

Grabbing sound waves. Reflections on the contemporary status of podcasting in the mediated world

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Abstract (EN): In this essay we reflect upon the contemporary status of podcasts, both as media artifacts and a form of mediation / social practice, at the intersection of culture, economy, technology and society. While the similarities between podcasting and traditional broadcasting are widely known, we argue that both forms of mediation are closely related to traditional orality and older forms of social structuring through shared symbols, narratives and discourses. Even though podcasting and audio consumption are usually considered an isolated and individual experience, this contemporary form of mediation hides a very significant social substratum.

The rise of platforms and platformized mediation brought new relevance to audio, both in the production and consumption spheres with podcasting taking a central role in the new audio mediation processes and renewed forms of social appropriation through sound.

Keywords: Podcasting, audio on-demand, platforms, media diets, mediation.

Agarrar som. Reflexões sobre o estatuto contemporâneo do podcasting no mundo mediado

Resumo (PT): Neste ensaio refletimos sobre o estatuto contemporâneo dos podcasts, como artefactos e ferramentas de mediação do som / prática social na interseção entre cultura, economia, tecnologia e sociedade. Ainda que as semelhanças entre o podcasting e a rádio em formato tradicional sejam largamente conhecidas, argumentamos que estas formas de mediação estão também estreitamente relacionadas com a tradição oral e formas mais antigas de estruturação social através da partilha de simbologias, narrativas e discursos. Ainda que o consumo de podcasts e de áudio sejam habitualmente considerados uma experiência isolada / individual, estas formas de mediação escondem uma dimensão social muito significativa. A ascensão das plataformas trouxe nova relevância para o áudio, na esfera da produção e do consumo, com o podcasting a assumir um papel central no processo de mediação do áudio e nas novas formas de apropriação social do som.

Palavras-chave: Podcasting, audio on-demand, plataformas, dietas de media, mediação.

Introduction

Podcasting emerged at the beginning of the 21st century as a new instance of listening (Morris & Patterson, 2015), outside social media or cloud-based structures, establishing itself as a unique sphere of content production and distribution with unique audience building systems. As a new medium (Bottomley, 2015) that planted its roots around 2000 and came of age around 2005, Podcasting has been evolving over time and it has the particularity of referring to “both a process and a practice, operating as both a verb and a noun” (Berry, 2019: 1). Its potential has been shared and developed by independent creators, professional or not, and legacy brands alike as “while podcasts were initially created primarily by amateur producers, mainstream media has also recently joined in by providing a variety of podcast content (McClung and Johnson, 2010: 83).

More recent developments have been attracting new players and circumstances have determined a much bigger market relevance for the medium. With Spotify acquiring distribution rights to Joe Rogan’s Experience Show for \$100M and providing new resources for podcasters (Carman, 2020), it is now possible to wonder whether the medium has finally turned mainstream and what role will content distribution platforms play in that process. Spotify's purchase of Anchor, a platform for creating and distributing podcasts, allowed a democratization of access to podcast technology, as shown by Sullivan (2019, p. 5): “There has been an exponential growth in the introduction of new podcasts (...), and much of that can be attributed to the success of Anchor in lowering the entry barrier to podcast production”.

Over the last two decades, sound has claimed a principal role in the mediation of everyday life. Whether through live and on-demand audio or through conversational practices and patterns, mediation is a necessary concept to understand our relationship with sound. Looking at the past year, we have had the opportunity to witness remarkable changes within the process of audio mediation: from the social audio trend started by Clubhouse to the role of Whatsapp audio messaging in managing our everyday life, and even to the appropriation of audio for disinformation purposes, not only audio but mediated audio appears to be conquering new mediated spaces and occupying a wider range of social dimensions. Podcasting is, for that matter, probably the best example of such centrality of audio and sound or what we may well call an audio shift in communication practices, emphasizing new social appropriations of mediated sound in networked communication

(Cardoso, 2008), and as any mediation agent in the last few decades, podcasts mean more than content, as they provoke changes in perceived meaning and form new social and cultural forces based not on received meaning but rather on the representation users have of media (McQuail and Deuze, 2020).

