

A review of radio and podcasts in the USA and Malaysia

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ABSTRACT The digital transformation of media has led to the rapid growth of podcasts as a complementary audio platform to conventional radio broadcasting. This paper presents a comparative review of podcast integration strategies and challenges among radio stations in the United States of America and Malaysia. Through a qualitative document analysis and systematic literature review from 2019 to 2024. The study examines how radio stations utilise podcasts for content delivery, audience engagement, and monetisation. The United States of America will be a great benchmark for emerging podcast markets like Malaysia due to the United States's position as a global leader in broadcasting industry while also providing a broad perspective on podcast broadcasting. This comparison can help researchers understand the difference between podcast in Malaysia and the United States of America in many significant ways. Findings reveal significant differences between both countries in podcast adoption stages, host selection, content strategy, marketing techniques, and technological infrastructure. While the United States of America exhibits mature practices with diversified business models and advanced marketing, Malaysia remains in an early adoption phase with a focus on rebroadcasting. This review highlights the potential for podcasting as an innovation in the radio industry and offers insights for broadcasters aiming to bridge strategic gaps.

KEYWORDS: Podcast, Radio Station, Challenge, Broadcast Strategy, Comprehensive Review

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INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of digital technologies and internet accessibility has significantly reshaped the global media landscape. Statista (2024a) reported that 5.07 billion internet users worldwide. It shows that the shift toward on-demand content has led to the emergence of podcasts as a popular audio platform. Before podcast, radio traditionally dominated by Frequency Modulation (FM), Amplitude Modulation (AM), and Shortwave (SW) transmission and radio has evolved to include internet-based content dissemination (Ibrahim & Wahab, 2021; Alzoubi, 2023).

Scholars such as Berry (2015), Bonini (2015), Aufderheide *et al.* (2020), and Azmi (2024) argued that the presence of podcasts had brought innovation and become an additional platform to radio stations in delivering information and entertainment more efficiently. Using podcasts allows radio stations to archive part of the programme into podcasts to help listeners access the missed programme. It aims to overcome the weaknesses caused by the limitations of time and place in the radio industry to convey information through AM, FM, and SW (Clark, 1998; Liikanen, 2001). The existence of podcasts as an additional platform has given the radio industry an advantage in conveying more in-depth and comprehensive information to a global audience. Because of these factors, researchers need to know how radio stations can take advantage of the use of podcast to provide the needs and wants of users. It is essential to avoid interruptions in the operation of podcasts.

Most radio stations worldwide began integrating radio broadcasts with podcasts (Pew Research Center, 2023; Forbes, 2021). Statistics shows that there are 546 million podcast listeners worldwide in 2024 (BACKLINKO, 2024). It shows that communities positively accepted podcasts. However, that number still cannot match the statistics of global radio listeners (3.2 billion), as Statista (2024d) stated.

Podcasts offer flexible, time-independent access to audio content and have been integrated into radio station programming worldwide (Anderson, 2013; Berry, 2015; Azmi, 2024). Podcasting serves as both an alternative and a complement to traditional broadcasting, enabling radio stations to broaden their content reach and enhance audience engagement. However, the strategies for implementing podcasts and the challenges faced differ significantly between countries. In the United States of America, podcasting has been extensively integrated into radio operations, while in Malaysia, it is still in the early stages of development (Azmi, 2024; Beh, 2024).

This paper presents a comparative review of how radio stations in the United States of America and Malaysia incorporate podcasting. It focuses on the strategies they use, the challenges they face and the implications for future development.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach to study past research on podcasts and radio in the United States of America and Malaysia. This approach is required to analyse past studies, documents, journals, articles, and other sources to build credible research in the future. This study involves rediscovering and interpreting concepts to create new insights and findings. It then identifies research gaps and adds breadth of understanding to existing epistemologies. Previously, Rime *et al.* (2022) used literature analysis techniques from previous research documents to examine podcast usage strategies and podcast usage by radio stations. For this reason, the same techniques were used to analyse strategies and challenges in radio stations that use podcasts. Ibrahim (2022), and Marcu (2019) also used the same techniques to research podcasts and radio. Search Engine as Google Scholar, AI Dimensions and Science Direct were used in this research. Table 1 shows the summary of the documents found in the initial search related to the podcast.

