PODCAST AS A CONTEMPORARY FORM OF AUDIO STORYTELLING IN DIGITAL MEDIA

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Abstract

The present study aims to provide a systematic examination of the theoretical and practical aspects of the podcast as one of the most dynamically developing formats of contemporary audio media.The empirical object of the study is the Georgian Public Broadcaster's Audio Platform (1tvpodcast.ge), which is one of the largest podcast hosting platforms in Georgia. The paper analyzes the technical, structural, and content-related characteristics of podcasts, thereby enabling an assessment of the developmental trends of this format within the Georgian media landscape.The methodological foundations employed in the present study enabled a comprehensive examination of the research topic at both theoretical and empirical levels. It is noteworthy that, in this field, practical developments in Georgia have significantly outpaced theoretical research. Consequently, one of the principal challenges of the study was the establishment of a theoretical framework and the identification of relevant scholarly sources.The findings demonstrate that the podcast has emerged as one of the significant formats of audio communication within the contemporary digital media ecosystem, thereby underscoring the necessity for a systematic theoretical understanding and investigation of its functional characteristics. It is also noteworthy that the conceptual understanding of podcasts within Georgian media practice remains inconsistent. As a result, in certain cases, the produced content does not correspond to the format under which it is initially presented.The significance of this study is multifaceted and is primarily reflected in the fact that it represents one of the first attempts in the Georgian academic field to conduct a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the podcasts hosted on the Georgian Public Broadcaster's audio platform.

Keywords: *podcast, audio platform, Georgian Public Broadcaster (First Channel), digital media, audio media.*

Introduction

The development of modern technologies has significantly transformed the forms of mass communication and the means of disseminating and receiving information. In the digital era, podcasts have gained considerable popularity, emerging as a form of continuation of traditional radio and a rapidly growing format of contemporary audio media. Unlike radio, which primarily operates on the principle of live broadcasting, a podcast is an audio product distributed through internet platforms that users can create and/or listen to at a time and place of their choosing.

The development of podcasting dates back to the 2000s and is associated with the introduction of RSS (Really Simple Syndication) technology, which enabled the automatic distribution of audio files (Bottomley, 2015). The popularity of podcasts is driven by their accessibility, ease of production, diversity of genres, and ability to cater to listeners' individual interests.

The analysis of podcast popularity is based on data from reliable statistical platforms, such as: Demandsage (Singh, 2025), Thepodcasthost (Gray, 2025), Teleprompter (team, 2025), Podcastatistics (Team, 2026) და Backlinko (podcastatistics.com, 2026). According to data from the aforementioned platforms, the number of podcast listeners reached 584.1 million in 2025; in the current year, this figure stands at 619.2 million, while the forecast for 2027 is 651.7 million. These figures indicate that the number of listeners has been increasing by several tens of millions each year. According to statistics from demandsage.com, the number of podcasts worldwide exceeded 4.5 million by the end of last year.

The data demonstrate that podcasts are no longer merely an experimental media format. Particularly noteworthy is the growth in the number of listeners, which indicates a positive shift in the culture of audio content consumption.

In Georgia, podcasting is a relatively new and developing field. Its examination from the perspective of the digital transformation of traditional radio is of particular interest. It is precisely in this context that the study of podcasts as a form of "new life" for radio becomes relevant, along with an analysis of their functional, technical, and content-related characteristics.

The significance of the present study is determined by its scientific and practical value, as it represents one of the first attempts to conduct a systematic analysis of podcasts available on the audio platform of the Georgian Public Broadcaster.

The research problem concerns the scarcity of studies on podcasting within Georgian academic scholarship. In particular, insufficient attention has been devoted to examining how podcasts transform traditional radio, what functions they acquire in the digital era, and how Georgian Radio utilizes podcasts as a new form of communication with its audience.

The aim of the study is to conduct a theoretical and practical analysis of podcasts as a contemporary audio media format and to assess their role in the transformation of radio.

The main research questions (RQs) are as follows: What theoretical foundations underpin the study of podcasting, and what is the current state of scholarly knowledge on the subject? What technical and content-related characteristics distinguish the podcasts available on the audio platform of the Georgian First Channel?

