



DIGITAL AUDIO ADVERTISING IN MENA



DigitalAudio

Part 1 of 3: Audio Opportunities in MENA

Introduction

There has been a surge in interest around Digital Audio Advertising globally, as new technologies and formats become available to advertisers. Audio is increasingly seen as a significant addition to campaigns complementing them through the power of sound at times that are most likely to resonate with consumers. In addition, many recent studies have shown that Audio is a key player in driving attention, making it a cost efficient and effective addition to campaigns.

For this three-part MENAVoices Q&A series, we asked members of our IAB MENA Audio Taskforce to give us an overview of the landscape in MENA and how Audio is bought and the benefits of adding Audio elements to a campaign. In this first edition, we look the opportunities in Audio advertising in MENA.



George Rahme
Client Partner Lead,
Spotify / Aleph



What types of Audio advertising are available in MENA?

Digital audio advertising appears primarily on music and podcast streaming platforms. Non-audio platforms, such as gaming have also adopted Audio advertng as a way to connect with consumers and monetise their attention. Audio Advertising can be divided into 3 broad categories:

Music Streaming

Within music streaming advertisers have the opportunity to consider different formats to connect with their audiences:

- Audio Ads - These can be standard ads, immersive or dynamically changing depending on situations, such as stock levels, weather or perhaps the score of the local team
- Music Curation - Sponsorship of specific playlists is an effective way to connect with audiences by tapping into their interests and aligning with brand values and positioning
- Music Creation - Effectively used for generations in radio, advertisers can create jingles or sonic descriptors, brand songs or align artists with a specific brand

Podcasts

Podcasts have the unique opportunity of aligning to a presenter, the podcast brand or the content, making it a highly interesting and effective contextual advertising opportunity for advertisers. Formats include:

- Audio Ads - Both standard or dynamic optimisation
- Host read - Keeping production costs low, flexibility high and leveraging the host brand for association
- Podcast Show sponsorship - Building frequency and brand association
- Podcast show creation - Greater content control, but needing to invest in audience growth

Gaming

- Uninterrupted audio ads that will allow the users to listen to it while playing
- Opt-in audio ads that will be served only when the users have their volume up
- Reward based audio ads that are immersed in the experience of the game



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Zak Naciri

Snr Manager - Precision
Publicis Media MENA



What are the big opportunities that audio can provide for MENA advertisers?

There are numerous opportunities for effective connection between brands and consumers using Audio advertising. Below is a snapshot of some of the key advantages Audio advertising provides.

Stand Out in a Clutter-Free Environment

Imagine your ad being the sole message a listener hears during their favourite podcast. With fewer ads competing for attention on audio platforms, your brand doesn't just get heard, it's more likely to be remembered. This scarcity elevates your message above the noise found in other crowded media channels.

Protect Your Brand with Safe and Premium Spaces

Picture your advertisement seamlessly integrated into a curated playlist on a trusted regional streaming service. You're assured that your brand is showcased alongside quality content, free from controversial or inappropriate material. This controlled environment safeguards your reputation and builds consumer trust.

Achieve More with Cost-Effective Campaigns

Consider a local startup that reaches thousands of potential customers without the hefty costs of video production. Audio ads are not only often more affordable to produce but also offer precise targeting. You invest less and get more, maximising your return on investment while efficiently reaching your desired audience.

Engage Consumers During Screenless Moments

Visualise your ad reaching a busy professional in Riyadh while they cook dinner or a student in Dubai during their morning jog. Audio advertising taps into these screenless moments—times when traditional visual media can't reach consumers. Your brand becomes a part of their daily routine, engaging them in a personal and unobtrusive way.

Enhance Relevance Through Contextual Alignment

Envision your health food brand advertising during a popular fitness podcast in the MENA region. By aligning your message with content that resonates with your target audience, you increase relevance and engagement. Listeners are more likely to respond positively when the ad complements the content they're already invested in.

Deliver Personalised Experiences with Dynamic Ads

Imagine greeting each listener by name or tailoring your message based on their music preferences and listening habits. Advances in programmatic technology allow for dynamic ad insertion, creating personalised experiences that captivate your audience. Personalization isn't just a trend—it's a powerful tool to boost engagement and conversion rates.



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Suzi Kuban

Content & Mkt Director
Next Broadcast Media



How is the MENA audio landscape unique compared to other regions?

