

# MOTIVATIONS BEHIND THE PRODUCTION OF NEWS PODCASTS IN ESTABLISHED CZECH MEDIA

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## ABSTRACT:

News podcasts are an emerging media phenomenon in Czechia, and yet there has never been a proper analysis of the fundamental incentives for producing them. This study identifies three principal factors that motivate established media houses to create news podcasts alongside other traditional forms of delivering the news: focus on a younger audience, content presentation and the building of trust. Each motive is analysed independently and thoroughly. The study also reveals the background of media marketing strategies concerning podcasts and examines the mechanisms of adapting foreign trends in podcasting to the Czech context. The study focuses on six different Czech news podcasts (including news-politics and news-talk formats) and is based on twelve in-depth interviews with the hosts and their Editors-in-Chief. This work aims to broaden the knowledge of podcasting in Czechia and to help understand how this surging media platform can be generally used to share news stories and information about current affairs.

## KEY WORDS:

motivations, news, news podcasts, radio, traditional media

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## 1 Introduction

It seems that news podcasts have been a breakthrough success in the digital media world. As “*one of the fastest growing areas of media consumption*”,<sup>1</sup> in part driven by the pandemic, this phenomenon has already become part of the distinctly modern process that some international journalists, media analysts and academics call “*the audio renaissance*”.<sup>2</sup> Listening to news whenever and wherever one wants to certainly has a great potential

1 NEWMAN, N. et al.: *Reuters Institute: Digital News Report*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2020, p. 5.

2 Remark by author: The term is in variations mentioned in, e.g., EDIRISINGHA, P. et al.: A Renaissance of Audio: Podcasting Approaches for Learning on Campus and Beyond. In *European Journal of Open, Distance and E-Learning*, 2010, Vol. 1, p. 1-10; WEISSBROT, A.: *The Audio Renaissance Is Here*. [online] [2022-05-28]. Available at: <<https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/audio-renaissance/1710265>>; *Podcasting, Smart Speakers Driving an Audio Renaissance*. Released on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2018. [online] [2022-05-28].



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to transform the whole media industry in every part of the world. Modern technology has completely changed the habits of the media audience: rather than adapt to linear broadcasting, people want to listen, read and watch on-demand. Our mobile phones have become our TVs, radios and newspapers on the go. Podcasts are a perfect fit for this hasty and liquid world of constant commuting, information surplus and no-time-to-lose sprint in which social media are in the spotlight and the dutiful work of journalism is undermined by a plethora of disinformation. This study reveals why podcasts attract both media and listeners in the fight for the audience's attention.

In Czechia, this whole process is still a coming-of-age story. Even though the first Czech news podcasts started appearing just three years ago, their popularity has been rising ever since and the Czech media environment is still in the middle of what has been called a 'podcasting boom'. In September 2021, the size of the audience recorded a year-on-year increase of more than 200%.<sup>3</sup> While there were only two Czech news podcasts in 2019, one produced by *Český rozhlas* (in English *Czech Radio*), the national public service broadcaster, and another by *Deník N*, a daily newspaper, today almost every media house in the country has its own original news podcast.

Podcasting in general has become a vital part of the international media industry and as an on-demand media service it deserves significant attention. Brought about by the media convergence processes and technological development, this advanced medium derives its theoretical background from 'traditional' media, but simultaneously delivers a brand-new media experience. Media houses are aware of that. News podcasts serve as a promising platform in which publishers want to invest more money.<sup>4</sup> As will be thoroughly discussed and analysed in this study, traditional media houses recognise the potential of news podcasts as another and attractive space for presenting their content as well as an instrument for targeting a younger audience – which is famously difficult to attract. The third uncovered motivation is possibly the most crucial in today's shaken and weakened media environment. If treated well and with the necessary respect, building trust with the people who subscribe to podcast channels and listen to episodes regularly could be a prospective game-changer for journalists all around the world.

It is perspicuous that the situation in Czechia reflects global developments, as many well-established media houses noticed the podcasting trend rather swiftly and started producing their own news podcasts, regardless of their previous experience with audio journalism. However, the golden era of podcasting for Czech media might still lie ahead of us. This study explores this fascinating phenomenon in the small Czech media landscape and analyses six pre-selected news media in Czechia to determine why the journalists chose to create a news podcast, what they expect from it and, additionally, what do they think about the experience they've had as podcasters so far.

## 2 The News Podcast as a New Medium

In the short history of podcasting, we can distinguish three fundamental stages. The first started around two decades ago with the development of digital technology, namely pocket-sized MP3 players such as the Apple iPod. Due to the wide availability of these devices, people at the beginning of the new Millennium could conveniently download audio files from the Internet to their portable players and listen to them whenever and wherever they wanted. Inventions enabling on-demand consumption of chosen content changed our lives and created a society that empowers users to have 'nearly absolute' control over what media, when, and how they want to read, listen to and watch.<sup>5</sup> The evolution of podcasts is closely related to the transition from the era of narrowcasting to the age of 'egocasting', as described by Rosen.<sup>6</sup> The term "podcast" was coined in

Available at: <[https://www.insideradio.com/free/podcasting-smart-speakers-driving-an-audio-renaissance/article\\_4a848106-c6cb-11e8-b7fd-ef50c8741225.html](https://www.insideradio.com/free/podcasting-smart-speakers-driving-an-audio-renaissance/article_4a848106-c6cb-11e8-b7fd-ef50c8741225.html)>.

3 *Poslechovost zpravodajsko-publicistických podcastů*. Released on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2021. [online]. [2022-05-28]. Available at: <<https://talk.youradio.cz/magazin/clanek/poslechovost-zpravodajsko-publicisticky-podcastu-lame-pred-blizicimi-se-volbami-rekordy-stoupla-dokonce-o-45>>.

