COMEDIAN PODCASTERS CHANGING THE COMEDY SCENE

THROUGH THE PODCAST MEDIUM

A Master's Thesis

by

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Ankara

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To Zeynep…

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The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences

of

İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

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I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

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THROUGH THE PODCAST MEDIUM

Yardımcı, Kemal

M. A. in Media and Visual Studies

Supervisor: Asst. Prof. Andreas Treske

December 2021

The particular aim of the current thesis is to shed light on the liberating nature of podcasts as an innovative medium, and its effect on the comedy scene. Ultimately, it is suggested that podcasting is an emerging form of new media that shape the comedy scene, through exemplifying the impact of comedian podcasters on the new and niche audiences. In this thesis, the social and technological impacts of comedian podcasts will be studied by examining the emerging relationship between podcasts and other forms of new media through literature review and case study. The particular focus of the paper is examined in relation to the career of Joe Rogan, the host of *The Joe Rogan Experience* podcast. Through this examination, it is discussed how new generation comedian podcasters are challenging the conventional understanding of corporate-managed media with independent, self-produced and accessible broadcasts. It is further argued that the authenticity and the wide array of topics offered by these podcasters allow for a greater impact that major networks usually fail to obtain, arguably due to their artificial outlook, and lack of inclusiveness in terms of opinions and people.

ÖZET

KOMEDYEN PODCAST YAYINCILARININ PODCAST ORTAMI ÜZERİNDEN KOMEDİ SAHNESİNİ DEĞİŞTİRMESİ

Yardımcı, Kemal

Medya ve Görsel Çalışmalar

Yüksek Lisans

Tez Danışmanı: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Andreas Treske

Mevcut tezin amacı, yenilikçi bir ortam olarak podcast'lerin özgürleştirici doğasına ve komedi sahnesindeki etkisine ışık tutmaktır. Sonuç olarak podcast yayıncılığının, komedyen podcast yayıncılarının yeni ve niş izleyiciler üzerindeki etkisini örnekleyerek komedi sahnesini şekillendiren ve yeni medya bağlamında gelişmekte olan bir medya biçimi olduğu ileri sürülmektedir. Bu tezde, podcast'ler ve diğer yeni medya biçimleri arasında ortaya çıkan ilişki literatür taraması ve vaka çalışması ile incelenerek komedyen podcast'lerin sosyal ve teknolojik etkileri incelenecektir. Bahsedilen bu etkiler, *The Joe Rogan Experience* podcast'inin sunucusu olan Joe Rogan'ın kariyeri esas alınarak incelencektir. Bu inceleme aracılığıyla yeni nesil komedyene dönüşen podcast yayıncılarının, bağımsız, kendi ürettikleri ve erişilebilir yayınlarla kurumsal yönetilen medyanın geleneksel anlayışına nasıl meydan okuduğu tartışılmaktadır. Ayrıca bu podcast yayıncıları tarafından sunulan özgünlük ve geniş konu yelpazesinin, büyük medya yayın ağların –genellikle farklı veya alternatif görüşler ve kişiler açısından kapsayıcı olmamaları nedeniyle– elde edemediği daha büyük bir etkiye yol açtığı da öne sürülmektedir.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The term "podcasting" can be traced back to a Guardian article written by Ben Hammersley in 2004. The article was a praise to the new and revolutionary audible media technology that enabled people to listen to downloadable audio recordings from their iPods. In the article, Hammersley offered potential words to name this technology, one of which was "podcasting":

> With the benefit of hindsight, it all seems quite obvious. MP3 players, like Apple's iPod in many pockets, audio production software cheap or free, and weblogging an established part of the Internet; all the ingredients are there for a new boom in amateur radio. But what to call it? Audioblogging? Podcasting? GuerillaMedia? (Hammersley, 2004, para. 1)

Podcasting finds itself in a constantly changing digital paradigm as it struggles to find itself a single or specific subject within the media literature. More specifically, as podcasts continuously interact and merge with other forms of media on the Internet, the podcasting research requires a critical lens consisting of a broad array of critical approaches to truly catch up with the innovative nature of this evolving medium. Accordingly, it is my intention to incorporate the critical views of some of the key thinkers in media studies, such as Henry Jenkins and Marshall McLuhan, in order to better articulate and reflect the significant

changes the podcast medium brings into place. After the introductory current chapter regarding what podcast is along with a literature review and case study methodology, in the second chapter the media theories on new media and podcasting will be discussed in relation to the emerging podcast medium based on the existing literature. In this context, podcasting will be considered in terms of a collective medium and a scholarly subject. The third chapter will explore podcasting activities within today's media industry in relation to the platforms of podcasting, the new media and other forms of social media. The comedian podcasts and the comedy subculture will be examined in the fourth chapter through selected studies, and examples from current comedian podcasts. The impact of the LA comedy subculture will be examined closely in this regard, and the careers of comedian podcasters and their transition from the stage to the podcast medium will be particularly delved into with references to the recently released Comedy Store docu-series (Binder, 2020). Later, in the fourth chapter, of particular interest to this thesis, *The Joe Rogan Experience* podcast will be introduced as an example of the comedy podcasts that dominate this new medium. Selected episodes of *The Joe Rogan Experience* will be analyzed in the fifth chapter from a case study perspective with an emphasis on the political, social, and individual impacts of the podcast on the mainstream and new media, journalism, social media and comedy subculture. Finally, the future directions of comedian podcasting will be discussed in terms of potential markets and monetization opportunities, as well as which turns the sub-genre is expected to take in the future.

1.1. Methodology

The methodology of the thesis will be based on literature review and case study. Through the literature review, the existing studies in media studies that examine podcasting will be explored while the case study of *The Joe Rogan Experience* will provide a real-life

example of the comedian podcasts' impact on the digital culture with the analyses of a selection of eposides.

1.1.1. Literature Review

Literature review as a research method has become increasingly relevant as media research has become an interdisciplinary field involving a variety of theories, methods, and evaluations (Snyder, 2019). In this thesis, the literature review method is used in order to build the main arguments around the fragments of information on media theories and the development of podcasting with respect to comedian podcasts in particular. For this purpose, various articles are consulted to better explain the historical development of the new media platforms, as well as the media theories regarding these new mediums. In this context, the process of conducting the literature review is aimed towards providing the relevant literature in comedian podcasts, new media theories and the evolution of social media. It is further aimed that the literature review as a methodology builds the fundamental basis for the following arguments in this thesis, and opens up new research opportunities and more questions to tackle for future studies in line with the existing literature.

1.1.2. Case Study

According to the *Encyclopedia of case study research*, the case study methodology is applied in order to provide information regarding a particular topic in accordance with a relevant theoretical framework (Mills, 2010). Case studies are frequently used in social sciences to acquire a detailed exploration or examination of a particular topic with the support of a real-life situation.

Whatever the field of interest, the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena. Case studies allow you to focus in-

depth on a 'case' and to retain a holistic and real-world perspective -such as in studying individual life cycles, small group behavior, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, school performance, international relations, and the maturation of industries. (Yin, 2018, p. 5)

In this thesis, it is aimed to explore the dynamics of digital media and comedy podcasts in relation to the relevant podcasting literature in media studies through the example of *The Joe Rogan Experience* podcast. For this purpose, as suggested for studies doing case studies, the primary step of the current thesis involved reviewing the literature and finding relevant research questions (Yin, 2018). In reviewing the relevant media literature, the specific focus has been on the evolving nature of the new media platforms, digitization and the delivery of comedy in podcasts. The main arguments of the thesis have been built around the idea that the delivery of comedy in online platforms, podcasts particularly, is shaping the digital culture. Accordingly, *The Joe Rogan Experience* has been determined as a corresponding example of this phenomenon with various examples (e.g. episodes, impact, history). Hence, the relevant literature review is considered alongside the episode analyses of *The Joe Rogan Experience* podcast in order to exemplify the arguments, and to provide supporting evidence from a holistic and real-world perspective.

The selected content consisted of digital recordings of podcast episodes were critically observed and studied for a year for further examination. The coding scheme for the digital data in question was prepared in terms of transcriptions of the material from digital audio files to written texts. The material used for the analyses of the selected episodes were retrieved by downloading the respective episodes of *The Joe Rogan Experience* podcast from Spotify, and transcribing the highlighted points used throughout the paper.

In terms of episode selection, episodes covering topics of media, politics, podcast, comedians, news and journalism were searched in particular. As an avid listener of the podcast since 2014, the vision and the ideas for the current paper have been very clear from the beginning of the thesis. Hence, the episode selection process was largely based on going back to the previously listened episodes and going over several of them to make the final cut based on the desired topic criteria.

CHAPTER 2

PODCASTING LITERATURE

2.1. Podcasting: A Collective Medium

Integrating McLuhan's view that "medium is the message", meaning the true message of a medium is the profound changes that it brings into "human affairs" (McLuhan, 1964; McLuhan et al., 1967), into this thesis has a significant importance for a better understanding of how a medium such as podcast introduces innovative ways of delivering comedy material, as well as changing the alternative comedy scene. Such critical reading plays a significant role in examining the ways comedian podcasters operate using this specific medium as a performative device while creating a digital space for themselves.

McLuhan argued that: "… radio affects most people intimately, person-to-person, offering a world of unspoken communication between writer-speaker and the listener. That is the immediate aspect of radio. A private experience" (McLuhan, 1964, p. 299). As a futuristic person, McLuhan predicted the networked digital age long before the introduction of the Internet. Through his writings, he hinted out that media is transformative, and the new media technologies that we create would bring the people together. He believed that every new means of media amplifies some sort of human capacity, and provides new states of perception, a new sense of understanding and a social change.

Podcast is a digitally networked medium. The innovative technologies of today that enable us to create personalized content and share it with the rest of the world instigate social changes, which brings us to the concepts of form and content. We usually tend to spend more

time on understanding the content and the meanings that are embedded into a form. However, according to McLuhan, the overall impact of the medium is more significant than the content it carries: The medium is more important than the message. This can be interpreted in terms of the overall impact of the podcast medium on the comedy scene. McLuhan puts significant emphasis on the idea that instead of focusing only on the content, the medium itself should be looked into in order to understand the potency and innovative power of that medium for the society, as well as its transformative functions for the human interactions and society. In this case, regardless of what is being shared on a daily or weekly basis on podcasts, the true message is the way podcasting changes our behaviors: The way podcast listeners reach out to information, share their opinions and communicate with others on a networked platform, and eventually, the way we extent our perceptions of the world.

Podcasts changed the way users of media navigate certain type of media content, and reformed the broadcast radio into a digitally networked medium. Therefore, the overall success of podcasts is not due to the quality of the content but its way of carrying a content. It's the way it introduces new ways of interactions between people and environment and the way it extends our perceptual qualities.

Moreover, implementing a medium theory based critical approach can further explain the innovative features of the podcast medium in terms of bringing a new method of artistic delivery into comedy, and a way of building a bond between the host and the audience. Since the particular podcast *The Joe Rogan Experience* that this thesis will look into is coming from an improvisational comedy subculture within the comedy culture, it should be taken into consideration that through the use of the podcast medium, a particular comedy tradition finds a way of expression, and the medium becomes a projection of the subculture.

Since its early beginnings in 2004, podcasting has become not only a converged medium, but also a disruptive technology that changed the rules of digital culture in terms of

audiences, consumption, production, and marketing (Berry, 2006; Jenkins, 2006). Jenkin's critical rhetoric is that with the rapid digitalization of the world, the passive participants of media can now actively shape the way they prefer to use mediums rather than receiving it in a passive position in a top-down manner. The top-down manner specifically refers to the hierarchical structure of the organization of media platforms and distributors from major media companies to the individual participants of media. In a way, instead of merely accepting what is given by top-down media outlets, the participants can now choose how to use the mediums for themselves. Such critical approaches by Jenkins not only invites the reader to contemplate the "complex relations between top-down corporate media and bottom-up participatory media" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 283), but also prompts them to consider media technologies from a whole different cultural perspective.

The reconsideration of traditional top-down media ultimately opens up new ways of understanding the use of media where the participants could separate content and products from the top-down media outlets, and create a self-directed digital/cultural space for themselves. Podcast as an emerging medium celebrates the "do it yourself" culture and allows participants of media to operate independently within the same space with top-down media outlets. In the case of the topic of this thesis, the participatory "do it yourself" media allows the comedian podcasters to deliver their artistic material independent from traditional comedy outlets, and creates a liberated atmosphere to engage with the audience. The comedian podcasters' rising popularity, and their making it into the mainstream attention of the media exemplifies Jenkin's rhetoric that the participants of media platforms, in this case comedians, can now shape and program a medium according to their own taste and artistic purposes. Likewise, Jenkins also envisions that in the long run, the cultural consequences of the shifts taking place in media will resolve through the dynamic between "corporate based

concept of media convergence and the grassroots concept of participatory culture" (2006, p. 290).

In this context, although typically considered a descendent of the broadcast radio, an alternative consideration of podcasts within the media studies literature exists in the context of the emerging convergence paradigm (Jenkins, 2004; 2006). Henry Jenkins' (2006) *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* is a significant asset to shed light on the dynamics between the traditional top-down media outlets such as radio stations, major television channels and other corporate media platforms, and the bottom-up media, such as social media platforms and podcasts. Contrary to the assumptions of the 1990s digital revolution period, which argues that new media replaces old media, the convergence paradigm assumes that new and old media will interact in intricate ways. In accordance with this idea, it can be stated that podcasting is a converged form of new media that synchronously makes sense of old forms, such as radio and television, and contents while creating and taking on new meanings. It does not diminish the previous forms and contents of media, but rather arises as an interactive new medium. Hence, it can be suggested that one aspect of podcasting that makes it a converged medium is the interactivity.

The implications of the interactive nature of the new media are not limited to the collaborative relations between different forms and mediums. In fact, the increasing content accessibility and the online connectivity are beginning to disturb the traditionally hierarchical relationship between consumers and the extensions of corporate media through independent content producers working in new social media platforms and/or doing podcasts. Consumers of today are more conscious about the ways in which they can control their use of different media technologies and communicate with other consumers. As a result of this realization, they are exercising their right to become participators of digital culture, which, in itself,

reveals another aspect of podcasting that contributes to its converged form: The inherent relationship between consumers and producers.

The relationship between consumers and producers form a horizontal medium rather than a vertical or a hierarchical one. This new, horizontal medium presents a virtual space where consumers can be producers, and vice versa. Podcast users can easily access and participate in content that is meaningful to them while they, themselves, can become producers of content should they wish to do so. This new, emerging medium opens up a free space for anyone who is interested in producing content without the restrictions of the traditional broadcast media. While consumers are able to become producers, producers are able to work independently with less legal obligations, and without the inevitable commitment to a corporate media company. This creative freedom enables producers of content to more easily share their authentic self, and be able to talk about a wide array of topics while communicating with their audience.

