

The definitive, peer reviewed and edited version of this article is published in Berry, R. (2024) 'We hardly need to use our ears: Video, audio and the shaping of the podcast medium in the 2020s', *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media*. Intellect. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1386/rjao_00097_1.

Received 1 March 2024

Accepted 8 August 2024

Published 31 December 2024

This is the post-print version

Abstract

In 1979, the British pop band The Buggles released 'Video Killed the Radio Star', generating a provocation used to explain change (where x killed y). Two years later, the song's video was used to launch MTV, marking a change in how audiences consumed music. It is not the title that is of interest here, but a line in the track that suggests in the age of video, 'We no longer need to use our ears' (Downes et al. 1979). Although the open standard of podcasting has meant that video and audio could coexist, podcasting has been primarily an auditory medium. However, in 2024, several leading podcasts on Spotify now play as easily as video as audio. This article discusses this evolution, arguing that this shift not only reflects the actors that shape podcasting but also poses questions for how we might define podcasting in its third decade. Is podcasting still an aural medium?

Keywords: podcasting, video, audio, video podcasts, visualization

Introduction

We are now twenty years into the evolution of podcasting; in that time, the medium has transformed itself. What was once a space created for amateurs is becoming professionalized and dominated by corporate actors (Sullivan 2024); what was once niche is now decidedly mainstream (Berry 2020). This article explores this ongoing development with a specific focus on the contemporary relationship between podcasts and video, considering examples of video podcasting and reflecting on what their presentation can tell us about the nature of podcasting in 2024.

In considering podcasting as a medium, it is important to note some history. As Andrew Bottomley notes (2020), the process of podcasting (distributing audio content via RSS) predates the name, with producers such as Dave Winer, Adam Curry and Christopher Lydon all producing audio work before the community settled on the term in late 2004. Podcasting was developed and nurtured by these amateurs who shaped the nascent medium as oppositional to the corporate forces of traditional media. These pioneers were influenced by radio but had intent that podcasting could be different. Just as those early amateurs shaped the medium in the 2000s, in the 2020s, different forces are shaping and reshaping the medium. Writing in 2022, Tiziano Bonini draws attention to this changed environment, noting, '[w]hen we use the word podcast today, we mean it differently than we did in 2004' (Bonini 2022: 9). Rather than making a binary choice between defining media content as 'podcast' or 'radio', he suggests that podcasting is a hybrid medium of different elements shaped by actors indicative of our time. In his description, podcasting is:

[N]ot just a cultural form shaped by networks of different actors, but a whole hybrid media ecosystem made by competing networks of actors and shaped by asymmetrical power relations between legacy broadcast and media companies, emerging tech companies and independent producers.

(Bonini 2022: 27)

This is the malleability of podcasting, where the status of podcasting as a decentralized medium means external actors can change the shape of work. He encourages us to see past the binary debate of radio vs. podcasting but see it as a network of actors and power relations in which platforms increasingly shape work (Poell et al. 2022). Although Bonini focuses on the aural, we can locate the rise of video in podcasting in this framework, and this shift is the focus of this article.

In a blog post in August 2023, consultant Jay Nachlis suggested that podcasting has now entered the ‘what is a podcast era’ (2023), where the lines between audio and video converge and blur. He refers to a study (Goldstein and Nachlis 2023) that illustrated that not only were more people watching podcasts, 75 per cent of them thought a podcast could be audio or video. He adds that we ‘can dismiss how some consumers perceive what a podcast is, but that’s their perception’ (2023, original emphasis). In other words, we can present valid arguments that podcasts are and can be audio but that will not shift the honestly held views of the audience. We can view these changes within the context of podcast studies because, as Dario Llinares suggests, the definitions we use are indicative of ‘an emergent discipline that is still fundamentally in flux’, where the very notion of podcast-ness remains open for debate (2022). This is a position that Jemily Rime and her co-authors describe as ‘conceptual fuzziness’ (2022: 1261), where our understanding of podcasting may change but where there are some key features at play which will remain, not least the way participants can shape it too (Berry 2022). Perhaps, just like radio, our definitions will change over time, and ultimately, any attempt to define it conclusively is futile (Lacey 2008: 110). In that framing, podcasting is what it is at any given time.

This fuzzy situation can be illustrated in an episode of ‘The Problem with Jon Stewart Podcast’ (2023), where he sits down with the British journalist and editor Ian Hislop. In the posted video, we can see the two men sitting in front of a low table with two studio-type broadcast microphones on small stands, one in front of each man and visible in a wide shot. However, neither microphone appears to be plugged in, suggesting they are strategically placed props to visually signal that it is a ‘podcast’ – even though the episode is only available on YouTube and Apple TV. This might suggest that the ideas podcasting embodies are of such cultural value that they are copied by other forms, where the word ‘podcast’ describes a form of media work rather than audio content distributed over RSS.

Podcasting as a medium

Whether we call it a medium or not (Sharon 2023), what we now know as ‘podcasting’ emerged in a world before social media, YouTube, Instagram and the iPhone. As Enrico Menduni (2007) writes, podcasting initially presented itself as a bridge into the mobile internet era, offering listeners the chance to consume audio content outside the home. For Menduni, podcasting was an interim technology, a solution to a problem. For others, it was both a solution and an emerging set of practices, with a 2006 article in *Computer* stating, ‘[t]he term podcast refers not only to the delivery of files but also to their content’ (Patterson 2006: 1). The files referred to here could be audio or video, but historically, podcasting has been predominately an audio medium, even though the RSS infrastructure it is built on is agnostic about the file types it can deliver.

Many early discussions around the possibilities for RSS as a media distribution emphasized video rather than audio (Winer 2001). Although video was supported by the iPod since 2005, podcasting has remained an audio-dominated ecosystem (Berry 2016), which podcasters have leant into, not least because it allows listeners to multi-task and allows producers to explore sound’s creative and emotional impact (Siobhán McHugh 2022). Where audio producers focused on podcasting, visual content creators found a home on YouTube, which arguably offered a better solution for video, partly because the ad-funded model made it free for producers.