The establishment of podcasting as a distinct medium derives from the way podcasts are created and consumed (Berry, 2018). Podcasting allowed for people to do radio on their own terms (Markman, 2011) and may be described as “a creative medium distinct from radio with its unique modes of not just dissemination but also production, listening and engagement” (Spinelli and Dann, 2019, p.19). Most importantly, it should be reminded that the rise of the medium happens under the influence of an inherently collaborative and participatory culture (Markman, 2011, Markman and Sawyer, 2014).

The status of podcasting, as a concept, more than some sort of contemporary media artifact which has become economically relevant, is strongly related to its subjective relevance and placement at the epicenter of any discussion about audio and mediation. The evolution of podcasting is the result of a group of actors (Bonini, 2020) who, taking advantage of the influences of other media and realities, bring new dynamics to the podcasting sphere. These new dynamics which are not only visible on podcasts, but also on conventional radio and online social networks, show the resilience of audio as a form of communication that has been able to adapt to various contexts throughout history, including the digital age, or, more recently, in the pandemic context.

As an independent medium and the materialization of on-demand audio, Podcasting is now at an intersectional position of culture and interpretation, where it has distanced itself and can be seen as independent from traditional media narratives (Zelizer, 2017). In a changing media environment that fosters the growth of the content value chain, mostly because of growing platformization, consumer behavior or business models (Deuze and Prenger, 2019) without ignoring the need to frame media content within entrepreneurial endeavors (Singer, 2017), there is also systemic pressure towards sustainable innovation models and frameworks (Posetti, 2018).

The overlap between podcasting and platform-based structures proves the technological, economic, social, and cultural relevance of the medium. As they became the contextual focal point for businesses and audiences alike (Park, 2018), platforms are crucial elements in the creation and escalation of value in today’s media landscape. However, the

consolidation of platform-based structures does imply significant changes to the balance of power and ownership among stakeholders, and some may be benign and others not so much.

With content quality becoming a central requisite for the escalation of podcasts within platforms and their content structures, production value is a central variable in discussing the future of podcasting. A good example of how the quality of content sets the pace of the technology's own success is the publication, in 2014, of "Serial" podcast. This podcast is defined as "one of the greatest successes of public radio storytelling but also represents the turning point for the second age of podcasting" (Bonini, 2019). The second era is characterized by the transformation of podcasting into mass media content with relevant audiences and content produced specifically for distribution through this technology.

As an ecosystem, podcasting has been steadily nurtured by a wide variety of content, by professional and amateurs alike, and therefore imbedded by remarkably diverse flows of production investment – that diversity of approaches to on-demand audio became a distinguishing feature of the medium as it became an arena where different kinds of content could prosper, regardless of genre or level of complexity. At the same time, the newness of these competitive parameters also leveled the playing field, with remarkably different producers competing for audience attention regardless of technical or conceptual knowledge of audio production and distribution systems, an aspect that underlines the need for knowledge regarding podcasters and the way they relate to their audiences (Avila and Zuñiga, 2012).

In this essay we reflect upon the origins and development of podcasting to reframe the discussion on its future. Despite the shared traits of podcasting and traditional broadcasting it is often forgotten that both these forms of sound mediation relate to older and established communication structures where orality played a major role in the production and reproduction of social meaning and symbolism (Ong, 1982). Even if mediated through technology, podcasts also rely on spoken word or sound to establish themselves as meaningfully listened and shared artifacts. For all those reasons they occupy a unique place within contemporary media ecosystems, due to uniqueness of their technological, cultural, economic, and social meaning. As a research question for this essay we ask: RQ1 – Given the specific traits of podcasting as a medium and mediation structure, and the characteristics of contemporary platform structures, what are the

theoretical and practical implications for reflection on the role of podcasting on today's media ecosystem?