Jenkins argues that converged forms of media constitute a continuing convergence process with no end point (2006). This applies to the relationship between consumers and producers who are a part of this process. The consideration of the convergence in light of the participatory culture, as opposed to the consumer culture, is enabled through technologies such as the Internet and portable media devices where the producers and the audience can interact with little to no interruptions or limitations (Jenkins, 2007). The line between the consumed and the produced content is now blurrier than ever as the extensions of media become more interactive and accessible. As Deuze (2011) argues, media cannot be considered separate from its users, and the fact that, in recent years, media have become so engraved in us that even our thought patterns and mental capacities are affected and mediated by media shows the *collective intelligence* (a term first coined by the French cyber theorist

Pierre Lévy in 1994, later considered within the context of media convergence and participatory culture by Jenkins, 2006) at work. Deuze (2007, as cited in Markman, 2012) explains:

> Participatory media production and individualized media consumption are two different yet co-constituent trends typifying an emerging media ecology –an environment where consuming media increasingly includes some kind of producing media, and where our media behavior always seems to involve some level of participation, co-creation and collaboration, depending on the degree of openness or closedness of the media involved. (p. 549)

Jenkins describes collective intelligence as the "ability of virtual communities to leverage the combined expertise of their members" (2006, p. 27). In this sense, the interactive and horizontal qualities of podcasting can be considered both a driving force, and a result for the emergence of this collective intelligence. The tendency to connect with others, to move the conversation to online platforms, has undoubtedly increased online participation to emerging new mediums. Jenkins (2006) further argues that although the roots of participatory culture had been planted throughout the 20th century already, it has only begun to emerge with the common use of the Internet as people began to form online communities and cultural trends independently and freely from the comfort of their own portable devices, without the restrictions of traditional media. The Internet has not only encouraged but also enabled the merging of the participatory culture and commercial culture. In the context of different emerging media, this new paradigm has affected the move to new forms of media in particular since these new mediums were more adaptable in terms of incorporating the rules that governed these new interactions. Hence, the emerging participatory culture, coupled with the limitations of broadcast radio to meet such social demands of listeners, has enabled a

transition from radio to podcasting. The limitations associated with broadcast radio include, but are not limited to, the lack of a feedback mechanism that is inherent in social media platforms, the vertical hierarchy of radio stations in the sense that there are apparent divisions between listeners, hosts and producers of radio programmes, and a predetermined programme to be followed, which does not necessarily reflect the creative decisions of the radio host alone.

The growing participation in this alternative medium has established new social rules for online behaviors by offering a free space for social interactions and creating independent content. These new rules allow consumers of media to become participants, or feedback givers the least, so that the products of media are not stand-alone entities but interactive products within the participatory culture. The emergence of collective intelligence has, in turn, made individuals more connected, and eliminated the boundaries and the hierarchy between consumers and producers, as well as owners and employees. The freedom, the creative space, and the cooperation that has come with the convergence and participatory cultures have renovated the traditional broadcast media into a more interactive, social, and community based virtual hub with new business rules and communication strategies. Hence, the current media trends and studies can be better understood through the discourse of interactions, rather than the strict categories of ownership or corporatization. Specifically, these interactions can be examined through detailed studies on independent podcasters themselves. This is because the examination of podcasters and specific podcast genres provide an opportunity to make detailed analysis of the subject matter.

2.2. Podcasting: A Scholarly Subject

2.2.1. Podcast Genres and Independent Podcast Hosts

The significance and the motivation behind podcasting studies become more noticeable when the rise of podcasting is considered together with the relatively later interest in research in this area. Berry (2006) presented one of the first academic articles on podcasting where he drew a comparison between podcast and radio, and argued that podcasting had the potential to become a disruptive new medium that could affect traditional broadcasting in the long run. The fact that podcasting possessed qualities that the traditional broadcast radio did not –such as portability, intimacy and accessibility– helped overcome the barriers in broadcast radio –studio requirements, license fees, contracts, and so on. In their comparative analysis on the digital radio platforms, Nyre and Ala-Fossi (2008) argued that podcasting offers more opportunities for individuals to produce their own content, and make more personalized content available for the consumers as opposed to traditional media. Podcasters are able to curate personal content as a result of the ease and accessibility of podcast production, just like they would, had they started a personal blog.

The opportunity to produce personalized and original content leads to the emergence of different genres of podcasts. In fact, there have been studies that focused on the specific genres of podcasts including television (Diffrient, 2010), sports (Ruddock, Hutchins, and Rowe, 2010), and religion (Swanson, 2010) as well as education (see De Souza-Hart, 2011; Dupagne, Millette, and Grinfeder, 2009; Eash, 2006). The examination of different genres offer opportunities to discover the dynamics and the impacts of each genre on listener behaviors. For instance, studies on science podcasts suggested that online discussions and conversations about science are stimulated with the help of these types of podcasts (Birch and Weitkamp, 2010; Dantas-Queiroz, Wentzel, & Queiroz, 2018; MacKenzie, 2019). Genres of particular interest encourage online communities and groups to form and actively participate in discussions and topics related to the respective podcasts. The most common example of these emerging online communities, and the engagement occurring with the growing interest

in podcasts, is the fandoms that are born out of TV podcasts. Episodic TV podcasts are a subgenre of podcasting, in which the podcast host(s) engage in an episode-by-episode examination of a TV series throughout the podcast. For example, Diffrient (2010) focused on two fan podcasts of the television series *Gilmore Girls* in his book chapter, arguing that podcasts help build online fan groups by creating a virtual space where fans of the show could partake in online discussions, and be active members of this community. It can be deducted from these kinds of studies that online fan groups tend to focus on the social dynamics of podcasts in terms of the cyber communities that emerge because of the niche topics being discussed on these platforms. In this context, TV podcasts are examined with a particular emphasis on fandoms and online communities. In this sense, podcasts act as a medium for people sharing mutual interests to connect and interact with each other.

In addition to behaviors of podcast listeners, another focus of interest for these studies have been the hosts of these podcasts (see Jenkins, 1995). For instance, a recent study examined the "fan labor" of the TV podcast hosts in terms of their role in the engagement across the fandom (Savit, 2020). Thanks to the interest of the fans of the show, TV podcast hosts gain a subcultural celebrity status as a result of the success of their show. Hence, the practice of podcasting, and TV podcasts in particular, may produce fan behaviors and lead to the formation of virtual hubs for fans to come together and discuss their mutual interests. The TV podcast subgenre is a good representation of the modern-day podcasts in general not only because of its particular focus on building online communities but also because it highlights the fact that consumers can become successful podcast producers. Moreover, the inherent open accessibility of podcasts blur the line between consumers and producers (Busse, 2006). Savit (2020) describes the work done by these hosts as "a form of digital fan labor situated within the online fan gift economy" (p. 106). In this sense, the podcast hosts, themselves,

become subcultural icons within the fandom as more people tune in to these episodic podcasts after the show.

There is a growing number of studies on the independent podcast hosts. For instance, Markman (2012) examines the motives of podcasters in particular, and talks about how people from different backgrounds can produce distinctive forms of podcast content for the masses. The accessibility to the equipment and means required for podcasting is highly available such that anyone who wishes to produce and record a podcast can easily do so. As compared to the obstacles one would encounter, had they wished to produce their own show on a major network, this accessibility allows people from all kinds of socio-economic backgrounds to share their opinions on any kind of matter. Moreover, it creates the opportunity for individual and authentic personalities to emerge on this platform. The accessibility of podcasts to content producers from all socio-economic backgrounds is one aspect of this advantage; the other aspect comes from the perspective of the audience.

The audience is able to communicate with the podcast host, as well as other listeners, and join the conversation on whatever topic is being covered with more ease as compared to a traditional radio broadcast. There is no bureaucracy in reaching a person and getting one's opinion across with podcasting. This also means a lack of insincerity and more humble hosts/producers running the show. Hence, there have been studies examining this newly found relationship between consumers and producers. For instance, in one study, McClung and Johnson (2010) examined the demographic characteristics of individuals that listen to podcasts, and the motivation behind tuning into certain types of podcasts. Their work well recognizes the success and the potential of the podcast, and its engagement with the audience. Their research further shows that one of the main motivations of podcast users has to do with social factors where they use podcasts as a social platform for further discussion, and connecting with other users. Apart from categorizing the audience motivations in plain terms,

however, the distinctive social backgrounds of audiences who prefer downloading podcasts is something worth exploring. The ability of independent podcasters to attract a wider audience, even compared to the wide reach of major networks, is arguably due to the more humble and relatable podcast hosts, and the unrestricted, independent content they are able to create. This apparent distinction between podcasts and the productions of major networks presents an advantage in favor of podcasts where podcasts answer to the needs of the audience who look for more relatable, accessible, and authentic content.

2.2.2. The Advantages of Podcasts Over Broadcast Media

In order to understand podcast's evolution through the years, from its consideration as an extension of radio at first to it becoming an emerging and well-known new media form, it is important to understand the dynamics that make independent podcasters more preferable, as opposed to major network hosts (including radio hosts). Podcasts offer news and opinion pieces just as much as entertainment content. In this context, the shift towards independent podcasters –with the number of online platforms for news, entertainment and music increasing as well– can arguably be linked to the increased awareness and frustration with the structured and biased deliveries on the major media networks. The traditional radio programs require appointed listening with specific schedules whereas podcasts can be accessed at anytime from anywhere. In addition, podcasts provide listeners a more intimate and personal listening experience as they listen to a pro-am (professional-amateur) host with simpler audio characteristics while their experience is further enhanced by the use of headphones or earbuds (Collins, 2018). Where the intimate nature of the podcast meets the prevalence of comedian podcast hosts, the hierarchical relationship between the listener and the producer is disrupted, which is why this subgenre of independent podcasters require significant consideration.

The research on independent podcasters has received substantial attention in the past years as more scholars have begun to recognize the significance of this field within media studies. One of the pioneers in this field is Kris M. Markman, who presented one of the first studies on independent podcasters that was briefly mentioned above (2012). Markman's research focuses on the motivations for independent podcasting through quantitative methods. For instance, results from a web-based survey shows that podcasting is still dominated by educated, professional males over 30 years of age (Markman & Sawyer, 2014). In this study, 120 podcasters were interviewed in order to determine their motivations for podcasting. The self-reports of participants who took the survey indicated that the primary motivations for podcasting were engagement with the community, feedback, and continual improvement.

Given the context of research on user-generated content (UGC) within media studies, the strategy adopted in this study was argued to be more comprehensive in the sense that it focuses on motivations for media production, rather than consumption. However, connecting the results of the study within the framework of the convergence paradigm and participatory culture, the argument goes: "[The] boundary blurring means that the terms producer and consumer are no longer are relevant, because producers and users of media can now be one in the same" (Markman & Sawyer, 2014, p. 25). These results are brilliantly interpreted in relation to a new demand curve for a product's availability and popularity in the marketplace (C. Anderson, 2006). According to this new demand curve which Anderson (2006) refers to as *the long tail*, the traditional products still possess the higher demand by consumers; however, they now have to compete since there is an increasing amount of niche products available to consumers (Figure 1). The low to no cost that these niche products require, encourage new entrepreneurs and innovators to create such products, and to partake in the long tail. It is suggested, as a result of this new order, that independent podcasts fit the

description of the niche products that occupy the long tail, and could arguably offer diverse content which the broadcast radio is not able to provide (Sterne, Morris, Baker & Freire, 2008).

Figure 1

The Demand Curve of Product Availability
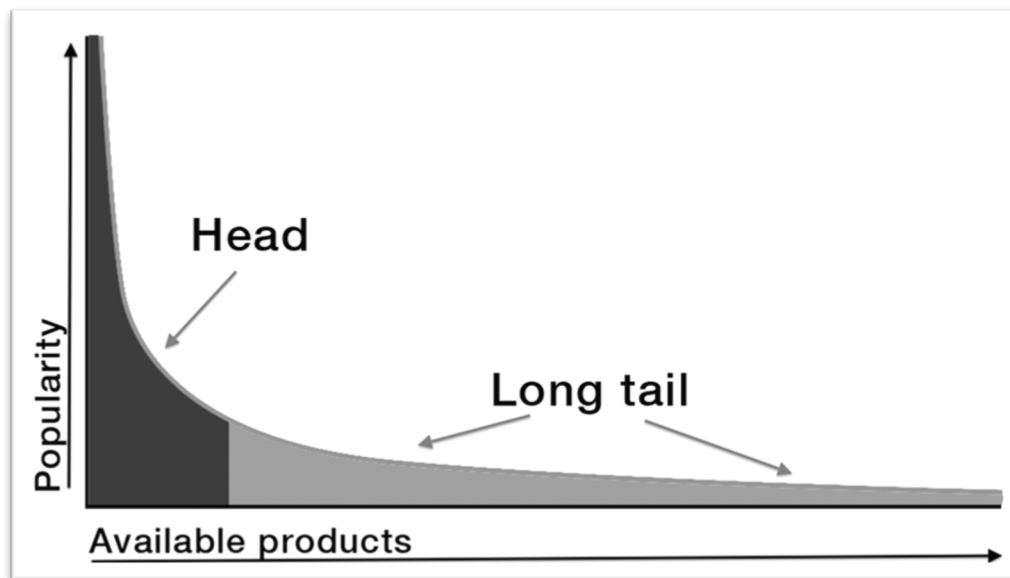
Note. The figure depicts a distribution of a product's popularity as a function of its availability. The long tail of the distribution represents a product's declining popularity as it becomes more prevalent. From "Why Pod? Further Explorations of the Motivations for Independent Podcasting," by Kris M. Markman & Caroline E. Sawyer,2014, *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, *21*(1), p. 25 (https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19376529.2014.891211?scroll=top&needAccess=true)

The current literature on podcasting mostly covers topics such as podcasts as an educational tool, podcast genres and their corresponding audience, or the place of podcasting

in media studies. However, particular focus on podcast hosts has started to be considered as an area of study only recently as more podcasts have begun to build a solid audience base, and increased their brand value and visibility. In addition, the financial earnings in the industry have become noticeable in terms of their status in the larger media sector. In particular, attention has been drawn to the podcast market as companies such as Spotify began to see this platform as having a potential growth opportunity, and made large investments in several podcast startups (Kafka, 2019). With the growing number of listeners who prefer spending their time listening to podcasts rather than radio, the applications that can be used to listen to podcasts have gained immense value. Hence, the move towards investing in podcasts, tailoring advertisements suited for podcasts, or turning to podcasts as a means for talk shows is not a strange one. As a result of this, the growing podcast industry inevitably goes hand in hand with the corresponding podcast and media research. Hence, it was aimed to delve into the subject of podcasts as a research topic in this thesis, and to explore the dynamics of independent comedy podcasts and digital media in relation to the relevant podcasting literature. The methodology used for these purposes is explained in the following section under *Literature Review* and *Case Study* headings.

CHAPTER 3

PODCASTING WITHIN THE MEDIA INDUSTRY

3.1. Platforms of Podcasting

Similar to other forms of media, podcasting is being molded through the platforms in which it is incorporated. However, because podcasting emerged during the beginning of the 2000s, and before the occurence of all popular social media platforms that we use today, it tended to grab whichever platform it had its hands on to survive. The early connections of podcasting with Apple and iTunes Store shaped the way for its later platformization and characterization in terms of storage, discovery and consumption (Sullivan, 2019). In his paper, Sullivan offers a thorough investigation of the podcast platformization with respect to its impacts on distribution and media industry (2019). He argues that "one of the distinguishing features of podcasting is the openness of its distribution mechanism" (Sullivan, 2019, p. 2) as a result of podcast's early emergence and "decentralized technical architecture" (Sullivan, 2019, p. 2), in which a "Rich Site Summary" (RSS) link is used to store the audio content on the Internet. In fact, in the early years of podcasting, the respective RSS link of a particular podcast had to be copied and pasted in order to download or subscribe to a certain podcast. Podcasts became more accessible with the update of iTunes in 2005 enabling users to subscribe to the podcasts on a visually attracting platform, which they previously did via RSS links. In the following years, other platforms followed Apple to incorporate podcast content into their applications (e.g. Google Music, Spotify, Pandora, etc.). As podcasts could more easily be found via external applications, they became less dependent on the RSS links.

Accordingly, there has been a steep decline in Google search queries for "RSS" starting from 2005 to 2017 (Sullivan, 2019). The move from the simple RSS links to specialized applications meant alternative practices of interactivity and social tools for the users as well (Morris & Patterson, 2015).

