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Elements of podcast journalism, an emerging framework

ABSTRACT: This chapter discusses an emerging framework for the study of news podcasting based on a qualitative international analysis of news podcasts from Canada and Australia. It aims to identify the ways in which news podcasting is, whether intentionally or not, helping address various crises currently facing journalism, including news avoidance and threats to journalistic relevance. Using qualitative methods that prioritize listening, the research analyzes two different types of news podcasts in the two countries looking for ways in which journalists are taking advantage of the medium's unique affordances. Following the news podcast typology proposed by the global Reuters *Digital News Report*, we analyze podcasts in the news roundup and deep dive/explanatory categories. Barely a decade into news podcasting, we remain at the early stages of understanding the podcast medium is reshaping journalism. Among other affordances, podcasting has to develop new forms of news production, leaning into forms of intimate communication and reinvigorating genres like confessional journalism, investigative series, and true-crime, often impacting and challenging traditional journalistic norms and roles such as objectivity and distance-based reporting. Our chapter discusses one of the central aspects of news podcasting, conversations about the news, as a defining element of news podcasting.

KEYWORDS: podcast journalism; deep listening; news podcasts; digital journalism; trust

Introduction

In early 2024, a contributor on Reddit posted this question: «I have become averse to accessing any news sources – podcasts, websites... I am politically very liberal and I do vote. Everything is just so bleak right now, and I don't need that kind of energy. Is that a bad thing? Does it really matter? What does the news do for you?» ([Active_Ad9337], 2024). The question spurred a lively debate with answers ranging from «the news is untrustworthy at best, so why bother?» to those confessing they quit the news to protect their mental health, while others provided tips for how to better consume news and learn fact-checking instead of tuning out (*Ibidem*).

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It was not an isolated or rare discussion. In fact, news journalism is going through an existential crisis with dwindling audiences in many countries around the world. As Toff, Palmer, and Nielsen (2023) argue in *Avoiding the News: Reluctant Audiences for Journalism*, news avoidance is tied to factors from the pedestrian, such as lack of time and money, to the more complex, such as identity and information infrastructures. Two major factors of news avoidance in different countries appear to be information overload – overwhelmed audiences turning off the news (Villi *et al.*, 2021) – and a sense that an excess of negativity in the news is harmful to personal mental health (Overgaard, 2023). The trend towards news avoidance is intertwined with a crisis of news relevance in an environment of media and cultural change that includes the dwindling power of broadcasting platforms like radio and television to attract mass audiences. The words of a former broadcast journalist-turned podcaster in Canada sums this up well: «I was a broadcast journalist. Now, TV is the last place I go for news» (Mesley, 2024). Tired of rigid formats favoring top-down, officialist approaches to the news, and of facing neverending streams of, often negative, information, audiences are turning to technologies that offer streaming and on-demand news, often led by individual personalities (Reuters Institute, 2024).

Against this backdrop, podcasting has emerged as «a bright spot for publishers, attracting younger, well-educated audiences» according to the Reuters *Digital News Report* (2024: 11). The same report found that publishers look at podcasts as opportunities for exploring formats that can help address the challenge of news disengagement, especially because podcasts are less immediately reliant on platform algorithms that tend to push people into news silos. Meanwhile, journalists see podcasts as a space where they can experiment with how news is presented to audiences, challenging traditional conventions of journalistic objectivity and detached reporting (Bird & Lindgren, 2024; Nee & Santana, 2021).

Podcasting started in the early 2000s, but podcast journalism took a while to break into the medium. In 2014, the serialized investigative journalism podcast *Serial*, produced by a team of public radio journalists in Chicago, dropped its first season and marked a turning point for podcasting and news. *Serial* opened the door for journalists to play with the medium outside broadcasting and print constraints and turned the gaze inwards to reveal the behind-the-scenes of journalistic investigations (Perdomo & Rodrigues-Rouleau, 2021). Then, in 2017, the launch of the *New York Times* podcast *The Daily* marked another landmark moment. The podcast took an innovative approach to journalism with its 20-minute daily deep dives into a single news story, dropping episodes Monday to Friday. Eventually spawning copies in many countries, including Canada and Australia, the success of *The Daily* has had a major impact on the ways in which journalism is both produced and shared with audiences, underlining a return of more narrative forms of delivering the news (Lindgren, 2016) and establishing journalist-to-journalist conversations as an effective format to explain the news.

