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Radio, music, podcasts – BBC Sounds: Public service radio and podcasts in a platform world

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Abstract

In 2018, the BBC announced plans to replace their long-established 'iPlayer Radio' service with a new platform called BBC Sounds. The new service was promoted as a single space where listeners can consume BBC radio, music and podcasts, creating a single point of interaction between audiences and content. This is, however, far more than an exercise in reframing public service radio content in a new app; it is also a practical application of these policies through the commissioning of content made for online, specifically, younger, audiences. This shift happens not only at a time where traditional broadcasters are exploring ways to re-engage younger listeners but as commentators search for the 'Netflix of Podcasts' This article explores the manner in which the BBC Sounds project is a response to current trends in the radio industry and to which it recognizes podcasting as an audio medium that is distinct from but institutionally connected to radio.

Keywords

BBC

radio

podcasting

platforms

music

soundwork

Introduction

In September 2019, the BBC began the process of retiring their iPlayer Radio service and replacing it with a new iteration called 'BBC Sounds'; but rather than this being a revisioning of the previous application, the new venture has been envisioned as a platform built to engage new (and younger) audiences through a re-designed interface and natively digital content. It is now also the umbrella brand that wraps all BBC Audio content on smart speakers and all podcasts irrespective of the platform used to download or stream them. In this article, I will reflect on the nature of this new direction for BBC Audio content through engagement with the new app, analysis of content and publicly available documents.

In early 2020, the BBC reported early results of the platform, where they described their service BBC Sounds as

our personalized audio app, bringing together all live stations with on-demand radio programmes, podcasts and music mixes making it easier for listeners to discover and enjoy audio from the BBC. It replaced iPlayer Radio which closed last autumn. BBC Sounds now has a bigger audience than iPlayer Radio did.

(BBC Press Office)

Although all BBC podcasts are available externally, it is towards BBC Sounds that domestic listeners are directed when the presenters encourage subscription. This represents a move that not only forms part of the changing nature of public service media (Doyle 2010; Edmond 2014; Donders 2019) but could also be seen as recognition that podcasting is an inherently different medium. This differentiation is a relatively new step in the BBC's relationship with podcasting as The BBC for years persisted in not understanding it – as shown by the way its radio programmes that were hosted on a web server after transmission were described as podcasts. They're not: they're stored radio programmes available for access at the listener's convenience. (Naughton 2019)

Beyond the interface, this undertaking can be located within debates in platforms as discussed by Sullivan (2019) and Cwynar who notes that 'what once appeared to be an open and participatory RSS-based format is now evolving into a medium that is increasingly professionalized and oriented towards a group of rising walled-garden services' (2019: 13). These are apps that Morris and Patterson (2015) have badged 'people catchers', where the processes by which audio and data is captured position these apps as cultural intermediaries for audio consumers that create audiences, shape listener experiences and encourage engagement through the digital features that allow greater control and personalization over a user's audio environment (2015: 225)

Rather than purely acting as idle intermediaries between listeners and the audio they seek (like the iPod was), mobile apps are becoming active agents in the creation of highly personalized flows of self-selected and self-scheduled content (Morris and Patterson 2015: 227). These are movements predicted by Nicholas Negroponte (1995), who forecasted our need for such agents to help us navigate what may otherwise be a

seemingly unending and unnavigable flow of content. This is all especially pertinent when seen in the context of the growth of podcast platforms such as Luminary, Audible and, more notably, Spotify, whose ambitious plans for growth have stimulated debate about whether audiences need a 'Netflix for Podcasts' (Goldstein 2018; Locker 2019). In this regard, BBC Sounds might be considered a sociotechnical response to the changing nature of the radio space and the challenges of reaching audiences who do not own (or listen to) conventional radio (Wright 2020). The use of such tools is nothing new to the BBC, as Dubber notes, new technologies in the radio industry offer opportunities 'to do more and better' (2013: 168) where the Internet presented 'different communicative possibilities' (165). This reflects the dual role played by BBC Sounds to recommend and deliver curated content and to provide an ecosystem into which new content can be delivered.

