

Podcasts, platformisation and listener loyalty

A qualitative study of podcast consumers



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Abstract

From its origin over two decades ago, podcasting has experienced a major surge in popularity, becoming widely adopted by the public both at home and abroad. The economic incentives relating to this mainstream success, has contributed to an increase in interest from various media actors, promoting a surge in investment and subsequent relocation of content to proprietary platforms. These developments, being the contours of platformisation, have redefined the landscape of podcast consumption and distribution, thus posing questions as to its potential effects on the listeners' relations to their content of choice.

Hence, I have decided to examine the perceived effect posed by the process of platformisation on the listener loyalty of podcast consumers. In order to propose an answer to my thesis question: *How does the process of platformisation affect podcast consumers' sense of listener loyalty?*, I have selected a qualitative methodological approach, through the use of focus group interviews, in combination with theoretical perspectives regarding the formation of host-listener relations, and the process of platformisation. As such, I propose that my data suggests a clear significance of host-listener relations, and in extension parasocial interactions and relations, perceived ethos and trust, in the listener loyalty of podcast consumers. Furthermore, I would argue that said elements pose as distinctly potent motivators in the selection of content and platforms, even when compared to other considerations such as: content genre, economic strain and ease of use. Hence, they seemingly dictate the presence and strength of listener loyalty, and the manner in which it may be affected by platformisation. Consequently, my research lends support to the importance of the various components of host-listener relations in the sense of listener loyalty of podcast consumers, and the manner in which it may be affected by the process of platformisation.

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The past year has been a truly eventful, emotional journey. Periods of intrigue, frustration and at times, delightful satisfaction, have all merged together to facilitate an experience like no other. However, as with any project of such magnitude, the process would not have been possible without the support of an ensemble of key players. In fact, I would argue that they have been essential in facilitating the development and implementation of my research, thus deserving all the praise possible for their efforts.

Hence, I would like to commence my thesis by expressing my sincere gratitude to the supervisor of my project, Brita Ytre-Arne, for patiently providing valuable insight, perspectives and guidance to the project. Furthermore, I would like to acknowledge the Bergen Media Research Group under the Department of Information Science and Media Studies at the University of Bergen, for graciously inviting me to attend their meetings and events, whilst also providing useful academic advice along the way.

Followingly, I also wish to recognise the informants selected for the project. Without their willing attendance, allowing me to gain valuable insight into their perceptions, motivations and decision making as podcast consumers, the realisation of the thesis would simply not have been possible. Finally, I would like to thank both friends, family and colleagues for having provided a great deal of emotional support, and words of encouragement throughout the process. Thank you all, sincerely:

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Excitement, amusement and fascination. Those are but some of the words that come to mind when I listen to aural forms of media. Whether exemplified in the emotional reflection facilitated by a great piece of music, the amusing nature of an entertainment podcast or even the efficient conveying of events through radio news, I have always found them to be thoroughly exciting, grasping both my attention and imagination as a listener. This inherent captivation has led me on a journey of exploration, allowing me to experience a plethora of aural mediums, such as that of music, radio and more recently podcasts, both from the viewpoint of a consumer, producer and distributor. Having culminated in the position as General Manager of the Student Radio of Bergen, I have become increasingly aware of, and curious towards the factors relating to consumer sentiment and selection of content.

Why, I wonder, are certain programs able to maintain and foster an active, loyal listener base across longer periods of time, whereas other shows, though appearing quite similar in nature, seemingly dissipate and wither into oblivion? Regarding the fierce competition within the podcasting space, I am additionally curious as to what factors might possibly contribute to, or indeed counteract the longevity of a concept, exemplified in the success of programs such as: “Berrum og Beyer Snakker om Greier”, “Jan Thomas og Einar Blir Venner”, and “Harm og Hegseth”. (Kantar, 2024) Furthermore, I wish to explore the deliberations and decisions made by the individual listener in relation to their podcast consumption, and the elements that may affect them. Lastly, acknowledging the ever-changing landscape of media distribution and consumption, I want to examine the manner in which the process of platformisation, in this case referring to the rearranging of content across platforms, might potentially affect the considerations made by podcast consumers in relation to their programs and platforms of choice. Consequently, I have decided to direct the focus of my master thesis towards the potential effects of platformisation on the listener loyalty of podcast consumers.

In providing an appropriate foundation for my project, both in relation to the development and answering of a thesis question, I have chosen to make use of a twofold approach. The first of these key components would relate to the selection of a methodological and analytical approach suitable for the project. Notably, different scholars have made use of a wide range of such approaches in their research of podcasts and podcast consumers. However, recognising that the aim of my research will be to examine the inherent perceptions and

motivations of podcast listeners, I have decided to select a qualitative approach, through the use of focus group interviews. The data gathered from said approach will be central in my attempt to analyse the considerations and decisions made by podcast consumers in relation to their programs and platforms of choice, which will be facilitated through a thematic analytical approach. Furthermore, the addition of a suitable theoretical framework, relating to both the medium of podcasting, development of listener loyalty and the platformisation of content, will serve as the second main pillar of the thesis. Notably, it will serve as a context for the analysis of the data from the informants, all of which will be presented and discussed in further detail in their respective chapters.

1.1 - Thesis question

The research question chosen for this thesis will be: *How does the process of platformisation affect podcast consumers' sense of listener loyalty?*

The selection of the question above, on which I have decided to base my master thesis and its related research, were based upon a number of considerations. Firstly, concerning the proposed subject matter of the project, I decided to base my project firmly within the field of aural media research. The reasoning behind this decision was twofold. First and foremost, relating to my academic and professional background, I had developed a thorough interest in aural media in general, as well as podcasting in particular. This appeal had manifested itself in a number of ways, from the practical, relating to my activities in the field of student media, to the academic, based upon my background as a bachelor's graduate in TV and Media Production.

Furthermore, I was aware of the distinct effect the process of platformisation had exhibited on the distribution and consumption of digital media content in recent years. Exemplified in the numerous services catering to the streaming of audiovisual content such as Netflix, Disney+ and Amazon Prime, I perceived the digitalisation and consolidation of content to be a prominent factor in the current media landscape. Notably, I was also cognisant of the process taking place within the area of podcast distribution, with platforms such as PodMe, Podimo and NRK Radio, facilitating a notable fragmentation of the Norwegian market, thus potentially affecting the consumers' abilities to access their content of choice. As such, I wanted to incorporate selected theoretical approaches regarding podcast research, listener

loyalty and platformisation within my thesis, theorising that the combination would prove favourable in obtaining the knowledge I sought. Naturally, said approaches will be presented in greater detail in their respective chapters.

Secondly, having selected a suitable thematic framework for the project, I subsequently had to choose an appropriate manner of conducting the research at hand. Throughout this process, I was adamant in my wish to explore the manner in which platformisation might affect the sense of loyalty of podcast listeners. As to the manner of “effect”, in question, I wished to examine the way in which platformisation, might exert an influence upon the motivations and decisions regarding content and platform selection, as perceived by podcast consumers. Hence, in order to explore said perceptions in a suitable manner, I deemed it beneficial to base the project upon a qualitative methodological approach, with the use of focus group interviews. Selecting such an approach, in favour of a quantitative counterpart, granted me the means of collecting a thorough, detailed set of data, which I found more appropriate given the subjective nature of the knowledge I wished to procure, thus culminating in the thesis question above.

1.2 - Structure of the thesis

Regarding the structure of the thesis, I will commence chapter 2 by proposing a definition of the term podcast, before detailing the various technological characteristics separating it from other forms of aural media. Subsequently I will present an overview of the key historical developments of the medium, relating to its origin and mainstream adoption, from both an international and Norwegian point of view. The chapter will be concluded by a brief presentation of previous podcast consumer research, from both a Scandinavian, American and European point of view.

In chapter 3, I will present a theoretical framework relating to the formation of listener loyalty, with various perspectives regarding parasocial interactions and relations, and perceived ethos and trust being of key relevance. Followingly, chapter 4 will provide a theoretical framework relating the process of platformisation, wherein I will detail perspectives from three prominent traditions on the field, namely those of business studies, political economics and software studies.

In chapter 5, I will present the methodological framework of my project. This chapter will be divided into a number of subsections, separated on the basis of theme and approach. Firstly, I will commence by reflecting upon the reasoning behind my choice of methodology and method, before highlighting various considerations made during the preparation, gathering and handling of the data. Finally, I will present the potential limitations of my project, before briefly commenting upon my selection of an analytical approach.

Chapter 6 will provide a general introduction to the analysis. As such, it will contain a brief overview of the informants' backgrounds as podcast consumers, based upon the information of the attached informant sheet. Concluding the chapter, I will present the structure of the ensuing analysis, as a means of facilitating ease of navigation throughout.

Chapter 7 will be centred around the informants' perceptions of listener loyalty. Hence, it will examine the factors deemed prominent in the creation, continuation and potential discontinuation of said loyalty, and the manner in which they were perceived and expressed by the informants. The chapter will draw upon the theoretical framework of parasocial relations and interactions, as well as perceived ethos and trust. Furthermore, chapter 8 will relate to the perceived relations between the informants and their platforms of choice, being contextualised by the theoretical framework of platformisation.

Chapter 9 will deal with the potential effect of platformisation on the sense of listener loyalty, as perceived by the informants. Firstly, I will commence by assessing whether or not any effect was actually perceived. Secondly, having established the presence of such an effect, the following subsection will relate to the manner in which it was perceived and acted upon by the informants. The third and fourth subsection of the chapter will relate to the elements deemed influential in assessing the persistence of listener loyalty in the face of platformisation. Once again, any findings will be grounded in the theoretical frameworks of listener loyalty and platformisation.

Finally, chapter 10 of the thesis will serve as a conclusion to the project, providing any final remarks on the practical process and analysis as such, as well as suggestions towards further research on the matter.

Chapter 2 - On the subject of podcasting

In order to provide a suitable academic context to the subject of podcast research, I will commence the following chapter by proposing a suitable definition of the term itself.

Followingly, I will describe the technological innovations and characteristics that have given rise to the separation of podcasting from other forms of aural media. Furthermore, I will briefly detail the broad historical developments of the medium, both in relation to technological innovation and consumer sentiment, within an international and Norwegian context. Finally, I will present a selection of previous research on podcast consumers, in order to contextualise the academic field in which I place my thesis, both from a Scandinavian, American and European point of view.

2.1 - What is a podcast? - Defining characteristics

Perhaps as a consequence of the heightened popularity of the medium in recent years, the term podcasting and its adjacent terminology has transitioned from somewhat obscurity into becoming a well-known term in everyday speech. However, when examining the phenomenon in an academic context, I find it beneficial to present and discuss the underlying qualities and characteristics that may contribute to a suitable definition of the term, allowing it to be utilised as an appropriate denominator throughout the thesis. Within the area of podcast research, a number of academics have proposed differing definitions of the phenomena. These definitions seemingly vary somewhat with regards to the emphasis put on different traits of the medium, and how they separate it from other forms of aural mediums. For instance, some researchers, commentators and journalists have made a point of highlighting the technological attributes of podcasting, arguing it to represent the unique character of the medium as such. A prominent example of this would be the journalist Ben Hammersley, who in 2004 first proposed the term *podcast*, in an attempt to describe the rising trend of what was then known as independent online radio, being based mainly upon the distinct technological distributional mechanisms on which it relied. Consequently, a novel term was created to describe the medium, consisting of an amalgam between its means of consumption, which at that time overwhelmingly was the Apple iPod, and broadcasting in general, thus creating the term “Pod-Cast.” (Bottomley, 2015, p. 166)

Various later scholars have in turn found this early definition of podcasting to be somewhat overgeneralized, to the point of not properly distinguishing between different means of online

content consumption. (Bottomley, 2015, p. 166) Hence, referring to an article by Farivar, Bottomley notes that: “Technologically speaking, podcasting refers to digital audio files (e.g.,MP3s) delivered via RSS to an Internet-connected computer or portable media player.” (Farivar, 2004, cited in Bottomley, 2015, p. 166) Commenting upon the usage of RSS in the distribution of podcasts, Bottomley details the presence of a feed based system, wherein consumers subscribe to their preferred programs to be notified and up to date on the release of new content, chiefly in the form of individual episodes. In turn, the episodic and serial nature of podcasting, which may be viewed as a consequence of the distributional model of RSS based services, also help to distinguish the medium and provide a distinct space within the area of aural media, separated from that of music and traditional radio. (Bottomley, 2015, p. 166) However, it is important to note that such a clear emphasis on the RSS model is also somewhat contested within the field, wherein Bottomley notes that scholars such as McElhearn, Giles and Herrington have argued for the relevance of: “‘time-shifting’—the ability for listeners to hear the audio ‘anytime, anywhere’ in contrast to the streaming model of broadcasting—as podcasting’s defining characteristic.” (McElhearn, Giles and Herrington, 2006, cited in Bottomley, 2015, p. 166)

However, other figures such as the aforementioned Hammersley have proposed further differing approaches to the separation of podcasts from other aural media, highlighting the independent nature of its production and distribution, as a clear contrast to the institutionalised nature of the traditional media industries. (Bottomley, 2015, p. 166) Nonetheless, I would argue that categorising podcasts as an alternate and independent alternative to traditional aural media, however appropriate at the time, has somewhat lost touch with the reality of current distributional trends. As mentioned previously, contemporary podcasting has seen a marked surge in popularity, which in turn has prompted a number of major actors within the fields of media production and distribution to invest heavily into the market, as seen in the increasing number of mainstream celebrities embracing the medium as of late. (Bottomley, 2015, p. 166)

Consequently, various researchers argue that the separation of aural media based solely upon its technological attributes and institutional affiliation, is somewhat unsuitable for current academic needs. (Bottomley, 2015, p. 167) As such, Morris and Patterson notes that: “Podcasting is neither limited to nor defined by its technologies. Rather, it is a specific set of practices and cultural meanings that are entirely entwined with the technologies for its

distribution, organization, and consumption.” (Morris and Patterson, 2015, pp. 221-222) In support of such a notion, McHugh further argues that podcasting is: “much more than just a delivery mode for audio content”, referring to: “both the production and consumption of podcast content, which can be of infinite variety.” (McHugh, 2016, p. 78) Hence, rather than defining the medium based solely upon its technological attributes and independent structures of production and distribution, they argue for the relevance of assessing key practical and cultural implications and intentions that are developed within it, thus proposing a somewhat more holistic approach to the matter, compared to that of their peers.

Having presented a number of varying approaches regarding the definition of the term “podcast”, I would argue that they all contain points of interest as they relate to my thesis. Notable examples would be the technological focus of Farivar, McElhearn and Harrington, emphasising factors such as the content delivery and consumer mechanism of RSS, the attention directed towards the DIY mentality and independent production by the likes of Hammersley, and last but not least, the emphasis placed upon a broader set of practices and their cultural implications by scholars such as Morris, Patterson and Mchugh. Consequently, based upon the perspectives presented above, and the focus of my particular project, I would propose the following definition of the term *podcast*: “an aural form of media, episodic and serial in nature, which is accessible through the means of digital platforms.”

2.2 - On the technological attributes of podcasting

With the term podcasting being intrinsically linked to the adoption of RSS technology as a means of accessing and consuming content, it is clear that these means of digital media distribution and consumption have played an important role in its development into a distinct form of media. Hence, I find it appropriate to further detail these technological attributes, in order to provide a proper context to the thesis at hand. As noted by Heeremans: “The past two decades have seen developments in distribution technology, economic models and production and consumption cultures that have affected all facets of the media industry profoundly.” (Heeremans, 2018, p. 57) At the forefront of said developments we find Apple, arguably being one of the main actors in the international podcasting space. In fact, Sullivan writes that: “The increased visibility of podcasting in the past 10 years is due in no small measure to the market power of Apple's digital platform (specifically its Apple Podcasts directory, iOS mobile operating system, and hardware such as iPods and iPhones).” (Sullivan, 2019, p.1)

In later years however: “Podcast networks of various shapes and sizes, and with different origins, organisational structures and goals, have emerged across the globe in the past decade” (Heeremans, 2018, p. 57), likely based upon the increased adoption of the medium, and its subsequent lucrative position in an otherwise saturated media ecosystem. As previously stated by Heeremans, the range and scope of these networks and platforms, both with regard to the quality and quantity of content and their market impact, have seemingly varied quite a bit. Some scholars have made a point of relating said variety to the democratising effects of digital technology, with Berry arguing that the medium of podcasting ought to be viewed as: “a convergence of technologies that already existed and, in many cases, that users already owned”, resulting in: “a move in power from programmers to listeners.” (Berry, 2006, p. 145)

However, it is important to note that one of the most impactful recent developments in the podcasting space, would arguably relate to the creation, or in some cases, the redevelopment and promotion of proprietary platforms by institutional media corporations and technology companies. This development has taken place across various markets, with media outlets such as CBS with their Play.it platform, and NBC with NBC Sports Podcast Network being prominent examples from the U.S, and NRK with their NRK Radio platform, as well as Schibsted with PodMe being rather prominent in a Norwegian context. (Heeremans, 2018, p. 58)

Furthermore, selected international technology companies have also intensified their investment in the podcasting space. Utilising their existing technological infrastructures, which in the case of Spotify was priorly utilised for the streaming of music, they have seemingly managed to ascertain an ever-increasing share of the international market. However, it would appear as if though Apple and its range of platforms still manages to attract a rather large share of international podcast consumer activity, wherein the: “podcast hosting firm Blubrry (2017) reported that approximately 56% of all podcasts it hosted in 2017 were downloaded or accessed via Apple’s platform.” (Sullivan, 2019, p.1) Hence, despite the democratising effects of RSS technology and the availability of production equipment, the current podcast market is largely dominated by institutional actors, ranging from major media conglomerates, to international technology companies, with Apple being able to maintain its dominant market position, despite of, or perhaps because of, having been present in the space far longer than any of its competitors.