There is no question that the transformation of journalism experienced from the early years of the 21st century is now intertwined with podcasting. In the

words of Aldona Kobus, the medium has earned its place as a «marker of cultural shift in media» (2002: 7). And though it is true that news podcasts comprise a relatively small portion of all existing podcasts, they are highly popular and still growing. Several studies are showing audience growth for news podcasts in both Australia and Canada. News podcasts boasted a listening audience of 3.8 million Australians in the first half of 2024 alone (CRA & Triton Digital, 2024), and in Canada all podcast consumption is trending upwards – one quarter of the population listened to news podcasts in 2024 (Triton Digital, 2024).

The above-average number of young people engaging with podcast journalism, as well as the rise in dedicated news consumers who are engaging with podcast journalism and news, indicates new habits are rapidly emerging, showing a promising sign for how podcasting may be helping journalism overcome issues with news avoidance and its crisis of relevance. Amongst the thousands of podcasts now populating Apple and Spotify's catalogues for news and current affairs, there are countless examples of journalists ranging from independent producers to national broadcasters experimenting with new approaches to news reporting. This includes popular journalist-to-journalist interviews that have come to characterize daily explanatory-journalism types of podcasts and novel forms of storytelling using creative sound designs in podcast news documentaries. Public broadcasters such as the ABC in Australia and Canada's CBC were early adopters of podcasting and have continued to expand their offerings (Clark & McLean, 2020).

Our study departs from traditional approaches to analysing podcasts by prioritizing listening and orality, a methodology that allows researchers to truly appreciate the transformative power of podcasting (Perdomo & Rodrigues-Rouleau, 2021). By using deep listening as an analytical lens, we identify specific ways in which both independent and mainstream media organizations, including digital media publishers and broadcasters, are taking advantage of podcasting's unique aural affordances in ways that help address journalism's concurrent crises of news avoidance and threats to relevance. This is the first step in a larger project mapping the intrinsic elements of podcast journalism.

Our analysis aims to provide perspectives from two major English-speaking podcast journalism markets, Canada and Australia, whose journalistic cultures share many traits such as the presence of strong public broadcasters with popular podcast offerings and similar numbers in podcast listeners relative to overall population. This chapter begins to outline how the intersection of podcasting and journalism is resulting in new ways to produce and deliver news, and starts to unpack the timely question of whether podcasting might help address the multiple crises facing journalism. Our theoretical framework is based on the notion that journalism is a culture whose norms, boundaries, and practices are always susceptible to change. Based on Ryfe's (2012) notion that the culture of journalism is reinforced and changed through the socialization of journalists, this framework allows us to understand how journalism's intersection with podcasting is a site of transformation and

possibility. All the while, we recognize that our findings are centred in English-speaking industrialized countries and do not mean to speak for the rest of the world. As Hanitzsch and colleagues have argued (2019), we also also underscore that there is no single «journalistic culture» but rather that multiple journalisms co-exist even within apparently homogenous cultures.

Journalism under threat – Podcasting to the rescue?

News avoidance first gained significant attention when the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism began to track it systematically in their *Digital News Report* in 2012. But the topic came into even sharper focus during the COVID-19 pandemic, when researchers observed a marked increase in people deliberately avoiding news content (Fitzpatrick, 2022; Ytre-Arne, & Moe, 2021). There are several, often interlinked, factors driving news avoidance: emotional exhaustion from negative news coverage (often termed «news fatigue»), distrust in media organizations, feelings of powerlessness when faced with overwhelming global problems, and what researchers call «information overload» in our increasingly connected digital environment (*Ibidem*).