Over time, different human and non-human actors emerged that steered podcasting in one direction or another (Bonini 2022: 26). In the early years of the medium, participants effectively claimed their voice, bypassed traditional media and made direct connections with audiences via the internet (Berry 2006). These early actors set many of the formats and templates that have characterized later work, not least the decision to make the system open to all (Winer 2010). Over time, investments made by public radio (Murray 2009) in podcast-specific projects (Fox and Ebada 2022; Lindgren 2016; McHugh 2016) and the shaping effects of platforms like iTunes or Spotify (Berg 2021; Morris and Patterson 2015; Sullivan 2019) all made different impacts. As John Sullivan notes, the status of podcasting as a decentralized medium makes it (mostly) less susceptible to the forces of platforms, as although most listeners use platform-centric apps such as Apple Podcasts and Spotify, the open architecture of RSS does not compel them to do so (2019, 2024). Despite the choice of over 40 different apps in the Apple App Store, a few key platform-driven services (Apple, Spotify and YouTube) dominate. These platforms are becoming increasingly important to podcasters, not just because of the data they generate but also because of their ability to place content in front of the audience through a matrix of ‘platform native tools’ (Poell et al. 2022: 54).

In considering why podcasts are becoming more visual, we can find evidence in a Reuters report on journalism trends, which notes that filming podcasts and placing them on as many platforms as possible can extend the reach of shows (Newman 2023). This, in turn, can increase opportunities to monetize work (Scribe 2023). This is part and parcel of the new materiality of screen-based audio, through which ‘we listen to soundwork both streamed and podcast, enjoying its programs live and listening again later’ (Hilmes [2013] 2024: 44) but also where screen-centric platforms (such as Instagram and YouTube) serve as useful promotional tools to audio media. For podcasting, this visual materiality might present itself via podcast artwork, written show notes or interactions on social media (Hancock and McMurtry 2018; Hilmes [2013] 2024), but this also gets us to the topic of this article and the role of video in contemporary podcasting. In 2024, podcasting is literally more visible (Dotan and Blino 2022), with clips of podcasts appearing across different social media platforms, showing hosts engaging with each other and their guests in highly visual formats (Listen 2022). This paradigm is mirrored in my own experiences in the classroom, where students reported that their podcasting consumption was not only visual but the most popular hosts were often already established in other forms of digital media, suggesting that new human actors were also driving changes. One student noted how they were aware of podcasts not because they listened to them but because they saw video clips of podcasts on social media, whilst others stressed the need to do something with their eyes. I am not alone in this; Amplifi Media CEO and podcast tutor at NYU Steve Goldstein writes: ‘There is still a debate about what a podcast is and whether it must have an RSS feed. We’ll have to move beyond that [...] Podcasters thinking about how to grow and retain audiences should have my students in mind and how they discover content’ (Goldstein 2023), especially if they consume clips rather than listening in full. In May 2022, an annual report by Signal Hill for the Cumulus podcast network emphasized the dominance of YouTube as a podcast consumption platform, especially with users who are younger and newer to podcasts and who prefer watching to listening (Cumulus Media 2022). Key findings indicate that almost a third (31%) of the sample of 608 listeners who had listened to a new podcast had done so on YouTube, a platform that was the most used by consumers who were new to the medium. The fact that only 37% of the sample actively watched videos suggests that part of the attraction could be the platform’s convenience. A further study a year later highlighted this shift in how audiences define, consume and perceive the work (Nachlis 2023), where 75% of those studied saw podcasting as audio or video. Although we might take solace in that only 3% thought podcasts were only video, this position is all about perception. As consultant and podcaster Matt Deegan outlines in a blog post, ‘[i]t doesn’t matter what you think a podcast is, you need to consider what your audience thinks one is’ (Deegan 2023, original emphasis). This suggests a complex landscape where audiences and platforms shape definitions and cloud our ability to define

content (Clarke 2022) and where ‘our preferences, our colloquialisms and our culture give the word “podcasting” its meaning’ (Rime et al. 2022: 1273).

Analysis and methods

This article draws on a two-step study, initially examining the connection between podcasts on Spotify and their use of video. Spotify was selected as it has integrated video agnostically into the platform and actively promotes the visual content it hosts. The top ten popular shows in the United Kingdom in August 2023 were initially examined to establish a typology of approaches for discussion. This sampling confirmed that all but one podcast (which was made by a YouTuber, anyway) made use of video. Indeed, the two most popular shows, The Joe Rogan Experience and The Diary of a CEO (DOAC), were both natively video. However, not only was DOAC equally popular on platforms without video, broader research questions emerged in the process, not least because many of the shows trending on social media had yet to add video to Spotify.¹

Therefore, a broader purposive sample (Bertrand and Hughes 2018: 266–68) was examined to include a broader selection of work to help frame the discussion of this constantly changing trend. This work includes The Receipts Podcast, Saving Grace, The Sounds of Black Britain, The Always Sunny Podcast, Anything Goes with Emma Chamberlain (2020–present) and Small Talks (2022–23) on Spotify, plus episodes from The Daily (2017–present), The News Agents (2022–present), Mayim Bialik’s Breakdown (2020–present) and The Media Podcast (2014–present) on YouTube. Multiple episodes were viewed at each step to evaluate their use of visual content. This process helped to define two research questions:

1. How is video used within contemporary podcasting?
2. What are the implications of this trend for how we understand podcasting?

The overall study identified three key typologies where the sampled work fell into one of the following categories:

- A fully visualized podcast on one or more platforms.
- An audio-first podcast with filmed content for social media or YouTube short.
- An audio-first podcast with visualized social media posts.