2.3 - A brief historical overview of podcasting

As noted previously, the development and adoption of new technologies have been key factors in distinguishing podcasting from other aural media. Consequently, the history of the medium is closely linked to said innovations, as will become rather apparent throughout the following chapter. Hence, in discussing the history of podcasting as an aural medium, separate from that of radio, it is common to start in the early 2000's, with the invention and implementation of RSS technology. However, during the early years of its development, only a select number of developers and insiders had access to the technology, with individuals such as Adam Curry and Dave Winer experimenting with various manners of utilising the system for audio files, thus creating the first basic forms of podcasts. (Bottomley, 2015, p. 164)

Despite these early years of testing, it is common to cite 2004 as the year when podcasting first became a viable means of producing and consuming aural media, with RSS to iPod services becoming available to the public through applications such as iPodder by Adam Curry. Furthermore, it was around this time when the breakthrough show called "Daily Source Code", started to garner widespread attention, with the term "podcast", being publicly coined by Hammersley that same year. (Bottomley, 2015, p. 164) These developments ushered in what some have named "the year of the podcast", with the medium continuing to garner mainstream attention both in the U.S and abroad, exemplified in the term "podcasting", being selected as the word of the year by the New Oxford American Dictionary. (Bowers, 2005)

In 2013, the Apple podcasting platform within iTunes surpassed one billion streams, a sign of the mass appeal, economic viability, and growth potential that would come to characterise the podcasting space in the following years. The journey to this milestone, however, was one of many trials and tribulations, with the timeframe between 2005 and 2013 featuring slow growth and widespread industry scepticism, exemplified by commentators such as Freedman, Iskold and Wolfe speculating in the death of the medium as early as 2006. (Freedman, 2005; Iskold, 2007; Wolfe, 2008) The cause of this troubled period has been theorised by some scholars to be the combined result of a number of factors, such as difficulties of monetizing content, fierce competition from online video sharing platforms such as YouTube, as well as the perceived connection between the medium and the iPod as its means of consumption,

becoming increasingly obsolete in the era of smartphones. (Bottomley, 2015, p. 165) However, podcasting was never truly dead, rather slowly gaining popularity during the last decades, both in the U.S and other markets such as those of Scandinavia and Norway. Consequently, Apple introduced iTunes version 4.9 in June 2015, which included full scale support and integration of podcasts, hence facilitating greater ease of use for the common consumer and promoting a further increase of appeal and mainstream success. (Bottomley, 2015, p. 164)

2.4 - Regarding the Norwegian podcasting space

When discussing the rise of podcasts in a Norwegian context, I find it appropriate to acknowledge the impact of the international developments mentioned above on Norwegian listening habits, due, in large part, to the connectivity and accessibility granted by modern digital technology. Such a connection may be exemplified by the widespread adoption of international podcasting platforms in Norway, with the aforementioned Spotify and Apple Podcasts garnering considerable market shares both internationally and domestically. (Norstat et. al., 2023) However, relying solely upon such similarities would not assess the distinct qualities of the Norwegian podcast market, naturally differing somewhat from that of the U.S and other international counterparts. Hence, in discussing these features, I will commence by highlighting selected key developments from the Norwegian media industry starting in 2015 and onward, and how they may relate to the listening habits of podcast consumers.

As described above, 2015 was a year of immense development with regards to the production and distribution of podcast content, both internationally and within Norway. Major media corporations such as VG and Aftenposten commenced to increase their quantity of concepts within the podcast segment, foreshadowing a number of changes to the market that would follow in the years to come. (Jansen, 2017, p. 15) Hence, the impact of said increase in corporate interest and resource allocation, truly became visible in the period from 2016 and onward, exemplified by the national conference for aural media, named “Radiodager”, inviting a number of international podcasting profiles to hold presentations for their Norwegian counterparts, whilst also introducing podcasts as a separate category in their yearly award ceremony named “Radio Prix”. (Jansen, 2017, p.16) Further illustrating these developments, the industry centred event called “Den Store Podkastdagen”, was first hosted by AdLINK Media and M24 in early 2017, wherein various media officials were invited to a

collection of seminars regarding the future of Norwegian podcasting, focusing on the cultural, technological and economic potential of the medium. (Jansen, 2017, p.16)

Reflecting the domestic increase in consumer demand for podcast content, “Oslo Podfest”, first held in 2016, was a proprietary festival specifically oriented toward podcast listeners. The festival also became somewhat of a cultural phenomenon, with numerous prominent concepts hosting live performances in front of paying audiences, thus further emphasising the demand for, and economic potential of the medium. (Jansen, 2017, p.16) Currently, the festival has been dormant since late 2019, likely due to the fallout of the corona pandemic. In further examining the consumer habits of Norwegian podcast listeners of recent years, I find it relevant to utilise data from *Den Store Podrapporten 2023*, which after being published on a yearly basis since 2020, has proved instrumental in documenting the developments and alterations of Norwegian listening habits.

At the time of writing this chapter, the latest version of the report, released in 2023, suggests the number of active Norwegian podcast listeners to be the highest since records began. (Norstat et.al., 2023) With 46% of the population being categorised as “active listeners”, defined by the report as an individual who consumes podcast content at least once a month, the increase compared to the previous year of 2022, where the number was a mere 34%, seems rather significant. However, it is worth noting that 2021 and 2022 are specified as somewhat statistically differing from the reports of 2020 and 2023, due to the theorised effect of the corona pandemic on listening habits. Nevertheless, when comparing 2020 and 2023, one may still observe an increase of 8% in the number of active listeners, underlining the positive trajectory of total podcast consumption across Norway. In addition, the report also outlines demographic trends regarding listening habits, with the age group between 30-39 reporting the highest share of active listeners at 65%, and groups with low listener counts, such as those above the age of 50, reporting a major increase of active listeners between 2022 and 2023. (Norstat et.al., 2023)

With regards to the age group most relevant to my particular project, namely those between the ages of 20-29, one may observe a rather stable coverage over the last two years, with an active listener share of 59%, a marked decrease from its peak of 69% in 2021. As stated by the researchers within the report, these developments may arguably reflect the altered listening habits of the corona pandemic, seeing that the given statistics have remained rather

stable in the years since. Despite this statistical decline in active podcast listeners, the age group in question still reports the largest amount of total time spent consuming aural media, with more than 70 hours a week on average. However, it should be noted that a large majority of this time, 88% in fact, is allocated to the consumption of music via streaming services, posing an interesting backdrop for my own project. Further supporting an association between the platformisation of content and altered listening habits, the report suggests a correlation between the allocation of programs between platforms and behind paywalls, and the respondents who reported a decrease in listening time, with a 28 year-old male stating that: [my translation] “many podcasts have moved to PodMe, which costs money. (It was) Much better when things were on Spotify.” (Norstat et.al., 2023) The researchers also note that the main driving forces behind the consumers’ choice of podcasts seems to be those of availability, audio quality and access without payment. (Norstat et.al., 2023)

Once again, it is worth pointing out that Spotify, as indicated by the aforementioned respondent, is by far the most utilised platform for podcast consumption in Norway, with the free to download NRK Radio and Apple Podcast apps as the second and third contender. This may coincide with the dominant position obtained by Spotify in the realm of music streaming, thus reflecting the shift by international tech companies towards podcast distribution. Between the ages of 15-29, 29% of respondents report currently paying for podcast content, with PodMe being the largest actor in the category by far, maintaining a 44% share of the market. However, a large majority of active podcast listeners do not make use of such paid options, with the perceived willingness to pay for exclusive content, as well as content that is free of commercials, actually declining somewhat from 2022 to 2023. (Norstat et.al., 2023) Hence, the latest report seemingly indicates a set of challenges regarding the willingness to pay for content, preferences regarding platform choice and perceived low motivations to alter existing listening habits by Norwegian podcast consumers, thus facilitating an interesting context for my own research.

2.5 - Selected research on podcast consumers

Based upon numerous searches of both digital and physical academical databases, it would seem as though the area of research within which I place my thesis, namely the intersection of podcast consumer research and platformisation studies, is a relatively understudied field within media studies as a whole. Naturally, such a lack of research may potentially relate to a number of factors, some of which I will highlight as a means of contextualising the considerations made with regards to my own project. Firstly, it should be noted that, even though the separation of podcasting from other aural mediums took place over two decades ago, its adoption within mainstream culture and academia has been a rather lengthy process. This slow maturation may naturally have resulted in a somewhat more contrived quantity of research on the medium and the consumers of it, compared to that of other more established areas within media research.

Furthermore, the platformisation of media content, more particularly related to aural media, may be categorised as an even more recent process, with a relatable small quantity of research. When viewing these developments as it relates to a Scandinavian, or even a Norwegian context, the body of literature is reduced even more. Nevertheless, I have managed to procure and curate a selection of previous academic work, mainly through the use of the digital database of the University Library of UiB, named ORIA. Hence, I have chosen to select and present three research projects that I would argue illustrate the current body of literature regarding the intersection of podcast consumer and platformisation research from a Scandinavian, American and European point of view.

2.5.1 - Scandinavian research on podcast producer and consumer sentiment

Firstly, I would like to present a project related to the research of podcast producer and consumer sentiment from Denmark. Named [my translation] “Business models and future prospects of the Danish podcast market”, it is largely centred around questions relating to the distribution and consumption of podcast content within the Danish, and in extension Scandinavian media-ecosystem. Acknowledging the explosive rise of podcasting in recent years, and the institutionalisation and platformisation of its adherent means of distribution, the authors aim to utilise their research as a means of providing industry actors with sufficient data to successfully navigate the current and future challenges and opportunities of the market. (Kammer and Sejersen, 2022, p. 6) Consequently, the project examines a vast array

of topics and research questions, with those relating to consumer willingness to pay for content, and the factors contributing positively or negatively towards it, being of particular interest to my thesis.

Consequently, I have chosen to select and discuss the findings related to the following two research questions, namely: [my translation] “What characterises podcast consumers' willingness to pay for content?”, and: [my translation] “What factors influence the willingness to pay?” (Kammer and Sejersen, 2022, p. 7) Concerning the first of these two questions, the researchers examined the willingness of podcast consumers to pay for content. In doing so, they distributed a quantitative digital survey, from which they received 2353 responses within an age range of 18-75. The survey found that 43,1% of the respondents did in fact listen to podcasts, and that age, more so than gender, proved a key indicator to the manner and frequency in which they utilised the medium. (Kammer and Sejersen, 2022, pp. 36-37) Interestingly, regarding the notion of whether or not a consumer ought to support their preferred podcasts economically, 38,6% of the respondents agreed to some degree, compared to 12, 7% who disagreed. Although these attitudes were generally evenly demographically dispersed, the respondents between the ages of 18-34 were generally the most positive to the notion, with 44,3% being in favour. (Kammer and Sejersen, 2022, p. 43)

Relating attitude to action, the survey also contained questions regarding whether the respondents had actually supported podcasts economically. Hence, the researchers noted that 21,3% of those who were identified as active podcast users, reported having supported a concept economically, which comprised a mere 9,3% of the total respondents. It is worth noting that in this instance, the authors noted a significant difference between the sexes, with 22,7% of the male and 15,9% of the female respondents respectively, reporting said economic support, whilst the aforementioned age related differences persisted, with 33,0% of 18-34 year-olds having done so, compared to a mere 9,5% of 50-75 year-olds. (Kammer and Sejersen, 2022, p. 44) The main form of economic contribution stated by the respondents was subscribing to platforms such as Spotify and Podimo, followed by one off payments and crowdfunding ventures. (Kammer and Sejersen, 2022, p. 46)

The research related to the second of the highlighted research questions, was conducted via a set of qualitative focus group interviews, centred around the factors that may affect a listener's willingness to contribute economically to a concept. The resulting opinions

expressed by the informants suggested that elements such as audio quality and user-friendly distribution may contribute positively towards a sense of value in the consumption of podcasts. (Kammer and Sejersen, 2022, pp. 50-51) Furthermore, the researchers highlighted the formation of perceived relations between the listener and concept, and its resulting consumer loyalty, to be of key relevance within the informants' considerations regarding monetary contribution. (Kammer and Sejersen, 2022, pp. 51-52) As such, I would argue that these findings lend support to the theoretical direction of my own thesis, particularly regarding the formation of host-listener relations, which will be further detailed in a separate chapter.

Contrastingly, a subset of the informants expressed a distinct unwillingness to pay for podcast content, if not deemed entirely necessary, rather opting for free content and platforms whenever possible. Combined with the possible limitations pertaining to the budgets of media consumers, the authors note that podcasting platforms seemingly tend to get sidelined in the fight for subscriptions, in relation to other streaming services such as Netflix, HBO Max and Disney+. (Kammer and Sejersen, 2022, p. 53) Conclusively, a number of the findings of this Danish study seemingly match the trends observed within my own data, with the reported presence and significance of host-listener relations in the creation of listener loyalty being of particular relevance. As such, it provides an interesting insight into the area of podcast consumption and platformisation within Scandinavia, hence why I have chosen to present it in my thesis.

2.5.2 - American research on podcast consumers

Followingly, I have chosen to include the article by Chan-Olmsted and Wang, named "Understanding Podcast Users: Consumption motives and behaviours." In identifying the motivation behind their project, the authors highlight the distinct variations of outcome observed within previous research on podcast consumers. (Chan-Olmsted and Wang, 2020, p.686) They propose said variations to be the combined results of limited sample sizes, and considerable variations of preference amongst the examined informants, thus facilitating the need to create: "a more generalizable motivation typology based on a comprehensive list of motive items derived from existing academic and industry literature, using a cross-sectional, large-scale national survey of podcast users in the United States." (Chan-Olmsted and Wang, 2020, p. 687)

The project was based upon four central research questions, namely: “What are the motives for podcast consumption in the United States?”, “How do podcast consumption motives differ by podcast consumption settings?”, “How do podcast consumption motives affect podcast usage?”, and: “What is the relationship between podcast consumption motives and alternative audio media usage?” (Chan-Olmsted and Wang, 2020, pp. 687-689) In conducting their research, the authors utilised a quantitative methodology, consisting of data collection through the means of an online survey. Regarding the sample size, 2000 respondents from the Qualtrics (2014) panel were selected, based upon the demographic structure of the U.S.A at the time, and the following screening criteria: “(1) they considered themselves a regular podcast user (either monthly or weekly) and (2) they have listened to podcasts in the last 6 months.” (Chan-Olmsted and Wang, 2020, p. 690)

Concerning the findings of the study, the researchers present a rather substantial and varied set of quantitative data, noting that: “Podcasting is, at its core, about content and a unique way of delivering that content on demand, as entertainment, information, and audio platform superiority were found to be the three most important motivators. However, the results also showed that podcast consumption is dynamic—users listen to podcasts in different settings for different reasons.” (Chan-Olmsted and Wang, 2020, p. 696) Notably, they also found the perceived importance of platform superiority as being highly pronounced in their data, particularly during the consumption of podcasts outside the home, writing that: “out-of-home podcast consumption seems to be less about these two needs, but more about the platform’s advantages in content, control, and mobility, and its utility to escape, to connect and socialize, and to affirm selfidentity.” (Chan-Olmsted and Wang, 2020, p. 698)

Concludingly, I find it relevant to mention that even though the researchers in this American study chose not to focus on the economic aspects related to podcast consumption, contrasted by the aforementioned project by Kammer and Sejersen, I would argue that their findings still provide valuable insight into the inherent motives and behaviours of podcast listeners. Relating to both the selection of content, platforms and preferred settings of consumption, the project delivers one of the first comprehensive examinations of its kind, and an ample context for my own research. (Chan-Olmsted and Wang, 2020, p. 696)

2.5.3 - European research on host-listener relations in podcasts

Finally, I would like to present the following project by Schlütz and Hedder, named “Aural parasocial relations: Host-Listener Relationships in Podcasts.” As the name implies, the authors aim was to study the presence and perceived importance of parasocial relations between podcast hosts and their listeners, or in their own words: “this study aims at exploring PSR between podcast hosts and their listeners. In doing so, we focus on characteristics of the host as a persona and his or her conversational behavior.” (Schlütz and Hedder, 2021, p.462) As mentioned previously, the theoretical framework regarding said perceived parasocial relations, will be detailed in a separate chapter. Furthermore, the authors present two key research questions on which they have based the project, namely: “Which characteristics of the podcast host promote parasocial relationships with listeners?”, and: “Do parasocial relationships with podcast hosts foster persuasive effects on listeners?” (Schlütz and Hedder, 2021, p.463) I particularly find the second research question to be of interest with regards to my own project, thus entailing my choice of providing a somewhat greater emphasis on its related findings.

In presenting the context of their research, Schlütz and Hedder provides a key description of the current international podcast market, namely that: “Nowadays, the status quo of podcasting is one of professionalization, commercialization, and consolidation of organizational structures. This goes along with... the establishment of market structures (by organizing in networks like Gimlet Media or Radiotopia), new players (Spotify, audible), and content adoption into other media (e.g., Homecoming, Alex, Inc.).” (Schlütz and Hedder, 2021, p. 458) Acknowledging the relevance of said platformisation and commercialisation to my project, these developments will be presented and contextualised in greater detail in a separate chapter.

The authors followingly highlight the importance of examining the motivations and behaviours behind the loyalty of podcast listeners, as exemplified by the work of Punnett, stating that: “Audience engagement as a way of building and maintaining listenership and brand loyalty is not only interesting from a theoretical point of view but also from a practical standpoint as it might be a gateway for persuasive effects (i.e., impact on listeners’ attitudes, and behaviors...)” (Punnett, 2016, cited in Schlütz and Hedder, 2021, p. 458) The methodology utilised in the study was that of a quantitative exploratory online survey, which

was made available to potential participants throughout June of 2018. 804 respondents were taken into account in the analysis, all of whom fell within the category of podcast consumers living in Germany. The age of the respondents varied greatly, with the youngest being 13 and the eldest 64 years of age. Notably, the group included both average and avid listeners, with half of the sample size making use of the medium at least on a daily basis. (Schlütz and Hedder, 2021, p. 464)

Recounting the findings relating to the first research question, the authors argue that: “the more a host showed parasocial interaction behaviour (showing an interest in the listeners and sharing details about his or her own life) and the more unpredictable, authentic, and competent s/he was being perceived, the more extensive was the parasocial relationship.” (Schlütz and Hedder, 2021, p. 465) Followingly, in relation to the second research question, the authors note that: “The statistical value showed that a parasocial relation with the podcast host had a rather strong positive effect on the listener’s attitudes and behaviors.” (Schlütz and Hedder, 2021, p. 466)

Thus, as introductorily hypothesised by the researchers, their data supports the ability of parasocial relations to affect and reinforce the attitudes and behaviours of podcast consumers. Consequently, I would argue that these observations create an intriguing backdrop for my own research on the subject, possibly indicating that the theoretical framework of parasocial interactions and relations may prove exceedingly relevant in the analysis to come. I wonder, will the effects of such relations on listener loyalty prove as apparent within my own data, when presented with the potential challenges of platformisation?

Chapter 3 - Theoretical framework of listener loyalty

The following chapter of my thesis will be focused on presenting a suitable framework regarding the formation of listener loyalty, within the frame of my project. Highlighting a number of different theoretical approaches to the area, I have found it appropriate to divide them into two main categories, namely the role of parasocial interactions and relations, and those relating to perceived ethos and trust. I would argue that these perspectives may be of particular relevance to my project, as they clearly relate to the formation of perceived social relations, which, as presented previously, has been proposed by various researchers to be key facilitators of perceived value and loyalty between podcast listeners and their programs and hosts of choice. (Schlütz and Hedder, 2021, p. 466) As such, I would theorise that these perspectives may be valuable in providing an appropriate theoretical framework for the upcoming analysis of my own data, hopefully providing an insight into the motivations behind podcast consumption and listener loyalty in the face of platformisation. Hence, I will commence the following chapter by presenting and reflecting upon a theoretical framework of parasocial interactions and relations, before subsequently discussing that of perceived ethos and trust.

