

Exploring Podcasting as a Medium for Sharing Modern Issues with College-Age Demographics

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the problem

This paper examines the medium of podcasting and creating a personal brand through this medium. While analog forms of broadcast media such as television and radio were some of the most common sources of the public's information until around the 1960s, technological advances and the creation of the internet drastically changed the way that the public absorbs and accesses its information. Media serves to provide several key roles in our society: entertainment, education, providing a platform to discuss issues, and serving the role of a watchdog for institutions and governments (2016).

Podcasting, as a modern media form that has become increasingly popular over the last two decades, can be used to satisfy these needs. Starting up a podcast relies on an understanding of the needs of the media consumer, as well as personal branding and an understanding of the media climate. This study will look at the way that information regarding a variety of topics can be made accessible in an entertaining and educational way to the specific demographic of college-age students through a podcast.

Background of the problem

The term "podcast" comes from a hybrid between the word 'iPod' and 'broadcast', likely due to the fact that the media form first became popular around 2004, when the technology of the internet and portable audio devices like the iPod began to change the media scene (Chafroud, 2020). The medium has come a long way since its beginnings; early on, only around 6 million people in the United States listened to podcasts. As of 2023, data from an Edison Research Report showed that approximately 183 million U.S. listeners had listened to podcasts, with

around 120 million people sharing that they had listened to them in the last month (Infinite Dial, 2023). According to the Pew Research Center, in 2023, approximately half of the American population listened to podcasts, and one in five listened to podcasts multiple times per week. Additionally, the study showed that of the individuals surveyed, 60% shared that they utilize podcasts for entertainment, followed closely by 55% who shared that they utilize podcasts for learning purposes. Podcasts in the vein of comedy, politics, and entertainment were the most popular genres (Shearer, 2023).

Data can also give insight into the usage of podcasts by media consumers of specifically younger demographics. According to another Pew Research Study from 2023, two-thirds of respondents between the ages of 18 and 29 shared that they have utilized podcasts as a media form in the last year (Shearer, 2023). Due to the fact that more than half of people within this younger demographic in the United States engage with podcasts, podcasts catering to this demographic are an area for relevant exploration.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore podcast creation catering to the interests of younger demographics of podcast listeners, which have been identified by Pew Research studies as active users of this media form. Additionally, podcasting involves knowledge of the purpose that media can serve for the consumer; in this case, this study will explore creating media that satisfies an educational purpose, while infusing elements of entertainment to satisfy this need as well. The focus will be creating a podcast brand that runs on authenticity: sharing not only educational material but also personal experiences and personality that create a certain accessibility and relatability to the average podcast user between the ages of 18 and 29.

Setting for the study

This study will be taking place as a part of a journalism senior project at the California Polytechnic University in San Luis Obispo, as a way for a journalism student to explore media creation outside of traditional news media writing. The podcast will be titled “Trickle Down Takes,” featuring the voices of two fourth year college students: Arabel Meyer, and Olivia Davis, along with occasional guests. Podcast episodes will explore relevant issues to youth navigating the modern world: wellness, social stratification and inequality, gender, religion, and many other topics explained in an accessible and engaging way. These episodes will be edited and released bi-weekly on online podcasting platforms.

Research Questions

1. What is the process of writing, recording, editing, and publishing a podcast?
2. In terms of personal branding, how does a podcast creator cultivate a strong brand within this media outlet to draw in viewers?
3. How can a podcast serve to engage the demographic of college students and young adults with the information it presents?
4. What is the process of creating podcast content that serves the two media roles of both entertainment and education?
5. How can a podcast be used as a medium to share insights about a range of topics in the modern world?

Definition of terms

The following terms help give the reader background within the context of the study:

Audio Storytelling - utilizing sound to share information or convey messages on various media forms.

Podcast - a modern audio media form in which listeners can stream or download digital audio files on their devices.

Radio - an early audio media form developed in the 20th century that relies on the transmission of electromagnetic radio waves from a transmitter to an antenna on a device.

