



Significantly more listeners are happy with the music offered by radio stations in their area than eight years ago, according to the ABA's new research monograph, *Understanding Community Attitudes to Radio Content*.

Listeners happier with choice of music on radio

Significantly more listeners are happy with the music offered by radio stations in their area than eight years ago, according to research released by the ABA.

'This is an encouraging result because it shows that the introduction of new FM services has increased radio's ability to meet listener needs,' said Acting ABA Chair Ms Lyn Maddock.

Music was the program format most listeners were interested in listening to, followed by news and information then local news and information. Listeners living outside the capital cities were more interested in, and more satisfied with, local news and information than their capital city counterparts.

The results are contained in the research monograph *Understanding community attitudes to radio content*.

The research also examined attitudes toward the influence of radio presenters and their sponsors, and the disclosure of sponsors by talkback presenters. More than three-quarters of commercial AM radio listeners said it is important to be informed by radio presenters about their personal sponsors. Just over eight-in-ten agreed that radio personalities' on-air

opinions should not be influenced by their personal sponsorship deals.

'The research indicates strong endorsement by the community of the requirement for on-air disclosure of commercial agreements introduced by the ABA in 2001,' said Ms Maddock.

Community concern about radio content has remained relatively low and stable since research was last conducted in 1997. The main areas of concern (spontaneously mentioned) were swearing and coarse language (4 per cent of radio listeners), discriminatory language (4 per cent), and bias (4 per cent). While about one-third of radio listeners were concerned about coarse language and sexual references when prompted, concern about these issues has softened over the last six years.

'Better understanding of listener's views provided by the research will contribute to public debate about radio content issues, as well as assist the radio industry to respond to community interests and concerns,' said Ms Maddock.

ABA research

One of the primary functions of

the ABA is to conduct or commission research into community attitudes on issues relating to programs. The *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* also states that broadcasters must take account of relevant research by the ABA in developing their codes of practice.

The research was timed to coincide with a review of the Commercial Radio Codes of Practice, which is currently being undertaken by Commercial Radio Australia. The codes of practice were last reviewed in 1999 and aim to ensure that broadcasters have regard to prevailing community standards, while exercising the right to responsible freedom of speech.

Research method

Taylor Nelson Sofres (TNS) was commissioned by the ABA to undertake this study into community attitudes to radio content.

The study involved a series of eight group discussions (qualitative stage) with radio listeners in four states conducted in February and March 2003. This was followed by a nationally representative survey (quantitative stage) of 1254 people aged 15 years and over, conducted in April and May 2003.

Main results

Radio listening behaviour

The results confirm that radio is an important communication medium by its reach into Australian homes and its ability to satisfy a range of listening needs. Ninety-four per cent of survey respondents regularly listened to radio and 70 per cent regularly listened to commercial radio services.

Almost two thirds of listeners (63 per cent) can be described as 'loyal' because they listened to the same station most or all of the time. More than one third (37 per cent) of listeners were 'switchers' who either alternated between two or three stations or listened to whatever sounded good at the time.

Satisfaction with radio

Ninety per cent of radio listeners were at least fairly satisfied with the choice of radio stations available to them in the area where they lived. Only 8 per cent were dissatisfied (not very/not at all satisfied) and more than half (58 per cent) were extremely or very satisfied.

Music was the most popular format delivered by radio, particularly among younger



people. Most listeners (72 per cent) spontaneously nominated music as the feature of radio they particularly liked or enjoyed, followed by news and information (39 per cent) and talkback (18 per cent).

Fewer listeners in a 1994 ABA study said they liked the music offered by radio stations: 44 per cent spontaneously nominated music and 8 per cent said the variety of music.

When prompted specifically about music in the 2003 study, 90 per cent of people said they listened to or had an interest in listening to music on the radio. Of all the program types surveyed, music attained the highest level of satisfaction with regard to service delivery (60 per cent extremely/very satisfied).