BBC Sounds: 'radio, music, podcasts'

On the surface, BBC Sounds represents a redesign of the interface used by listeners to consume BBC radio content, but behind it lie wider changes that are less visible to the listener and it is this (rather than intricacies of the user experience or UX) that are the subject of this article. Although 'Sounds' is ostensibly presented as an 'app', we can draw some deeper insights of the 'operating model' (Light et al. 2018) that has driven the formulation of the endeavour. In their work, Light et al. have deployed a 'walkthrough model' to analyse such services and it is a model which I have used here as it highlights that 'technologies are designed, experienced and further developed within a culture that shapes and is influenced by them' (2018: 887) in a process that they call 'mutual shaping' (887). Their model suggests that, by walking through an app as a user might, we can uncover its aims and the connections to wider factors. In our case, BBC Sounds has been shaped by the demands of the BBC to create a new UX that has itself been shaped by external social patterns and political obligations to serve audiences; not least at a point in time when the BBC is seeking to defend the licence fee (Barker and Hughes 2020).

In his launch speech, the BBC's Director General Tony Hall defined their new venture as 'a standalone and standout destination, bringing the best of everything we do in audio into one place' (BBC 2018a). This is an embodiment of the 'stickiness' model highlighted by Henry Jenkins et al. (2013), where audiences are brought to a centralized destination, although there is a dichotomy here, as BBC podcasts are also external (and so 'spreadable'), even if listeners are directed towards the app in the BBC's own messaging. As Lord Hall notes above, the platform offers a single point of interaction for listeners, including access to live and on-demand feeds of all BBC services. The latter is, of course, a long-standing feature of the iPlayer Radio and has been continued here, as it forms a key pillar in the BBC's evolving role of a digital public service broadcaster (Hendy 2013; Jauert et al. 2017; Genders 2018). What has changed here is that users must sign in to the service using their BBC account, thus synchronizing their choices across devices and generating recommendations based on usage. In taking the next step of a walkthrough of BBC Sounds as a user, one can see that it presents a collection of BBC-branded audio that extends beyond linear radio. In framing this, we can draw upon Michele Hilmes' (2013) definition of audio content as 'soundwork', as a term that

encompasses radio, podcasts and music, although one might equally use 'audio'. Hilmes suggests that 'radio' (her emphasis, 41 and 61) now embraces multiple forms of audio where: 'through screens we listen to soundwork both streamed and podcast, enjoying its programmes live and listening again later, creating our own "radio" through playlists and algorithms' (2013: 43). These elements sit within what McKelvey and Hunt call 'surrounds', the elements of a screen and their hierarchy, where 'devices present a managed array of content to consume' (2019: 3) that shape the experience and direct attention. What is notable in the movement from iPlayer to BBC Sounds is a blurring of content, as whilst 'podcasts' are a section in their own right, one needs to explore further to see whether this is bespoke content or has already been on the radio. When scrutinizing the genre categories, all such delineations between the competing forms of content are all but invisible to the listener, with podcast-only and broadcast content achieving equal status. Our attention is drawn to content, not the names of radio stations.