Organization of the study

The chapters within this study are designed to streamline its findings into an organized and cohesive whole. Chapter 1 presents the statement of the problem, background of the problem, the purpose of the study, and Chapter 2 presents an examination of the emergence of audio storytelling, the neuroscience behind storytelling, and what differentiates podcasts from past forms of auditory media. Chapter 3 presents the methodology of the study, including data sources, data collection, data presentation, and delimitations. Finally, chapter 4 analyzes the data and chapter 5 discusses and summarizes the study's findings.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Examining The Emergence of Audio Storytelling

Audio storytelling can be defined as utilizing sound to share information and/or convey messages through media (Dhiman, 2023). Radio was one of the earliest forms of audio-based media in the modern age. It wasn't until around 1910 that the first entertainment broadcasts began to reach public audiences in the United States, largely driven by the public demand for radio. The Golden Age of Radio occurred between the late 1920s and early in the 1950s; a period of time in which radio flourished, drawing millions of listeners in the United States as shows of various genres emerged. The novelty of radio began to fade in the 1950s upon the advent of television, but the media form still remains incredibly popular and constantly evolving today (PBS). Since the Golden Age of Radio, the development of smartphones and mobile devices has allowed for not only increased accessibility to audio media but also more opportunity for diversification and development into new forms. Podcasts, as a form of media, were born out of this technological revolution (Dhiman, 2023).

Audio storytelling in podcasting is being produced during a time when individual media consumers are constantly bombarded by an onslaught of information and media in many different forms. Media scholars have observed that this is simply serving to shorten the attention spans of consumers as so much information is being processed and integrated. However, consumers tend to appreciate media that takes time to tell stories with care and depth (Dhiman, 2023). Audio storytelling, therefore, is a great way to accomplish this, because it allows a content creator like a podcaster to dive into a particular topic, exploring its nuances in a way that is engaging to a modern audience.

The Neuroscience Behind Storytelling

Storytelling is an essential part of the human experience and has been so throughout human development. Storytelling is used to make sense of the world around us while connecting with others. Stories help humans to teach social norms and foster cooperation in social settings, according to a recent study from Nature Communications. Scientists believe that humans have been telling stories as long as we have had verbal language; they have been an important means to pass along traditions and culture orally (Kluger, 2017).

Several processes occur in our brain as we hear and process the telling of a story. Firstly, as we are listening to a story, neural mirroring occurs, which refers to the way that the neurons in our brain fire in the same pattern that the speaker's neurons are firing. This creates a contextual model of the story between the listener and speaker. This occurs throughout many parts of the brain, including the frontal, motor, and sensory cortexes. The brain builds up anticipation about the resolution of the story, which triggers a release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter and hormone which gives the listener a feeling of satisfaction and pleasure (Hasson, Silbert & Stephens, 2010).

The informal structure of podcasting allows for different forms of storytelling that engage our interests. This potential for the additional telling of stories makes podcasting a modern media form that draws on ancient forms of communication that directly stimulate our brains.

Examining What Differentiates Podcasts from Past Auditory Media

Podcasting as a modern media form has, in the last two decades, undeniably touched the cultural mainstream and emerged as a differentiated medium from past auditory media, namely radio. There are several characteristics that define podcasts as a media form: podcasts are a very

mobile medium (listeners can absorb the media in transit and in public spaces), offer increased listener control, elicit active listener selection and engagement, are closely tied to social media engagement, and are often created and produced independently, allowing for increased creative license of the creator (Spinelli, M., & Dann, L.). Because podcasts often have a slightly less formal structure than traditional auditory media, this also allows more room for creative license. For example, due to the fact that podcasts are self-produced, they do not have the same kind of schedule or time-related constraints as radio. Podcast creators can release media which is whatever length and at whichever time they choose.

The diverse environment of the podcasting landscape is one that allows for the exploration of many different genres-allowing listeners to find something they are interested in, regardless of differing passions or interests. This leaves additional room for not only choice but exploration of different topics and material (Dhiman, 2023).

Chapter 3

Methodology

For this section we will look at the methods of collecting data for this study, including data sources, collection, presentation, and delimitations.