Video and podcasting

As noted above, podcasting is a medium that was invented in a different sense. Nobody owns it, and as such, it is subject to the forces of different actors over time, each steering it one way or another (Berry 2022; Bonini 2022; Llinares 2022; Rime et al. 2022) since no

central body determines what content it can and cannot carry. The presence of video could be an effect of this openness, where podcasting is a cultural form that can be applied equally well in video, audio or even live events.

In June 2023, the Swedish podcast platform Spotify published an update on the development of video podcasts on their platform, a process that saw the numbers rise from a handful in 2020 to over 100,000 by the summer of that year (Spotify 2023). This development refers to a relatively new feature of the platform where shows hosted by the Spotify-owned hosting service formerly known as Anchor can be consumed as both audio and video. When the user clicks play, the platform can serve either video or podcasting, depending on the user's preferences (Spotify for Podcasters 2022) and the device on which they are consuming. In this iteration of the podcast app, video and audio are interchangeable and are treated the same in search and playback. Shows such as The Joe Rogan Experience, Call Her Daddy and DOAC will playback as video by default on the Spotify app, a web browser and apps on smart TVs.

As this article explores, a spectrum of production approaches is evident when examining podcast use. On the one hand, podcasts are fully produced natively as video, often using dedicated studio spaces. On the other, video recordings are frequently the by-product of recording podcast episodes over video conferencing services, where video functions in a paratextual role in promoting episodes on social media. However, rather than being a video podcast per se, some social media clips could be classed as videos of podcasts since the rest of the episode is unavailable visually. This is the case with the Louis Theroux Podcast (2023–present), where interviews are remotely recorded, with video clips extracted for social media in a move recommended to delegates at a podcast event in 2024 (Goldstein 2024).

While some podcasts might have previously used static images or animated videos generated by apps such as Headliner, today's shows are now being recorded in visual studios created for podcast production. This means that podcasts such as Help! I Sexted My Boss (2018–present) can capture whole or partial episodes in vision in a studio where cameras have been added (Audio Always n.d.). What is noticeable across all this work is the sense that although many of the conventions of multicamera television are present (lighting, sets, reaction shots, etc.), this is not a form of television. Although some podcasters replace over-ear headphones with discrete earpieces, the hosts address microphones rather than cameras in most of the podcasts examined. Although the studio used for The News Agents (Global 2023) has been designed as visualized audio media (Crew and Barbu 2022), the hosts often have laptops on their knees or look away from the automated cameras in ways that add an informal, almost voyeuristic aesthetic. Much like

visualized radio (Berry 2013), many visualized podcasts use video as a secondary layer, which we can theorize is there to supplement the audio. In responding to the use of video in this kind of transmedia work, podcaster and comedian Ed Gamble posted: ‘No guys, a visualised podcast is not just a TV show. It’s an in-vision format for your EYES that you can also hear with your EARS. Nothing like a TV show actually’ (2024).

Podcast infrastructures

Traditionally, podcasters have uploaded their shows to a single hosting service, informing a network of apps that a new episode is available. This equitable position means a listener using Spotify is treated the same as one using Pocketcasts, as they each access the same content via a single RSS feed. In recent years, traffic has been migrating to Spotify (Perez 2021), which seeks to become a destination for audio content (Bertoni 2021) rather than being an agnostic thoroughfare for podcasts. John Sullivan notes that despite the potential for more independence in this market, attention is focused on relatively few apps (2019: 1). However, audiences may not be loyal to those apps as more than half of those who consume podcasts on YouTube also consume the same work on other platforms (Mayer 2023). By acting as intermediaries, podcast apps mediate experience by recommending work (such as Apple’s ‘New and Noteworthy’) or using data to present charts of popular shows. Podcasters will, therefore, deploy a range of measures to optimize their profile as they adjust their ‘production and distribution strategies to accommodate the structural and algorithmic logics of online platforms’ (Sullivan 2024: 84). These strategies now include a halo of approaches designed to grow audiences, including video. As Marta Perrotta notes in her extensive study of public broadcasters in Europe, ‘the listener of the future is and should be also a viewer – perhaps a viewer who is not used to listening to radio and audio content but whose viewing data may be useful for profiling’ (Perrotta 2023: 136). For their part, platforms like Spotify welcome this shift away from the open architecture of RSS, which they see as outdated (Laughlin 2024) allowing instead for data-rich connections via their own closed systems. All of this builds a system where the means of reception are disconnected from the means of distribution. Where previously the sense that anyone could make a podcast and distribute it for free over RSS, we are being progressed into a platform world where access is subject to corporate strategy (Morris 2024: 187–89) rather than an platform-independent system (Hoyt et al. 2021) in which individual producers have more control.

Beyond the infrastructural questions, for podcasters producing video clips or fully visualized episodes, extra steps are required in production and distribution. Beyond any additional cost and time for production and editing, producers may need to upload work and collect data from multiple sites. Although YouTube now allows producers to add their

RSS feeds, this only works for the audio versions and creates a static image video from the artwork that appears in the feed (YouTube 2024). At present, any moving image video version needs to be uploaded separately. The Google-owned platform has also added a tab to allow producers to flag to users that the videos on this tab are ‘podcasts’ – even if there might be semantic or technical debates around whether they are or not.

This discursive position that is reflected in a 2023 study of podcasting and YouTube by Coleman Insights and Amplifi Media. The report revealed that YouTube was the number one podcasting platform among consumers, especially those new to the medium (Nachlis 2023). This raises a debate on whether platforms impact our understanding of podcasting ‘as a living, dynamic, malleable, evolving body’ (Bonini 2022: 26) and how that is shaped by an evolving company of human and non-human actors. These actors include commercialized media platforms that can exert authority over the medium because it lacks central control. As Jean Burgess and Joshua Green (2018: 8–13) outline, YouTube is shaped by similar forces but does so from a position where it must factor in its own corporate and commercial interests (Gillespie 2010), whereas podcasting (as an ecosystem) does not. Podcasting exists as a system that does not depend on the mass attention of audiences, and this might go some way to explain why platforms are keen to embrace video podcasting, as it adds an additional (platform-specific) facet that makes their delivery of it more compelling. We must, therefore, question whether the push towards video is wholly about a desire to watch podcasts or whether platforms are leveraging this inclination to gain attention for commercial gain (Laughlin 2024).