1. The genetics of podcasting

Media ecosystems are permanently changing, as are their underlying economic structures. Whether on an evolutionary or disruptive basis, this permanent change impacts the content production, distribution and reception spheres (Cardoso, 2006). As a central element to globalization (Giddens, 1991, 2000; Bauman, 1998), digitalization in particular, holds a crucial part in systemic integration structures and technology (Castells, 1989, 2002) affecting the communicational channels in which humans relate to each other and create meaningful bonds and connections (Carroza, 2018).

The intertwining between digitalization and a mainstream economic, social, industrial and technological order affects the rate at which change happens and influences processes of evolution and / or growth, podcasting being no exception. Dearman and Galloway (2005) refer to the underlying disruptive systemic processes at the core of the podcasting phenomenon, a "peripheral technology" that bypasses traditional broadcasting structures to distribute audio content and therefore renders many traditional production structures irrelevant to that end. However, the definition of podcasting goes beyond its technological definition, as the associated cultural and social practices are as meaningful as the technology in which they are based (Jenkins, 2006), coinciding with collaboration and participation patterns that are at the core of the Web 2.0 systemic features (Benkler, 2006) which allow for the rise of new social fields and social practices (Gillmor, 2004).

Crofts et al. (2005), however, describe a much more transitional process in which massified radio broadcasting organically migrates towards personalized and on-demand media spheres, becoming much less dependent on practical constraints such as broadcasting schedules and spatial or physical barriers. It is precisely with the digitization of conventional radio that each one can take an active role in choosing their own "media diet", assuming the podcast a central role in this equation (Cordeiro and Paulo, 2014).

Regardless of its technological configuration, the rise of podcasting as a form of mediation is closely related to a trait it shared with traditional broadcasting, its reliance on orality and the creation of meaning through spoken word. Long before podcasting

established itself, telephone, and radio, as well as other sorts of electronic technology, brought us into the age of ‘secondary orality’:

This new orality has striking resemblance to the old in its participatory mystique, its fostering of a communal sense, its concentration on the present moment and even its use of formulas. But it is essentially a more deliberate and self-conscious orality (...) Like primary orality, secondary orality generates a sense for groups immeasurably larger than those of primary oral culture – McLuhan’s ‘global village (Ong, 1982, p.133).

Podcast usage is fostered by a wide range of social motivational aspects that operate as a gratification system which emanates not from the newness or technological configurations of the medium but from the distinctive intimacy imported from traditional radio – some authors claim that radio has a paternalistic relationship with the podcast (Llinares et al., 2018) – and even older forms of audio transmission – such as spoken word. Even though podcasting implies a depart from the linearity and disconnection of legacy broadcasting (Meserko, 2014) the medium retains some of its symbolic traits, regardless of its technological specification (Geiger and Lampinen, 2014).

Whether podcasting may be considered as revolutionary and as a depart of traditional broadcastings structures, or as new element within an organic evolutionary system, which took place in other media spheres as well, the medium tends to be viewed as the materialization of an alternate cultural model of broadcasting (Sterne et al., 2008). Furthermore, its genetic characteristics allow for significant impact on several genre spheres such as news and entertainment as well as the educational and medical fields (Campbell, 2005; Zanussi et al. 2011). Podcasters often present themselves as journalists, scientists, specialists, entertainers, etc. and not as podcasters or some sort of audio professionals, primarily. For the diversity of active intervenients it encompasses, podcasts have become part and “created a unique and uniquely valuable space of public discourse in the pre-commercial phase of podcasting” (Aufderheide et al., 2020: 1697).

Shortly after the podcasting came of age in 2005 (Bottomley, 2015), Berry (2006) would envision a future for the medium, in which it would outlive the iPod and the MP3 player, in their duration and technological specifications, by transitioning to personal and highly connected devices (such as the smartphone). This survivability is due to both the technological simplicity of podcasts and their much more complex cultural meaning as communicational artifacts that converge audio, web structures and portable hardware, three key elements for communication structures in the XXI century (Berry, 2006).