3.1 - Parasocial interactions and relations

Different scholars have proposed somewhat varying definitions regarding what constitutes *parasocial relations*. Horton and Wohl, being two academics known for their early exploration of the phenomenon, proposed in 1956 that parasocial relations should be understood as: “illusional relationship[s]”, wherein: “The most illustrious men are met as if they were in the circle of one's peers.” (Horton and Wohl, 1956, p. 215) They proposed said relations to be composed of individual exchanges between performers and audiences, notably within the frame of traditional mass media, in a: “simulacrum of conversational give and take”, aptly named *parasocial interactions*. (Horton and Wohl, 1956, p. 215) Further detailing their stance on the matter, they emphasised the perceived and actual distribution of power within such relations, arguing that, in their basic form: “The interaction characteristically, is one sided, nondialectical, controlled by the performer, and not susceptible to mutual development.” (Horton and Wohl, 1956, p. 215)

Furthermore, they maintained that media performers, and in extension podcast hosts, may deliberately trigger consumers to form parasocial relations by utilising strategies such as: an

informal conversational style, anticipating audience reactions, treating the supporting cast as a group of close intimates and mingling with the audience both in person and within the respective medium. (Horton and Wohl, 1956, pp. 217-218) Consequently, they argued that such tactics might contribute to, and nurture the “illusion of intimacy”, that defines parasocial relations, thus potentially encouraging a sense of loyalty between the media consumer and the program host in question. (Horton and Wohl, 1956, pp. 217-220)

Continuing the elaboration upon different theoretical approaches to parasocial relations, certain scholars have made a point of further highlighting the division between the various time frames within such relations, with Giles’ model of parasocial interactions and relations being rather prevalent in this regard. In it, he argues for: “the distinction between PSI as momentary activity and the longer term development of parasocial relationships.” (Giles, 2002, p. 298) Furthermore, he proposes that PSI should be understood as: “a behavior that might vary in nature with regard to different types of media figures” (Giles, 2002, p. 298), posing an: “extended social activity in the form of a continuum.” (Giles, 2002, p. 293) In relation to said continuum, the parasocial interactions taking place during the consumption of a podcast would likely be classified as a: “first-order encounter”, wherein: “the media figure addresses the user directly” (Giles, 2002, p. 294)

In discussing why the perspectives outlined above may prove relevant to my study of podcast consumers and platformisation, I would once again refer to the work of Schlütz and Hedder. They argue that podcasting is an exceedingly suitable medium for developing parasocial relations, listing a number of different characteristics differentiating it from other established forms of media, such as television and radio. The majority of these factors relate to the ability of podcasts to cater towards a highly specific audience, thus contributing to a perceived increase of intimacy and personalised listening experiences. Such characteristics include, although are not limited to: serial storytelling, involving audio narratives, focusing listener attention and customizable experiences. (Schlütz and Hedder, 2021, p.462) “Consequently, parasocial relations can be a straightforward way to satisfy social needs. PSR therefore motivates media consumption, including audio media.” (Perks and Turner, 2019; Savage and Spence, 2014, cited in Schlütz and Hedder, 2021, p. 461)

Furthermore, I also find it worth noting that the area of parasocial interactions and relations has been researched quite extensively over a number of years, contributing to a rather large

body of data and valuable insight into the relevance they may pose to the consumption of media content. Quite interestingly, and likely of particular relevance to my personal research, previous studies have found parasocial interactional behaviour to exhibit a clear beneficial effect regarding the formation of loyal audiences. (Spangardt, Ruth and Schramm, 2016, pp. 90-91) In doing so, they indicate the manner in which the interactive strategies outlined by Horton and Wohl, may be utilised by radio presenters, and in extension podcast hosts, in order to cultivate parasocial relations with their respective listeners. Consequently, it will be intriguing to further examine the perceived effect of such relations when encountered with the potential challenges of platformisation. What indications may be given by the informants regarding the main motivations behind their podcast consumption, and how may they potentially manifest in an impact upon their listening loyalty?

3.2 - Perceived ethos and trust

In examining the various components that may contribute to listener loyalty, I find it relevant to present and reflect upon a theoretical framework related to the perceived character of podcast hosts. By doing so, I intend to highlight various central theoretical perspectives on the notion of perceived ethos as a rhetorical attribute, and how it further relates to the area of podcast consumer research. As such, I will utilise the coming chapter to provide a set of suitable definitions of the terms perceived ethos and trust, based on various academic traditions, which in turn will provide the groundwork for further elaboration regarding the potential effects they may exhibit on the creation of listener loyalty.

The notion of *ethos* has been presented in rhetorical studies since the time of Aristoteles, as noted by Amossy: “In Aristotle’s art of persuasion, the term ethos (in Greek, character) designates the image self-built by the orator in his speech in order to exert an influence on his audience.” (Amossy, 2001, pp. 1-2) In short, such an *Aristotelian* view on ethos, also referred to as *derived ethos*, may be categorised by the relation and trust that is built within the act of communication, or as defined by McCroskey: “the ethos of a source produced during the act of communicating.” (McCroskey, 2005, p. 83) Furthermore, this tradition of ethos studies tends to dismiss the potential influence of pre and post communicative time frames, being centred mainly around the perceived impact of the communicative act itself. Since the mid 20th. century however, this approach has become increasingly disputed, with various academic traditions proposing somewhat differing definitions and views on the matter.

One such tradition relates to the increased focus on the importance of *initial*, or *Cisceran ethos*. Defined by McCroskey as: “the ethos of a source prior to the beginning of a given communicative act” (McCroskey, 2005, p. 83), it diverges from the aforementioned derived ethos on a number of levels. Firstly, in relation to the time frame in question, it focuses mainly upon how the ethos of a communicator is shaped during the period prior to the communicative act. Furthermore, the tradition acknowledges a different, and somewhat broader set of factors that may contribute to this preconceived ethos, such as social background, perceived status, institutional affiliation etc. Such a recognition of the impact of preconceived social factors has made this approach rather popular within the academic field of sociology, where Amossy, referring to Bourdieu, explains that: “In terms of rhetoric rather than of analytical philosophy, one could say that the force of discourse is not dependent on the image of self the orator produces in speech, but on his or her social position”, and “the access he [or she] can have to the language of the institution.” (Bourdieu, 1991, cited in Amossy, 2001, p.2)

Subsequently, I would like to comment upon the third and final time related derivation of perceived ethos, commonly referred to as *terminal ethos*, or: “the product of the interaction between initial ethos and derived ethos.” (McCroskey, 2005, p. 95) Various scholars have made a point of distinguishing between various forms of derived ethos based upon the intended outcome of the communication in question, resulting in what McCroskey refers to as “concept centred communication”, and “ethos centred communication.” (McCroskey, 2005, p. 95) Concerning the development of listener loyalty, I would theorise a palpable presence of ethos centred communication, wherein the: “communication's primary purpose is to enhance the ethos of the source” (McCroskey, 2005 p. 95), and: “the source trades on the audience’s favourable attitudes to increase ethos.” (McCroskey, 2005, p. 96) Furthermore, it should be noted that other academic fields such as social psychology and communications have proposed somewhat differing views on the subject of perceived ethos, putting a greater emphasis on the credibility and believability of information, as opposed to the communicator as such. However, I do not find these perspectives to be of great relevance to my project, wherein the focus will lie upon the relations between the podcast listener and their content and hosts of choice. Hence, I have chosen to refrain from detailing them any further.

Although occasionally misconstrued to represent the inherent traits of a communicator, a number of prominent academics rather consider the notion of ethos to signify an assigned set of attributes, with Hauser noting that: “Ethos is not an inherent quality a person possesses. It is an interpretation of that person's character based on how the person behaves in light of a specific audience’s readiness to respond.” (Hauser, 2002, p. 163), and McCroskey further specifies that: “The source does not (have ethos). The receiver has the ethos. It is in the mind of a receiver, just as any other attitude is.” (McCroskey, 2005, pp. 83-84) Hence, I have chosen to be consistent in my usage of the term *perceived ethos*, as opposed to solely ethos, highlighting the inherent perceptive nature of the concept, and its contingency upon the receiver within the communicative setting, in this case the podcast listener.

Furthermore, I would like to present a selection of key perspectives regarding the notion of *trust* between a communicator and an audience. Quoting an article by Hoff-Clausen, Kjeldsen and Hess note that: [translated from Danish] “trust is an attitude of positive expectations to other people’s action and is directed towards the future, while credibility is a quality, we are attributed, or we attribute to other people on the basis of their previous actions and present behaviour.” (Kjeldsen and Hess, 2023) Furthermore, van Dalen makes a point of noting that other scholars have proposed somewhat differing definitions of the term, wherein: “Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman... define trust as ‘the willingness of a trustor to be vulnerable to the actions of a trustee based on the expectation that the trustee will perform a particular action, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party.’” (van Dalen, 2020, p. 357) Based upon this range of propositions, one may identify a clear contrast between the aforementioned qualities of perceived ethos, and those of trust. In relation to my own thesis, I would characterise the key distinctions separating the two as follows: The notion of trust is intrinsically linked to someone's expectations towards the future intentions of a communicator, whereas perceived ethos, and in extension credibility, is rather viewed as a perceived set of character traits spanning a range of differing situations and time frames.

In conclusion, I would theorise that the perceived ethos and trustworthiness of a podcast host may prove relevant in enhancing the listeners’ relations with their programs of choice, thus facilitating the formation of listener loyalty. Furthermore, I propose that the development of such a perceived ethos would likely span the periods prior to, during and after the act of listening. Consequently, the active listening time of a podcast consumer would probably not present itself as the sole factor of relevance in this regard, likely being accompanied by the

preconceived awareness that may be shaped by factors such as: fame and status, appropriate marketing, an active social media presence etc. In the context of podcast consumption, I would therefore suggest the construction of listener loyalty to be viewed as a continuum, in line with the views of Giles (Giles, 2002, pp. 293-294), with the various time related instances of both parasocial relations and perceived ethos, likely being of relevance. As such, it will prove interesting to assess the potential effects these perceived relations and attributes may exert on the informants' sense of listener loyalty, and whether or not they will outweigh any potential technological and economic hindrances related to the process of platformisation.

Chapter 4 - Theoretical framework of platformisation

As pointed out in a previous chapter, the introduction of podcasting as a separate phenomenon within the space of aural media, has been intrinsically linked to a number of technological innovations relating to both the production, distribution and consumption of content. One such innovation of key relevance, would arguably be the early adoption of online platforms. As mentioned previously, both the Apple iTunes and the later Apple Podcasts platforms have maintained quite prominent positions throughout the lifespan of the medium, with other actors such as Spotify, NRK Radio and PodMe, entering the market at later stages. As the subject matter of my project relates to the intersection between podcast consumer motivations and the platformisation of content, I thus find it beneficial to present an appropriate theoretical framework related to the process of platformisation. Hence, the following chapter will commence by presenting various attempts at defining the term, before subsequently focusing upon the perspectives of three prominent academic traditions on the subject, namely those of: business studies, political economics, and software studies.

4.1 - Various perspectives and definitions

Some media scholars have proposed a set of rather simple and finite definitions of the term *platformisation*, and how it ought to be utilised in the research of podcasts. Simply put, scholars such as Srnicek, suggest that platforms, as they relate to the subject at hand, may be viewed as: “digital infrastructures that enable two or more groups to interact”, serving as: “intermediaries that bring together different users.” (Srnicek, 2016, p. 30) On the other hand, researchers such as Gillespie find it appropriate to somewhat further elaborate on the matter, suggesting that platforms should be understood as: “sites and services that host public expression, store it on and serve it up from the cloud, organise access to it through search and recommendation, or install it onto mobile devices.” (Gillespie, 2018, p. 254) Based on such definitions, I would argue that, as proposed by Sullivan, a platform may be viewed as an intermediary between different forms of users including customers, suppliers, producers, service providers, and advertisers: “consisting both of the technical infrastructure that allow for sharing of information as well as a set of rules (governance) that enable and constrain particular types of user activity.” (Sullivan, 2019, p. 3)

4.2 - Platforms as multi-sided markets

Having proposed a suitable definition of the term, I would call attention to the fact that the process of platformisation has been studied and theorised by a number of scholarly fields, all contributing somewhat differing perspectives upon the matter. In fact, Nieborg and Poell make a point of distinguishing three main bodies of scholarly work on the area, namely those of: *business studies*, *critical political economics* and *software studies*. (Nieborg and Poell, 2018, p. 4288) Firstly, viewing the sentiment of business studies on the subject, a prominent aspect of the tradition would relate to the view of platforms as multi-sided markets, within which institutional actors interact with various forms of end consumers. (Nieborg and Poell, 2018, p. 4277) Another key component would be the so-called network effect, wherein the increased utilisation of a particular platform, by both distributors and consumers, may itself contribute to an added sense of value among those present within it. Such an effect may present itself as being both social and/or technological in nature, thus prompting an increase in the number of active users on the platform in question. (Srniczek, 2016, pp. 30-32) Such a market centred, profit driven approach to platformisation, provides a valuable insight into the economic and managerial backdrop of the creation of platforms, thus illustrating why they have become so integral to the distribution and consumption of content. (Nieborg and Poell, 2018, pp. 4277-4278)

4.3 - Platforms as accumulative entities

On the other hand, political economic researchers have presented a somewhat different approach to the studies of platformisation. Again noted by Nieborg and Poell, the tradition may be characterised by a particular focus on the power struggle and politics relating to platforms, namely by emphasising the: “accumulative tendency of capital and corporate ownership and its subsequent effects on the distribution of power and... the precarious and exploitative nature of cultural and (immaterial) labor of both producers and end-users.” (Nieborg and Poell, 2018, p. 4279) Furthermore, scholars such as Srniczek have explored the manner in which these developments relate to the production and distribution of aural content. He argues that the producers of content clearly benefit from the possibilities of the platform ecosystem, although clearly being subject to the uneven power dynamics of what he refers to as “Platform Capitalism.” (Srniczek, 2016, pp. 41-42) Hence, one may theorise that the proposed power relations between the platforms and the producers and user present within them, will likely contribute to greater corporate concentration and commercialisation,

named as two key components in Benkler's "Project of Control." (Benkler, 2006 p. 32) Further implications of this development have been theorised by some scholars to include the commodification of content, and the exploitation of cultural labour, within the increasingly consolidated platforms of distribution. (Nieborg and Poell, 2018, p. 4279) In contrast with the above-mentioned business studies, scholars within the area of political economic research seldomly direct any major attention towards the basic economic framework of platforms, exemplified in the proposed presence of the network effect and multi-sided markets. Personally, I find this decision to be somewhat puzzling, seeing that such a theoretical diversification would likely prove to benefit any further research on the subject, hence why I have chosen to include them in my thesis. (Nieborg and Poell, 2018, p. 4280)

4.4 - The technological qualities of platforms

Lastly, I would like to briefly mention the research on platformisation as it relates to the tradition of software studies. Referring to the fields of software, app and platform studies, this academic tradition may be categorised by its explicit focus on: "the material, computational, and infrastructural dimension of platforms." (Helmond, 2015; Montfort and Bogost, 2009; Plantin et al., 2018, cited in Nieborg and Poell, 2018, p. 4280) Researchers within the field have placed a particular emphasis on the technological developments of recent platforms, with regards to both computation and algorithms. Furthermore, they have documented and analysed the rise of algorithmic logic, wherein the gathering of user data is utilised to fuel: "the proceduralized choices of a machine, designed by human operators to automate some proxy of human judgement or unearth patterns across collected social traces" (Nieborg and Poell, 2018, p. 4280), providing a clear contrast to the previously prevalent editorial logic, which explicitly relied upon the recommendations of human experts in the formation of equivalent conclusions. (Nieborg and Poell, 2018, p. 4280) Furthermore, I would argue that such a shift regarding the manner in which decisions are being made within platforms, and the potential to influence user patterns and preferences, clearly relates to the area of podcast distribution and consumption, and thus my own project. (Nieborg and Poell, 2018, p. 4281)

In conclusion, Nieborg and Poell argue that, although the aforementioned academic areas have been vital in the research and theorization of platformisation, they all offer a somewhat limited understanding of the subject. (Nieborg and Poell, 2018, p. 4288) Hence, acknowledging the increasing implications it presents to society at large, the authors advocate

for the need of further developing an appropriate academic framework as it relates to platformisation and cultural production, and in extension podcast distribution, (Nieborg and Poell, 2018, p. 4289) They suggest a threefold approach, ideally integrating the aforementioned areas of research, wherein the: “shifts in market structures, forms of governance, and infrastructures mutually articulate each other.” (Nieborg and Poell, 2018, p. 4288) As such, I would argue that in combining the central aspects of these differing areas of platformisation studies, Nieborg and Powell presents a framework better suited to the needs of current researchers, being relevant to both the production, distribution and consumption of cultural content, and in extension podcasts. Consequently, I have chosen to include theoretical perspectives from all of the three traditions within my thesis, in order to accurately examine and analyse both the motivations behind the informants’ selection of platforms, as well as the potential impact of platformisation on their perceived listener loyalty.

4.5 - Regarding the usage of theory in the data analysis

The previously presented selection of theory and research is meant to act as a context for the following analysis, hopefully facilitating an improved understanding of the experiences of podcast consumers in the face of platformisation. Firstly, the chapters outlining the varying listening habits of podcast consumers both internationally and in a Norwegian context, will provide a backdrop when presenting the general listening background of the informants. How may their habits relate to the reported average of their demographic group, as presented by current research such as *Den Store Podrapporten 2023*?

Secondly, when exploring the various elements perceived as noteworthy in the formation of host-listener relations and listener loyalty, the perspectives regarding parasocial interactions and relations, and perceived ethos and trust, will be frequently utilised. Finally, the theoretical framework regarding platformisation will be applied whilst contextualising and analysing the informants’ motivations behind their selection of platforms. Lastly, these varying theoretical perspectives will be used somewhat interchangeably when discussing the relation between the informants' sense of listener loyalty and the potential challenges faced in light of platformisation, thus emphasising the academic placement of my research at the crossroads of podcast consumer and platformisation studies.

Chapter 5 - Methodological considerations

In the upcoming section of my thesis, I intend to present and reflect upon the choice of methodology within my project. As detailed in previous chapters, past research on the subject of podcast production, distribution and consumption, has made use of a wide range of such approaches. This may be related to the rather extensive area of interest presented in some of these studies, which in turn likely promoted the inclusion of a wide array of research questions and methodological variations. However, it is apparent that a considerable portion of said research has been based upon various quantitative methods, with an apparent preference of online surveys. Although such an approach may provide a sizeable and subsequently quantifiable set of data, I do not believe that it would suit the needs of my project, being aimed more so at the subjective perceptions of platformisation by podcast consumers, as established by the thesis question: *How does the process of platformisation affect podcast consumers' sense of listener loyalty?*

Hence, I will commence the following chapter by detailing the reasoning behind my selection of a methodological approach for my research. Followingly, I will present the preparations made prior to the collection of the data, both relating to the creation and revision of an interview guide, as well as the process of recruiting an appropriate set of informants for the study. Lastly, I will describe the process relating to the implementation of a pilot interview and the subsequent modifications made to the interview guide prior to the final data collection.