4 NEWMAN, N. et al.: *Reuters Institute: Digital News Report 2022*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022, p. 6.

5 ROSEN, C.: *The Age of Egocasting*. Released in 2004. [online]. [2022-05-28]. Available at: <<https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/the-age-of-egocasting/>>.

6 ROSEN, C.: *The Age of Egocasting*. Released in 2004. [online]. [2022-05-28]. Available at: <<https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/the-age-of-egocasting/>>.

2004 by combining two words emblematic for these two eras: iPod and broadcast.<sup>7</sup> The first podcasting boom began around 2006 with entertainment and comedy shows.<sup>8</sup> Even though their popularity was limited, media theorists already started to think about how and to what extent could podcasts revolutionise the hundred-year-old radio technology. At that time, Berry noted that it was refreshing to see grassroots podcasters competing with established broadcasters, underscoring the substance of the content.<sup>9</sup> Later, podcasts began to professionalise as established media houses in the Western world started sharing their content through emerging podcast platforms and independent producers launched crowdfunding campaigns to gather money for their shows. Bonini calls this era 'the second age of podcasting', in which podcasts evolved into a massively popular digital medium.<sup>10</sup>

A noteworthy turning point in subsequent development was the true-crime podcast series *Serial* by Sarah Koenig that started in 2014.<sup>11</sup> The popularity of this podcast in the U.S. and around the world was tremendous – the first season broke all records with 300 million downloads worldwide and the podcast received many journalism prizes, such as the Peabody Award.<sup>12</sup> *Serial* kickstarted the rise of podcasts in many different fields, including deep-dive daily podcasts, a format invented by *The Daily* from *The New York Times* in 2017.<sup>13</sup> *The Daily* built its reputation on well-crafted audio storytelling, the adaptation of the affective power of sound<sup>14</sup> and intimate listening to conversations held by the always witty, savvy and gregarious host Michael Barbaro, the voice of a generation.<sup>15</sup> In other words, everything that is necessary for good podcasting practice. The format, once considered quite new and a bit offbeat in comparison with linear radio broadcasting, swiftly became the golden standard which made every other deep-dive podcast a copycat. The fast growing *The Daily* reached 4 million downloads per day in 2020<sup>16</sup> and became a model for many other news podcasts around the world (*Today, Explained* by *Vox*, *The Intelligence* by *The Economist*, etc.). It also inspired many news podcasts outside the English-speaking world, including in Czechia. I would call this the third era in podcasting history.

The rise of the popularity of news podcasts, especially in the United States and United Kingdom, but also, for example, in Slovakia (*Dobré ráno* [in English *Good Morning*] by *SME Daily* or *Nahlas* [in English *Aloud*] by *Aktuality.sk*), is also reflected in the current boom of news podcasts in Czechia. Fascinatingly, the news podcast has by now become a perfectly ordinary media product in the portfolios of many radio and TV stations, weekly newspapers, dailies and online news websites which produce their own podcasts focusing on news, journalism, interviews and current affairs. Some of them are original pieces intended for on-demand platforms, sometimes referred to as "native podcasts",<sup>17</sup> created by, e.g., *EuroActiv.cz* (*Europe Up Close*), *Sport (iSport)*, *Český rozhlas (Vinohradská 12)*, *Deník N (Studio N)*, *SeznamZpravy.cz (5:59)*; some are just catch-up radio,<sup>18</sup> or catch-up tv/videocast, e.g., those produced by the *Reflex* magazine (*Prostor X*) and *Český rozhlas (Interview Plus)*.

7 PAPPER, R. A.: *Broadcast News and Writing Stylebook*. London: Routledge, 2020, p. 228.

8 GREEN, B.: *Podcast Master*. London: Canelo Digital Publishing, 2015, p. 11.

9 BERRY, R.: Will the iPod Kill the Radio Star? Profiling Podcasting as Radio. In *Convergence*, 2006, Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 159.

10 BONINI, T.: The 'Second Age' of Podcasting: Reframing Podcasting as a New Digital Mass Medium. In *Quaderns del CAC*, 2015, Vol. 18, No. 41, p. 24-25.

11 BERRY, R.: A Golden Age of Podcasting? Evaluating *Serial* in the Context of Podcast Histories. In *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, 2015, Vol. 2, No. 22, p. 170.

12 BLAIR, E.: *How the Investigation of Adnan Syed Became a Podcast Phenomenon*. Released on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2022. [online]. [2022-11-12]. Available at: <<https://www.npr.org/2022/09/20/1124141699/serial-adnan-syed>>.

13 NEWMAN, N., GALLO, N.: *Daily News Podcasts: Building New Habits in the Shadow of Coronavirus*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2020, p. 5.

14 Remark by author: The term was elaborated deeply in MCHUGH, S.: The Affective Power of Sound: Oral History on Radio. In *The Oral History Review*, 2012, Vol. 39, No. 2, p. 187-206.

15 SCHNEIER, M.: *The Voice of a Generation Michael Barbaro Made the New York Times Podcast The Daily a Raging Success. Or Is It the Other Way Around?* Released on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2020. [online]. [2022-11-12]. Available at: <<https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/01/michael-barbaro-the-daily-podcast-new-york-times.html>>.

16 ELEFFSON, L.: *NY Times' 'The Daily' Podcast Has Doubled Downloads Since Last Year to 4 Million*. Released on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2022-11-12]. Available at: <<https://www.thewrap.com/new-york-times-the-daily/>>.

17 NEWMAN, N., GALLO, N.: *News Podcasts and the Opportunities for Publishers*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2019, p. 9.

18 NEWMAN, N., GALLO, N.: *News Podcasts and the Opportunities for Publishers*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2019, p. 9.