> Since the three functions of content platforms –storage, discovery, and consumption– are dispersed among podcast hosting companies . . . it would appear that podcasting is less susceptible to the forces of platformization. However, . . . the podcast market is undergoing rapid transformation, spurred largely by the interest of large tech giants like Apple, Spotify, and Google. Strategic alliances among discovery and consumption platforms, in particular, are moving podcasting in the direction of fully integrated content platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. (Sullivan, 2019, p. 9)

It has been mentioned that podcasts have been one of the fastest growing media platforms over the last decade. During this time, many platforms have started to incorporate podcast content into their applications including music platforms (e.g. Spotify, Pandora) despite their initial focus on the music content. One concern with this convergence over music content and podcasts was that the two contents may overlap within the free time that users decide to spend on these applications. So, one idea was that as a result of this overlap, that is, introducing podcasts to what was originally a music platform, users may change the way they consume music as well. With this in mind, a recent study examined the effect of the addition of podcast content on users' listening behaviors (Li, Wang, Nazari, Chandar & Carterette, 2020). Data collected from a widely used audio streaming platform were used for this purpose. Their results showed that the two types of content compete somewhat, but users

tend to spare a separate time to listen to podcasts. This suggests that the proposed effect of the overlap does not result in a significant change in user behaviors, and although future research may present new findings suggesting otherwise, this possibility is ignored for the time being in the remainder of the discussions on podcasts and user behavior.

3.2. Podcasts and New Media

Podcasts are considered to be situated within the new media (Castelluccio, 2006; Jetnikoff, 2019; Symons, 2017). Usually, this consideration is made in terms of podcasts being the digital and updated version of the radio. However, it can be seen both through this thesis and by considering the inherent characteristics of podcasts that podcasts constitute a new platform by themselves, and only share some corresponding features with the radio. In this sense one of the differences between podcasts and radio is that radio programs are broadcasted live while podcast episodes are pre-recorded, which means that they can be edited later on. Moreover, radio programs have a predetermined schedule that they follow regardless of the momentarily developing events. Podcasts, on the other hand, are more independent when it comes to scheduling as podcast hosts can record new episodes as often or rarely as they please. Podcasts may appeal to more people today than radio does; however, when considered vaguely in general terms, radio has a mass appeal as a result of its general, on-schedule and regular occurrences whereas podcasts have a niche audience. More specifically, although podcasts have a large audience base, the audience is separated into diverse podcast genres depending on their personal preferences and interest.

In terms of the regulations and licensing of podcasts, it can be seen that podcasts are not regulated for the most part, and do not require the proper licenses or monitoring to sustain the business. As a result of this, podcast hosts are more free to shape their programming the way they want, and they are not accountable to anyone. Moreover, some differences can be

seen between new media users and traditional media users when a comparison is made between traditional and new media platforms in terms of user behaviors. Considering the users of new media platforms, it is seen that there is a younger audience compared to traditional media platforms. This younger audience is a group that has a shorter attention span, as will be discussed in later sections, and prefers to follow tiny bits over conventionally longer radio shows. In addition, there is a growing preference towards more casual, honest and authentic content, rather than the scripted and controlled performances on the radio. In a sense, podcasts' popularity and success as a platform of new media is not completely dependent on the addition of the internet culture that made podcasts an up and coming medium, but instead, it gained popularity through its use of the new media tools in ways that made the content more engaging and authentic.

3.3. Podcasting and Other Forms of Social Media

Although it is safe to say that podcasting has gained considerable momentum in popularity among other platforms of social media, it also has a unique quality in that we don't see the social media personalities emerging as influencers in podcasting that we are now accustomed to. Social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube and Tiktok rely on visual content, and their users are able to monetize their content in direct proportion to the number of views/likes/comments they receive (Abidin, 2016; Mhalla, Yun, Nasiri, 2020). Podcasting, however, is originally an audio-based platform, although podcast video recordings are also prevalent now, and the monetization of content is through sponsorships and advertisements (Pancy, 2015). Considering the evolution of any form of social media platform, there is a mutual pattern in which once the platform is popularized and becomes a tool for making money, people begin to monetize their content through advertisements and voluntary donations by viewers. This is obviously true for all platforms of the same nature. However,

the difference lies in the quality and sustainability of content as well as the amount of social interaction that is allowed in the platform. In this sense, various social media platforms can be examined through the features that can be examined in terms of the level of interaction, accessibility, transparency, and the extent of control that the user has. Such features will affect how users think about the respective social media platform, how they use it, as well as their trust in the platform. Therefore, these attributes also indirectly affect application, monetization, and user motivations. Below, the characteristics of podcasting will be discussed in relation to other social media platforms in terms of application, monetization, and user motivations. By comparing the various social media platforms with each other, these features will be examined in terms of both the inherent structural aspects of the platforms and the aspects arising from the interaction of the users with these platforms.

3.3.1. Social Media Ads and Monetization of Content

In theory, a podcast itself is not a social media platform, just like a website is not a social media platform. However, it is a form of digital media that allows considerable interactions. Listeners are able to share opinions, communicate with others, and even form communities about podcasts on other media platforms. Therefore, although podcasts receive a considerable amount of interaction, due to these interactions taking place in other platforms, and by virtue of its lack of space for listeners to interact, podcasting is not social media. With this in mind, one way podcasting differs from other social media platforms is that certain platforms tend to be more exploitable than others in providing direct cash flow to anyone with a certain number of followers regardless of the quality of content. And if podcasting is to be considered in relation to other social media, such comparison is necessary. For example, with the popularization of Instagram, people began to curate content on popular topics ranging from fashion and beauty, to lifestyle and popular culture, to business. Regardless of

whether people buy followers or build their follower base from scratch, those with a certain following have the opportunity to benefit financially from their online presence, and make a career out of their online activities and shared content (Cuevas, Chong, & Lim, 2020; Stoldt, Wellman, Ekdale, & Tully, 2019).

Similarly, another newly emerging platform, TikTok offers its users to accept donations from viewers in the form of virtual stickers that have monetary value (K. E. Anderson, 2020). In the case of podcasting, however, there is no direct relation between the listener and the host such that the host would benefit from the interaction financially. Podcasts are rather monetized through sponsorships and advertisements that are mentioned during the beginning, middle, or end of a podcast (Nguyen, Tian, & Xue, 2010; Ritter & Cho, 2009). Moreover, the podcast audience is arguably more engaged and less skeptical of the targeted ads as opposed to social media users because they have a more trusting and genuine relationship with the podcast host, which results in a greater chance of engagement and less annoyance. This is because the podcast audience encounters only the ads from the podcasts that they listen to, whereas the social media user is bombarded with all kinds of ads that come from all kinds of sources whether they follow them or not. Therefore, it may be suggested that podcast ads tend to be more targeted and have higher chances of engagement as a result of the more intimate and authentic relation between the audience and the host.

A very recent study on consumer perceptions of podcast advertising reports the results of a survey related to the podcast listening behavior, and attitudes and responses towards recommended products that were encountered while listening to podcasts, as well as demographic characteristics (Vilceanu, Johnson, & Burns, 2021). In the survey, two thirds of the participants reported that they listen to 6 or more podcasts in a week. Participants' preferred podcast genres were predominantly comedy, and society and culture. In terms of ad preferences, participants reported that they prefer narrative ads where the host talks about his

or her own experience with the product over pre-recorded ads, which in fact supports the idea that the authenticity and the genuine relationship between the podcast hosts and listeners benefit the success of the advertisements. Moreover, it was stated that listeners pass through dynamically inserted pre-recorded advertisements that were constructed by digital algorithms. Finally, it was noted that podcast listeners preferred call-to-action in the ads so that there are more options to contribute and support brands other than simply purchasing a product, such as visiting a webpage or making a donation.

In terms of the effectiveness of social media ads, as compared to podcast ads, another recent study examined the impact of Instagram ads and the consumer perception on purchase intention (Suprapto, Hartono, & Bendjeroua, 2020). In this study, a questionnaire was applied to Instagram users who recently made purchases on Instagram, and who already followed stores' Instagram accounts. The results showed that while the advertisement promotions on Instagram did not directly affect people's purchasing intentions, it affected their perceptions. On a similar note, it was found that especially young female users are likely to be influenced by online celebrities' product recommendations, and their purchase decisions are likely to be influenced by these Instagram profiles (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Overall, the online consumer behavior studies mentioned above suggest that the distinction between podcasts and other social media platforms in terms of monetization and targeted ads is that there is a greater match between the podcasts/podcast hosts and the listeners in terms of trust in such that the purchase recommendations are more effective on podcast users. However, studies also suggest that the online advertisement tactics tend to appeal to young females more than other age and gender groups, and that people don't tend to base their purchase decisions based on these ads.

3.3.2. Statistics on Digital Media Consumer Behavior

Another way podcasting differs from other social media platforms is that podcasts have become increasingly popular over the last few years with their portable and easier use, as a result of which, users are offered an easier alternative to having to constantly view a screen (Davidson et al., 2019; Drew, 2017a; Perks & Turner, 2019; Statista, 2019). While most platforms include pictures, photos and short videos, podcasting includes only audio or audiovisual content. This inherent difference imposes certain implications on the user background, and what each platform can offer to its users. For instance, podcast users constitute a smaller sample of the people who use media applications; however, the increasing interest in podcasts have accelerated the growth of this platform more so than the other social media platforms (Edison Research and Triton Digital, 2020).

According to a recent survey, an estimated number of 212 million people are familiar with podcasting, which constitute a rough estimate of 75% of the American population (Edison Research and Triton Digital, 2020). The survey further states that 155 million people in the U.S. have reported to have listened to a podcast at least at one point in their lives. Approximately 104 million people have reported that they listen to podcasts on a monthly basis while an estimated number of 68 million, which corresponds to the 24 percent of the American population, have reported that they listen to podcasts on a weekly basis. In order to have a reference point with respect to the use of other media platforms: It was reported that as of 2020, an estimated number of 178 million Americans use Facebook, and approximately 116 million Americans use Instagram.

A new addition to the survey this year, it was reported that nearly 31 million Americans used TikTok in 2020. In terms of the evolution of users in these platforms, it was reported that from 2018 to 2020, the use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram increased by 1% and 5%, respectively. On the other hand, podcast familiarity and

podcast listening has increased by 11% over the last two years alone. Hereby, two observations from this survey can be listed as follows: First, the yearly growing curve of social media users seems to be completed as seen by the lower proportions of growth per year while new social media platforms make an ambitious impression (e.g. TikTok). Secondly, as an independently emerging audio/visual platform, podcasts seem to have gained momentum in terms of new users and regular listening.

Figure 2

Monthly Podcast Listening in the U.S.
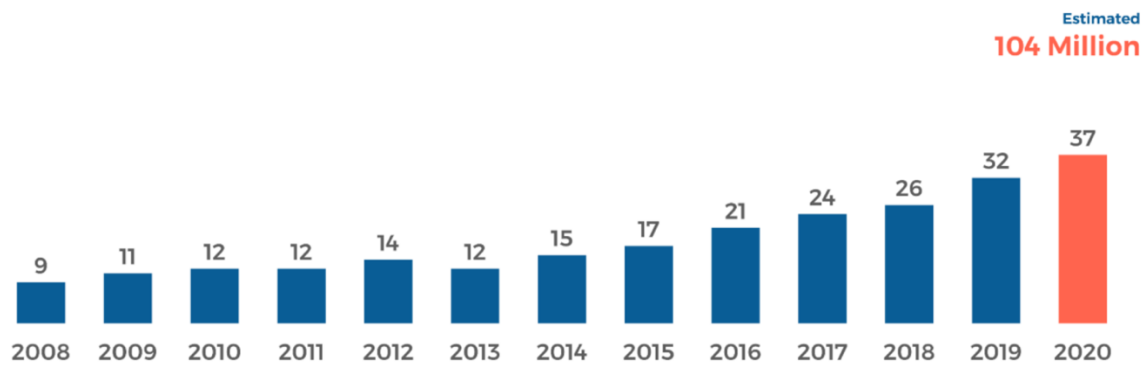
Note. The above figur presents the estimated percentage of people in the U.S. who listened to a podcast in the last month, based on a survey on digital media consumer behaviors. From *The infinite dial 2020*, by Edison Research and Triton Digital, 2020. (https://www.edisonresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Infinite-Dial-2020-from-Edison-Research-and-Triton-Digital.pdf)

It is noteworthy that in addition to its inherent qualities, the exponential growth of podcasts can also be attributed to the development and simplification of mobile applications such as Apple Podcasts, Spotify, SoundCloud, and many other applications, which undoubtedly made it easier to reach, download and listen to podcasts for the users (Ciancutti

et al., 2017; Statista, 2019). Weiner (2014), quoted in Casares (2020, p. 2) states that: "Staring at a laptop or a tablet for hours on end exacts a physical toll; podcasts present a way to reenter, and move through, the natural world without logging off". Podcasts provide its users an extensive library that include topics such as culture, health and fitness, business, comedy, education, and many more that they can access anytime and anywhere (Drew, 2017a; Edmond, 2015; Hurst, 2019). In addition to its growth in the number of users, the number of active podcasts has also increased significantly over the past few years. The number of available podcasts online rose from 26,000 in 2016 to 43,000 in 2018 (Madden 2006; Madden & Jones, 2008). Moreover, a recent research on podcast statistics has reported that the library of the Apple Podcast application offers more than 1,000,000 podcasts as of 2020 (Winn, 2020). As for the number of downloads within the app, it was reported that the number of streaming and downloads was over 50 billion since the early 2005 (Locker, 2018). Despite, and also as a result of, its rising trend, the outgrowth of podcasts is still at its development stages and has a long way to go before it slows down (Aufderheide et al., 2020; McHugh, 2020).

In spite of its massive popularity and demand, podcasts are not very prevalent among all developers or services, in fact, apart from Apple podcasts, there are few servers that offer podcast access (although the number is rising). There is no doubt that the impact and the reach of podcasts are recognized both by podcast listeners and media scholars studying this particular subfield. However, with reference to where the podcast research stands and points to, it is predicted that the industry will be growing exponentially within the next few years. The growth will naturally bring about more and larger investments, which will contribute to the position of the podcast industry among other media platforms. Podcasts are already beginning to be incorporated in many different domains on a large scale. One example of this is the use of podcasts for educational purposes (Drew, 2017b; Robson & Greensmith, 2009;

Tam, 2012). The application of educational podcasts is not limited to schools either; big companies are using podcasts for training their staff, as well as communication purposes (Butler, Camilleri, Creed, & Zutshi, 2021). In this regard, podcasts can be involved in a number of domains and purposes. The fact that podcasting is growing out of the domains, in which it was initially expected to grow, into a larger scene contributes to its success and future achievements. The expanding reach of podcasts hints at the profitability of the podcasting industry in the following years as millions of people are listening to podcasts on a daily basis.

3.4. YouTube and Podcasting as Internet Cultures

The ever-changing transformation taking place in the new media is moving the dynamics between the mainstream and alternative media. As mainstream media is losing its monopoly in informational flow to the new media, they are getting more tribal and polarizing to attract immediate attention from the viewers. For a very long amount of time the radio played its role successfully to reach masses. However, along with the media, the users of the media are also changing. The attention span of the new media audience is very fragmented and intolerable to some of the old ways of the legacy media. Podcast and YouTube culture, in that sense, were able to survive the technological transition taking place and thrive in this new way of using the media.