The MENA digital audio landscape is one of the most vibrant, fast-growing industries in the world. From who is listening, to what they're listening to, it's a distinctive space that presents unparalleled opportunities for advertisers. Some of the most notably unique aspects of the MENA region are:

Unmatched Listener Engagement

MENA's podcast consumption is skyrocketing. In Saudi Arabia and the UAE, 67% and 62% of adults are tuning in for over an hour each week. These engagement levels outpace what we see in the US (38%) and the UK (26%), where audio is often viewed as more developed. This makes audio an essential part of daily life in MENA, offering brands prime opportunities to connect with highly engaged listeners.

A Brand-safe Environment

With insights from our brand safety partner, we can see local content contains far fewer instances of "unsafe" discussions compared to US content. Local creators in this region tend to focus on education, arts, and personal growth. This makes the content naturally brand-safe, giving advertisers peace of mind that their messages will align with positive and engaging material.

Youth-driven Consumption

MENA's young population, especially Gen Z and Millennials, is driving audio trends. These digital natives are highly engaged with podcasts and streaming platforms, offering brands a unique chance to build lasting connections with the next generation of consumers.

Cultural Affinity for Storytelling

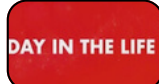
Storytelling has always been central to Arab culture, and podcasts are a natural extension of that tradition. Listeners in MENA are highly engaged, often spending more time with podcasts than their global counterparts. This creates a perfect environment for brands to tell their own stories and connect with audiences on a deeper level.

Surging Music Streaming

When it comes to streaming, Arabic music is taking the lead, despite making up just 1% of music libraries. This local trend gives advertisers the perfect opportunity to tap into culturally relevant music that resonates deeply with listeners.

Other IAB MENAVoices

Day in the Life



CTV



Retail Media 1



Retail Media 2





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Part 2 of 3: Audio Effectiveness

Introduction

In this second part to our three-part series on Digital Audio in MENA, we look at effectiveness of Audio advertising . From how to select the right Audio opportunity, to how it compares with other channels. We asked members of the IAB MENA Taskforce to provide their perspectives.



Carl Chalhoub

Associate Sales Director

DMS



How does the effectiveness of Audio compare to other formats and channels?

Adding Audio advertising to a cross-channel campaign can add significant value to the campaign's overall effectiveness. This is due to some specific characteristics of Audio and the associated opportunities. Below are just four examples of how it delivers increased effectiveness:

Strong share of voice

On average, users spend between 10 to 14 hours per week on audio platforms, engaging with only 3 to 4 audio ads during a typical 1-hour session. This indicates that while users stream audio approximately as much as they scroll through social media, they encounter significantly fewer ads. As a result, advertisers benefit from a higher share of voice during a session or campaign, often leading to improved recall effectiveness.

Unique access to consumers

Audio content can be consumed while engaging in other activities, such as driving, exercising, or working, allowing advertisers to reach audiences who might not be available for visual ads. It also creates a personal and immersive experience, often leading to deeper emotional connections with the content and the brand. Research shows that audio ads often have high engagement rates because they create an intimate listening experience.

Cost effectiveness

Creating audio ads typically requires less investment than video ads, which involve casting, filming, and post-production. It also allows for quick adjustment and updates, easily adapting the creatives to multiple listening contexts.

Reduced Wastage

Audio ads can also reduce reach wastage thanks to the highly accurate first party data of audio streaming and podcast platforms i.e. login data; real-time mood and activity information based on the music the user is listening to; passive behaviour and interest data of a podcast listener etc.



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Snr Manager - Precision
Publicis Media MENA



How do advertisers identify the most suitable audio platforms and formats?

Customer Data and Preferences

Selecting the right audio platforms and formats begins with customer data, offering insights into preferred genres, apps, and platforms. This data helps advertisers choose where their audience engages most, but additional factors should also be considered.

Time Constraints

When speed is crucial, programmatic options allow campaigns to launch in as little as 5 minutes via an audio ad manager or DSP. This fast approach also provides data-driven targeting, measurement, and scalability, avoiding the longer process of direct buys. It's a quick and effective solution.

Budget Considerations

Podcast and streaming ad costs vary based on audience size and targeting. For smaller budgets or test campaigns, programmatic buying via DSP ensures efficient spending across multiple channels. It allows advertisers to optimize in real time, even with limited funds.

Ad Formats and Buy Types

Programmatic audio offers several formats, balancing reach, and cost-effectiveness:

- Pre-roll: Ads before episodes; cost-effective for clear, short messages.
- Mid-roll: Highest-cost placement, best listen-through rates.
- Post-roll: Least expensive, still effective as the last message heard.
- Host-read/Live Playback: Utilizes the trust between hosts and listeners to enhance brand connection.
- Branded Podcast: Entertains or educates while promoting the brand.