One can witness how the BBC positions their service in an online video and TV trailer produced to promote the service (BBC 2018b). In the video, the Sounds app is posited as a single point of interaction for audio content, including live sports commentary, debates, documentary and music. The film shows a young woman moving through the routine activities of a typical day in which her tasks are scored by a soundscape of music, podcasts, live radio and the familiar sounds of iconic BBC radio programmes and presenters. This promotional piece articulates the functional aspects of the Sounds app as a repository of soundwork that caters to our moods and our more practical needs to stay informed. One can see the underpinning imperatives for this by scrutinizing data from the quarterly Measurement of Internet Delivered Audio Services (MIDAS) study (RAJAR 2019), which shows the disproportionate use of catch-up listening (or 'Listen Again') which heavily skews towards older listeners. Although podcasts are popular amongst the under 35s, they are much less likely to use 'listen-again' services than their older counterparts. More specifically, the BBC iPlayer Radio app was only used by 3 per cent of people under 35 years (BBC News 2018). In other words, the younger audience are engaging with podcasts, but they were not catching up on last night's edition of *The Archers* (1951–present) as a listen-again programme. There are elements here that echo Raymond Williams (1990) findings on TV in the 1970s, where he highlighted the complex relationship between technology and the wider social and institutional frameworks, where 'new technology is itself a product of a particular social system' (1990: 135), where in our case that social system represents a shift in how audio content is consumed. BBC Sounds is emblematic of society's move towards apps and platforms, where user data are collected and used to deepen the experience that might help shape the listener experience (see Sullivan 2019; Cwynar 2015; Srnicek 2017). In using the walkthrough model, the social and political logics of the platform start to emerge as it shifts attention towards digital products in a streaming, rather than a downloading, model. Whereas iPlayer Radio foregrounded live listening using an interface that looked and felt like a radio dial, BBC Sounds shrinks this aspect, and whilst live radio remains at the top of the screen, our eyes are more immediately drawn to graphics of curated content. Whereas the 'CBC Listen' app (CBC Canada) divides content between 'Live

Radio', 'On Demand', 'CBC Podcasts' and 'Music Playlists', BBC Sounds holds this section visually onto a single page, using tabs for 'Listen', 'My Sounds' and search. These are elements that Light and his co-authors describe as 'functions and features' (2018: 891).

When logged into the BBC ecosystem, one's actions are tracked; Gazi and Bonini (2018) described this constantly tracked listening mode as a form of 'commodification of haptically mediated radio listening' where 'every touch made on a smartphone in order to open an app to listen to an online radio is measured and commodified' (2018: 111). This level of data has already proved to be useful to producers at National Public Radio (NPR) after analysis from their app NPR One (Charney 2016) where the technology team have shared data on what techniques worked and what did not to producers. There is a shared intent here, as both BBC Sounds and NPR One explore ways to attract 'new people to the public radio universe' (Ellis 2015) that could 'create the listening habit of the future' (Jullien cited in Kiefer 2018). Unlike the traditional over-the-air listening, downloading and streaming allows for an experience that can be not only more personalized but also more networked and connected (Lacey 2014). There are benefits of this move towards an app-based ecology; not only does it cater for the mobile nature of audio consumption, but evidence from the branded content producer Pacific Content suggests that app listeners are more engaged (Misener 2019). They cite a model from New York-based digital agency Campfire (Monello 2012) who talk about dippers, skimmers and divers. The skimmers visit the website and sample content, whereas the divers are app users: the ones who listen to entire episodes and binge a series. So far, I have considered BBC Sounds as a digital iteration of BBC policy and a response to the changing dynamics of the radio landscape where public service broadcasting is reflecting on its role (EBU 2002; Ramsey 2017). When it comes to BBC Sounds, the app merely provides the interface to what are more significant political and economic shifts within the BBC; unlike the iPlayer Radio, BBC Sounds is a department in its own right with a production budget, a controller and a podcast commissioning team (Waterson 2018; Tobitt 2019). This marks an important shift on the part of the corporation in recognizing podcasts as a distinct form of audio content that can be created in discrete teams or commissioned from external providers from the expanding UK market.

Podcasts as a distinct medium

As a medium, podcasting is built on open-source tools, and whilst content passes through commercially owned servers and gatekeepers (like Apple), the principle that anyone can make a podcast remains a dominant feature. It has managed to retain the ethos of an amateur medium, despite the more recent commercial developments detailed by Bonini (2015). It is, though (like all media), moving into an app-led ecosystem. This represents a move away from the iPod environment described in early articles on podcasting (Berry 2006; Menduni 2007) where the medium felt more improvised. Henry Jenkins claimed that media are also 'cultural systems' (2006: 14), which suggests that losing the RSS1 feed that gave rise to podcasting might change the nature of the medium, if content starts moving behind a paywall. When I posed this question on Twitter to Dave Winer (a founding father of the medium), he replied that

