

The media and the role of new subcultures in the digital revolution – the influence of podcasts on youth movements and collective ideas

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Abstract. The study aimed to identify the channels and means through which podcasts influence the formation of youth subcultures, social movements, and collective meanings in the digital media environment. The study was based on comparative analysis, conceptual analysis of scholarly literature, functional analysis, and case analysis of podcast projects. It was established that podcasts occupy an intermediate position between traditional media and social platforms. According to recent data, 83% of young people aged 16-24 are regular podcast listeners, while 73% of the America population aged 12+ have consumed podcasts at least once. The regularity of audio content consumption and personalised recommendation mechanisms contribute to the emergence of stable digital communities. Political podcasts have transformed into an environment for civic mobilisation: Pod Save America mobilised hundreds of thousands of volunteer actions during the 2020-2024 election campaigns. The political podcast The Rest Is Politics gathered 15,000-20,000 spectators at a live event in London, demonstrating the transition of audio content into offline communities. Environmentally oriented podcasts combine educational functions with climate activism; educational podcasts perform informal civic socialisation. The functions of podcasts in the youth environment are identified, each accompanied by both positive outcomes and potential risks. Podcasts have become an independent socio-cultural space within which new models of collective identity, digital solidarity, and civic activity of young people are being formed. The influence was determined not only by content but also by the combination of parasocial interaction, algorithmic personalisation, and network self-organisation, creating prerequisites for new subcultural formations in the digital age. The results can be used by media communications and civic education specialists to develop interaction strategies with youth communities

Keywords: algorithmic personalisation; civic participation; feedback; parasocial relationships; political mobilisation; worldview orientation

INTRODUCTION

During the 2010s-2020s, the digital revolution transformed information production and consumption. Social platforms, streaming services, and digital technologies enabled young people to shape their values, behavioural patterns, and collective identities outside traditional institutions. Podcasts emerged as a dynamic segment of the digital media environment, combining personalised communication, long-form narrative, and stable audience communities. Unlike short social media formats, podcasts allow in-depth discussion of politics, civic participation, social justice, environmental activism, and cultural identity. Consequently, podcasting has transformed from a media tool into a space for constructing new subcultures with shared narratives, symbolic codes, and models of social

interaction. Thus, studying the role of podcasts in forming youth movements and collective ideas is relevant, as young people are active participants in digital communication and agents of cultural transformation.

A contribution to understanding the mechanisms of podcast influence on audiences was made by K.T. Yorganci & L. McMurtry (2024). The researcher established that the perception of host authenticity is formed through a set of characteristics, among which immediacy, spontaneity, similarity to the audience, and the demonstration of one's own imperfections are significant. The obtained results showed that it was precisely these features that contributed to the emergence of parasocial relationships that go beyond ordinary media consumption and affect listeners' beliefs,

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behavioural attitudes, and consumer practices. The issue of podcasting as a tool of digital activism was explored by Z. Zokaei (2024). The researcher demonstrated that podcasts can perform a broader function than disseminating information or presenting alternative views. Using the Price of Secrecy project as an example, it was shown that audio communication can create a space for reflecting on social traumas and the experiences of marginalised groups. The educational potential of podcasts was highlighted by U.Y. Aulia & L. Oktaviani (2024). The authors concluded that the use of podcasts in the educational environment contributed to increasing the level of civic engagement among university students. The research results demonstrated the development of critical thinking, the ability to reflect, and a readiness to discuss social issues. At the same time, it was established that podcasts allow overcoming the limitations of traditional educational practices due to their interactivity and greater proximity to the everyday information environment of young people.

A line of research examined digital youth movements and climate activism. J. Aiello & E. Di Martino (2024) found that podcasts effectively form collective identity within youth environmental communities. An analysis of Generation Climate Europe showed that digital communications disseminate environmental information and create a sense of belonging to a transnational movement, combining expertise, mobilisation potential, and shared values. R. Barbarino *et al.* (2022) explored podcasting's social integration potential, finding that collaborative podcast creation strengthens intercultural dialogue and involves diverse social groups in local community discussions. Podcasts thus empower communication participants and create new forms of civic participation. The digital storytelling environment facilitates the inclusion of traditionally underrepresented voices in public discourse. Podcasts as an environment for forming collective identities were analysed by J. Donison (2023), who showed that podcast platforms enable complex, multidimensional models of group belonging, creating public spaces where community members offer different interpretations of their social experience. This allows podcasts to overcome simplified identity representation and support intragroup diversity. Similar tendencies were identified by A. Wilbur *et al.* (2022), who examined podcasts as a tool for building solidarity around migration. The audio format enables co-production of meanings and public pedagogy, allowing participants to tell their stories while forming mutual understanding and social support. The problem of collective action in the digital environment was investigated by T. Moldovan *et al.* (2025). Through analysis of Black Lives Matter discussions, they established that podcasts articulate calls to action, form participation intentions, and discuss civic outcomes. Collective action in podcasts is accompanied by specific emotional patterns where positive forms of mobilisation dominate alongside protest sentiments, positioning podcasting as a separate channel for supporting and reproducing civic activity.