5.1 - Regarding the choice of a qualitative approach

As argued by Gentikow, it is essential to reflect upon and consider the methodological approach of one's project, in order to provide the information most suitable to the selected thesis question. (Gentikow, 2005, p. 32) Defined as: [my translation] "a tool or means of support which is used to make sense of a complex phenomenon" (Gentikow, 2005, p. 32), and: [my translation] "With 'methodology' we mean a planned means of execution to reach knowledge" (Østbye et. al., 1997, p. 11), the value of utilising such a plan to guide one's research can hardly be overstated. Further detailing the importance of selecting an appropriate methodological approach, Gentikow argues that: [my translation] "most phenomena in our world contain both quantitative and qualitative aspects, with the key being

to figure out what aspects one should primarily study to solve the issue one is working on.” (Gentikow, 2005, p. 35)

In attempting to examine and analyse the experiences of podcast consumers, I find it sensible to facilitate the ability of any potential informants to express themselves as freely as possible. Acknowledging that such an approach would likely facilitate considerable reflection and a subsequently vivid set of data, I have chosen to make use of a *qualitative methodology* in my project. As detailed by Gentikow, this tradition is characterised by a relative lack of strict scientific guidelines, resulting in an “open and exploratory”, approach to research. (Gentikow, 2005, p. 38) Highlighting the importance of said methodological flexibility, she states that: [my translation] “when using an exploratory approach... it is almost self-evident that one has to be flexible at every step of the process.” (Gentikow, 2005, p. 52) Furthermore, I also find it relevant to highlight the inherent *inductive* quality of the knowledge generated by such an approach, where: [my translation] “based upon the research, concrete data is used to reach a deeper or abstract insight”, as opposed to: [my translation] “deductively making use of abstract ideas on the concrete material that is being researched.” (Gentikow, 2005, p. 40)

Based upon the thesis question of my project, I would argue that the manner of knowledge gathered within it, would in all likelihood possess such inductive qualities. Hence, my concurrent choice of methodology may prove beneficial in lending support to the academic validity of said knowledge, due to the relative lack of scientific regulation within qualitative research, compared to its quantitative counterparts. (Gentikow, 2005, p. 54) As such, the “explicit reflexivity”, of my qualitative approach would thus, by definition, permeate throughout the extent of the project, wherein: [my translation] “it becomes necessary that the researcher decide on and evaluate the choices made before, during and post research.” (Gentikow, 2005, p. 54), hence maintaining a responsive relation between myself as the researcher and the informants. (Gentikow, 2005, p. 55)

Regarding why I do not believe a quantitative methodology to be suitable for the insight I wish to procure with my research, I would point to the structural characteristics of the tradition, and how they might impact the attributes of the gathered data. In essence, however qualified a researcher may be in selecting a quantitative approach, there will always exist a possibility of certain reflections not matching the proposed framework of the project in

question, and thus not being visible in the subsequent analysis of the data. Consequently, I would argue that the combination of a greater range of freedom within its scientific framework, as well as its inductive approach towards the analysis of the resulting data, makes the qualitative approach ideal for allowing me to examine the perceived effects of platformisation upon the listener loyalty of podcast consumers.

5.1.1 - The semi-structured qualitative interview

As mentioned previously, the number of podcast consumers in the Norwegian population has never been higher. (Norstat et. al., 2023) Judging by these statistics, one might surmise that a majority of any potential informants would be experienced in using the medium. However, such experiences and reflections will likely vary somewhat on an individual basis, hence being expressed rather differently between them. Gentikow argues that such individual expressions often prove quite valuable in the context of qualitative research, stating that: [my translation] “The most sought after (data), are unsolicited expressions, where people may formulate things in a way in which the scientist had not thought of before... formulations that convey new insights, new realisations extracted from the empiricism.” (Gentikow, 2005, p. 45) I for one ascribe to this idea, thus regarding the potential enrichment of empirical data to pose an inherently positive contribution to the later analysis. As a consequence, I have decided to make use of a *semi-structured qualitative interview* as my method of choice, being classified by Gentikow as: [my translation] “A form of interview which is suitable to extract people's experiences using their own word.” (Gentikow, 2005, p. 45)

In choosing said approach, it is rather common to utilise an *interview guide* as a means of directing the conversation between the informants and the researcher. However, the guide is not necessarily intended to be strictly adhered to, instead acting as a general thematic guideline for the interview, whilst providing an overview of different subjects deemed thematically interesting by the researcher. As such, one should not be alarmed if the informants, and thus the conversation, stray somewhat off the timeline and topics indicated within the guide, as it will likely not pose any notable deleterious effects to the quality of the collected data. Nonetheless, the researcher may choose to redirect the conversation, if deemed adequately irrelevant for an extended period of time. Thus, an appropriate usage of a semi-structured interview would likely require an active and well reflected researcher, being vigilant in balancing both the interhuman dynamics and systematic aspects of the method.

(Gentikow, 2005, p. 54) Of note, I have chosen to consistently refer to the participants of the interviews as *informants*, in line with the recommendations of scholars such as Gentikow. In contrast to other commonly used terminology such as *respondents*, defined as: [my translation] “a person who reacts... on the questions formulated by the researcher” (Gentikow, 2005, p. 47), the term informant entails a greater sense of autonomy as it relates to the formulation and expression of one's own views and experiences, thus implying: [my translation] “an independent subject; he/she does not simply react, but is deemed as someone who has something to tell.” (Gentikow, 2005, p. 47)

Such a choice of terminology may therefore be regarded as an extension of the reflexive nature of the qualitative tradition, and the resulting freedom provided to the informants in regard to formulating and expressing their views through their own language and emotions. Thus, the semi-structured qualitative interview may be viewed as a cooperative effort by the researcher and informants, wherein the relations between those participating in the conversation is key, recognising that: [my translation] “The informants are granted and required to exhibit a great deal of autonomy”, entailing that: “..the interview does not solely take place on the premises of the researcher.” (Gentikow, 2005, p. 47)

5.1.2 - Focus groups as opposed to individual interviews

Further reflecting upon my selection of method, I would like to address the choice of utilising *focus groups* as opposed to individual interviews. Defined by Thaagard as: [my translation] “a method where multiple people discuss a theme with a researcher as leader or moderator” (Thaagard, 1998, p. 81), the method presents a number of potential possibilities and obstacles, somewhat differing from those of an individual interview. In my opinion, the most prominent of these dissimilarities would likely relate to the possibility of social interactions amongst the informants, originating from the inherent group dynamic of the method. As pointed out by Gunter: “It is important not to lose sight of the fact that focus group data are group data. They reflect the collective notions shared and negotiated by members of the group. Individual in-depth interview data, in contrast, reflect the views and opinions of a single person, shaped by the social process of living in a particular culture or society.” (Gunter, 2000, p. 44)

I would personally argue that these social interactions may exert a positive influence on the collection of data and subsequent analysis within my project, exemplified by the aforementioned statistics from *Den Store Podrapporten 2023*, which details the broad adaption of the medium throughout Norwegian society. As such, based upon the arguments of scholars such as Gentikow, like: [my translation] “Statements made in a focus group, normally attain a greater ‘common’, relevance in that they do not only express individual, but partly collective experiences and attitudes as well.” (Gentikow, 2005, p. 86), in combination with the social and cultural implications of podcast consumption, I find the choice of utilising focus group interviews in my project to be both appropriate, and in line with relevant academic advice. (Gentikow, 2005, p. 85)

5.2 - Preparations for the data collection

5.2.1 - Pilot interview

In the period after the completion of the interview guide, I decided to conduct an initial pilot interview. This decision was based upon various considerations, notably the wish to test the formulations of the questions, as well as the order in which they were presented, thus allowing for any alterations to be made prior to the data collection. In short, I wished to assess whether the questions of the interview guide would be understandable and relatable from the point of view of a potential informant, and if its disposition and arrangement would promote a suitable flow within the conversation. Furthermore, I was also aware of the variability pertaining to the social nature of focus group interviews and was thus keen on assessing how it might influence the arrangement of the proposed guide.

Another potential uncertainty was associated with the appropriate timeframe of the conversations, not only in relation to each area of interest, but also the entirety of the interviews. Hence, I wished to facilitate an appropriate balance between encouraging the reflections of the informants and ensuring a sensible progression of the conversations. Lastly, I found the pilot interview to be quite beneficial in providing an opportunity to exercise my skills in the role of interviewer and researcher in a suitable environment, prior to the actual collection of data.

Consequently, I conducted a pilot interview on Friday the 29th. of September 2023. The pilot group consisted of two male and one female informant, between the ages of 24 and 27. I

would deem the interview as a success, showcasing both the benefits and areas of improvement within the proposed interview guide. For instance, the flow of questions and clear division between the various themes of interest, seemingly promoted both relevant reflections and discussions between the informants. However, it should be noted that the amount of deliberation pertaining to each question varied quite a bit, with some informants requiring greater guidance and follow up questions from myself in order to adequately express their opinions, whilst others simply spoke for minutes on end without the need of much intervention whatsoever.

Although such lengthy deliberations might exhibit a potential of straying somewhat from the given area of interest, it ultimately did not pose any major challenge during the pilot interview. On the contrary, I found that the informants generally provided an impressive range of relevant reflections to the subject at hand, boding well for the upcoming data collection. In conclusion, I find that the real-life experience of the pilot interview provided me with increased comfort relating to the implementation of qualitative focus group interviews. Furthermore, it facilitated any necessary adjustments to the interview guide, thus finalising the preparations for the data collection ahead.

5.2.2 - Recruitment strategy

Having laid the practical groundwork for the interview process, and made any necessary modifications to the interview guide, the time had finally arrived to commence the process of recruiting informants to the project. As stated previously, I had chosen to make use of qualitative group interviews as opposed to individual interviews as the method of my project. This naturally posed a unique set of challenges related to recruitment, both in terms of the increased number of informants required within each interview, as well as the coordination necessary for placing them into three suitable groups. Additionally, I was aware of the general difficulties related to the recruitment of informants, having been informed of the tedious experiences of other master students. Consequently, I went into the process with an open mind, though expecting some difficulties along the way. Having identified these potential challenges, I decided to commence recruiting as early as possible, whilst also selecting an age group in which I was confident of attaining a suitable number of informants, in order to match the proposed method of the project.

The age group selected for the project was thus based upon a few notable considerations. As mentioned previously, the data provided by *Den Store Podradpporten 2023*, would seemingly indicate that young adults between the ages of 20-29 are some of the most active podcast listeners in Norway. (Norstat et. al., 2023) Suggesting a prominent connection to the medium, I viewed the potential of recruiting suitable informants within this age range as quite high. Consequently, I chose to select young Norwegian podcast consumers between the ages of 20-30 as the informants of my project, being hopeful that their prior experiences with podcast consumption would promote insightful reflections in the interviews to come.

As suggested by Ytre-Arne and Moe, there are a number of manners in which to approach the process of recruitment to minor qualitative studies. (Ytre-Arne and Moe, 2023, pp. 27-28) As such, they deem the sharing of information through appropriate channels of communication to be highly beneficial, a stance with which I totally agree. Consequently, I chose to create a recruitment text, whose purpose was to promote and share relevant information regarding the project, with the intended goal of generating excitement and persuading potential informants to establish contact.

Followingly, I chose to distribute the recruitment text through various social mediums such as Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. It was shared both as a general post, being visible to all my contacts on the given sites, as well as within various private groups and chat rooms, mainly relating to student media organisations such as the Student Radio of Bergen. Followingly, I also deemed it appropriate to create new, separate chat rooms, where I invited individuals who indicated an experience with, or general interest towards the subject of podcasting. This approach to recruiting, referred to by Ytre-Arne and Moe as [my translation] *Network Recruitment*, may be defined as: [my translation] “recruitment strategies based upon your own network-not solely in relation to social media-to locate relevant informants.” (Ytre-Arne and Moe, 2023, p. 29) As it allowed me to take advantage of my rather sizable network of acquaintances within the selected age range, of whom the vast majority were active podcast listeners, this strategy would become the principal manner by which I was able to identify and recruit suitable informants to the project.

Lastly, although not as prevalent as the aforementioned Network Recruitment, the so-called [my translation] *Snowball Method*, wherein: [my translation] “a person recruits another person, who then has tips regarding other participants”, thus: “making the ball roll”

(Ytre-Arne and Moe, 2023, p. 29), was occasionally utilised as a means of providing additional informants in the few cases where an individual was unable to attend an interview, due to any number of unforeseen events.

5.2.3 - Informant selection and group composition

Ultimately, I was able to recruit 12 informants, of whom 5 were female and 7 were male. Although not being a conscious consideration on my part, nor indicated as being of particular relevance to the selected method, I was nonetheless rather pleased by the fact that I was able to attain a somewhat equal ratio between male and female participants. A clear imbalance in favour of one or the other might potentially have challenged the validity of the views expressed within the groups, as they may have been deemed unrepresentative of the particular demographic as a whole. Furthermore, the number of informants acquired was deemed to fit within the recommended guidelines of qualitative focus group interviews, as proposed by Gentikow, having been a distinct priority during the recruitment process. (Gentikow, 2005, p. 77) Moreover, the selected informants also matched the proposed age range of the project, with the youngest informant being 21 and the oldest being 30 years of age at the time of the interviews.

Furthermore, the selection displayed an even distribution of informants who worked and studied, with 6 individuals in each subgroup respectively. However, their previous knowledge regarding media studies, production and consumption did in fact vary quite a bit, with 4 participants studying, or having studied media related subjects on a university level, and another 4 reporting a background from student media. Notably, there was a certain overlap observed between these two subgroups, with 2 informants having both studied and practised within the field of media production. As such, there were 6 informants who potentially possessed a substantial amount of knowledge related to media theory and practice prior to the interviews, and 6 who did not, a halfway split. On the other hand, the informants who did not study or work within the field of media, maintained quite a varied background when it came to their line of studies and professional careers, with fields such as computer security, archaeology, philosophy and European studies being examples of note.

5.3 - On the interview guide and data collection

In the early stages of the project, I made a conscious decision regarding the use of a physical as opposed to a digital interview setting. Although modern technology may arguably facilitate a rather seamless user experience, as opposed to previous generations, I still view the physical setting as ideal for conducting focus group interviews. Somewhat related to the considerations regarding the social nature of the method, and the subsequent benefits it may provide the data, I would argue that these factors would seem more prominent in a physical setting as opposed to a digital one. Consequently, I was adamant in making sure that my informants were able to attend the interviews in person which, thankfully, turned out to be the case for the vast majority of those partaking.

As such, the three focus groups followed a rather similar trajectory, commencing with a short presentation of myself and the general purpose of the project. The informants were then handed a set of documents and provided sufficient time to fill them out. Followingly, I continued by explaining the purpose and content of said documents, namely the letter of consent and the form regarding their background of podcast consumption, whilst simultaneously answering any potential questions from the informants.

Based upon the structure proposed by the interview guide, the following discussions within the focus groups were divided into three main parts. Firstly, they commenced with a quick round of introductions, with the purpose of creating a comfortable conversational setting, and facilitating honest reflections and dialogue throughout the interviews. Notably, I did not sense any major discomfort related to the sharing of information from any of the informants, which I would interpret as an indication of the positive contribution of said strategy.

The second section revolved around the informants' consumption of podcast content. Beginning with a general discussion concerning their listening habits, I wanted to outline the characteristics of each informant, in order to better understand their respective backgrounds of podcast consumption. The two main subjects within this section would relate to the average reported listening frequency of the informants, and their personal preferences regarding both podcast genres and specific programs. Followingly, the questioning turned more explicit towards their relations with their programs of preference. In doing so, I wished to examine the manner in which they discovered said programs, why they enjoyed them more

than other concepts, and whether they had noticed any particular changes occurring during their time as listeners. Such changes might include: the addition or removal of podcast hosts, adjustments of release schedules and altering channels of distribution.

Thirdly, the informants' perceptions and selection of podcasting platforms were discussed. Similar to that of previous sections, I commenced with a set of rather broad questions regarding their usage of said platforms, as a means of outlining the general tendencies within each group. Subsequently, I continued the conversation by presenting questions of increasing selectivity, meant to encourage reflection concerning their motivations and choices related to platform selection. Examples of such questions would be: why they used some platforms as opposed to others, what elements they appreciated or disapproved of within said platforms and why they avoided other platforms.

Finally, the themes of content preference and platform selection were merged, with the conversation finally revolving around the process of platformisation and its potential effect on their loyalty as listeners. Firstly, the informants were questioned as to whether any of their programs of preference had changed platforms during their time as active listeners. This turned out to be the case for the vast majority, lending support to the theoretical basis of the project. Followingly, they were questioned as to whether these alterations had affected their relations with the programs in question, thus encouraging further reflection regarding their motivations and decisions to continue or discontinue said relations in the face of platformisation.

As a means of concluding each interview, the informants were asked if they wished to share any final thoughts on the subject, prior to ending the session. Informants from two of the three focus groups utilised this opportunity to add additional information regarding their listening habits. In the second focus group, the informants also made a point of elaborating on the benefits of publishing podcast content in both video and audio formats, as well as the perceived differences between subscribing to platforms with audio and video compatibility, as opposed to those solely focused on aural content. Discussing the usage of Youtube in the consumption of podcasts, they further argued that various concepts required a combination of video and audio to accurately portray the conversations and reactions of their hosts, exemplified in American humour concepts such as: “The Joe Rogan Experience”, “This Past Weekend with Theo Von”, and “Bad Friends”. In the third focus group however, one

informant in particular, Gard, conveyed a wish to comment on the ethical and cultural responsibilities of NRK as a state-owned media actor. He was critical of what he viewed as a shift away from the development of new concepts and talent within the organisation, towards the acquisition of external, celebrity-led programs. In fact, NRK has received ample public criticism for said development, with the discontinuation of the show “Sophie og Fetisha”, posing as a prominent example. (Tassamma and Revheim-Rafaelsen, 2023)

Conclusively, I found the overall execution of the focus group interviews to have gone exceedingly well. The informants seemed highly engaged during the conversations and exhibited a remarkable willingness to reflect upon and contextualise their motivations and choices regarding podcast consumption. Furthermore, a number of them continued to elaborate upon their experiences after I had finished the questions of the interview guide, indicating a prominent appeal of the subject matter. Additionally, some informants made a point of highlighting the perceived educational value of the interviews, stating that the questions had provoked a great deal of reflection, thus allowing them to become more conscious of their own habits of media consumption. Consequently, the data proved to be both rich in detail and quite varied, thus creating a suitable foundation for the upcoming analysis.