Table 1. Initial database search summary

Year	Search Engine	Articles
2019-2024	Google Scholar	16,400
	AI Dimensions	12,865
	Science Direct	569

It is important to understand that a comprehensive review goes beyond simply summarising the findings and conclusions of qualitative studies. Instead, it involves reconceptualising those findings, allowing to interpret them in a way that generates new insights. This comprehensive review can develop new theories and conceptual models, identify research gaps, and understand existing knowledge more deeply. Therefore, following the appropriate steps and procedures is crucial when conducting a meta-synthesis analysis, and these are as shown in Figure 1.

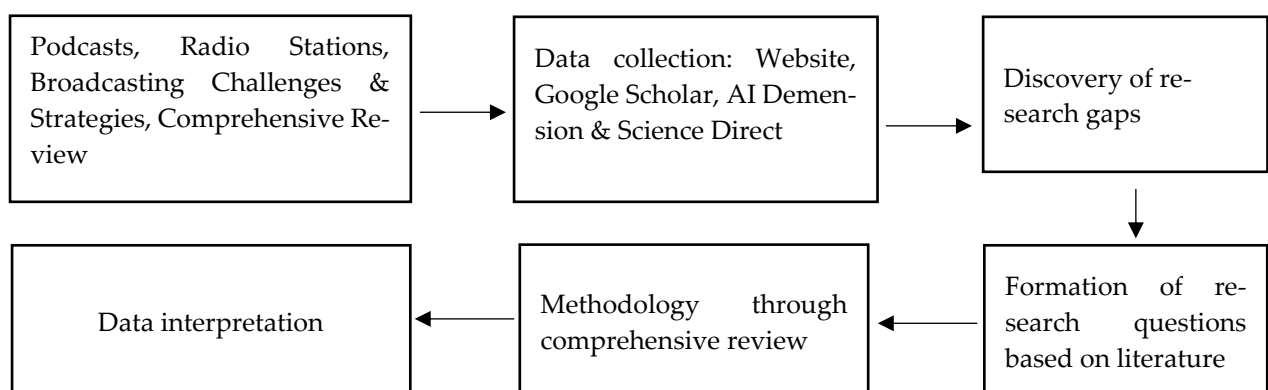


Figure 1. Research Design

Research questions were first derived in this paper. Studies in the United States of America show that less than one-fifth of respondents were aware of podcasting as of 2006. However, after 17 years, podcasting usage in the United States of America experienced significant growth, with 157 million monthly podcast listeners recorded and entertainment podcasts emerging as the most popular genre (Resilient *et al.*, 2022; Triton Digital, 2023; Statista, 2024b). In contrast, podcast usage in Malaysia has exhibited different trends. According to Azmi (2024), podcasting was still in its early stages six years ago but saw a surge during the COVID-19 pandemic. By 2023, the number of podcast users in Malaysia reached three million, utilising podcasts as a source of both entertainment and information (Start.io, 2023). The data indicates that the United States of America has embraced podcasting within its media culture, leading to wider acceptance and usage over a decade compared to Malaysia. This raises an important question: What are the differences in podcasting strategies and challenges radio stations face in the United States of America and Malaysia?