Despite the body of research, the understanding of the role of podcasts as an environment for the formation of new youth subcultures, within which the mechanisms of collective identification, digital activism, civic participation, and the dissemination of shared socio-cultural narratives are combined, remains insufficiently systematised. The aim of the study was to determine the role of podcasts in the formation of new youth subcultures, movements, and collective ideas in the context of the digital revolution. To achieve this aim, the study intended to investigate the transformation of podcasts from a digital content format into an environment for the formation of subcultural communities; to characterise the mechanisms of podcast influence on the construction of collective identity, civic activity, and youth movements; and to identify the socio-cultural opportunities and risks associated with the spread of podcast communities in the digital environment.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is defined as qualitative and interdisciplinary, employing comparative, content-analytical, and case-oriented approaches, aimed at identifying the specificities of podcast functioning as an environment for the formation of youth subcultures in the digital era. The chronological boundaries of the study covered the period from 2020 to May 2025, which is determined by the period of the most intensive growth of podcast audiences, the development of platforms such as Spotify, Apple Podcasts, YouTube Podcasts, TikTok, as well as the emergence of new forms of youth online communities functioning around audio content. The theoretical and methodological foundation of the study comprised the concepts of digital subcultures and network communities (Oksanen *et al.*, 2024), parasocial interaction (Bottomley, 2024; Scherer & Cohen, 2025), algorithmic content personalisation (Liu *et al.*, 2025), and mediated formation of collective identity (Tripathi, 2024). To characterise the transformation of youth media consumption, data from the Reuters Institute presented in the Digital News Report 2024 (Newman *et al.*, 2024) were used, as well as statistical materials from Ofcom (2024) regarding changes in the media consumption structure of young users in Great Britain. These sources were selected due to their regularity, international coverage, and specialisation in monitoring digital media practices. Their use made it possible to trace the dynamics of the youth audience's transition from traditional media to digital platforms and to determine the place of podcasts in the structure of information consumption. To analyse the scale of podcasting penetration, statistical materials from Edison Research (2025a; 2025b) were used, in particular The Infinite Dial and The Gen Z Audio Report. Additionally, data from Spotify (2025) regarding the audio content consumption of Generation Z were used. At the stage of processing statistical materials, the method of secondary data analysis was applied, which made it possible to summarise the results of previous research and identify trends in the development of the podcast market without conducting one's own large-scale survey.

During the development of a comparative characteristic of traditional media, social networks, and podcasts, the method of structural-comparative analysis was used. The comparison was carried out according to the following criteria: type of communication, content control mechanism, average duration of contact with a message, level of audience engagement, features of group identity formation, mechanisms of influence on young people, potential for subculture formation, features of youth consumption, and typical outcomes for the subcultural environment. The material basis for this comparison was data from Edison Research (2023), K.T. Yorganci & L. McMurtry (2024), H. Scherer & E.L. Cohen (2025), B. Litterer *et al.* (2025), N. Newman *et al.* (2024). The application of these criteria made it possible to assess not the individual technical characteristics of media but their potential for creating stable youth communities and maintaining group identity. The theoretical understanding of the transformation of youth subcultures was carried out using the method of conceptual analysis of scholarly literature. Within this stage, research devoted to digital subcultures and network forms of social interaction (Ok-sanen *et al.*, 2024), online communities (Tripathi, 2024), and mechanisms of identity formation in the digital environment (Pérez-Torres, 2024) was processed. The method of conceptual analysis was used to clarify the categorical apparatus of the study and to determine the characteristics of youth associations that distinguish them from the subcultures of the industrial era.

Additionally, a case analysis of podcast projects was applied, selected according to the principle of thematic representativeness and the presence of documented influence on youth digital communities. The sample included those podcasts around which the formation of stable audience communities, the development of off-platform interaction, or the involvement of listeners in social activities were recorded. For the analysis of political subcultures, the podcasts Pod Save America (Crooked Media, n.d.) and The Rest Is Politics (Goalhanger, n.d.) were selected, as both projects demonstrate the transformation of audio content into stable political communities. The research materials included The Big Issue (2024). To study the influence of podcasts on youth climate activism, A Matter of Degrees (n.d.) was selected, as this project combines expert analysis of environmental problems with practices of public mobilisation and is oriented towards young participants of environmental movements. Materials from the University of Dayton (2023) were used for the analysis. The study of educational and civic subcultures was conducted using the example of the podcast Civics 101, which was included in the sample as a specialised project in the field of civic education and the popularisation of democratic institutions. To study participatory digital subcultures, the true crime podcasts The Vanished was selected, as this case made it possible to trace the transition from individual content consumption to the collective activity of participants in a digital community.

During the construction of the second analytical matrix, the method of functional analysis was used. The assessment was carried out according to the following criteria: formation of collective identity, socialisation function, educational function, communicative function, mobilisation function, culture-creating function, function of representation of marginalised groups, function of emotional support, function of alternative media production, function of disseminating expert knowledge, algorithmic function, and function of digital experience archiving. For each criterion, potential positive effects and possible risks were analysed simultaneously. The identification of positive impacts and potential risks for each sociocultural function of podcasts was informed by a thematic synthesis of empirical and analytical insights from A. Ismayilova (2020), P. Bártová (2022), E. Bootle (2024), S. Witmer & D. Dowling (2024), H. Scherer & E. Cohen (2025), and N. Liu *et al.* (2025). The interpretation of the obtained results was based on a combination of socio-cultural, communicative, and network approaches. The socio-cultural approach was used to analyse the formation of collective values and symbolic systems within podcast communities. The communicative approach made it possible to consider podcasts as an environment for the production and dissemination of narratives. The network approach was applied to identify interconnections between digital platforms, recommendation algorithms, and processes of self-organisation of youth communities.

