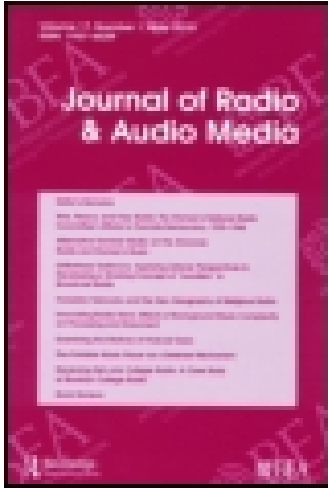


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Call-In Talk Radio: Compensation or Enrichment

Elizabeth M. Perse and Jessica S. Butler

This study focused on call-in talk radio because it provides a unique opportunity to test competing hypotheses drawn from two different perspectives about the appeal of media programming. A good deal of research on call-in talk radio grows from a deficiency perspective, which holds that people seek out media content to fill gaps in their lives. More recent research, however, suggests that, like the selection of other media content, the appeal of talk radio lies in enrichment, or its ability to provide content for specialized interests. A random telephone survey tested competing hypotheses that compared listeners to call-in talk radio with nonlisteners. For the most part, the results supported an enrichment explanation. Compared to nonlisteners, listeners to call-in talk radio listened to the programs for information, perceived themselves as more mobile, and valued arguments. Compared to nonlisteners, callers to the programs were also more civically engaged. Moreover, listening to various subformats of talk radio programs was also likely to signal enrichment.

Radio is a medium that touches our daily lives. With dozens of different formats, radio offers something for almost everyone. One format that has grown in popularity and visibility in recent years is call-in talk radio. This format typically involves discussion moderated by a host who invites listeners to call in and comment. Many call-in talk programs are local and aired during the daytime; over 1,100 radio stations now use that format (Radio Advertising Bureau, 2000). Several national hosts, however, have brought this format to the public attention. Rush Limbaugh has made himself a political force, and Dr. Laura Schlessinger has made herself a topic of public controversy. Several talk radio hosts, such as Don Imus and Howard Stern, have even added their programs to cable network lineups.

As call-in talk radio has become more popular over the past two decades, thinking about the format has changed considerably. Research in the 1970s and '80s considered talk radio a phenomenon that blended aspects of interpersonal and mass communication. Scholars believed that the format's primary appeal was that it mimicked

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face-to-face communication, and it became a substitute for people who could not fulfill their needs for interpersonal contact in their daily lives. More recent research, however, has focused on the political influence of the programs. Because hosts and callers bring local and national issues to public discussion, scholars believe that the format is now a political force. No longer are listeners considered passive, social isolates. Now, listeners to talk radio are considered politically active, involved, and knowledgeable.

Political issue-oriented talk radio, however, is only one type of call-in talk radio. This study focused on a range of call-in talk radio formats, including political discussion, sports talk, psychology and health advice, sex talk, and practical information and advice. Its goal was to reconcile some of the inconsistencies in research on the format. Based on uses and gratifications, this study tests competing hypotheses about the appeal of the format from both compensation and enrichment perspectives.

Functions of Media Use

Media Use as Compensation. Uses and gratifications is a mass communication research perspective that takes an audience-centered approach to understanding the appeal and effects of mass communication. This theory holds that it is important to understand why and how individuals select and use mass media content. According to uses and gratifications, media selection and use are motivated by personal, psychological, and social influences (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). That is, people are motivated to select certain media content as a result of their personal and situational circumstances.

Traditionally, uses and gratifications has operated from a need-oriented approach, according to which media use was viewed as a response and solution to felt problems (Rosengren, 1974). When people feel some deficiency in their lives, they recognize that a need exists. Then, these needs generate action to solve the problem. Mass communication is viewed as one potential source to gratify needs. So, mass communication was viewed as a way to compensate for problems and/or deficiencies in people's lives.

A good deal of research was conducted from this mass-media-as-compensation orientation. Television was seen as one source for "escape," a way to deal with daily pressures and stress (e.g., Katz & Foulkes, 1962; Pearlin, 1959). McGuire (1974; see also Conway & Rubin, 1991, for a contemporary use of this approach) summarized a variety of psychological theories that predicted that various psychological needs, such as needs for consistency, equilibrium, order, external guidance, autonomy, and stimulation, were the sources of gratifications sought from the media. The need for orientation is viewed as leading to news media use (McCombs & Weaver, 1985; McLeod & Becker, 1974).

The need for social contact has been a widely researched motivational force. Herzog (1944) hypothesized that women who were socially isolated would be more likely to listen to radio serials as a way to compensate for a lack of social contacts.

Similarly, Riley and Riley (1951) found that children who were not well integrated into peer groups watched more television. Rosengren and Windahl (1972) characterized television as a functional alternative to social interaction. They argued that people need social interaction, and that when their needs cannot be met in "natural" ways, people will find alternatives. Because television can mimic social interaction, television use can be motivated by that need. Rosengren and Windahl found that when people had fewer opportunities to interact socially, they were more likely to become involved with television content.