McHugh (2020) underlines this cultural aspect of the concept, particularly in the influence it had on podcasting becoming an industry, regardless of the importance of its technological component, two aspects which should not be separated in this discussion and Knoblauch (2014) refers to the relatability factor, stating that “podcasting is powerful not only because it has the ability to relate complex arguments into digestible bits of information, but also because it can transform those arguments into relatable stories”.

2. From inception to massification and commercial relevance

The embedding of podcasting apps/software in its core operative system iOS by Apple allowed for widespread access to a range of content. Culturally speaking, the release of podcasts such as “Serial” (2014) – which Berry (2015) defines as a landmark and the precursor of a Golden Age of Podcasting – resulted in a “seismic cultural shift that introduced millions to the podcast format” (McHugh, 2020, p. 7). By solidifying a meaningful technological and cultural setting for consumers, the medium also allowed for increased genre diversity in on-demand audio, promoting both new forms of inclusion (McHugh, 2020, p. 9) and the foundations for a highly desirable demographic. This particular group of consumers is driven by a wide range of motivations, such as the need for entertainment, time shifting (or the necessity to kill time), library building of the consumption of this specific kind of media for social related reasons (to stay updated on content that is relevant to social narratives on social media) a trait that makes it particular relevant in the context of an economy based on attention. The highly connected aspect of this group of consumers is as central to the concept of podcasting today as it was on its rise, with Webster (2008, apud McClung and Johnson, 2010) mentioning, back in 2008 the tendency of podcast users and producers to be active social networkers on platforms such as Facebook and MySpace.

Adding to Berry’s (2006) contribution on the relevance of both culture and technology, Bonini (2015) argues for the inclusion of economic variables to trace and interpret the transformation of podcasting into a commercially relevant set of consumption practices and into mass media. The author argues that the transformations podcasting went through were mostly motivated by the existence of production structures that allowed for small, independent, and often amateur producers, to experiment outside traditional and industrial frameworks, finding and generating relevance for new genres (such as true crime podcasts

(Berry, 2015)) and ways of communicating audio to audiences, a creative spurt which resulted in a “second age of podcasting” (Bonini, 2015). This new phase of the medium’s development also coincides with a set of positive conditions which favors its spread: widespread usage of smartphone devices (and all the connectivity that comes with it), the early exploration of alternative funding systems (micro-patronage through crowdfunding, etc.) and the development of audio related social networks (preceding Facebook and Twitter) (Bonini, 2015) which, altogether, redound in the benefit of a highly connected and potentially literate audience.

Bonini (in Sullivan, Aufderheide, Bonini, Berry and Llinares, 2020) also categorizes podcasting as a cultural form between old and new media, which cannot be seen in an isolated way, but rather as the result of an evolution in which several actors are involved (such as podcasters, platforms or audiences). In practice, the podcast takes the form of “new, hybrid, cultural form, that draws not only from radio, but also from theatre, performing arts, design and internet culture” (Bonini in Sullivan, Aufderheide, Bonini, Berry and Llinares, 2020, p.5).

Social media and connectivity are vital concepts to the understanding of the mediums’ rise in the context of a “group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 61; Kaplan, 2015, p. 197). The rise in connectivity fostered the establishment of platforms and business models based on the tracing of consumer habits and preferences, with data ownership and availability becoming central to media distribution and bringing with it both risks and opportunities for consumers, creators and content distributors. Iglesias et al. (2013) argue that “brands are organic entities that emerge and develop in a space where multiple interactions occur and multiple conversations among different stakeholders take place” (Iglesias et al. 2013, p. 685), a conflicting situation with traditional views on strict managerial control over brands. However, the consolidation of independent and experimental media offers in the podcasting sphere commonly implies much more adaptive systems, with improvised ways of solidifying brands at a micro-scale, with little to no control over audiences at a micro-scale. Even legacy and historical brands players are prone to experimentation / trial and error approaches with new mediums such as podcasting: if, initially, the medium was used to redistribute traditional broadcast content, which was simply made available online, stakeholders now look at the possibility of exploring audio ecosystems as a

complement to other branded content spheres. This is particularly evident on the rise of news podcasts within traditional news structures such as The New York Times and its podcast, The Daily. Despite the importance of The New York Times as a brand, The Daily podcast has become “a very major news platform in ways we had never expected” (Newman and Gallo, 2020), averaging 4 million downloads per day (double the numbers in 2019). In The Guardian’s case, in Britain, the Today in Focus podcast has not only helped enlarge the brand’s audience but also contributed to its diversification:

