



The rise of podcast marketing in India: Strategies and examples

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Abstract

Podcasting has emerged as one of the fastest-growing formats of digital media, evolving from a niche audio medium of the early 2000s into a mainstream channel of infotainment consumed by millions of listeners worldwide. This paper examines the rise of podcast marketing with particular reference to India, where platforms such as YouTube have made long-form, conversational video podcasts widely accessible. Adopting a structured narrative review methodology, the study synthesizes literature published between 2019 and 2024 across databases including Scopus, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and SSRN, organizing findings into thematic areas such as podcasts as a marketing tool, listener behavior, advertising effectiveness, and host credibility. The review reveals that trust, authenticity, and parasocial relationships between hosts and listeners are the dominant drivers of advertising outcomes, with host-read and content-congruent advertisements outperforming conventional pre-recorded formats in brand recall, favorability, and purchase intention. Supplementing the review, a qualitative examination of Indian YouTube podcasts illustrates how creators and brands leverage series formats, guest appearances, and audience engagement through comments to build loyal niche communities. The paper concludes that podcasting represents a low-cost, high-engagement marketing avenue that remains under-researched in the Indian context, and it identifies directions for future empirical work using listener data and brand-level engagement metrics.

Keywords: Podcast marketing, digital marketing, podcast advertising, parasocial relationships, host credibility, consumer behavior

Introduction

Storytelling is the most ancient form of imparting knowledge and instilling cultural values. It is the most timeless technique in the Indian landscape, a land known for its art, music, and culture. From mythological times to the Kingdom period and digital India, it has taken various shapes and forms. Social media platforms serve this purpose very well. Reels on Instagram, Shorts on YouTube, Podcasts on Spotify, and Channels on WhatsApp are the most convenient ways to find valuable information.

In context to YouTube, lengthy videos with conversating style can be defined as podcasts. It started back in the 2000s as an audio media player medium, but technological changes have given space to videocasts as well. YouTube channel has different categories like videos, shorts, playlists, and has an option for podcast nowadays. Individual or series with the name is generally uploaded with a catchy thumbnail to attract new listeners, and the average length is about 45 minutes to an hour, during which different categories are discussed. People with diverse interests follow such things for both information and entertainment. Hence, podcasts are considered a medium of infotainment.

Podcasts help promote not only products or brands but also people. The advertising model follows three stages of purchase action: cognition, affection, and behavior. Podcasters, as new, emerging trusted influencers with a loyal community (Brinson & Lemon, 2023) ^[5], target the affectionate stage of determining their likes and interests, through which like-minded listeners can be categorized into a niche market. Podcasters sharing their personal experiences or stories in surrounding, not only engage listeners but also make them dependable influencers.

Personality, credibility, and authenticity develop a parasocial relationship between podcasters and their listeners, which enables the brand to capitalize on trust in

the audience and advertise directly or indirectly. Though the history of podcasting dates back to the 2000s, it has now gained much popularity and emerged as an uncovered aspect and opportunity for creators, brands, marketers, and even audiences in different ways.

Podcasts, being a part of digital marketing strategy, have elements in the implementation same as other marketing strategies, starting from defining the target audience, which aligned with companies' values and backgrounds. It has different themes and formats of content like interviews, solocast, audiocast, videocast, and storytelling so it could be prioritized according to the listener's preferences of likes and interests. Like other social media platforms, it requires a particular calendar so that episodes can be uploaded frequently and the type of content in that frequency can be monitored. This also manages the content and streamlines the publishing not only on one channel but through cross channels as it helps in message optimization and promotion of podcaster and brand as well. Though there are no defined techniques to measure the engagement and the impact but tracking and analyzing results can help to enhance the content and increase social presence accordingly.

Review Methodology

This study adopts a structured narrative review approach to examine existing literature on podcast marketing, with particular emphasis on its relevance in the Indian context. The purpose of this methodology is to synthesise prior research findings, identify emerging themes, and highlight gaps for future investigation.

Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across academic databases including Google Scholar, Scopus, ResearchGate, and SSRN. The search was carried out using

a combination of keywords, including “podcast marketing,” “podcast advertising,” “digital marketing,” “consumer behavior in podcasts,” and “parasocial relationships in media.” Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to refine the search results and ensure relevance.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To maintain the quality and relevance of the review, the following criteria were applied:

Inclusion Criteria

- Studies published between 2019 and 2024
- Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and credible working papers
- Studies focusing on podcasting, digital marketing, advertising effectiveness, and consumer behavior
- Research addressing trust, engagement, and parasocial relationships in media contexts

Exclusion Criteria

- Non-academic sources such as blogs and opinion articles (unless used for contextual understanding)
- Studies not available in English
- Research unrelated to marketing or consumer behavior aspects of podcasting

Data Selection and Analysis

Relevant studies were screened based on titles, abstracts, and full-text reviews. Selected articles were then categorized into thematic areas such as podcast as a marketing tool, listener behavior, advertising effectiveness, and host credibility. A qualitative synthesis approach was employed to analyze patterns, similarities, and contradictions across studies.

Limitations of the Review

This review is limited by its reliance on secondary data and the availability of existing literature. Additionally, the study primarily focuses on global research, with relatively limited empirical studies available specifically in the Indian context. Therefore, findings should be interpreted with consideration of these constraints.

Review of Literature

Dhiman (2023) ^[7] defined a podcast as an emerging digital marketing tool that helps increase brand awareness and engagement by sharing information with a targeted audience. Competitive advantage could be taken discussing the company's expertise and product relevancy. People see them as experts and leaders positioning themselves by shooting a podcast. Unlike traditional advertisements, the product can be promoted through demonstration or case studies, or storytelling. Though discoverability for a new channel and getting revenue, donations, or sponsorships is not very handy, technical errors sometimes irritate listeners, resulting in losing audience and brand trust in podcasters. Metadata, data analytics, promotional strategies, and appealing content can be used as versatile tools to achieve marketing goals.

This study has been done through 1700 responses from podcast listeners via Facebook to determine the attitude towards advertising and consumer action. It also signifies the impact of the host's perceived relationship with listeners and host-read advertisement effectiveness. The author was

able to find that trust and action are driven in host-read ads comparatively. Also positive attitude and knowledge of listeners are directly proportional to their behavioral action. This research study was able to fill the gap in studies by determining attitudes towards podcast advertising and also correlating consumer actions to it (Moe, 2023) ^[13].

A study revealed that the most consumed theme of podcasts is comedy, followed by cultural values and music, entertainment, and politics. A person listens to 4–6 podcasts weekly with the purpose of entertainment followed by learning new things, which either can be recommended by any social media platform or their friends or family. 41% of people tend to buy a product, and 72.4% almost listen to ads if they align with their likes and interests. This study fills the gap between identifying the listeners' behavior, their preference, and their attitudes regarding podcasts and their advertising (Vilceanu, Johnson, and Burns, 2021) ^[15].

Brinson and Lemon (2023) ^[5] explored authenticity and credibility as characteristics of podcast hosts, which can develop parasocial relationships with the audience and enable brand recall. A parasocial relationship refers to an imagined social bond that develops between the host and listeners of the show, which often starts to treat them as relatable partners. The author was conclusive of the evidence that podcaster familiarity is perceived as more trustworthy and credible. When hosts use a personal style with clear and straightforward conversation, it is more authentic to listeners. Demonstrating marketing potential for advertisers, these factors (trust, authenticity, and credibility) cannot be achieved without developing strong parasocial relationships. It plays a vital role in shaping advertising outcomes.

One of the studies done with generation Z listeners in China provides insight into shaping consumer behavior through auditory engagement. China as a podcast economy entered into a growth phase, which traced the title of ‘Year of Chinese podcasts’ in 2020 with boom of ‘ear economy’. The study focuses on the impact of sensory stimulation and perceived value on purchase action. Satisfaction and trust in content positively impact purchase intention, including perceptions of product quality and appeal. L&S model was used to analyze the impact on attitude and behavior of five sensory stimulation and overall evaluation and utility derived from the product. The study also revealed that purchase behaviour is not determined by a sense of belonging, novelty, or happiness or discomfort. To that extent, satisfaction and auditory stimulation are the only factors that determine purchase (Ge, 2023) ^[1].

Bernal and Timur (2024) ^[4] used a theory of planned behavior to explore subjective norms, behavior, and trust of podcast hosts to redeem promotional codes, and trust was found as a dominant factor, followed by parasocial relationship consistent with other research studies as well. Along with a positive attitude, acceptance of behavior significantly influenced the intention, leaving behavioral control with no significant impact. This positive attitude comes from the perceived value of codes and integrity of the host. The trust factor in this study is used as a mediator, which can be earned by consistent content that is authentic and hosts to build transparency.

