Multimedia Journalism at ManMetUni

AJE conference, June 2022

Do pandemic teaching innovations have a place in post-pandemic pedagogy?

Dr Eleanor Shember-Critchley, Pete Murray

Multimedia Journalism at ManMetUni

- Audio technology has moved on fast - in less than a decade
- Students' expectations of us as tutors changed - probably irrevocably - under Covid Lockdown
- Students benefit from the flexibility and portability of podcasts (Sims, 2021)

Image: PM

What was the problem?

5.2 Whether considered leaving

To complement the above question assessing the choice to enrol at university, we have again included a question – first introduced in 2021 – which asked students whether they had considered leaving their course, with a follow-up as to the reasons behind this.
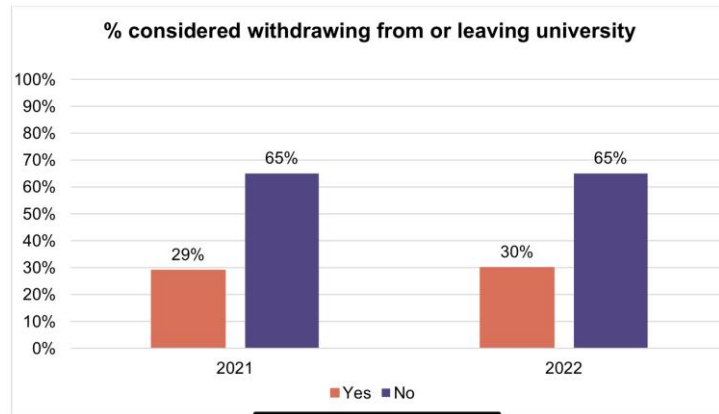
% considered withdrawing from or leaving university

	2021	2022
Yes	29%	30%
No	65%	65%

Image: AdvanceHE student experience survey, 2022

A show of hands...

how many have noticed continuing drop off in student attendance post-lockdown?
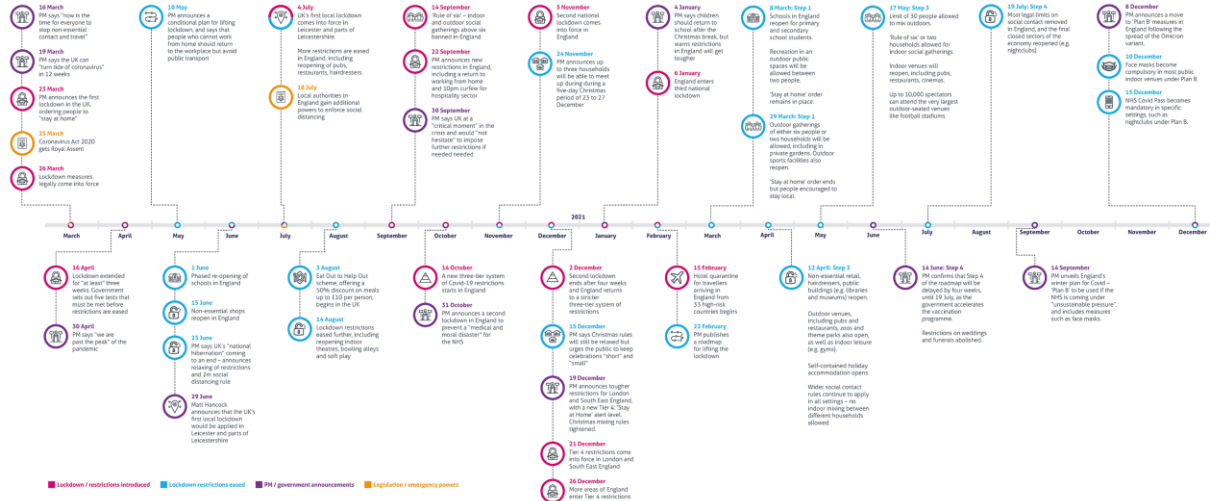how many regularly listen to podcasts?

how many regularly produce podcasts?

This is for you

Daddy, what did you do during the pandemic?

Timeline of UK government coronavirus lockdowns and measures, March 2020 to December 2021

Source: Institute for Government analysis.

