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Podcast Trends as an Alternative Medium of Independent Journalism: a Study of Audience Perceptions of the Redibility and Objectivity of Information

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ABSTRACT

Independent journalism podcasts are now seen as a highly credible source of information, often even more trusted than mainstream media. This is due to the transparency of the narratives presented, consistency in topic selection, and freedom from pressure from certain parties, which allows for the delivery of broader and more diverse perspectives. Audiences rate independent podcasts as relatively objective, although the personal opinions of the podcasters remain influenced. A presentation style that combines conversational formats and storytelling techniques creates emotional intimacy, strengthens trust, and builds listener loyalty. Topics that are current and relevant, presented in a relaxed yet informative manner, are a unique attraction that distinguishes podcasts from conventional media. However, challenges remain, particularly in verifying information and the potential for personal bias, which can affect the accuracy and objectivity of the content. Therefore, audience media literacy is crucial so they can critically review the information they receive. With all their advantages, independent podcasts have the potential to enrich the media ecosystem by providing a more diverse alternative source of information, provided they maintain ethical standards, openness of sources, and transparency in every aspect of their production process.

Keywords: podcast, independent journalism, credibility, objectivity

INTRODUCTION

The changing media landscape is marked by advances in digital technology that have significantly encouraged the birth of various forms of alternative media that are more flexible, interactive, and personal than mainstream media (Fauzan et al., 2025). This alternative media not only offers the freedom to choose content according to audience interests, but also enables faster, cheaper, and more geographically limitless distribution of information



through online platforms. This development is changing people's information consumption patterns, where audiences now tend to rely on non-conventional sources such as podcasts, blogs, YouTube channels, or social media, which often provide perspectives that differ from traditional media narratives. This has also impacted the journalism ecosystem, opening up space for independent journalists and content creators to play an active role in delivering fresher, more diverse information that is closer to the public's needs.

Podcasts have become one of the fastest growing forms of media in recent years, driven by ease of access through various digital platforms and smart devices that allow audiences to listen anytime and anywhere (Sullivan, 2019). Its relatively relaxed yet informative format makes podcasts popular with a wide range of audiences, as it presents information, interviews, discussions, or narrative stories in a more personal and in-depth style than conventional media (Perks & Turner, 2019).

The flexibility of duration, diversity of topics, and freedom for creators to package content without the strict constraints of traditional broadcasting regulations make podcasts a medium that is not only entertaining but also educational. These advantages make podcasts an attractive alternative for audiences seeking a combination of entertainment and insight, while also providing a wider space for independent journalism to convey information directly to the public without the intermediary of mainstream media (Whipple et al., 2023).

Podcasts as an independent journalism medium are increasingly gaining ground in the modern information ecosystem, primarily due to their ability to provide journalists with a space to convey news, opinions, and analysis more freely without being tied to corporate interests, major sponsors, or political pressure (Nee & Santana, 2022). Through flexible audio formats, independent journalists can address issues often marginalized by mainstream media, present alternative perspectives, and highlight rarely published stories from the field. This freedom allows for more in-depth, transparent, and authentic information delivery, thus building an emotional connection with the audience (Wellman et al., 2020).

Furthermore, direct interaction with listeners through social media or podcast community forums helps create a reciprocal relationship, where journalists become not only information providers but also facilitators of public discussion. Thus, podcasts play a vital role as a means for independent journalism to maintain integrity, prioritize objectivity, and expand the reach of diverse information in the digital age (Azhani et al., 2025).

Podcasts allow for a more in-depth, personal, and interactive narrative presentation due to their flexible format and freedom from the limitations of duration and strict structure of conventional media (Leandro et al., 2025). Through podcasts, content creators can explore a topic comprehensively, provide in-depth analysis, and include multiple perspectives from relevant sources (Kulkov et al., 2024). The personal delivery style creates an emotional connection between host and listener, allowing the audience to feel directly

involved in the conversation. Furthermore, the interactive nature of podcasts is enhanced by listener feedback, which can be shared via social media, email, or community platforms, enabling two-way discussions and developing content that is more responsive to the audience's needs and interests. This combination of depth, personalization, and interactivity makes podcasts an effective medium for building long-term relationships with listeners while enhancing the quality of the information delivered (Kulkov et al., 2024).