Due to the growing popularity of podcasts (and news podcasts), this media phenomenon is increasingly often studied by both experienced and upcoming academics in Czechia. They examine podcasts from the perspective of new media,<sup>19</sup> interactive media and education<sup>20</sup> and directly from the point of view of the public-service broadcaster *Český rozhlas*<sup>21</sup> which has been initially rather coy about podcasting, unsure whether the podcast is a merciless rival to its original content or a brave explorer pioneering the path towards the future.

### 3 Navigating the Media Convergence

“Convergence” is the leading theoretical foundation for the current process of interlinking, connecting and blurring of the boundaries in the modern digital media world. Media convergence first appeared with the disintegration of the concepts of “traditional” audio-visual media and their smooth transformation. We once again live in a period in which old media interact with new media in many parallel dimensions in a process of media morphosis.<sup>22</sup> This change in the media is a reflection of our postmodern (liquid) society,<sup>23</sup> of which media convergence is an accompanying feature. Bolter and Grusin define the remediation of media as a process of perpetual evolution in which technology allows media to persist, adapt and modify rather than collapse.<sup>24</sup> Unceasing technological development enabled the advent of New Media 3.0 and on-demand consumption, in which individual and mass-media communication are intertwined.<sup>25</sup> People could listen to, watch and read whatever, whenever and wherever they wanted. All they had to do was put on their earbuds and tap their favourite mobile application on their smartphone. It has never been so easy to get someone to talk about current news directly into your ears. Jenkins enriched the theory of media convergence with his concept of “participatory culture”, which, amongst other things, combines the will of media content consumers to intervene in the way they receive the offered media content.<sup>26</sup> While podcasts may seem to be ‘orphaned media’,<sup>27</sup> the community they attract might be, from the participatory culture perspective, called a fandom.<sup>28</sup> As in social media contexts, podcasts enable the audience to develop much more intense relationships with the hosts than in the case of linear radio broadcasting.<sup>29</sup> It would seem illogical not to use this hard-earned, yet perfectly natural connection in potentially very profitable marketing strategies. Several media houses have already started to implement monetisation strategies in their podcasts.<sup>30</sup>

Although the theory of podcasts (including news podcasts) rests on the theoretical framework of media convergence, it is still fruitful to consider the podcast as an audio format that changes the form of communication as we know it, or the one we were used to from linear radio broadcasting. It turns out that the current process of media convergence not only affects how content is distributed and consumed, but to some extent also influences its structure and format. Podcasts tend to have a specific host-driven narrative style, changing the old habits of audio storytelling,<sup>31</sup> because the audio narration in a podcast is closely related to the

19 Remark by author: The topic was elaborated, e.g., in: KOUČKÁ, A.: *Fenomén podcastu a jeho význam v současných médiích*. [Bachelor’s Thesis]. Prague : Charles University, 2021; SVOBODOVÁ, M.: *Podcasting jako fenomén nových médií a jeho současný stav v České republice*. [Master’s Thesis]. Prague : Charles University, 2019; NOVÁKOVÁ, K.: *Český podcasting veřejnoprávních médií jako fenomén dnešní doby*. [Bachelor’s Thesis]. Prague : Charles University, 2021.

20 Remark by author: The topic was elaborated, e.g., in: BOČKOVÁ, K.: *Analýza české podcastové scény se zaměřením na vzdělávání posluchače*. [Bachelor’s Thesis]. Brno : Masaryk University, 2020.

21 Remark by author: The topic was elaborated, e.g., in: BALCÁRKOVÁ, E.: *Jak vzniká zpravodajský podcast Českého rozhlasu Vinohradská 12*. [Bachelor’s Thesis]. Prague : Charles University, 2021; KRAWIECOVÁ, N.: *Podcast jako etabloující se žánr Českého rozhlasu*. [Bachelor’s thesis]. Brno : Masaryk University, 2019.

22 Remark by author: The term “mediamorphosis” was coined by Fidler in: FIDLER, R.: *Mediamorphosis: Understanding New Media*. Thousand Oaks : Pine Forge, 1997.

23 Remark by author: The term was coined by Bauman in: BAUMAN, Z.: *Liquid Modernity*. Oxford : Polity Press, 2000.

24 BOLTER, J. D., GRUSIN, R.: *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge : MIT Press, 2000, p. 225.

25 JAKUBOWICZ, K.: *Nová ekologie médií*. Zlín : Verbum, 2013, p. 16-69.

26 Remark by author: The term was coined by Jenkins in: JENKINS, H.: *Convergence Culture*. London, New York : New York University Press, 2006.

27 SPINELLI, M., DANN, L.: *Podcasting: The Audio Media Revolution*. New York : Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019, p. 46.

28 JENKINS, H.: Fandom, Negotiation, and Participatory Culture. In BOOTH, P. (ed.): *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*. Hoboken : John Wiley & Sons, 2018, p. 14.

29 SPINELLI, M., DANN, L.: *Podcasting: The Audio Media Revolution*. New York : Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019, p. 13.

30 NEWMAN, N., GALLO, N.: *News Podcasts and the Opportunities for Publishers*. Oxford : Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2019, p. 25.