As their book *Avoiding the News: Reluctant Audiences for Journalism* explores, Toff, Palmer, and Nielsen (2023) outline a complex web of reasons for why audiences turn away from journalism, from structural and societal factors, such as being time poor, to personal choices, such as choosing to prioritize mental health. Villi *et al.* (2021) identify information overload as a major factor for tuning out the news. Additionally, many people report avoiding news because they find it disruptive to their mental wellbeing, with some individuals describing news consumption as anxiety-inducing and detrimental to their daily mood (Overgaard, 2023). Recent works have looked at news avoidance from the lens of social class (Lindell & Mikkelsen Båge, 2023) and even gender (Sui *et al.*, 2022). According to the *Digital News Report* (2024: 10), global interest in news has fallen by 12 percentage points since 2021 to 48%. The global downturn in news consumption is reflected in many markets, including Poland, Italy, Hungary, Ireland and the UK. Bucking the trend is Australia, which has maintained relatively steady levels of news interest at 54% (*Ibidem*). In 2024, over half of Australians (51%) accessed news more than once a day, with notable rises among Gen Z and women (*Ivi:* 77).

Part of the intricate web of reasons, trust in journalism is also falling and contributing to news avoidance. The 2024 *Digital News Report* states that, «across the world, much of the public does not trust most news most of the time. While there is significant variation from country to country and from brand to brand, in this year's report, just 40% of our respondents across all 47 markets say they trust most news» (Reuters Institue, 2024: 34). And it is not just a question of trust. Especially in the last decade, journalism has been facing a crisis of relevance, facing competition in a saturated and chaotic media market (Carlson *et al.*, 2021).

Finding out how journalists are fighting back is part of the impetus for our research, and we look at this specifically from the standpoint of podcasting. We know that journalists build claims to their relevance by seeking legitimacy and authority through relational practices – that is, through constructing and performing their work in ways that seek to be labelled "legitimate" or "authoritative" by their different publics, as Carlson argued in *Journalistic Authority: Legitimating News in the Digital Era* (2017). This means that journalists must constantly strive to build these claims to relevance through different means. Initial studies into how journalists are doing this in podcasting have found that a strategic use of journalistic transparency and turning the gaze inwards into journalism's processes can help build the case for journalism's overall relevance (Perdomo & Rodrigues-Rouleau, 2021). Moreover, others have found that podcasting's ability to connect intimately with listeners is key to understanding how trust is built in this medium (Lindgren, 2016).

Podcast journalism

The short history of podcasting dates back to just about two decades, and journalism did not enter the medium until after 2010 (Berry, 2015). Podcasting has become an increasingly significant medium for journalists, without the bounds of conventions and fixed broadcast schedules of its relative radio journalism. Testing the affordances of podcasting, journalists have experimented with sharing information about journalistic processes, connecting with audiences through conversations, leaning into explanations and commentary, and innovating on storytelling techniques (Lindgren, 2022; Rae, 2023; Bird & Lindgren, 2024; Snoussi, Heywood & Lugo-Ocando, 2024).

David O. Dowling's aptly titled book *Podcast Journalism. The Promise and Perils of Audio Journalism* (2024) signals both the affordances and challenges of the alluring medium, so successful in capturing new audiences and keeping them listening. Dowling notes podcast journalism has much to offer with its storytelling, servicing both mass audiences and previously underserved communities. Notably, public radio in particular has led the way into news podcasting and public broadcasters continue to dominate podcast charts globally. As Clark and McLean argue, «Public broadcasters have been well positioned to develop and advance the full technological attributes of the medium, relying on the best features of the radiogenic narratives they have been producing for decades, and in some cases "remediating" them for even deeper listener engagement» (2020: 208).

In contrast, however, news podcasting is also seeing the increasing dominance of a few publishers and platforms, and growing questions about ethics and adherence to journalistic principles. And, as illustrated by Donald Trump's win in 2024 in what was called the «first podcast election» (Fu, 2024; Galloway, 2023), the medium is also providing a platform for disseminating disinformation.

Analyzing podcasts

Our study follows the Reuters *Digital News Report*'s typology of news podcasts established by Newman (2023) and analyzes the following two news podcast categories. First, the news roundup, consisting of short news bulletins usually lasting under 10 minutes and offering brief updates on multiple stories. And second, the daily deep dive/explanatory podcast, which is often around 20-minutes long and features an in depth look at one or two news stories, with some narrative and sound design. Newman also identifies two other categories of news podcasts in this typology – the extended chat and the news documentary – but our first analysis is only occupied with the first two.