After formulating our research questions, a literature search using databases Google Scholar, AI Dimensions, and Science Direct were conducted where only article published in English from 2019 to 2024 are included. To ensure a representative sample of high-quality studies, we focused on articles, books, book chapters, and reports, which were identified through an iterative process based on the journal articles we reviewed. The database search results are as shown in Table 2

Table 2. Final database search summary

Year	Search Engine	First Search	Second Search	After Inclusion & Exclusion (n)
2019-2024	Google Scholar	16 400	999	26
	AI Dimensions	12 865	3462	5
	Science Direct	569	154	3

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

From the data obtained, a thorough comparison revealed six core dimensions in podcast integration between the United States of America and Malaysia (refer to Table 3).

Table 3. Critical Comparison between the United States of America and Malaysia

Dimension	United States of America	Malaysia
Content Strategy	Original and Diversified Content. (Aufderheide <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Alaejos <i>et al.</i> , 2022).	Rebroadcast of existing radio segments. (New, 2023; Azmi, 2024).
Host Selection	Expert, personally driven hosts (Aufderheide <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Schofield, 2023)	Celebrities and general announcers (Azmi, 2024; Sinar Harian, 2019)
Monetisation Model	Subscriptions, ads, sponsorships (Alaejos <i>et al.</i> , 2022)	Minimal monetisation (Azmi, 2024).
Marketing Channels	Multi-Platform (including X) (Aufderheide <i>et al.</i> , 2020; McHugh, 2020).	Facebook, Tik Tok and Instagram (Nurulhusna & Mardhiah, 2022; New, 2023; Azmi, 2024; Beh, 2024)
Technical Challenges	Oversaturation, listener retention (Fagelson, 2022; Gallego, 2010; McHugh, 2022)	Infrastructure, staff skills (Ibrahim, 2022).
Audience Reception	High, long-established adoption (Aufderheide <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Alaejos <i>et al.</i> , 2022; Statista, 2024b).	Growing but early-stage (Start.io, 2023; Azmi, 2024).

Radio stations in the United States of America (USA) and Malaysia integrate radio stations and podcasts. This integration is brilliant since it contributes to the constructive ecosystem in the radio landscape. It shows significant changes in information and entertainment distribution by the broadcasters and consumed by the listeners. It shows that radio stations have begun to see podcasts as a new medium that can open opportunities for broadcasters to create more interactions with listeners, as explained by Newman and Gallo (2019) and Aufderheide *et al.* (2020).

Based on table above, it is discovered that radio stations like National Public Radio (NPR) in the United States of America have developed robust podcast strategies by producing original and diversified content that extend beyond traditional programming. Shows like *Invisibilia*, *Radiolab*, and *Snap Judgement* exemplify how podcasts can delve into niche topics with creative formats (Aufderheide *et al.*, 2020; Alaejos *et al.*, 2022). In contrast, Malaysia radio stations largely repurpose existing radio content, with platforms. For instance, Suria FM converting segments such as *Suria Gaya* into podcast episodes (New, 2023; Azmi, 2024; Beh, 2024).

It is found found that the selection of podcast hosts plays a crucial role in shaping the listener's experience and building a strong connection between the audience and the content. According to Olmsted & Wang (2022), effective hosts are not only responsible for delivering information but also communicating tone, emotion, and social cues that foster listener engagement. In the United States of America, podcast host are often chosen based on their subject matter expertise and strong personal branding. Past researchers such as Aufderheide *et al.* (2020) and Schofield (2023) indicates that the United States of America radio stations priorities personality-driven hosts that believed can enhance podcast's impact. For instance, National Public Radio (NPR) features Guy Raz, a well-known figure who hosts the popular show *How I Built This* (Weldon, 2021).

While in Malaysia, the selection of podcast hosts tends to emphasize celebrity appeal and entertainment value rather than subject matter expertise. Azmi (2024) and Sinar Harian (2019) highlight that broadcasters often feature local celebrities or radio personalities to attract a younger audience. This strategy might enhance accessibility and engagement, but it lacks the depth and consistency that offered by expert-driven formats. Supporting this view, Azmi (2024) notes that international podcasts often rely on hosts with expertise. Beh (2024) also points out that celebrity-hosted shows can attract followers from social media. Therefore, selecting hosts with both credibility and communication skills is essential for developing podcast content.