31 MCHUGH, S.: How Podcasting Is Changing the Audio Storytelling Genre. In *The Radio Journal: International Studies in*

authenticity of the podcaster.<sup>32</sup> The hyper-intimate character of conversation<sup>33</sup> is also highly unique. Swiatek calls the podcast an intimate bridging medium for delivering knowledge and social connection while giving “the impression of directness and closeness”.<sup>34</sup> McHugh in her most recent study of narrative podcasts notes that podcasting is radio’s flirty first cousin – a young innovation that exploded into a pop-culture phenomenon.<sup>35</sup> The podcast became the audio prodigy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, radio for youngsters, and the media keep investing noticeably more money into the format to fuel the hype.<sup>36</sup>

### 4 Methodology

This study applies a qualitative methodological approach used by various scholars to investigate the impacts of technological development on media and communication.<sup>37</sup> The intention was to examine news podcasts in selected media, and especially the motivations behind their creation. All the selected podcasts were launched between the years 2019 and 2021 and suitably represent the news podcast landscape in Czechia, as the list of their producers includes a combination of print, online and broadcasting media houses. The data set consists of twelve in-depth interviews with podcasters and their managers or Editors-in-Chief<sup>38</sup> conducted in a semi-structured form. Although the questions for interviews had been predominantly scripted in advance, we also asked additional follow-up questions and allowed the respondents to say more about topics that they were more interested in or open to discuss. As a result, the interviews with podcasters were mostly divided into three standalone, but interrelated parts:

1. the description and perception of podcasts as a new medium or genre,
2. the characterisation of the respondent’s own news podcast, its audience share and community bonding or feedback,
3. the motivations to produce a news podcast, the role of the respondent’s news podcast within the media house, the future of podcasting, monetising aspects etc.

The interviews with media managers and Editors-in-Chief were narrowed down to the first and third of these parts. In this study, we wanted to explore primarily the motivations for producing news podcasts, which is why only answers related to this topic were selected for a rigorous analysis.<sup>39</sup> For the quotes, the author decided to use mostly the opinions of the podcasters. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, all of the interviews were conducted via phone calls. The selected media are:

#### a) *Vinohradská 12 (Český rozhlas)*

*Vinohradská 12* is a news podcast by *Czech Radio* launched in April 2019. Czechia has a dual broadcasting system in which *Czech Radio* is a public service broadcaster established in 1923. Its podcast was created by the former foreign correspondent Lenka Kabrhelová, who in April 2022 left for *SeznamZpravy.cz*. The manager responsible for the development of *Vinohradská 12* was Jiří Malina, former head of the New Media Department at *Czech Radio*.

*Broadcast and Audio Media*, 2016, Vol. 14, No. 1, p. 78.

32 SPINELLI, M., DANN, L.: *Podcasting: The Audio Media Revolution*. New York : Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019, p. 65.

33 BERRY, R.: Part of the Establishment: Reflecting on 10 Years of Podcasting as an Audio Medium. In *Convergence*, 2016, Vol. 6, No. 22, p. 666.

34 SWIATEK, L.: The Podcast as an Intimate Bridging Medium. In LLINARES, D., FOX, N., BERRY, R. (eds.): *Podcasting*. Cham : Springer, 2018, p. 175.

35 MCHUGH, S.: *The Power of Podcasting: Telling Stories through Sound*. New York : Columbia University Press, 2022, p. 5.

36 NEWMAN, N.: *Journalism, Media, and Technology Trends and Predictions 2022*. Oxford : Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022, p. 16.

37 LINDLOF, T. R., TAYLOR, B. C.: *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks : SAGE, 2011, p. 24.

38 Remark by author: All of the respondents included in the study provided the consent to participate and the consent to publish. All of them had a chance to read the manuscript before the publication. The ethical aspects of the study were also approved (No. 47/2022) by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Social Sciences (Charles University).

39 Remark by author: As declared in the “Acknowledgement” section at the end of this study, this study is a partial outcome of the author’s Dissertation Thesis on news podcasts in Czechia.

b) *Studio N (Deník N)*

*Studio N* is published by the *Deník N* daily newspaper, which was founded in 2018 and is based on a subscription model. The first episode of the podcast was published in September 2019, making it the second oldest news podcast in Czechia. Its main host and producer is the former radio journalist Filip Titlbach. The idea to develop *Studio N* came from the newspaper's CEO Ján Simkanič. Although the newspaper's website is paywalled, the podcast is available for free.

c) *Podcast Týdeníku Respekt (Respekt)*

*Respekt*, a weekly political magazine, started to produce its news podcast in September 2020. Until October 2022, it was hosted by Hana Řičicová, a former radio journalist. Since November 2022 the podcast is being produced by Štěpán Sedláček, originally a science reporter affiliated with *Czech Radio*. The Editor-in-Chief of *Respekt* is Erik Tabery. Like in the case of *Studio N* podcast, while the magazine's website is paywalled, the podcast is available for free.

d) *Ranní brífink HN (Hospodářské noviny)*

*Ranní brífink* (in English *Morning Briefing*) is a podcast of *Hospodářské noviny* (in English *Economic Newspaper*), a daily business newspaper. It has several hosts, each of which prepare the program individually. There is always one interview, several stories, and a short news monitor. The Editor-in-Chief of *Hospodářské noviny* is Jaroslav Mašek. *Ranní brífink* does not use any type of monetisation, even though the content on the newspaper's website is behind a paywall.

e) *Prostor X (Reflex)*

*Prostor X* (in English *Space X*) is originally a videocast produced by *Reflex*, a weekly political, social and cultural magazine. The format is a one-on-one interview published several times a week. The former host is Čestmír Strakatý and the manager responsible for developing this format was Petr Cífka, the former head of video content at the *Czech News Centre*, the publisher of *Reflex*.

f) *Vlevo dole (SeznamZpravy.cz)*

*Vlevo dole* (in English *Bottom Left*) is a political/discussion podcast from *SeznamZpravy.cz*, one of the most influential media houses in Czechia. The podcast is produced by Lucie Stuchlíková and Václav Dolejší, both experienced political correspondents. The head of digital projects at *SeznamZpravy.cz* is Hana Němečková.

This study analyses qualitative data from the in-depth interviews (20 – 40 minutes long) by applying deductive reasoning and the method of descriptive coding. The coding was open in order to build categories “and have attributes ascribed to them”, as described by Lindlof and Taylor.<sup>40</sup> As a result, three main motivations for producing news podcasts were identified:

1. targeting a younger audience,
2. a new space for presenting content,
3. a new way for bonding with the audience and building trust between the listeners and journalists.