This notion of media use as a compensation for deficiencies in social activity undergirds much of the research on call-in talk radio. Researchers expected that call-in talk radio would be popular with people who were "deprived of interpersonal contact" (Turow, 1974, p. 173) and with those who would be constrained in their search for social contact by economic circumstances. In general, those research expectations were supported. Turow observed that callers to a Philadelphia talk radio show were more likely to live alone and had lower incomes than the typical person. Avery, Ellis, and Glover (1978) found that many listeners to talk radio had lower incomes and were retired. The researchers suggested that these socially isolated listeners viewed the format as a "window on the world." Tramer and Jeffries (1983) asked callers to Cleveland talk radio shows why they called the programs. Whereas sharing information was the most commonly mentioned reason for calling, the listeners who called for companionship were among those who called most often. Tramer and Jeffries characterized these callers as "isolated listeners." More recently, Armstrong and Rubin (1989) found that callers to talk radio programs appeared to use the programs as a substitute for interpersonal contact. Compared to listeners who did not call, callers were less mobile and found interpersonal communication less rewarding. Research, then, has found some support for a compensation-oriented approach to listening to call-in talk radio. In general, an illusion of social contact appears to motivate listeners and callers to turn to the programs. This research presented a dismal view of the audience for call-in talk radio.

Media Use as Enrichment. There are limits, however, to considering media use solely from a need-oriented compensation standpoint. It is hard to reconcile findings that characterize the audience for call-in talk radio as socially isolated and economically insecure with the growth of the format. Neither station owners nor advertisers would find much appeal in such an audience. Moreover, not all research supports the view that mass media use is motivated by a desire to compensate for life's deficiencies. Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985), for example, found no support for a hypothesized relationship between loneliness and parasocial interaction, or a sense of friendship with television newscasters. Instead, substantial research suggests that people select mass communication to enrich their lives and to promote their interests.

Early writings about the two-step flow (e.g., Menzel & Katz, 1955; Merton, 1949) portray opinion leaders as information seekers. Instead of being socially isolated with few resources, opinion leaders are generally of higher education, of higher socioeconomic status, more innovative, have many social contacts, and have more exposure

to mass media (Rogers, 1995). Opinion leaders seek out information, not because they feel deficiencies in their knowledge, but because certain topics interest and excite them. Their interest and knowledge, coupled with a wide range of social contacts, mark them as influential.

Research on the relationship between the mass media and learning reinforces the importance of media use as enrichment, rather than compensation. This research characterizes some people as "information hungry": those who need to seek information, not because they are deficient, but because they enjoy learning and sharing with others. Those who learn the most from the news are those who have the most prior knowledge about topics (e.g., Robinson & Levy, 1986). Knowledge gap research also points out that those with greater knowledge not only learn more but are more motivated to seek additional information (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970).

The appeal of various entertainment genres underscores the centrality of enrichment as a motivating factor in media use. Exposure to sad films (e.g., Oliver, Weaver, & Sargent, 2000), suspense films (e.g., Zillmann, 1980), and horror films (e.g., Tamborini, 1991) cannot be explained as compensation. Clearly, people do not seek out these genres because they feel the need to cry or be frightened. Instead, research suggests that, for certain people, exposure to these genres leads to positive affective responses. Attending frightening films can give some viewers the opportunity to show mastery of fear, especially when they attend movies with others who are frightened (Zillmann, Weaver, Mundorf, & Aust, 1986). Research on the role of sensation seeking and media exposure provides another explanation for positive responses to suspense and horror genres: Sensation seeking is a personality trait that predisposes people to prefer risky, unusual, novel, and exciting experiences (Zuckerman, 1994). High-sensation seekers have higher optimum levels of arousal than low-sensation seekers, and they find pleasure in arousing situations, even those that stimulate negative reactions. Although a deficiency explanation can be applied to sensation seeking's influence on using arousing media (i.e., need for arousal), there is evidence that lower-than-optimal levels of arousal do not motivate media use for high-sensation seekers. Instead, high-sensation seeking has been linked to watching television to pass time (Conway & Rubin, 1991; Perse, 1996).

Research on call-in talk radio shows that these programs are used to enrich people's interest in politics. Hollander (1996) observed that listeners to issue-oriented call-in talk radio were more educated, of higher socioeconomic status, more likely to read newspapers, and reported higher levels of political participation and political self-efficacy than nonlisteners. Hofstetter and Gianos's (1997) survey of the San Diego political talk radio audience found that listeners were not a socially deprived group. Compared to nonlisteners, listeners were better educated and reported higher incomes. Moreover, listeners were more politically involved than were nonlisteners. They reported higher political efficacy, greater political involvement, and greater likelihood to vote in local and national elections. Listeners were also more attentive to political news in other media, suggesting that talk radio was part of media use that grew out of political interest, rather than deficiencies in political knowledge. Interestingly, this portrait of callers to political talk radio differs dramat-

ically from that of the socially deprived callers in early research. Callers to political talk radio programs evidenced even higher levels of political participation than those who listen and do not call (Hofstetter & Gianos, 1997; Hollander, 1996).

Hypotheses

The primary goal of this study is to test compensation and enrichment approaches to the appeal of call-in talk radio. The compensation approach focuses on the *social deficiencies* in people's lives and holds that people listen to talk radio to fill those social needs. The enrichment approach holds that people are motivated more by *cognitive needs*—including the need to acquire and use information and the need for cognitive stimulation. So, two competing sets of hypotheses were tested.