Another study used a group of college students identified as potential listeners due to their diverse interest and curiosity about various subjects, and also they generally develop a strong sense of connection with the like-minded people.

This study explored the impact of source credibility. Taking traces of Aristotle's research, there are three dimensions of communication: a source, a listener, and the content itself. It believes a credible source not just delivers content but gets the audience cognitively and emotionally connected with the host and content. This research has studied uncovered aspects of host gender, episode length, podcast genre, and host knowledge and authenticity on brand recall, which was proved in a direct proportionate to it. It also acknowledged the importance of words as podcasts are more of an auditory experience, unlike TV or other visual mediums of advertising. Hence, advertisers must choose hosts who not only align with their brands but can say it informatively and emotionally to provide knowledge about the product and simultaneously foster a change in brand attribute and purchase intention through engagement and brand recall (Fischer, 2019)^[9].

Grett and Jakobs (2021)^[11] used the theory of acceptance with technological use to explore how podcast is perceived and behavioral changes. The survey was conducted with passionate listeners online, and data was analyzed using structural equation modeling. Entertainment was identified as a major reason, followed by its convenience and accessible features. Unlike other research, social media was found to have a negative impact because of the personal lifestyle of the host, distractions, and other people's reviews as well. Also, there was no difference seen between podcast consumption based on subscription. Every user has their preference, not only of style, format, and theme but also the subscription model. As long as podcasts offer personalized content aligned with their interest, the monetary aspect does not matter, as per the study done. Marketers should analyze host social media and design campaigns carefully so that negative impacts can be timely reduced.

Podcasts provide an auditory experience where content plays a crucial role in enhancing connectivity and engagement. This research explored the marketing of content to check with the attitude of listeners towards advertisement and brand perception. Content marketing enhances brand personality and consumer sentiments. The study included 230 podcast listeners, with 83% of them listening to podcasts more than an hour per day, making them correct respondents to study about deep reflection. Strong trust and connectivity were found in the content of conversational style, whereas thematic content like storytelling appeals to emotional resonance; however, both positively impact brand perception and favorability. The author suggested using more immersive and reflective content with the use of thematic formats to increase emotional engagement (Yin, 2024)^[16].

Ettmuller (2021)^[8] studied about congruency between advertisements that are either embedded or have a particular time in podcast and brand advertised. Participants of the study were German podcast listeners, and the author was an intern at a marketing company where selection of podcasts and strategies to integrate brands within were the tasks assigned, making this study more authentic in research. Congruency does not interrupt listeners and provoke them to skip ads like in other media forms. If it's adequately aligned, the listeners will assume it is a part of the podcast, and hence, the brand can leave a strong impression. Both thematic and image ads that were congruent to podcast themes have a positive impact on brand recall and recognition in comparison to incongruent ads.

Schofield (2023)^[14] revealed how podcasting has influenced the choices of entertainment of Millennials. Their ad-avoidance behavior and ad-saturation provoke brands to do more personalized, tailored, authentic, and relatable content-rich yet interactive and engaging podcasts to drive brand loyalty. Authors suggested the use of blockchain technology and AI-driven personalization to enhance advertising in podcasting medium. Advertisements need to be more creative, engaging, and interest-specific to maintain listeners throughout the show. Effectiveness and optimization could be gained through programmatic advertising. The impact of ads can be measured further by behavioral engagement (like, comments and shares), website traffic, subscription rate, interaction on other social sites, exploring other products of the brand, and holistic engagement.

Podcast

Podcasts are a source of infotainment, a blend of information and entertainment. Podcasts, as compared to other media platforms, provide listeners a sense of online forum or community of shared beliefs. Accessibility and convenience, and the diversity of content available make millions of people its listeners.

Apple's media player, iPod, and broadcasting done through radio combined to make word podcasting, which meant connecting people through any audio media players, which is more accessible and intimate. "Podcast" was first used in New York's Port American Dictionary of English in year 2005 and declared as word of the year by NOAD editors. The rise of smartphones and busy lifestyles has given a boost to podcasting. People with different interests, such as entertainment, sports, spirituality, politics, music, media business, education, comedy, and dramedy, make different styles and formats of podcast listeners.