In less than a year the Guardian has built a bigger audience for its Today in Focus podcast than buys the newspaper. ‘It’s hundreds of thousands every day,’ says the Guardian’s Head of Audio, Christian Bennett, who points out that the podcast attracts younger people who are listening to the vast majority of each 25–30 minute episode, with a 80% completion rate: ‘It’s younger than people that buy the paper and it’s younger than people that come to our website as well. It’s opening up a new audience as opposed to cannibalising.’ (Newman and Gallo, 2020, p.23).

3. Platformization and its impact on an open medium

The consolidation and industrialization of the medium through platformization brings new challenges to a previously decentralized production, distribution and consumption ecosystem built by both traditional structures such as broadcasters, journalists, and other institutions as well as independent and decentralized producers / structures (Benkler, 2006), artists and non-professional stakeholders (Bonini, 2015). The impacts of platformization become relevant when platform business models have been observed as prone to homogenize both content, production and consumption frameworks. Back in 2003, Hughes raised the issue of the vulnerability of the music industry to the concentration of “power and wealth in just a few conglomerates that simultaneously compete and collaborate”, exerting pressure and growing leverage over both institutional decisions and public opinion (Hughes, 2003, p. 187). Connectivity and sociability associated to media usage benefits both creators and platforms, the latter relying heavily on third-party content to attract the attention of users and keep them within the boundaries in which the platform exerts its influence. As sociability becomes relevant to the way we relate to content, so does the unstoppable flow of content which drives our attention and allows users to consolidate their connected, digital identity. Social networks and platforms did not create this mutual relationship between content and social practices. They did, however, exponentially foster the way and intensity in which content becomes relevant to our digital selves, creating monetization structures and consolidated business

models that changed the concept of media creation, ownership, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

The conceptual field of media entrepreneurship is still lacking when it comes to the definition of a consensual proposition and theoretical framework (Khajeheian, 2013; Khajeheian, 2017; Khajeheian, and Arbantani, 2011). In an effort to mitigate this conceptual fragility, the author covers both the value creation and the distribution systems in media structures, as

“Taking the risk to exploit opportunities by innovative use of resources in transform of an idea into activities to offer value in a media form that meets the need of a specific portion of market, either in an individual effort or by creation of new venture or entrepreneurial managing of an existing organizational entity and to earn benefit from one of the sources that is willing to pay for” (Khajeheian 2017, p.105).

Originating from the managerial dimension of the media sphere, Khajeheian contemplates on several isolated yet central variables to the discussion of different mediums, such as podcasting, platforms and the professionalization systems, covering matters such as creation / discovery, radical / incremental / imitative use of resources, control and ownership dynamics (to which one might add power as a transitional variable), value creation and delivery, in structures based in content/platforms/user data aimed at output attainment (which translates not only into money but also into attention or the modeling of consistent behavioral patterns).

Plantin et al. (2018) follow a different course, highlighting the distinct features of platforms, in the media ecosystems and in media studies, when compared to infrastructures. Despite the fact that both concepts relate to structures which encompass relevant sets of media and associated practices in digital ecosystems, infrastructures and platforms have different theoretical builds. However, Plantin et al. (2018) mention that an approach to subjects such as contemporary media structures and content universes is inherently complex and, therefore, may benefit from a complementary framework inspired both in infrastructure and platform studies, in the shape of something the authors name as a “theoretical bifocal”. In their proposition, the authors underline the close connection between both concepts through the development of an increasingly connected world: if, on a first stage, the “platformization of infrastructures” allowed for competition gains due to the reduction of costs and increase in profits since the 1970’s, later on, the rise of companies like Google, Facebook (which became the contemporary equivalents of railroad, telephone or energy supply monopolies of the late XIX century