Data Sources

For this study, research was conducted on a variety of topics of interest to the podcast hosts; topics that cater to the education and entertainment of young adults. This podcast was designed to create a feeling of relatability through personal storytelling. This is accomplished through the two podcasters' presentation of information: the podcast is structured with one podcaster presenting data and researched information, while the other reacts and offers personal experiences related to the topic, establishing a relatability and connection between the listener and creator.

Data Collection

Relevant research was conducted for each individual episode of the podcast, as each episode contained different topics of interest. Each episode was researched with relevant information organized before the recording of every episode. This research for each episode was informed by multiple online sources put together by one of the podcast hosts. Upon the time of recording, researched data and information was built upon personal experiences and stories by both hosts.

Data Presentation

After research was conducted on each individual topic, episodes were recorded using the computer application *Garage Band*, with an attached microphone to ensure good sound quality

during the recording process. *Garage Band* was then used to edit the episode - polishing the episode to have a professional sound and quality to it.

According to research on the topic, the average podcast episode is around 42 minutes long, but podcasts usually run anywhere between 20 minutes and 2 hours long (Breitman, *Riverside*). For this podcast, episodes were kept on the shorter side - to pique the attention of the listener and hold their attention, allowing them to listen to a whole episode to learn about a topic. For this reason, episodes released were kept at a shorter length of about 23-25 minutes, the perfect amount of time to present the information and tell personal stories while keeping the interest of the listener. The final public presentation of this media was presented on *Buzzsprout*, a popular podcasting platform.

Delimitations

Some of the delimitations of this study included time frame, resources, and monetary constraints. Firstly, this study was conducted within a 10-12 week period in which the methodology and process of podcasting were studied while recording and producing the product. Additionally, another factor in the boundaries of this study was prior knowledge of recording and producing audio media before *Trickle Down Takes*. This required much trial and error to create a cohesive and well-organized podcast. Due to this timeframe, a limited amount of media was able to be created, but the branding and methodology were established to continue to run a recurring podcast.

Additionally, resources were limited for the creation of this product - podcast recording is constrained by monetary availability to fund the necessary devices for production. For this study, the devices available from the Cal Poly Journalism rental office were utilized, but the recording was constrained by those devices available.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

This section will provide analysis of the collected data by going into the creation of branding elements like name and logo art, giving a detailed timeline of episode production, and covering the publishing of Trickle Down Takes for public listening.

Creation of brand elements: Name and logo art

Before the creation of a podcast, the first task is to create a name that is catchy and representative of the content and purpose of the media. When deciding on a name, the important elements of this media were considered: the perspective of young adults, accessibility to demographics, and the presentation of a multitude of information on different modern-day issues. The name decided upon was ‘Trickle Down Takes’, to represent the ‘takes’ or perspective of two young adults, as well as the ‘trickle down’ effect of social, political, wellness, and environmental issues on the greater population.



Additionally, podcasts require logo art before publishing on online platforms. The Adobe programs *Photoshop* and *Illustrator* were utilized to create this logo for Trickle Down Takes. Taken into account was the name of the podcast, as well as presenting a visual representation of the two podcast hosts, Arabel and Olivia.

Timeline of an episode production

Episode 1, season 1 of Trickle Down Takes was titled ‘Breathing’, and covered the topic of the physiological effects of breathing in the body, and its connection to mental and physical health. After conducting research, the episode was recorded. The two podcasting hosts worked together to create a media that felt like a conversation, utilizing personal storytelling to engage the parts of a listener's brain that are engaged by storytelling. Host Arabel presented the data and research while connecting the information to experiences with breathwork as a yoga instructor. Olivia responded to the data and research presented, sharing her personal experiences related to mental health, and background as a child development major. The episode was then edited and produced by Arabel before being published online.

Each episode of the podcast was conducted in a similar fashion, with work divided similarly and the rapport between the hosts cohesively established as part of the personal branding to engage recurring listeners.

Publishing Trickle-Down Takes for Public Listening

Starting a podcast requires finding a podcast hosting site, in which the podcast is published and then becomes available to a public audience. Some popular podcast hosting platforms include *PodBean*, *Buzzsprout*, *Libsyn*, and *Spreaker*. For the production of this podcast, the platform *Buzzsprout* was used to make Trickle Down Takes available online for listener access.