RESULTS

Podcasts as a media space for the formation of youth subcultures in the digital era

The digital revolution has changed not only the technological means of accessing information but also the very logic of media consumption. Whereas the communication model was based on the dominance of television, the printed press, and radio broadcasting, by the early 2020s the centre of gravity had gradually shifted to digital platforms that provide personalised, mobile, and interactive access to content. These processes were particularly noticeable among the youth audience, for whom the digital environment has become the main space for socialisation, information acquisition, and the formation of cultural practices. Data from the Reuters Institute (Newman *et al.*, 2024) showed that the interaction of young users with information content takes place through digital platforms, primarily video services and social networks. The report emphasises the formation of the so-called “platform reset”, whereby traditional news media lose their monopoly on the production and dissemination of information because digital platforms, influencers, and independent content creators become intermediaries. At the same time, a reduction in the audience of traditional communication channels is observed. In 2023, only 48% of young people aged 16-24 watched linear television weekly, whereas in 2018 this figure stood at 76%. Young users choose YouTube, TikTok, that provide the opportunity to independently shape their own information agenda (Davies, 2024).

Audio content occupies a significant place in the structure of media consumption. Unlike video, it does not require constant visual attention and can be integrated into daily activities: studying, moving around the city, playing sports, or performing household chores. It is precisely this functional flexibility that has become one of the reasons for the rapid spread of podcasts among young users, with 83% being regular podcast listeners. Furthermore, the audience demonstrates high loyalty to selected programmes: almost three-quarters of listeners regularly return to a small number of podcasts, forming stable information communities around specific authors and topics (Ofcom, 2024). The spread of podcasts reflects a broader trend of transition from mass broadcasting to individualised content consumption. Whereas traditional media offered audiences a unified information product, podcasting functions on the principle of thematic segmentation. Users choose content according to their own interests, professional needs, political beliefs, or cultural preferences. As a result, digital audiences emerge that are united not by territorial affiliation but by shared interests and value systems.

Statistical data indicate a steady increase in the popularity of podcasts. According to the results of the Edison Research (2025a) study “The Infinite Dial 2025”, 73% of the US population aged 12 and over had consumed a podcast in audio or video format at least once, and 55% had done so within the last month. All indicators are the highest for the entire observation period. At the same time, more than half of respondents are already getting

acquainted with podcasts through video format, which demonstrates the gradual blurring of boundaries between audio and video communication. A specific feature of podcasting development has been its inclusion in the broader ecosystem of digital platforms. Podcasts no longer exist exclusively within specialised applications. A significant part of the audience finds and consumes them through YouTube, Spotify, TikTok. Such convergence of platforms changes the mechanisms of youth community formation. Whereas social networks provide rapid dissemination of information and short communication cycles, podcasts create conditions for long-term and in-depth discussion of complex topics. It is precisely this characteristic that contributes to the emergence of stable interpretive communities whose members regularly interact with a particular author or thematic direction. Unlike short messages on TikTok or Instagram, a podcast provides the opportunity for a detailed presentation of arguments, which strengthens its influence on the formation of young people’s worldview orientations.

The growing role of podcasts is also associated with a change in the young generation’s attitude towards the authority of information sources. Young users turn to personalised sources of communication, where the author acts not only as a content producer but also as an intermediary between the information environment and the audience. The factors of podcast popularity among the youth audience and their comparison with other means of obtaining information are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparative characteristics of traditional media, social networks, and podcasts in communication with young people

Criterion	Traditional media	Social media	Podcasts
Communication type	One-way transmission of information from editorial teams to audiences	Multidirectional interaction among users and content creators	Predominantly one-way communication accompanied by the development of parasocial relationships and thematic communities
Content control mechanism	Professional editorial selection and journalistic standards	Combination of algorithmic ranking and user-generated content	Author-driven content selection within platform recommendation systems (Spotify, YouTube, Apple Podcasts)
Average duration of contact with a single message	From a few seconds to several minutes	Predominantly seconds or minutes due to feed-based consumption	Typical episode duration ranges from 20 to 90 minutes, creating conditions for deeper engagement with a topic
Level of audience engagement	Limited by available feedback mechanisms	High level of interaction through comments, reactions, and sharing	High cognitive and emotional engagement through regular listening and trust in the host
Formation of group identity	Primarily around mass culture and national information agendas	Around trends, hashtags, and networked communities	Around shared worldviews, interests, and long-term thematic communities
Mechanisms of influence on youth	Information dissemination and socialization through editorial agendas	Viral content diffusion, social approval, and network effects	Narrative immersion, parasocial relationships, and regular contact with the speaker
Potential for subculture formation	Limited due to orientation toward mass audiences	High but short-term because of the volatility of trends	High and long-lasting due to the formation of stable audience communities
Characteristics of youth consumption	Tendency toward a declining share of young audiences	Dominant format of everyday digital consumption	One of the growing segments of the digital media market among Generation Z; consumption increased by 57% in 2023
Typical outcomes for the subcultural environment	Reinforcement of dominant cultural narratives	Rapid emergence and disappearance of digital micro-communities	Formation of stable thematic communities with their own norms, symbols, and communicative practices