The credibility and objectivity of information have become crucial issues amidst declining public trust in mainstream media, which is often associated with political bias, news framing that directs opinion, and the interests of media owners in determining the news agenda. (García-Marín, 2020b) This situation has triggered anxiety in audiences who are increasingly critical of the sources of information they consume, thus encouraging the search for alternative media that are considered more independent and neutral (Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou, 2022).

When traditional media outlets are perceived as losing some of their integrity, audiences tend to turn to platforms that offer transparency in their reporting, diversity of perspectives, and a preference for facts over vested interests. In this context, alternative media outlets, such as podcasts, are often viewed as channels capable of presenting information with a more authentic, in-depth approach, and free from political or commercial pressures, potentially rebuilding public trust in journalism.

Audiences are increasingly seeking alternative media outlets perceived as more honest, transparent, and free from editorial pressure, in response to their disillusionment with mainstream media, which is perceived as being saturated with vested interests. The need for purely fact-based information is driving people to turn to platforms that allow for the presentation of news or analysis without interference from parties with political or commercial agendas. Alternative media outlets such as podcasts, independent blogs, or YouTube news channels often meet these expectations by providing space for more authentic narratives, diverse perspectives, and an open reporting process for audiences (Marín, 2020). Transparency in information sources, freedom of topics, and direct interaction between content creators and listeners create a more egalitarian relationship, where the audience feels like they are part of the journalistic process, not just passive consumers of news (Dekavalla, 2020).

New media consumption trends show that young people and urban populations are increasingly turning to digital audio platforms as their primary source of information (Fikri & Junaidi, 2024). This shift is influenced by fast-paced lifestyles and high mobility, where audio formats like podcasts allow audiences to flexibly access news, analysis, or educational content while engaging in other activities, such as traveling, exercising, or working. Digital audio platforms also offer a diversity of topics and presentation styles that are fresher, more interactive, and tailored to personal preferences, thus attracting audiences who desire a practical yet in-depth information consumption experience. Furthermore, content distribution technology that is easily

accessible via smartphones and streaming apps makes digital audio media a relevant choice amidst changing information consumption patterns in the digital era.

This phenomenon reflects a significant shift in news consumption behavior, where audiences are no longer entirely reliant on one-way mainstream media, but are shifting to platforms that offer flexibility, interactivity, and personalized content. This change is driven not only by the development of digital technology and easy access to information, but also by the growing need for news formats that are more relevant to modern lifestyles, especially among the younger generation who value the freedom to choose sources and formats of information. This shift has also impacted the media ecosystem as a whole, forcing news industry players to adapt to digital trends and compete with alternative media such as podcasts that can present information quickly, in-depth, and tailored to specific audience interests.

The lack of research on audience perceptions represents a significant gap in academic studies of podcasts, given that most existing studies focus on technical aspects of production, business models, or market development trends (Bezbaruah & Brahmhatt, 2023). Yet, understanding how audiences perceive the credibility, objectivity, and relevance of podcast content is crucial to assessing this medium's role in the modern information ecosystem. Without in-depth studies of listener perceptions, it is difficult to gauge the extent to which podcasts, particularly those promoting independent journalism, are able to build public trust and meet the need for bias-free information. This research gap opens up opportunities for developing studies that emphasize audience perspectives, thereby contributing to the development of more effective, ethical, and responsive content strategies to the dynamics of society's information needs.