Watching podcasts

Adding visual content to an audio medium is not new; radio has experienced the encroachment of visual content (Berry 2013; Ferguson and Greer 2018). In 2024, adding cameras to a radio studio would be a normal part of the design process (Laor 2021), meaning programmes such as the James O’Brien show on LBC in the United Kingdom now enjoy ‘a level of visibility and sociability that would not have been possible in previous iterations of the radio phone-in’ (Berry 2023: 507). The presence of cameras allows for live radio programmes to clip up core moments of programmes and share them quickly on social media or pass them on to news broadcasters. It is this shareability of clips that has driven this interest in visualization as it has made audio media literally more visible. Many of the camera systems used to visualize radio and podcasting are unobtrusive and automated, allowing for low-cost operation but can mean a need to install additional lighting, for presenters to wear earpieces (rather than headphones), or to bolt chairs to the floor to prevent politicians from escaping the camera’s glare (Vinter 2024). Podcasters are no exception to this. Just as with radio, podcast studios now factor in visualization in their

design, creating spaces that look like hi-tech audio studios, creative spaces or environments that appear to be the host's home (e.g. Mayim Bailik's Breakdown). This work takes the intimate aesthetic of podcasting and fuses it with the visual stimuli of YouTube, but again, it raises the question of which actors are driving this change.

In these shifts, we can also see the impact of social media influencers, where content creators are entering podcasting, having already enjoyed success on platforms like Instagram, YouTube or TikTok. Just as the early podcasters had come from blogging, and producers in the 2010s came from public radio, in the 2020s, podcasting is a space dominated by celebrities, many of whom bring their experience in video with them. For example, the UK-based podcaster Grace Keeling (known as GK Barry) was already well-established on TikTok when she launched her *Saving Grace* (2022–present) podcast in 2022. It typifies content creators podcasting from other media (Buchan 2023) and bringing visual practices (and audiences) with them. Where podcasts such as *The Daily* (2017–present) use fixed images on YouTube, these new productions have multiple cameras and sets that add visual cues to the nature of the podcast. *Saving Grace* is shot within a studio set with columns, golden framed pictures of Keeling and a halo hanging over the host's head. Studio microphones are placed in front of the participants, although nobody wears headphones. In watching video podcasts, it is interesting to note the often interchangeability of the words 'listening' and 'watching', as whilst some shows recognize that consumption is split between the modalities, this is not universal. In the video version of Episode 414 of the *Lex Fridman Podcast*, Fridman faces the camera and talks directly to the audience to address criticisms of his choice of guest, but in describing the audience, he uses the word 'listener' framing the audience as the singular, whereas an episode on *Carnival in Small Talks* has a 'guess the flag' quiz amongst the participants, in which the listening audience is wholly excluded (2024). In this, we might see a split between audio-first and video-first productions, where the secondary platform/medium is acknowledged yet subservient, in the same way that RSS feeds are used to deliver unremediated forms of radio programming.

The British daily podcast *The News Agents* (Global) is symbolic of the pivot towards video in podcasting. The podcast makes use of a broadcast studio designed with visualized audio production in mind, and although in the summer of 2023, their use of video was restricted to clips on social media, by early 2024, it has been expanded to fully visualized episodes on YouTube and the Global Player app. In watching these episodes, we can establish some of the traits (contradictions, even) of video podcasting, in that although the space is highly visualized with branded screens behind the hosts and the use of earpieces for monitoring, the hosts rarely look at cameras and can be seen balancing laptops or relaxing in their seat. This can also be seen in different shows recorded in Spotify's London studio, where *The*

Receipts Podcast (2016–present), *The Sounds of Black Britain* (2022) and *The Rest Is...* Entertainment (2024–present) have wall-mounted screens and set dressing that enhance the visual look of the episode. In common with other visualized forms of audio, high-quality microphones are visible, but nobody wears headphones. Like visualized radio, this work sounds like a podcast but does not resemble television. As Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (2001) and Raymond Williams (1990) all discuss, media emerge from cultural and social contexts, in this case, social media and the demands of their audiences (Clarke 2022) for video. Although many video podcasts offer very features associated with other forms of video content (television, YouTube, etc.), in both of these podcasts, producers have made use of overlaid footage or inserted elements that are animated for the viewer but from which the listener is not excluded.

However, this encouragement of podcasting on YouTube poses questions, as notably visual podcasts draw almost exclusively from one type: the chatcast, a format described by Hannah McGregor as ‘freeform conversational podcasts driven more by host dynamics than topic coverage’ (2022). Beyond static images or transcriptions, there are no (fully) visualized dramas or documentaries, and so these trends are so far restricted to a specific iteration of podcasts. Nonetheless, this returns us to Tiziano’s Bonini suggestion that podcasting is a hybrid cultural form undergoing constant evolution (2022: 25) that embraces textual elements, imagery and live events (see: Eakin 2023). Perhaps what we are witnessing is an adoption of the term to describe a long form mediatized conversation, in which video is but one presentation of the form. As a medium, podcasting draws inspiration from a myriad of sources and is shaped by both the strong connection to radio (Bottomley 2020) and the ways in which it grew out of audioblogging and a wider collection of natively digital communication practices. Like other media, podcasting engages in transmedia production not only by outwardly producing content for different spaces but also by inwardly, as other media forms use podcasts to engage new audiences (Newman et al. 2019) or to create extra content for loyal fans, such as *The Always Sunny Podcast* (2021–present). In all this, we might be witnessing not just the hybridization of an audio medium but the adoption of the term and some of its cultural codes and practices into adjacent forms of media. Although our reasons for consuming podcasts, our relationship with them and their role in our lives may remain unchanged. Unlike radio, our consumption is granular, where we follow shows or hosts rather than radio stations, and we slot our consumption around our daily lives. And whilst in 2006, it felt like audiences would not consume video on small screens, we now know that they will. What we are less clear on is why.