'some people call those podcasts, I don't' (2019). Whilst the emphasis here is technical, given his previous position, the inference is that there are political and cultural definitions of podcasting, ones that are rooted in the amateur history of the medium (Winer 2015, 2018). This suggests that the tensions between the political, technical, economic and cultural means of defining 'podcasting' are live debates that have yet to be settled. However, it remains a theme that we should be mindful of, not least as the economic factors of 'walled garden' apps could lead to a two-track system (Locker 2019). It is into this framework that the BBC has positioned the Sounds project to potential listeners as an audio destination for BBC podcasts; even if they are available elsewhere. Far more than being a solely central point where listeners can find all their audio needs, the project is a producer and a commissioner of content, building relationships with BBC departments (such as News or Documentaries) and independent producers. There are some internal politics here, as whilst some work within the Sounds team, online it sits alongside work commissioned by the radio networks and their own digital or podcast commissioners. For example, in 2019, BBC Radio 4 created *Forest 404* (2019), an audio drama that was built on academic research into the environment (AHRC 2019), which embraces the delivery system of podcasts by placing weekly bundles of content into the same feed that include the drama episode, a talk and a soundscape aimed at capturing audience reactions to environmental sounds. At the same time, other networks have created their own array of content, such as *13 Minutes to the Moon* (2019) (History, with a cinematic score), *Paradise* (2019) (True Crime), and *Hooked: The Unexpected Addicts* (2019) (a podcast about addiction presented by former addicts), that all pay attention to the core qualities of podcasting as an intimate, sonically expansive, and attentive medium. Although distributed via BBC Sounds, the above series are made for the current radio networks, where each has subtly different approaches. Although an earlier adopter of the medium, this reinvigoration can be seen as part of a wider effort on the part of public broadcasters to explore how podcasts might be deployed (Berry 2015; Patterson 2016; Cwynar 2019). These are developments that can be seen as representative of the wider challenges for the BBC as it navigates the role of public service media in the digital age (Ramsey 2018). Furthermore, this new content can be seen as a space for innovation, as one that recognizes the inherent differences in podcasting, suggesting that BBC podcasts are breaking free from the notion that they are a remediated form of radio. In a technical guide, the BBC notes that A podcast is an edited piece of content which can be a complete radio programme, an edited extract or highlights from a programme, or unique content with a particular theme made to be subscribed and listened to as a series. (BBC Sounds n.d)

Speaking on the BBC Academe podcast, the podcast commissioner for Sounds, Jason Phipps, noted that 'we'll be looking at commissioning stuff that has fallen in the cracks between the network commissions. We're commissioning into the gaps' (Podcastology 2018).

There is a wider issue, one with which audio and radio educators are familiar with: young people are listening to less radio. According to a British Council report, 'young people are listening to less live radio each week than their peers, a trend that

shows no sign of changing' (Linfoot 2018: 6). Linfoot's report adds that what it describes as 'lean-forward' (or lean-in) listening is a key trend amongst this audience and, as such, 'stations that rely on young audiences for "linear", live listening are offering more content on different platforms (such as social media, listen again and podcasts), in the hope of replenishing their listeners' (Linfoot 2018: 4). What Linfoot calls 'lean forward', we might also call 'active listening', where listeners are more engaged because they were more actively engaged on finding and selecting content that responds to a specific mood or interest. This is a pattern which the UK media regulator Ofcom reported on in their first annual report on the BBC in 2018, which notes the need to address the issue through the creation of 'content that appeals to young people, and to find the best ways of reaching them, which suit and reflect their viewing and listening habits' (2018: 27). The tailoring of the UX of the BBC Sounds app and much of the content towards this audience is a recognition of this. It is designed for the 'lean-forward' listening experiences described by Linfoot, as a modality 'where time is set aside for concentration and deliberate consumption' (2018: 15). Although these changes were made in the context of political imperatives and social contexts, the transition has proven to be unpopular (Sawyer 2019; Runcie 2019), especially amongst the listeners who had grown to love the old iPlayer Radio service.