Publishing the podcast included creating an account on the site, adding cover art, and including a bio of the podcast for listeners to view. Each episode is uploaded individually, with a title, episode and season number, and short description. Season 1, episode 1 of Trickle Down Takes, Breathing, is available via the link [here](#), or the link below.

Episode 1 link: <https://www.buzzsprout.com/2362125/15022354>

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

Summary

This study served to examine the medium of podcasting and creating a personal brand through this medium. Podcasting, as a modern audio media form represents the evolution of past forms of media into a new and modern way to share and receive information. This medium serves to engage the brains of listeners by utilizing personal branding and the increased ability for differentiation. Additionally, podcasts are a very mobile medium, offer increased listener control, elicit active listener engagement, are closely tied to social media engagement, and are often produced independently, which makes them unique and customizable.

To further explore the study's research questions, podcasting was put into practice through the creation of Trickle Down Takes, which allowed for a look into many aspects of this media form, including its production, personal branding, and publishing for online listening.

Discussion

The creation of Trickle Down Takes allowed for the exploration of the following research questions identified at the beginning of the study:

1. What is the process of writing, recording, editing, and publishing a podcast?

The process of creating Trickle Down Takes included an organized approach to conducting research for individual episodes, recording and editing episodes via the platform *Garage Band*, identifying an online hosting platform, and then publishing the podcast for online listening.

2. In terms of personal branding, how does a podcast creator cultivate a strong brand within this media outlet to draw in viewers?

To create a cohesive personal brand, podcasting requires that the creator first identify a cohesive area of focus for the podcast; for Trickle Down Takes, the focus was entertainment and education, exploring topics of social issues, wellness, and modern society. Additionally, personal branding includes name creation and making a representative cover art/logo for the podcast. Finally, another element of personal branding for podcasts includes establishing a host personality and cohesive rapport between hosts on the podcast.

3. How can a podcast serve to engage the demographic of college students and young adults with the information it presents?

By differentiating a podcast in terms of tone and content, a podcast creator can customize a podcast to engage the interests of specific demographics of people. By presenting their perspectives as college-age women, as well as sharing personal stories, the podcast hosts of Trickle Down Takes were able to engage the demographic of college students and young adults.

4. What is the process of creating podcast content that serves the two media roles of both entertainment and education?

By pre-searching episodes and organizing the recording in such a way that both research and data but also personal stories and anecdotes are presented, the creators of Trickle Down Takes were able to serve the two media roles of entertainment and educational value through the podcast.

5. How can a podcast be used as a medium to share insights about a range of topics in the modern world?

By creating a brand that presented the podcast as a medium to share insights on a variety of topics in a conversational style, the creators of Trickle Down Takes were able to create a product of media that could explore a diverse number of different topics.

Recommendations for Practice

At the completion of the study, the data collected identified two important aspects of podcast creation: organization and distinctiveness. These two aspects serve to create not only a strong personal brand but also a smooth operation of creating media. Firstly, the organization allows the podcast creator to have the ability to create cohesive episodes that appeal to the interests of the listeners. By pre-researching and keeping the editing process organized, episodes can be created and released in a professional and timely manner. Additionally, distinctiveness and personal branding are important to create a unique brand. Differentiation helps to create a unique product that has its own specific value to different podcast listeners with differing interests. Catering a podcast to a specific demographic (college-age students and young adults) relies on a strong personal brand that draws in specific listeners from the wide range of podcast listeners within today's market. Additionally, this serves to fulfill different media roles, ie education, and entertainment.

Study Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of the study identify that creating a podcast relies on a variety of elements, including personal branding, organized research, editing and producing tools, the rapport between cohosts, selection of hosting platforms, and publishing for online listening. These unique elements come together to allow for a unique form of media that is more dynamic

and customizable than earlier forms of audio media. Throughout the process of creating the podcast Trickle Down Takes, these elements were relied upon to create a cohesive product intended to serve the purpose of engaging young adults and college-age students to serve educational and entertainment purposes.

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Appendix

Example episode script : Episode 1, season 1, Breathing.

