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Podcast as a Tool to Popularize Political Science Knowledge into Non-Academic Audiences: The Case of Universities' Podcasts in Poland¹

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Abstract

Increasing digitization means that education is forced to adapt technological solutions to the learning process. Podcasts are one of the forms that accompany education. This article is an analysis of political science podcasts in Poland, which are produced by academic units. The purpose of the article is to verify the methods of popularization, promotion, and distribution of political science podcasts. Study draws on qualitative and quantitative analysis of sources. The first allowed to discover what topics are covered by political science podcasts in Poland and how they are distributed. The quantitative analysis of sources made it possible to gain knowledge of the number of episodes of these podcasts produced. The author also posed three research questions 1) What are the political science podcasts in Poland that are produced by university units? 2) What topics do they cover? 3) How do the creators try to reach non-academic audiences? The study draws attention to good practices in producing and distributing political science podcasts to reach beyond an academic audience.

Keywords: podcasts, civic education, political science podcasts, popularization of science, non-academic audiences.

Introduction

The ever-increasing digitization is making its way into various areas of social life. One such area is education, in the field of which audiovisual works are being created. These are projects aimed at transmitting knowledge to the audience but also popularizing learning. A special form in this regard is podcasts. This was pointed out, among others, by Thomas Moore, who divided educational podcasts according to the creator, the number of participants involved, and the format. The use of podcasts to transfer knowledge is an example of an epistemically diverse approach to education. In this article, Moore's approach is adopted, which considers the podcast as an additional or complementary teaching tool. It is essential to know the advantages and disadvantages of creating podcasts (Moore, 2022). As it was pointed out by Jham et al. (2008) that the benefits of podcast production are low production costs, widespread online access (anytime, anywhere) and a form that is user-friendly. An essential aspect in this regard is to distinguish areas that are relevant to the design of this form of broadcasting. Christopher Drew (2017) singled out such areas as content type, length,

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who the author is, style, purpose, voice or addressing, fit with other materials, series structure, pedagogical approach, and topic. A podcast is also a form of communication that connects academia and a wider audience interested in the topics covered. In this way, people who do not participate in academic discussions daily can learn about the opinions of experts. In considering the relevance of the adaptation of educational content, attention must be paid to the target audience. Marc Prensky characterized today's students as digital natives. They expect education to take new forms and knowledge to be transmitted through digital tools. This is because this is the environment in which they navigate daily (Ralph, Head, Lightfoot, 2010). The subject of research in this article is political science podcasts in Poland produced by academic units. This study aims to discover how podcasts' production and distribution methods support popularizing political science among non-academic audiences.

Podcasts in Poland

Research on the podcast market shows that it is the most rapidly growing media area, not only in Poland but also across Europe. The biggest breakthrough in this area was in 2019-2020. According to the survey "Czas na podcasty!" 27% of respondents listen to podcasts at least once a month. By 2021, this figure has risen to 31% (Interaktywnie.com, 2023). The results of the survey, conducted by the Ariadna panel for "Wprost" and Studio PLAC, showed that viewers pointed to the desire to learn something new as the main motivation for listening to podcasts, and one in three said they listen to podcasts for educational purposes. One of the most recent surveys, "Jakich podcastów słuchają Polacy?", which was released in 2022, showed that 57% of respondents indicated that the topics of the podcasts they listen to are combined with a popular science aspect. It is also noteworthy that within the same survey, 62% of respondents considered the great value of podcasts to be the expansion of knowledge gained at different stages of education (Fiedorek, 2023). This proves that audiences want to educate themselves on their own and are looking for this type of content themselves.

Study on the market for political science podcasts in Poland produced by university units

The subject of this study is the sphere of political science podcasts in Poland, which are produced within university units. It was aimed at verifying the manner of production and distribution of this type of content. The research questions are the following: 1) What political science podcasts in Poland are produced by university units? 2) What topics do they cover? 3) How do the creators try to reach non-academic audiences? Study draws on qualitative and quantitative source analysis. The first allows to discover what topics are covered by political science podcasts in Poland and how they are

distributed. In turn, the latter allows to gain knowledge of the number of episodes of these podcasts produced. A podcast is defined as a regularly published online audio or visual-sound form (Ralph, Head, Lightfoot, 2010). A political science podcast means that covers topics related to current events in politics, history or civic education. The purposeful selection of the analyzed podcasts was the study of the market for political science podcasts in Poland produced by academic units and distinguished the following: Podcast Maturalny, Nie-koniec historii (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan), Migroscacja, WOS w pigułce (University of Warsaw), Świat od nowa (Mikołaj Kopernik University in Torun), Przystanek #misjaUJ, Sprawy Wschodu (Jagiellonian University in Krakow) and Podcast Wszechnica.org.pl – Nauka (cooperation of the Polish Academy of Sciences with the University of Warsaw). The author excluded political science podcasts of a journalistic nature from the field of research, due to the fact that the purpose of their presentations is to comment on current events, not to popularize science. The scientific and cognitive quality of such podcasts is questionable. In addition, they do not connect the academic world with an audience that is not exposed to this environment daily. The above podcasts were analyzed in terms of the number of their distribution channels, their promotion on social media, the topics they cover in the field of political science, their content production (whether they are spoken by experts), accessibility (existence of transcriptions) and technical implementation of distribution (dedicated graphics and jingles).