The main research questions selected for this study are deliberately very broad, as the field itself remains largely uncharted in Czechia:

*RQ1: What were the motivations for producing original news podcasts in Czechia?*

*RQ2: To what extent and how do the podcasters draw inspiration from other existing news podcasts?*

40 LINDLOF, T. R., TAYLOR, B. C.: *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks : SAGE, 2011, p. 251.

## 5 Results

### *Motivation 1: Younger Audience*

When the BBC started to publish its original radio programmes online in 2006, it succeeded in gaining new, younger and more global audiences,<sup>41</sup> even though initially, the podcasts were only classic radio shows made available for on-demand listening. The in-depth interviews conducted for this study suggest that the advent of podcasts as online products that would expand the reach of the given medium was also a fundamental motivation in the Czech media environment. In particular, the essential factor for producing podcasts was that this media type would enable them to reach an audience that is otherwise difficult to contact or unreachable. This is related to the omnipresence of social media and the need to forge a relationship between producers and young media consumers, which can be especially difficult for ‘traditional’ media houses. They spend more of their free time on mobile phones than ever – four out of five children and teenagers (in the UK) who listen to podcasts do so using their mobile phones.<sup>42</sup> According to the Nielsen Admosphere polling agency, 94% of Czechs (15 – 39 years) are aware of podcasts.<sup>43</sup>

Podcasts target a new audience, characterised as one that utilises the possibilities of the modern lifestyle or one that is simply younger. For example, *Respekt* expects to target a group of people aged 17 to 40 years. For comparison, the age brackets that listen to podcasts the most in the UK are the 18 – 24 years (43% of respondents) and 25 – 34 years (40% of respondents) groups.<sup>44</sup> Filip Titlbach from *Deník N* directly acknowledges that the podcast aims at a young audience.

On *Spotify*, the *Vlevo dole* podcast is mainly listened to by people in the 28 – 34 years age group, but this could be because the platform generally attracts a younger audience. The distribution of podcasts through websites usually attracts an older audience of people between 30 – 40 or 45 years, predominantly male. The difference in the age of listeners caused by different distribution mechanisms, namely website players and podcast apps, was also noted by Čestmír Strakatý, the host of the *Prostor X* podcast.

Tomáš Lysoněk, who is one of the podcasters in *Hospodářské noviny (Ranní brífink)*, argues that even though young people quite naturally take their headphones with them wherever they go. For people born in the world of digital media, podcasts seem to be more attractive; some podcasters have even called the podcast “a modern radio”. Czech podcasters and their Editors-in-Chief agree that the production of podcasts mainly targets a younger audience. Lysoněk also adds a comment concerning the “identification” with a particular medium:

*“More and more people take their headphones everywhere, so it is natural for them to consume content through their ears. On the other hand, this generation does not fully identify with linear radio streaming. They want to choose what is interesting for them.”*

Before the large media houses in Czechia adopted this mindset, podcasts had already gained substantial popularity in the United States and United Kingdom. Many Czech podcasters admit that they were inspired by podcasts of the NPR or BBC. Similarly to how *The Daily* kicked off the podcasting megatrend in the U.S., the adaptation of the journalistic practices, format and distribution mechanisms of *The Daily* in *Czech Radio's Vinohradská 12* (since 2019) launched the news-podcasting era in Czechia. For *Hospodářské noviny*, the inspiration came from the *Financial Times*. *Deník N* drew inspiration for *Studio N* from various podcasts,

41 GREEN, B.: *Podcast Master*. London : Canelo Digital Publishing, 2015, p. 11.

42 See: BEST, E., CLARK, C.: *Children and Young People's Engagement with Podcasts before and during Lockdown*. London : National Literacy Trust, 2020.

43 *Co jsou podcasty? Přesně to ví jen čtvrtina Čechů na internetu*. Released on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020. [online]. [2022-05-28]. Available at: <<https://www.mediar.cz/co-jsou-podcasty-presne-to-vi-jen-ctvrtina-cechu-na-internetu/>>.

44 NEWMAN, N. et al.: *Reuters Institute: Digital News Report*. Oxford : Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2020, p. 25.

including the BBC *Global News* format and the free conversation style of *Pod Save America*. In other cases, the podcasters were fascinated by the style of hosting in a foreign language podcast rather than the format itself.

Hana Němečková, who created the *Vlevo dole* political debate podcast with Lucie Stuchlíková and Václav Dolejší (produced by *SeznamZpravy.cz*), was a follower of the tech podcast *Pivot*, in which two podcasters talk about tech news. Some of the Czech news podcasts drew inspiration from Slovakia, where the news podcasting scene had developed a little earlier. The concept of *Vinohradská 12* was strongly influenced by *The New York Times* podcast *The Daily*; says Kabrhelová, even though the team originally planned to follow the format of NPR's *Up First* instead:

*“Czech Radio intended to provide a public service to other listeners who had no relationship with the radio as a medium. They simply did not listen to classic linear broadcasts, and the new way of distributing the content in the form of podcasts actually allowed us to reach these listeners.”*

This aspect is particularly important for *Czech Radio*, as its linear broadcasting service has been losing young listeners for a very long time. According to a Reuters Institute survey in the UK,<sup>45</sup> only a small fraction of young people under 34 years listen to linear radio broadcasting (11% of people between 18 – 24 years and 19% of people between 25 – 34 years). Kabrhelová and Malina consider one of the successes of *Vinohradská 12* that it managed to attract its listeners to ‘linear’ radio as well, and even to convince some people to start paying radio concession fees. There is, however, no hard data to support these claims.