You may not need reminding…

Inclusion - poor WiFi, lack of study space during lockdown

How did we use podcasts to solve it?

- One of our object-based podcasts was a walking tour of milestones in the history of radical journalism in Manchester, but in other cases the "objects" were embedded in a downloadable script which accompanied each week's "episode"

- Evidence that 18-25 is one of the highest growing audiences for podcasting (Edison Research, 2021; Newman and Gallo, 2020)

- We wanted to demonstrate multimedia journalism techniques in the creation (and consumption) of learning materials

How did we use podcasts to solve it?

- One of our object-based podcasts was a walking tour of milestones in the history of radical journalism in Manchester, but in other cases the "objects" were embedded in a downloadable script which accompanied each week's "episode"

- This particular podcast included geomapping, directions within the audio and on Word.doc

- One audio element of the podcast was taken from a short film about *The Guardian* archive in Manchester's John Rylands Library

How did we use podcasts to solve it?

- One of our object-based podcasts was a walking tour of milestones in the history of radical journalism in Manchester, but in other cases the "objects" were embedded in a downloadable script which accompanied each week's "episode"

- We followed *The Guardian* archive segment by interviewing Helen Pidd, the current North of England Editor

- Other segments included selections of historical writing on Manchester from Engels, Orwell

How did we use podcasts to solve it?

- Our big Object-based Podcast was a walking tour of milestones in the history of radical journalism in Manchester, but in other cases the "objects" were embedded in a downloadable script which accompanied each week's "episode"

- Interviewees included founder/editors of Manchester-based investigative site, The Meteor, and Joshi Herrmann of The Mill

- *"That's it! I've found my home. I'm staying right here!"* - one student's reaction during podcast walking tour

Method making - a typical podcast

- This example of a conversation between Eleanor and me in a podcast on coverage of social movements since 2010

- #Occupy, #Uncut, #MeToo, #BLM, Extinction Rebellion, equality and diversity in journalism

- Importance for students of links/pics etc on Word.doc enhanced script

Student responses

- "Very helpful - I struggle to focus on one thing so podcasts were more engaging and allowed me to potter around and get other things done too!"

- "They helped lay the groundwork on what we should study further in our own time"

- "I loved having the script as well so I could saved it and always have something to look back on"

- Saunders and Hutt (2015) found that multimedia technology in learning has the advantage that it can "be paused, replayed and reflected upon"

80% of survey respondents said they would find similar podcasts useful post-Covid

What did it look like?

- Graphics, stills, or links to video made text more engaging and varied

- Hyperlinks to further reading

- Much of the material could also be repurposed in formal, more traditional "lecture notes"

- Lonn and Teasley (2009) found that for podcasting to work in this way, "instructors must be willing to adjust their teaching styles and not merely lecture, but create... a variety of learning opportunities."

JMS March 2021

Fake news", fact-checking and verification

Making sense of media

In one way, some of the hysteria around fake news already feels like a bad dream – even if it was a five-year long bad dream chiefly conjured up by ex-president Donald Trump. It's certainly the case that Trump and his supporters used the chant of "fake news" as a distraction technique: hiding their own serial misinformation by undermining trust in established news outlets.

On the other hand, some of the toxic false rumours, conspiracies and downright lies which long-predated the Trump campaign and presidency such as anti-vaccination campaigns or the anti-semitic, racist tropes that hung around the fringes of his administration, are still circulating and are likely to continue to fester for years to come.

Those are a problem for wider society, but what we're looking at today is more specific: how misinformation and partisan hostility have contributed to the erosion of trust in mainstream journalism over the last five years or so.

It's also important at this stage to distinguish these concerns from other debates going on in political and civil society right now: from combating online extremism or grooming, to regulating the big media giants. So we'll park those questions for the moment.

I hope by now you've had the chance to look at the Ian Hislop documentary on the history of fake news, which you can get via the Box of Broadcasts link that Ellie's put on Moodle. You'll see there that this story's been around in one form or another for decades, and maybe even for centuries, depending on how you define it.