Platform effects and podcasting as a cultural form

As podcasting shifts from an app-based ecology to one in which platforms are more central, it is imperative to develop strategies to persuade audiences to spend more time with any given service. In their article, Jeremy Morris and Eleanor Patterson (2015) highlight how podcasting apps (and, by extension, platforms) are as much about catching people as podcasts. For their part, Spotify wants to become a destination (Bertoni 2021). YouTube appeals through its role in discovery as a search engine (Funk 2020) and its recognition of audiences who appreciate flexibility ‘to watch and listen, only watch or only listen’ (Cox 2019). The adoption of these services reflects a process described by Nick Srnicek as ‘network effects’, where digital platforms ‘must deploy a range of tactics to ensure that more and more users come on board’ (Srnicek 2017: 46), in part to capture data (Srnicek 2017: 106). If (video) podcasts are appearing on YouTube, is this because the (younger) audience expects all content to be on the site or because they need the visual stimulus of video exemplified by the screen-centric nature of social media and YouTube itself? Perhaps the medium itself is changing, or is this driven by corporate actors seeking to stimulate content that works for them? As the world’s second most visited website (Venditti 2024), having content where it can be found makes sense, even if it is an ‘audio-first’ podcast with a static image. It also permits a degree of accessibility, allowing documentaries such as *The Nobody Zone* (2020) to experiment with transcription. There are benefits, too, through the more visible use of comments (Rae 2023), thus presenting a more significant opportunity for connection (Baron 2019).

Whether these shifts are down to platform effects, producers using video as a lure for younger audiences, new technical affordances (video calls, etc.) or human actors creating hybrid forms of work that fuse social video and podcasting is open for debate. In truth, it might be all these working together; as Bolter and Grusin note, digital technologies are ‘hybrids of technical, material, social, and economic factors’ (2001: 77). Whatever the source, it might be fruitful to briefly reflect on whether there are discernible podcast traits that have translated into these visual productions. Each of the examined shows and the broader clips that keep appearing in my social media feeds demonstrates that the hallmarks of podcasting are still there. The shows still feel niche, exploring minor topics or ideas, even if that is just the views of the host and their guest. These podcasts are still ‘full frontal’ (Spinelli and Dann 2019: 69) and recognize that podcasts are still ‘opt-in’. There is still a sense of the personal (Heiselberg and Have 2023) or the intimate (Euritt 2022), where hosts are open to sharing their thoughts, feelings and experiences, where the core qualities of informality and authenticity are still evident, but with the loss of one crucial word from Siobhán McHugh’s ‘pillars of podcasting’ (2022: 9): audio. However, perhaps these are definable and distinctly human qualities that could be detached from the technology that introduced them and carried into other media. As Bonini suggests, podcasting is an

evolving medium and static definitions only capture a moment in time, which, through remediation creates a different presentation compared to the one we have previously experienced. As Rime et al. also note, if 'innovation is intrinsic to podcasts, how can the definition of "podcasts" given earlier be valid, when the medium is expected to change?' (2022: 1273) and may continue to do so. In 2008, Jonathan Sterne and his co-authors also urged us to think of podcasting not as a new medium but as 'a group of connected technologies, practices and institutions' (2008: n.pag.). Whilst these authors reflect on podcasting as an audio practice, there is an argument that video content is merely an extension of this logic, as these qualities can transcend a single form of communication. Even if, as passionate audio consumers, we are reluctant to concede this.

Conclusions

This article has presented an outline of an evolving situation that demands further research as it poses ontological questions about the nature of podcasting and demands research with podcasters into the practical realities of podcasting in the 2020s. As Jeremy Morris suggests, the development of podcasting has not been a straight line, and there remain multiple futures (2024: 83) for what we call podcasting. As I have outlined, podcasters are using a range of visual approaches, from static images through social media clips to fully visualized episodes in specifically designed studios, complete with graphics.

The presence of video podcasts (or videos of podcasts) on social media or within apps such as Spotify and YouTube poses provocative questions about the status of podcasting as an exclusively aural medium. Not least because '[m]any consumers, but not all, expect video' (Goldstein 2024: n.pag.). The video podcasts discussed here are primarily from one format (the conversation), so whilst interest in visualization is strong, this trend is not universal across all iterations. However, this could point to a position where the 'chatcast' has become a hybrid form of expression that embraces audio, video and live events, but narrative formats remain as audio only, even if they use video platforms for distribution or use video material to promote the work.

As this article suggests, this hybridization is partly driven by new actors entering the medium from video-rich social media, the effects of platformization (Morris 2024; Sullivan 2024) and younger audiences seeking visual stimulus (Baron 2019). These trends underline the malleability and experimental nature of podcasting as a decentralized medium and indicate that more research is required to understand how audiences are (or are not) engaging with audio media. We have witnessed similar patterns in radio (Black 2001), where the term became a convenient and attractive way to describe a curated music stream. The meanings attached to a particular artefact and its uses can vary over time, and so listeners may equate podcasting with a form of mediated conversation or just a piece of

media content they consume on-demand over the internet. Thus, our evolving use of the word 'podcasting' is a response to not only how consumers do (or do not) understand the term but also reveals how the cultural value of the word can be reappropriated freely. As academics, we might be driven by a desire to see order or to describe an ontological position clearly and decisively to aid our research (Rime et al. 2022: 1270), but as scholars (Bonini 2022; Llinares 2022; Morris 2024; Verma 2024) have suggested, this elasticity means attempting to reach a single unified all-embracing definition is complex and subjective (Berry 2018, 2022). It may even be futile or, at worst, unhelpful. In the opening of his book, Neil Verma highlights how he is also sceptical that clear answers are available (2024: 3), perhaps because, as I have discussed, this is not only a constantly moving target but one which the user defines. Perhaps podcasters are podcasters because they say they are and distribute audio over RSS (Nuzum 2019: 9), or because the audience says they are, or maybe it is because some sense of 'podcastness' is present. These definitions may be connected to our entry point into the medium (Nachlis 2023), depending on whether our first podcast was The Daily Source Code (2004–13), The Ricky Gervais Show (2005–11) or later work where the video is an integral feature. As Jay Nachlis notes in summarizing a study: 'Quite simply, there are fewer purists that see podcasting as an audio-only medium and more that see it as comprising audio and video' (2023). My definition of a podcast may differ from yours, and those definitions could change over time as we take on new influences. Younger consumers might associate podcasting with video, but older consumers may still consider it a form of radio, and these tensions are not going to go away.