We selected two podcasts from each category from Canada and Australia, for a total of eight podcasts. From those, we selected three episodes from the month of August, 2024, for each of the eight podcasts for the analysis. The podcasts were intentionally selected as examples fitting Newman's typology of news podcasts and based on anecdotal evidence of each of the podcasts' popularity. The sample includes the following podcasts:

News podcast typology	Canada		Australia	
News round-ups: (Typically 1 – 10 minutes) Podcasts that update audiences briefly with multiple stories (Newman, 2023).	*CP Newswatch*, by *The Canadian Press*	*The Peak Daily*, by *The Peak/ Curiouscast*	*SBS News Updates*, by *SBS News*	*From the Newsroom*, by *news.com.au*
Online podcast description	Your must-listen every day, bringing you the most-important news and sports stories. Produced by The Canadian Press, Canada's trusted news leader.	Fast Canadian business news. Get up-to-speed quick with a fun and smart breakdown of the three biggest Canadian and global business stories in less than 10 minutes.	A bulletin of the day's top stories from SBS News. Get a quick rundown of the latest headlines from Australia and the world, with fresh updates each morning, lunchtime and evening.	Every morning, afternoon and across the weekend the team at news.com.au get you your headlines, entertainment, sport and everything in between in bite-size easily digestible mini-podcast chunks.

Deep dive/explanatory: (Typically 20 minutes) Examine one or two subjects in detail, narrative style with sound design (Newman, 2023)	*The Decibel*, by *The Globe and Mail* newspaper	*Frontburner*, by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation	*The Daily Aus* (independent)	*The Morning Edition*, by the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* newspapers
Online podcast description	Context is everything. Join us Monday to Friday for a Canadian daily news podcast from The Globe and Mail newsroom. Explore a story shaping our world, in conversation with reporters, experts, and the people at the centre of the conversation in Canada.	Your essential daily news podcast. We take you deep into the stories shaping Canada and the world. Hosted by Jayme Poisson. Every morning, Monday to Friday.	This is a daily news podcast for young people in Australia. Join *The Daily Aus* team every weekday morning as we cover the news in your language. We're a newsroom of young journalists, delivering news for young people. TDA is completely independent. We are not owned by any larger media company.	*The Morning Edition* (formerly *Please Explain*) brings you the story behind the story with the best journalists in Australia. Join host Samantha Selinger-Morris from the newsrooms of *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*, weekdays from 5am.

Reflexive thematic analysis: deep listening

Getting to the heart of what makes podcast journalism a potential catalyst for journalistic change requires an approach to coding that goes beyond relying on text-based transcripts. Listening to the audio samples *first* and coding as we listened, before engaging with transcripts, was an important step. This listening lens foregrounds the importance of hearing and experiencing the unique elements of news delivery that podcasting affords, as Perdomo & Rodrigues-Rouleau (2021) found in their study about the *New York Times* podcast *Caliphate*. Following Saldaña (2016), who articulates qualitative coding as a

process of coding-as-analysis, and a reflexive thematic analysis framework that allows for flexibility and iteration, as Braun & Clarke (2006) suggest, we strived to *hear* for clues as to what could be considered elements unique to news podcasting that can be actively helping journalism thrive.

Our reflexive coding process started with general characterizations of "crises" facing journalism, but no code book was created beforehand, eschewing preconceived code books in favor of interpretive coding. We started with the two outlined challenges facing journalism – the issues of news avoidance and threats to relevance – that the podcasts might be addressing, and created a preliminary table before starting our listening sessions. We both analyzed the audio first, and then the text transcripts, looking for salient elements that could be construed as a) an antidote to *news avoidance* (including news fatigue, information overwhelm, and so on); or b) as a way to claim *relevance* for journalism. These elements could be anything from sound production techniques, to the style of the podcast's host, to the format and length of each episode.