Compensation. Because some approaches to uses and gratifications hold that media use is motivated by perceived needs, or desires to fill gaps in one's life, we hypothesized that, consistent with the results of early research, the listeners and callers to call-in talk radio would be more socially deprived and motivated by a desire to experience conversation:

- H_{1a}: Listeners to call-in talk radio will be more likely to perceive themselves as less mobile than nonlisteners.
- H_{1b}: Callers to call-in talk radio will be more likely to perceive themselves as less mobile than nonlisteners.
- H_{2a}: Listeners to call-in talk radio will be more likely to perceive themselves as less socially active than nonlisteners.
- H_{2b}: Callers to call-in talk radio will be more likely to perceive themselves as less socially active than nonlisteners.
- H_{3a}: Listeners to call-in talk radio will be more likely to perceive themselves as less interpersonally connected than nonlisteners.
- H_{3b}: Callers to call-in talk radio will be more likely to perceive themselves as less interpersonally connected than nonlisteners.
- H_{4a}: Listeners to call-in talk radio will report stronger companionship motives for listening to the radio than nonlisteners.
- H_{4b}: Callers to call-in talk radio will report stronger companionship motives for listening to the radio than nonlisteners.

Enrichment. There is also evidence that media use is motivated by desires to enrich existing interests. Based on this enrichment approach and recent research on political talk radio, we developed several hypotheses that linked listening and calling talk radio to evidence of greater interest in information and conversation.

- H_{5a}: Listeners to call-in talk radio will report stronger information-oriented motives for listening to the radio than nonlisteners.
- H_{5b}: Callers to call-in talk radio will report stronger information-oriented motives for listening to the radio than nonlisteners.

We also considered some personal aspects of people that could lead them to see call-in talk radio as an enriching experience. Argumentativeness is a personality trait that leads people to value arguments and seek situations where arguments might arise (Infante & Rancer, 1982). Because many talk radio shows encourage controversy and contention, we predicted that:

- H_{6a}: Listeners to call-in talk radio will be more argumentative than nonlisteners.
 H_{6b}: Callers to call-in talk radio will be more argumentative than nonlisteners.

Our next set of hypotheses derives from the expectation that people who value conversation would be more likely to seek out media content that mimics interpersonal interaction.

- H_{7a}: Listeners to call-in talk radio will value conversations more than nonlisteners.
 H_{7b}: Callers to call-in talk radio will value conversations more than nonlisteners.

As an additional examination of the explanatory power of compensation and enrichment approaches, we asked a research question:

- RQ₁: Is listening to call-in radio subformats better explained by a compensation or an enrichment approach?

Call-In Talk Radio Formats

Several different subformats of popular call-in talk radio programs exist (Petrozzello, 1996). Political call-in talk radio encourages listeners to participate in a discussion of local and national concerns. Among the most popular and visible types of programs are those in which outside guests are invited to facilitate discussion of specialized topics. Psychology and health programs have also been growing in number. Several hosts, such as Dr. Laura Schlessinger, Dr. Dean Edell, and Dr. Harvey Ruben answer questions and lead discussion about family, health, and medical issues. The "topless" radio format of the 1970s (Carlin, 1976) has evolved into sex talk programs. Younger audiences tend to listen to therapists and psychologists who answer questions about sexual topics and experiences. Almost every city airs sports talk programs, both local and syndicated. Hosts of these programs encourage spontaneous conversation about the major events, people, and strategies in the sports world (Norman, 1990). Radio listeners tune in daily to a variety of programs that provide information about business, finance, real estate, auto care, food, home repair, and more. These programs give listeners personalized and free advice from experts and are a source of practical information.

Because prior research found a link between political involvement and listening to political talk radio (e.g., Hofstetter et al., 1994), we predicted that:

H₈: Listening to issue-oriented call-in talk radio will be linked to higher levels of civic engagement.

Little research, however, has focused on any subformats beyond political talk radio. A final interest of this study was to explore listening to some of the different subformats. Consistent with our interest in testing compensation and enrichment approaches, we asked the following research question:

RQ₂: Is listening to different call-in talk radio subformats better explained by a compensation or an enrichment approach?

The following study tested these hypotheses and attempted to answer the research question.

Method

Procedure and Sample

Twelve paid interviewers made calls over a 3-week period in April and May 1996, to a random-digit dialed sample of adults living in New Castle County, Delaware. This region was chosen because it has a concentration of call-in talk radio programs broadcast from New York, Philadelphia, Delaware, Baltimore, and Washington, DC (Charles Tarver, WVUD station manager, personal communication, December 19, 1995). Of the calls, 207 respondents completed the 10- to 15-minute questionnaire.¹ The sample was 42.0% male ($n = 87$) and ranged in age from 18 to 94 years old ($M = 40.23$, $SD = 15.97$). Of the sample, 21.3% were unemployed or retired. Respondents' educational level ranged from seventh grade to completion of a doctoral degree ($M = 14.43$ years of education, $SD = 2.58$). The majority (56.0%) did not consider themselves to be a supporter of a political party. Of those who did, 35.3% reported to be Democrats, 29.5% Republican, 2.9% Libertarian, 1.4% Reformists, and the rest either did not know or supported another party.