The subject of the study is the specific features and characteristics of Georgian podcast production, while the object of the study is the podcasts available on the Georgian Radio audio platform (1tvpodcast.ge).

Theoretical Framework

To examine the functional characteristics of podcasts, audience behavior, and their communicative impact, it is important to consider four theoretical approaches: Uses and Gratifications Theory, Technological Determinism, Two-Step Flow Theory of Communication, and Parasocial Interaction Theory. These concepts provide a complementary theoretical foundation that enables a comprehensive understanding of the podcast phenomenon.

Uses and Gratifications Theory conceptualizes media consumption as a purposeful process driven by individuals' needs and motivations. According to E. Katz, J. Blumler, and M. Gurevitch, audiences are not passive recipients of media content but active users who select the means of obtaining information according to their own interests and needs (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). This approach is particularly relevant to podcasts, as their on-demand nature allows listeners to independently determine the subject matter of the content, as well as the time, place, and frequency of listening. Accordingly, podcast consumption may be associated with the satisfaction of informational and educational needs, as well as entertainment, emotional, and social needs. Thus, the theory provides an important foundation for examining podcast audience motivations and individual media consumption practices.

Technological Determinism Theory regards technological development as one of the determining factors of social and communicative change. According to Marshall McLuhan's conceptual framework, the technological characteristics of a medium influence not only the form in which information is disseminated but also its perception and social relationships (McLuhan, 1964). From this perspective, podcasts represent a media format that has emerged as a result of the development of digital technologies, expanding the possibilities of audio communication and overcoming the temporal and spatial limitations characteristic of traditional radio broadcasting. The accessibility, mobility, and potential for asynchronous consumption of podcasts contribute to the transformation of audience behavioral practices. Accordingly, this theory provides a framework for analyzing the development of podcasts in the context of the relationship between technological innovations and the culture of media consumption.

The Two-Step Flow Theory of Communication, which is based on the research of Paul Lazarsfeld and his colleagues, attributes particular importance to opinion leaders in the process of information dissemination (Lazarsfeld & Katz, 1955). According to this theory, media influence is often exerted not directly, but through individuals who interpret the information they receive and communicate it to their own audiences. In the context of podcasts, this intermediary function may be performed by the podcast host, who contributes to shaping listeners' views and attitudes through the discussion, evaluation, and interpretation of specific issues. Thus, the theory is important for examining the role of the podcaster as a potential opinion leader and their communicative influence on the audience.

Parasocial Interaction Theory, developed by Donald Horton and Richard Wohl, describes the sense of a one-sided yet subjectively personal relationship that emerges between a media user and a media persona (Horton & Wohl, 1956). In the context of podcasts, this phenomenon acquires particular significance, as the intimate nature of the audio format, the immediacy of the host's voice, the informal conversational style, and regular content consumption contribute to

fostering a sense of closeness, familiarity, and trust among listeners. Although communication is predominantly one-sided, listeners may perceive the podcaster as a familiar and trustworthy individual. Accordingly, Parasocial Interaction Theory provides a framework for analyzing the mechanisms through which emotional bonds are formed between podcast hosts and their audiences, as well as their influence on listener loyalty, engagement, and perceptions of the credibility of the information disseminated.

The theories discussed provide a multidimensional conceptual foundation for podcast research. Uses and Gratifications Theory explains audience motivations and the mechanisms underlying their choices; Technological Determinism highlights the role of digital technologies in the development of the media format; the Two-Step Flow Theory of Communication identifies the potential influence of podcasters on the formation of public opinion; while Parasocial Interaction Theory explains the characteristics of the subjectively perceived personal connection between podcasters/hosts and listeners.

Literature Review

Scholarly research on podcasts as a contemporary audio format remains relatively limited, given that this media product itself is relatively new and still undergoing development. According to the available sources, podcasts have primarily been studied and analyzed from technological, content-related, and social perspectives.

Understanding podcasts solely at a practical level does not provide a sufficient basis for a comprehensive examination of this media format; theoretical analysis is equally important.