This methodology means engaging with a deep listening practice with a logic attuned to more than text and more than language, and in the case of news, to more than the immediate facts of a news story. Deep listening, as an emerging analytical framework in sound studies, offers researchers one way of engaging with a reflexive analysis that requires an understanding of the complex background of listening audiences (Tamboukou, 2021). By engaging with the podcasts on this level – by «earwitnessing», which is defined by its call to attuning and experiencing beyond the immediately audible (Rae, Russell & Nethery, 2019) – we can identify the specifically aural elements of podcast journalism that are helping to reach new audiences and therefore helping overcome news fatigue and threats to journalistic relevance. Such «elements not normally visible or audible in a traditional journalistic piece (e.g. sound checks, small talk, joking, etc.)», as Perdomo and Rodrigues-Rouleau note in their study (2021: 2317), are key for hinting at the different ways that podcast journalism is transforming through this medium to invite tired audiences back into the fold.

Listening allows us to highlight how journalists are building authority and legitimacy with their audiences in new ways. Slight differences in timbre, the inclusion of laughing, jokes, editing choices, background music, are all potentially transformative elements, however small they may seem on their own. Through listening in depth one becomes attuned to the tonalities of voice and the sonic atmosphere that would not be grasped through more traditional approaches to coding, or the reading of a transcript alone.

The findings we share here are but the beginning of a wider and ambitious attempt to identify elements of journalism that are unique to podcasting. In subsequent studies, we will expand our analysis to include the two other news podcast typologies identified by Newman (2023), the extended chat and the documentary, and include several other countries.

Findings

Listening to these eight podcasts, each on our own, but frequently discussing our findings, we leaned in to hear anything that could be a clue. In close analytical listening, we listened in for choice of language, scripting conventions, and whether hosts were formal or informal. We listened for interactions between hosts, between a host and their guest, or for hosts reaching out to their audiences. We listened for news story selection and journalistic approaches, for clues about the news stories and how they were turned into material for these podcasts. We listened – and we heard something. We realized that, like all podcast audiences, we seem to draw our fascination with this medium from an intrinsic need to participate in conversation, or at least to feel like we are «earwitnessing» one, to refer back to Rae, Russell and Nethery (2019).

It makes sense. Podcasting, as a digital medium, offers audio journalists the chance to break away from the conventions and broadcast constraints of radio news while also allowing newsmakers to take full advantage of the medium's capabilities for intimacy and storytelling. The history of radio news is marked by attempts to repackage print news for convenience. In fact, radio news bulletins started off as readings of newspaper print (Lacey, 2013). Strict bulletin schedules meant journalists had to remain constrained by tight scripts that would begin and end within milliseconds of the time allotted for the news segments. Podcasting offers journalists a chance to break free. And, it turns out, the language that emerges from removing restrictions like time and scripts is closer to human conversation.

We know from studies into the short history of podcasting that journalists are taking advantage of the intimacy afforded by podcasting (Euritt, 2019; Swiatek, 2018; Sharon, 2023). And we know that conversation is one of the ways in which audio journalists connect with audiences, through "informal and conversational" presentation style and tone (Lindgren, 2016: 27). But we haven't looked into how conversation is becoming a defining trait of podcast journalism specifically, and how conversation may be a key aspect of how podcasting is helping address news avoidance and the crisis of relevance in journalism.

In both of the podcast types we analyzed, the news roundup and the daily deep dive, although expressed in different ways, conversation emerged as a central element. Take Canada's *The Peak Daily* and Australia's *From the Newsroom*, two podcasts in the news roundup category. In both cases, the podcasts are hosted by two journalists who bring you the daily headlines in under 10 minutes. The format is quick and to the point, but the hosts are highly interactive with each other in a way that stimulates informal conversation. They also often inject the first person into their news scripts:

Host 1: «International travel is back.»
Host 2: «Woo!»

Host 1: «It's rebounded to pre COVID levels for the first time. First time since the pandemic.»
Host 2: «Go travel!» (*From the Newsroom*, Ep. 1)

Host 1: «I've never been to Newfoundland. I've never been to the Maritimes. Uh, but that's all I can think of.»
Host 2: «Oh, you gotta get out there, Brett.»