Along with podcasts, the comedians were able to make the same transition and grab the attention of the new media users. Contrary to a traditional radio show where almostnthe entirety of the show is scripted and highly edited, the uncut dialogues and raw content of podcasting appeals more to the audience. The young audience of the new media value the genuine conversation and dialectical thinking process going on in a podcast more than a traditional radio show against which they show great cynicism. A typical comedy podcast

show, for instance, is simultaneously uploaded to YouTube and then divided into bits with titles for the grabs of the viewer. A deeply conversational episode or a comedic highlight, therefore, is deliberately fragmented for the viewers. Moving forward from the comparison of legacy media and new media, we can examine today's digital new media platforms based on their authenticity, ease of access and fragmented structure.

First of all, in terms of authenticity, podcasts undoubtedly offer more fluent, intimate and conversational content compared to heavily scripted programs broadcast on platforms such as radio and television. In this context, the fact that podcasts are preferred due to their content characteristics can be interpreted in terms of both podcasts being more relatable to the audience, and as a reaction to the traditional radio and television. The main reason podcasts can offer more authentic content is that there is no barrier to anyone making podcasts. The ability of anyone, famous or ordinary, expert or novice, to make a podcast means listening to people who appeal to a larger segment of the population. Still, the issue of authenticity is not just explained by the fact that anyone can make a podcast. In fact, the feeling of ease when listening to someone who makes good comments on society and who we think understands us is also a testament to this authentic content. A person who is outside of the norms of what counts as traditional hostmanship when interviewing someone, or someone freely expressing how he or she feels under certain circumstances exhibit characteristics that are considered authentic. Comedian podcasts possess all of these qualities in the sense that they put on a conversational and performative program through podcasts where they are sometimes vulnerable, sometimes excited or sometimes triggered. This openness and honesty is also passed on to the viewer or listener who seeks authenticity of content in the first place. This pushes the audience to turn to podcasts instead of television or radio.

Secondly, podcasts are way easier to access than radio or television. Podcasts do not have a broadcast stream like radio and television, and they use an open source interface

where all content is accessible. In this way, listeners can access the content they want to listen to from their phones -or any other device- whenever they want. On the one hand, podcasts are very accessible in terms of listening, but they are also accessible in terms of production. It is easy for listeners to access podcasts, as well as for content creators to be able to produce content without being stuck in any bureaucracy chain. This accessibility opens up the content that needs to go through many stages in order to be broadcast on radio and television under normal conditions, and makes the podcast a more preferable platform for content producers. When we consider media platforms featuring podcasts such as Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and Youtube, and compare them to television and radio, it can be concluded that these platforms are more free, less filtered, and more transparent as a result of their inherently more accessible structure. Moreover, this transparent and accessible interface enables a more effective interaction between content producers and listeners/viewers to create a nonhierarchical producer-consumer relationship that radio and television cannot offer. In this sense, it is shown how accessibility affects the use of media platforms in the digital age by both producers and users.

Third, the fragmented structure of podcasts offer a less demanding product to the listeners due to the fact that they have a form that requires less attention than a continuous flow. Considering the shortening and fragmentation of our attention spans, this makes podcast an easier product to consume and digest for listeners. As an example supporting this idea, broadcasting of talk shows and short clips of TV series and movies on Youtube can be given as examples. For example, names such as Conan O'brien, Jimmy Fallon, John Oliver, and Jimmy Kimmel all have Youtube channels for their late-night shows, and these channels include short clips of certain fragments of their programs. Moreover, the flow of these programs is planned in a way that allows it to be divided into certain fragments later on: The guest talking about the newly released movie or album, a few details about their love life, an

interesting memory that they had gone through that we did not know before, and maybe a game played with the guest. As can be noticed from the pattern here, television programs are also aware of digitalization and the shortened attention span of their audience, and try to present their content in ways that the audience can engage more. Of course, as highlighted, this feature is inherently more prominent in YouTube videos and podcasts. In short, as a result of digitization and the widespread internet culture, there is a more impatient and perhaps insatiable audience. In order to appeal to and satisfy this audience, it is necessary to be able to produce and present content that is indexed to their user behavior in virtual environments. In this context, Youtube videos and podcasts, which are products of the digital age, are born in this culture, so they can more easily meet these user expectations. Considering the podcasting within the media industry, it is seen that podcasts can be easily adapted to the digital developments of the time, can be monetized through targeted advertisements, and that they create a more authentic and accessible alternative to other social media platforms, which all contribute to the rising popularity of podcasts. In this context, a very popular genre that can be examined within the scope of podcasting, is comedian podcasts. In the next section, the comedian podcasts will be discussed with respect to their shaping role in the digital comedy scene and new media.

CHAPTER 4

COMEDIAN PODCASTS

4.1. Comedian Podcasters

A niche genre of podcasts that attract a large audience is the personal, talk show-like podcasts by comedian podcasters, usually disguised under the comedy category. Podcast as a new communication medium not only provides a liberating performative space for comedians to express their artistic persona but also allows them to indulge into a deep conversation with their guests. The performative nature of comedy podcasts and the inherently participatory functioning of podcasting is never really divorced. Most of the comedy podcasts actively require the attention of the listener in delivering the conversational material as well as comedic relief. In these podcasts, the host talks about anything from personal life experiences to current events, to mental health.

An example of this is studied by Meserko (2014) where he examines the success of the podcast by Paul Gilmartin, *Mental Illness Happy Hour* which received considerable media attention (Brownfield, 2012). In *Mental Illness Happy Hour*, Paul Gilmartin talks about mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and chronic stress. The success of the podcast can initially be attributed to Gilmartin's previous experience in hosting and stand-up comedy; however, what makes his podcast a success is his raw and relatable attitude behind the microphone. Contrary to his comedic persona, "the tone of the show plays to the trope that all comedians are in actuality broken people who are willing to expose their brokenness for our light amusement" (Brownfield, 2012). Therefore, the self-produced, independent

podcast is able to gain a level of intimacy and accessibility that radio broadcasts are not able to achieve. This is because the podcast medium enables the host to express himself freely without the worry of his or her program being cancelled. Since the comedian host in such podcast shows is not necessarily tied to any media outlet in terms of self-agency, he/she can control and shift the artistic expressions during the show autonomously.

In addition to the creative freedom podcasts offer to comedians, the lack of a dependence on a boss or a company means that podcasts have a self-promoting, and self-advertising aspect from the perspective of the comedian hosts. Unlike the comedy shows, gigs, or talk shows a comedian may participate in, in which the promotion of the event is made by public relations staff or the owner of a club, podcasting eliminates the necessity in counting on others. This suggests that the podcasters also have a sense of freedom and autonomy in promoting their content as well as creating it. This aspect of podcasting helps comedians build their careers and share their materials in whichever way they would like without having to go off-brand for the sake of selling more tickets or attracting a larger crowd. In fact, podcasting helps comedians find their own audience, the kind of people who would listen to them, and enjoy their material who can also stick around to see what's next. In addition, the listeners and viewers of the podcast are able to directly interact with the host, the guests, and each other through online discussions and comments. This helps build the social and community aspects of the podcast, and stimulates the feeling of belonging and acceptance for the audience, while encouraging participation. Ultimately, being able to find a safe place for mental health discussions, and witnessing the vulnerability of the host contributes to the loyalty to the show by building a strong connection between the host and the audience.

While some of the comedy podcasts might lean more towards the comedy function and follow the mission of merely delivering laughs, others rather blur the line between a deep

conversational flow and comedic relief. It is, therefore, important to highlight that most comedian podcast hosts tend to go in between comedy and deep conversation flows. For instance, while comedians such as Andrew Schultz' podcasts are more on the goofy and entertaining/sarcastic side of the spectrum, the others like Joe Rogan's shows tend to go into deeper and more conversational episodes. As the conversations go on, the show becomes a therapeutic style of improvised conversation/comedy on pretty much every subject of life. The conversations taking place on shows like Rogan's and Schultz's are somehow for the comedians as they need to get things out of their chests, but they are also for the listeners as the shows are always up to date, and project on recent news. In the end, although they differ from one another, the overall experience with comedian podcasts is more or less the same. Hence, the two primary functions of the shows remain as performative and conversational.

Another consideration of a comedian-turned podcaster by Meserko (2015) can be found in his examination of the success of Marc Maron's *WTF* podcast. The *WTF* podcast launched in 2009 following the cancellation of Maron's radio show *Breakroom Live with Maron & Seder*. In his article, Meserko (2015) considers this podcast as an expressive medium for Maron to express his authentic sense of self. He argues that through the medium of podcast, Maron is able to experience his freedom, and obtain control over how he would like to be perceived by his audience. In this sense, it can be said that the podcast medium is also beneficial in terms of providing a safe space for comedians, artists, tv personalities, or anyone who is in the public eye, to communicate their thoughts and feelings and produce personal content, however extreme or controversial they might be. So, just as much as the audience is moving to this new platform, the content producers too, decide to move their work here. This interpretation, coupled with Maron's transition to podcast from radio, emphasizes the creative freedom and accessibility that come with podcasts, that not only build on the traditions of broadcast radio but also offers consumers and producers the long

desired expressive medium. It is further highlighted that the participatory, and self-sustained media, as in the case of the *WTF* podcast, "allow for narratives of self-discovery that elude and resist dystopian understandings of new communication technologies" (Meserko, 2015, p. 796). The new media are far from the restrictive and controlled dystopian ideals of communication, on the contrary, new media platforms prove to be a free space that enables people to talk about their own journeys, opinions, heart breaks, and achievements.

In *Tragedy Plus Time: Transforming Life Experience into Stand-Up Comedy Material*, Oliver Double talks about how he turned a nasty accident into a comedy podcast series called *Breaking A Leg* (Double, 2017). What he did here was to transform a real-life incident and emotional trauma into a stand-up comedy routine. On a similar note, Piper (2015) examines the comedian podcasts where humor meets honesty, and tragedy meets comedy. The focus of her paper is the podcast *Walking the Room* hosted by stand-up comedians Greg Behrendt and Dave Anthony where they talk about their lives and daily events mixed with jokes and a bit of irony. Piper (2015) defines this genre of comedian podcasts as a self-reflective and self-representational process in which the inherent expectations about a comedian as a cultural figure are beginning to evolve. In this context, the comedian podcasts are not evaluated as stand-up comedy but rather, they are evaluated as a self-revealing comedy routine in which the comedians "cut the jokes" (Weinman, 2013, as quoted in Piper, 2015).

In "Comedian Hosts and the Demotic Turn" (2018), Collins talks about the intimacy and the commonality that comedian-turned podcasters exhibit which consequently disturb the hierarchical expectations of celebrity culture. She suggests a fitting term for the function of these podcasts hosted by comedians that she calls *off-label*, in which listeners and viewers of the podcast tend to use the podcast series for self-help purposes. She argues that the confessional and pro-am nature of these podcast series goes hand in hand with the more

transparent and attainable tone of the modern media. Some examples of what may be called

the comedy/talk-show genre hosted by comedians, such as the *WTF* and the *Mental Illness*

Happy Hour podcasts mentioned above, provided future podcasts an inherent model to follow

which Collins (2018, p. 229) outlines in a successful formula: "The formula, popularized by

Maron, tends toward a monologue followed by the guest interview (comedians, actors,

musicians, directors, writers, even the president of the United States) that emphasizes

conversation between host and guest replete with intimate, personal subject matters, rather

than rote, publicity-style interview banter seen and heard in other broadcast venues."

  She also mentions the contribution of the guests in these podcasts' success, which she

calls the "expertise factor". Although the comedian hosts offer the audience the much-needed

honesty and the confessional style of conversation, what eventually keeps the series

interesting is the wide range of topics discussed in these podcasts. The intimate talks between

the host and their guest, while covering topics such as science, spirituality, politics, and

psychology, has the flow of a conversation between two friends. The vulnerability and direct

communication add to the authenticity factor that build the growing interest in this podcast

genre. On why comedians seem so right for the podcast medium, Collins quotes Pete Holmes,

the comedian host of the *You Made It Weird* podcast, where he explains that ". . . the thing

that we can't all do for ourselves or get from our phones or get from just reading something

on the Internet is perspective and authenticity and a direct, soulful communication with

somebody" (Fox, 2015, quoted in Collins, 2018, p. 243). In this sense, the new group of

comedian-turned podcasters offer a unique look at the personal struggles of an ordinary

individual with the honest and humorous touch of a comedian. The fact that they talk about

topics ranging from personal confessions to sobriety makes their audience feel like they are

talking to someone they know. Their online popularity, along with their reachability and

relatability, creates a loyal audience base, which makes their work very organically successful.

In connecting the dots between the comedy and the podcast scenes, it can be stated that long-form improvised comedy has had a significant influence on the media for a long time. The influence of comedy routines and improvisation can be found in popular TV shows such as *Seinfeld* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* where the producers chose to go with a comedy route and incorporate certain elements that originally belong to stand-up comedy in theatres or bars, to the TV screen. More recently, we can find the same routine in comedy podcasts where comedic narratives are integrated with everyday situations and real life problems. One way to consider these comedy podcasts is to imagine a comedy routine structure with honest personal content where the goal is not to make people laugh but to have them engaged in a genuine, honest conversation.

In a recent article, Smith (2019) examines how long-form improvised comedy within podcasting interacts with the cultural dimensions and new technologies. He identifies three characteristics of these podcasts by drawing on the content of comedy podcasts such as *Comedy Bang! Bang!*, *Hollywood Handbook* and *With Special Guest Lauren Lapkus*. These three characteristics are as follows: First, the flow of episodes are generally in interview format with a discussion topic. Second, the informal and relaxed style of comedy improvisation is embraced in the episodes. And third, Smith (2019) mentions serialization in order to connect the narrative of multiple episodes. These characteristics are very useful for the current paper, as well as for future reference in the academic literature on comedy podcasts. Understanding the comedy culture and its characteristic implications on the comedy podcast genre helps better analyze the content and cultural impacts they impose on society. Moreover, drawing parallels between podcast hosts and stand-up comedians support the main

ideas in this paper arguing for the increasing impact of comedian-turned podcasters on digital culture.

4.2. Comedian Podcasts Among Other Genres of Podcast

To understand the influence of comedy culture on the popularity and success of podcasts, one can look at its relationship with other podcast genres, and its place among them. As mentioned above, the inherent formula of the podcasts in the mentioned genre is a monologue by the host followed by the guest interview. More specifically though, what makes the dialogue between podcast host and guest interesting is that the conversation revolves around personal matters and intimate subjects as opposed to the superficial and attention seeking interviews conducted in other broadcast programs. In this context, the comedian podcast host presents an interesting and honest program to be followed together with the easy-to-listen conversational flow brought by the stand-up comedy culture. In addition, the above-mentioned "expertise factor", that is, hosting experts or well-known names as guests, combined with the sincere and understandable language used by the comedian host, turns into a pleasant and easy-to-understand dialogue for the audience.

For example, when considering the news programs or open sessions on television, it is seen that most of the guests use a more scientific, formal language with abundant terminology. However, having such guests as guests on a comedian's podcast means that where the conversation leads, there are conversations that are interesting and have a flow-of-consciousness. The episode where Joe Rogan hosted Bernie Sanders in 2019 has more than 14 million views (Rogan, 2019a). It must have been a breath of fresh air for people to see Sanders engage in a genuine conversation on Rogan's podcast at a time when he gave the same interview from channel to channel and answered the same questions. Rogan's attitudes such as his relaxed and humorous demeanor, his interest in what the other person has to say,

his involvement in the subject by commenting from time to time, make the guests feel comfortable and help them engage in a sincere conversation. This attitude is a feature we can see in Rogan as well as many comedian podcasters like Marc Maron or Andrew Schultz, and it's exactly what sets this genre apart from the others. If you are a journalist, you can have a podcast full of serious and valuable information about the agenda and you can interview important names and make effective comments, if you are a chef, you can talk about the culinary history and gastronomy for hours, if you are a politician, you can make effective determinations about the problems of society; but if you are a comedian, all these topics covered are your material that you can use for converstive or performative purposes. All of this puts comedy podcasts one step ahead of other genres, especially in terms of delivering engaging content. In this sense, it can be concluded that one of the factors that makes comedian podcasts stand out from other podcast genres is that they can present the monologue plus interview format in the most sincere and authentic way possible.