5.4 - Transcription and translation

In transcribing the data from the interviews, I utilised Microsoft Word’s proprietary transcription tool. Delivered as part of the Office 365 package, made available through my UiB account, I selected the tool mainly due to its efficient manner of dividing the recorded audio files into sections, through the use of timestamps. The program displayed a surprising adequacy in recognising and separating the voices of the informants and the interviewer, although seldomly understanding the particular words that were uttered. Thus, it became more of an aid in sectioning the audio into manageable pieces, rather than an actual transcription assistant as such. Acknowledging the notoriously time-consuming process of transcription, I was thankful for any tools that would be of assistance, although eventually only making use of the one mentioned above. The final transcription was composed of roughly 110 pages, containing around 35.000 words. During the process of transcribing, I was adamant in my wish to transfer the audio recording into text as transparently as possible, maintaining the informants' manner of speech in the final data. In doing so, the goal was to

appropriately convey the atmosphere and dynamics within each conversation, thus contextualising various statements of interest in the upcoming analysis. Finally, I would like to note that all of the quotes presented in the upcoming analysis have been translated from Norwegian into English. In doing so, I have made use of various digital, online translation tools such as: The Cambridge Dictionary Translator and Deep L Translate, facilitated by my personal editorial vigilance, in order to ensure an accurate presentation of the wording and tone within the given material, as expressed by the informants.

5.5 - The choice of an analytical approach

In selecting an analytical approach for my project, I was conscious of the theoretical field in which it was placed, the denominators of the qualitative research tradition, and most importantly, the knowledge which I wished to procure in order to answer my thesis question: *How does the process of platformisation affect podcast consumers' sense of listener loyalty?* As noted by Jensen: “Typically, a qualitative study will identify subsets and sequences of data that are related thematically or structurally, and which can be singled out for further systematic and comparative analysis.” (Jensen, 2021, p. 299) Acknowledging the relevance of the theoretical and thematic perspectives regarding listener loyalty and platformisation within my project, I found it appropriate to utilise them as guiding principles for the process of analysis. Hence, I decided upon selecting the approach of *thematic analysis*, categorised by an: “in-depth and iterative categorization of interviews, observational notes, and other texts with reference to their ‘content’ (concepts, metaphors, themes, etc.)” (Jensen, 2021, p. 300) In selecting said approach, I found it useful to divide my analytical process into various steps, as recommended by scholars such as Johannessen, in order to cohesively categorise and identify relevant patterns within the data. (Johannessen et al., pp. 278-279, 282)

As such, I commenced by preparing the transcribed material for the analysis at hand, before coding, categorising and finally reporting the findings located within it. During the coding of the material, I marked and highlighted various quotes of interest, through the use of colour codes and personal notes, as a means of creating a rudimentary overview of the identified themes of interest and facilitating an organised analysis. Followingly, I placed these quotes into the thematic categories in which they resided, based upon the areas discussed during the interviews, as exemplified in the attached interview guide. These primary categories were: (1) The informants' sense of listener loyalty, (2) The informants' usage of platforms, and (3) The

perceived effect of platformisation on the sense of listener loyalty. As a means of further systemising and contextualising the material, I placed the quotes within these categories into subsections based upon the informants in question, and the focus groups in which they belonged. Finally, I reported my findings through the analysis chapters of my thesis, wherein I made use of the thematic framework in question, and the theoretical perspectives upon which they resided, in order to appropriately convey my findings. Hence: “By comparing, contrasting, and organizing narrative and other discursive constituents in categories”, I was able to: “abstract various conceptions of ‘the meaning of’ particular media contents, communicative practices, organizations, or audiences, as far as specific informants are concerned.” (Jensen, 2021, p. 300)

5.6 - Methodological reflections

5.6.1 - Ethical considerations

In cooperation with my supervisor, I delivered any relevant information regarding my master project to the website called RETTE. RETTE is the system currently used by the University of Bergen for the overview and control of the utilisation of personal information within research and student projects. (University of Bergen, 2023) Through my research, I gathered information regarding the personal motivations and reflections of the informants as it related to their podcast consumption. Prior to each interview, I also presented the informants with a rudimentary questionnaire, containing information of personal and potentially identifiable character, such as their name, age and current professional status. During my analysis, I will naturally use this information, as a means of contextualising selected quotes from the transcribed material. As such, I will take full responsibility for the ethical and responsible treatment of said data, making use of any necessary precautions to protect the privacy of the informants. Notably, this project will not deal with personal data that falls within categories of particular sensitivity, as defined by the regulatory framework of The Norwegian Data Protection Authority (2023), such as political affiliation, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, ethnicity etc. Consequently, the project is deemed as exempt from further obligations of reporting to organisations such as the national SIKT database.

Prior to each interview, the informants of the project were provided a form of consent, explaining the further usage of their personal data in relation to the project. The document detailed the significance of their participation, how the gathered data would be handled, the

measures of identity protection that would be taken, as well as their rights as informants. The general outline of this document was based on the template of consent forms from the national SIKT database, which was further edited in order to suit the particular circumstances of my project. After receiving the signature of each informant, I also went through the form in an oral manner, highlighting key information regarding their roles and rights within the project, and allowing for any potential questions. As a means of identity protection, all names have been altered in the published thesis. Finally, I would like to point to the fact that the data gathered within the project was handled with great care, being stored on units with password protection, and solely being handled by myself as the researcher.

5.6.2 - Potential methodological and analytical limitations

Naturally, there are a number of potential limitations relating to the selected methodological and analytical approach of the project. Firstly, in relation to the methodology of the project, one may theorise that the selection of a qualitative approach might have exerted a deleterious effect upon the representativity of the data. Naturally, this approach does not deliver the same amount of data as its quantitative counterpart, rather focusing on the procuring of deeper, more selected knowledge of the informants in question. Hence, although the goal of my research was linked to the examining of the subjective perceptions of podcast consumers, my methodological selection may have affected the representative nature of the data, in relation to the Norwegian population at large. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the implementation of focus groups, as opposed to individual interviews, may have facilitated a suitable setting for examining the social implications of podcast consumption, allowing the informants to share, reflect upon, and discuss their perceptions and experiences with each other. However, this must not be confused with the amount of data presented by quantitative research methods, entailing a distinct set of possibilities and challenges altogether.

Finally, my selection of a thematic analytical approach was clearly grounded in the theoretical perspectives proposed by previous research on the topic. Hence, various theories regarding listener loyalty, platformisation and the manner in which they may affect one another, became key components in the coding, categorisation and presentation of my findings. As a consequence, this distinct focus may have facilitated a lack of attention towards other theoretical perspectives of potential relevance to the project, thus possibly limiting the transferability and validity of the data analysis.

Chapter 6 - Introduction to the analysis

6.1 - A brief introduction to the informants

The following subchapters will provide a brief presentation of the general background of the informants and their habits of podcast consumption. In doing so, I will contextualise the apparent trends of the material through the quantitative data presented by *Den Store Podrapporten 2023*, as a means of highlighting any correlations or contrasts between the experiences of the informants and that of other Norwegian podcast consumers within their age range. Hence, I will commence the chapter by providing a general outline of the selected informants, whose names have been altered for reasons of privacy, before continuing to comment upon the dynamics within each focus group as such. Seeing that the majority of the discussion within this chapter will be based upon the data provided by the attached informant background sheet, I would recommend utilising it as a reference, in order to facilitate a comprehensive presentation of the subject at hand.

6.1.1 - Overarching trends

As mentioned previously, the three focus group interviews were comprised of young adult podcast consumers between the ages of 20-30. Furthermore, the final informant selection of the project was characterised by a rather even ratio of males and females, with the distribution between those identifying as students and working professionals also displaying similar tendencies. These overarching trends were also reflected within each group, with an even ratio of various backgrounds being present across all the interviews. However, it should be noted that the academic and professional background of each informant varied quite substantially, with prominent examples ranging from students within the fields of philosophy and archeology, to freelance sound technicians, nurses or even teachers. Such variabilities are also reflected within the data from *Den store Podrapporten 2023*, lending support to the broad appeal of the medium throughout Norwegian contemporary society. (Norstat et. al., 2023)

Regarding their selection of podcast content, the informants displayed a rather similar range of preferences across the various focus groups, characterised by a clear fondness of concepts located within the genres of humour and entertainment. Although being contrasted by a minor subgroup who stated an inclination towards the consumption of news and other factually based concepts, the majority of the informants nonetheless favoured the predispositions

outlined above. Once again, similar observations are exhibited within *Den Store Podrapporten 2023*, where contemporary statistics suggest that the majority of Norwegian podcast consumers place a great value upon being entertained by their content of choice. (Norstat et. al., 2023)

In relation to the informants' selection of platforms, one may observe a rather clear tendency towards the adoption of both Spotify and NRK Radio, being the preferred choices of the overwhelming majority. The quantitative data from *Den Store Podrapporten 2023*, once again support such observations, reporting that the platforms have been utilised by 67% and 62% of the respondents respectively. Hence, the findings from the report, in combination with my own preliminary data, would suggest a prevalent position of these platforms in the Norwegian podcast space. (Norstat et. al., 2023) Other less prominent platforms, occasionally reported by the informants, would be those of Apple podcasts, the original distributor of podcasts, as well as PodMe, the novel platform of the Schibsted Media Conglomerate. Conclusively, it should be noted that these platforms display quite significant variations in relation to their economic and technological qualities, selection of content and general accessibility. Hence, I would like to reiterate that the varying considerations made regarding the selection of content and platforms, as well as the potential implications pertaining to the process of platformisation on the matter, will be presented and reflected upon in greater detail during the upcoming analysis.

6.1.2 - Focus Group 1

Having established a general overview regarding the background of the informants' podcast consumption, I will continue by presenting selected observations that I find suitable in providing an appropriate perception of the personalities, experiences and opinions constituting the conversational dynamic within each focus group. As such, I will commence by presenting my initial impressions of the first interview. which was held on the 10th of October 2023 and consisted of two male and two female informants between the ages of 21-28. Regarding the structure of the remainder of the chapter, I have chosen to start each subsection by commenting on the observations relating to the female informants of each group, before continuing with those related to the males.

Hence, the first informant of Focus Group 1, named Tina, frequently highlighted her novel status as a podcast listener, and her views of the medium as an adjunct form of entertainment within her preferred musical streaming platforms. In turn, this attitude was reflected in her apparent unwillingness to invest economically in her consumption of content, and the subsequent lack of value expressed towards her shows of preference. Marte, the other female participant, reported a greater experience as a podcast listener, making use of the medium quite actively, although somewhat sporadically, and expressing distinct relations with her programs of choice. However, akin to the views of Tina, these relations were apparently not sufficient in justifying additional economic costs, thus facilitating her use of a single streaming platform, Spotify, for both her music and podcast consumption.

The two males in the group had both been avid podcast consumers for a number of years, although some differences appeared between them. On the one hand, Markus actively sought out his favourite shows, switching between platforms to be able to maintain his relations and listening experience. However, he made a clear point of solely making use of free platforms such as Apple Podcasts and NRK Radio, thus excluding commercial actors such as PodMe and Podimo. On the other hand, Simen was seemingly the most avid podcast listener in the group, expressing that the medium played a significant part in his daily routines. He was a loyal listener to a number of programs, having followed them across various paid and free platforms. Hence, he was the only participant in the group who valued the medium of podcasting to the extent of paying for it.

6.1.3 - Focus group 2

The second focus group was held on the 12th of October 2023 and consisted of three males and one female between the ages of 22-25. Firstly, I would like to point to the informant Mina. She was quite adamant in the fact that she solely listened to podcasts as a means of providing light entertainment whilst performing other, menial tasks throughout the week. As such, she reported a low sense of value in relation to her content of choice, seldom listening to podcasts for their own sake. Hence, she solely made use of the free NRK Radio app in accessing content, although she expressed having tried other platforms such as Apple Podcasts in the past. In contrast to most informants in the project, Mina did not have a subscription to Spotify, rather opting for the podcasts from NRK Radio in favour of music to facilitate her daily activities.

Contrastingly, Erik was an avid user of podcasts, mainly making use of the RSS based service Podcast Addict to access his content of choice. In explaining his use of the platform, he highlighted the ability of customising its user experience, both in regard to the layout of the app and its wide selection of content. He maintained that such a customizability stood in stark contrast to other mainstream platforms such as NRK Radio and Spotify, where he argued that such options were extremely limited. The two final informants in the group, Per and Martin, made use of a similar range of platforms, with Spotify being a clear preference. In describing their choices, they referred to the perceived benefits of having both one's music and podcast catalogue on the same platform, reflecting similar notions presented by other users of the platform. Furthermore, they reported mainly listening to foreign, English speaking podcasts. However, it is worth noting that Martin frequently listened to one Norwegian concept, for which he made use of the NRK Radio app. The three males of the group all stated that they listened to podcasts at least on a daily basis, whereas Mina utilised the medium somewhat more sporadically, coinciding with her weekly chores and errands.

6.1.4 - Focus group 3

The third and final focus group interview, which was held on the 18th of October 2023, consisted of two male and two female informants between the ages of 23-30. Commencing the conversation, the informant Celine made a clear point of stating that she did not consider podcasts to be a medium of comparable value in relation to content such as TV shows, films and music. Such views may be partly explained by her professional career within the field of TV Production, likely reflecting an elevated interest in the consumption of such content. However, she did in fact report listening to a selection of podcast concepts on a regular basis. In doing so, she mainly utilised Spotify, as she argued it was preferable to other platforms, due to its inherent capabilities of combining both podcasts and music in a singular space. Annabelle on the other hand, expressed an entirely different approach to podcast consumption, with the loyalty towards her favourite shows prompting her to switch platforms, and pay money to access their content. Furthermore, it is worth noting that she did not pay for any platforms relating to other forms of media, instead making use of the accounts of other relatives and loved ones. I found this to be a rather intriguing observation, as it stood in stark contrast to the previously expressed views of informants such as Celine, whilst also making her willingness to pay for podcast content even more profound.

Furthermore, Gard reported having been an avid consumer of podcasts for a number of years. However, he had made a conscious decision of refraining from paying to access any of his preferred shows, even though some of them had switched platforms during his time as a listener. Hence, he expressed a distinctly negative view towards the conglomeration of modern media, culminating in his decision of not contributing monetarily to said development. Notably, he did make use of Spotify, which requires a paid subscription, stating that he already used it for music streaming purposes, thus legitimising his access to podcast content within the same subscription. Lastly, Tom made use of a number of differing platforms to access his content of choice. Explaining his use of the RSS based service Podcast Addict, he highlighted elements such as its user friendliness, customizable experience and large variety of content, thus closely aligning with the previous remarks made by Erik. Furthermore, Tom also made use of the paid podcasting platform PodMe, as a means of accessing his favourite show “Papaya”, with which he had developed an avid relation over the span of seven years. Notably, the informants of this particular group mainly listened to Norwegian podcasts, with Caroline being the only one listening to any of foreign origin, namely the English speaking “Ologies”, podcast.

6.2 - Regarding the structure of the analysis

Having spent the previous chapters outlining the selected theoretical and methodological approach of my thesis, as well as the general background of the informants, I will followingly commence the analysis of the collected data from the focus group interviews. In doing so, I will utilise a thematic analytical approach, in order to answer the thesis question of my project, namely: *How does the process of platformisation affect podcast consumers’ sense of listener loyalty?*

As such, the initial area I wish to explore relates to the various components pertaining to the informants’ sense of listener loyalty. In identifying and analysing said traits, I will attempt to provide an appropriate context for any subsequent assessments regarding the manner in which said loyalty may be affected by the process of platformisation. Furthermore, I have chosen to divide this primary section into two subsections, being somewhat separated in terms of thematic approach. The first of said subsections, will deal with the perceived relations between the informants and their podcast programs and hosts of choice. In it, I will explore how such relations may influence the perceived value of podcast content, and

subsequently affect the sense of listener loyalty. The observations from the data will be examined in light of the aforementioned theoretical framework of parasocial interactions and relations, and perceived ethos and trust.

Followingly, the focus of the analysis will shift towards the informants' relations with their podcasting platforms of choice. In doing so, I will attempt to examine the manner in which the various qualities of said platforms may present an effect on the listening habits and loyalty of podcast consumers. Based upon the previously presented research on the subject, some factors of potential interest may include: content selection, ease of use and economic considerations. The analysis of these findings will be based upon the theoretical framework of platform and platformisation studies, and its underlying branches of interest, namely: business studies, political economics and software studies.

Having proposed the various elements comprising and affecting the listener loyalty of the informants, the second main section of the analysis will be centred around the potential effect exhibited by the process of platformisation on said loyalty. In commencing the section, I will analyse whether or not any such effect was actually observed within the data, providing a natural prerequisite for any further analysis on the subject. Followingly, I will examine the various manners in which said effects were perceived and subsequently expressed by the informants. Once again, I have chosen to divide the subsequent analysis into two subsections, based upon the division of opinion between those who did in fact perceive an effect of platformisation, and those who did not.

Followingly, I will reflect upon the observed differences of outlook and opinion between the informants whose loyalty broke in the face of platformisation, resulting in the discontinuation of existing host-listener relations, and those who did not. Finally, I will attempt to assess the combined findings of my analysis, utilising observations from across various themes of interest, in order to provide a comprehensive perspective on the relations between the factors in question, and their collective effect on the listener loyalty of the informants. In doing so, I will discuss the observed connection between the presence of various key elements, and the perceived strength or fragility of said loyalty. Hence, appearing across a similar range of informants, I argue why these factors seemingly act as potent indicators of the value granted by the individual informant toward his/ her listener loyalty, and the subsequent likelihood of it prevailing in the face of platformisation.

Chapter 7 - On the formation of listener loyalty

The goal of the following chapter will be to explore the various factors of interest regarding the informants perceived relations with their programs and hosts of choice. In doing so, I wish to gain a greater understanding of the components that may contribute to the formation and continuation of host-listener relations, and subsequent listener loyalty, hence providing a basis for the ensuing analysis. As such, I will attempt to outline and analyse the key traits that were most commonly reported by the informants, and view them in light of the theoretical perspectives of parasocial interactions and relation, and perceived ethos and trust.

7.1 - The importance of parasocial relations

In the process of identifying prominent elements in the formation of listener loyalty, I have attempted to assess both the frequency in which they were brought up, as well as their perceived importance and subsequent priority in the informants' selection of podcast content. Hence, I would like to commence this chapter by commenting on the value placed upon the role of the podcast host, as opposed to the thematic genre and subject matter of the programs in which they reside. In fact, based upon the data from the interviews, it would seem that a clear majority of the informants actively utilised their perceived impressions of media personalities and podcast hosts, in their evaluating the value of their respective programs. In other words, the perception of a podcast host would seem to serve as a clear indicator in the informants' interest in and perceptions of podcast content.

Viewing the attached documentation outlining the informants' background of podcast consumption, one may identify a prominent trend, namely that the majority of them share a rather similar taste related to their programs of choice. The programs in question tend to be of predominantly Norwegian origin, mainly falling within the genres of humour and entertainment. Furthermore, the entertainment podcasts mentioned by the informants also tended to be hosted by rather prominent profiles within the Norwegian media landscape, otherwise referred to as "celebrities". Prominent examples of such shows may include: "Papaya", "Berrum og Beyer Snakker om Greier", and "Harm og Hegseth". Thus, it would only seem natural that such celebrity-led podcasts might utilise the notoriety of their hosts in attracting and conserving their listeners, which the quotes from the informants seem to confirm, with Marte and Gard stating that:

I mainly find new shows through celebrities that I like and follow on Instagram or YouTube... Yeah, like when they go: "now I have a podcast", and I'm like: "oh I love these guys, so I'm definitely going to love listening to their podcast". So yeah, that's how I discover new stuff (podcasts) that I might like to check out.