Podcasts were more focused on audio file content, but due to advancement in technologies, they now include video podcasts, same accessible and convenient as the former. Podcast growth through qualitative content and cross-channel promotions (Lehtonen, 2024)^[12]. Synchronization of various digital media platforms not only enhances the perceived relationship with listeners but also ensures audience engagement.

Effective podcast leverage refined content marketing strategies as consumers once got to used to their favorite podcast according to their needs, likes, and preferences. They seek content proactively, which helps to improve brand image rather than directly driving sales growth. The podcast is more about like-mindedness, common shared belief, or companionship rather than geographical location or proximity.

The podcast is defined as a theater-of-mind approach by Vilceanu *et al.* (2021)^[15] where the audience mentally engages with hosting content that combines information and entertainment. The podcast is not seen as a separate activity; rather, it can be combined with any routine task, mostly driving, exercising, gymming, etc. So it is referred to as snack-like content (Vilceanu *et al.*, 2021)^[15].

An average podcast's duration is 45 minutes, according to various research reports. This long period makes the audience passionate listeners of a particular topic, which makes podcasters do in-depth research and planning before recording, and brands, through engagement, can identify their new leads.

The podcast genre plays a significant role in determining buying actions. History-based podcast produces fewer results than comedy and personal enriched podcasts because the latter is more positive about advertisement. Audience consider their favorite podcaster as an authentic influencer and prefer ads created by them. Conversational nature enables host and guest to share experience and invite ideas from listeners in chat box.

According to Edison research report published in 2020, podcasts were the most identified way for brands to reach targeted audience. Listeners who skip ads on other platforms through premium subscriptions are more likely to enjoy ads embedded in podcasts for an uninterrupted, enjoyable experience. Nielsen also reported that supplied ads that are pre-recorded are kind of forced and not preferred as compared to podcast host-read ads because it is perceived as more authentic.

Podcast hosts can be specified as a mediating link between celebrities and guests and their followers here. Digital celebrities are often referred to as influencers who emerge as opinion leader because they are closely connected with their followers through comments, messages, giveaways, etc. They help in changing brand-related attitudes and behavior (Burnashea and Gusuh, 2020). The credibility of podcast hosts is measured within three contexts of knowledge, expertise, and attractiveness, with expertise as the strongest influencer (Fischer, 2019)^[9] and attractiveness as not a key contributor.

As per the 2024 Statistical Report, the number of podcast listeners will increase to 719 million by 2029 from 411 million in 2023^[13]. Diversified content keeps the listeners engaged and makes podcasts more enjoyable. Interviewing guests or experts is the most common format in podcasting (Yin, 2024)^[16]. This provides creators and marketers the opportunity to do well-equipped searches and to use podcasts as prime advertisers.

The podcast is a mix of traditional media, doing auditory messages with digital platform that are more conveniently accessible on demand. Celaya claimed podcasts to be in the growth phase among product life cycles because many people started consuming them, and marketers also have identified this as a new opportunity or platform to do marketing because of increased users and optimal cost.

Integrating augmented reality and virtual reality for a better experience in podcasting is the new segment to study. Incorporating polls, quizzes, Q&A, and a do's and don'ts list develops a sense of belongingness and involvement in listeners. The conclusion of podcast could also be repurposed into blogs, vlogs, or videos.

Podcast Marketing

Podcasting is a diverse, intimating form of digital media (Dhiman, 2023)^[7]. Though it caters to specific interests but it builds a loyal fanbase which could be used as a niche market to the company as well. Podcasts focused on marketing trends and interviews with experts position the company as a thought leader. Podcast marketing has a higher conversion rate because listeners are more likely to enjoy ads than skip them.

Listeners approved of more advertising the more they listened to it (Moe, 2023)^[13] as they believe that these ads are necessary to maintain the consistent quality of their favorable podcasts. Gender and age are less important as brands should focus more on the number and format of

podcasts people regularly listen to, which better targets their potential customer (Moe, 2023)^[13].

It enhances brand recognition and generates leads indirectly. Storytelling on live ads embedded in podcasts narrated by hosts is more impactful in brand recall than recorded advertisements. Podcasts address consumers' basic factors of purchasing decisions in a creative format.