A: Breathing has been an area of interest of mine for a while now. As a yoga teacher, breathwork was a central focus of my studies of yoga while getting certified, as it is one of the limbs of yoga practice. Breathing has the direct power to steady the nervous system and has a great impact on our physical and emotional health. In this episode, we will explore different breathwork techniques, the physiological process of breathing, and how our awareness of our breath can serve as a powerful tool in mind-body connection.

A: Recently I finished the book *The Body Keeps the Score* by Bessel Van Der Kolk, and in a section about breathing, he shared that as we breathe, our inhalations and exhalations regulate our heart rate. Breathing has a direct impact on our nervous systems; when we are stressed, taking slow, deep breaths are a sure way to calm ourselves down. Something I want to explore in this episode is how we can harness our bodily connection with breath to calm our anxieties and recenter ourselves in a world that presents a constant strain on our nervous systems.

A: In modern society, there are a lot of stimuli which activate our sympathetic nervous system, or the fight or flight instinct that evolved in us to prevent us from being eaten by wild animals. It's funny to think that work, financial, or family stresses would have the same effect of a wild tiger attack on our brains, but they do. The sympathetic nervous system activates the adrenal glands, and stress hormones like cortisol have an impact on our long term health.

A: Humans have always possessed an intrinsic understanding of our connection with the breath, something which I believe has been lost in modern society as a whole. All over the world, humans developed methods of breathwork tied to certain traditions and groups of people. Breathwork is present in yogic traditions as well as in breath-centered meditations of many forms tied to Buddhism, Christianity, Sufism, Taoism, and Shamanism. Interestingly, in many languages, the word for breath has the same meaning as the word 'spirit' or 'spiritual force'. The word 'spirit' in the English language comes from the Latin word 'spiritus', meaning 'a breath'.

A: In many languages, including Pranayama, or breathwork in yogic tradition is something that I can speak to. Prana, in Sanskrit refers to 'life force energy', so the word pranayama essentially controls the life force energy through breath. Pranayama is the fourth of the eight limbs of yoga written in by the sage Patanjali. Asana, which is the physical posturing that is commonly associated with yoga in the west, is held at the same level of importance of breathwork. Personally, as a yoga teacher, I have seen the benefits of breathwork. When I invite my students to sit and tune into their breathing, I can see a direct impact on the calming of their being.

A: Neuroscience behind the way that anxiety and stress function in the body can explain why the breath is such a powerful tool to calm the mind and body. There are two pathways of anxiety: cortex based anxiety and amygdala based anxiety. The cortex of the brain is the thinking brain, while the amygdala is an ancient structure in the brain that creates the physical sensation of anxiety. The amygdala stimulates the sympathetic nervous system, creating the fight/flight/freeze response in our bodies. Because the amygdala and cortex are separate, it is sometimes hard to communicate with our thinking brains to the amygdala that we are okay and can calm down. For

anyone who has experienced a panic attack, which are common among people who experience anxiety, it is very hard to use our thinking brains to calm down the physical sense of overwhelm that an anxiety attack brings up in the body. However, the breath is a tool that can be used to speak to the amygdala in its own language. Taking slow, deep breaths and untensing the muscles is a proven way to calm the body when experiencing an anxiety attack.

A: Breathing can have additional fascinating effects on our body that still being studied. Wim Hof, a Dutch athlete has been studied for his abilities that he attributes to the combination of breathwork and cold water plunges. Practitioners of the Wim Hof method have been studied specifically for their ability to regulate their immune response. In one study at Radboud University in the Netherlands, several practitioners of the Wim Hof method were injected with endotoxins, bacteria that cause sickness. The results showed that they were able to control both their sympathetic nervous system and immune response, which is pretty incredible.

A: There are so many benefits to tuning into the natural rhythms of our bodies that humans have always had an intrinsic understanding of. Breathing is a way of communicating with our brains amygdala, the control center of our physiological and emotional responses to stress. It is comforting that we possess this natural understanding and healing ability. It will be interesting to see how research around breathwork continues to reveal the multiplicity of benefits it can have on our bodies and minds.