As Joshua Meyrowitz suggests, when situations merge or divide, there are questions about whether these moments create a new situation, offer no change or just confusion (1985: 44). In truth, since it comprises so many forms, podcasting has been in a continual state of confusion as definitions are not only slippery but personal and dependent on what we are listening to and how we started. Whatever might happen in conversational or chat podcasts, we cannot ignore that podcasting is a spectrum of content with content formations that cannot translate easily into video. In this, there is an inherent definitional tension that is not easily resolved, even if we boil a podcast down to a series of aesthetic values. This does require further research, not least with producers for whom video might be a barrier. This article has also posed questions about whether video has intrinsic appeal that is driving change, whether platform effects are at work or a network of actors is continuing to steer podcasting in new directions.

Previous subject debates may have centred on whether podcasting was an extension of radio. While this discussion may have been mostly settled, the conversation should also focus on whether podcasting is a form of human interaction that extends across

modalities. Thus, whilst for many consumers and many forms of content, podcasting may remain an audio (first) medium, some aspects are becoming hybridized as they connect audio shows distributed via RSS with video content, walled-garden subscription programming and live events via common practices and formats. Perhaps more so than ever, podcasting remains a medium that will continue to prompt further debate and evade a definition that can be agreed upon.

References

Anything Goes with Emma Chamberlain (2020–present), Emma Chamberlain, USA.

Audio Always (n.d.), 'London visual podcast studio', <https://audioalways.com/studio-hire/london-visual-podcast-studio/>.

Baron, Jessica (2019), 'The key to Gen Z is video content', Forbes, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jessicabaron/2019/07/03/the-key-to-gen-z-is-video-content/>.

Berg, Freja Sørine Adler (2021), 'Independent podcasts on the Apple Podcasts platform in the streaming era', *MedieKultur: Journal of Media and Communication Research*, 37:70, pp. 110–30.

Berry, Richard (2006), 'Will the iPod kill the radio star?: Profiling podcasting as radio', *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 12:2, pp. 143–62.

Berry, Richard (2013), 'Radio with pictures: Radio visualization in BBC national radio', *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media*, 11:2, pp. 169–84.

Berry, Richard (2016), 'Podcasting: Considering the evolution of the medium and its association with the word "radio"', *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media*, 14:1, pp. 7–22.

Berry, Richard (2018), "'Just because you play a guitar and are from Nashville doesn't mean you are a country singer": The emergence of medium identities in podcasting', in D. Llinares, N. Fox and R. Berry (eds), *Podcasting*, Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 15–33.

Berry, Richard (2020), 'Radio, music, podcasts: BBC sounds: Public service radio and podcasts in a platform world', *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media*, 18:1, pp. 63–78.

Berry, Richard (2022), 'What is a podcast?', in M. Lindgren and J. Loviglio (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Radio and Podcast Studies*, 1st ed., London: Routledge, pp. 399–407.

Berry, Richard (2023), 'Radio in the round reflections on the future of sound media', in K. McDonald and H. Chignell (eds), *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Radio*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 504–19.

Bertoni, Steven (2021), 'Spotify has plans to move beyond music and become the Instagram and TikTok of audio', *Forbes*,
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevenbertoni/2021/11/29/spotify-has-plans-to-move-beyond-music-and-become-the-instagram-and-tiktokofaudio/>.

Bertrand, Ina and Hughes, Peter (2018), *Media Research Methods: Audiences, Institutions, Texts*, 2nd ed., London: Macmillan Education Palgrave.

Black, David A. (2001), 'Internet radio: A case study in medium specificity', *Media, Culture & Society*, 23:3, pp. 397–408.

Bolter, Jay David and Grusin, Richard (2001), *Remediation: Understanding New Media*.

Bonini, Tiziano (2022), 'Podcasting as a hybrid cultural form between old and new media', in *The Routledge Companion to Radio and Podcast Studies*, Routledge, pp. 19–29.

Bottomley, Andrew (2020), *Sound Streams: A Cultural History of Radio-Internet Convergence*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Buchan, Sophie (2023), 'GK Barry announces "Saving Grace" Glasgow podcast tour: How to buy tickets', sec. What's On, *Glasgow Live*, 18 October,
<https://www.glasgowlive.co.uk/whats-on/gk-barry-announces-saving-grace-27931332>.

Burgess, Jean and Green, Joshua (2018), *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture, Digital Media and Society*, 2nd ed., Cambridge and Medford, MA: Polity Press.

Call Her Daddy (2018–present), Alex Cooper, USA.

Clarke, Laurie (2022), "'It's the way the industry is going": How YouTube is transforming podcasting', sec. Media, *The Observer*, 3 September,
<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2022/sep/03/video-podcasting-youtube-joe-marler-mrballen-tiktok>.

Cox, Tom (2019), 'How different generations use social media', *Business, The Manifest*,
<https://themanifest.com/social-media/how-different-generations-use-social-media>.

Crew, Jon and Barbu, Ioana (2022), 'LBC's latest brilliant creation', 2 August, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u0z7gbU2TUw>.