Research specifically examining audience perceptions of podcast credibility and objectivity remains limited, despite the growing popularity of podcasts as an alternative source of information in the digital age. This paucity of research in this area has left academics under-developed to what extent podcasts, particularly those promoting independent journalism, can build public trust and maintain standards of objectivity. Yet, audience perception is a key factor in determining podcasts' success in positioning themselves as a reliable and bias-free medium. This research limitation opens up the opportunity for studies combining qualitative and quantitative analysis to explore the factors shaping audience trust and assess its impact on news consumption behavior amidst the changing media landscape.

The purpose of this study is to analyze audience perceptions of the credibility of information conveyed through independent journalism podcasts, examine their views regarding the objectivity of news in podcasts compared to mainstream media, and identify factors that influence the level of audience trust in podcasts as a source of information.

The novelty of this research lies in combining an analysis of podcast media trends with a specific focus on audience perceptions of two key aspects of

journalism: credibility and objectivity. Unlike previous studies, which generally highlight podcasts as a means of entertainment or education, this research places podcasts within the context of independent journalism, thus exploring their role as an alternative source of information. Furthermore, this research utilizes audience perspectives as the primary data, providing a perspective rarely explored in alternative media studies and enriching understanding of the dynamics of public trust in new media in the digital era.

This research gap lies in the lack of studies that directly address audience perceptions of podcasts as an independent journalism medium. Most previous research has focused on the production and distribution aspects of podcasts, without delving deeply into the process of trust-building between podcasters and audiences. Furthermore, there has been no comprehensive study comparing perceptions of podcast credibility and objectivity with those of conventional media in the context of journalism, resulting in limited understanding of podcasts' position in the media landscape and their role in building public trust.

METHODOLOGY

This research method uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods to explore audience perceptions in depth, with the aim of understanding listeners' subjective views regarding the credibility and objectivity of information in podcasts. The research type used is a case study of podcasts considered representative of independent journalism trends, with a focus on content analysis and audience experiences. The research was conducted on popular podcast platforms such as Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and YouTube Podcasts over a three-month period (Zellatifanny, 2020). The research participants were active podcast listeners who met the inclusion criteria, namely listening to podcasts at least twice a week and were familiar with independent news or journalism themes. The number of participants for in-depth interviews was approximately 20-30 people, while for the quantitative survey as supporting data, 100-150 respondents were recruited. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling to select listeners relevant to the research focus. The research instruments included an interview guide with open-ended questions regarding perceptions of credibility and objectivity as well as closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires using a Likert scale. Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews, online surveys, and observations of podcast content (episodes, format, narrative, presentation style). Data analysis used thematic analysis to identify patterns of audience perception, with a manual coding process or using qualitative analysis software such as NVivo or Atlas.ti, and triangulation of data from interviews, surveys, and observations to increase validity. Data validity and reliability were maintained through member checking, triangulation of sources and methods, and documentation of interview transcripts and field notes. This study adhered to research ethics by obtaining participant consent through informed consent, maintaining the confidentiality of respondents' identities, and using data only for research purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research results show that audience trust in podcasts, particularly independent podcasts, is high. The majority of respondents considered information from independent podcasts to be more credible than mainstream media, with key factors being narrative transparency, supporting data, and topic consistency. Perceptions of objectivity were also relatively better, as independent podcasters were seen as having more freedom to express various viewpoints without pressure from certain parties, resulting in their content being perceived as having less political framing and more focused on facts and analysis. The conversational and storytelling formats created an emotional connection between the audience and the source, reinforced by interactions on social media that increased listener loyalty. The topical topics and relaxed yet informative delivery style received a positive response, where the podcasters' honesty and openness were still appreciated even though they included personal opinions. However, audiences also recognized challenges in verifying information, due to limited verifiable evidence and the potential for personal bias on the part of the podcasters.