The sample was somewhat representative of the general population of the country. According to the 1990 census, the county was 48.4% male, with a median age from 45 to 49 years; 66.9% of citizens in the county were employed. The typical county resident had completed some college.

Measurement

Radio Exposure. Respondents indicated how many hours on a typical week day they spent listening to the radio. Radio exposure ranged from 15 minutes to 12 hours ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 2.64$). Of the sample, 8.2% ($n = 17$) reported that they did not listen to the radio. These nonlisteners differed from radio listeners only in that nonlisteners were older ($M = 53.06$) than listeners ($M = 39.13$), $t(202) = 3.44$, $p < .001$.

Radio Listening Motives. Radio listeners compared their own reasons for listening to the radio to 13 radio listening motive statements drawn from previous research (Armstrong & Rubin, 1989; Mendelsohn, 1964; Surlin, 1986; Times Mirror Center for the People & the Press, 1993). Using a 5-point scale, respondents indicated how closely these reasons matched their own for listening to the radio (5 = *exactly*, 4 = *a lot*, 3 = *somewhat*, 2 = *not much*, and 1 = *not at all*).

The responses to the 13 motive statements were subjected to principal axes factor analysis with oblimin rotation. Criteria for factor retention were at least two primary loadings of at least .35 with no secondary loadings greater than .30. The analysis identified three factors accounting for 44.1% of the variance. The factor analysis is summarized in Table 1.

Factor 1, Information (eigenvalue = 3.19), accounted for 24.5% of the common variance. It included loadings of all information statements and reflected listening to the radio to find out about current issues of the day. The second factor, Diversion (eigenvalue = 1.99), accounted for 15.3% of the common variance. It included loadings of the enjoyment, relaxation, and day structuring items. Factor 3, Companionship/Pastime (eigenvalue = 0.56), accounted for 4.3% of the common variance. It was

Table 1
Radio Listening Motives Oblimin Factor Analysis

	Information	Diversion	Companionship
To obtain useful information about daily life (2.67, 1.32)	.66	.05	.04
To learn about how different people feel about different issues (2.51, 1.42)	.64	-.06	.11
To pick up information that I can use in conversations with other people (2.49, 1.34)	.63	-.04	.07
To keep up on issues of the day (3.13, 1.48)	.62	-.08	-.29
Because it is a good way to learn things that I can't find out elsewhere (2.53, 1.32)	.61	.15	-.02
Because it allows me to unwind (3.26, 1.47)	-.06	.77	.07
Because it entertains me (4.11, 1.07)	-.05	.74	-.01
Because it helps me change my mood (3.02, 1.44)	.04	.65	.20
Because it breaks up my day (2.84, 1.51)	.05	.65	-.01
Because it is enjoyable (4.29, 1.04)	.00	.63	-.07
When I have nothing better to do (2.27, 1.52)	-.16	.05	.78
So I won't have to feel alone (2.07, 1.39)	.22	.16	.39
Because it is a habit (2.98, 1.55) ^a	.04	.00	.29
<i>M</i>	2.97	3.38	2.21
<i>SD</i>	1.01	1.01	1.17
α	.76	.83	.55

Note: *N* = 190. Numbers in parentheses are item means and standard deviations.

^aItem not included in further analyses.

made up of loadings of two companionship statements. Although this factor was marginal, it was retained for hypothesis testing. Radio listening motive scores were created by averaging responses to the items loading on each factor. Motive scores are summarized in Table 1. Radio listening motives were correlated. Diversion was significantly related to Companionship ($r = .48, p < .001$).

Listening to Call-In Talk Radio. Respondents who listened to the radio were asked if they tuned into talk radio programs, those programs where the host of the show invited listeners to call in. Of the sample, 45.9% ($n = 95$) were listeners and estimated that they listened an average of 1.80 hours of call-in talk radio a day (range = 5 minutes to 10 hours a day, $SD = 1.90$). Listeners were asked if they had ever called into a talk radio program; 9.7% ($n = 20$) reported that they had.

Respondents also indicated how often, on a scale from 5 (*regularly*) to 1 (*never*), they listened to five subformats of talk programs: political ($M = 2.50, SD = 1.05$), sports ($M = 1.87, SD = 1.16$), psychology and health ($M = 1.79, SD = 0.98$), sex ($M = 1.62, SD = 0.86$), and practical information ($M = 1.90, SD = 1.05$). Listening to some different program subformats were interrelated. Listening to psychology and health shows was positively linked to listening to political shows ($r = .40, p < .001$) and to practical information shows ($r = .25, p < .05$).

Argumentativeness. Argumentativeness is a personality trait that leads people to value and enjoy situations in which arguments occur (Infante & Rancer, 1982). For this study, we used a shortened, six-item version of the Argumentativeness scale (Infante & Rancer, 1982) that had been pretested.² Respondents indicated how true, on a scale from 5 (*almost always true*) to 1 (*never true*), the six statements were about themselves when they approached arguments about controversial issues. Averaged argumentativeness scores ranged from 1.00 to 5.00 ($M = 2.59, SD = 1.01, \alpha = .86$).