Cumulus Media (2022), 'Cumulus-media-and-signal-hill-insights-podcast-download-spring-2022', <https://www.westwoodone.com/blog/2022/05/17/cumulus-media-and-signal-hill-insights-podcast-download-spring-2022-report-watching-podcasts-soars-as-youtube-edges-out-spotify-to-become-the-most-used-u-s-podcast-platform-and-li/>.

Deegan, Matt (2023), 'What's the best podcast strategy for YouTube and how does it all work?', <http://www.mattdeegan.com/2023/10/23/whats-the-best-podcast-strategy-for-youtube-and-how-does-it-all-work/>.

Dotan, Tom and Blino, Marta (2022), 'YouTube has quietly become Spotify's most feared podcasting threat as it attracts Gen Z and helps podcasters like Logan Paul cash in more ad revenue', Business Insider, 27 August, <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-youtube-became-a-podcasting-powerhouse-without-trying-2022-8?r=US&IR=T>.

Downes, Geoff, Horn, Trevor and Woolley, Bruce (1979), 'Video Killed the Radio Star', Island Music.

Euritt, Alyn (2022), *Podcasting as an Intimate Medium*, London: Routledge.

Ferguson, Douglas A. and Greer, Clark F. (2018), 'Visualizing a non-visual medium through social media: The semiotics of radio station posts on Instagram', *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, 25:1, pp. 126–41.

Fox, K. and Ebada, Y. (2022), 'Egyptian female podcasters: Shaping feminist identities', *Learning, Media and Technology*, 47:1, pp. 53–64.

Funk, Matthias (2020), 'YouTube 2nd biggest search engine: The myth that just won't die', Tubics.Com, 7 February, <https://www.tubics.com/blog/youtube-2nd-biggest-search-engine>.

Gamble, Ed (2024), 'Ed Gamble on X: "No guys, a visualised podcast is not just a TV show. It's an in vision format for your EYES that you can also hear with your EARS. Nothing like a TV show actually. Anyway, glad you're enjoying #Uncloaked! Love @TheTraitorsUK, Love @ClaudiaWinkle Love the Players, Love the Guests"/X', X (Formerly Twitter), <https://twitter.com/EdGambleComedy/status/1743399423994991080>.

Gillespie, Tarleton (2010), 'The politics of "platforms"', *New Media & Society*, 12:3, pp. 347–64.

Global (2023), 'The News Agents', *The News Agents*.

Goldstein, Steve (2023), 'Podcasting's multiplatform imperative', Amplifi Media, <https://www.amplifimedia.com/blogstein-1/podcastings-multiplatform-imperative>.

Goldstein, Steve (2024), 'Podcasters are grappling with how to make YouTube work', Amplifi Media, <https://www.amplifimedia.com/blogstein-1/podcasters-are-grappling-with-how-to-make-youtube-work>nbsp.

Goldstein, Steve and Nachlis, Jay (2023), 'New rules of podcasting on YouTube', Podcast Movement, Denver, 30 August, https://colemaninsights.com/coleman_studies/the-new-rules-of-podcasting-on-youtube.

Hancock, Danielle and McMurtry, Leslie (2018), "'I know what a podcast is": Post-serial fiction and podcast media identity', in D. Llinares, N. Fox and R. Berry (eds), *Podcasting*, Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 81–105.

Heiselberg, Lene and Have, Iben (2023), 'Host qualities: Conceptualising listeners' expectations for podcast hosts', *Journalism Studies*, 24:5, pp. 631–49.

Help! I Sexted My Boss (2018–present), Audio Always, UK.

Hilmes, M. ([2013] 2024), 'The new materiality of radio, sound on screens', in Loviglio: How to Submit Audio-First Podcasts to YouTube with RSS Feeds, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrb327agiDE>.

Hoyt, Eric, Bersch, J. J., Noh, Susan, Hansen, Samuel, Mertens, Jacob and Morris, Jeremy (2021), 'PodcastRE analytics: Using RSS to study the cultures and norms of podcasting', *DHQ: Digital Humanities Quarterly*, 15:1, <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/15/1/000519/000519.html><https://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/15/1/000519/000519.html>.

Lacey, Kate (2008), 'Up in the air? The matter of radio studies', *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media*, 16:2, pp. 109–26.

Laor, Tal (2021), 'How does it "sound"? Audiences, broadcasters, and managers on visual radio in Israel', *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 27:4, pp. 1038–54.

Laughlin, Alex Sujong (2024), 'If you love podcasts, dump Spotify', *Defector*, <https://defector.com/if-you-love-podcasts-dump-spotify>.

Lindgren, Mia (2016), 'Personal narrative journalism and podcasting', *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media*, 14:1, pp. 23–41.

Listen, Admin (2022), 'When is a podcast no longer a podcast?', Listen Entertainment Ltd, <https://www.listen.co.uk/when-is-a-podcast-no-longer-a-podcast/>.

Llinares, Dario (2022), "'Podcast studies" and its techno-social discourses', in M. Lindgren and J. Loviglio (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Radio and Podcast Studies*, 1st ed., London: Routledge, pp. 408–17.

Louis Theroux Podcast (2023–present), Louise Theroux and Spotify Studios, UK.

Mayer, Elizabeth (2023), YouTube's Growth as a Podcast Power Player Revealed in Cumulus Media and Signal Hill Insights' Podcast Download: Fall 2023 Report | Westwood One, Atlanta, GA: Cumulus Media, <https://www.westwoodone.com/blog/2023/12/04/youtubes-growth-as-a-podcast-power-player-revealed-in-cumulus-media-and-signal-hill-insights-podcast-download-fall-2023-report/>.

Mayim Bialik's Breakdown (2020–present), Mayim Bialik, USA.

McGregor, Hannah (2022), 'Podcast studies', in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McHugh, S. (2016), *How Podcasting Is Changing the Audio Storytelling Genre*.

McHugh, Siobhán (2022), *The Power of Podcasting: Telling Stories through Sound*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, NewSouth Publishing.

Menduni, Enrico (2007), 'Four steps in innovative radio broadcasting: From QuickTime to podcasting', *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media*, 5:1, pp. 9–18.