Source: compiled by the author based on Edison Research (2023), N. Newman *et al.* (2024), K.T. Yorganci & L. McMurtry (2024), H. Scherer & E.L. Cohen (2025), B. Litterer *et al.* (2025)

The comparative analysis showed that podcasts occupy an intermediate position between traditional media and social networks. They are inferior to social platforms in terms of the speed of information dissemination, but surpass them in the duration of contact with the audience and the level of trust in the communicator. It is precisely the combination of long-form narrative format, regularity of consumption, and a high level of personalisation that creates favourable conditions for the formation of stable youth communities and subcultures. Unlike social networks, where interaction often depends on short-term trends, podcasts ensure the long-term reproduction of collective meanings and the maintenance of group identity.

Youth communities of the 21st century function according to different principles than the subcultures of the industrial era. Whereas for punks, metalheads, or hip-hop communities of the second half of the 20th century, the defining features were physical meeting places, local networks, and relatively stable collective identity, the digital environment has contributed to the emergence of more flexible and dynamic forms of group belonging. Subculture participants can simultaneously belong to several online communities, combine different cultural practices, and change forms of self-presentation depending on the specific platform (Tripathi, 2024). In this regard, the scholarly literature uses the concepts of “network subcultures”, “digital subcultures”, or “online subcultural communities”, which focus attention not on the territorial localisation of the group but on the communicative connections between its participants (Oksanen *et al.*, 2024). The transition of subcultures into the digital space has changed the mechanisms of their emergence. Traditionally, a subculture was formed around musical genres, style of dress, or certain political beliefs. In the digital environment, the starting points are algorithmic platform recommendations, thematic forums, Discord servers, YouTube channels, TikTok communities, or podcast networks. As a result, groups emerge whose participants may never meet physically but demonstrate a high level of symbolic cohesion through shared vocabulary, memes, values, and ways of interpreting information.

The issue of group identity acquires significance in this process. Unlike previous generations (Baby Boomers and Generation X), young people form their self-image simultaneously in offline and online spaces. Social networks are considered here as a kind of “digital social mirror” through which adolescents and young people receive feedback on their own behaviour, views, and external appearance. Constant interaction with other users contributes to the formation of a clearer sense of belonging to a particular group and helps integrate personal identity into a broader collective context. At the same time, digital platforms create conditions for experimenting with different models of self-presentation, which makes subcultural identity more fluid and multidimensional compared to previous historical periods (Pérez-Torres, 2024). The formation of digital subcultures also relies on mechanisms for the co-production of symbols and meanings. Participants are united

not only by an interest in a specific topic but also by the creation of their own information environment. Memetic culture, specific slang, inside jokes, characteristic visual elements, and shared narratives function as symbolic markers of group belonging.

The spread of podcasts in the digital environment has changed not only the ways of consuming information but also the mechanisms for forming collective perceptions of social reality. One of the specific features of podcasting is its narrative nature. Unlike most digital communication formats, audio content usually involves a long-form story, sequential plot development, and the presence of the author’s personal voice. It is the voice that becomes an instrument of social influence. The mobility of the audio format and the effect of “narrative immersion” are directly related to the strengthening of parasocial relationships between the audience and podcast hosts (Watson, 2025). Regular listening reinforces the feeling of personal familiarity with the podcaster even in the absence of real interaction between the parties (Scherer & Cohen, 2025). The phenomenon of trust in podcasters also exists among the youth audience. Unlike television or news media, where communication is perceived as formalised, podcasts create an atmosphere of informal conversation. Listeners associate the authenticity of podcasters with openness, self-disclosure, an informal manner of communication, and a willingness to demonstrate their own doubts or mistakes (Bottomley, 2024). It is precisely these characteristics that become the basis of trust in the author. It has also been established that parasocial relationships in podcasts are associated with increased trust in information, greater cognitive engagement, and the audience’s readiness to critically comprehend the proposed topics. The factors of such influence turned out to be the author’s expertise, narrative proximity, and personal self-disclosure.

The role of recommendation algorithms in the dissemination of podcast content deserves special attention. Audio platforms use algorithmic personalisation mechanisms. Spotify, YouTube Podcasts, Apple Podcasts form recommendations based on listening history, thematic interests, and behavioural characteristics of the user. As a result, the audience receives content that corresponds to their previous preferences, which increases the likelihood of long-term engagement with a particular topic. At the same time, the influence of algorithms on the spread of ideas cannot be considered exclusively through the concept of the “filter bubble”. For example, an analysis of experiments with nearly nine thousand participants showed that recommendation systems can influence the information environment of users, but they do not automatically determine their political beliefs (Liu *et al.*, 2025). Nevertheless, algorithms play a role in enhancing the visibility of certain ideas and communities. As a result, a new model of idea circulation is formed, based not on a mass audience but on networks of thematically interested users.