Defining (BBC) podcasts

As I have already noted, BBC Sounds is positioned as a destination app, which is host to both catch-up listening that only appears there and podcast content that is externally available. It is this additional function of BBC Sounds as a producer of podcast work that I will examine next. Before I go onto exploring some of the deeper qualities as expressed in the commissioning briefs, I have surveyed the podcast category and sorted the content using six author-defined typologies that may offer some insight into how podcasts fit into the wider audio ecology of BBC Sounds.

Radio programmes – where the podcast is a remediated version of a broadcast piece. This aspect is shrinking, as it becomes clear that only certain forms have cut through in the podcast space. The obvious example here is *Desert Island Discs* (1942–present), a popular programme on BBC Radio 4 that is now available in a remediated form as a podcast. (This remediation usually involves reducing the amount of music but has also allowed for extended versions.)

Curated – this strand features a range of content often fronted by a presenter; in this format, podcast series such as *Seriously...* (2017–present) or Friday Night Comedy series extract single programmes from the BBC Radio 4 schedule and distribute them with additional framing. This reflects the 'TiVo for radio' approach in public radio identified by Murray (2009) and Cwynar (2015) who described such works as 'promotional paratexts' (Cwynar 2015: 191), as works intended to promote and serve the wider radio offering of a public broadcaster. This paratextual approach might be seen more acutely within a 'highlight' formats used to distribute programmes such as the BBC Radio 1 Breakfast show as a podcast in a way that compresses time and removes music or draws out key elements from a range of programming to allow for a more compressed form of listening.

Bespoke content – If the previous examples are indicative of podcasting's public radio past, the following categories demonstrate the new confidences that public broadcasters are finding in a Post-Serial marketplace. It is a space in which BBC Sounds features two strands: one which carries the BBC Sounds brand, and one where content is aligned to or generated by/for other parts of the corporation. This forum for content has also allowed local radio stations to distribute content to a wider audience in a lead taken by BBC Radio Sheffield and *The Naked Podcast* (2018–present).

What is notable when someone explores these categories is how the above definitions are often difficult to establish. Whether the programme has ever been on the radio, this effectively removes the inherent differences between 'listen-again' content that is managed within a specified ecosystem of approved apps or devices and podcast content that is pushed out freely via RSS. It further blurs the boundaries between podcasts and radio, as although 'podcasts' is a category, content from here also sits alongside 'radio' content in thematic categories. In working with students to explore these categories, it is clear that from their perspective this blurring positively aided their discovery and their judgement of content that they may have previously disregarded due to its affiliation with a radio brand.

As part of these moves, the BBC has created new and distinctive work, such as *Beyond Today* (2018–present), a more accessible version of the iconic *Today* (1957–present) programme that competes in the daily news space alongside *The Daily* (2017–present) (New York Times) and *Today in Focus* (2018–present) (The Guardian) in taking a single story in depth each weekday. However, perhaps more typical of the role that BBC Sounds is trying to establish for itself in reaching new audiences is *The Next Episode* (TNE), a less frequent news podcast with a different approach to news reporting. Writing on Twitter, the editor Dino Sophos said,

Our audience is younger & more diverse than other 'news' pods. We like to tell them something new about the issues they care about, rather than just adding to the noise [...] Importantly, the team that makes TNE is also young & diverse. Not everyone has got into media & journalism via the usual routes. We ask people immersed in the story to help tell it and give us an insight into their worlds
(Sophos 2019: n.pag.)

The use, in these podcasts, of more informal language, off-agenda stories and the foregrounding of reporters who would not normally feature in the mainstream is significant. This is all reflective of the notions of podcasting as a deinstitutionalized form of broadcasting (Jarrett 2009), where a different style of discourse is possible, if not encouraged.