In terms of the functions of the comedian podcasts, performative and conversational aspects can be mentioned. Although it is known that the most basic feature of podcasts in general terms is their conversational nature, it can be said that comedian podcasts make this feature a little more interesting with their performative presentations. The performative aspect of these podcasts, of course, derive from the comedy tradition and the stand-up comedy performance history of the comedian podcast hosts. With the development of podcasts, a new platform has emerged where comedians can maintain and even extend their careers, and the effects of this situation on podcasts in general, or among other podcast genres, is that this tradition brought by comedians led to a unique style of podcasting, and offered something new and different from other genres. Among these features is the transition of the stand-up comedy performance from the stage to the digital medium. Comedian podcasts have the performative aspect they do by virtue of the one-liners, funny anecdotes, and observations

that are incorporated in the conversation during the episodes. The comedian host is not in the business of just interviewing the guest, or simply asking some follower questions, but rather, the comedian host converses with the guest about wherever the flow of conversation takes them. The flow of consciousness that is present in these conversations allow comedians to reveal, or be, their authentic selves and reflect that to the listeners. Moreover, the jokes and the stories that come with the dialogues undoubtedly make the episodes more enjoyable which contribute to their streaming numbers. Finally, the coming together of different comedians in many podcast episodes, in addition to the conversational and performative aspects mentioned here, create a comedian podcast subculture. This subculture of comedian podcasts proves to be a genre on its own terms that is rooted in the comedy and stand up subculture. Hence, the impact of the comedy culture is echoed in the comedian podcast genre by way of its revival through the podcast medium.

4.3. The Authenticity and Reliability of Comedian Podcast Hosts

The authenticity and reliability of a podcast host are measured against his or her online sincerity. A usual comedian podcast host, as described in the current work, is someone authentic and able to express sincerity towards the audience. In addition to being a significant asset for a podcast host's value in the eye of the audience, the way authenticity is handled in online platforms is also noteworthy as the usual podcast audience has much more access to a podcast host through participatory online forums like Patreon Q&A segments and discussion threads where the they can participate and directly ask questions to the host. The authentic persona of a podcast host is what eventually determines the online popularity and therefore the market value of a podcast. Authenticity and reliability of a podcast host, to this extent, are not divorced from one another. The existent feature that is common among the comedian podcast hosts that are mentioned in this thesis is that they present genuine, natural, and more

importantly, unique content rather than a scripted act that is tied to a predetermined agenda. Therefore, being sincere and expressing such authenticity as explained above is a must for a podcast host to differentiate himself/herself from the usual mainstream understanding of a radio or TV host in terms of reliability. Authenticity, therefore, is crucial to a podcast host's online image that he or she uses in order to build a reliable bond with the audience.

4.4. The Impact of Podcasts on the Careers of Comedians

If we examine the impact of podcasts on the careers of comedians, we can see that comedians carry their materials to digital platforms, especially in 2009 and later, with the popularity of podcasts and the gaining importance of digital media in general. Podcasts, which can be considered within the scope of these digital platforms, are perhaps the medium where comedians can present the comedy routine they physically perform on stage in the most authentic way. From this point of view, it can be said that podcasts provide a serious boost to the careers of comedians at a time when many professions are unable to fully adapt to digital mediums. In these days when much content is transferred to digital platforms, it is inevitable that comedy materials also find a place on digital platforms. For example, within the scope of this digitalization, various comedians have had comedy specials (examples) on television and digital streaming platforms. However, comedy specials are generally single or, at most, made up of several episodes, financed by certain production companies and their rights are also owned by these companies. Podcasts, on the other hand, are products whose content, editing, and rights (unless specifically stated otherwise) are under the sole discretion and financial control of the comedian host. In this context, podcasts contribute to the career of comedians both directly by creating a new medium where they can present their material, and by giving them complete authority in the digitization of their material. If we talk specifically about this complete authorization that comedians have, we can examine this

benefit in terms of providing creative freedom to comedians, and managing the rights and promotions of the content they produce.

It didn't happen out of the blue that comedians started making podcasts to find themselves a space to express themselves more freely. Before that, there were a few names among comedians who started making podcasts for the first time, and continued to record new episodes at a time when podcasts were not as popular as they are today. Examples of these names are Marc Maron and Joe Rogan. Maron and Rogan were pioneers in this business for fellow comedians. Many comedians who were inspired by them or started to make podcasts with their support started to make their own podcasts and over time joined the trend of comedian podcasts that have taken place today. Perhaps the most obvious reason for their success and being listened to in this job is that they can present authentic and conversational content with the comfort of being their own boss, stemming from their comedian identity.

The authenticity provided by this creative freedom has been a prominent and sought-after feature, especially during the podcast trend where superficial and similar content is prevalent. As mentioned above, Rogan was one of the people who started doing podcasts, encouraged other comedians to make their own podcasts and invited them to his own podcast as guests. This support is undoubtedly a factor that draws more people into the world of podcasts. This podcasting tradition, which Rogan initiated, soon took its place among comedians. Many comedians have started making their own podcasts for various reasons. These reasons include the desire to earn money, the inability to find enough jobs, and as a result, creating one's own business and furthering the already accelerated popularity. For whatever reason, comedians' embarking on this path led to the emergence of a subculture of comedy podcasts in the podcast community, or to make this culture even more prominent.

The increasing number of comedian content among podcasts has reached such a level that it could reach a very large number of listeners, even when only considering the comedian hosts who are guests among themselves. As a result, a self-sustaining career path has been opened for comedians, which has become even more popular, reached high viewing rates when the stories told are shared separately on Youtube, and where comedians could make a living just by doing this job. A significant point that should be mentioned with respect to this context is that female comedians, who were not able to access many opportunities to the same extent as their male counterparts because of the sexism they were exposed to, could be self-sufficient without the need for anyone's approval or permission, thanks to the podcast medium.

The Nikki Glaser Podcast by Nikki Glaser, the *Good for You* podcast by Whitney Cummings, and *Meanspiration* by Annie Lederman are some of the successful podcasts hosted by female comedians. All of these women have very successful comedy careers partly thanks to their podcasts; however, this isn't to say that their success is dependent on their milking the podcast opportunity to the best of their ability. These comedians all come from the Comedy Store subculture, which will be covered in the following sections, and represent characteristics of the LA comedy scene as well as the digital comedy scene. Moreover, comedians such as Tiffany Hadish, Ali Wong, Amy Schumer, Hannah Gadsby and Jenny Slate having Netflix comedy specials truly helped pave the way for fellow female comedians' visibility, and potential to be watched, or in this case, listened. Their material is bold and daring, like the struggle of female comedians making their debut on the digital comedy scene. Female comedians cover many topics from gender roles to the female body, from interpersonal relationships to racism and feminism in politics. Theirs is an attitude and a type of perspective that has unfortunately been missing from talk shows and stand-up comedy for many years. However, the many new opportunities that digital media offers and is changing

have made great strides in making women, as well as many minority groups, voice and presence heard in virtual environments. Moreover, female comedians covered many topics that were not talked about or treated superficially in their podcasts in a casual, informative and often entertaining attitude. Hence, considering all, with finally considering the impact of podcasts on the careers of female comedians, we can see that the podcast medium contributes to the comedy scene just as much as the comedy culture contributes to the podcasts. More specifically, when considered in terms of the careers of comedians, it can be mentioned that there is a significant impact of comedian podcasts that affects the definition of the podcast medium.

4.5. The LA Comedy Store Subculture in the Podcasting Scene

The roots of the American stand-up comedy can be traced back to the 1840s when various humorous acts started to be performed in front of an audience for entertainment purposes (Parker, 2008). These earlier shows leaned towards the performative and theatrical end of the comedy spectrum, in which the performers used costumes, make-up and additional accessories to act in character in a vaudeville or burlesque-like fashion. The modern American stand-up comedy, however, was based on more modest and simple roots. The proponents of the modern American stand-up comedy between the 1930s and 1960s included Bob Hope, Frank Fay and Fred Allen who performed directly to the audience in front of a curtain. This time, they were not in character but performed as themselves as they aimed to entertain their audience with humorous monologues without the props or accessories. The reason for the stylistic change between the modern era comedians and the previously popular vaudeville performers was arguably the urbanization and industrialization that accelerated after World War II (Mintz, 1977; Oliar & Sprigman, 2008). During this time, American humour changed with the changing pace and the flow of life in big cities, and a new demand

for more fast-paced, witty, and conversational comedy arose. The urbanization and the growing interest in city life also contributed to the accessibility of stand-up comedy in big cities where people could simply go to a club to see a comedy show. Later, with the developments in the radio and broadcast media, the careers of the modern era comedians were elevated even more. The growing interest in stand-up comedy and late night shows expanded the topics of stand-ups into social satire, sex, politics and race.

In the 1950s and 1960s, "new wave" stand-up comedians started their skits and acts in small clubs in the cities such as the *hungry i* in San Francisco, and *The Bitter End* in New York (Mintz, 1977). The Comedy Store was opened in West Hollywood, California in 1972 by comedians Sammy Shore and Rudy de Luca. The building was previously the home of Ciro's, a night club whose regulars included Marilyn Monroe, Humphrey Bogart, Frank Sinatra, Joan Crawford, James Dean and many other famous celebrities of the time. Sammy Shore's ex-wife Mitzi Shore gave the club its current name and started operating it in 1973, after requesting the club in a divorce settlement. After the handover, the club became very popular among comedians who wanted to break into the comedy scene. The Comedy Store was the first club where comedians followed each other's acts in a lineup, without a singer or a juggler in between. The tradition of a lineup of comedians became very popular, and following the Comedy Store, other clubs and TV shows started mimicking this lineup as stand-up comedy began to become a mainstream way of entertainment. However, what made The Comedy Store really stand out, and become more than a local club was the moving of *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson* from New York to Los Angeles, California in 1972. The club raised, and helped discover, many comedians who would later go on television to do a quick skit on the late-night show. The show's move to California accelerated the popularization of Los Angeles based comedians who would have less chances of exposure had the show stayed in New York. Moreover, the mention of The Comedy Store

on national television contributed greatly to its popularization, and expanded the comedy scene and culture in Los Angeles and Hollywood.

Carson's *Tonight Show* had the classic format of the late-night talk shows in which he opened the show with a few one liners which was followed by the introduction of the stand-up comic, followed by the guest interviews, and the musical and the comedy performances. The show offered a break opportunity to the local, up and coming comedians. The Comedy Store was the middle step in being discovered for the stand-up comedians, who proved themselves on stage in hopes of being on the *Tonight Show*. Some of the names who were popularized through The Comedy Store and the *Tonight Show* include David Letterman, Robin Williams, Jim Carrey, Howard Stern, Whoopi Goldberg and Michael Keaton. In one of the interviews of The Comedy Store docu-series, Howard Mendel describes the *Tonight Show* as "the litmus test for being a comedian, a professional comedian, in our day and age" (Mendel, quoted in Binder, 2020, 00:13:14).

4.6. Comedy Store: The Docu-series

The docu-series based on The Comedy Store was released by Showtime in 2020, in which the director (Michael Binder, a Comedy Store alumnus) goes on a podcast with a different comedian on each episode to talk about the store's history and impact on today's media and comedy culture. The creative decision to use podcast-based dialogues in the series sets the tone for the narrative of the show. The show's format in choosing different comedian podcasts in each episode as a narrative tool further highlights the tight relation between the Los Angeles comedy scene and the comedian podcasters. The first episode of the series delves into the comedy scene in Los Angeles and Hollywood from the 1970s and 1980s with the comedian Marc Maron in his *WTF* podcast. The following episodes continue with the effect of the 1979 comedian strike on the club's future, to the club's wild and dark years into

the 1990s. In the fourth episode with Joe Rogan, the impact of comedian podcasts on the comedy scene is discussed while the delivery and the advertisement of comedy is considered with respect to today's media and opportunities. Rogan's impact and contribution on today's comedy culture and the popularity of fellow comedians is immense as he produces one of the most popular podcasts in the world, *The Joe Rogan Experience*. In the fourth episode of the series, the conversation is around the more recent developments in the comedy scene including the podcast-era of comedy. During the episode, in his podcast with Mike Binder, Rogan talks about the impact of the Comedy Store on the up and coming comedians: "The comedy store was Macca, that was where you wanted to go. That's where Sam Kinison came out of, everybody knew Letterman came out of there. Everybody knew that the greats all came from the Comedy Store" (Rogan, quoted in Binder, 2020, 00:01:25).

However, as much as the Comedy Store was influential during its prime years, following its dark years, during which the club lost its original momentum, comedians began looking for new opportunities to advertise their comedy routines. On top of not being able to perform at an established club to popularize their names, there were now hundreds of ways for comedians to be recognized, which made the competition among amateur comedians even more intense. As a result, comedians started to delve more into personal projects to broadcast their material to a larger audience, and the new era of comedians doing podcasts began. Many comedians who stumbled upon the Comedy Store started their own podcasts towards the end of 2000s with Rogan and Maron starting their own podcasts around similar times in 2009. With podcasts gaining popularity around the same time, the comedian podcasts became a big hit since they offered access to a wide range of different comedians with their own personal episodes, and did not require that the audience tune in at a specified time. The comedian podcasts, in that sense, helped comedians target a direct audience that would actually buy tickets to their shows, while also creating a community of comedian podcasters who had

similar histories and shared a mutual interest in The Comedy Store. In fact, in most episodes, the hosts invite other comedians to be their guests, and have casual conversations about their lives and careers with humorous undertones, which naturally leads to conversations about their time in The Comedy Store.

The authenticity and the sincerity of these conversations between comedians is something that the broadcast radio was not able to provide. The comedians are aware of this changing trend as well, and they try to incorporate authenticity in their podcasts. In her interview for the docuseries, Nikki Glaser, who is a comedian, actress and podcast host, says that "authenticity resonates with people, and it's something that we are all now trying to lean into because we've done podcasts, and we know that that's what the audience want from us" (Glaser, quoted in Binder, 2020, 00:13:36). As a matter of fact, for some comedians, their podcast becomes such a huge success that they decide to focus on the podcast even more than radio or television appearances, which only proves the popular demand for authentic content. Moreover, the success of these podcasts can also be attributed to comedians having an independent platform so that they can create content in any way that they would like, which gives them the much-needed creative space. All of these dynamics including the changing delivery of comedy, audience preferences, and the emerging conveniences for the comedians create a new sense of comedy and make podcasts an important tool for comedy delivery.

4.7. Changing the Delivery of Comedy: *The Joe Rogan Experience*

The comedian podcasters possess similar qualities in the sense that they present an authentic identity that covers an array of different topics such as spirituality, wellness, sports, science, philosophy, and the struggles of everyday life blended with humor, which have arguably created a niche group of listeners and viewers for themselves. The mentioned podcast hosts attract a large number of audience by virtue of their grounded and authentic

manners, and easy-to-listen flow of conversation with their guests from different backgrounds regardless of their political or social agenda. One of the independent podcasters that exemplifies these qualities, and who is the main focus of the current paper, is Joe Rogan, the host of the *The Joe Rogan Experience*. The reason for choosing Rogan as the focus of this paper is because he represents the "misfits" among other traditional comedians and is mostly able to thrive by practicing his conversation/rant in an improv comedy style.