Nielsen states that while listening, when exposed to brand or product details, listeners are more likely to visit the website thereafter out of curiosity. Guest appearances and influencer collaboration, which enhance brand loyalty and recognition, are the usage served by podcast. Analyzing the listener behavior and demographics, a business should modify their marketing strategies. This data-driven decision-making will prove cost-effective and authentic and will enable the industry to get an edge over the competition and stay relevant.

Podcasts are used as an impactful communication tool that can hold a brand voice, which is more of an oral presentation of companies' messages or expertise to their consumers and market. Unlike traditional advertising, podcasts offer the ability to specialize in target ads. Advertising through mobile is discussed as complementary to podcasting, which caters to users' specific interests and enables them to transact directly with advertisers.

Increased online fraud and paid reviews do not target customers. Podcasters having a strong parasocial relationship can serve better here, positively influencing behavioral actions (Brinson & Lemon, 2023)^[5]. Choosing a podcaster for marketing that if it's a good fit includes the process starting with the alignment of brand and host value, in-depth research on his sponsorships, and analyzing his different social media channels. This three-step process resembles with influencer selection process (Childers, Lemon and Hoy, 2019).

Promotional codes emerged as a key strategy for advertisers to drive engagement. This getaway offers discount subscriptions for certain times and builds a parasocial relationship and transparency among host and listeners. Advertising capitalizes on trust between the host and listeners (Bernal & Timur, 2024)^[4].

Since this media offers an audio experience, advertising messages should be enticing and successfully connected. Although well-defined and impassioned visuals can help generate memories, the host must also maintain the caliber of the content and conversational style.

There can be two forms of advertising: one is brand placements (Fischer, 2019)^[9], where the ad becomes part of content to most commonly referred to as indirect marketing, and one is embedded commercials (Fischer, 2019)^[9], where ads are played in traditional style at certain points in time frame within podcast. Advertisements could be integrated within content provided it should be aligned with the theme for an uninterrupted listening experience like natural conversation (Yin, 2024)^[16].

The podcast is a low-cost, convenient medium to deliver valuable information to passionate listeners, focusing more on content that offers unique advantages to brands, unlike traditional media forms. From attracting particular segments to establishing long-term relationships with loyal customers. Fostering critical thinking can improve the brand's connectivity with listeners. Exposure to other platforms on social media enhances further reach, maximizing the engagement rate. Purchase links, promo codes, scratch-and-

reward mechanics, etc., can be integrated into podcast promotion, benefiting hosts and brands simultaneously.

Scope of the Study

Due to its growing potential, podcast could be used as a marketing tool. However, not enough research has been done on the topic, particularly in India. Despite its tremendous growth, this component of digital marketing is still unknown. The author dwells on providing examples of YouTube podcasts through searching and listening efficiently. Among social media platforms, Instagram and YouTube are the most used, according to Statista (2023)^[1]. Podcasts are lengthy videos; hence, they are supported only on the YouTube platform.

Examining videos thoroughly, the author significantly presents podcasting as an emerging tool to do marketing. Analyzing comments concluded that people do prefer series with names and wait proactively. Raising questions, demanding topics, giving suggestions, and conversating themselves were the most found comments. A growing number of likes and subscriptions indicates that the podcast is a popular topic. The study's investigation of podcasts has shed light on how to use them as a marketing tool without explicitly discussing advertising.

Examples

The author went through different categories of podcasts uploaded on YouTube by Indian podcasters; some of them are used in the study to present the significance of this subject:

Limitations and Future Directions

CEOs, managers, and experts talking about their brands and products and benefits derived, provokes people to know better and gain more related information. These listeners and commenters could be directly connected for the raised query. A large market share, as well as brand recall and recognition, can result from consistent actions and follow-up. This is a suitable platform for creators who wish to experiment and become influential through their discourse. The research component can be handled by social media marketing teams, who can also link specialists and create campaigns. Listeners can have a great opportunity to interact through comments, inquiry box, etc. This altogether makes podcast as most demanding platform through which information could be efficiently channelized.

The author provided the YouTube podcasts as samples for preliminary study after doing a qualitative analysis of them. Further studies could be conducted using listeners' data to gain insight into the impact of marketing through podcasts. Brands that have done any podcasts could be researched for studying the engagement level. Because of a lack of study findings, the subject is open to additional investigation in all fields.

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