Defining podcasts, the BBC way

As a public broadcaster, the BBC is required to commission work for independent producers (DCMS 2016), as well as from its internal departments. As part of this process, the BBC outlines the nature of the work they are seeking and the audience it should be attracting. The BBC has pitched these across four briefs:

- Funny, Quirky, Odd
- Dramatic Storytelling
- Discover, Explain

Pop cultures, sub cultures

A common theme across all these briefs is a desire to create 'podcasts that engage existing podcast listeners who don't consume BBC output and podcasts that convert new people to the joys of podcasts' (BBC Commissioning n.d. a) and no doubt, in turn, the BBC. The documents detail three key areas of focus: 'Innovation: podcasts which play with and exploit the form's creative storytelling possibilities. Podcasting allows for genre-bending and reinventions of the grammar of radio' (BBC Commissioning n.d. b) and 'New voices: podcasts that authentically represent the rich diversity of voices and lived experiences relevant to under 35 audiences' (BBC Commissioning n.d. c). And, finally

New audiences: podcasts which engage existing podcast listeners who don't consume BBC output and podcasts which convert new people to the joys of podcasts. So we want to hear brilliant ideas aimed at sophisticated listeners who may consume hours of US podcasts but not consider listening to the BBC.

(BBC Commissioning n.d.: 4)

In bold type, the document then adds that '**[t]he target audience for podcasts commissioned by the BBC Sounds commissioning team is people in the UK aged 18-34**' (BBC Commissioning n.d.: 4). The BBC recognizes here that there is a section of population who never listen to news on Radio 4 but *are* listening to podcasts on news or politics.

However, there is a challenge here as whilst the BBC seems to recognize the wealth of skills in the UK podcasting industry, the qualifying criteria for pitching will mean inevitably those securing commissions are established radio production businesses who are potentially making podcasts for the first time. To aid their transition to podcast production, the BBC created a short manifesto, published by the newly appointed commissioner Jason Phipps, to help producers. Although short, the list is indicative of many of the common understandings of the nature of podcasts and is positive recognition that the BBC is not only aware that radio and podcasting are different media but are positively celebrating the differences. Rule #1 states that '[a] podcast is not a radio programme even if radio programmes can be made available to the public as podcasts' (BBC Commissioning n.d.); a rule confirmed by rule #11, which indicates that whilst podcasts are 'agile' and rules can be broken, rule #1 is sacrosanct. They acknowledge that podcasts 'are natively global digital forms of audio' (#10), Cinematic (#6), intimate (#5), offer clarity in 'manic' news cycles (#8), are capable of telling 'thorny and emotionally complex stories, real and made up' (#7), are 'tribal' (#9), and are built for the 'headphone generation' (#4). It is perhaps in rule #2 that we see, perhaps, the most important point, '[f]or a younger generation who will never own a radio, podcasts are their radio but, reread rule 1'. In other words, whilst podcasts are *not* radio, there is an equivalency here as the audience may use it in the same way their parents use radio. The implication here is that younger are rejecting the idea of a radio, as a device, as opposed to the idea of listening to a human voice telling a story; however, we might define the experience. This treatise is reflective of some of the debates raised by academics scrutinizing the emergent medium. Martin Spinelli and Lance Dann establish how podcasts are able to pick through 'the complex intergenerational dialogue about

professionalism, standards and cultural value in audio as part of an effort to describe podcasting's potential as distinct from radio' (2019: 73) where issues around intimacy and the way that is achieved through language and sound design are brought to the fore. As Lisa Perks and Jacob Turner note, 'podcasting seems to have found and stabilized its entertainment identity emphasizing a more personal and personalized experience' (2018: 2).

Throughout their book, Spinelli and Dann detail interviews with podcasters which return to these themes of intimacy, authenticity and the nature of podcasting that shares a lineage with radio but is in many ways different. As Danielle Hancock and Leslie McMurtry also conclude in their examination of Post-Serial fiction, the 'podcast is no longer a side project of radio, but a self-regulating and generating media form in its own right' (2018: 100). The guidance offered by the BBC to their aspiring producers is reflective of these academic observations that podcasting is indeed a medium in its own right, and whilst there may be contesting arguments, in the eyes of the BBC at least, it is an argument that they considered to be more settled.