After music, a majority of radio listeners also expressed an interest in listening to news and information (84 per cent), with somewhat more interest in general news and information (79 per cent) than local news and information (62 per cent). Satisfaction (among those who were interested in listening to these formats) was greater for general news and information (55 per cent extremely/very satisfied) than for local news and information (45 per cent).

A majority of listeners (56 per cent) also had an interest in listening to programs containing comedy or humour, however this aspect of programming had the lowest satisfaction levels (29 per cent extremely/very satisfied) of all the program formats measured.

Forty-six percent of listeners were interested in talkback programs and the satisfaction levels for this format were moderate (43 per cent extremely/very satisfied). More than one third of listeners (36 per cent) had an interest in educational and special interest programs, and 36 per cent were satisfied with this type of programming.

These results suggest that while there was generally high satisfaction with the program types surveyed, some programming could be more responsive to audience needs. This is particularly evident for comedy and humour in programs, but also applies to local news and information, education and special interest, and talkback programming.

Local news and information needs

Radio played a significant role in delivering local news and

information, especially for adults aged 25 years and over. ABC Radio was seen as the most important source of local news and information (38 per cent extremely/very important) followed by commercial radio (30 per cent) and community radio (22 per cent). Newspapers and commercial television (53 per cent and 44 per cent respectively) were perceived as more important sources of local news and information than radio.

The significance of radio as a provider of local news and information was emphasised by the 14 per cent of radio listeners who spontaneously nominated it as a feature they particularly liked or enjoyed about radio. Further, almost two thirds (62 per cent) said they listened to or had an interest in listening to local news and information on radio when prompted.

Satisfaction with the delivery of local news and information was moderate (45 per cent extremely/very satisfied). This was on par with satisfaction levels for talkback (43 per cent) but not as high as satisfaction with radio's delivery of music (60 per cent) or general news and information (55 per cent). Listeners living outside the capital

cities were more satisfied with local news and information (53 per cent) than their capital city counterparts (39 per cent).

Sixty-nine percent of commercial radio listeners said there was about the right amount of local news and information broadcast on commercial radio, however a substantial proportion (27 per cent) said there was not enough. This result may indicate scope for more local news and information on commercial radio services.

Level of concern about radio content

One in ten radio listeners (10 per cent) said they had heard something on radio that concerned or offended them in the last seven days. This is exactly the same level of concern that was found in an ABA study conducted in 1997. However when asked about concerns over a longer period, a higher level was noted in 2003 (23 per cent in last 12 months) than in 1997 (18 per cent in the previous 10 months).

Reasons for concern

A variety of concerns were reported spontaneously, the most common being swearing or coarse language (4 per cent radio listeners), discriminatory language (4 per cent), and bias (4 per cent).

When concerns were analysed according to broad format categories, most related to general radio announcers (8 per cent of radio listeners), talkback announcers (7 per cent), and news and information reporting (6 per cent). Concerns about music and song lyrics, and competitions and pranks were not mentioned often (2 per cent and 1 per cent respectively).

Figure 1: Reasons for listening to radio





Trends in community attitudes

There is some evidence to suggest a small shift in attitudes since 1997 about issues associated with taste and decency. In 2003, there was less concern about, or perhaps a greater acceptance of, coarse language and sexual content heard on radio in certain circumstances.

Comparisons between the 1997 and 2003 survey results show that more radio listeners in the later survey:

- agreed that swearing and coarse language is acceptable on certain types of radio stations (agreement up from 31 per cent to 39 per cent).
- disagreed that there is too much swearing and coarse language on radio at times of the day when children could be listening (disagreement up from 42 per cent to 50 per cent).

In 2003 fewer radio listeners agreed that:

- there is too much talk about sex on radio these days (agreement down from 36 per cent to 31 per cent).

In 1997 and 2003 the majority of listeners agreed that the subject matter covered by radio presenters is usually suitable for the time of day it was broadcast (78 per cent and 81 per cent respectively).

Talkback radio

Nearly one third of commercial radio listeners (29 per cent) said they regularly listened to commercial AM talkback programs, with its popularity higher among older listeners rising to about one half of those aged 55 years and over. Talkback programs were considered to have a number of benefits including education and raising accountability by bringing important matters to the attention of the community.