This particular artistic expression seems to be very popular among podcast listeners as it successfully shifts a particular comedy tradition into deep but also entertaining conversation episodes. Anyone listening to Rogan's podcast for the first time might conclude that he is an offensive, right-wing middle aged man who is obsessed with conspiracy theories. However, what he is trying to do with his podcast is to include all kinds of ideas in his podcast without any filter or pressure. In fact, this is the reason why Rogan attracts a large audience. Regardless of his own opinions, he tries to include many people who are experts in different fields, or who are on the agenda in his podcast. It should also be mentioned in terms of putting Rogan at the center of this thesis that when comedy and podcasts are mentioned, Rogan is undoubtedly the name that has reached a large part of the society, and made one of the best representations of comedy tradition in podcasts, while also having something to say about many topics.

The first episode of the Joe Rogan Experience podcast was recorded in December, 2009. Rogan, who is also one of the pioneers in podcasting with his early start, has been consistently recording new episodes. Like many others, he initially recorded podcast episodes from his home, speaking to his close friends and fellow comedians. Later, with both his continued involvement and the increasing popularity of podcasts, Rogan began to gain a solid audience base. Meanwhile, his flow and the topics he talked about started to become more or

less clear. During this time, the fact that other comedians started their own podcasts, and Rogan hosted them helped the careers of new comedian podcasters while also promoting and popularizing the comedian podcasts overall. The fact that comedian podcasts became more well-known allowed Rogan to invite more famous people, as well as people who are experts in their field, to his podcast. Rogan's guest list includes professors, politicians, athletes and artists, writers and many more. He famously hosted Bernie Sanders in 2020 during the presidential elections. He also hosted Elon Musk and Edward Snowden twice in his podcast over the years.

There are more than a thousand podcast episodes of Rogan, and therefore it is almost impossible to delve into each episode, and explain the projection of improv comedy style conversation through the medium of podcast. Hence, it is my aim to pick and go over certain episodes and bits of *The Joe Rogan Experience*. By sampling different episodes from the podcast, I will explain how a certain form of comedy tradition finds articulation through an innovative use of the podcast medium. The sampling of the episodes will be based on the guests and the topics that would most ideally provide input in terms of media studies and the current comedy scene, as well as the role of podcast in providing a new medium for accessible and unfiltered discussions. Since Rogan is coming from the abovementioned comedy tradition, the topics he tends to touch on and the guests he hosts on a weekly basis are very much related to this tradition. An average listener of Rogan, therefore, would be familiar with the flow of the conversation and comedic tone, as well as the shared topics and guests. Moreover, the fact that the guests on Rogan's podcast episodes represent a wide spectrum from science to politics shows the success of comedian podcasts in making even the most complex topics accessible and worth listening to, through comedy culture and routines.

The portrayal of the new-generation, comedian-turned podcasters illustrate the potential of podcasting as an emergent platform that builds digital culture by virtue of their authentic identities, and the great exemplification of the current ideals of the podcasting platform as an up and coming converged medium. In this regard, the following questions will be examined during the consideration of the selected episodes from *The Joe Rogan Experience* podcast: First, do podcasts, and comedian-turned podcasters in particular, have an increasing impact on digital culture as an emerging form of new media? Secondly, can podcasts replace productions of major media networks given that they provide their audience with more authentic, independent and unrestricted contents?

CHAPTER 5

SELECTED EPISODES AND ANALYSES

The name of *The Joe Rogan Experience* podcast is a tribute to the album named *The Jimmy Hendrix Experience,* Jimmy Hendrix being one of Rogan's favorite musicians, and an example of creative freedom (Rogan, 2020a, 14:02). According to Rogan, one of the reasons for producing his own podcast is that he did not want to be accountable to a boss or to any corporation. Hence, his intention was to make a show without having the corporate intermediaries that are usually involved in the creative process. Although *The Joe Rogan Experience* is technically listed under the comedy category, the topics discussed in the show range from politics to science, to sports and health. In fact, Rogan is known to publicly support platforms such as Wikileaks and similar forms of cyber activism. He talked in favor of the journalist Julian Assange on many occasions, and even interviewed Edward Snowden in an episode of his podcast (Rogan, 2019b, 2020b). In this sense, it can be said that Rogan is known to enjoy his freedom of expression, and arguably, would not be in the same position had a hierarchical media company been monitoring and editing his podcast.

Rogan's humor can be described in terms of the humor of the East coast that resonates with the comedians from New York and Boston. In that sense, he is known to use rude remarks and have an aggressive tone in his performances and on the podcast, and frequently comments on sensitive or taboo topics such as sex, religion, pseudoscience and historical mysteries. Of course, his attitude and the tone of his podcasts should be considered a part of his act, as he argues most of his material is for humorous purposes and is not intended to

target any certain group or be offensive (Rogan, quoted in Binder, 2021, 03:01). Rogan is also known for his advocating of meditation and the use of psychotropic drugs such as marijuana and ayahuasca for explorative and treatment purposes. In this context, he is an avid defender of the legalization of cannabis as he discussed this topic many times in his podcast. Rogan's authentic style and passion for freedom of expression and cyber activism sets him apart from the traditional broadcast news and entertainment personalities through many differences. These differences are observed in topics covered by Rogan, as well as the production and advertising aspects of the podcast. His interest in various topics, and his willingness to learn and share these topics are instrumental in hosting many different people on his podcast.

In fact, since launching his podcast, Rogan has interviewed many people, from the art world to politics and science, as mentioned above. Of course, his podcasts are more like a talk show than an interview, so the flow of the subject is in line with the flow of thought. Below are some of the podcast episodes Rogan has made over the years. While choosing these episodes, especially the flow of conversation, the topics discussed, the guests and the impact of the episode (such as the number of views and its place on the agenda) were taken into consideration. In this context, care has been taken to include well-known media personalities in the field, as well as the episodes with journalists and comedian guests. Here, "media personality" is more specifically meant for online presence in independent media and social media, with the impact of podcast and internet culture in mind. On the other hand, conversations involving unpopular, radical and/or opposing views and discussions about controversial issues were also the reason for selection since one of the most important things that comedian podcasts have achieved is that they can convey such situations to any listener in a conversational fashion.

5.1. Episode 1529: Whitney Cummings and Annie Lederman

The guests in this episode are Whitney Cummings, who is a stand-up comedian, actress, writer, and the host of the *Good for You* podcast, and Annie Lederman, who is a stand-up comedian and the host of the "MEANSPIRATION" podcast on *All Things Comedy*. Both Cummings and Lederman are friends/acquaintances with Rogan from *The Comedy Store*. In this episode, Rogan, Cummings and Lederman talk about female comedians, the delivery of comedy today, and how offensive humor is treated amidst the cancel culture. They talk about the fact that many of their jokes to each other are made up of offensive comments and emotionally triggering observations. The fact that these jokes are not taken seriously, or personally, and are only laughed at, shows the sincerity between the joker and the person being joked about. That's why, when an offensive joke is made, it is only laughed at, rather than throwing criticism arrows at the person making the joke and giving them the intimidation of cancellation. In fact, silencing offensive jokes harshly only results in more authentic and natural humor.

> Something that was so important at the Comedy Store the other night is that these last six months have sort of hoodwinked me into believing that, like, jokes are dead, that we're not allowed to make jokes anymore. Right. And because [of] Twitter, sort of, you know, we're hallucinating with all the [things] we're seeing on Twitter and blowing it up to be bigger than it should be. (Cummings quoted in Rogan, 2020c, 00:13:11)

Considering the impact of social media on the careers of people who perform in front of the public eye, such as comedians, it is clear how fast such jokes can travel on social media and reach a large number of people. In this context, the fear of making mistakes and being

cancelled prevent comedians from reflecting their best and most authentic selves on one hand, and determines the kind of content that major broadcast media companies choose to include in their broadcast streams, on the other. Although this is a harbinger of bad things for comedy in general, it has been a good development for comedian podcasts in terms of giving comedians an open creative space and offering more authentic content to the audience, doing what broadcast media could not do. On the other hand, if we were to specifically examine the effect of making offensive jokes with respect to male and female comedian stereotypes, it could be said that since making such jokes is traditionally considered a masculine and intimidating characteristic for female comedians, female comedians' offensive jokes actually create an equal ground for their consideration.

> I never feel more equal than when a male comic is pummeling me because they know I can take it. You know, you come right back. That's exactly what's fun about it. It's like they're not doing it to be a bully. They know they're doing it because you want to spar, and you can handle it. (Cummings quoted in Rogan, 2020c, 00:15:39)

Perhaps it is further argued that one of the wrongly claimed reasons for why female comedians are not taken as seriously as male comedians on subjects such as politics, sex, or when making offensive humor may be that women are generally seen as needier than men. So much so that when a woman talks about the bad things that happened to her, or makes a joke about a daring memory, instead of laughing at the absurdity and irony of the situation, a feeling of pity or disgust appears in men's minds. Although this wrongful prejudice against female content producers prevented women from taking part in many projects in broadcast media over time, the spread of free media movements and the ability of female content producers to make their own rules is now plaguing this situation. In this sense, female

comedians, who can share their unique humor with the audience through podcasts, break this meaningless prejudice and help female comedians to hold on in the comedy world. At the same time, there is a serious sense of community and support among female comedians because everyone has the awareness that the use of mass media is the way to convey their ideas and contents, and to support other like-minded female comedians.

This sense of community is not limited to female comedians. Today's comedy scene has become an environment where the competition among comedians is less frequent than it was in the past years, thus creating an environment where comedians can produce their own original content with less competition. One of the reasons for this is that today, social media and modern broadcasting tools inevitably liberate content production and access to content. This liberation has brought with it a reduction in the need for traditional broadcast media outlets. Thus, the rules of the now-ancient show world, in which many people competed with each other for a single slot, have been replaced by the rules of the modern podcast era, where everyone competes in their own lane and reflects their own style.

> This is the least competitive era of any era of comedy and the most supportive. We support each other because, [with] the Internet, there's not a limited number of slots, like this is the thing that we were talking about with Jay Leno, like back in his day, there was only one host of The Tonight Show. And everybody wanted that spot when Johnny Carson left. (Rogan, 2020c, 03:11:22)

Also on that note, the freedom that podcasts offered showed that comedians could rely on each other for popularity and screen time, not the big media companies. Now, a comedian's reputation and recognition in every household is not dependent on their brief appearance on *The Tonight Show*, but their presence on the already known and popular

network of comedian podcasters. For example, it can be mentioned that the comedians who participated in the *Joe Rogan Experience* program increased in popularity and found more job opportunities after the show. In that sense, being on a popular podcast today is the equivalent of appearing on *The Tonight Show* in the past. Hence. the good thing about the current situation is that the popularity of a comedian is not dependent on a monopolized establishment's final decision.

5.2. Episode 993: Ben Shapiro

Ben Shapiro is the editor-in-chief for the Daily Wire, a writer, and the host of *The Ben Shapiro Show*. In this episode, Rogan and Shapiro delve into topics ranging from politics, gender, and censorship on the Internet. A large portion of Rogan and Shapiro's conversation in this episode is about current political events, and the impact of the media coverage of these events on people's perceptions. In this context, they talk about the media censorship and propaganda around many agenda items such as the American presidential elections, the Black Lives Matter movement and LGBTQI+ issues, how tolerant the leftist or liberal segment of society is against views different from their own, and the impacts of the anonymity of the Internet. In terms of media's differing opinions on the agenda and the delivery of news, the differences between newscasts of radio and television channels, and independent media outlets such as podcasts, which differ fundamentally from each other is discussed with respect to fake news and disinformation.

Shapiro stresses the fact that there is a difference between false information and opinions, which can easily be overlooked on issues that are approached very sensitively and aggressively, such as politics. In this context, it is inevitable that the stories shown on the news channels are subject to harsh criticism and denials. In line with this, the fact that newspapers and television channels inherently have their own political attitudes and opinions,

and that these opinions are often embedded with the facts in the news also creates a general feeling of distrust towards radio and television sources. On the other hand, the reliability that television and radio often cannot provide is easily found in news and conversation programs in podcasts. In this context, considering that current news presentations are of a show nature, the increasing demand for comedian podcasts can be explained by the fact that people have moved from unreliable media platforms to free media outlets where more reliable and authentic conversations take place. At this point, popular podcasts featuring both liberal and conservative personalities are becoming very popular. For instance, although it can be said that Rogan owes his popularity to the easy listening flow brought by his comedian identity, it can be seen that the thing that carries his show to the top is regularly hosting people with different views and professions.

> I don't think you have to agree with people . . . The idea that you can't just have a conversation with someone about something, and see if you can find a middle ground or see if you could clearly define their point of view or find their perspective; that's missing today. (Rogan, 2017a, 01:53:32)

The problem with the broadcast media is, as Shapiro puts it, that "the opinions that are embedded with the facts; those are opinions, and that's what's so hard about . . . the modern media landscape, [that it] is trying to separate the facts from opinions" (Shapiro, quoted in Rogan, 2017a, 01:54:32). What is meant here by separating opinions and facts is that some parts used in a news article or speech are biased information, and that biased information will inevitably be interpreted as false information if indistinguishable. This interpretation encourages the listener to think more constructively in today's media pool full of information pollution, and the need for a healthy discussion environment forces its way into people's lives

inevitably. The constructive and adaptive characteristics of podcasts can be considered revolutionary considering the inability of traditional media to see the pulse and needs of the public. In this sense, it is seen that podcasts have emerged and become popular not only as a reaction to traditional media, but that they have also taken on a constructive task as a response to the problems of today's media.

The constructive role of podcasts is an opportunity for many professions, for the first profession that comes to mind that can provide the desired conversational flow is the comedian, if not the talk show host. It's a fact that digital media is taking off with social media apps, but that's obviously because podcasts were left out of the equation for a long time. Now we see very clearly that podcasts are not only a social media entertainment tool, but also a media tool that people use to meet their news needs and have ideas. More importantly, a large part of the responsibility for podcasts to acquire this quality rests with the producers. For this reason, it can be easily said that the comedians carried the comedy scene to the podcast medium and initiated a new understanding of digital culture. This transition from traditional media tools to internet-based digital media tools started with the news reviews of the late-night show hosts on Youtube, and it now continues with the conversations of various podcasters about the news.

Later in the episode, anonymity on the Internet is discussed with respect to online hate and freedom of expression. It is criticized that online hate in the virtual environment can be expressed without any consequences by hiding behind an anonymous account. In this sense, the fact that the hatred expressed by many people reaches the level that they almost enjoy it, is actually an indicator of dysfunctional behavior, and is something that is not necessarily consequence free. Rogan and Shapiro both argue that online anonymity will probably be gone in 10 years with the advancements in technology, and there will be a lack of control over privacy issues. In line with this thought, the possibility that the language and activities people

use online may have consequences in the future, if not today, is considered. This opens up a discussion about self-expression that runs between the two ends of a spectrum, which are privacy and freedom of speech. On one hand, anyone should be able to express themselves freely in any environment given that the thoughts and opinions expressed are not of ill nature. However, in this day and age, it is also crucial that certain private thoughts are kept as they may attract too much attention or offend those who may find them thoughtless and aggressive. The point that Rogan and Shapiro discuss, and agree, is that worrying about offending people shouldn't create an environment so constrained as to require walking on eggshells.