Host 1: «I know you've been, and you, and you love, and you love, and by the way, I know Newfoundland is not the Maritimes, it's Atlantic Canada. So I want to correct that before somebody yells at me. Um, but yeah, I would love to go out East.» (*The Peak Daily*, Ep. 1)

In the case of *The Peak Daily* (Can), the hosts employ explanatory language, inviting the audience to hear why a story is relevant or important. The conversation between the two hosts includes the listener, who hears directly from them what they need to know to gauge the relevance of the news item and to connect it to a broader context. The hosts often use explanatory turns of phrase in their script. In the second episode we analyzed, for example, one of the hosts explains why news about the rise in solo dining is relevant: «This is all happening because, per Lightspeed, the top reason for more solo dining is the growing interest in self care» (Ep. 2). The phrase «it matters because» indeed appears to be baked into the script of *The Peak Daily* episodes:

It matters because merch drops drum up social media buzz and build brand loyalty, especially among young and chronically online consumers. (Ep. 1)

It matters because canola was Canada's top export to China this year. Not top crop export, top export period, bringing in 3.84 billion. (Ep. 2)

It matters because by this measure, the return on investment for a degree has shrunk in recent years. (Ep. 3)

In *From the Newsroom* (Au), conversations run more closely to friendly chit-chat about the news items that hosts choose to share with their audience. In the episodes we analyzed, the two hosts go through the headlines commenting in a lighthearted tone, akin to friends digesting information together:

Taylor Swift was joined by a very special guest during the first of her five sellout shows at London's Wembley Stadium. Ed Sheeran came out to sing a couple of songs with Taytay. (Ep. 1)

Host 1: «Bucky, shall we do a bit more light hearted stuff?»
Host 2: «Yeah, why not? We'll stick with the theme of Logies. Um, we actually spoke to Sonia Kruger backstage last night and she confirmed that there's a bit of tension between the coaches...»
Host 1: «Whooo.»
Host 2: «…on the new season of *The Voice*, which starts on Channel 7 tonight. Now, Sonya told New. com.au that Kate Miller-Heidke clashes with LeAnn Rimes and Adam Lambert, and she says it's pretty full on.»
(News clip)
Host 1: «Spicy stuff.» (Ep. 2)

Host 1: «A Jetstar passenger was arrested this morning after he opened the emergency exit door.»
Host 2: «Can't do that.»
Host 1: «The flight had just landed in Melbourne from Sydney when the man pulled open the door, walked out onto the wing and jumped down onto the tarmac. He was quickly tackled by ground handlers and was then taken into custody by federal police.»
Host 2: «Interesting behaviour.» (Ep. 3)

In both of these podcasts, as the hosts use slang, share their opinions on news items, and speak in the first person in a tone that is accessible and friendly, you could argue that their approach to news makes them seem more approachable, easier to connect with and overall more inviting to audiences. The banter, which includes exclamations and even small glimpses of emotion, evoke a freer format that invites that parasocial relationship with the audience in a way that straight-up radio news bulletins cannot do.

Notably, two other podcasts that we analyzed in this category of news roundups appear reluctant to exit the confines of this more traditional format of radio news bulletins. Both Canada's *CP Newswatch*, a podcast produced by the news agency The Canadian Press, and Australia's *SBS News Updates*, also a product of a larger traditional newsroom by the same name, have similar formats. Both podcasts rely on news readers trained in the broadcasting tradition – their tone is formal, declarative, unemotional; they deliver the news with voices that project a sense of authority and command. Their news selection follows the conventions and hierarchies of traditional newscasts by keeping the more "serious" national and international news as the top headlines and sports as the closing item and, since there is little in the form of conversation or banter, there is room to pack several news items in one single episode.

