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Section 4: Safety and podcasts

Safety considerations in podcasting

Introduction

Podcasts is is are usually part of a series of digital audio content that is made available for users to download or stream. Podcasts are episodic – each installment is complete, with a start and an end, that contributes to a larger theme (e.g. issue-themed feature news, a specific topic) or story.

Learning objectives

This section will be about unpacking some safety considerations in podcasting. Specifically, around how to mitigate some potential risks as well as how a storyteller can have more control over their content by choosing the right platform for their needs.

Preparing to podcast safely

The common format of a podcast is the main host having a conversation with a person who has experience and knowledge on a certain topic or theme. But increasingly, podcasting is being used to tell stories.

Storytellers who are considering podcasting as a way to tell their stories will have to consider some things in order to do it more safely. Generally, many podcasters use their real names and only involve others who do the same. Podcasts being all audio provides a sense level of non-identifiability because it is faceless.

However, depending on how sensitive the storyteller´s theme is as a storyteller, they you might want to consider ways in which to control their identifiability as they you podcast. Theirs and the people they you want to involved in it.

It is important for the storyteller to imagine the impact of their podcasts will be on themselves and their guests, and to try to mitigate negative consequences. These negative consequences could be:

- harassment of the storyteller or their guests from people who do not share their opinion
- re-traumatising the interviewee
- exposing the identity survivor of a human rights violation or sexual abuse and causing them harm
- re-traumatising listeners

If the theme of a podcast is too sensitive, for example on issues of equal access to justice or the weaknesses of Sharia legal systems, the storyteller might want to consider having a different format for their podcast. In recent years, some podcast producers have used fictionalised content to engage more serious topics, or to share stories. Instead of using the more standard conversation format, they instead write scripts for audio dramas. These range from short stories (each episode is a short story) to longer fictional stories (each episode is a chapter).

Whether or not the storyteller will use the more standard podcast format, or do a fictional podcast, they should still consider the following questions before they start podcasting:

- What is the podcast about? Are there going to be themes in it that will put the storyteller or the guests at risk?
- Who will be the guests on the podcasts? Are they agreeable to be identifiable? If they prefer to use a pseudonym, you as the one creating the podcast will have to be mindful of not slipping up and using your guest’s real name. If your guest prefers to be anonymous, it is common to still have some kind of reference because it is natural to want to call the person by name. So a generic pseudonym like ¨friend¨, ¨Person A¨ or a generic name in your culturecould help.
- What is already available on the internet about the storyteller? Is there information about the storyteller that can be used to harass them or those close to them? The storyteller would need to do this with people who will be guests in their podcasts as well.

It is also recommended that a storyteller gets a separate email address (not their personal or their work email addresses) for their podcasting use. They can use a free and secure service like https://proton.me or TutaNota for this. This will protect them from possible spamming of their personal accounts as well as help protect their identities on the internet.

Here's an example of a story that can be seen as very controversial, about a lesbian in a straight marriage, podcast produced by Juana Jaafar.

Juana Jaafar. 2016. “On being lesbian in a straight marriage”. *JuanaJaafar.net*, 21 July. http://www.juanajaafar.net/2016/07/on-being-lesbian-in-a-straight-marriage/

Safety considerations in choosing podcast hosting providers

As with any other forms of digital content that is meant to be shared, where that content is hosted (stored and shared) is an important consideration. There are a lot of podcast host services available. Most of them for a fee. Some are free – with a lot of limitations about length of the podcasts, size of the audio files, and permanence of the files on the host server.

In selecting podcast hosting providers, a storyteller must consider the following:

User control over podcasts

Will they be able to delete, edit, and / or archive episodes?

Some free podcast hosts delete podcasts after a month. If you want to archive them, ensure you have back up, but where and how you store these could have further security issues too.

Is the podcast host able to delete users content?

The storyteller needs to read the End User License Agreement of the podcast hosting provider to know if the service will be able to delete content without the user´s permission. Sometimes services will try to detect copyrighted materials or are against certain topics being promoted, like

the human rights of LGBTIQ persons or environmental issues where accusations of wrong-doing may be deemed as defamatory.

Audience engagement and management

Where do the podcast hosting provider automatically feed the podcasts?

Some of them automatically feed the podcast to more mainstream platforms (iTunes, Spotify), which means the podcaster will not have that much control over who gets to listen to their podcasts. This also means the podcasts will likely reach a wider audience. The storyteller needs to consider how much they are able to control who listens to their podcasts.

Will the podcast hosting service allow the podcaster to control the RSS feed of their own podcasts?

An RSS (Rich Site Summary or Real Simple Syndication) feed is a list of updates of new content from websites. The most common use of RSS feeds is in news content. This allows a user to get new content from different news sites using one application (examples of RSS readers, https://fossbytes.com/best-rss-reader-apps/) instead of going to these websites one-by-one for updates. Podcasting generally uses RSS feeds in order for podcasters to automatically update their podcasts on different podcasting applications (i.e., Spotify, Stitcher, iTunes). Most podcasting hosting services automatically generate RSS feeds for podcasts and share them with more popular apps. This is important if the storyteller wants to limit how their podcasts are released. What this means is that the podcast hosting service will not automatically share the podcasts with mainstream platforms but rather allow the podcaster to share it themselves.

General hosting safety

- Does the podcast have site-wide HTTPS?
- Do they allow for strong passwords? 12+ characters
- What do they publish about their users? Do they publish real names of their users? Or usernames? It is safer if the host only shares user names and not actual names of their

users publicly and on their sites.

Related links

Fiction Podcasts: https://www.thepodcasthost.com/fiction-podcasts/story-format/

How to Protect Your Privacy While Podcasting: https://theaudacitytopodcast.com/how-to-protect-your-privacy-while-podcasting-tap288/

How to Stay Safe and Secure in Podcasting: https://theaudacitytopodcast.com/how-to-stay-safe-and-secure-in-podcasting-tap289/

Why you need your own privacy polices in podcasting: https://theaudacitytopodcast.com/tap079-why-you-need-your-own-privacy-policies-disclosures-and-releases-for-blogging-or-podcasting/

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