Contextual Age. Similar to Armstrong and Rubin (1989), we used two items each drawn from Rubin and Rubin's (1982) contextual age scale to assess perceived mobility, social activity, and interpersonal connectedness. Respondents marked how much they agreed, on a scale from 5 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*), with two statements for each construct.³ Averaged mobility scores ranged from 1.00 to 5.00 ($M = 4.10, SD = 0.93, r = .13, p = .06$), social activity scores ranged from 1.00 to 5.00 ($M = 3.34, SD = 1.05, r = .28, p < .001$), and interpersonal connectedness scores ranged from 1.00 to 5.00 ($M = 4.20, SD = 0.80, r = .14, p < .05$).

Value for Conversations. To measure the value for conversations, we used a shortened versions of the Conversation Orientation factor of the Family Communication Patterns scale (Chaffee & McLeod, 1972; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990).⁴ This factor includes items that reflect valuing open conversation in the family. Respondents indicated how much they agreed, on a scale from 5 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*), with each of the six statements. Averaged value for conversation scores ranged from 2.83 to 5.00 ($M = 4.50, SD = 0.50, \alpha = .73$).

Civic Engagement. We measured political participation with two measures. Respondents marked either yes (coded as 2) or no (coded as 1) when asked if they had contacted an elected official or attended a public government meeting (city council, public hearing, or legislative meeting). Together, these two items assessed respondents' civic engagement. Averaged civic engagement scores ranged from 1.00 to 2.00 ($M = 1.41$, $SD = 0.48$, $r = .56$, $p < .001$).

Statistical Analysis

After scale construction and reliability analysis, we conducted two sets of analyses. We used t tests to compare nonlisteners to listeners and to callers in order to test hypotheses derived from compensation and enrichment approaches. For these t tests, we isolated callers to talk radio. That is, when we compared nonlisteners and listeners, we included only those participants who listened but did not call the programs. Then, we used stepwise multiple regression to answer the two research questions that considered the how well compensation and enrichment approaches explained listening to call-in talk radio.

Results

Comparing Nonlisteners and Listeners to Call-In Talk Radio

A primary goal of this study was to assess compensation and enrichment approaches to understanding the appeal of call-in talk radio. T tests compared nonlisteners and listeners to call-in talk radio to test the explanatory power of the two approaches. In general, the t -test results offer more support for viewing listening to call-in talk radio as enrichment (see Table 2).

Consistent with H_{5a} , listeners to call-in talk radio reported stronger information-oriented radio listening motives ($M = 2.97$) than nonlisteners ($M = 2.36$), $t(188) = 4.47$, $p < .001$. Listeners were also more argumentative ($M = 2.83$) than nonlisteners ($M = 2.38$), $t(44) = 3.22$, $p < .001$, supporting H_{6a} . In addition, contrary to H_{1a} , listeners were more mobile ($M = 4.23$) than nonlisteners ($M = 3.99$), $t(204) = 1.97$, $p < .05$. Listeners to call-in talk radio listened more to the radio ($M = 3.57$) than nonlisteners ($M = 3.44$), $t(188) = 2.09$, $p < .05$, and listeners were more civically engaged ($M = 1.56$) than nonlisteners ($M = 1.35$), $t(203) = 2.14$, $p < .05$. There was no support for any of the hypotheses derived from the compensation approach (H_{1a} , H_{2a} , H_{3a} , and H_{4a}).

Several of these relationships remained when callers to talk radio were excluded from the analysis. Listeners who did not call talk radio reported stronger information-oriented radio listening motives ($M = 2.85$) than nonlisteners ($M = 2.36$), $t(168) = 3.50$, $p < .001$. Listeners were also more argumentative ($M = 2.76$) than nonlisteners

Table 2
T Tests Comparing Nonlisteners and Listeners

	Nonlisteners ^a	Listeners ^b	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> <
Compensation					
Mobility	3.99	4.23	204	1.97	.05
Social activity	3.23	3.46	204	1.60	.11
Interpersonal connectedness	4.22	4.17	204	0.43	.67
Companionship	2.13	2.21	188	0.45	.65
Enrichment					
Information	2.36	2.97	188	4.47	.001
Argumentativeness	2.38	2.83	204	3.22	.001
Value for conversations	4.46	4.54	204	1.08	.25
Civic engagement	1.35	1.56	203	2.14	.05
Other variables					
Radio hours	2.74	3.52	188	2.09	.05
Diversion	3.62	3.38	188	1.65	.10
Age in years	39.88	40.63	202	0.33	.74
Years of education	14.46	14.38	202	0.22	.83

Note: Table entries reflect Likert responses from 5 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*). So, higher scores reflect higher levels of the variable.

^a*n* = 112. ^b*n* = 95.

($M = 2.38$), $t(184) = 2.55$, $p < .05$. In addition, contrary to H_{1a} , listeners who did not call were more mobile ($M = 4.30$) than nonlisteners ($M = 3.99$), $t(168) = 2.51$, $p < .05$. Near significant results offered some additional support for the enrichment approach. Contrary to H_{2a} , listeners who did not call were marginally more socially active ($M = 3.53$) than nonlisteners ($M = 23.23$), $t(184) = 1.95$, $p < .06$, and listeners who did not call talk radio listened a bit more to the radio ($M = 3.44$) than nonlisteners ($M = 3.44$), $t(168) = 1.73$, $p < .09$.