From the perspective of cultural analysis, podcasters act as cultural intermediaries between different social

groups, the expert community, and the youth audience. They adapt complex topics to an understandable format, select information, identify priority issues for discussion, and effectively participate in the production of the symbolic order of digital society. For this reason, podcasts cannot be viewed solely as a technological format for content dissemination. Their function lies in creating discursive spaces within which the coordination of values, the formation of group perceptions, and the construction of collective identity take place.

In the structure of the digital environment, podcasts have gradually transformed into one of the influential formats for disseminating public ideas, as podcasting provides the opportunity for long-term and detailed discussion of topics that remain outside the news cycle. It is precisely this function that facilitates the circulation of social, cultural, and political narratives among the youth audience, for whom depth of explanation becomes more significant than the speed of obtaining information (Barrios-Rubio, 2025). The specific nature of spreading ideas through audio platforms lies in the fact that communication takes place not in the form of individual messages but through series of episodes between which a meaningful sequence is formed. The listener gains the opportunity to regularly return to a particular topic, gradually accumulating knowledge and assimilating the proposed interpretations of social processes.

Podcasts have become a platform for discussing topics directly related to the interests of young people. An analysis of the catalogues of Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and YouTube Podcasts shows a steady increase in the popularity of programmes devoted to mental health, issues of identity, social justice, political participation, gender relations, work culture, ecology, and the digital lifestyle. For example, in the global annual reports for 2025, the leading positions are occupied by The Joe Rogan Experience, The Diary of A CEO with Steven Bartlett, The Mel Robbins Podcast, Call Her Daddy, Huberman Lab, and Crime Junkie (Khan, 2025). According to data from The Gen Z Audio Report (Edison Research, 2025b), among listeners aged 13-24, the most popular podcast genres are comedy, music, and entertainment. At the same time, 86% of Gen Z use audio content to improve their mood. Furthermore, research by Spotify (2025) records a change in consumption patterns during the study period: young people begin to turn more actively to podcasts about science, technology, news, and business. Thus, Generation Z uses podcasts not only as an entertainment product but also as a source of self-development, an explanation of social processes, and a search for alternative views on current events.

A practical manifestation of this process is observed in the transformation of individual podcasts into full-fledged social communities. In 2024, a number of popular podcasts in Great Britain and the United States began gathering audiences of thousands at live performances. In particular, the political podcast *The Rest Is Politics* (Goalhanger, n.d.) performed at The O2 arena in London in October 2024, attracting 15,000 spectators (The Big Issue, 2024). This

example demonstrates that podcasts are capable of fostering stable communities that extend beyond the digital realm. This is due precisely to the high level of emotional closeness between the presenters and the listeners, which gradually develops into a sense of collective belonging. The ability of podcasts to unite an audience around shared topics has a direct influence on the formation of young people's worldviews. Podcasts raise issues that are difficult to explore fully in the format of short videos or social media posts. The length of the episodes allows creators to examine complex issues in a broader context, bring in experts and offer alternative interpretations of social processes. As a result, podcasts become platforms for developing shared approaches to understanding reality.

An illustrative example is also the American political podcast *Pod Save America* (Crooked Media, n.d.), created by former employees of the Barack Obama administration. After its launch in 2017, it gradually transformed into one of the most influential political media projects among the young audience in the United States. The programme analyses political events and also systematically integrates calls for civic participation. During election campaigns, the project team implemented the *Vote Save America* initiative, aimed at voter registration, volunteer activities, and involving citizens in the electoral process. According to data from the organisation Crooked Media, associated with the podcast, through the *Vote Save America* platform, hundreds of thousands of volunteer actions and voter contacts were mobilised during the 2020-2024 election campaigns (Bártová, 2022). This example demonstrates a fundamental function of podcasting: the boundary between informational activity and civic mobilisation becomes less noticeable. The podcast ceases to be exclusively a source of information and begins to perform the function of an organisational infrastructure for social participation.

Another example is the British podcast *The Rest Is Politics* (Goalhanger, n.d.), created by former Director of Communications for the UK government Alastair Campbell and former minister Rory Stewart. Launched in 2022, it quickly became one of the country's most popular political podcasts, and its audience extended far beyond the digital environment (Geddes-O'Dolan, 2025). The podcast effectively became the centre for the formation of a specific political subculture of young listeners, characterised by regular consumption of analytical content, participation in discussions, attendance at offline events, and engagement in the discussion of socio-political processes. The project's popularity contributed to the transfer of political discussions from traditional media to the environment of youth audio communities, where politics is perceived not as a formal institutional sphere but as an element of everyday culture.

Similar mechanisms are observed in the sphere of youth climate activism. The podcast *A Matter of Degrees* (n.d.), hosted by American climate policy researchers Leah Stokes and Kathryn Wilkinson, is primarily oriented towards young civic activists and supporters of environmental movements. The project's content combines explanations

of the causes of climate change with demonstrations of successful public campaigns, examples of environmental mobilisation, and practical tools for participation in climate initiatives. The podcast is created in partnership with the University of California's The 2035 Initiative and the All We Can Save project, and its episodes systematically cover the activities of environmental movements, decarbonisation mechanisms, and tools for citizens to influence climate policy (University of Dayton, 2023). As a result, a subculture of youth climate activism forms around such podcasts, where audio content performs not only an informational but also a mobilisation function. Listeners receive not just knowledge about environmental problems but concrete scenarios for civic participation, which facilitates the transition from passive interest to practical activity.