In the first episode of *CP Newswatch* (Can) that we studied, headlines include a rail stoppage in Canada, the US Democratic convention, a Canadian mining company finding a giant diamond in Botswana, and three sport stories. In the first episode we analyzed for *SBS News*, similarly, stories include a po-

litical controversy over visas for Palestinians, a UN report remarking the death of over 40,000 Palestinians, a story about the state election in Australian New South Wales, calls to end police discrimination against indigenous people, and one sport story about the National Rugby League. These podcasts are more consistent in their length (*CP Newswatch* just over 4 minutes each and SBS close to 5 minutes each). Overall, they both sound closer in tone and format to traditional, commercial news – simply delivered through podcasting, but not entirely embracing the medium.

In the daily deep dive category, we found this conversational element of podcast journalism even more salient. In the four podcasts we analyzed in this category, it became abundantly clear that the format leans into conversations about the news that make the listener feel as a guest in a cordial and well-informed discussion, with a host and a guest examining a single news item in depth in each episode. In many cases the guest is another journalist, often from the same newsroom producing the podcast. This figure, which we will refer to as the Journalist-as-Guest (JAG), is emerging as a key element of this type of explanatory/deep dive podcast type, which has proven highly effective in attracting large numbers of listeners.

These podcasts share several characteristics that point to the conversational nature of podcast journalism. They are, quite literally, conversations about a single news story that take place over a period of time ranging from at least 15 to up to 35 minutes. The conversations are between two hosts, for the benefit of listeners. They are also imaginary conversations between hosts and listeners, through language directly addressing listeners as "you". They tend to start off with long introductions setting up the story and feature long answers from the guest-expert or the JAG, offering plenty of background and contextual information as well as explanation. Take for example this excerpt from *The Decibel*, a podcast by Canada's largest national newspaper, where the host asks a simple question to her guest, who is a colleague at the newspaper – a JAG:

> Host 1: «So, Maria, this story really centers around one of the victims of this shooting, Arash Missaghi. What do we know about him? Who was this man?»
> JAG: «So, Arash Missaghi was an alleged fraudster with a career that spanned two decades, at least. In June of this year, he was killed by one of the individuals he had allegedly defrauded, Alan Kats. But if we rewind through those last 20 years, Mr. Missaghi allegedly victimized dozens of people, primarily through fraudulent mortgage schemes, but he also had a variety of other methods, like he would hire people and then fail to pay for their service. There were allegations that he did money laundering, participated in art theft, and he also allegedly used businesses and individuals, including his own family members, to serve as proxies for some of his crimes.» (*The Decibel*, Ep. 3)

In an episode of *The Daily Aus*, an Australian independent podcast, it's evident that the conversation revolves around explanation. One of the two hosts indicates explicitly that the goal of the episode is to explain a news item in depth:

> Host 1: «Have you ever missed a work deadline? What happened when you did? Well, that's what the New South Wales Liberal Party is reckoning with at this very moment in time after it failed to file essential paperwork on time. What does that mean? Well, at least 138 Liberal Party candidates won't run in the upcoming New South Wales local council elections. In today's deep dive, we're going to explain what exactly has happened and what the Liberals think should happen next.»

Examples of this explanatory language abound in these daily deep dive podcasts. The host usually sets up a question in a way that the guest can respond boasting of their deep knowledge of the topic at hand. When a JAG is involved, they sometimes speak about their own journalistic process, for example how they investigated an issue, or who they reached out to for comment on a story. They do this multiple times in *The Decibel* (Can):

> «So I've spoken to experienced condo developers» (JAG, *The Decibel*, Ep. 2)
> «According to the documents you found…» (Host, *The Decibel*, Ep. 3)

In *The Daily Aus* (Au), the two hosts, both journalists, often use language that is explicitly about underlining the relevance of a story but also explaining in detail and helping the audience make sense of the news:

> Host 1: «I've kind of seen this in the headlines over the past week, can we just start, what do we need to know?»
> Host 2: «Well, I think where we need to start with this story is just a bit of context about the New South Wales local election, because as you said, I mean, I will acknowledge that we actually spoke about the Melbourne City Council election.»
> Host 1: «True. It is the season for local elections.»
> Host 2: «Two for two of me just wedging in random political knowledge, but hey, so with New South Wales specifically. On the 14th of September, New South Wales will hold local council elections. And just a bit of a reminder here that in Australia, we have three levels of government.» (*The Daily Aus*, Ep. 2)