Talkback presenters were perceived to have improved their treatment of callers. In 2003, more radio listeners (52 per cent) agreed that talkback presenters usually give callers a 'fair go' by allowing them to express their point of view compared with 44 per cent in 1997. Commercial AM radio talkback listeners were stronger than all radio listeners in their agreement with this (65 per cent).

Influence and disclosure

Influence and disclosure issues were important to radio listeners.

More than half of commercial radio listeners (51 per cent) and 60 per cent of commercial AM talkback listeners agreed that some radio announcers have too much influence over the community.

An overwhelming majority of radio listeners agreed that radio personalities' on-air opinions should not be influenced by their personal sponsorship deals (85 per cent agreed in total: 40 per cent strongly agree and 45 per cent agree). In addition, 76 per cent of commercial AM talkback listeners said it was at least fairly important for radio personalities to inform listeners of any personal sponsors. It was clear from the group discussions that although these announcements were strongly supported, some listeners found it difficult to tell whether the announcer's views were genuinely believed or influenced by the sponsor.

Eleven per cent of commercial radio listeners and 37 per cent of commercial AM talkback listeners had heard a disclosure announcement.

Understanding the complaints process

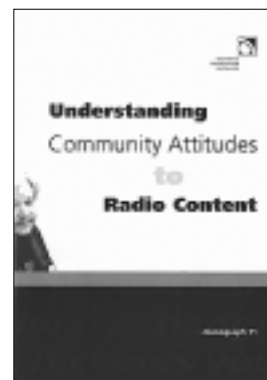
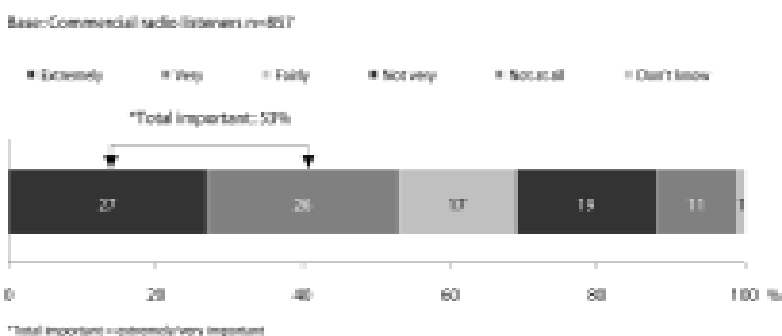
A quarter (25 per cent) of commercial radio listeners had thought about making a complaint about inappropriate content heard on commercial radio stations, but had not proceeded to do so. Most of the reasons for not making a complaint related to listeners' lack of motivation. However, there was some feedback identifying barriers to the

complaints process: a belief that complaints would not be taken seriously (16 per cent of those not proceeding with their complaint), not knowing how to make a complaint (7 per cent), and not having the right contact information to do so (6 per cent).

A majority of commercial radio listeners (77 per cent) said they would, in the first instance, contact the radio station directly if they were going to complain, probably by telephone (63 per cent). The ABA was mentioned by 5 per cent of commercial radio listeners as their first port of call. While an official agency was cited as the most probable second port of call if they were not satisfied with the radio stations' initial response to their complaint, mention of the ABA specifically was minimal (4 per cent).

Awareness of radio announcements informing listeners about the Commercial Radio Codes of Practice and the complaints process was moderate with 44 per cent of commercial radio listeners being aware of these announcements. One quarter of commercial radio listeners (25 per cent) had heard an announcement within the last month, but more than half (53 per cent) had never heard an announcement.

Figure 2: Perceived importance of radio personalities informing listeners of their personal sponsors



Printed copies of *Understanding Community Attitudes to Radio Content* are available from the ABA for \$20, tel: 02 9334 7700 or 1800 226 667. The report is also available in PDF format on the ABA web site: www.aba.gov.au/radio/research/projects/current_index.htm