A separate area of influence is associated with the formation of civic and educational subcultures. A characteristic example is the American podcast Civics 101, created by the public media organisation New Hampshire Public Radio. The project specialises in explaining the mechanisms of democracy, electoral processes, the judicial system, and state institutions of the United States. The podcast is actively integrated into the educational environment: educational materials, interactive tasks, and resources for teachers and students are developed for it. During the presidential election period, New Hampshire Public Radio implemented a special project within which the Civics 101 team provided young people and educators with daily explanations regarding the functioning of American democracy, electoral procedures, and political institutions (Ismayilova, 2020). Thus, a distinct youth civic subculture is formed, whose

participants use podcasts as an alternative tool for political socialisation and non-formal education.

A pronounced subcultural effect is observed in cases where listeners move from content consumption to collective activity. An example is the community around the true crime podcast The Vanished. Listeners of the project actively interact in digital communities on Facebook and Reddit, collectively analyse criminal case materials, exchange information, and participate in the search for missing persons. The authors define this phenomenon as a form of participatory journalism, within which the audience ceases to be a passive consumer of information and assumes the role of a participant in socially significant activity (Witmer & Dowling, 2024). In this case, the podcast becomes the core of a subculture with specific norms of interaction, its own values, and a high level of collective engagement.

The specificity of youth podcast subcultures lies in their hybrid nature. Unlike traditional youth subcultures of the late 20th century, which were built around musical genres or styles of dress, contemporary audio communities are formed around shared interests, values, and information practices. Their development is supported through Discord servers, Reddit communities, Patreon platforms, live streams, and offline events. As a result, podcasts perform the role of social institutions that not only disseminate information but also shape the collective identity of young people. It is precisely this ability to combine content, communication, and shared activity that is one of the reasons for the growing influence of podcasts on youth subcultures. The advantages and risks of the influence of podcasts on the youth community are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Socio-cultural functions of podcasts in the youth environment: potential and risks

Sociocultural function of podcasts	Positive impact on youth subcultures and movements	Potential risks and limitations
Collective identity formation	Creation of shared symbolic frameworks, values, and behavioural models; support for a sense of community belonging regardless of geographical distance (communities surrounding The Vanished, The Rest Is Politics)	Strengthening of group insularity and distancing from alternative social groups; formation of narrow information environments
Socialization function	Acquisition of new norms of civic participation, environmental responsibility, political engagement, or cultural consumption (Pod Save America, A Matter of Degrees)	Normalization of viewpoints that have not undergone professional expertise or fact-checking
Educational function	Access to complex topics beyond formal education; popularization of political science, history, law, and psychology (Civics 101, The Happiness Lab)	Oversimplification of complex issues through authorial interpretation; dependence of knowledge quality on the host's competence
Communicative function	Establishment of long-term horizontal connections among listeners; development of digital communities through Discord, Reddit, and Patreon	Transfer of discussions into closed communicative environments with limited exposure to alternative viewpoints
Mobilization function	Promotion of participation in elections, volunteer campaigns, civic initiatives, and environmental actions	Use of audiences for political mobilization without sufficient pluralism of opinions
Cultural-creative function	Development of new subcultural codes, slang, symbolism, and interaction practices (political, sports, and true crime communities)	Cultural fragmentation and the growth of isolated micro-communities
Representation function for marginalized groups	Providing a voice to communities underrepresented in traditional media; fostering inclusive discussions	Emergence of alternative information spaces characterized by a low level of external criticism
Emotional support function	Creation of a sense of social inclusion and psychological support through regular interaction with hosts and community members	Development of excessive parasocial relationships with media personalities

Table 2. Continued

Sociocultural function of podcasts	Positive impact on youth subcultures and movements	Potential risks and limitations
Alternative media production function	Reduction of barriers to entry into the media sphere; opportunity for young people to create their own content without substantial financial resources	Lack of editorial oversight and dissemination of unverified information
Expert knowledge dissemination function	Rapid dissemination of scientific findings, civic practices, and professional expertise	Emergence of pseudo-experts who gain high audience trust due to the popularity of the format
Algorithmic function	Facilitation of access to niche interests and specialized subcultures through recommendation systems of Spotify, YouTube, and Apple Podcasts	Formation of information bubbles through algorithmic reinforcement of similar content
Digital archiving function	Accumulation of collective community memory; preservation of histories of activism, local movements, and cultural practices	Reinforcement of one-sided interpretations of historical or political events within particular communities

Source: compiled by the author based on Goalhanger (n.d.), Crooked Media (n.d.), A Matter of Degrees (n.d.), The Happiness Lab Podcast (n.d.), A. Ismayilova (2020), P. Bártoová (2022), E. Bootle (2024), S. Witmer & D.O. Dowling (2024), H. Scherer & E.L. Cohen (2025), N. Liu *et al.* (2025)

The presented data demonstrated that evaluating the influence of podcasts solely through the categories of “benefit” or “harm” is insufficient. The analysis revealed a different pattern: the majority of socio-cultural effects of podcasting are dual in nature. The very mechanisms that ensure a high level of integration of young people into a community can simultaneously create prerequisites for its isolation from the broader information environment. In particular, parasocial closeness to hosts contributes to trust and stability of communities, but at the same time increases the audience’s susceptibility to one-sided interpretations of events. Similarly, algorithmic personalisation helps young users find content that matches their interests, yet simultaneously reduces the likelihood of contact with alternative viewpoints.