Moreover, there is another issue with the popularity of podcasts in the Czech environment – they simply do not reach the numbers of downloads seen abroad.<sup>46</sup> Firstly, they mainly focus on a local Czech audience and publish episodes in English only very rarely. Secondly, as mentioned earlier, podcasting is still a very young phenomenon in Czechia. *Czech Radio*, the national public-service broadcaster, attracts nearly 1,700,000 listeners per day, and in 2022 increased its market share to more than 27.5%.<sup>47</sup> In contrast, one episode of a news podcast is listened to by thousands or at most tens of thousands of Czechs. On the other hand, Czech podcasts attract as big an audience as some radio stations within the *Czech Radio* family or other radio stations.<sup>48</sup> The download numbers also match the print runs of some of the daily newspapers or magazines.<sup>49</sup>

## Motivation 2: Content Presentation

Media of all kinds are experiencing a rapidly changing and dynamic time. In the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many media publishers and journalists faced enormous changes related to the phenomenon of convergence. One crucial factor of success, however, has remained unchanged – the importance of good content, since content *“is still a king”*.<sup>50</sup> News podcasts are just another platform used to share original content and extend the spectrum of accessible media channels, as Kabrhelová further notes:

*“(Our podcast) has 25 minutes, and is full of content that we often try to convey through our journalism. It frequently presents the journalism of Czech Radio, or that was the original ambition.”*

45 NEWMAN, N. et al.: *Reuters Institute: Digital News Report*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2020, p. 25.

46 ELEFFSON, L.: *NY Times’ The Daily’ Podcast Has Doubled Downloads Since Last Year to 4 Million*. Released on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2020. [online]. [2022-11-12]. Available at: <<https://www.thewrap.com/new-york-times-the-daily/>>.

47 BUMBÁLKOVÁ, B.: *Český rozhlas rekordně navysuje svůj podíl na trhu, Radiožurnál zůstává s nárůstkem nejoslouchanějším rádiem v Česku*. Released on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2022. [online]. [2022-05-28]. Available at: <<https://informace.rozhlas.cz/cesky-rozhlas-rekordne-navysuje-svuj-podil-na-trhu-radiozurnal-zustava-s-8743426/>>.

48 VOJTĚCHOVSKÁ, M.: *Radiožurnál zůstává na čele, stabilní Impuls, lepší Frekvence 1*. Released on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2022. [online]. [2022-11-12]. Available at: <<https://www.mediaguru.cz/clanky/2022/11/radiozurnal-zustava-na-cele-stabilni-impuls-lepsi-frekvence-1/>>.

49 *Media Projekt, Unie vydavatelů, Asmea, 1. 7. 2021 – 30. 6. 2022*. [online]. [2023-04-06]. Available at: <[http://www.unievychovatelu.cz/gallery/files/2022\\_08\\_11%20-%20UV%20-%20MEDIA%20PROJEKT%20-%20zakl\\_%20vysledky%20za%203\\_%20Q%202021%20a%20C5%BE%20\\_%20Q%202022.pdf](http://www.unievychovatelu.cz/gallery/files/2022_08_11%20-%20UV%20-%20MEDIA%20PROJEKT%20-%20zakl_%20vysledky%20za%203_%20Q%202021%20a%20C5%BE%20_%20Q%202022.pdf)>.

50 LOEWENTHAL, R., MCMULLAN, M.: *Audio Opportunities for News Media*. Dallas: INMA, 2019, p. 7. [online]. [2022-11-12]. Available at: <[https://medienorge.uib.no/files/Eksterne\\_pub/audio-opportunities-for-news-media-pdf-34-sider.pdf](https://medienorge.uib.no/files/Eksterne_pub/audio-opportunities-for-news-media-pdf-34-sider.pdf)>.

From this perspective, the publishing houses can use podcasts to promote their individual journalists who have experience in the field being discussed and can share specialised knowledge. This means that podcasts serve also as an advertisement for the production of a media house, and in some cases, the brand of the podcast itself can eventually outshine the brand of the media house it represents.

In addition to reporting on news stories from reputable journalists, *Czech Radio* also supports the content in other ways. *Vinohradská 12* is a contextual, roughly 25-minute interview enriched by an original sound design which includes audio clips from the radio’s archives. It also uses a mixture of various genres of journalism (some forgotten, some abandoned) to tell the whole story. The *Studio N* podcast utilises a similar principle, combining an in-depth interview with an overview of current news and one original cynical comment from the host at the end of each episode. *Prostor X* is a classic interview format with no post-production and almost no connection to the original content of the *Reflex* magazine. This way, it effectively expands the brand’s published content. The *Reflex* magazine realised that it *“has to be where the people are”* and started to offer on podcasting platforms its content originally made for videocasting. Strakatý describes the process as simply publishing the audio track separated from the video.

For radio and newspaper media houses, a news podcast can also be a format that replaces traditional news summaries that highlight the most important event or events of a day. This could be a useful news production strategy for a society *“flooded with information”*. In this case, podcasts help consumers navigate the world of media and current affairs. *Czech Radio* even plans to transform from a broadcasting house to a producer of audio content for any form of distribution – both linear and on-demand. In 2021, *Czech Radio* founded a new specialised department focusing on podcast development.<sup>51</sup>

Podcasts such as *Ranní brfink* or *Podcast Týdeníku Respekt* are different because their authors usually try to select several stories from the newspaper or magazine content and present them in a new and different, audio-focused way. This prompted the established media houses to start discussing a whole new marketing strategy, because this was an opportunity to start experimenting with a subscription (to monetise their podcast production), advertising in a podcast or simply promoting the stories originally published in print or behind a paywall. Ultimately, a news podcast can grow the community and hypothetically entice people to buy the content or subscribe. In some media, the discussions concerning marketing strategies are still ongoing, because they fear they might lose their audience, but at the same time struggle to find the resources to finance the media itself. The *Respekt* podcast relies on interviews with the magazine’s journalists who present the stories they work on while still being a platform for presenting original content in a new form. Řičicová admits that sometimes audio testimonies from people can give a story more power, so journalists must consider what will be recorded to be played and what will be taped to be written down and printed.