In deep dive episodes featuring a host with an expert, hosts often boast of their own knowledge as journalists and use their questions to demonstrate their own mastery of a topic and their ability to connect it to larger-picture issues. In one episode of *Frontburner*, a podcast produced by the Canadian public broadcaster, the host and the guest, an economist, have this exchange:

> Host: «I know another thing that people have been concerned about here with the temporary foreign worker program is that it could have the effect of suppressing wage growth, right? If you have the option to pay less, then you'll take that option. And then, one good thing about a tight labour market is that employees have more leverage, right? And so what about the argument that you're taking that leverage away from them?»
> Guest: «100%! I mean, pure demographics tends to Canada on a silver platter, the opportunity to make every job a good job. And when you pour in an extra supply of desperate workers and desperate students also who turn out to be workers, you take away some of the shine of that platter, but it exists underneath it all.»

Discussion

There are many reasons why podcast journalism may be centering around conversations about the news as opposed to offering original news reporting in the two podcast types we studied, the news roundup and the deep dive. Having people discuss the news is, for one, cheaper to produce. And we know that conversation is not new to audio journalism, as the history of broadcasting abounds with examples of host-to-host banter and conversational styles. But our analysis suggests that conversation may be much more than an affordable way to relay and – where the podcast is used to republish broadcast content – also replay news. The shape of the conversations occurring in news podcasts is different, to the point that we argue conversing about the news may indeed be an intrinsic element of podcast journalism, and one that can prove enormously effective in inviting audiences back into journalism and restore its relevance in our societies.

Podcasting is above all a child of the digital era whose ethos is centred on interconnection, authenticity, and transparency. Journalism appears to be leaning into these values as it continues to experiment with the medium. Podcasting, as an audio format, relies on the human voice, and the most common way human voices are "applied" is in conversations. Podcasting is therefore allowing this most human of audio interactions to break free from the more formal news-reading format that was mastered in radio, which was based on emulating newspapers and "reading" the news.

The podcasts we analyzed confirm this. They reveal a willingness to depart

from cold and distanced forms of reporting that marked the dominant formats of the 20th century, led by the supremacy of the print word – newspapers – above all. The rise of podcasting, and more recently of podcast journalism, signals a breaking point with the supremacy of the written word in favour of orality expressed through these conversational formats. By harnessing the power of conversation, podcast journalism is aligning with the growth of solutions, explanatory, and constructive journalism to deliver a powerful form of news that focuses on the role of journalists as sense makers. Podcasting as a medium is thus proving to be a perfect match for conversational formats focused on going beyond traditional, highly constructed and performed forms of news.

In these news-as-conversations, the journalist as sense-maker emerges here as a key figure of podcast journalism, as hosts and JAGs help listeners make sense of the world around them. Indeed, this format addresses a major drawback of the digital era, information overload, one of the drivers of news avoidance. The daily deep dives in particular are taking advantage of the medium to demonstrate the value of spending time to go behind the headlines. In doing so, they also help expose elements of the journalistic process, which is a form of transparency that, when used strategically, can also help build claims to journalistic relevance and legitimacy, and ultimately journalistic authority (Perdomo & Rodrigues Rouleau, 2021).

Overall, whether through informal banter or the often more serious interactions with guest experts or JAGs, the centrality of conversation denotes a format of journalism that is more approachable, easier to connect with, and more inviting to audiences. The co-creation of news understanding, which has always been part of radio's relationship with the listener (who brings their own understanding to a story), appears to have entered a new dimension with podcasting, as the freer format invites the listener to "earwitness" the very processes of journalism, including the process of sense-making, happening *through* conversation.

As a first step in our study, we offer two initial conclusions. First, we underscore the importance of employing reflexive deep listening as a methodology for our emerging framework to analyze the elements of news podcasting. And second, we identify the centrality of conversation as the first pillar in our framework, one that is interconnected with the role of journalists as sensemakers. As we inquire further into the elements of news podcasting, we will learn more about how news podcasting is tangibly helping attract audiences back into the fold of journalism, combatting news avoidance and reestablishing relevance for the news.

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