The transformation of the very nature of subcultures acquires significance. Traditional youth subcultures of the second half of the 20th century were usually formed around musical styles, local territories, or specific forms of leisure. In the case of podcast communities, the central element becomes the shared interpretation of social reality. The unifying factor is not an external lifestyle but a set of narratives, values, and communicative practices. This explains why podcasts demonstrate effectiveness in the environments of political activism, civic education, climate movements, or communities related to mental health. Another characteristic feature is the gradual blurring of boundaries between media consumption and social participation. In many cases, listening to a podcast becomes only the initial stage of involvement in community activity. Further interaction moves to Discord servers, Patreon networks, thematic forums, or offline events (Rubio Arevich, 2025). As a result, podcasts perform the function of infrastructure for supporting collective activity, rather than merely a channel for information transmission.

The identified patterns also demonstrated a change in the principles of forming youth subcultures in the digital environment. Whereas in the industrial and early digital era, the consolidation of youth communities was mainly based on shared consumption styles, musical preferences,

or symbolic distancing from the dominant culture, network associations in the 2020s are formed around the interpretation of social issues, the development of shared value orientations, and participation in specific social practices. The analysed examples showed that podcasts act as one of the environments within which the construction of such communities takes place, ensuring the long-term reproduction of shared meanings and the maintenance of intra-group communication. At the same time, the spread of podcast communities is accompanied by a complication of the structure of the digital public space. The formation of a large number of thematically specialised audiences contributes to the diversification of youth culture and the emergence of new forms of collective identity, but simultaneously strengthens the segmentation of the communicative environment. Therefore, the socio-cultural effect of podcasts is determined not only by the content but also by the nature of the communicative practices that form around it.

DISCUSSION

The results of the conducted study have made it possible to consider podcasts not only as a channel for disseminating information but as a distinct mechanism for the formation of youth subcultures, collective identity, and models of social participation. The obtained conclusions correlate with the results presented in the work of N.A. Askar & N. Mellor (2024), which established that young listener use podcasts simultaneously for entertainment, information acquisition, and personal development. The study also found that the influence of podcasts on youth communities is not limited to the informational function. The analysed cases of Civics 101, Pod Save America, A Matter of Degrees, and The Rest Is Politics demonstrated a combination of educational, worldview, and mobilisational influence. At the same time, the results of the aforementioned authors focused primarily on the individual level of content consumption, whereas the study made it possible to trace the next stage of this process – the transformation of trust in the podcaster into the formation of stable digital

communities. The conclusion regarding the role of trust in the host as a prerequisite for the emergence of collective forms of interaction gained significance and directly correlates with the results of the cited authors.

A similar nature of comparison was observed with the conclusions of the scoping review by Y. Zou *et al.* (2025). The authors concluded that podcasts effectively increase the level of youth awareness regarding health issues, but evidence of their impact on actual behavioural changes remains limited. The study was not aimed at assessing behavioural changes in the field of health, but the analysis of podcasts of civic, political, and climate orientation revealed the presence of mechanisms through which audio content moves from informing to practical participation. Thus, the results of the scholars confirm the ability of podcasts to influence the knowledge and attitudes of the audience, while the study expands this conclusion by demonstrating the conditions under which informational influence transforms into collective social practices. A comparison of the results with the study by T. Sharon & N. John (2025), devoted to parasocial relationships between podcasters and the audience, required attention. The authors showed that the central element of such relationships is the image of the imagined listener, constructed by the content creator themselves. The obtained results confirmed the role of this mechanism. The analysis of political, educational, and activist podcasts showed that communities form around a sense of shared experience between the host and the listener. At the same time, the study made it possible to expand the authors' interpretation, as it demonstrated that parasocial closeness performs the function not only of interpersonal connection but also of a mechanism for forming group identity. It is through this that stable subcultural environment emerged, which gradually extend beyond the digital platform.

Comparison with the work of R. Bhoj *et al.* (2024) revealed another aspect of the research problem. The study showed that digital media contributed to the formation of multiple identities and the recreation of subcultures through mechanisms of self-presentation and cultural mixing. The study confirmed similar processes, but within the audio communication environment. Whereas the scholars analysed primarily visual platforms and subcultures associated with style and external representation, the results of the podcast study showed a shift in emphasis from external cultural markers to shared narratives, values, and ways of interpreting social reality. The obtained data indicated that youth subcultures have formed around information practices rather than aesthetic characteristics. In this aspect, the authors' conclusions correlate with the study, although they reflect a different stage of digital subculture development.