Even though the popularity of podcasts in Czechia has not yet matched the figures commonly recorded by traditional media houses, their number is skyrocketing. In 2020 alone, a thousand new podcasts were launched.<sup>52</sup> Almost every established media house in Czechia has its news podcast now, as having one is seen as necessary or ‘a must’. For example, *SeznamZpravy.cz* is an online news site that systematically builds its position based on personalised journalism, relying on strong individualities and focusing on on-demand consumption. Similarly, as Strakatý noted, the authors try to get closer to people. They want to enter the spaces where people spend their free time looking for new information: on social media, in podcast applications and in e-mail inboxes. This situation is beneficial for both the media and their consumers. Media houses produce so much content that nobody can read it all; newsletters and podcasts are platforms that can deliver it straight to the reader or listener, as mentioned by Němečková:

*“We do not want to be dependent on an awful lot of content that no one remembers tomorrow or has the time to read. These on-demand things, like podcasts or newsletters, are great because the contact with the listener or reader is maintained regularly.”*

51 SKALICKÝ, M.: *Český rozhlas má nové oddělení na podcasty, v létě vydá dvě novinky*. Released on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2021. [online]. [2022-05-28]. Available at: <<https://cz.ejo-online.eu/6689/top-prispevky/cesky-rozhlas-ma-nove-oddeleni-na-podcasty-v-lete-veda-dve-novinky>>.

52 JETMAR, J.: *Loni vzniklo tisíc českých podcastů. Má ho i Lidl*. Released on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2021. [online]. [2022-05-28]. Available at: <<https://www.mediar.cz/loni-vzniklo-tisic-ceskych-podcastu-ma-ho-i-lidl/>>.

### Motivation 3: Building Trust

One of the most crucial challenges that the world of journalism faces today is a globally declining trust in the media. Truth is no longer about clarity and transparency because it is now “reconfigured as an inner subjective reality”.<sup>53</sup> According to the newest Annual Trust Barometer by Edelman, 67% of people believe that “journalists and reporters are purposely trying to mislead people by saying things they know are false or gross exaggerations”.<sup>54</sup> As noted by a Reuters Institute report, people are now very sceptical of basic journalistic practices.<sup>55</sup> Trust in the media in Czechia has been low for a long time, and still continues to drop. The journalism theorist Moravec sees it as a multidimensional phenomenon and offers several explanations: audience fragmentation, the transformation of the journalistic profession, the local social-economic and political changes, etc.<sup>56</sup> The global COVID-19 pandemic helped the media regain some of the lost confidence and the trust figures slightly improved,<sup>57</sup> but they remain dismally low. Only 34% of people trust the news – and if they do, they specifically trust public broadcasting, which consistently ranks near the top.<sup>58</sup>

In journalism in general, it could be valuable to focus on specific topics such as strengthening the trust in the media, emphasising the context of stories, explaining why an issue should be addressed and showing journalistic practices and the work of journalists behind the scenes. And this is, as Titlbach emphasises, where podcasts could play a supportive and very welcome role:

*“If you do it authentically, show the journalists, talk about their work, reveal not only the backstage of power but also how we find information, and explain the context, then the podcast is one of the formats that can help build trust in the medium or the media in general.”*

Like Michael Barbaro in *The Daily*, Titlbach in his *Studio N* podcast prefers to invite other journalists from the newspaper to talk about the stories they covered. This allows them to explain their journalistic approach and why they want to write particular news stories. By doing that, they can strengthen public confidence in their work. In print media such as *Deník N*, *Hospodářské noviny*, *Týdeník Respekt* and *Reflex*, and in online media outlets such as *SeznamZpravy.cz*, there is an even stronger argument for doing this. Podcasts allow the authors to introduce themselves in more detail through their voice and diction, which helps present their content in a more intimate dimension, as stressed by Řičicová in the following quotation:

*“It is good to tell people that there is an actual person writing all the articles that you have been reading for ten years. This is their name; this is what their voice sounds like. In short, you allow the audience to develop a relationship with the magazine differently.”*

Ultimately, news podcasts allow the media to strengthen the reader-listener or producer-consumer bonds. This is another factor reflecting the participatory culture of contemporary society, which incorporates consumers into the media much more strongly.<sup>59</sup> As is well known, radio and podcasts allow a very intimate contact between producers and consumers. As Berry argues, podcasts could be a hyper-intimate type of medium.<sup>60</sup> Tomáš Lysoněk suggests this is why people tend to interact with podcasters more, because he receives much more attention from the public than for his other journalistic work. And he is not the only one

who noticed the increased audience engagement – Lucie Stuchlíková, the co-host of the *Vlevo dole* podcast by *SeznamZpravy.cz*, says that she had to get used to this new kind of relationship:

*“Just getting used to having some fans is a little weird. It really is like a relationship with those people. I was surprised by how deep it goes.”*

Čestmír Strakatý, the host of the *Prostor X* podcast/videocast, says that in some conversations he feels a certain vibe and a relaxed atmosphere. He confirms getting feedback from the audience is a part of his job. Some other Czech news podcasts (partly *Vinohradská 12*, *Podcast Týdeníku Respekt*, etc.) work on a similar ‘behind the scenes’ model, inspired among others by *The Daily*. By revealing the mechanism of basic journalistic practices, they let people see how the processes of gathering information and making the news work.