As defined by Croci & Molteni (2021), a business model serves as a fundamental structure that outlines how an organization creates and delivers added values for its audience. In the United States of America, monetization strategies include advertising, subscriptions, and crowdfunding. Platforms such as PodcastOne have successfully implemented advertising-based models, earnings millions in revenue (Alaejos *et al.*, 2022). For example, Luminary Media and PodcastOne have integrated blogs, news platforms, and specialized podcast content into comprehensive digital ecosystem. Podcast reported earnings of USD 34.3 million in 2022, largely attributed to advertising placements within podcast episodes (Alaejos *et al.*, 2022). It was discovered that these monetization frameworks not only support financial sustainability but also increased audience engagement. Despite this success, it is found that scholarly discussions often lack transparency regarding the specific pricing structures and user experience outcomes associated with various podcast monetization models. Therefore, there is a need for more detailed research on the effectiveness and ethics of these business strategies.

In contrast, it is discovered that in Malaysia it is lack advanced monetization structures, relying primarily on existing radio budgets without dedicated podcast revenue streams (New, 2023; Azmi,

2024). Future research should explore the feasibility and design of adaptable podcast business models tailored to the Malaysian landscape. Researchers discovered that the use of marketing strategies by radio stations in the United States of America and Malaysia is differ. In the United States of America, broadcasters utilize a variety of platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X to promote podcast content (Aufderheide *et al.*, 2020; McHugh, 2020). With high user engagement on X (106 million users in 2024), the United States of America stations can execute more dynamics campaigns (Statista, 2024e). While, Malaysian broadcasters focus more narrowly on Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, and YouTube due to limited resources and lower national penetration rate on X (Nurulhusna & Mardhiah, 2022; New, 2023; Beh, 2024; Statista, 2024c).

While the United States of America stations grapple with audience retention and market saturation, they are well supported by infrastructure and advanced analytical tools such as Dynamic Ad Insertion (DAI) (Gallego, 2010; Fagelson, 2022; McHugh, 2022). While Malaysian stations face more fundamental issues, including lack of equipment, limited podcast production skills and organisational readiness (Ibrahim, 2022). It was found that these differences illustrates that the United States of America stations are focused on optimising and monetising advanced podcast system. Malaysian stations are still in the early stages of technological adoption.

The United States of America has a well-established podcast culture with decades of user familiarity and growing demand for diverse content (Alaejos *et al.*, 2022; Aufderheide *et al.*, 2022; Statista, 2024b). On the other hand, Malaysian podcasting landscape remains in its nascent stage with gradual growth driven by younger audiences and increased digital adoption during the Covid-19 pandemic (Nurulhusna & Mardhiah, 2022; Start.io, 2023; Azmi, 2024). These comparative insights provide a roadmap for Malaysian broadcasters to refine their podcast strategies by learning from the more mature the United States of America model, while acknowledging the need for content-sensitive adaptation.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of podcasts, it is essential to consider their historical development. The origin of podcasting is closely linked to the creation of Really Simple Syndication (RSS) technology software by Harvard graduate Dave Winer in the late 1990s. This innovation was crucial in enabling the broadcasting of audio content to audiences with internet access (Lydon, 2001; Jin *et al.*, 2019; Sullivan, 2019; Kuchta, 2022). In 2000, journalist Christopher Lydon collaborated with Winer to distribute audio content online. By 2003, they recorded the first interview at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard, making it publicly available using RSS technology (Lydon, 2001).

Initially, podcasts were intended to deliver information to the public. However, they quickly evolved into a platform for discussing topics often overlooked by mainstream media, such as public concerns during the Iraq War in 2003 (Frizzel, 2016). Notably, the articles by Lydon (2001), Frizzel (2016), and Jin *et al.* (2019) do not mention any delays in the experimental phase, which spanned three years.