This little number, these slogans etched onto ancient Roman coins, dates back two and a half thousand years, to a dog whistle racist and misogynist campaign by the Emperor Octavian to smear his rival Mark Antony. It lives on to this day in the story of Antony and Cleopatra, which gives you an indication of just how tough it can be for people to shake off rumours and grudges.

What did it look like?

- Format developed from initial prescription of subtitled "video lectures"

- Viewing figures were low - students asked for something downloadable, to take with them

- Lonn and Teasley (2009) found that for podcasting to work in this way, "instructors must be willing to adjust their teaching styles and not merely lecture, but create... a variety of learning opportunities."

There have been others. More recently – well, forty years ago is more recent than 44BCE – three news giants including The Sunday Times and Newsweek had their reputations badly damaged when they were hoaxed into spending a fortune on what turned out to be entirely faked diaries supposedly written by Hitler.

But let's come closer to the present day.

Even in those two examples, you can see two different kinds of manipulation of information – one, by Octavian, for political gain, and the other, the creator of those fake diaries, for money. And for journalists as well as for the wider public, those continue to be probably the two dominant forces that have generated much of the concern over fake news in the here and now.

We saw examples of the first kind most notoriously deployed in the UK during the 2016 Brexit referendum campaign, from false stories about an influx of Turkish migrants preparing to flood into the UK, to the three-hundred-and-fifty million Pounds for the NHS on the side of a bus story. Around the same time, it emerged that a tiny group of teenagers in Macedonia was responsible for a host of fake stories placed on Facebook simply to make money for themselves by setting up what looked like real news websites and then conning people to click on stories there such as the Pope supports Donald Trump, or that Michelle Obama is actually a man.

What gave both these examples huge traction were the algorithms and bots which helped them circulate on social media at hitherto impossible speeds.

And so now part of the problem for journalists is that they face a dilemma: if someone's peddling lies, part of the journalist's job traditionally was either to check the facts, discard the falsehood, and not report it at all... or to put the story out with a rider or statement from another source correcting the false information. But what if that false story comes from the leader of a referendum campaign, or a head of state? What if it's deliberate misinformation, or malinformation? "The President says this or that," We know it's wrong, but he's the President. Do we still report it? If you think there's an easy answer to those questions, just remember that it took the US news media the best part of five years to reach a settled collective view on whether they'd state clearly and upfront when Donald Trump wasn't telling the truth – and even that was six months after he suggested people inject themselves with bleach to avoid getting Covid. And it doesn't end with Presidential quackery. Have a look at the accounts from ITV's news reporters covering the early stages of the pandemic - remember the one about how if you could hold your breath for 10 seconds, that meant you didn't have Covid! Or the reflections by ITV's Robert Peston on some of the early ministerial briefings - he was concerned that ministers pretty clearly didn't know what they were talking about, he said, but still felt required to report what they were saying.

And remember that it's not just White House or Westminster lobby correspondents who have to ask themselves these questions. Scrutinising sources and checking the accuracy of things is at the heart of all journalism, whatever the story, whatever level we're working at.

What did it look like?

- The podcasts frequently acted as "previews" for guest lecturers at webinars

- Podcasts gave us a way to start a conversation with the students, despite the yawning chasm of MS Teams calls

- Lonn and Teasley (2009) found that for podcasting to work in this way, "instructors must be willing to adjust their teaching styles and not merely lecture, but create... a variety of learning opportunities."

The dilemma has become sharper and harder to navigate in the last decade. And it's lead off in two directions: one fork goes to undermining trust in established news media, and the other leads to the growth of fact-checking to try to re-locate the importance of truth in public debate and re-establish the reputation of journalism itself.

Re-establishing trust looks like it will be a long-term project. You'll remember from this year's Digital News Report by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford University that overall trust in news in the UK has begun to climb back out of that five-year hole. You'll also remember overall that trust in news had dropped further and faster in Britain among people who identify as left-wing. Interestingly, that's almost the mirror image of what had happened in the United States, were trust in news was lower among Republican voters than Democrats.

We heard last week from Jennifer Jones at the Ardrossan Herald. She's talked previously about just how easy it can be to lose the trust of readers by making simple mistakes over the spelling of street names, or being taken in by what she calls" mad pet lady" stories about cats being blown up by fireworks.