Marte (24)

Well, in my case it's often related to the profiles that I already like. Then they suddenly have a podcast, so I'll go and check it out.

Gard (23)

Further lending support to such observations, *Den Store Podrapporten 2023* reports that 82% of active Norwegian podcast listeners under the age of 30, identify "being entertained", as a key consideration in their selection of content. (Norstat et. al., 2023) Accordingly, the report proposes a general approach to categorising podcast listeners, namely within the framework of the "active", and "passive", listener, the implications of which will be detailed shortly. Although arguably somewhat crude in nature, being based upon the broad indications that one may draw from such quantitative studies, this particular categorisation seemingly matches quite well with the qualitative data of my project in particular. According to the report, the listeners defined as "passive", tend to display an affinity towards the genres of humour and entertainment, and most notably, the selection of podcast content based upon previous knowledge of both the concepts in question, hence appearing rather similar to the trend outlined above. Consequently, the general characteristics pertaining to the "passive", listener, as defined by the report, were seemingly quite applicable to the majority of the informants selected within my own project. (Norstat et. al., 2023)

However, it should be noted that a minor subset of informants expressed rather contrasting views to those presented above, rather deeming the elements of subject matter and thematic approach as being key to their selection of content. I would argue that such a contrast may be somewhat linked to the manner of programs that these informants preferred, which concurrently differed substantially from the trend outlined above. Rather than listening to celebrity-led shows within the genres of humour and entertainment, this subgroup tended to prefer more factually based concepts, such as news podcasts and documentary programs. Here, both Norwegian and international podcasts such as: "Ukraine the Latest", by The Telegraph, "Oppdatert", by NRK and "Forklart", by Aftenposten were mentioned as

prominent examples. With such programs lacking the appeal of well-known celebrities, the informants who preferred such shows, reported being drawn by the subject matter and content being discussed, as opposed to the individuals holding the conversation. Once again, I would like to reiterate the fact that these opinions were expressed by a rather particular, minor subgroup of the informants. Nonetheless, such a distinct prioritising of theme and content above the significance of a specific host in the valuation of content, still provided a distinct contrast to the trend observed in the majority of the informants, and would prove useful as an early indicator in assessing the strength or fragility of their listener loyalty, which will be examined in greater detail at a later stage in the analysis.

Once again lending support to my observations, *Den Store Podrapporten 2023*, reports the share of podcast listeners under the age of 30, who express the ability of attaining new knowledge and staying up to date on current affairs as being key in their selection of content, as being a mere 23% and 24% respectively. (Norstat et. al., 2023) Returning to the framework proposed within the report, this group of respondents would seemingly fall within the category of “active”, podcast listeners. As opposed to the previously mentioned “passive”, listeners, this subgroup is defined by a preference of informational content, such as news and documentaries and, as mentioned above, the selection of podcast content based upon considerations relating to theme and content. (Norstat et. al., 2023)

Consequently, I would argue that the proposed categorisation of “active”, and “passive”, listeners, in combination with the quantitative data of *Den Store Podrapporten 2023*, lend support to the observations within my own data. Having identified the key denominators separating the preferences of content within my group of informants, I would argue that both theme and genre, combined with the presence, or indeed absence of well-known celebrity-like hosts, would seemingly appear as useful indicators in comprehending the contrasts between the perceived importance of podcast hosts versus subject matter in the selection of content. Acknowledging the importance of perceived host-listener relations, I thus find it appropriate to present and reflect upon the manner in which these views were expressed by various informants. In fact, the relevance of such perceived relations was frequently expressed by informants across the various focus groups, with Marte stating that:

I really recognise myself in what they're talking about (“Harm and Hegseth”). Like two friends who have been drunk together, and then they are going to talk about what happened the night before. So, I just really recognise myself, and feel like I'm part of it all... I almost feel like we're sitting in a room together, and they just sit and gossip, and I sit and listen.

Marte (24)

In this excerpt, she details her experiences with one of her favourite programs named “Harm and Hegseth.” Although being described in different manners by the various informants, the perceived sense of belonging and social coherence was frequently reported as a key consideration regarding their program selection. In fact, the sense of being part of a group, with the program hosts making the listener feel part of the conversation, continuously appeared as a key reason for continuing to follow a specific program, with Martin noting that:

It just feels a bit like friends talking shit together (“The Official Podcast”)... We're kind of in on the whole thing and it's, well, it's just a bit of fun really. Maybe it's kind of a loneliness thing, who knows? Ha ha ha!

Martin (25)

In addition to further detailing the already established importance pertaining to a sense of belonging, often referred to as “being part of the group”, in which the conversations take place, Martin also brings up an additional and rather relevant point. Although seldom expressed as explicitly as done above, a similar tendency was observed within the quotes from a number of varying informants, namely what he describes as “kind of a loneliness thing.” Referring to an apparent pursuit of a social connection, and the power it seemingly possesses in the formation and continuation of a listener’s relation with a program, I would argue that such perceptions highlight the presence of interpersonal relations formed within the medium of podcasting. Hence, I find it to be an appropriate point of entry to further examine the role of parasocial interactions and relations in the formation of listener loyalty.

Although the experiences portrayed by the informants during the interviews would suggest the presence of close, interpersonal relations with their hosts of choice, seemingly emulating that of a close group of friends, I would argue that such perceptions fail to constitute an accurate depiction of parasocial relations, as presented in previous chapters. Exemplified in

the work of Horton and Wohl, they argue that parasocial relations are inherently one-sided, with the media persona, in this case the podcast host, being the formative part. Thus, the relation would not be susceptible to any alterations based upon the wishes and opinions of the passive part, in this case the listener, rendering the perceived equality between the listener and host to be flawed at best, and likely a rather incorrect depiction of the actual dynamics present within these relations. (Horton and Wohl, 1956, p. 215)

It is worth noting that modern social media has presented a valid critique of Horton and Wohls framework, and its static view on parasocial interactions and relations. Justifiably so in my opinion, as the communicative possibilities between media personalities and consumers have drastically shifted with the introduction of the internet, modern chat services and digital platforms. Consequently, one might argue that the expressed sense of belonging and equality of status with their podcast hosts of choice, may be somewhat linked to their interactions with said hosts across various social mediums, in combination with the dynamics formed by the podcast consumption itself. However, I do not find it relevant to further discuss and reflect upon the possibility of such alterations taking place across other mediums than podcasting, based upon a couple considerations. Firstly, due to the subject not being of particular interest at the time of constructing the interview guide, the collected data displays a lack of direct and reliable quotes from the informants on the matter, thus making it difficult to perform a suitable analysis. Combined with the research question being explicitly centred around the consumption of podcast content, I have decided to focus upon utilising the framework of parasocial interactions and relations within the context of podcasting and the relations formed within the frame of the medium.

I would argue that podcasting, being a novel derivation of older audio centred mediums such as radio, has inherited a number of the technological and communicational constraints and possibilities of its predecessors. In the context of the aforementioned considerations regarding parasocial interactions and relations, one such factor would be the distinctly one-sided nature of communication within and distribution of the medium itself. Rather than being an aural medium promoting dynamism and dialogue, an example of which would be a telephone call, it is an inherently static product, being produced by and distributed from a communicator to a receiver, thus lacking any notable possibilities of commenting upon and affecting the product on the part of the receiver. Consequently, the very nature of the medium points to the

one-sided nature of parasocial relations within podcasting. Hence, I would argue that the views of Horton and Wohl still hold true within the context of my thesis.

If one is to look at the aforementioned research on podcast consumers, the findings relating to the importance of host-listener relations, hardly come as a surprise. In fact, they seemingly correlate quite well with Schütz and Hedder's research on the matter. As detailed in a previous chapter, they identified a clear positive correlation between the perceived parasocial relations between a listener and a host, and the listener's attitudes and opinions regarding the content in question. Although being based upon a somewhat different set of data than my current project, making use of a quantitative methodological framework, as opposed to a qualitative one, their results did indeed suggest, concurrent to my data, that parasocial interactions and relations may influence the formation of listener bias, content preferences and in the long term, listener loyalty.

Furthermore, I also find it relevant to mention that these parasocial relations and the sense of ownership and belonging to a program, seemingly increased in both strength and prominence the longer it persevered, or in other words, based upon how long the relation had been developing for. Such an observation could potentially be linked to a number of different elements, with various informants pointing towards factors such as the power of habitual behaviour, nostalgia etc., with Tina and Marte, noting that:

Tina (22): The more you listen to the podcast, the more you become invested in it... Like, you kind of get to know the people who are in it. So... it just gets more and more fun to listen to, if that makes sense?

Marte (23): Yeah, because then you understand all their inside jokes, since you might have heard them in another episode, so now you're kind of in on it.

Tina (22): Yes, and you kind of feel that they (the podcast hosts) are becoming more and more open, but that might be because you get to know them more in a way.

Such quotes regarding the apparent time-related increase in the prevalence and effect of parasocial relations, may be appropriately viewed in context of the framework and model of Giles. His approach to the matter proposes a rather distinct separation between the short term and immediate actions within such relations, named parasocial interactions, and their long-term consequences, referring to parasocial relations as a whole. (Giles, 2002, p. 298)

Identifying, as I believe I have done, that the long term parasocial relations between podcast hosts and listeners seemingly turns more pervasive and resilient over time, one might theorise such a development to be the result of an increase in the quantity and quality of the parasocial interactions constituting present within it. Consequently, Giles' view of parasocial relations as a continuum would appear most befitting, wherein he proposes that such relations develop with time, being the combined result of a plethora of parasocial interactions, in an extension of normal social activities. From the initial interaction, which in a podcast would likely fall under the category of a first-order encounter, the character of the relation alters with each interaction, thus potentially being reinforced or reduced over time. (Giles, 2002, pp. 293-294)

Regarding the importance of parasocial interactions in the development of loyal listeners, the observations from my data would also seemingly concur with contemporary research on the subject. In fact, Spangardt, Ruth and Schramm were able to identify a distinct correlation between the usage of parasocial interactional tactics, and the promotion of loyalty within a given audience. (Spangardt, Ruth and Schramm, 2016, pp. 90-91) As such, I find it reasonable to suggest that each interaction between a host and listener may indeed play an important role in the development of long term parasocial relations between podcast consumers and their preferred programs, being reinforced by their continuous recurrence over time.

In summary, based upon the various points analysed in this chapter, I would argue that the relations between the listeners and hosts of podcast programs, seemingly play a central role in the creation and continuation of listener loyalty. Furthermore, based upon the theoretical framework of parasocial interactions and relations, it would seem that the prevalence of both short term parasocial interactions, and long term parasocial relations, may both exert a discernible influence on the formation and strength of said loyalty. Additionally, I propose that, based upon the presented quotes from the informants, these host-listener relations seemingly increase in both prevalence and significance with the passing of time, suggesting that the longer a relational bond is developed, the stronger it will be perceived, and the greater effect it may assert in the decision making of the listener. Finally, I would argue that such observations further indicate the importance of both the quality and quantity of parasocial interactions across time, in the development of strong parasocial relations, which in turn play a corresponding role in the creation and continuation of listener loyalty.

7.2 - The value of the perceived ethos of podcast hosts

Having examined the perceived effects of parasocial interactions and relations on the formation of listener loyalty, I would like to present another element of a similar nature, which also cemented itself in a prominent manner within the collected data. Hence, I will continue the analysis of the elements affecting the loyalty of podcast listeners, by discussing the role of the perceived ethos and trustworthiness of podcast hosts.

Naturally, the factors constituting the perceived ethos of a host, as conveyed through the medium of podcasting, would likely vary somewhat based upon the listener in question. Indeed, acknowledging the range of genre, program and host preferences reported by the informants, a concurrent variation regarding how these traits were perceived, was also observed. However, I was nonetheless able to identify a distinct feature that was frequently highlighted across the interviews, which I have thus chosen to examine further, namely the perceived honesty and transparency of podcast hosts.

There's a bit more honesty in that podcast ("Berrum og Beyer Snakker om Greier"), versus what "Papaya", brings to the table. Yeah, because they touch a bit more on the vulnerable side of things. They kinda have a lot of ups and downs, and there's not as much silly stuff. Don't get me wrong, there's a lot of silliness, but it's also a bit more serious, I think (compared to equivalent programs).

Simen (21)

In this extract, Simen details the personal traits of podcast hosts as being a key motivation for selecting and continuously supporting his program of choice. Of the various traits constituting a perceived ethos, he specifically mentions the perceived honesty of the podcast hosts as being what he believes separates the show in question from similar podcasts within the genre in which it is located, in this instance, that of humour and entertainment.

As exemplified above, the sense of vulnerability on the part of the podcast hosts, was greatly appreciated by the informants, with a number of them naming it one of the key factors separating their favourite programs from other similar shows within their respective genres. As such, by portraying both the positive and negative aspects of their daily life, interpersonal relations and personal well-being, the podcast hosts seemingly allow the listener to take part

in their own life, for better and for worse. These supposedly raw and unobstructed displays of life in its entirety, in turn, were closely connected to the perception of a podcast host's honesty and trustworthiness, which as detailed above, appeared to be a prominent motivation in the informants' selection of content.

7.2.1 - On the lack of critical distance between listeners and hosts

As mentioned previously, a number of scholars in the field of ethos studies, such as Hauser and McCroskey, have made a clear point of arguing that the notion of ethos, rather than being a set of traits inherently possessed by a communicator, refers to the various characteristics attributed to him/ her by others. (Hauser, 2002, p. 163; McCroskey, 2005, pp. 83-84) Thus, in light of this theoretical consensus, the honesty and vulnerability portrayed by the communicator, in this case the podcast host, would only constitute as his/ her ethos, if it was perceived as such by the receiver of the communication, in this case the podcast consumer.

However, it should be noted that the distinctions made in the literature regarding the various aspects of ethos and trustworthiness, do not necessarily appear as clear cut in real life conversations, exemplified in the experiences of the informants. Hence a lack of conscious reflection on the subject, might indeed contribute to the notion of ethos potentially being viewed as an inherent trait, and the true, honest and reliable reflection of an individual's character. This became rather apparent during the interviews, with the informants portraying the personality, trustworthiness and general character of their preferred podcast hosts in a manner of perceived personal acquaintance. Although having never met the hosts in person, the informants spoke about them with a familiarity and warmth as if they had developed close, friendly relations across extensive periods of time.

Furthermore, I would argue that such a lack of critical distance may be viewed in context of the aforementioned connection between the attributes of perceived ethos and trust. Herein lies the notion regarding the importance of a credible perceived ethos, relating to the current views and attitudes towards a communicator, in the creation and strengthening of trust as an attribute, describing more so the future expectations towards said communicator. As such, although being somewhat separated in the literature (van Dalen, 2020, p. 357), the two attributes seemingly exhibit an intelligible influence upon one another, suggesting an interconnected nature potentially related to the various timeframes of perceived ethos, which

will be discussed in further detail in a separate subchapter. Naturally, one might further speculate as to whether or not such a development may be related to the qualities of parasocial interactions and relations, and their proposed role in strengthening the bonds between hosts and listeners. I suspect it might, with the gradual familiarisation that takes place with each passing interaction, slowly eroding the perceived distance between the host and the listener, thus contributing to heightened levels of trust, comfort and familiarity.

Hence, acknowledging the role of the informants' perception of the podcast hosts' ethos in their content selection, I found their lack of critical distance towards one another to be rather intriguing. A number of the shows pointed out by the informants as prominent examples of containing trustworthy and likeable hosts were large budget, high profile, nationally acclaimed concepts, wherein the hosts would be categorised as well known, professional comedians, celebrities and media personalities. Despite these professionalised settings, which one might theorise would increase the perceived distance and minimise personal host-listener connections, in particular within an intimate medium such as podcasts, this was seldomly brought up or reflected upon by the informants. On the contrary, they repeatedly highlighted the personal qualities and trustworthiness of podcast hosts as if though the programs in question were not large budget, celebrity driven entertainment concepts, but rather raw, honest conversations between friends, in whom they could naturally place their faith in, exemplified in the excerpt below:

(Do you feel that you know Berrum and Beyer better than the hosts of other programmes you've listened to?) Yes, because they can actually be open about hitting the wall, and having to leave the stage because they can't perform (in the context of a mental breakdown). And in the next moment, they joke around about not being able to pronounce different words, so it's kind of a good... A good balance, and not just like sketch after sketch after sketch (unlike other humour podcasts).

Markus (28)

Here, Markus further echoes the points made above regarding the informants' perceptions of the honesty and credibility of podcast hosts. He identifies their ability to be open about mental challenges and how it affects their professional and personal life, as being a key factor separating "Berrum og Beyer Snakker om Greier", from the majority of other humour podcasts. Combined with their ability to contrast these serious moments with the silly nature

normally associated with the genre, they are able to provide the listener, in this case Markus, with a unique experience that seemingly provides ample opportunities for the development and strengthening of host-listener relations, and subsequent listener loyalty.

7.2.2 - Time related effects of perceived ethos

Continuing my analysis, I find it appropriate to contextualise my findings within the framework of the various time related derivations of perceived ethos, whilst examining their degree of relevance towards the creation and continuation of listener loyalty. In relation to the initial, or Cisceran ethos, a natural focus of attention would be the significance of the podcast hosts' perceived ethos prior to the initiation of the listening relation, and its effect upon the informants' motivations of commencing said relation.

As mentioned above, a number of the informants' favourite programs were hosted by well-known entertainers and celebrities. Prominent examples of such celebrity driven programs would be: "Berrum og Beyer Snakker om Greier", "Jan Thomas og Einar Blir Venner", "Friminutt", and "Harm og Hegseth". Consequently, one might theorise that the prior knowledge of these celebrity hosts, and their perceived ethos, would be a relevant factor in the discovery and selection of new content, thus initiating the possibilities of long term listener loyalty. Indeed, a number of the excerpts from the interviews seemingly confirmed such a notion, exemplified in the following quote from Gard:

The reason I listen to them is because I've sort of already become aware of them (through other platforms)... Yeah, so it's usually profiles that I already like and then, suddenly they have a podcast, so I go and check it out.

Gard (23)

Despite the previous knowledge of podcast hosts generally displaying some connection to the informants' discovery of, and motivations relating to the selection of new shows, it is seemingly the perceived ethos built during the communicational interaction itself, in this case the act of listening, that is portrayed as being key to their valuation and continuation of their listening relations. Also known as contemporary or Aristotelian ethos, each episode presents an opportunity for the podcast hosts to shape or enhance the traits that constitute their perceived ethos, either in a deliberate fashion or entirely unconsciously. The listener is thus

presented with a certain picture of said host, mediated through the particular interactional constraints and possibilities which define podcasting as a medium, and is thus left to interpret the personality of the hosts through the scope of these interactions.