Of particular interest to our research was the scholarly work The Remediation of Radio: A Media Theoretical Framework for Podcast Research (2024–2025) by Monika Andok. As the title suggests, the author seeks to demonstrate that podcasts are not merely a form of new media but also represent an innovative development of radio in the digital era. The author addresses this issue at the beginning of the study. Particular attention is devoted to the application of Bolter and Grusin's theory of "remediation," which describes the process whereby new media do not replace older media but instead draw upon and examine their forms, structures, and stages of development. This approach demonstrates that podcasts are not merely a technological innovation; rather, active listener engagement plays a significant role in this process. The study essentially aims to identify and describe the media-specific characteristics of podcasts (Andok, 2025).

> *"Podcasts are popular for several reasons. First and foremost, they offer users flexibility, as they can be listened to whenever individuals choose (for example, while commuting, exercising, or at home). Furthermore, podcasts are easy to produce, enabling both professionals and ordinary individuals to share their own content with others"* (Andok, Podcast - The Remediation of Radio: A Media Theoretical Framework for Podcast Research, 2025).

Podcasts can be regarded as one of the most modern and rapidly growing means of content dissemination, both in Georgia and worldwide. According to Monika Andok, perceptions, awareness, and particularly interests have undergone significant changes in contemporary society. Under these circumstances, podcasts are not merely a new media format but an essential component of the contemporary media landscape, with their own audiences and the capacity to exert a certain influence.

According to the study The Remediation of Radio: A Media Theoretical Framework for Podcast Research, podcasts are particularly effective and informative for young people. As Monika Andok notes, podcasts have been adopted most rapidly by this particular segment of society. In the digital media landscape, podcasts represent a significant innovation, bringing together virtually all types of content within a single platform.

Podcasts are no longer merely a means of entertainment. They also play an important role in professional development. As Professor Vandana Vaishnav and her co-authors note in their study The Role of Podcasts in Digital Communication, the popularity of podcasts has been increasing since the early 2000s. According to data from 2023, more than 465 million people worldwide actively engage with podcasts, further emphasizing that listeners prefer a simple, effective, specialized, and engaging format that can be integrated into their daily lives (Vaishnav, Tripathi, Pandey, Kumar, & Sharma, 2025, p. 2).

Based on the aforementioned source, it can be argued that podcasts have significantly transformed the audio media landscape and presented radio with new challenges. The principal advantage of podcasts lies precisely in their simplicity. Rather than being overshadowed by the emergence of podcasts, traditional radio is further strengthened and seeks to adapt to contemporary demands.

Italian media scholar Professor Marta Perrotta brings together research by various authors in her publication Podcasts in the Future of Journalism. In the introduction, she presents podcasts as one of the most significant and rapidly developing formats of contemporary digital media. She also notes that the media landscape is undergoing transformation in the context of technological development, widespread audience engagement, and the continued presence of traditional media. The author presents podcasts as an innovative format in radio journalism.

While some researchers regard podcasts as an independent form of media, Marta Perrotta writes:

> *"Podcasts can be regarded as a hybrid cultural form that emerged through the mediation of various media"* (Perrotta, 2025, p. 9).

Marta Perrotta also notes that podcasts represent a form of "sociotechnical assemblage" that integrates various media forms and remains in a state of constant transformation. She further observes that podcasts exert a significant influence on listeners today. The author emphasizes that podcasting is still evolving and that its future remains uncertain.

In his book Podcast Journalism: The Promise and Perils of Audio Reporting, Professor David Dowling highlights two beneficial aspects of podcasting: first, podcasts provide a means of

disseminating information; second, the production process itself is of particular interest (Perrotta, Podcast in the uture of journalism, 2025, p. 15).

Based on the sources reviewed, it can be argued that podcasts represent an innovative medium that encompasses informational, educational, and recreational (entertainment) functions. Some authors point out that podcasts were initially perceived merely as a technical format; however, they now encompass a wide variety of content.

As demonstrated, scholarly research on podcasts remains limited, which is directly reflected in the scarcity of academic resources. This gap is particularly evident in the Georgian context, where it can be stated with certainty that practice has significantly outpaced theory.

Methodology and Methods

The study employs a mixed-methods approach that integrates secondary source analysis with qualitative and quantitative content analysis. The application of these methods enables a comprehensive examination of the development, content-related features, and functional characteristics of podcasts as a contemporary media format.