The term "podcast" began to gain recognition in 2004 when journalist Ben Hammersley introduced it in *The Guardian*, combining "iPod" (Apple's portable media player) and "broadcast" (Menduni, 2007). Podcasting gained momentum in 2005, when the *New Oxford Dictionary* named "podcast" its Word of the Year, coinciding with a surge in Google searches that reached 6,000 results (Wired, 2005; Sullivan, 2019; Rime *et al.*, 2022; Kuchta, 2022).

By 2011, the success of the comedy podcast *The Adam Carolla Show*, which garnered 59 million downloads, highlighted the growing popularity of the medium. In 2013, Apple recorded one billion podcast subscriptions. A wave of enthusiasm in 2015 prompted major platforms like Spotify and Google to launch their podcast services (Rime *et al.*, 2022). The integration of podcasts into popular applications during this period further accelerated their reach, culminating in a staggering 3.2 million podcasts and 178.37 million episodes produced globally by 2023 (Statista, 2023). This remarkable growth underscores the rise of podcasts as a rapidly expanding and influential digital medium. This historical development is summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Podcast historical development

Citation Identifier	Historical development
Markman (2012)	Podcast as a digital audio file broadcast over the internet using Really Simple Syndication (RSS), which can be downloaded onto any mobile device.
Berry (2015)	Podcasts are defined as audio content that can be broadcast using Really Simple Syndication (RSS) technology and provide users with the opportunity to listen to and download podcasts at any time.
Alaejos <i>et al.</i> 2022.	Podcasts are audio content that connects producers and consumers by providing freedom in producing and curating content in the digital ecosystem.
Kuchta (2022)	Podcasts are defined as audio content that has a similar format to radio broadcast content but is enhanced using the internet.
Nurulhusna & Mardhiah (2022)	Podcasts are digital audio content that is broadcast over the internet and can be downloaded using digital devices.
Rime <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Podcasts as episodic audio content that can be streamed, downloaded, and played anytime, anywhere over the internet.

CONCLUSION

Podcasts have become part of radio stations by providing many incredible benefits to the user audience regarding information access. Structuring a podcast broadcasting strategy can help radio stations maintain relevance and remain a conventional medium that delivers information. In the presence of various social media platforms, podcasts are seen as an efficient alternative in helping radio stations generate income and give new life to radio by rebroadcasting interesting radio content and broadcasting more in-depth information. This answers the research question regarding the position of podcasts, which is not a replacement for radio but rather a complement to radio stations effectively channelling information.

It was discovered that podcast broadcasting strategies in radio stations in the United States of America are more forward-looking and focus on innovation, diverse content adaptation, technology development, and effective monetisation. Radio stations in the United States of America increasingly see podcasts as an additional innovation to produce new content by applying various formats, including genre and duration. Monetisation targeting also sees the role of advertising and subscription models becoming the primary source of income for radio stations. In contrast, radio stations in Malaysia are still in the first phase, with a greater emphasis on rebroadcasting radio content on podcasts and less on applying an effective monetisation model. Although there is a gap in the use of podcasts in radio stations in the United States of America and Malaysia, it should be noted that the United States of America has been using podcasts for almost two decades while Malaysia is still in the first phase. In addition, the public's reception of podcasts has yet to be ascertained, even though there is potential for developing podcasts in Malaysia. Therefore, there is a need for more in-depth research into podcast broadcasting strategies based on podcast listeners' requests, as this is a crucial area for the future of radio and podcasting.

Radio stations in Malaysia also integrate podcasts as a step to adapt to current consumer demand. Among them are Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM), Suria FM and BFM. However, the podcast acceptance is still in its first phase among users and broadcasters in Malaysia. In the United States of America, podcast integration on radio stations has been implemented for a long time as an alternative and monetization medium. This also provides space for researchers to identify differences in podcast development in Malaysia and the United States of America in terms of podcast usage strategies and challenges.

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