Comparing Nonlisteners and Callers to Call-In Talk Radio

Additional tests of the compensation and enrichment approaches involved comparing nonlisteners to callers. Once again, *t* tests supported the enrichment approach (see Table 3).

Callers to call-in talk radio reported stronger information-oriented radio listening motives ($M = 3.38$) than nonlisteners ($M = 2.36$), $t(113) = 4.70$, $p < .001$, supporting H_{5b} . Consistent with H_{6b} , callers were also more argumentative ($M = 3.08$) than nonlisteners ($M = 2.38$), $t(130) = 2.89$, $p < .05$. Callers to call-in talk radio also listened marginally more to the radio ($M = 3.87$) than nonlisteners ($M = 3.44$), $t(113) = 1.92$, $p < .06$. There was no support for any of the hypotheses derived from the compensation approach (H_{1a} , H_{2a} , H_{3a} , and H_{4a}).

Table 3
T Tests Comparing Nonlisteners and Callers

	Nonlisteners ^a	Callers ^b	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> <
Compensation					
Mobility	3.99	3.98	130	0.05	.97
Social activity	3.23	3.20	130	0.11	.92
Interpersonal connectedness	4.22	3.90	130	1.58	.21
Companionship	2.13	2.55	113	1.33	.19
Enrichment					
Information	2.36	3.38	113	4.70	.001
Argumentativeness	2.38	3.08	130	2.89	.01
Value for conversations	4.46	4.60	130	1.07	.29
Civic engagement	1.35	1.68	129	3.52	.001
Other variables					
Radio hours	2.74	3.87	113	1.92	.06
Diversion	3.62	3.45	113	0.68	.51
Age in years	39.88	44.95	129	1.28	.21
Years of education	14.46	14.15	128	0.47	.67

Note: Table entries reflect Likert responses from 5 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*). So, higher scores reflect higher levels of the variable.

^a*n* = 112. ^b*n* = 20.

Comparing Listeners and Callers to Call-In Talk Radio

Although there were no hypothesized differences between listeners and callers to call-in talk radio, *t* tests compared listeners and callers because that has been the focus of much prior research (e.g., Armstrong & Rubin, 1989). The results are summarized in Table 4.

There were few significant differences between listeners who did not call and callers. Callers reported stronger information radio listening motives ($M = 3.38$) than listeners who did not call ($M = 2.85$), $t(93) = 2.09$, $p < .05$. Callers listened more to political talk radio programs ($M = 3.00$) than listeners who did not call ($M = 2.27$), $t(90) = 2.38$, $p < .05$. However, callers listened marginally less often to psychology and health programs ($M = 1.69$) than listeners who did not call ($M = 2.16$), $t(91) = 2.09$, $p < .07$, and callers reported to be marginally less interpersonally connected ($M = 3.90$) than listeners who did not call ($M = 4.24$), $t(92) = 1.76$, $p < .09$.

Predicting Listening to Call-In Talk Radio

Because there were fewer than 100 ($n = 95$) call-in talk radio listeners in our sample, we used stepwise multiple regression to examine whether compensation or enrichment approaches better explained talk radio listening. Stepwise multiple regres-

Table 4
T Tests Comparing Listeners and Callers

	Listeners ^a	Callers ^b	df	t	p <
Compensation					
Mobility	4.30	3.98	92	1.67	.10
Social activity	3.53	3.20	92	1.35	.19
Interpersonal connectedness	4.24	3.90	92	1.76	.09
Companionship	2.12	2.55	93	1.47	.15
Enrichment					
Information	2.85	3.38	93	2.09	.05
Argumentativeness	2.76	3.08	92	1.30	.20
Value for conversations	4.53	4.60	92	0.67	.12
Civic engagement	1.53	1.68	92	0.61	.55
Radio subformats					
Political	2.37	3.00	90	2.38	.05
Sports	1.83	2.00	87	0.57	.58
Psychology and health	2.16	1.69	91	1.89	.07
Sex talk	1.36	1.67	82	1.25	.22
Practical information	2.17	1.83	87	1.22	.23
Other variables					
Radio hours	3.44	3.87	193	0.59	.56
Diversion	3.36	3.45	93	0.34	.74
Age in years	39.45	44.95	91	1.41	.17
Years of education	14.45	14.15	92	0.47	.65

Note: Table entries reflect Likert responses from 5 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*). So, higher scores reflect higher levels of the variables.

^an = 95. ^bn = 20.

sion is a multistep procedure that maximizes power by including at each step the single variable that contributes the most variance to the dependent variable. The process continues until there are no additional variables that would significantly increase the variance (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2000). We regressed the variables of the study on hours spent listening to call-in talk radio. We included radio listening motives, mobility, social activity, interpersonal connectedness, argumentativeness, value for conversations, and civic engagement. Because age, gender, and education have been linked to listening to call-in talk radio (e.g., Hofstetter & Gianos, 1997; Hollander, 1996; Turow, 1974), these were also included in the analyses.