Secondary source analysis is employed to examine scholarly literature, theoretical approaches, and existing research relevant to the research topic, thereby facilitating a conceptual understanding of the subject and the identification of the study's scientific novelty.

Qualitative and quantitative content analysis occupies a central role in the empirical component of the study, providing the basis for examining podcasts available on Georgian Radio's digital audio platform (Georgian Radio, n.d.). The following were identified as the main criteria for analysis: (1) the thematic focus of the podcasts; (2) their content-related and structural characteristics; and (3) the quality of their technical production.

Qualitative analysis focuses on interpreting the content-related and functional characteristics of the podcasts, while quantitative analysis aims to identify the frequency of relevant characteristics and the principal trends.

The principle of random sampling was applied in selecting the research material. To minimize subjective influence during this process, the online platform Random.org was used to randomly select the episodes for analysis. At least two podcasts by each author were examined.

The proposed methodological approach ensures a systematic analysis of the research material and provides a basis for identifying the content-related, technical, and communicative characteristics of podcasts, as well as the principal trends.

Results and Discussion

The empirical examination of podcasts available on the audio platform of the First Channel of the Georgian Public Broadcaster reveals several significant trends in the development of contemporary Georgian audio journalism. A comparative analysis of the content-related,

structural, genre-specific, technical, and communicative characteristics of the media products examined in this study demonstrates that the platform incorporates both forms characteristic of traditional radio journalism and narrative and experimental approaches specific to digital audio media. Furthermore, one of the central findings of the study is a certain discrepancy between the potential of podcasts as an independent digital media format and the existing models of its practical implementation.

First and foremost, the thematic diversity of the podcasts is noteworthy, encompassing sociopolitical, cultural, historical, literary, musical, educational, technological, and agricultural topics. Such a broad range of content indicates the Public Broadcaster's aspiration to establish its digital audio platform as an accessible media environment for audiences with diverse interests and informational needs. In this respect, the platform is not limited to the dissemination of information but also demonstrates the potential to promote cultural heritage, facilitate public education, and foster intellectual discourse.

It is also important to note that thematic diversity does not necessarily imply diversity of formats. The examination of the empirical material revealed that, despite differences in thematic focus, interviews predominate in a significant proportion of the podcasts. This tendency is particularly evident in sociopolitical, cultural, and educational podcasts, where the structure of the audio product frequently reproduces the compositional model of traditional radio programmes. Consequently, distribution through a digital platform does not, in itself, lead to a transformation of the journalistic product's format.

This tendency is particularly evident in sociopolitical podcasts. For example, the episodes of 42nd Parallel examined in the study are distinguished by their analytical treatment of current issues, discussions with interviewees, and technical proficiency; however, their duration is approximately one and a half hours. Similar format-related characteristics can be observed in Dato Gorgiladze's podcasts addressing the war in Ukraine, which have a running time of approximately 53 minutes. In both cases, interviews and analytical discussions perform important functions in terms of content, although the principles underlying the organization of the audio products more closely resemble the structure of traditional radio programmes.

This observation raises the question of the relationship between podcast duration and content organization. The lengthy episodes identified in the study cannot, in themselves, be regarded as a format-related shortcoming, since their functional effectiveness depends on the complexity of the topic, the interests of the target audience, and the dynamics of the narrative. Nevertheless, the empirical material demonstrates that, in the case of extended interviews, the coherence of the discussion, maintenance of thematic focus, and the host's management of the communicative process become particularly important. In episodes where interviewees frequently deviate from the main topic, participants interrupt one another, or discussions lack sufficient structure, duration emerges as an additional challenge. Accordingly, the essence of the problem lies not only in the length of the audio material but also in the relationship between duration and content density.

In this context, the distinction between transmitting information and utilizing the expressive potential of audio media is particularly important. The study demonstrated that, in some

podcasts, the audio format essentially functions as a technical means of verbal communication, whereas in others, sound emerges as an independent narrative and compositional resource. A noteworthy case in this regard is Sopho Kikvadze's podcast series Memory, particularly the episodes Is This the Ticket? and I Was Going to Paris, in which personal narration, ambient sounds, interviews, and reportage elements are integrated into a coherent audio narrative. In these media products, environmental sound details do not merely serve as background elements; rather, they directly contribute to the development of the story, create a sense of spatial presence, and connect listeners with the events being described. This approach demonstrates that the distinctive nature of podcasts does not lie solely in the flexibility of the conversational format. An important characteristic is the construction of a soundscape in which narration, acoustic details, and the author's interpretation function as complementary components.