As pointed to previously, such constraints are likely linked to the technological and communicational qualities of the medium, providing the basis for the relatively one-sided nature of the communication, and resulting relations formed within it. It is thus left to the communicator to provide his/ her audience with communication that shapes their perception of him/ her in a manner suitable to their inherent wishes and preferences as podcast consumers. In other words, the podcast host is able to use the communicative act, the podcast episode, as a vehicle for shaping his perceived ethos, thus promoting the closeness and familiarity expressed by the informants, and the relations from which the formation of such experiences are possible. The effect of this exercise on the host-listener relations of the informants was clear, with the value of the positive impressions of podcast hosts in the selection of content, being exemplified in the following excerpt from Erik:

I think it has a lot to do with just... liking the people (podcast hosts), you know? It's mostly that really, that you like the people who talk to each other.

Erik (22)

Lastly, having outlined the effects of Aristotelian ethos within the communicative act, I find it natural to consider the results of these interactions as a continuum. Commonly referred to as terminal ethos, the long-term implications this may exert upon the perceived ethos of podcast hosts, might naturally prove relevant in the attempt of identifying the components pertaining to listener loyalty, and more specifically, the manner in which this loyalty is developed over time. Acknowledging that the various derivations of perceived ethos in large part influence one another, with the initial ethos establishing a basis for the derived ethos of the communicative act, which in turn provides the material needed for the formation of a terminal ethos is, in my personal opinion, a useful approach to the question at hand. Hence, I would argue that the long term implications of host-listener interactions should be classified as equally important as the Aristotelian ethos of each interaction. In fact, I would argue that it is, in essence, the impression left by the hosts upon the listener from each communicative act, that in turn constitute the motivations of the listener to return to a specific program, and become a loyal listener. Without the positive impression left by the listening experience, the

terminal ethos of the host would likely not promote the recurrence of such interactions, thus effectively eliminating the possibilities of sustained listener loyalty.

As mentioned previously, I would categorise the terminal ethos of podcast hosts, in relation to the development of listener loyalty, as falling within the category of ethos centred communication, as defined by McCroskey. Such a proposition would be based upon the desired outcome of the communication in question, in this case the distribution and consumption of podcast content, being, as I have argued, the development and shaping of the perceived ethos of the podcast host. In shaping the favourable attitude of his/ her audience, the podcast host is able to enhance his/ her perceived ethos, hence creating an advantageous position for the long-term continuation of host-listener relations and subsequent listener loyalty. (McCroskey, 2005, p. 96)

I find that such a theoretical positioning also coincides with the previously proposed role of parasocial relations, as its inherent goal would seemingly be to increase and sustain the desired perceived ethos of the communicator, thus providing an ample context for the formation of long-term host-listener relations and listener loyalty. In contrast, the previously mentioned Aristotelian ethos, would be more akin to the qualities of parasocial interactions, being that it takes place within the timeframe of the communicative act itself. Consequently, I would argue that the manner in which the long-term development of parasocial relations relies upon the character of each individual interaction, further lends support to my observations regarding the manner in which the various time related instances of perceived ethos exert an influence on one another.

Concludingly, the perceived ethos and resulting credibility and trustworthiness of a podcast host, appear to exert a rather significant influence on the selection of content by the informants of my project. In fact, in tandem with the previously discussed effects of perceived parasocial interactions and relations, they appeared to play a significant role in the creation and continuation of long-term listening habits and loyalty across the questioned informants

Chapter 8 - Platform selection

Having identified various key factors regarding the creation of listener loyalty, the following chapter will be centred around the informants' perceived relations with their platforms of choice. In doing so, my goal is to shed light upon the various factors that may influence the selection of said platforms, either in a positive or negative manner, as well as the perceived importance pertained to the selection of podcasting platforms compared to that of specific programs and hosts. Based upon the findings of the aforementioned research on the subject, I will thus examine the perceived effect of elements such as: content availability, consumer and producer activity, ease of use and economic considerations.

8.1 - Platforms and the value of content variety

I mainly use Spotify, mostly for practical reasons, really. I already have Spotify, which I pay for, so I thought I'd use it if I can... Yes, I listen to podcasts, but there are other things I do just as much. Like listening to music when I work out, or just listening to music in general really... that's what I like about Spotify, because you kind of have both.

Martin (25)

Commencing the analysis of the informants' platform preferences, I find it appropriate to present and discuss the perceived value of content availability, both relating to quantity and quality. In the excerpt above, Martin details why he considers Spotify to be an adequate platform for his patterns of podcast consumption. In doing so, he points to the fact that large, multifaceted platforms such as YouTube, Apple Podcasts, and in this case Spotify, offers the consumer access to a vast amount and variety of content. As the platforms mentioned by the informants generally relate to the consumption of aural media, this perceived variety of content mainly points to the ability of accessing both music and podcasts within a singular platform. In fact, a number of the informants highlighted this wide selection of content as being a major consideration in their selection of platforms, as followingly presented by Per and Marte:

I think Spotify has turned into a pretty good platform. I don't know if they made a really big investment or what the deal is, but they have seemingly brought several big creators over to their platform, in order for them to be exclusive there.

Per (30)

I like having them (podcasts) on Spotify, because I have all my albums, my playlists, I have everything else I listen to, so it's like... I want to keep things organised, so it's all in the same place.

Marte (25)

Such a perception of platform value, mainly relating the quantity of available content, may appropriately be viewed within the context of the aforementioned academic tradition of business studies. In it, the exchange of products or services, in this case relating to podcast content, is theorised to be a key indicator of the perceived value of a platform. (Nieborg and Poell, 2018, p.4277) Such an exchange would naturally be contingent upon the actors present within it, hence linking the perceived value of a platform to its rate of adoption by both the producers and consumers of content. As such, an increase in said adoption would subsequently reinforce both actual and future trends of utilisation, and the perceived value of the platform in question. (Nieborg and Poell, 2018, p. 4278)

As presented by the quotes above, Spotify is a clear example of the perceived effect such developments may pose to consumer sentiment of podcasting platforms. Having cemented itself as one of the most prominent music streaming platforms in the world, the consumer footprint of Spotify was arguably quite significant prior to their venture into the distribution of podcast content. As such, the considerable number of consumers who already made use of the app, facilitated major possibilities for further expansion in relation to both music and podcast distribution, increasing the perceived value of being present on the platform, and fuelling the growth of its user base into the future.

Based upon the findings of this chapter, I have presented an apparent correlation between the informants' perception of platform value and the content available within them. Furthermore, in relation to major, multifaceted platforms such as Spotify, it appears that the quantity and variety of said content would be of particular significance, as opposed to the availability of individual programmes. Hence, I would argue that these features may be associated with the

mass adoption of said platforms by both consumers and producers of content, thus reinforcing the perceived value within them. Followingly, I find it appropriate to continue my analysis by examining the perceived value relating to the availability of specific content, in the selection of podcasting platforms.

8.2 - Platforms and the value of selected content

Although previously exemplified by major multifaceted platforms such as Spotify, the consolidation of content also proved influential in the informants' relations with other, more specialised podcasting platforms. In fact, the perceived value of platforms such as NRK Radio, PodMe and Podimo, was seemingly more contingent upon the availability of selected, key programs, than the quantity and variety of content associated with the likes of Apple Podcasts. As a means of contextualising the development in question, I would argue that the transfer of content between the aforementioned platforms could be categorised as a consequence of two separate, although somewhat similar developments. The first of said developments would relate to the withdrawal of content already owned by said company, exemplified in recent efforts made by the Norwegian public broadcaster NRK, gradually transferring the majority of their aural content from third party platforms to their proprietary app called NRK Radio. (Grut, 2021)

The only reason I use NRK (NRK Radio) is actually because they have removed most of their... podcasts from Apple (Apple Podcasts) and instead focused on putting their content on their own platform. Which is a good idea, because I have fallen into the trap and started listening to many other podcasts on the app.

Markus (28)

As exemplified by the quote above, these efforts of content consolidation had seemingly not gone unnoticed by the informants. In fact, they frequently highlighted the necessity of accessing NRK's proprietary platform, either voluntarily or involuntarily, in order to access their content of choice. Hence, such a development would likely promote a redirection of podcast listener traffic from third party platforms towards the NRK Radio app.

Consequently, the content that was once accessible through numerous digital sites, is currently restricted to a single provider, thus forcing whoever wishes to consume said content to make use of the platform in question, as highlighted by the following excerpts:

So, I only use the NRK (Radio) app because I want to listen to the programs that are only available there. The same goes for Podme, as I have no real desire to use it. But if I want to listen to the shows I enjoy...I have to pay for it.

Tom (30)

Yeah, well it's a lot of the same stuff that people here are saying, in regard to NRK, that is (NRK Radio)... It's where they have their content, they have moved it all to their own app, so that's why I started using it.

Simen (22)

These quotes from Tom and Simen, detailing the motivations behind their selection of podcasting platforms, lend further support to the observations regarding the usage of the NRK Radio app. Furthermore, they also elaborate upon what I argue to be the second main category of consolidatory developments within the Norwegian podcasting space, namely the acquisition of content made by various commercial actors such as Schibsted's PodMe app. Although sharing a similar trajectory to the efforts made by NRK, I would argue they differ on a number of levels. Firstly, in contrast to NRK's withdrawal of proprietary content, commercial actors have seemingly focused more on the acquisition of new programs and personalities. In doing so, platforms such as PodMe have actively bolstered their catalogue of both well established, and novel concepts, whereas NRK has mainly focused on altering the manner of distribution of their proprietary content, and not necessarily the purchase of new programs.

Secondly, the inherent goal of said efforts by commercial actors, would seemingly be to increase the perceived value of their platforms, hence allowing them to monetise the access to said value. Although such economic considerations would naturally be incentivised within the activities of a private company, it nonetheless provides a clear contrast to the backdrop of NRK's decisions, which were seemingly based upon various editorial and privacy concerns, regarding the use of third-party platforms. In fact, the head of Radio and Audio services within NRK, Cathinka Rondan, issued the following statement regarding their decision of removing content from other platforms:

[my translation] “NRK maintains a defined and clear strategy of making itself less reliant upon third-party platforms. In order to make sure that NRK is going to be able to uphold and fulfil its societal mission in the future, we require complete editorial and publishing control... Only on proprietary platforms are we able to to fulfil these criteria... To us this implies... (that) we are able to maintain control during the whole process, from the content being delivered to us, to you (the audience) finding it. This is the principle on which we base our entire existence and which we thus have to protect.” (Rondan, 2023)

Despite these differences of context and incentives, the implementation and resulting consequences of the platformisation of content appear quite similar in nature. Characterised by the accumulation of podcast content within a limited range of platforms, the development forces the listeners to make use of said platforms to access their content of choice. Such consolidatory efforts, either for the sake of editorial control, privacy concerns or economic gains, are closely linked to, and may thus be viewed in light of the political economic tradition of platformisation studies. As mentioned previously, this tradition emphasises the importance of power dynamics within platforms, between platforms, and between the providers and consumers within said platforms. (Nieborg and Poell, 2018, p. 4279) In relation to the above-mentioned developments, I find the dynamics related to platform capitalism, and the commercialisation and concentration of content, as presented by Srnicek and Benkler, to be of particular relevance. (Srnicek, 2016, pp. 41-42; Benkler, 2006 p. 32)

Perhaps especially recognisable in the space of commercial platforms such as PodMe, the acquisition of content is seemingly utilised as a tool to provide them with greater market shares within the Norwegian podcasting space. As such, the listeners are required to make use of these platforms in order to access their preferred content, prompting a greater reliance upon them, and a subsequent concentration of market power over time. In fact, the development might act in a self-reinforcing manner, promoting greater consolidation of content, consumer reliance, and thus increasing the possibilities of monopolistic tendencies within the space. Some may argue that such developments are already taking place, particularly in the international podcast space, with the efforts of major, multifaceted platforms such as Spotify being prominent examples. (Moreno, 2022)

In conclusion, based upon the views expressed by the informants, I would argue that the adaptation and consolidation of content seems to be of key relevance in determining the perceived value of podcasting platforms. Furthermore, one might also argue that such a perception of platform value may be linked to the aforementioned role of host-listener relations in shaping the listeners' preferences of content. I find that such a connection would appear rather rational, in that the value of content itself, likely deriving from the relations developed within it, would likely affect the perceived value of the platform through which it is accessible. As such, I would not consider the two matters as completely separate entities, but rather differing parts affecting the loyalty of listeners in their respective manners.

8.3 - Platforms and the value of user friendliness

Continuing the examination of the informants' platform selection, I would like to present a third factor of prominence, which I have chosen to refer to as "user friendliness". In contrast to the previously mentioned elements of platform selection, the factor of user friendliness would relate to the technical qualities present within each platform, and the manner in which they are perceived by the consumer. Due to a lack of relevance to my thesis, I have chosen not to elaborate upon each technical aspect separating the various platforms from one another. However, I will nonetheless address a few key factors that were highlighted by the informants, commencing with that of "user interface":

You can personalise it a lot (RSS based Podcast Addict). You can have it exactly how you want it; you can place everything where you like (interface), you can customise the speed and volume, skip, pause... and basically do anything you want. And that's also kind of why I use an Android phone, I really like having things exactly the way I want them. I also think it's really nice to have it (podcasts) on a different platform, or different app than my music.

Erik (22)

In the excerpt above, Erik details his appreciation of the various options by which he can customise the user interface of his platform of choice, the RSS based app Podcast Addict. In fact, this customizability was frequently highlighted as a key reason for the selection of RSS based services, by the informants who made use of them. Furthermore, Erik and Tom, the two main proponents of such apps, reported an extensive background from radio and media

production. As such, one may theorise that this subset of informants would possess a somewhat heightened level of awareness relating to the technical aspects of podcasting platforms. Nevertheless, such technical features were certainly not ignored by the informants who made use of other, more mainstream platforms. However, the focal point of their considerations tended to lean more towards a general sense of user friendliness, and selected key features available within their platforms of choice, with Per noting that:

The user-friendliness is very good (on Spotify) Like the sleep timer for example...I mean, it's not some advanced hocus-pocus, but it's well suited for podcasts. And then there's also a video in the background that isn't... buffering or anything like that. Very seamless... which you can watch if you want, but you don't use a lot of data loading a long video if you don't want to... So, it has good facilities for that (podcasts), I think.

Per (24)

Once again, Spotify is brought to the forefront, as an example of the positive technological aspects of podcasting platforms. Throughout the interviews, it was frequently pointed to as being rather easy to use and containing a number of convenient features. In the quote above, Per mentions a number of features that have been introduced to Spotify in recent years. Whether they were designed with the intention of podcast consumption, or the streaming of music would be rather difficult to assess, as the two mediums interrelate quite extensively on the platform. However, it is clear from the views expressed by the informants that such features have exerted a positive perceived effect on their listening experiences, hence further contributing to the selection of Spotify as their platform of choice.

Acknowledging the technological nature of the considerations presented above, I find that they lend support to the perspectives promoted by the academic tradition of software studies. As noted by Nieborg and Powell, this tradition places a distinct focus upon the importance of technological features in the perception of value relating to digital platforms. (Nieborg and Poell, 2018, p. 4280) Hence, I would argue that such a perception of value would not only provide a suitable theoretical context for the chapter, but also correspond to the observations presented within it, thus lending support to the perceived effects of technological attributes in the selection of podcasting platforms. (Nieborg and Poell, 2018, p.4280)

Quickly summarising the findings of this chapter, I have identified a selection of key technological attributes of digital podcasting platforms. Hence, I have attempted to analyse their perceived effect regarding the perception of value and subsequent selection of platforms, as expressed by the informants of the project. In doing so, it became evident that the informants did indeed evaluate the technological experience of their preferred platforms, with individual preferences varying somewhat based upon listening background and specific interests. Here, assessments regarding the customizability of platforms, convenient features and general user friendliness may be highlighted as elements of distinct significance. Lastly, I utilised the academic framework of software studies as a means of providing an appropriate theoretical context to my findings. Consequently, I would argue that these perspectives lend support to my observations regarding the relevance of technological features in the selection of podcasting platforms. As such, I would like to conclude with a set of quotes, which I find describes the essence of the chapter in a rather direct, and slightly entertaining manner:

Annabelle (25): That PodMe app freaking sucks (the user interface). It is so freaking terrible.

Tom (30): Yeah, it's pretty bad, in fact I'd say it's downright horrible.

Annabelle (25): Yeah, we all agree that Spotify is superior, that's fine, but PodMe is like so far down on that list... It's absolutely awful. (The group nods confirmingly)

8.4 - Platforms and economic considerations

Finally, I would like to address a consideration that seemingly exerted a considerable influence upon the platform selection of the informants. As highlighted in a number of the previous quotes, the act of balancing economic costs with the perceived value of content, appeared to be a key factor of significance. In fact, it would appear as if both the informants who reported paying for the access to exclusive content, and the ones who solely made use of free alternatives, all deemed the issue important in their selection of platforms.

Naturally, the varying perceptions of content value observed between the informants, promoted corresponding contrasts in their willingness to pay for said content. Consequently, those who were of the perception that their favourite shows provided great value to their podcast consumption, were more likely to convey a general willingness to pay for content, and vice versa.

Such a perception of value also ties into the previously discussed aspects related to the informants' selection of content. Indeed, those who expressed having developed strong parasocial relations with their programs and hosts of choice, preferably over longer periods of time, also expressed a greater willingness to pay for the access to said programs, as opposed to those who had not developed such relations. Furthermore, these parasocial relations also seemed to play a significantly greater role in the perceived value of a program compared to its content, theme and genre. These notions were reflected across the various interviews, hence suggesting a correlation between the development of parasocial relations and the perceived monetary value of a podcast, as followingly described by Simen and Annabelle:

And then there's PodMe, which I do use. Well, I pay for that, and it's really just because "Papaya", moved from NRK (Radio) to PodMe a few years ago, and I've been listening to it since, like 2015. So I kind of just had to.

Simen (21)

I'm more than willing to pay for it (PodMe), because I know how much I use it. So for me it's like paying for film and TV streaming services, because I know how much I make use of it in my everyday life.

Annabelle (25)

Viewing the statements made above, it becomes evident that, in addition to the relations with specific programs and hosts, the overall podcast consumption of the individual also exerted an influence on their willingness to pay for content. The informants who expressed a frequent usage of the medium, both in regard to specific programs and in general, tended to view the value of monetised content in a more favourable light, compared to those who reported less frequent listening schedules.

For me, I feel that podcasts are a bit like radio. You can just switch it on and off and you don't have to think about it too much. That's why I just enjoy the free podcasts, so I don't have to commit to them. It's kind of not worth it (paying for content) in the same way as (TV) series or films, if you want to put it a bit more bluntly... When you're doing something else, it just sort of stays on in the background, whereas when you're watching a film, you're actually watching the film.