Podcasts as a trusted media alternative

Podcasts as a trusted alternative media are increasingly asserting their position in the modern communications landscape, in line with findings that support the Uses and Gratifications theory, where audiences actively choose media that suits their needs, interests, and preferences (Laughlin, 2023). The high level of trust in podcasts, especially independent ones, is inseparable from the public's crisis of trust in mainstream media, which is often seen as being rife with political, economic, and editorial interests (Susanto, 2023). In this context, podcasts offer a more open space for conveying information in a relaxed, conversational, transparent, and data-driven style, thus building a strong emotional connection between podcaster and audience. This advantage makes podcasts not only an entertainment medium but also an alternative source of information that is relevant and credible, and able to meet the audience's need for diverse perspectives and minimal outside intervention.

Objectivity in an independent format

The editorial freedom afforded by podcasts, especially independent ones, provides space for a more balanced presentation of news and information, as they are not tied to agendas or pressure from capital owners or certain political interests (Tennant, 2023). This flexibility allows podcasters to explore multiple perspectives, present diverse sources, and craft a more transparent and in-depth narrative. However, while this freedom is a plus, objectivity is not entirely free from influence, as the podcaster's personal perspective, background, and experiences will naturally shape how they interpret, select, and convey information to their audience (Haque & Zdravkovska, 2023).

Emotional closeness and audience loyalty

The emotional closeness between podcasters and audiences is one of the key factors that forms listener loyalty and strengthens the level of trust in the content presented (Rihi Tugu et al., 2025). Through personal interactions, whether directly in conversation and storytelling formats or through supporting channels like social media, a parasocial relationship is created where the audience feels an emotional bond with the podcaster. This relationship makes listeners more receptive to the information, opinions, and perspectives conveyed, due to the sense of familiarity and personal connection.

This advantage is a significant differentiator compared to traditional media which tends to be more formal, distant, and has minimal two-way interaction (Islamiyah et al., 2025). With a warm and authentic approach, podcasts are able to build a loyal community of listeners, where loyalty is driven not only by the quality of the information, but also by the sense of closeness the audience feels to the person behind the microphone.

The risk of bias and the need for media literacy

The risk of bias in podcast consumption arises when the high level of credibility given by the audience is not balanced with critical skills in checking facts and validating information (Allen et al., 2021). Emotional attachment to a particular podcaster can lead listeners to accept information without questioning its veracity, opening the door to personal bias or one-sided interpretation. Therefore, strengthening media literacy is crucial so that audiences can distinguish between opinion and fact and remain objective even if they have a preference for a particular podcaster's delivery style or perspective. Good media literacy not only helps prevent the spread of misinformation but also ensures that podcasts continue to function as a healthy, inclusive, and balanced source of information in the digital media ecosystem.

Implications for the journalism ecosystem

Implicitly, the presence of independent podcasts makes a significant contribution to the journalism ecosystem by enriching the diversity of information sources available to the public. Their flexible format, free from institutional pressures, allows podcasts to address issues often overlooked by mainstream media and to present more varied and inclusive perspectives.

However, for this role to operate sustainably and maintain public trust, ethical standards and transparency are essential in the content production process. This includes clarity about information sources, openness to potential conflicts of interest, and efforts to avoid the dissemination of unverified information. Thus, podcasts are not only a

trusted alternative media outlet but also an integral part of sound and responsible journalism practices (Efendi et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

Independent journalism podcasts are perceived as having a higher level of credibility than mainstream media, primarily due to narrative transparency, topical consistency, and freedom from pressure from certain parties. Audiences rate the objectivity of information in independent podcasts as relatively better, although it is still influenced by the podcaster's personal opinions. The conversational and storytelling formats used can build emotional closeness, thereby strengthening listener loyalty and trust in the podcaster. The topicality of the topic and the relaxed yet informative delivery style are key determinants of audience appeal and acceptance. However, the main challenges faced are limitations in information verification and the potential for personal bias, so audience media literacy is still needed to maintain objectivity in receiving information. With these advantages, podcasts have the potential to enrich the media ecosystem by providing a more diverse alternative source of information. However, to maintain public trust, ethical standards and transparency are required in every content production process.

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