A similar tendency can be observed in Dato Tsintsadze's podcasts, particularly in the episodes Urmuli and Orovella and Ase Kaia. The integration of traditional music, dialectal speech, and ambient sounds becomes an important means of conveying cultural content. Unlike media products in which music serves a purely decorative purpose, in these cases, sound material is directly related to the topic under discussion and communicates its significance through the distinctive expressive means of the audio format. Accordingly, podcasts simultaneously perform educational and documentary functions while contributing to the preservation of cultural memory.

A comparison of these two cases makes it possible to identify one of the important characteristics of podcast storytelling: the functional integration of audio components. When ambient sounds, music, or archival recordings contribute to the development of a topic, they become independent carriers of meaning. By contrast, episodes based exclusively on verbal narration depend more heavily on the dynamics of the author's speech, the structure of the text, and the quality of interpretation. Thus, the effectiveness of audio production is determined not by the number of sound elements employed but by their relevance to the content.

Another significant finding of the study concerns the genre hybridity of podcasts. According to the empirical material, interviews, feature narratives, reportage, monologues, and informational-analytical reviews frequently coexist within the same media product. Such synthesis expands the creative possibilities of podcasts; however, its effectiveness depends on the coherence with which different genre components are interconnected. The combination of genres does not, in itself, ensure content coherence; the decisive factor is their organization within a unified narrative structure. For example, when narration is fragmented, deviations from the main topic are frequent, or an interviewee's discussion is insufficiently moderated, genre flexibility may become a source of content ambiguity. This problem manifests itself to varying degrees in the episodes of Geysers, Digital Tower, and Brave New World examined in the study. Despite their different thematic orientations, maintaining a balance between conversational freedom and structural coherence emerges as a common challenge.

The study established that Georgian Radio's audio platform represents an important resource for making specialized knowledge accessible to a wider audience. The Ecoagrometer podcast series is particularly noteworthy. This case demonstrates that the public value of podcasts is not determined solely by the selection of topics appealing to a broad audience. Equally important is

the coverage of specialized issues that may receive relatively limited attention in traditional media.

An interesting tendency was also identified regarding the topical relevance of podcasts. The platform accommodates both audio materials focusing on current political and international developments and historical, literary, cultural, and personal-experience-based narratives whose relevance is not directly dependent on the time of publication. This distinction is important in terms of the long-term relevance of podcasts. Episodes addressing current events lose their immediate relevance over time, although they may retain documentary and archival value. By contrast, podcasts with cultural and educational content may remain relevant for a comparatively longer period.

In the same context, Levan Akhalaia's podcast series World News, which presents international issues in Georgian and English, deserves attention. The episodes examined in the study demonstrate the application of a bilingual approach, which facilitates the international dissemination of content.

The empirical study also revealed several interconnected characteristics of the visual and technical organization of the platform (1tvpodcast.ge). Consistent corporate branding (Georgian Radio – Audio Space), thematically designed cover images, and a unified audio platform design create a sense of institutional coherence. At the same time, some podcasts employ individualized branding elements, including distinctive intros and cover images. This demonstrates that maintaining corporate identity and creatively individualizing individual series are not mutually exclusive approaches. On the contrary, their deliberate integration may become an important prerequisite for enhancing the recognizability and thematic identification of audio products.

From a technical perspective, a significant proportion of the podcasts examined demonstrate satisfactory production quality. The shortcomings identified are primarily associated with sound balance, occasional editing inaccuracies, or the inconsistent use of audio components.

Regarding platform organization, episode numbering, thematic sequencing, and publication frequency emerge as separate areas of concern. In certain series, episodes are arranged nonchronologically. Furthermore, the number of episodes varies considerably across series: some contain only a few episodes, while others comprise hundreds of audio recordings. This difference does not, in itself, indicate editorial inconsistency, as it may be associated with the differing objectives and durations of individual projects. Nevertheless, shortcomings in episode organization indicate the need to improve content navigation for users.