(Plantin et al, 2018; Wåge and Crawford, 2020)) was made possible by the “infrastructuralization of platforms”, the definitive cristalization of platform business models at the core of media ecosystems and frameworks. As a consequence, and at a strict economic or competition scope, platformization as an inductor for monopolistic market structures promotes *winner takes-all* logics shifting power dynamics in favor of already consolidated players.

The issue of platformization is particularly sensitive when discussed within the podcasting sphere, mostly due to the fact that this peculiar ecosystem has so far relied on a huge diversity of approaches and propositions, as well as in the openness of content. Innovation and change through digital transformation may operate in a disruptive way when turned into a homogenizing set of trends and practices, ignoring it brings significant competition risks (Muthuraman, 2020) and growth requires structural awareness for transformation to materialize (Muthuraman, 2020).

The economic aspect of platformization implies the replacement of two-sided market relationships with significantly more complex multisided designs and layouts, unilaterally established by platform corporations. Therefore, content producers must constantly adapt to shifts in governance within structures they have no control of but are drawn to by new services and opportunities that allow growth and audience diversification (Nieborg and Poell, 2018). The matter of platformization and its impact on cultural industries and outputs becomes, in this regard, an issue of the effects of structure over production and distribution:

As cultural producers are transformed into platform complementors, they are incentivized to change a predominantly linear production process into one in which content is contingent, modularized, constantly altered, and optimized for platform monetization. This results in the rise of the contingent cultural commodity, which further destabilizes the neat separation between the modalities of production, circulation, and monetization (Nieborg and Poell, 2018, p.23)

Platform-based structures compromise the stability of pre-existent media distribution models, with podcasting being no exception, at two very different levels: on the one hand “[platforms] threaten the growing advertising revenue that fuels public podcasting’s most interesting (and expensive) new productions, and they challenge the ability of a public podcasting sphere to maintain itself” (Audferheide et al., 2020, p. 1697); while, on the other hand, the impact of platformization may compromise of the medium’s inherently collaborative structure, with the migration of podcasts from “a benign”, open distribution

RSS architecture to platforms whose business model relies on user / consumer data gathering (Audferheide et al., 2020). Perks and Tollison (2019), however, highlight the weight of “Social Engagement” to the freedom and openness associated to the medium, referring that “social media can be particularly useful to connect with niche listeners or fan communities” (Perks and Tollison, 2019, p. 631) and even more relevant if platform-enabled connectivity may have a prominent role in the provision of meaning to an otherwise solitary experience. According to the authors, podcast usage is far from an individual experience, as the medium enables listeners to connect to the world and the people around them – on the listeners’ own terms, while providing an immersive and personal experience (Perks and Tollison, 2019). Mou and Lin (2015) corroborate this idea, suggesting that the apparent loneliness and linearity of podcast consumption hides a very meaningful “social dimension through interpersonal discourse” (Mou and Lin, 2015: 490) which acts as an incentive for people to be attracted to the medium.

The reconfiguration of the digital world, in the way media is distributed, is as relevant today as it was at the birth of podcasting in the early XXI century, and it has become clear that this transformation does not relate only to technological progress but also to how business models adapt to wider economic structures of digitalization (Lawson-Borders, 2010). As platforms assimilate traditional production and distribution spheres, issues concerning the redistribution of power within these structures become more relevant, particularly in the way value is weighted and perceived by all actors involved. In the podcasting sphere, the way value is created and perceived in terms of production and investment is equally relevant as it relates not only to the medium’s configuration but also to the self-perceived identity of podcast producers.