Conclusion

Although the development of BBC Sounds equates to more than the development of an app for podcast and radio listening, one must view these changes in the context of podcasting developing into 'a medium that is increasingly professionalized and oriented towards a group of rising walled-garden services' (Cwynar 2019: 13–14) which risks 'leaving RSS as a "second-class" distribution mechanism reserved for amateurs' (Sullivan 2019: 16). As Sullivan points out, '[f]or these players, the major value of platformization comes from their ability to glean more accurate consumption data from a large audience for the purposes of monetization' (2019: 9), or, in the case of the BBC, to evidence their public value, which, at present, is politically important (Tobitt 2020). To date, the BBC has not declared any interests to follow Spotify, Luminary and Audible in pitching themselves as a platform with exclusive content that only sits within their domain. Although the ideas laid out by Jenkins (2006) on the relationship between delivery systems and cultural systems are valid, the questions outlined here on podcasting's reliance on RSS will not disappear, even if some content may end up inside a walled garden. As a public broadcaster, the BBC is not alone in developing a platform that coalesces content experiences in one place, nor are they alone in seeking out this kind of interface in their exploration of the entertainment industries; as Smith and Telling conclude, companies will need to control both the production of content but also the interface with their customers and the data that generate (2017). It is worth noting here that during 2019, the BBC did just that and removed content from some third-party platforms over their ability to access these kinds of data (Clifton 2019a, 2019b) it now direct listeners to the Sounds app and BBC smart speaker 'skills'.

Beyond the ability to manage rights, BBC Sounds also represents the way in which the broadcaster is seeking to position and define itself in the digital space. In their discussion of the iPlayer service for television, Grainge and Johnson highlight this aim when it came to reimagine 'iPlayer from a catch-up service to the digital expression of the BBC online' as a process which involved 'reconceptualizing what public service broadcasting might mean beyond the experience of broadcasting itself' (2018: 39). We

can, therefore, safely locate BBC Sounds within this tradition as a further attempt to extend online presence beyond the traditional notions of 'broadcasting' (see Bennett and Strange 2014). These are ideas that are reflected by Jonathan Sterne et al. (2008), who argued that podcasting was a 'realization of broadcasting that ought to exist alongside and compete with other models' rather than replace other forms, even if such works might attract a larger 'share of ear' amongst some listeners. The development of a distinct podcasting offer within the BBC reflects wider trends within public radio as seen by ventures such as WNYC studios (or other podcast-specific projects from broadcasters such as CBC, ABC or RTE): to create podcast only content that reflects and engages with specificities of the medium, rather than being a remediation of radio. The introduction of this platform for medium-specific content and distribution is a response to social changes (younger people are not listening to enough radio) and the political desire and responsibility to engage with media forms (podcasts) that they might respond to. In the wider formation, BBC Sounds also presents a digital 'brand' for audio content that encompasses traditional radio, pop-up services, digitally native podcasts and music that are interwoven with the corporation's public purposes as a twenty-first-century public broadcaster.²

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Notes

1 RSS refers to web protocol called 'Really Simple Syndication', a process by which a web 'feed' is subscribed to by users, who receive updates when new content is added to the feed. Although also used by websites, when enclosures are added to the 'feed', they can deliver podcasts automatically to software and mobile apps. RSS is an open-source protocol and is, therefore, available to all.

2 Addendum: Prior to the final submission of this article, the BBC published an initial dataset for BBC Sounds, which notes that New figures confirm that more than half a million young people (16-34s) use Sounds each week, and that BBC Radio stations are hugely popular on BBC Sounds with 56% of overall plays being of live content. This rises to 67% when looking at the total hours spent with BBC Sounds, showing the lure of the brilliant schedules that keep listeners tuned in. (BBC 2020)

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