We also know how, at a national level, high profile errors such as a BBC news producer using the wrong footage of Boris Johnson laying a Remembrance Sunday wreath at the Cenotaph on Whitehall, how that can undermine trust at a stroke. Another now notorious example came during the 2019 election campaign when the Yorkshire Post and the Mirror collaborated on a story which centred on an image of a young boy Jack Williment-Barr being left on a hospital floor in Leeds because of a lack of beds.

A slew of posts on Twitter and Facebook started by largely Conservative-supporting accounts tried to cast doubt on the story. Then a second row erupted after heavyweight political correspondents Tom Newton-Dunn from The Sun, the BBC's Laura Kuenssburg and Robert Peston at ITV tweeted that an aide of then health secretary Matt Hancock had been punched by a Labour supporter as he was leaving the hospital where the 4 year old was being treated. Tom Harwood, who was then at the right-wing Guido Fawkes website, continued to Tweet about the story, long after it had been discredited.

There was no punch. It wasn't true. But the damage had been done, and it wiped the story about the shortage of hospital beds off the headlines – a win for Conservatives in the heat of a fractious election campaign.

And at a global level, hoax stories such as 5G phone masts being to blame for Coronavirus allowed demonstrably false information to circulate as a conspiracy theory partly because some news organisations believed they had an editorial duty to report something people were talking about, even when it wasn't true.

What did it look like?

- Theoretical, ethical, social issues on this module required reference material which students could use in assessments

- Episodes normally lasted no more than 30 min - more complex issues broken into 2-parters

- Lonn and Teasley (2009) found that for podcasting to work in this way, "instructors must be willing to adjust their teaching styles and not merely lecture, but create... a variety of learning opportunities."

What did it look like?

- Two years in, we know the format works, and is popular with students

- Fast-changing stories and industry development means none of the scripts is "boiler plate", but changes to the template are less onerous now

- Lonn and Teasley (2009) found that for podcasting to work in this way, "instructors must be willing to adjust their teaching styles and not merely lecture, but create... a variety of learning opportunities."

We know now that it proved to be less of a game-changer than the founding managers had hoped. The biggest of them, Andrew Neil, quit his own studio in barely disguised disgust at how the station was performing. And the performance of another presenter - Boris Johnson's former press officer Guto Harri, who took a knee live on air during a debate about the England football squad - meant he got red-carded by the new boss and quickly quit altogether.

Some critics have warned that, just as the reputation of journalism had begun to recover as people look for trusted news sources in the pandemic, we need a right-wing disrupter like a hole in the head. One poll last year suggested that a lot fewer Brits wanted to watch this kind of stuff than were in favour of it. However, Ofcom's never really had to deal with a TV operation which could challenge its impartiality rules in a way that GB News threatened to.

Now, the Reuters Institute and the Society of Editors, Ofcom and the NUJ don't often agree on things, but they do appear to agree that journalism has two tools to build back better after these corrosive years of fake news, and the last two years of Coronavirus – in one hand, we've got accurate reporting, and in the other, professional impartiality.

That's it for now, please do click through on those links in the script – they'll really help you in your research. Thanks for listening, we'll see you in the week.

Journalism education

- Passing on knowledge

- Passing on skills - including listening

- Adding to the range of learning materials

- Giving students confidence to produce their own multimedia journalism in a range of formats, and introducing the idea of repurposing content across different platforms

Journalism educators - how can you do it?

Image: ESC

- If you make podcasts, you may know this already...

- If you've never made a podcast, this is how it's done...