They further emphasize that although activities on the Internet require attention, the disclosure of information in people's private lives should not cause them to be cancelled. In this sense, since podcasts do not impose their content in a way similar to the broadcast stream of a television or radio channel, and choosing to listen to a stranger's ideas on a podcast will be one's own decision, it may be thought that the rules governing television and radio do not apply to podcasts. While the idea of refraining from making comments that may be offensive does not directly suggest that the cancel culture is toxic, it is a thought that presupposes that online behavior should be evaluated and handled within the context of confidentiality and related circumstances. In other words, the focus of this discussion is not whether the canceled person is in that situation for justified or unjustified reasons, but that when considering online behaviors in general terms, it is suggested that neither acting inappropriately by hiding behind the mask of anonymity nor using private matters against the person is the right way to go. Do podcasts have a special place in taking responsibility for comments made with a leaner moral compass? The answer is, largely, no. However, it should also be taken into consideration that podcasts do not have the same screening process for hosts as radio and television. Anyone can make a podcast.

5.3. Episode 1485: Krystal and Saagar

Krystal Ball and Saagar Enjeti are the hosts of the web series *Rising*, which is about the daily news and opinions on the current agenda and political stories. In this episode, Krystal, Saagar, and Rogan talk about the media's influence on politics, its shaping of the political agenda, and its impact on people's mental health. The episode begins with the conversation on how people can make quick judgments about subjects, events and persons on social media. So much so that the judgments made do not even have to be based on an accumulated knowledge. In fact, one's views about a person is consistent with how one judges any person who shares the same opinions with that person, whether that person is an artist, a political figure, or a commoner. For example, a political figure can be criticized on the basis of how rational the opinions shared by one of his supporters are. These supporters in question may be online accounts who support a presidential candidate, for instance, and the online behaviors and attitudes of these people can be further attributed to the person in question, that is, the presidential candidate in this example. People are quick to make snap judgments about a situation based on the limited amount of information they encounter online, such as headlines, tweets, or quotes. Furthermore, when considering the influence of the media on people's opinions, the reliability of the information source or its comparison with other sources is often not even considered. On this matter, Rogan argues that social media is being shaped into a reductionist perspective today:

> I think . . . that has to do with this quality of posting things on social media, like this 140 character, now 280 character quality of Twitter where you're just kind of condensing things into this reductionist view of stuff, and then just put it out there.

Oh, he's racist. Oh, he's sexist. Oh, he's supported by white nationalists. . . That's the

narrative . . . there's no nuance. (Rogan, 2020d, 00:23:03)

Social media, and especially Twitter in the context of political discussions online,

tend to distort and challenge the existing perceptions of events towards an exaggerated and

aggressive tone because it's "simplistic, . . . sensationalist, driven" (Ball, quoted in Rogan,

2020d, 00:25:20). The reason for this distortion and exaggeration is that people will pay more

attention to news that excites them and triggers their adrenaline and activates dopamine

pathways, Ball argues. The underlying concern that drives the necessity to somewhat create

an attraction in the news has to do with the kind of news that will sell. One of the easiest

ways to create an attraction in the news is to make contrasting opinions clash with each other

so that the accountability of people who are responsible is ignored, and an interesting

narrative can be created with a villain involved. These practices, which are applied especially

by major media channels and aim to increase the number of viewers, are carried out with the

corporate mentality and the aim of making more profit.

They find the worst person that's supporting you, and then they use that to dismiss the

whole thing . . . that way, they don't have to engage with your arguments or your

policy ideas or who you are, what you're doing as a person. It's like this person

associated with you is bad, ergo you are bad. Ergo, we don't have to deal with that at

all. (Ball, quoted in Rogan, 2020d, 00:22:45)

The media's manipulation of people with provocative content does not only prevent

access to accurate news sources. These fast paced and tense news feeds may cause anxiety

and stress in many people. The fact that news feeds and media applications are designed to

attract attention and keep the person on the screen causes people to be exposed to this type of

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stress-inducing content longer than they should. For this reason, the demand for platforms that do not require a priori planning and offer authentic content is increasing, rather than platforms and tools that aim to increase people's screen time and engagement. In this regard, with Joe Rogan being the lead, comedian podcasts provide people the much-needed escape from mainstream media. It is inevitably preferred to listen to the comments on current events from two comedians with a sincerer take on matters, rather than from specially planned news feeds.

In this context, if a comparison is to be made with podcasts, it is understandable that news channels and radios present more extreme, provocative and shocking narratives when compared to podcasts. This is because corporate companies account for more money, and have a larger audience than podcasts do; hence, they have much more at stake in terms of view counts, advertisement revenue, and brand value, so to speak. For this reason, it can be argued that the tendency to make the news more chaotic and sensational has, in fact, contributed to the increase in the popularity of talk show style comedian podcasts. This is because podcasts provide the much-needed quiet space for interviews with experts on a given topic, and an easy flow of conversation amidst the storm of chaotic news on other media outlets. In addition, the authentic manner in which people express their opinions in podcasts provide a more natural and convincing narrative regarding the news. Finally, the fact that listening to a podcast is an individual activity that doesn't require a schedule or a predetermined pace shows that the news and opinions can be perceived with a clearer mind, away from the hurry of radio and television. In sum, independent media outlets and online resources such as podcasts manage to avoid sensational news making by offering critical content without being under the pressure of a company. From this perspective, it can be further argued that although comedian podcasts do not change our news habits overnight,

they are a fresh response to the newly emerging digital needs, and reshape the digital culture by changing our purposes and ways of using media tools over time.

5.4. Episode 1523: Joey Diaz & Brian Redban

Joey Diaz is a Cuban-American stand-up comedian, actor and podcast host. His podcast is called *The Church of What's Happening Now*. Brian Redban is a comedian and the founder of the *Deathsquad* podcast network. In this episode, Rogan, Diaz and Redban talk about today's comedy scene and *The Comedy Store.* They also talk about how making podcasts for a comedian is a more sustainable and viable option for their careers than their irregular standup gig. Podcasting creates an opportunity for comedians to present their material directly to the audience, instead of going through an audition process to be picked. The good thing about this situation is that a lot of comedians nowadays can pass work to each other by inviting each other to their podcasts, and in a sense, they back each other. Thus, it is more than destiny and general media trends that set the course for comedians' careers. It also allows comedians to be themselves when choosing creative decisions and comedy routines, rather than considering audience expectations or the lineup at the club they're in that night.

> Because everybody had podcasts, like, everybody kind of fed off of each other doing that. And so it was beneficial to everybody to pump you up, like, to let you, like, you let me know about Jeremiah. You let me know about Tony Hinchcliffe. We let each other know about these guys and everybody sort of circulates and everybody does well together. It is a really good environment. (Rogan, 2020e, 00:38:36)

Meanwhile, Diaz's past memories in the comedy scene provides an opportunity to compare the situations that comedians have faced in the past with the career developments of

young comedians today with the impact of The Comedy Store, the new media, and the birth of podcasts. In this sense, the harder and more realistic world of entertainment that Diaz mentions in his memoirs and the amateur comedy clubs of old times show that it was much more difficult for comedians to make a debut, or get support from their communities at that time, compared to today's conditions. It could definitely be said to be a dog-eat-dog world at the time, because aside from the limited opportunities available, it was very difficult for a comedian to find the audience to whom his humor was addressing. If we talk about Joey Diaz on this subject as an example, it is inevitably obvious that the harsh language he uses and his humor centering on being an immigrant in the US in his early days will not appeal to large masses. However, aside from the fact that he has become more proficient in his craft over the years, modern developments and the fact that independent social media is accessible from everywhere today are some of the factors that helped Diaz find his own audience.

Diaz states that he was initially closed to the idea of making podcasts, and even found the idea silly and childish. Maybe it does really seem lame to sit in front of a microphone in a room and have casual conversations with friends for someone who grew up in the entertainment world of the 1980s and was hustling to make money and find his crowd. However, it's an inevitable fact how influential it was in Diaz's career to both have his own podcast and to be a guest on other people's podcasts. Diaz's presence on podcasts has allowed him to present what he does best, perhaps in the most ideal way: A man with hundreds of interesting memories and a great deal of storytelling, talking about his life and people in a casual and incredibly funny tone. Of course, that doesn't mean Diaz's career would have ended if podcasts didn't become popular, but Diaz is one of the best examples of careers podcasts have carried forward. The popularity of Diaz's career as he moved his show and content to the digital environment, his involvement in a community with other comedian podcasters as he makes podcasts, and his ability to reach audiences with similar tastes to his

own audience were all thanks to the producing opportunity offered to consumers by the podcast medium.

The contrast between the careers of comedians back then and now shows that the emergence of participatory culture proved to provide a more liberated digital space for consumers of technology. As mentioned, comedians in the past did not have the opportunities today to advance their careers. The birth of podcasting, among other social media tools, presented comedians an opportunity to become producers, as well as consumers. The participatory culture that emerged in virtual media tools as digital media took shape gave comedians the creative space and freedom they needed to advance their careers. Going back to Diaz, we can take a closer look at the impact of past and present media outlets on the careers of comedians. Diaz's career started at a time when the aforementioned Comedy Store and The Tonight Show were popular. There weren't as many talk shows then as there are today, and there were no clubs where comedians could get on stage and perform. This meant that the things a young comedian could do to show off were limited. People could have performed in a comedy club, but if the audience didn't like their humor, they didn't have much of a chance. The best thing to do in a situation like this at the time was to keep trying and hopefully find your own audience. A comedian starting out today is likely to start a podcast, especially if he's aware of his niche humor. Although Diaz was successful, podcasting helped move his career to the next level.

If we follow the development of podcasts over the careers of comedians, we can see that comedian podcasts, which constitute a very popular part of podcast genres, have seriously shaped digital media. It is possible to find comedians talking to an expert or a novice in their podcasts on many topics, notably the news reporting and political commentaries exemplified above. The point where this situation affects the content offered by traditional media tools is the point where podcast content is preferred over television or

radio content. It was mentioned above how the developing participatory culture can advance the careers of comedians. Because, in order to understand the importance of the place of comedian podcasts in the current media scope, it is necessary to understand the reasons why the producers of these podcasts prefer this medium in the first place. Podcasts help elevate careers of comedians, while comedians contribute to the popularity of podcasts, and making podcasts an alternative medium that offers authentic content.

5.5. Episode 1039: Iliza Shlesinger

Iliza Shlesinger is a comedian, writer, and a podcast host. In this episode Rogan and Shlesinger talk about what they've been through in their careers as comedians and the issues of men and women in the comedy community. One of the topics discussed is the decrease in competition among comedians today. Among the reasons for this, as mentioned above, are the fact that comedians no longer need to appear on one of the limited number of shows as they used to, and that the talk show and television appearances have lost their old charm. We have now entered a period where comedians' careers benefit from being more community-oriented, rather than being individualistic. This situation confirms the predictions of the transition to digital culture that Jenkins (2006) mentioned, where consumers who have become passive with the digitalization of the media appear as active participants and the top-down media hierarchy is broken. In this context, comedians, as content producers, are shaking off the requirements of the previous media order, in which they were merely the passive products of bigger media companies. Instead, they are now active in the virtual environment and more interactive in this virtual hub. As mentioned above in the section on fan podcasts, comedian podcasts are also more interconnected thanks to interactions between the audience, the hosts and the guests. The participatory and interactive nature of podcasts, and digital social media tools in general, allow for the popularization and acceptance of the

comedian/artist into the digital comedy scene, and reduces their dependency on external media outlets. This means that in turn, the podcast medium has gained many talented but not as controlled as a professional content producer. On the other hand, the fact that these contents are open to everyone means that the works done in this field can be announced to, and consumed by, people very quickly. In this context, in the podcast medium, comedians have their own club in terms of having a digital space for continuing the comedy culture that was inherited from the comedians in The Comedy Store.

There's a comradery that we share that is very unusual in a fairly competitive art form. . . I don't think it's as competitive anymore, and what I mean by this is that I don't think that the idea of getting a sitcom, or being the host of The Tonight Show, or these limited number of gigs that are available, I don't think that's where it's at anymore. I think there's more people like you that are doing Netflix specials, and me. We both do podcasts, . . . that kind of thing, I think, is way more open to people, and it's way easier for us to all be supportive of each other in the art form of standup. (Rogan, 2017b, 00:59:34)

"There's an art form of letting people talk in a way that is easy to consume for the people that are listening", Rogan tells Shlesinger, talking about how he's improved a lot since he started podcasting in terms of making conversations with people in a way that appeals to the listeners (Rogan, 2017b, 01:01:50). On how comedians can lean into podcasts in their careers today, Shlesinger credits Rogan, adding that he "single handedly changed the landscape in the way that [people] consume comedy" (Rogan, 2017b, 01:00:50). Rogan did indeed start doing podcasts early on, and more importantly, continued doing it, which paved the way for many comedians to do the same. The reasons why there is a tight community

among the comedians today are undoubtedly due to the foundations Rogan laid by starting a

podcast years ago. In addition, the fact that the careers of comedians are shaped by their

media presence, or rather personal projects such as podcasts, gives them independence

regarding their careers.

5.6. Episode 1228: Bari Weiss

Bari Weiss is an American opinion writer, editor, and a columnist for The New York

Times. In this episode, Rogan and Weiss talk about journalism, and how fast paced

information travels as a result of the digital culture shifting at a hyper speed. Consequently,

they mention how people can be dismissed and abstracted easily in today's media scene as a

result of the fast-paced news environment. The fear of being abstracted from online

communities arouses the need for many people to belong to an in-group or community,

because the discussion of ideas on any subject, especially on social media, has taken such a

dimension that people either belong to a group or are doomed to be alone. Moreover, if

someone is alone, that means they are in a vulnerable position to attacks because now on

social media, people are not judged by their individualism, but rather by what idea they

represent. The rapid flow of online information creates a state of panic in people, so to speak,

and a "lack of empathy towards anyone who doesn't share [one's] opinion" (Rogan, 2019,

00:22:45). Rogan and Weiss argue that this causes the formation of radical groups in the

society, hatred against the out groups, and polarization in general. This episode critically

addresses journalism and social media journalism in particular, and the long-term dynamics

that can be caused by using social media outlets as a news source are explained. On this

matter, social media outlets such as podcasts were mentioned as offering an alternative to

mainstream broadcast media. Moreover, as mentioned in the Shapiro episode, it was

emphasized that podcasts are preferred because they offer freedom of expression, and

unfiltered and authentic content. In this section, it will be discussed how social media and new media outlets' presentation of unfiltered and natural content, away from traditional journalism, can manipulate many people towards fanaticism and hatred towards outgroups.

As soon as people lose their trust that you are unbiased, you're giving them an objective perspective on exactly what's going on. . . It flavors your perspective on news, and these people, . . . journalists and contributors to these websites and newspapers are fighting for their life because everything is dropping off. The revenues are down, . . . and what takes their place? Bloggers? Who's looking at them? Are you sure that they have journalistic ethics and standards that are like what we would expect from [journalists]? They don't. They don't have to. (Rogan, 2019c, 01:43:49)

Rogan and Weiss argue that many newspapers still have journalistic ethics and standards unlike unprofessional news reporters, such as bloggers, on social media applications, and that "the loss of trust in the press is a symptom of the loss of trust in lots of public institutions" (Weiss, quoted in Rogan, 2019c, 01:41:33). The lack of trust in authority figures, public institutions and news organizations can be seen from the very fact that people tend to validate their distrust of news organizations at the slightest mistake they may make. Moreover, people have an attitude of behavior almost as if they want to take revenge on the trust that people have lost against the authorities from the news organizations. This situation may be one of the reasons for the decline in the circulation of the big news organizations, and the increase in the interest in the independent media outlets. For as much as the new podcast era of journalism fills this gap people look for, being fixated on independent media content also carries the risk of being manipulated, provoked and exposed to comparably more radical

ideas. After all, social media has a way of pushing content that will conform with the existing opinions of its users, making these opinions more rigid, and devoted. Although it is undeniable that more and more people begin to prefer alternative media outlets, the question remains, do people just want to confirm their own opinions?