## 6 Discussion and Conclusion

This study examines the motivations for producing news podcasts in Czechia and draws clear conclusions for why the established media houses decided to follow the international trend (boosted by the pandemic) of rediscovering audio for transmitting news in a new and popular manner. Leading Czech media have started producing news podcasts for three main reasons: to reach a younger audience, to utilise a new content presentation platform and to build trust.

The news podcast has become a go-to media type for established media houses in Czechia because it allows them to reach a wider audience. It targets young people born into the digital world who are surrounded by latest technologies and social networks. Since they are fully connected to the digital media ecosystem and the news podcast is an on-demand media type, utilising the Internet and portable audio devices, it makes sense for established media houses to try getting their attention through news podcasts. Czech media have also adopted the podcast platform as a space where they can share their content more broadly. They took inspiration from successful news podcasts from the U.S., the UK or Slovakia. As previously mentioned by Bolter and Grusin or Jenkins, we live in an era of innumerable media platforms driven by the remediation process and rapid technological development boosting the importance of on-demand media published through the Internet.<sup>61</sup> Established media need to cope with this advanced delivery strategy in some way. As observed abroad, news podcasts allow Czech publishers and podcasters to decide which content to publish and which and how to promote in an audio form. This motivation can also play a crucial role in summarising the main stories for people flooded with news who turn to podcasts to avoid unwanted information. If the remote control implied the advent of the age of choice, as put by Rosen, the media convergence world faces the age of hyper-choice.<sup>62</sup> And because the remote control also allowed people to “tune out annoying commercials”,<sup>63</sup> the established media houses in Czechia want to make sure they are not tuned out by podcasts. They aim to use them to their own benefit rather than compete with them. For now, their effort is rewarded mostly through marketing benefits rather than any strategic monetisation campaigns.

Last but not least, there was a clear motivation for revealing the background of the journalistic work and standard procedures to strengthen trust between the media and its audience. Participatory culture and the increase of digital media news platforms caused by rapid technological development created an on-demand society;<sup>64</sup> on the other hand, the presence of digital media also fuelled the appearance of fake news and blurred

53 DAHLGREN, P., HILL, A.: Parameters of Media Engagement. In *Media Theory*; 2020, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 14.

54 *Edelman Trust Barometer 2022*. [online]. [2022-05-28]. Available at: <[https://www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2022-01/2022%20Edelman%20Trust%20Barometer%20FINAL\\_Jan25.pdf](https://www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2022-01/2022%20Edelman%20Trust%20Barometer%20FINAL_Jan25.pdf)>.

55 See: TOFF, B. et al.: *Overcoming Indifference: What Attitudes towards News Tell Us about Building Trust*. Oxford : Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2021.

56 MORAVEC, V.: *Proměny novinářské etiky*. Prague : Academia, 2021, p. 104-107.

57 NEWMAN, N. et al.: *Reuters Institute: Digital News Report 2021*. Oxford : Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2021, p. 72.

58 NEWMAN, N. et al.: *Reuters Institute: Digital News Report 2022*. Oxford : Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022, p. 73.

59 JENKINS, H.: Fandom, Negotiation, and Participatory Culture. In BOOTH, P. (ed.): *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*. Hoboken : John Wiley & Sons, 2018, p. 14.

60 BERRY, R.: Part of the Establishment: Reflecting on 10 Years of Podcasting as an Audio Medium. In *Convergence*, 2016, Vol. 6, No. 22, p. 666.

61 See, for example: BOLTER, J. D., GRUSIN, R.: *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge : MIT Press, 2000; JENKINS, H.: Fandom, Negotiation, and Participatory Culture. In BOOTH, P. (ed.): *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*. Hoboken : John Wiley & Sons, 2018, p. 11-26.

62 ROSEN, C.: *The Age of Ego-casting*. Released in 2004. [online]. [2022-05-28]. Available at: <<https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/the-age-of-egocasting/>>.

63 ROSEN, C.: *The Age of Ego-casting*. Released in 2004. [online]. [2022-05-28]. Available at: <<https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/the-age-of-egocasting/>>.

64 JAKUBOWICZ, K.: *Nová ekologie médií*. Zlín : Verbum, 2013, p. 69.

the difference between professional and amateur journalism.<sup>65</sup> Because trust in Czech media is at an ominous low,<sup>66</sup> some Czech media houses use news podcasts to provide transparent insight into what journalists do, why and how.

As we have seen, news podcasts provide an interesting distributing mechanism of media content, enabled by enormously swift technological progress and reflecting the current mood of society. At the same time, they build on approaches to audio storytelling that have been developing over decades. This combination, or the transformation of the old into the new, is the key to their success.

Established Czech media houses are well aware of this phenomenon, and their motivations to engage in it speak for themselves – as seen in this study, which provides the first comprehensive insight into the motivations behind the creation of news podcasts in Czechia. It must be mentioned, however, that the applicability of these findings may be limited due to a relatively small number of examined podcasts and the sensitivity of provided information. It can be assumed that private media companies in particular do not want to share all their know-how and explain their decision-making process. Further research is needed as well. News podcasts in Czechia are still a young and emerging phenomenon, and the motivations behind their creation can change over time. For now, the inspiration from foreign media markets is clearly visible, and the motivating factors, which include targeting a younger audience, presenting the content and building trust, were thoroughly described.

As the world of media evolves, news podcasts seem to be able to keep up with its momentum. Czechia is another country that can now see (or better, hear) how podcasts succeed in delivering a breakthrough in the making, distributing, and consumption of audio stories in general.

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65 MORAVEC, V.: *Proměny novinářské etiky*. Prague : Academia, 2021, p. 106.

66 NEWMAN, N. et al.: *Reuters Institute: Digital News Report 2021*. Oxford : Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2021, p. 72.

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