- Allows us to update and extend audio production skills from the studio or newsroom to academic environment

Learning lessons from podcasts
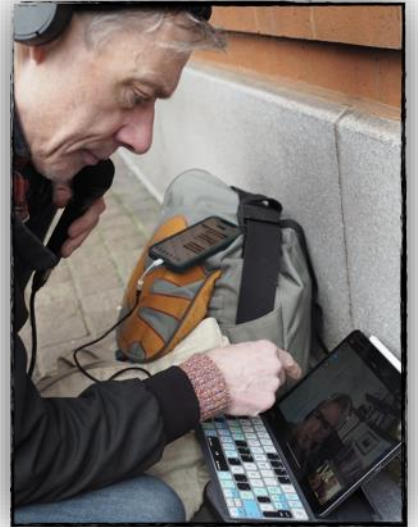
... in lockdown and later

Next steps #1 - tech

- Platforms such as (short-lived) Entale attempted to bring back enhanced podcasts

- Equally short-lived experimental [Strange Bird](#) podcast by The Guardian mobile innovation lab (Chalabi, 2018)

- Spotify's lyrics reader may become available for wider public use

- BBC and others (Octaviani and Baume, 2020) experimented with podcast tools including graphics and animation

Next steps #2 - pedagogy

- Rising cases of poor mental health, need to work, rising cost of living are among post-Covid pressures facing students (Neves and Brown, 2022)

- These podcasts have provided an equal platform for students to engage with learning materials

- They do not discriminate on whether a student attends a live sessions or not

- The podcasts exist beyond the timetable - students return to them

- Will podcasts of this kind help mitigate some of the worst impacts of students' circumstances?

References

Chalabi, M., 2018. Strange Bird | Culture | The Guardian. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/series/strange-bird>

EdisonResearch, 2021. The Infinite Dial 2021 UK - Edison Research. [online] Edison Research. Available at: <https://www.edisonresearch.com/the-infinite-dial-2021-uk/>

Grant Abt & Tim Barry (2007) The Quantitative Effect of Students Using Podcasts in a First Year Undergraduate Exercise Physiology Module, Bioscience Education, 10:1, 1-9, DOI: 10.3108/beej.10.8

Hartford, T., Alexander, R. and Baume, C., 2019. Even More or Less. [online] BBC Taster. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/taster/pilots/even-more-or-less> [Accessed 9 June 2022]

Institute for Government, 2022. Timeline of UK government coronavirus lockdowns and measures, March 2020 to December 2021. [image] Available at: <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/chart-images/timeline-coronavirus-lockdown-december-2021_0.png> [Accessed 9 June 2022]

Lonn, S, & Teasley, S.D., Podcasting in higher education: What are the implications for teaching and learning?, The Internet and Higher Education, Volume 12, Issue 2, 2009, Pages 88-92

Neves, J. and Brown, A., 2022. 2022 Student Academic Experience Survey - HEPI. [online] HEPI. Available at: <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2022/06/09/2022-student-academic-experience-survey/>

Octaviani, U. and Baume, C., 2020. A Remote Study on Enhanced Podcast Iteration. [ebook] London: BBC. Available at: <https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/rd/pubs/whp/whp-pdf-files/WHP389.pdf> [Accessed 9 June 2022].

Saunders, F. C., & Hutt, I. (2015). Enhancing large-class teaching: A systematic comparison of rich-media materials. Higher Education Research & Development, 34(6), 1233–1250

Sims, L., 2021. Effective Digital Learning: Transforming Traditional Learning Models to a Virtual World. Georgia; Apress

Any Questions?

Journalism and Media in Society podcasts

Dr Eleanor Shember-Critchley: former community radio producer, broadcaster and researcher; podcaster; fashion blogger

Image: PM

Journalism and Media in Society podcasts

AJE conference June 2022

Peter Murray - former radio news producer, outside broadcast specialist at the BBC, podcast producer, mobile journalism specialist
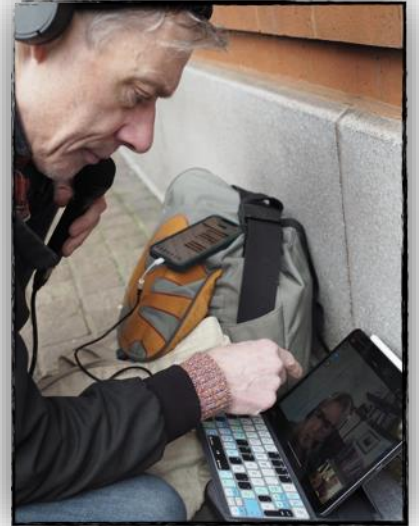
Image: ESC