A level of consistency was also found with the results of H. Weber (2022), who investigated the role of climate podcasts in stimulating environmental activity. The author emphasised the importance of storytelling and the concept of collective action for engaging listeners in climate practices. The analysis of the podcast *A Matter of Degrees* led to similar conclusions. It was established that

environmental topics are disseminated not through isolated informational messages but through the sequential formation of collective interpretations of climate problems. At the same time, the study made it possible to specify the socio-cultural dimension of this process. Whereas H. Weber focused primarily on the communication mechanisms of motivation to action, the obtained results demonstrated that separate youth communities with shared norms, values, and models of civic participation emerge around climate podcasts. Thus, the author's conclusions received additional confirmation through the analysis of the sub-cultural potential of climate podcasting.

At the same time, the results of the study by M.E. Rasul *et al.* (2025) allowed for a critical rethinking of certain aspects of podcast influence. The authors demonstrated a connection between the consumption of alternative political podcasts, the spread of misinformation, and the increase in contentious political participation. The study also revealed the presence of risks associated with the high level of trust in podcasters and the formation of closed information environments. In particular, during the analysis of political audio communities, it was established that the very mechanisms that contributed to community cohesion could simultaneously limit contacts with alternative positions. However, the results did not confirm an automatic link between political mobilisation and misinformation. On the contrary, the processed cases demonstrated the possibility of using podcasts for the development of civic participation without reliance on conspiratorial narratives. In this aspect, the scholars' conclusions do not contradict the study but reflect one of the possible scenarios for the development of political podcast communities.

One direction of comparison was the results of the scoping review by L. Persohn & S. Branson (2025), devoted to academic podcasting. The authors considered podcasts as a tool for democratising access to knowledge and overcoming the barriers of traditional scientific communication. The study confirmed the relevance of this approach. An analysis of the podcast *Civics 101* showed that complex political and legal issues were adapted to a format understandable to young people without losing substantive depth. At the same time, the results made it possible to expand the scholars' conclusions, as it was shown that the dissemination of knowledge through podcasts is accompanied by the formation of thematic communities. The educational function turned out to be inextricably linked with the socialisation function, and content consumption gradually transitioned into collective forms of interaction.

The comparison with the work of S.J. Kakungulu (2025), which examined podcasts as a tool for civic education and public dialogue, proved revealing. The obtained results are almost completely consistent with the main provisions of that work. The analysis of the cases demonstrated that podcasts have indeed created conditions for long-term discussion of public topics and have acted as alternative channels for the political socialisation of young people. At the same time, the study made it possible to detail the

mechanisms of such influence. It was established that the effectiveness of podcasts in the field of civic education is determined not only by the content of information but also by the existence of stable audience communities around them. It is precisely these communities that ensure the long-term reproduction of shared meanings and maintain collective identity. At the same time, the results also confirmed the warnings of S.J. Kakungulu regarding the risks of misinformation. The analysis showed that the openness of the podcast environment has created conditions both for the dissemination of expert knowledge and for the emergence of alternative information spaces with an insufficient level of external criticism.

Overall, the comparison of the obtained results with empirical and theoretical research demonstrated a high level of consistency regarding the understanding of podcasts as a socio-cultural phenomenon. The majority of works focused attention on individual aspects of this phenomenon – trust in hosts, civic education, knowledge dissemination, political mobilisation, identity formation, or the development of climate activism. The study made it possible to unite these directions within a single analytical framework and to show that the main characteristic of podcasting has been its transformation into an infrastructure for youth subcultures. It is precisely around podcasts that the combination of information consumption, socialisation, formation of collective meanings, and practical participation takes place. Such functionality explains why podcasts in the 2020s have begun to play a noticeable role in the transformation of models of youth communication and the emergence of new forms of digital group belonging.

CONCLUSIONS

The study established that podcasts occupy an intermediate position between traditional media and social networks, surpassing social platforms in audience contact duration and trust in the communicator. This combination creates conditions for the formation of stable youth subcultures. Globally, 73% of the US population aged 12+ have consumed podcasts at least once, and 55% have done so within the last month. Podcasts have transformed

into platforms for disseminating youth movement ideologies. The political podcast *The Rest Is Politics* gathered approximately 15,000 spectators at The O2 arena in London, demonstrating the transition of audio content into offline communities. *Pod Save America*, through the *Vote Save America* platform, mobilised hundreds of thousands of volunteer actions during the 2020-2024 election campaigns, blurring the boundary between information and civic mobilisation. Around the climate podcast *A Matter of Degrees*, a subculture of youth environmental activism has formed, while the community around the true crime podcast *The Vanished* moved from passive consumption to collective participation in missing persons searches, exemplifying participatory journalism.

The socio-cultural analysis revealed twelve functions of podcasts in the youth environment, each with a dual nature. For example, parasocial closeness builds trust but increases susceptibility to one-sided interpretations; algorithmic personalisation helps find relevant content yet reduces exposure to alternative views; digital archiving preserves collective memory while reinforcing one-sided narratives; mobilisation engages youth in civic actions but risks audience exploitation without pluralism. Thus, podcast influence is determined not only by content but also by the combination of parasocial interaction, algorithmic personalisation, and network self-organisation. A limitation of this study is its reliance on English-language sources and cases from North America and Western Europe. Further research should quantitatively measure parasocial relationship intensity across podcast genres and develop methods to assess audio content's long-term influence on youth worldviews.

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