Meyrowitz, Joshua (1985), *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Morris, Jeremy Wade (2024), *Podcasting, Digital Media and Society*, Hoboken, NJ: Polity.

Morris, Jeremy Wade and Patterson, Eleanor (2015), 'Podcasting and its apps: Software, sound, and the interfaces of digital audio', *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, 22:2, pp. 220–30.

Murray, Simone (2009), 'Servicing "self-scheduling consumers": Public broadcasters and audio podcasting', *Global Media and Communication*, 5:2, pp. 197–219, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742766509341610>.

Nachlis, Jay (2023), 'A podcast is audio or video: The customer says so', Coleman Insights, <https://colemaninsights.com/coleman-insights-blog/a-podcast-is-audio-or-video-the-customer-says-so>.

Nuzum, E. (2019), *Make Noise: A Creator's Guide to Podcasting and Great Audio Storytelling*, New York: Workman Publishing.

Patterson, L. J. (2006), 'The technology underlying podcasts', *Computer*, 39:10, pp. 103–05.

Perez, Sarah (2021), 'Spotify says US podcast listeners now use its service more than Apple Podcasts', *TechCrunch*, 27 October, <https://techcrunch.com/2021/10/27/spotify-says-u-s-podcast-listeners-now-use-its-service-more-than-apple-podcasts/>.

Perrotta, Marta (2023), 'Exploring public service broadcasters' strategies about radio apps', in K. McDonald and H. Chignell (eds), *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Radio*, Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 131–46.

Poell, Thomas, Nieborg, David B. and Duffy, Brooke Erin (2022), *Platforms and Cultural Production*, Medford, MA: Polity Press.

Rae, Maria (2023), 'Podcasts and political listening: Sound, voice and intimacy in The Joe Rogan Experience', *Continuum*, 37:2, pp. 182–93.

Rime, Jemily, Pike, Chris and Collins, Tom (2022), 'What is a podcast? Considering innovations in podcasting through the six-tensions framework', *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 28:5, pp. 1260–82.

Scribe, Sarah (2023), 'Why news outlets are putting their podcasts on YouTube', *Nieman Journalism Lab*, <https://www.niemanlab.org/2023/04/why-news-outlets-are-putting-their-podcasts-on-youtube/>.

Sharon, Tzlil (2023), 'Peeling the pod: Towards a research agenda for podcast studies', *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 47:3, pp. 324–37.

Small Talks (2022–23), Spotify UK, UK.

Small Talks (2024), 'Leigh-Anne, Digga D, Ash Holme & Specs Gonzalez SHARE their fave CARNIVAL memories, HIGHLIGHTS of the summer and put their carni knowledge to the TEST', <https://open.spotify.com/episode/3jDNP2jP2tyF9ktFFQBfem?si=QPavBMsQQzuDgUi2wci oWQ>.

Spinelli, Martin and Dann, Lance (2019), *Podcasting: The Audio Media Revolution*, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, Inc.

Spotify for Podcasters (2022), 'Why and how to start a video podcast on Spotify', <https://podcasters.spotify.com/resources/learn/create/how-to-start-a-video-podcast-on-spotify>.

Spotify (2023), 'Spotify tops 100,000 video podcasts', <https://newsroom.spotify.com/2023-06-29/spotify-tops-100000-video-podcasts/>.

Srnicek, Nick (2017), *Platform Capitalism, Theory Redux*, Cambridge: Polity.

Sterne, Jonathan, Morris, Jeremy, Baker, Michael Brendan and Freire, Ariana Moscote (2008), 'The politics of podcasting', *The Fibreculture Journal*, 13, <https://thirteen.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-087-the-politics-of-podcasting/>.

Stewart, Jon (2023), 'Satire in the age of Murdoch and Trump | The Problem with Jon Stewart Podcast', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbOiXmMnyw4>.

Sullivan, John L. (2019), 'The platforms of podcasting: Past and present', *Social Media + Society*, 5:4, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119880002>.

Sullivan, John L. (2024), *Podcasting in a Platform Age: From an Amateur to a Professional Medium*, New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

The Daily (2017–present), New York Times, USA.

The Daily Source Code (2004–13), Adam Curry, The Netherlands, UK and USA.

The Diary of a CEO (2017–present), Steven Bartlett and Flight Studio, UK.

The Joe Rogan Experience (2009–present), Joe Rogan, USA.

The Media Podcast (2014–present), Rethink Audio UK, UK.

The News Agents (2022–present), Global, UK.

The Nobody Zone (2020), RTE and Third Ear, Ireland and Denmark.

The Receipts Podcast (2016–present), The Receipts and Spotify UK, UK.

The Rest Is... Entertainment (2024–present), Goalhanger Productions, UK.

The Ricky Gervais Show (2005–11), The Guardian, UK.

The Sounds of Black Britain (2022), The Black Curriculum and We Are Unedited, UK.

Venditti, Bruno (2024), 'Ranked: The most visited websites in 2024', *Visual Capitalist*, <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/ranked-the-most-visited-websites-in-2024/>.

Verma, Neil (2024), *Narrative Podcasting in an Age of Obsession*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Vinter, Robyn (2024), '"Boris Bolt": LBC bolted down guest seat to stop former PM dodging cameras', sec. Politics, *The Guardian*, 9 January,

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/jan/09/boris-bolt-lbc-bolted-down-guest-seat-to-stop-former-pm-dodging-cameras>.

Williams, Raymond (1990), *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, 2nd ed., London: Routledge.

Winer, Dave (2001), 'Payloads for RSS',

<https://web.archive.org/web/20040621044720/https://thetwowayweb.com/payloadsforrss>

.

Winer, Dave (2010), 'The origin of podcasting', *Scripting News*,

<http://scripting.com/stories/2010/12/05/theOriginOfPodcasting.html>.

Note

1. At the time of writing, only videos hosted on Spotify can appear on their platform as visual podcasts.