Table 1 Analysis of political science podcasts in Poland produced by academic units in terms of production and distribution

| Title (Númer of episodes) | Multi-channels broadcasting | Promotion in social media | Content |
|----------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Podcast Maturalny (33) | YouTube, Spotify, Apple Podcast, Google podcast | Faculty website; Faculty social media (Facebook, Instagram); szkola.wnpid.amu.edu.pl, blogkandydata.amu.edu.pl | Politics, citizenship education , history |
| Nie-koniec historii (10) | Spotify, YouTube, Tunein | Faculty Facebook, kubajakubowski.pl | Political science, migration, commenting on current events |
| Migroscacja (14) | YouTube, Spotify, Google podcast, Breaker, Pockercast, RadioRepublic, Apple Podcast, Listennotes | University website | Political science, migration, commenting on current events |
| WOS w pigułce (30) | Spotify, YT, Audacy, Listennotes, Ivoox | University website, Facebook and Twwitter; Faculty website | Politics, citizenship education , history |
| Świat od nowa (7) | Spotify | University website; dedicated Facebook | political science, commenting on current events |

| | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| Przystanek #misjaUJ (62) | Spotify, Apple Podcast, radio.pl, Podtail | University website; dedicated Instagram | General science podcast also covering political science topics |
| Sprawy Wschodu (119) | Spotify, YouTube, Apple podcast, Podkasty, Muckrack | Dedicated Facebook, Instagram and TikTok | political science, commenting on current events |
| Podcast Wszechnica.org.pl – Nauka (471) | Spotify, YouTube, Apple Podcast, listennotes.com, Podchaster.com, Podcastaddict.com, Podtail.com, ivoox.com, Google podcast, Antennapod, Anytime player, Bullhorn, Castamatic, Castbox, Gpodder, Podcast index, Podvine, Radio public, Podcast guru, Listennotes, Podcast republic, Sonnet, Memento, Moon fm, Podfrend, steno.fm, Castroo, Vercast, Podhero, Curiocaster, Player fm, Podknife, Fountain, Pocket cast, Podstation, Goodpods, Podbean, Podverse | Dedicated Facebook and Twitter | General science podcast also covering political science topics |

Each of the podcasts tries to have a social media presence. Because they are university productions, the most common channel for announcing new episodes is the university or faculty websites or social media such as Facebook or Instagram. Only one podcast - Podcast Wszechnica.org.pl - Nauka has its dedicated website. This may be motivated by the wide audience base generated by the main university or faculty websites. Dedicated means of communication through social media such as Facebook or Instagram might not reach as large an audience as the university website, which has built an audience over the years. However, these types of profiles allow podcasts to reach a non-academic audience that is not familiar with university websites. Each of the podcasts is produced with the participation of experts, indicating a desire to provide quality, proven information and knowledge. The most common topics are those related to current events, which are commented on by experts, but also civic education or history. The largest number of episodes has been produced by the Wszechnica.org.pl - Nauka and Przystanek #misjaUJ, but it should be noted that these are podcasts that cover a much wider range of topics that go beyond political science. Through thematic diversity, these podcasts reach a much larger audience who are not only interested in political science but also in topics from other disciplines. The largest number of episodes in the field of political science has been released in the Sprawy Wschodu podcast. The platform on which all the analyzed podcasts are present is Spotify,

followed by YouTube.com. The Wszechnica.org.pl - Nauka podcast has the widest distribution, being present on 38 streaming platforms. This indicates that the creators of the podcast are focused on reaching the widest possible audience. Widespread distribution on streaming platforms that are not necessarily the most popular indicates that the creators want to reach out to all potential audiences. Meanwhile, the second most widely distributed podcast is the Migroścacja, which is present on 8 streaming platforms. All analyzed podcasts try to be as attractive to the listener as possible using visuals or sound (jingles). Despite the desire to reach as wide an audience as possible, none of the analyzed podcasts develops transcriptions for deaf people, making them not inclusive. This excludes a potential audience from experiencing the content.

Conclusion

The study showed that the market for political science podcasts in Poland produced by academic units is not well developed. And in addition, for the most part, those that are on the market do not make sufficient attempts to reach a wide audience. This is indicated primarily by the low number of streaming platforms on which they are present. And this is one of the two dominant factors that determine reaching a wide audience. The second is social media presence. The dominant channel of promotion is a university and faculty websites and Facebook profiles. Because such websites already have a certain audience this is a good direction in attracting podcast audiences. However, these types of channels that are associated with university units may reach mainly the academic community, rather than the non-academic community, which in this case is the target of the broadcast. Political science podcasts should take care to promote themselves in channels unrelated to the academic community, e.g. by working with elementary or secondary schools, which could share information about the podcast on their social media.

Expanding education channels into the digital space is particularly important in Poland because ruling elites seek to limit civic education. Since 2022, there has been a lively debate in Poland over the implementation of the subject Historia i Terazniejszość (ang. History and the Present) instead previous civic education program. Representatives of political scientists expressed their concerns about marginalization of civic education at elementary level (Stanowisko KNP PAN ws. wprowadzenia do szkół przedmiotu HiT, 2023). Podcasts in the field of political science provide an opportunity to reach students who have not absorbed knowledge in this area at school. They are one of the non-institutional channels that can be used to transfer knowledge, especially since it does not limit the listener in time and space. This is an opportunity to make young people aware of current events and provide basic knowledge of their rights in connection with political participation. It would be worthwhile to conduct a similar study on the example of the political science podcast market in

other countries to verify their level of involvement in this type of subject matter. The results could be compared to the state of democracy in a given country and verify whether there is a correlation between a given system and the state of civic education. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the popularity of remote learning to increase. Finally, it is worthwhile to obtain support from such entities as national (in Poland – Polish Political Science Association) or international political science associations such as IPSA or CEPSC.

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