

Summary of research to analyze the question of the influence of format on the perception of on-air fund drives

QUESTION

The question for this study is: Does a public radio station's format influence the listener's perception of on-air fund drives?

HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis is that talk formats such as news, information, interviews, etc. already have people talking and thus the on-air pledge drive is less jarring, consequently listeners will be more likely to keep listening because they are used to talking in any form. The opposite would be expected for music formats such as jazz, classical, and others because the listener expects to hear the soothing sounds of music, making the pledge drive all the more jarring and resulting in listeners who are less likely to keep listening during drives.

BACKGROUND

The main survey question used to address this study is the one that asks the respondent if they agree or disagree with the statement "I keep listening to the public radio station during on-air membership drives." We also have information on the type of format a listener listens to.

From an earlier study we know that whether or not a listener agrees that on-air drives are getting easier to listen to has a significant impact on whether or not they agree that they keep listening during drives. Therefore, when testing the effect of formats on the question of keep listening, we will also include the variable for drives are getting easier to listen to in order to compare its effect relative to that of formats.

Additionally, we also know that the more a person listens to a public radio station, the more likely they are to keep listening during an on-air pledge drive. Therefore, if some formats have more overall listening they may be more likely to show that a person keeps listening during a drive, regardless of the format. As a result, a certain format could show that listeners keep listening during a drive, simply because people listen longer to that format. In this case the time spent listening would be masking the actual effect of the format. Thus, we must control for time spent listening to format in order to reveal the actual effect of the format on willingness to keep listening during a pledge drive.

FINDING

The format in which people hear an on-air pledge drive has a negligible effect on their willingness to keep listening to the drive. The only thing that has a significant influence is the “listenability” of the drive.

STATISTICAL TESTS

Frequency

The first table addresses the simple question, What is the percent of public radio listening to different formats? It shows that about 31 percent of all public radio listening is to news programming. Classical music programming ranks second at 27 percent and jazz ranks third at just under 10 percent. All other formats are less than five percent.

Means and Crosstabs

The first group of tests are means and crosstabs. Both sets of tests examine the influence of programming format and the variable of whether a listener agrees that drives are easier to listen to. While the chi-square scores of the crosstabs are large simply due to the large N of observations, the only variable with real explanatory power is the question of drives are becoming easier to listen to. While some formats show a small effect on whether a listener keep listening, the influence of any formats is totally overwhelmed by the listener's perception of how easy the drives are listen to.

Partial Correlations

We know from a previous study that the more a person listens to a public radio station overall, the greater is their willingness to keep listening during a pledge drive. As a result, since classical music listening is so prevalent as shown in the frequency table, when testing the effect of each format, we controlled for time spent listening to the format.

We tested the effect of various formats on the question of Keep Listening during On-Air Pledge Drives while controlling for actual time spent listening to the format.

We found that formats have a negligible effect on a listener's willingness to keep listening during an on-air pledge drive. There was a very small influence that agreed with the predictions of the original hypothesis. That is, listeners to classical music formats were more likely to **disagree** that they keep listening during drives. Listeners to entertainment (which usually features a talk format) are more likely to **agree** that they keep listening during drives. However, listeners to “other music” formats (that is, non-classical and non-jazz) were more likely to **agree** that they keep listening during drives. Tests on news, jazz, and “other” formats did not yield statistically significant results.

All of these results for format were completely overwhelmed by the effect of how listeners answered the question of drives are easier to listen to.

One analogy to describe the comparison between effects involves the concept of scoring a hundred-yard touchdown in football. If statistical testing could perfectly reveal all of the variables that influence whether a respondent agrees or disagrees with the statement “I keep listening to the public radio station during on-air membership drives,” then it would be equivalent to scoring a one-hundred yard touchdown. The variable of whether or not a respondent agrees or disagrees with the statement that drives are easier to listen to has an influence equivalent to advancing the ball 36 of the hundred yards needed. The type of format listened to has an influence equivalent to advancing the ball less than one foot in the progression towards one hundred yards.

Clearly, format has very little effect on whether or not a person will keep listening during an on-air pledge drive. This effect is not masked by time spent listening to the format.

Additional Partial Correlations

To be completely thorough, we tested the effect of format on the question of whether or not a person agrees or disagrees that drives are becoming easier to listen to. According to the original hypothesis, we would expect that listeners to talk formats would be more likely to agree that drives are easier to listen to and listeners to music formats would be more likely to disagree that they are easier to listen to.

The results of these tests were even worse. Only two of the formats tested had a statistically significant influence on whether or not a person thought drives were easier to listen to and both were the opposite of what the hypothesis predicted. Listeners to “other music” were more likely to **agree** that drives were easier to listen to. Listeners to “news” were more likely to **disagree** that drives were easier to listen to. The other formats tested did not have a statistically significant effect.

Again, these results were completely dwarfed by the effect of whether or not the listeners agreed that they kept listening during drives.

Format type also has a negligible effect on whether or not a person agrees that on-air pledge drives are becoming easier to listen to.