At step 1, the Information listening motive added a significant 11.7% to the variance ($\Delta F = 11.95$, $p < .001$) and was a positive predictor of hours spent listening to call-in talk radio. Age was entered at the second step and accounted for another 5.0% of the variance ($\Delta F = 5.32$, $p < .05$). Age was also a positive contributor to the equation. At step 3, argumentativeness added another 3.7% to the variance ($\Delta F = 4.05$, $p < .05$). The final equation accounted for 20.4% of the variance in listening to call-in talk

radio ($R = .45$), $F(3, 88) = 7.51$, $p < .001$, and offered support for the enrichment explanation. Age ($\beta = .28$, $p < .01$) and argumentativeness ($\beta = .21$, $p < .05$) were significant positive predictors of listening to call-in talk radio. The Information radio listening motive was a near-significant positive predictor ($\beta = .20$, $p < .08$).

Predicting Listening to Different Call-In Talk Radio Formats

Because little research has considered different call-in talk radio formats beyond political talk shows, the study's research question considered if listening to the different subformats was compensation or enrichment oriented. So, we once again used stepwise multiple regression to assess the ability of variables drawn from compensation and enrichment approaches. As before, we included radio listening motives, mobility, social activity, interpersonal connectedness, argumentativeness, value for conversations, civic engagement, age, gender, and educational level in the analyses.

Political. At step 1, the Information listening motives accounted for 20.1% of the variance ($\Delta F = 22.15$, $p < .001$) and was a positive predictor. Diversion added a significant 4.4% ($\Delta F = 5.13$, $p < .05$) to the variance at step 2 and was a negative predictor. The final equation explained 26.4% of the variance in listening to political call-in talk radio programs ($R = .50$), $F(2, 87) = 14.16$, $p < .001$. The results suggest support for the enrichment approach; Information ($\beta = .48$, $p < .001$) was a positive contributor to the equation, and Diversion ($\beta = -.21$, $p < .05$) was a negative contributor. This regression provided no support for H_8 , as civic engagement was not a significant predictor of listing.

Sports. At the first step, mobility added a significant 4.7% to the variance in listening to sports call-in talk radio programs ($\Delta F = 4.22$, $p < .05$) and was a negative predictor. Valuing conversations added an additional 4.8% to the variance at the second step ($\Delta F = 4.55$, $p < .05$) and was a positive predictor. The final equation explained 9.9% of the variance in listening to call-in talk sports programs ($R = .31$), $F(2, 85) = 4.47$, $p < .05$. The results offered some support for both compensation and enrichment explanations. Listening was based on greater value toward conversation ($\beta = .22$, $p < .05$) and less mobility ($\beta = -.25$, $p < .05$).

Psychological and Health. At step 1, the Information listening motive accounted for 24.8% of the variance in listening to psychology and health programs ($\Delta F = 29.37$, $p < .001$) and was a positive predictor. Gender (female) added an additional 3.8% to the variance ($\Delta F = 4.55$, $p < .05$). The final equation explained 28.6% of the variance in listening to psychology and health call-in talk radio programs ($R = .53$), $F(2, 88) = 17.62$, $p < .001$. Information ($\beta = .48$, $p < .001$) and gender ($\beta = .20$, $p < .05$) were both positive contributors to the equation. The results did not clearly support either compensation or enrichment explanations.

Sex. The Companionship listening motive accounted for 8.7% of the variance in listening to sex talk programs at the first step ($\Delta F = 7.71, p < .01$) and was a positive predictor. At the second step, valuing conversations added another 5.2% to the variance ($\Delta F = 4.87, p < .001$). The final equation accounted for 13.9% of the variance ($R = .37$), $F(2, 80) = 6.48, p < .01$. Companionship ($\beta = .33, p < .01$) was a positive contributor, and value for conversation ($\beta = -.23, p < .05$) was a negative contributor. The equation offered support for the compensation approach. Listening to sex call-in talk radio programs grew out of a search for companionship but less value for family conversation.

Practical Information. At step 1, the Information listening motives accounted for 12.2% of the variance in listening to call-in talk radio shows that offer practical information ($\Delta F = 11.80, p < .001$) and was a positive predictor. At step 2, Diversion added an additional 6.4% to the variance ($\Delta F = 6.62, p < .05$) and became a negative predictor. At step 3, value for conversations added another 4.6% to the variance ($\Delta F = 4.99, p < .01$). The final equation accounted for 23.2% of the variance in listening to programs that offer practical information ($R = .48$), $F(3, 83) = 8.37, p < .001$. Information ($\beta = .41, p < .001$) and valuing conversations ($\beta = .22, p < .01$) were both positive predictors, and Diversion ($\beta = -.32, p < .05$) was a negative predictor. The results offered general support for the enrichment approach.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to test competing sets of hypotheses in order to understand some of the appeal of call-in talk radio. The results of this study reinforce some of the findings of more recent research on the audience for political talk radio: The audience can no longer be characterized as socialized isolated. The results of this study found that, compared to those who don't listen, listeners to call-in talk radio were more mobile and civically engaged, and callers were more civically engaged. For the most part, the results support cognitive enrichment explanations. There was little evidence that the talk radio audience is socially deficient; instead, they listen to gain information and because they appreciate conversations and arguments.

