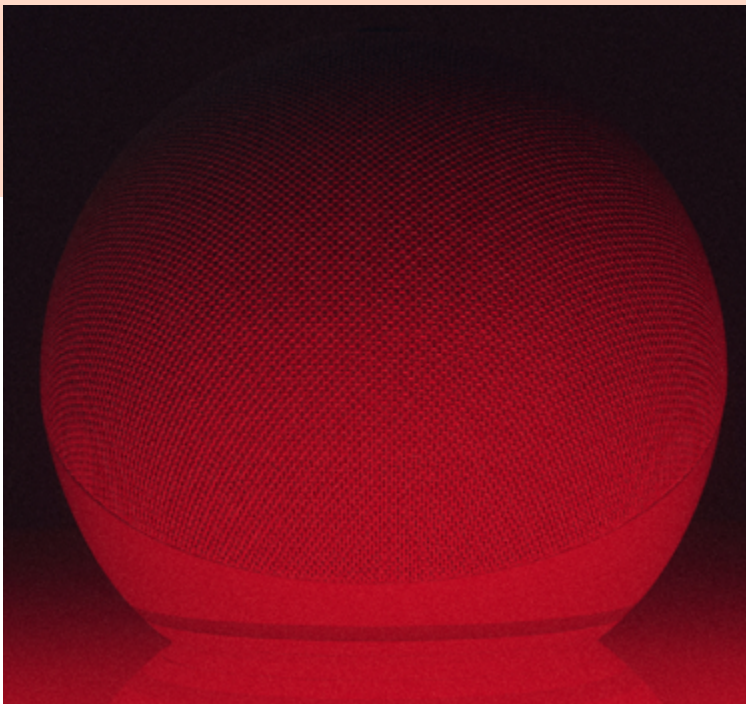
LISTENERS TRUST THEIR FAVORITE HOSTS

41% are likely to purchase from host-read ads

80% said it's important that hosts do their research

54% said they trust hosts to pick worthy sponsors

For a fresh take, producer-hosted ads are a great option. One-third of consumers said they would likely purchase a product after hearing a produced ad.



5

Listeners punish brands who message in controversial genres or shows.

FACT

Listeners like the unfiltered nature of podcasts. They want to be entertained and informed, and don't want topics or hosts watered down.

73% of listeners said controversial content doesn't impact their opinion of advertisers. Notably, about half said they think positively about a brand associated with controversial content.

6

If a brand advertises in a podcast with foul language, it damages its image.

FACT

Foul language is not a problem for most listeners. In some genres, like comedy, it's even expected. Likewise, neither controversial topics nor guests push most listeners away. Podcast audiences have an appetite for controversy, discord, and honest conversations.

That said, some lines can't be crossed. Listeners said they don't approve of hosts or guests entering certain negative areas. **In addition to an intolerance for racism, more than a third say derogatory language directed at someone else is unacceptable.**

LISTENERS ARE GENERALLY FORGIVING - THE EXCEPTION IS RACISM TRIGGERS FOR STOPPING LISTENING TO PODCASTS



Pro Tips: Follow Listeners' Leads

Honest intel from the audience

- Controversial topics, hosts, and guests are acceptable — and even expected.
- Foul language is okay, but racism and derogatory comments are not.
- Podcasts are fun, motivational, and inspirational. They're neither dull nor crass nor vehicles for misinformation, creating a brand-safe environment.
- The best ads have a style or tone similar to the podcast and an authentic, optimistic voice.
- Avoid a sales pitch that alienates listeners.
- Encourage hosts to experience your products. That creates more authentic endorsements.

Key Takeaways on Podcasts and Brand Safety

#1: Expand your podcast horizons. Try messaging in new titles and genres, and dig into data to see what unexpected shows and verticals will deliver your target consumers.

#2: Podcasts are an innovative playground. Vary your style with producer-hosted ads. Try new styles and voices, but keep it contextually relevant.

#3: Remember, you're not in this alone. At Audacy, we partner with Sounder to maintain brand safety and content standards, and 99% of our content is brand-safe.

Methology

We partnered with Alter Agents and leading media agencies for this 2023 study to assess brand safety perceptions among media industry executives and frequent podcast listeners. Audacy commissioned the 2023 Alter Agents study. Four Audio and podcasting company executives were interviewed. 6,000 respondents were surveyed through a 20-minute online survey collected between July 28 and August 3, 2023. Participants were a nationally representative sample based on age, gender, and ethnicity.

RESPONDENT QUALIFICATIONS INCLUDED:

- Must be age 18+
- Listens to podcasts weekly
- Aware of at least one podcast from the list