Business Objectives Alignment

- Brand Awareness: Programmatic audio offers wide reach and contextual targeting.
- Customer Acquisition: Podcast sponsorships help move listeners from awareness to action, building trust through hosts.
- Customer Retention: Programmatic campaigns keep brands top of mind, while sponsorships deepen emotional connections.
- Promotions: Ads with clear calls to action and geographic targeting boost impact. Nielsen reports a 10% lift in purchase intent after hearing podcast ads.



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Part 3 of 3: Getting Started with Audio

Introduction

This is the final part of our three-part series on Audio advertising. In Part 1 we looked at Audio Opportunities in MENA and in Part 2, we looked at the effectiveness of Audio advertising. In this third part we ask members of our task force to get practical and talk about getting started with Audio Advertising and leveraging the opportunity of personalisation.



Bharath Shetty
Associate Director
GroupM MENA



How do you buy Audio Advertising?

As we have seen in this series, there are a number of different Audio opportunities. Selecting the right one depends on objectives and desired audiences. So too, the right buying model depends to a large degree on which format is selected and the objectives. Broadly, there are three buy-types, each with their own benefits.

Direct Buys

Much inventory is made available directly through the publisher or sales house, allowing more bespoke planning approaches within each channel. Streamers like Apple Music, Anghami, and Spotify offer highly engaging ad formats. It does however mean, the ad buyer needs to deal directly with each streamer or podcaster, unlike in programmatic.

Sponsorships

Host-read ads and sponsorships offer a powerful form of personalisation by leveraging the trusted connection between podcast hosts and their audience. Much like influencer marketing, these ads provide an authentic voice, creating a deeper resonance with the listener.

Programmatic

Programmatic audio advertising, bought through a DSP, offers highly sophisticated targeting capabilities. Advertisers can place ads in relevant contexts based on audience interests, genres of content, time of day, and even specific events or takeovers. It also provides the opportunity to leverage data in analysing effectiveness by accessing real-time data on metrics such as impressions, clicks, conversions, and audience engagement.

Regardless of the chosen buying method, there are some best practices in delivering effective Audio advertising campaigns:

- 1. Define your brand KPIs and target audience: Define exactly what are you trying to achieve**
 - brand building, engagement, leads, sales
- 2. Select the right platforms for your brand: Is it Audio only, or part of cross-channel campaign**
 - Streaming, Podcasts, Gaming
- 3. Develop compelling creative content that captures consumers: bespoke to context or personalised**
 - Recorded, presenter read, audio identifiers, personalised
- 4. Launch, analyse, optimise: understand how consumers are engaging with your brand**
 - measure, analyse, optimise



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Adam Clifford
AI Audio MENA Lead
AudioStack



How can advertisers leverage personalisation with Audio Advertising?

Personalization in audio advertising is no longer optional—it's essential. Tailored, relevant content is transforming how brands connect with listeners, allowing them to go beyond traditional formats. Here's how advertisers can effectively leverage personalization in audio to maximize their impact.

Automation and Scaling

Successful personalization starts with the ability to automate and scale audio production efficiently. Brands need to create high-quality, customized audio experiences quickly and at a low cost. AI-driven automation accelerates this process and ensures that ads can be dynamically adapted to the listener's preferences, behavior, and context. This technology allows advertisers to produce and distribute personalized audio content across multiple channels with ease.

Data-Driven Personalization

The real power of audio personalization comes from using data to inform creative decisions. Advertisers can use location, time of day, and listener preferences to craft dynamic ads that feel personal and relevant. For example, location data allows for ads with local references, accents, or cultural elements, making the content more relatable and engaging. By delivering the right message at the right time, brands increase both engagement and effectiveness.

Flexibility in Production

Personalization requires flexibility. Advertisers need to be ready to adapt content quickly, whether creating new audio or modifying existing assets. This flexibility enables brands to respond to market changes and varying consumer needs. It also allows for the creation of different ad formats, lengths, and styles, ensuring that the content is optimized for diverse platforms.

Localization for Greater Impact

Localization is a critical aspect of personalization. It's more than just translating content—it's about tailoring it to feel familiar to each listener. By incorporating local accents, cultural references, and relevant events, brands can create a deeper emotional connection with their audience. This helps ensure that ads resonate on a personal level, especially in culturally diverse regions.

Relevance Across Channels

To fully leverage personalization, advertisers must ensure their audio content is consistent yet adaptable across all channels—whether it's streaming platforms, podcasts, digital radio or CTV. Dynamic creative optimization (DCO) tools enable real-time adjustments based on listener data, enhancing the relevance of ads across all formats.

By embracing automation, data, flexibility, localization, and multi-channel relevance, advertisers can create impactful, personalized audio experiences that resonate emotionally and drive business results.