The results of this study fit into more recent research that explores how media use is linked to social capital, or political and social engagement. Scholars have noted that the talk radio audience is gaining in social capital. Lee, Cappella, and Southwell (2003), for example, found that listening to political talk radio is linked to interpersonal trust and talking about politics. In fact, their experiment found that listening to talk radio can increase interpersonal trust. Clearly, research on the social capital of talk radio listeners also supports an enrichment explanation.

This study paints a portrait of an active call-in talk radio audience. Prior research on the reasons for listening to the radio has noted the importance of more diversion-oriented motives (e.g., Armstrong & Rubin, 1989; Mendelsohn, 1964). Radio is used be-

cause it is convenient entertainment that accompanies daily tasks. The results of this study reinforce that radio is used because it is entertaining; Diversion was the most salient reason for listening to the radio for both listeners and nonlisteners to call-in talk radio. However, listeners and callers to talk radio are marked by a more active orientation to the programs. They are significantly more likely to listen to the radio to gain information. This focus on gaining information from the radio is reinforced by the results of the stepwise multiple regressions. Listening to political, psychology and health, and practical information talk radio subformats grows out of more instrumental reasons. Moreover, listening to political and practical information call-in talk programs is negatively related to Diversion. An information orientation is key to understanding the audience for talk radio.

Although this study did not explore effects of listening to call-in talk radio, it is not surprising that prior research has suggested that listeners are more likely to read newspapers (e.g., Lipschultz & Hilt, 1999), feel more politically efficacious (e.g., Barker, 1998), learn about political candidates (e.g., Pfau et al., 1997), and be more politically active (e.g., Hofstetter & Gianos, 1997). Instrumental media use is more active and attentive (Rubin & Perse, 1987) and likely to facilitate media effects (Kim & Rubin, 1997). Future research should continue to explore the effects of listening to call-in talk radio, as well as consider formats other than political talk radio.

The results of this study also point out that it is still important and useful to consider talk radio as a form of interpersonal communication (e.g., Armstrong & Rubin, 1989; Avery et al., 1978). Although the results of this study did not find that listeners and callers used the programs as a substitute for interpersonal communication, there are indications that feelings about interpersonal communication color appreciation of call-in talk radio. Listeners and callers were both more argumentative than nonlisteners. Argumentativeness is a characteristic of people that predisposes them to like verbal intellectual confrontations. Infante and Rancer (1982) hold that people who are high in argumentativeness are more likely to approach situations in which there are arguments. The results of this study extend the context for encountering arguments to radio. Because talk radio hosts encourage discussion of controversial issues and welcome challenges and disagreements, the content is appealing to those who appreciate arguments.

Valuing conversations also leads to listening to call-in talk radio. The results of the stepwise regression point out that valuing conversation predicts listening to sports and practical information talk radio programs. For both those subformats, listening may be a way of gaining information from a valued source—the conversations of others.

The results of this study offer some indications that the deficient audience of early talk radio research might still be listening—to sex talk programs. Although this was not the format chosen most often by our sample, listening to these programs was predicted by listening to the radio for companionship. Moreover, lower levels of valuing conversation were also linked to listening to sex talk programs. Future research should continue to explore the listeners of the different subformats of call-in talk

radio. Just as music radio is highly polarized (Webster & Phalen, 1997), talk radio may also attract specialized audiences.

Although the results of this study do not generally support a need-oriented approach to uses and gratifications, the results of this study do reinforce a central tenet of the approach: Different motives for using mass media lead to selection of different content. Information seeking leads to call-in talk radio use; diversionary motives lead to listening to music-formatted radio; companionship is linked to listening to sex talk radio. Future research should consider some of the personal and social influences on different motives for listening to the radio that result in selection of different talk radio formats. The modest results of this study might reflect that personal and social deficiencies do not affect media choice directly but instead affect reasons for listening to the radio.

Notes

¹Of the 645 valid attempts, excluding businesses, answering machines, disconnects, modems, operators, pay phones, pagers, no answers, voice mail, and fax, there was a 32.1% completion rate.

²The six argumentative items were "I enjoy a good argument over a controversial issue," "I consider an argument an exciting intellectual challenge," "Arguing over controversial issues improves my intelligence," "I feel refreshed and satisfied after an argument on controversial issue," "I do not like to miss the opportunity to argue a controversial issue," and "I feel excitement when I expect that a conversation I am in is leading to an argument."

³The contextual age items were as follows: (a) Mobility—"I have to rely on others to take me places" (recoded), and "I stay at home most of the time" (recoded); (b) Social Activity—"I often participate in the meetings or activities of clubs, lodges, recreation centers, churches, or other organizations," and "I often visit with friends, relatives, or neighbors"; and (c) Interpersonal Connectedness—"I have ample opportunity for conversations with other people," and "I often feel lonely" (recoded).

⁴The value for conversations scale items were "Parents should encourage their children to express their feelings," "Families should often talk about things that they have done during the day," "Families should often talk about their plans and hopes for the future," "Family members should talk about their feelings and emotions," "Parents should ask their children's opinions when the family is talking about something," and "Children should tell their parents what they're thinking about things."

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