When podcasts are evaluated together with other social media outlets, it can be seen that the tendency of users to self-affirm and find similar contents, perhaps, prevents a selection similar to natural selection, when compared to the content offered by traditional media over which people do not have personal control. More specifically, the algorithms that govern social media outlets prevent any type of natural selection of content. What is meant by this is that whereas people would encounter news based on significance, proximity or popularity, they are now more likely to encounter news that serve as a conforming narrative according to their preferences. The virtual space works differently than the real world in terms of the rewarding of behaviors and the unrealistic amount of interesting activities taking place simultaneously in multiple mediums. The algorithm in many social media tools operate by learning consumers' preferences: Their likes, dislikes, duration spent viewing a certain content, or the duration spent listening to a certain content, when people log in and log off, what type of content keeps them coming, and so on. From this point of view, although the way digital media is being shaped by the newly released social media outlets can be explored through many examples, it is important to make sense of this shaping and to do it consciously.

When we look at the effect of comedian podcasts on this transformation, we see a serious movement in terms of people's preferences. At some point, it's worth taking a step back and thinking about why people choose to listen to comedians on serious topics. Because the reasons why comedian podcasts are preferred not only helps discover the kind of content people enjoy, they also encourage considering in what ways this preference is a symptom of

other things. The transformation that takes place in media today doesn't necessarily imply a transformation in the positive or negative direction, but rather, a transformation towards the most adaptable medium. The digital social media platforms have the tools to tweak the system in a way that will ensure their continuity; hence, the digital media culture has a built-in system that will keep promoting whatever is being consumed.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

As discussed in this thesis, the podcast medium, which has become popular with the digital media taking a bigger place in our lives, has become a very optimal performance venue for comedians. Comedian podcasts have become an alternative to traditional media outlets in terms of getting the news as well as for entertainment purposes for various reasons, and these podcasts, which cover many topics and include people from many different fields, have become one of the most important media elements that shape digital culture. Podcasts, which were handled here in the context of participatory culture, enabled independent producers and people from various professions to create their own authentic space in the virtual environment by virtue of the horizontal medium that allowed consumers to become producers, contrary to the traditionally hierarchical consumer-producer relationship. Hence, the comedian podcasts have become an influential part of today's digital media because of the fact that podcasts were a logical move for the careers of comedians, that the filtered and hierarchical structure of broadcast television and radio allowed the development of independent media outlets, and that comedy culture became mainstream and conversational through the medium of podcast which attracted a larger audience. In this context, two questions were tried to be explored by examining the comedian podcasts through the selected episodes of *The Joe Rogan Experience*, which were mentioned above. First, the impact of comedian podcasters was considered with respect to their role in the development and popularization of podcasts as an emerging form of new media. Regarding this consideration,

topics including the careers of female comedians in today's comedy scene, comedians' use of offensive humor and the cancel culture, and the authenticity of comedian podcasts were examined.

As an on-demand genre of the new podcast medium, comedian podcasts offer an alternative career path to comedians, as well as empowering female comedians in being able to make independent career choices. Many problems women face in the physical world such as prejudice, harassment, underpayment, and higher standards that must be met, though they do not disappear, are arguably less encountered in the digital environment. In this sense, the podcast medium offers women an equal platform to present their materials. Thus, female comedians' exposure to the audience also increases, and their visibility stands out. In other words, it can be said that as a result of the podcast medium and the inherent structure of the digital participatory culture, more screen time, or microphone time, is there for women to grasp compared to their presence in traditional media.

In addition to the pros of podcasting in terms of offering a better space for improving the careers of female comedians, podcasts, as a young and progressive medium, are more tolerant of offensive humor than television and radio. In television, radio and print journalism the news is sometimes scripted, and anything rough on the ear or offensive is avoided and frowned upon. Comedian podcasters tend to have a more natural temperament, and a natural flow, which is sometimes preferred by the listener. In fact, one of the most notable differences between people's perceptions of podcasts, and television or radio is that the authentic personalities of the comedian podcasters are welcomed to be as they are, whereas tv or radio personalities appear more distant. For example, the offensive humor in podcasts can be quite entertaining when it is not vulgar or mean, and is only made for comedy purposes. This may be because people can empathize more with a podcast host than a gorgeous looking woman on television. So going back to one of the questions asked above, do podcasts really

have a leaner moral compass in terms of the extent to which offensive comments and verbal remarks are allowed? Or, do people just have a higher tolerance for offensive humor when they hear it on a podcast because they associate it with comedy? Perhaps the answer is both. It can be suggested that the podcast listeners tend to criticize the use of offensive remarks to a lesser extent than they do with television or radio personalities. Moreover, the comedic undertone in podcasts eases the transition of the listener from a serious mindset to a more casual one. Either way, the acceptance of certain attitudes and expressions in podcasts imply that it has been embraced by the listeners.

The second question asked was whether podcasts can replace the productions of major media companies with their authentic, independent and unfiltered contents. In response to this question, topics including fake news, privacy and freedom of speech, and media provocations were considered. Fake news, according to Shapiro, can be thought of in terms of opinions plus facts, as mentioned above. It is not entirely possible to state that many of the well-established media companies always make completely unbiased news, both because they have inherent views on the political agenda, and because they have to attract people and influence them to be able to sustain high viewing rates. When we look at the comedian podcast front, we can see that comedian podcasters do not have the worries that major media companies have in terms of larger revenues, or a rooted history filled with political predispositions. Hence, they can act in a more independent manner with regards to making the news in a more casual, authentic and realistic way. Moreover, comedian podcasts remain to be a relieving experience when considered among the high paced, anxiety inducing televised news.

6.1. Monetization

It has been mentioned that podcasts are monetized through sponsorships and advertisements. The podcast advertisements were further argued to be more targeted and to have higher chances of engagement as a result of the authentic relation between the audience and the host. In this sense, podcasts possess a great revenue potential not only for the podcast host but also for the platform on which the podcast is shared. The Joe Rogan Experience is one of the most listened podcasts in the world, which means that it is one of the highest paid podcasts in the world. One of the companies that acted with the awareness of this financial potential was Spotify, who signed an exclusive multiyear deal with Rogan for $100 million dollars (Koetsier, 2020). This offer is very significant in the sense that an offer of this size is not heard of in the podcasting world. Spotify's move in investing in a podcast implies two things: First, it supports the fact that podcasting is on the rise in the media scene, and that it now affects the digital media market almost as much as the digital music industry considering the size of the offer. Second, it is an offer that opens the door to other podcasts, which Spotify might take under its wings in the future.

Having said that, Rogan's acceptance of the offer also means that his videos will be removed from Youtube, where all his podcast episodes remained until the offer. Although the podcast will still be free to access, by removing the content on Youtube and uploading it all to Spotify, the company hopes to increase their traffic, as well as users who are also podcast listeners. Another thing that an investment this size shows is that traditional media products are getting out of fashion, and that media products will be digitized in many fields in the future. If it continues this way, Spotify could also negotiate with other comedians to switch their podcasts to Spotify to keep users with similar interests on the app as user traffic increases. When such investment moves are considered from a broader perspective, it can be

seen that with the increase in the consumption of digital content, advertising and consumer behavior in media settings will be changed as well.

6.2. The Future of Podcast

In the future of the podcast, it is possible to encounter many new genres that are similar to the comedian podcast subgenre created by comedians. In this sense, what is meant by new genres is that people in different professions make their own podcasts to carry their work to digital platforms and independently do the content they produce or the service they offer. Since this thesis deals with the transition of the comedian profession to the digital platform in order to keep up with the digital age, it is thought that different professionals can follow similar steps in the way of digitalization. In this context, psychologists making therapeutic conversations on certain topics in different podcast episodes, creative writers telling stories with a new development in each episode through podcasts, or chefs telling their recipes through podcasts can be imagined as examples of adapting their professions to the digital medium. These kinds of podcasts have already started to be made at the present time. The point emphasized here is that comedians use podcasts as a tool to shape the comedy scene, as well as their careers, and that the changing characteristics of podcasting contribute to the shaping of the digital media through new ways and genres of podcasting. Accordingly, this is where the potential of the podcast for future professions and professional interactions comes from. Podcast is still an evolving and growing digital platform and has not yet realized all the potential it can offer. In this sense, it may arguably be a practice that will become widespread in the future for different professions to advance their careers, perhaps as an additional source of income, or entirely through the podcast medium.

Another development that is expected to occur with podcasts in the future is that podcasts will arguably provide a much larger and wider range of opportunities for brands and

businesses. Based on the current trends regarding podcast use, which was discussed in the previous sections, more people are expected to listen to podcasts in the future than they do now. The rising growth and popularity of podcasts will lead to a more diverse listener base that is representative of the targeted populations for future advertisements and public relations studies. Similarly, the growing budget set apart for the podcast ads will continuously grow so as to reach this population. At this point, the various ways a product or service can be monetized through podcasts, such as sponsors, merchandise, or discounts provided for the listeners, will provide many options to the marketers. Moreover, the cost of advertising on a podcast is quite low considering the simplicity and cheapness of the equipment used.

When these factors come together, podcasts will become a very affordable and targeted audience medium for the advertising industry in the future. The growing place of advertising in the podcast medium will mean new job descriptions and business opportunities for PR and marketing companies, as well as start-ups, who have smaller marketing budgets and a greater need to present their ads to a targeted audience. Considering the majority of comedian podcasts right now, we can see that these podcasts are sponsored by advertisements from various brands that target their audience. In addition to this, as mentioned above, the fact that these comedian podcast hosts are highly trusted and authentic figures also affects the fact that the ads made hit the desired audience and that an increased profit is achieved with the effect of the advertisement. In fact, podcasts enabling more targeted ads and having higher chances of engagement with the listeners, who are actively listening to podcasts rather than it being background noise, ensures that the percentage of ad return is perhaps higher than the ads made on other social media platforms (Nguyen, Tian, & Xue, 2010; Ritter & Cho, 2009).

6.3. Future Directions in Research

The current thesis explored the dynamics of the comedian podcasts from a general perspective with very little attention paid to the reasons behind the popularization of comedian podcasts from the users' perspective. Future studies may investigate the motivation(s) behind downloading and/or listening to certain podcasts from a listener's perspective. For instance, McClung and Johnson (2010) investigated the demography of people who are active listeners of podcasts, and the motivation behind their podcast listening habits. They suggested through their study that people who are listening to podcasts are in active search of a community or social environment to connect with people and to discuss with them the content they watch/listen to online.

The community forming aspect of the motivations of podcast users suggest that the people in digital environments seek similar mutual interests and social circles as they do in the real world. In this context, the community building aspect of podcasts have been mentioned in previous sections in terms of online user behavior and fandoms in the podcasting world. Future studies may perform more detailed analyses through surveys, interviews, or social experiments to better understand the behavioral motives that govern podcast use. Moreover, in this context, user behaviors in the digital podcast environment can be examined with respect to users' preferred news sources, the extent to which they get influenced by content, whether their opinions are affected in the digital environment, and so on for a more sociology and politics oriented research. Furthermore, parallels can be drawn between traditional media and podcasts in order to understand whether the ongoing transition towards digital mediums mentioned in the earlier sections corresponds to an actively conscious behavioral change in people who regularly listen to podcasts.

As well as the motivations of podcast users, the motivations of podcasters in making a podcast has also been considered in the literature (Markman, 2012; Markman & Sawyer,

2014). Markman and Sawyer (2014) interviewed podcasters, and found that their motivations were community engagement, personal growth and the opportunity to receive feedback. However, the number of recent or in depth studies on podcasters is still very low. Moreover, considering the fact that earlier studies were mostly dominated by educated, professional males over 30 years of age, and that no distinctions were made in terms of the genre or the number of subscribers these podcasts had; hence, a more thorough investigation of the behavioral and/or career based motivations of the podcaster awaits being explored. In particular, discussing the comedian podcasts mentioned in this thesis in terms of the career developments of comedians and their financial concerns, and making further studies on the demographic backgrounds and creative motivations of the comedian podcast hosts will contribute to the literature. Currently, there are studies that investigate certain comedian podcasts in the fashion of a case study (Brownfield, 2012; Double 2017; Meserko 2015); however, more detailed studies on this specific category of podcasts is very few (Collins, 2018; Piper, 2015).

The research questions of podcasts and specifically comedian podcasts that are less common in the literature are mentioned above. On the other hand, an area of podcast research that is well established in media studies is the news podcasts and the consideration of podcasts as public media (Aufderheide et al., 2020; Newman & Gallo, 2019). This aspect is touched upon in the current thesis through the discussion of some episodes of *The Joe Rogan Experience* with journalist guests. Accordingly, it is discussed how podcasts are preferred more due to their authentic and conversational flow, and the reasons why the broadcast radio and television lose their old popularity. In this context, the biased and manipulative nature of the news is considered the primary factor that drives people towards exploring alternative news sources. The gap in the literature on this subject is that the comedian podcasts are not examined within the scope of this category, that is within the scope of news podcasts or in

relation to political and social dynamics in the digital media that concern news making. The reason comedian podcasts are suggested to be examined under this category is that many comedian podcasters talk about the agenda and politics with their guests, from political figures to writers, as a talk show host. Moreover, as mentioned in the previous sections, there is arguably a trend in which listeners are moving to digital mediums to get the news as a result of the feeling of distrust towards radio and television sources. So, the consideration of comedian podcasters within the scope of news podcasts may unpack new perspectives on journalism, politics and digital media. In this context, surveys can be made with podcast listeners to better understand their reasons for choosing a digital media outlet, whether they follow the news on television as frequently, and how trustworthy they find the news on television versus podcasts, and so on. Such research would strengthen the argument that the transition from television/radio to podcasts is due to the loss of trust in traditional broadcast media.

6.4. Conclusion

This thesis explored the impact of comedian podcasts through the selected episodes of *The Joe Rogan Experience* podcast. The emerging relationship between podcasts and other forms of new media was discussed in terms of the similarities and differences with traditional media outlets. For this purpose, podcasting was considered as a collective medium in line with the media theories of Jenkins (2004; 2006) and its relation with other digital social media platforms was explored. The stand-up comedy culture was examined in relation to the Los Angeles comedy subculture and comedian podcasters in order to delve into the history for the emergence of comedian podcasts. The impact of The Comedy Store on the styles and the careers of the comedians coming from the club was mentioned specifically in terms of the comedy subculture. It was further mentioned that comedian podcasts, which many comedians from the Comedy Store started with the aim of digitizing their content and owning their

materials, created a podcast genre on its own by virtue of the authentic, conversational and performative features it exhibits. Moreover, it was also emphasized that this genre has shaped the digital comedy scene and platforms, and that it has emerged in order to adapt to these updates in today's rapidly increasing new media and digitalization.

Overall, the discussion on the relation between comedian podcasts and the emerging new media culture was around the selected episodes of *The Joe Rogan Experience* podcast, one of the most popular podcasts in the world, and it has been concluded that comedian podcasts have an immense impact on the shaping and growth of digital culture in many ways, including social and political dimensions. In this context, episodes of The Joe Rogan Experience that are thought to touch upon the social and political dimensions mentioned were selected and examined. As a result of this examination, comedian podcasts were evaluated in the context of journalism, social issues, standup comedy culture, online user behaviors and new media. The conclusions drawn here are that the podcast is a rapidly growing platform that shapes the digital media culture, that the comedian podcasts create a genre on their own, and that it is a source of news and opinion referenced in many topics from current news to technological developments, and that the future of podcast holds many opportunities in terms of the growth of the medium by way of newly occurring genres such as comedy, as well as new marketing and business options by virtue of its reliability and authenticity.

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