Conclusion

In this essay, we reflect upon the status of podcasting, as a medium, and consolidated mediation agent (Cardoso, 2006) on an increasingly platformized media ecosystem. Having acquired its own cultural identity (Berry, 2018, Markman 2011, Spinelly and Dann, 2019), distinct from radio broadcasting or a simple adaptation to on-demand structures, podcasting is genetically connected to the collaborative and participatory culture aspects of the Web 2.0, where socially motivated and produced content define market and economic outcomes (Benkler, 2006). As such, podcasting is not defined only

as a tool that enables a specific form of communication, but as a “set of associated protocols or social and cultural practices” (Jenkins, 2006) that are associated with that technological setting.

A significant part of the mediatory influence on social practices of podcasting, and its meaning as a medium, derives from the fact that it was originally defined and explored by amateur audio producers (Bonini, 2015) in a decentralized fashion (Benkler, 2006) that originated a cultural background in which, as podcasters, these agents found a sense of belonging, and generated a distinct identity (McQuail and Deuze, 2020).

The rise of platform structures, encompassing all sorts of content and media artifacts is central to the discussion on the future of podcasting, because companies like Facebook, Google or Spotify, which we recognize as platforms, may not even be called so due to the fact that at a purely conceptual level, neutrality is a key feature of platform structures (Dijck and Poell, 2018). In their business model, monetization strategies and relationship to content producers, contemporary media platforms have a key role in the mediation process at a distribution level, mostly based on monopolistic dominance.

We argue that the specific traits of podcasting as a medium and the inherent characteristics of contemporary platform structures operate at a conflictual dimension that may impact the internal functioning of podcasting. Issues such as content exclusivity and ownership, as opposed to the openness and widespread availability of content may operate as a pressure factor on podcasting as a specific medium and mediation structure.

The high dynamics of the medium is visible in the number of companies (like Gimlet Media, Podz or Megaphone) linked to podcasting have been bought by the main platforms in recent years – despite the pandemic – and there is also an increase in content creation by traditional media, which find in podcasting a way to increase their reach.

The reliance on spoken word to extract meaning from social structures stands at the core of mediated life (McLuhan, 1964) and the rise of the internet as social architecture (Rheingold, 1993, Fowler, 1994, December 1993, Harnad, 1991). While orality and discourse may be subjectively found and extracted from all sorts of communication codes and forms, contemporary audio formats such as podcasting rely not only on this aspect but also on the emotional connection through spoken word it inherited from traditional radio broadcasting. The pandemic fostered the rise of audio formats which highlight these configurations in an even more pronounced way. Live audio apps such as Clubhouse

(which is being mimetized by all sorts of platforms) incorporate the connected aspect of networked audio consumption to a momentary and transitory media experience. While this form of audio is referred to by the industry as “social audio” (Williams, 2021), even linear and older kinds of audio such as radio broadcasting were embedded in deep social and connected structures.

Although the podcast is “startlingly unpublic, solitary, and personalized” (Sienkiewicz and Jaramillo, 2019), developing in an essentially private sphere with regard to its consumption, the social construction of podcasting involves sharing and creating a community around content. The creation of a community is successful when the podcaster is able to transform a series of individual listeners in a true community that helps the definition and evolution of the content, creating a consistent connection between the audience and the product. It is precisely the content that creates larger communities that tends to be more successful.

Whether on its inception (Bottomley, 2015) or on its second age (Bonini, 2015), Podcasting has always stood at conceptual coordinates which are simultaneously covered by technology, culture, politics, and economy. While the marketing driven industry often relates change and progress to some “unprecedented” piece of hardware or software, medium drive change appears to be, at the least in its conceptual dimension, evolutionary and rather than instantaneous or transitory. Sound could be, for all we know, under permanent recontextualization. In the context of the pandemic, for instance, and despite their original reliance on the portability aspect (Berry, 2006), the medium found renewed meaning and relevance within confined environments, usually reserved for other sorts of media (Paisana and Martins, 2021).

Even so, it is quite visible how the various forms of audio have gained resilience with their constant adaptation to technological evolution, having not lost their relevance in the media space and in their audiences.

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