The categorization of podcasts also warrants attention. Alongside podcasts, the audio platform features musical compositions and recordings, raising the issue of distinguishing between different formats of digital audio products. Although music may constitute an important component of a podcast, placing independent musical works and podcasts within the same category requires a clearer approach to content selection.

The findings demonstrate that the development of podcasting within Georgian Radio's audio platform is characterized by the integration of traditional radio journalism practices and the new opportunities offered by digital media. The audio materials examined retain structural and genre-

specific characteristics of radio journalism while simultaneously demonstrating distinct approaches to podcast storytelling.

Conclusion

The present study has demonstrated that podcasts constitute one of the significant formats of contemporary digital media, combining the experience of traditional radio journalism with new technological, content-related, and expressive possibilities of audio communication. The theoretical examination of the subject confirmed the multidimensional nature of podcasts and the necessity of their systematic scholarly investigation. Furthermore, it became evident that the practical development of podcasting within the Georgian media landscape has significantly outpaced its theoretical examination, making research into the conceptual and functional characteristics of this media format particularly relevant.

The empirical analysis of podcasts available on the audio platform of the First Channel of the Georgian Public Broadcaster revealed thematic and genre diversity, generally satisfactory technical production quality, and different approaches to audio storytelling. One of the principal findings of the study was the discrepancy between the possibilities offered by the podcast format and certain instances of their practical implementation. Specifically, some of the audio products examined retain the structure of traditional radio programmes, suggesting that the distinctive characteristics of this type of audio content have not yet been fully explored.

The quantitative content analysis revealed that the podcasts available on the audio platform of the Georgian First Channel encompass nine principal thematic categories: music, culture, history, sociopolitical issues, technology, sports, agriculture, travel, and culinary arts. From a functional perspective, the podcasts served informational, educational, and recreational purposes.

Georgian Radio's audio platform contains a total of 22 podcast sections. The number of episodes in each podcast series is distributed as follows[1]: Acoustics comprises six podcast subsections containing a total of 98 musical compositions; 42nd Parallel – 63; Dato Gorgiladze's Podcast – 2; Memory – 20; MasterChef – 3; Folklore, comprising four subsections, contains a total of 61 episodes; World News – 13; Geysers – 2; From Aghu to Neh – 5; Cadence, consisting of two parts, contains a total of 377 episodes; Parable – 25; Digital Tower – 6; Dato Tsintsadze's Podcast – 13; A Man Was Talking on the Road – 7; Women in Sports – 6; Entertaining Stories of the World – 8; AmbAVI – 3; Georgian Classical Literature – 17; When a Woman Is Behind the Wheel – 7; Ecoagrometer – 83; and Brave New World – 3.

The findings confirm that the development of podcasting is not limited to the distribution of audio content through digital platforms but also involves the establishment of distinct principles of content organization, storytelling, and audience communication. Accordingly, the further development of Georgian podcasting requires both the consistent application of its format-specific characteristics in practice and the advancement of theoretical and empirical research.

[1] **Note:** The quantitative data presented were collected in September 2026.

These efforts will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the position and functions of podcasts within contemporary Georgian digital media.

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations should be considered for the further development of podcast content:

- Further diversification of the genre-specific characteristics of podcasts;
- The average duration of podcasts should not resemble that of traditional radio broadcasts or programmes;
- Greater attention should be devoted to podcast production and presentation to avoid producing exclusively narrative audio materials;
- It is advisable for each podcast to have its own distinctive or niche-specific intro;
- The use of so-called audio stingers is recommended to distinguish between different topics or segments within podcasts;
- When uploading audio files, attention should be paid to the accurate presentation of titles;
- Podcasts should be published regularly and periodically rather than on a one-off or sporadic basis;
- When selecting podcast titles, particular attention should be paid to the potential risks of positive discrimination (e.g., the podcast series "Women in Sports" and "When a Woman Is Behind the Wheel").

Taking these recommendations into account and implementing them in practice will contribute to qualitative improvements in podcast content from both technical and content-related perspectives. These changes will ensure greater alignment with the initially stated objectives of podcasts and establish a foundation for the full realization of their potential.

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