Mina (25)

In the quote above, Mina details her unwillingness to pay for podcast content, stating that she does not view it as a worthwhile investment for her personal pattern of use. Thus, I would argue that her statement lends further support to the previously presented tendencies regarding the relations between the perceived value of content, platforms and economic considerations. Based upon her infrequent utilisation of the medium, she had seemingly not developed a strong perceived relation to a specific host or program, thus reinforcing her lack of investment in her listening experience as a whole. Consequently, Mina, and the informants who shared her perceptions, displayed a significantly lower willingness to pay for the access to exclusive content, than their above-mentioned counterparts, rather highlighting the opportunities of accessing other, similar shows on free platforms. As such, I would argue that these contrasts further emphasise the role of parasocial interactions and relations in the perceived value of podcast content, and its subsequent influence on platform selection.

Lastly, I would like to point out that the tendency of conscious economic prioritising, may perhaps appear somewhat enhanced within my particular group of informants. Although not being a specified topic of interest within my research, I would theorise that this tendency may have been exacerbated by their general economic circumstances at the time of the interviews. Based upon the age range and professional status of the informants, it would only seem natural that they faced similar financial challenges as the majority of their peers. Hence, one might subsequently assume that the majority of the informants maintained a rather limited discretionary income of which they could spend on services such as podcasting platforms. In fact, a number of the informants expressed a general reluctance to pay for streaming platforms of any kind, regardless of the type of media in question. Instead, they would facilitate their habits of media consumption by relying upon family and friends for access to their platforms of choice, exemplified in the following quotes by Marte and Annabelle:

I've been lucky, in that I've previously just had to say: "I want to have that" (streaming service), and they've been like: "Okay, we'll make a user for you too", whether it's my dad, my brother, my flatmate, my flatmate's parents, my flatmate's brother and so on (who pays). Why should I buy my own when I'm allowed to have one (account) for free?

Marte (25)

No, I don't pay for any of them (other streaming services), because we have a family subscription to Spotify. For all the others I have a mum, a brother, a cousin or a friend who has it. So, yeah I guess I'm very, very lucky. Of course, I pay for PodMe... because it's important to me.

Annabelle (25)

Such a reliance upon friends and family was observed both from the informants who paid for podcasting platforms and those who did not. With Marte being an informant who did not perceive the value of podcasts as sufficient for the subscription to commercial platforms, one might understand her hesitancy towards paying for any streaming services, regardless of the media in question. However, as exemplified by the quote from Annabelle, a similar tendency was also observed in those who did in fact pay for one or more podcasting platforms. Hence, I would argue that these observations lend support to the cultivation of host-listener relations, and the subsequent perception of content value, as being key elements in the assessment and selection of podcasting platforms. Indeed, this perceived value appeared to trump the economic evaluations of the informants in question, exemplified in their general hesitancy to spend money on other streaming services. Thus, I find it appropriate to finalise this chapter with a quote from Annabelle, which quite effectively portrays the informants' economic circumstances and subsequent need of prioritising their subscriptions:

What young person is actually able to afford to pay for all the different streaming services, if they're going to have the full range?

Tina (22)

Chapter 9 - The perceived effect of platformisation

Having examined the informants' relations with and loyalty towards their content and platforms of choice, I thus find it appropriate to commence the analysis of the potential perceived effect of platformisation on the sense of listener loyalty, as presented by the thesis question: *How does the process of platformisation affect podcast consumers' sense of listener loyalty?* In doing so, I will firstly address whether or not such an effect was perceived at all, before analysing the varying manners in which it was subsequently expressed. Furthermore, I will address the observed differences between the informants whose listener loyalty broke due to the platformisation of content, and those who did not, before finally addressing the observed importance of continuous host-listener relations in the development and reinforcement of said loyalty.

9.1 - Did it affect listener loyalty?

Naturally, the first step in uncovering the potential effect of platformisation on listener loyalty, would be to assess whether or not such an effect was perceived by the informants in the first place. Acknowledging that the premise of my thesis question is largely contingent upon the presence of such a perceived effect, I have thus deemed it an appropriate starting point for the further analysis. Not surprisingly, it did not take long before a rather distinct trend appeared from the data. In fact, the majority of the informants expressed having perceived a distinct effect of platformisation on their consumption of podcast content. Consequently, the group in question also detailed the manner in which the process had forced them to make several changes to their listening habits over the past years, as exemplified in the following quotes by Tina and Martin:

Yeah, so "Friminutt", switched from Spotify to... I believe it was Podme. And then I stopped listening to it, which was a real shame because I actually enjoyed it a lot.

Tina (22)

Well, the show I listen to currently on NRK (“Svensken, Dansken og Nordmannen”) used to be available on Spotify... and then I think it just switched over to NRK (Radio). I don't know what the reason was, probably because NRK wants to have a monopoly on its own programmes, not sure though... But anyways, I kept on listening to it, because I think it's a great programme. (You started utilising the NRK Radio platform to access it?) Yes, exactly.

Martin (25)

However, a minor subgroup expressed somewhat differing perceptions of platformisation and the manner in which it had affected their listening habits. Providing a distinct contrast to the majority of the informants, these informants did not report having perceived any significant effect on their podcast consumption. In fact, they did not report any major difficulties in accessing their content of preference, likely relating to their previously detailed low perceptions of value and subsequent loose preferences of content. Rather, they tended to highlight the vast quantity of content available across various platforms, as a prominent reason regarding why the platformisation of specific programs was of little consequence to them. Consequently, they also pointed to their ability of accessing shows of a rather similar character to their programs of preference, as being an apt substitute for whatever content might be affected by the process of platformisation.

9.2 - How the effect of platformisation was experienced by the informants

In the previous chapter, I established that the majority of the informants did, in fact, perceive an effect on their podcast consumption relating to the process of platformisation, contrasted by a minor subgroup who did not. However, the manner in which said effect was perceived, seemingly varied quite drastically in relation to its character and severity. Consequently, I would like to continue my analysis by further examining these contrasts of perceptions within each subgroup. In doing so, I aim to facilitate an improved understanding of the elements influencing said perceptions, and how they materialise in the podcast consumption of the informants, through a combination of quotes from the data, and relevant theoretical perspectives on the matter.

9.2.1 - Those who experienced an effect

Firstly, I would like to present and examine the views of the informants who reported having altered their listening habits due to the platformisation of content. A defining characteristic of this subgroup was the inherent willingness to pursue programs across various podcasting platforms. Hence, they made conscious efforts in maintaining their existing listening relations, despite having to make alterations to their platform selection in the process. However, such alterations of platform utilisation were largely seen as unwelcome challenges in a landscape of media consumption otherwise characterised by rapid accessibility and ease of use, with Tom stating:

I've been using the exact same app (RSS-based Podcast Addict) for over 13 years now, ever since I started listening to podcasts... I guess I'm just used to using it, and maybe that's why I prefer it. But unfortunately I'm forced to use several others as well (platforms)... So yeah, I basically only use the NRK (Radio) app because I want to listen to the programmes that are strictly available there. The same goes for Podme, as I have no desire to use it, but if I want to listen to the programmes I enjoy, I guess I have to pay for it.

Tom (30)

Furthermore, although sharing the willingness to undergo the troublesome changes of platformisation, various informants within this subgroup expressed a particular point of contention, namely the reluctance to invest economically in said alterations. Indeed, the inclination to pay for the pursuit of content seemingly varied rather substantially between the informants, thus presenting a clear division within the subgroup. As such, the informants in question were indeed inclined to make use of new platforms, as long as they did not require any additional monetary expenses. Thus, with their expressed pursuit of content being contingent upon the free access to the platforms in question, one might speculate as to the perceived value they attached to their shows of preference, and the relating strength of their host-listener relations.

Followingly, I would like to focus upon the informants who had altered their listening habits by purchasing new subscriptions in the pursuit of content. In doing so, they not only made

themselves susceptible to the challenges relating to the adoption of new platforms, but also the additional economic strain associated with the access to commercial platforms. Furthermore, based upon the previously proposed limitations of their financial situations, such additional investments would presumably have to rely upon a clear sense of value pertaining to the content in question. Acknowledging the manner in which host-listener relations seemingly affect the perception of said value, one might explicate a clear correlation to the observed willingness to invest both time and resources into the pursuit of a program. In other words, it would seem that the perceived value of a podcast may directly affect the lengths to which the listener is willing to go in order to pursue it, both in relation to platform alterations and economic investments.

9.2.2 - Those who did not experience an effect

Furthermore, it should be noted that a minor subgroup of the informants reported not being particularly affected by the platformisation of content whatsoever, neither in a positive nor a negative manner. Thus, one might assume such views to indicate a possible continuation of their previously established listening habits, relating to both the selection of platforms, content and genre preferences. However, a number of them did in fact report that various shows had changed platforms over the course of their time as active listeners. However, they did not seem to particularly mind such a transition, providing a stark contrast to the views present within the previous subgroup. Naturally, the causality behind such a perceived lack of effect, would likely be a combination of various elements, likely relating to the informants' perceived value of podcast content. Hence, I would like to further examine two such prominent considerations, namely: the perceived abundance of available podcast content, and the economic costs of platform subscriptions.

Firstly, in viewing the abundance of podcast content across various platforms and its perceived effect on the motivations and choices of the informants, I would commence by referring to the following quote by Marte:

When they ("Harm og Hegseth") disappeared a bit, I sort of found "Friminutt". Then it vanished, and now I have "Jan Thomas and Einar" ("Blir Venner")... (finding a similar concept instead of changing platforms)

Marte (25)

In this excerpt, she expresses a distinct trend observed among a particular subgroup of the informants, namely the willingness to replace existing shows with new programs. Furthermore, the exploration of novel content, preferably of a similar nature to that which it was to replace, was viewed as not only being a viable alternative, but occasionally even a preferred option to continuing existing listening relations in the face of platformisation. As mentioned above, this subset of informants generally did not express distinctly positive nor negative emotions regarding these developments, rather arguing that the large quantity of content available within their platforms of preference, promoted a rather smooth and natural transition between programs. Hence, despite having clearly experienced an effect by the platformisation of content, with subsequent alterations made to their listening habits, they did not, in fact, view it as a major issue at all, as highlighted by the quote below:

You can always find other options that satisfy you in the same way. It's not really important that they are the same specific podcast (which one has listened to previously), because most podcasts are structured pretty much the same: listener questions, regular slots, chatting etc.

Markus (28)

Followingly, I would like to point to an observation which I believe may further contextualise the perceptions of the subgroup in question. This observation would relate to the seeming correlation between the informants who expressed a perceived lack of effect regarding platformisation, and those who expressed a perceived lack of value in relation to their podcast content and platforms of choice. As such, it would appear that, at least in the context of this project, the perceived effect of platformisation, or lack thereof, may indeed be linked to the overall perception of value in regard to the consumption of content in general. As presented previously, various elements such as parasocial interactions and relations, and the perceived ethos and trustworthiness of podcast hosts, seemingly act as key facilitators in the creation and continuation of listener loyalty. As such, they accordingly appear to affect the perceived value of both podcast content and distributional platforms, a dynamic further substantiated by the following quote from Markus:

I feel like some of the programmes that you can replace if you switch platforms, are the ones that you might chuckle at a little bit, kind of break a smile at. But the ones that you actually want to switch platforms for (to follow), are the ones where you genuinely laugh out loud at, and can go back and listen to the same clips several times and still laugh at the same things.

Markus (28)

Based upon the findings of this chapter, it would seem that the effects of platformisation, as perceived by the informants, may be linked to the state of their listener loyalty at the time in which it took place. If said loyalty had not been developed to a sufficient degree, resulting in an inadequate perception of content value, the informants would likely not be bothered to act upon the choices presented to them, in a manner associated with a loyal listener. Instead, it would seem that they would rather opt for a more convenient, unintrusive approach, exemplified in their efforts of replacing their content of preference, hence maintaining their established framework of podcast consumption relating to platform selection, genre preferences and subscription costs.

9.3 - In what manner was the sense of listener loyalty affected?

Having presented the manner in which the effect of platformisation was perceived by the informants, I will continue my analysis by assessing whether said elements pertained an intelligible influence on their sense of listener loyalty. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the way in which said effect was perceived, differed quite substantially on an individual basis. Hence, the resulting actions taken with regard to their listening habits, also displayed a similar variety.

Indeed, based upon the theoretical framework of parasocial interactions and relations, perceived ethos and the trustworthiness of podcast hosts, I have highlighted the influence of host-listener relations in the development of perceived value with regards to podcast content. Subsequently, I have argued how these factors not only play a role in the short-term perception of a program, but also seemingly influence the assessments and decisions regarding the continuation or discontinuation of such relations across longer time frames.

Consequently, when discussing the loyalty of a podcast listener, I find it natural to direct the attention of the analysis towards the long-term effects of the elements mentioned above. The reasoning behind this decision relates to the fact that loyalty, in the basic sense of the term, implies a sense of deliberate, continued action, exemplified in the Cambridge Business Dictionary's definition of *customer loyalty*: "a customer buying products or services from the same company over a long period of time." (Cambridge Business Dictionary, no date) Hence, I find that such a definition of customer, and in extent listener loyalty, lends support to my proposed focus on the long-term nature of the phenomenon, thus providing a discernable contrast to the potential randomised nature of single events or choices.

Hence, I would like to once again highlight the observations regarding the apparent time related strengthening of parasocial relations. As mentioned previously, relations that had been developed over longer periods of time, were seemingly valued and appreciated by the informants considerably more than those spanning shorter time frames. Consequently, I would deem it natural to utilise these observations as a means of contextualising the further analysis regarding the perceived effect of platformisation on long-term listener loyalty, seeing that they seemingly relate quite closely in both motivation, character and outcome.

9.3.1 - Those whose loyalty persisted

As theorised in the section above, the outcomes regarding the perceived effect of platformisation on listener loyalty, seemingly followed rather similar patterns to the informants' perceived value of podcast content. Based upon these observations, I have found it appropriate to divide the following part of my analysis into two subsections, each relating to a subgroup of informants displaying somewhat opposing experiences regarding their sense of listener loyalty. In doing so, I will examine whether said loyalty persisted or broke when encountered with the challenges of platformisation, and in which case, what may have been the reasoning behind it?

Firstly, I would like to start with the informants whose listener loyalty persisted in the face of platformisation, and who thus continued listening to their programs of choice, even if it entailed altering their existing listening habits and platform selection. Viewing the reasoning behind these decisions, one may indeed identify a number of the previous points of interest regarding the perception of content value. Notably, elements such as the presence of

parasocial interactions and relations as well as the perceived ethos and trustworthiness of podcast hosts, seemingly exhibit a distinct correlation with the informants' sense of listener loyalty.

In fact, those who had previously expressed a sense of well developed host-listener relations, preferably spanning across longer periods of time, and a correlating positive perception of content value, also reported an overwhelming willingness to persist in these relations, despite the challenges faced by the process of platformisation. Furthermore, the informants in question also displayed a high sense of awareness regarding the process, and how it affected their personal listening habits and economic considerations. In the excerpt below, Annabelle details parts of her reasoning for maintaining the relation with one of her programs of choice, further exemplifying the observations made within the given subgroup of informants:

I moved over to Podme together with "Harm og Hegseth". Like, back when they changed (platform) I went over there with them ... The thing is, they release their podcasts on Fridays, and I think I've been listening to them since, maybe like high school or something? So, it's sort of linked to that "Friday feeling", for me. Like, there are a lot of Fridays that have come around, when I feel like: "Hell yeah, it's the weekend!", because a new episode has come out. It's something I can look forward to throughout the week... giving me good vibes and energy.

Annabelle (25)

As displayed above, the informants who shared these views were quite adamant in their willingness to undergo the alterations of platformisation, based upon the perceived value of their listening experience and content of choice. Hence, it would seem that the positive perception of content value, likely being based upon the development of strong host-listener relations, would manifest itself in a pronounced sense of listener loyalty. Thus, despite having expressed a distinct perceived effect of platformisation on their personal listening habits, these reflections seemingly only acted to further reinforce their opinions and subsequent actions. Consequently, the perceived value of content became a means of justifying their continued loyalty toward their programs of preference, exemplified by the following quote from Simen:

I guess it's because I've been listening to them (“Papaya”)... for like six or seven years now, so they have kind of become a part of my everyday life. I guess that made it hard to stop. And I don't really think the subscription (to PodMe) is that expensive, so that's how it turned out.

Simen (21)

9.3.2 - Those whose loyalty broke

Subsequently, I would like to present and examine the opinions of the informants whose listener loyalty broke in the face of platformisation. In line with the findings of the previous chapter, I intend to base the following analysis upon the presence or absence of key factors facilitating the development of said loyalty, and how they subsequently affected the decisions made in the face of platformisation. Naturally, one might theorise that the absence of said elements, may evoke a correlative negative influence upon the listener loyalty of podcast consumers. In fact, those who displayed various risk factors pertaining to a low sense of content value and listener loyalty, seemingly corresponded with the subgroup whose loyalty did not persist in the face of platformisation. Concurrent to the observations of previous chapters, I would argue that such correlations lend further support to the relevance of said factors in the creation and continuation of listener loyalty.

Consequently, I have identified a set of potentially indicators for discerning whether or not the listener loyalty of an informant would persist or break under the pressure of platformisation, namely: a low sense of value regarding their podcast programs and hosts of choice, lack of motivation to enhance and build upon pre-existing host-listener relations, and perceiving the process of platformisation as not exhibiting any major effect on their general listening habits. Exemplifying said views and the resulting discontinuation of listener loyalty observed within this particular subgroup, I would like to present the following quote from Mina:

I used to listen to "Friminutt".. a lot! And I find it a bit...well, annoying that they're not on NRK (Radio) anymore. I believe it's being released on PodMe now. (And you didn't want to change platforms alongside them?) No, not really, I didn't want to pay for just one programme... NRK has many similar types of shows, at least in my opinion. So yeah, it's not really a big deal to miss one of them.

Mina (25)

Viewing the quote in light of the framework of parasocial interactions, relations and perceived ethos and trust, I would argue that the observed correlation between the lack of perceived content value, and the fragility of listener loyalty, would likely stem from an inadequate development of host-listener relations in both the short and the long term. Consequently, the informants who expressed an inadequate development of host-listener relations, and associated low perceptions of content value, also displayed an elevated risk of discontinuing their listening relations in the face of platformisation.

In examining the informants who expressed such a fragile sense of listener loyalty, one might hypothesise whether or not they would be more aware, reflective and indeed sensitive towards the potential economic challenges of platformisation. However, the findings from the data would not seem to support such a notion. On the contrary, it would appear that both those who expressed a strong, as well as weak sense of listener loyalty, all displayed a rather similar awareness regarding the monetary costs of podcast consumption and platform selection. Such an observation would seemingly support my previous arguments regarding the correlation between age and socioeconomic status, and the informants' economic considerations. In it, I argued that these circumstances likely facilitated rather cautious spending habits in general, including those regarding podcast consumption, hence entailing that the reflections and considerations on the subject might be somewhat unrelated to the development of perceived host-listener relations. As such, it would appear that the continuation or discontinuation of listening relations were not solely contingent upon economic considerations.

These findings may be further substantiated by the fact that various informants within the subgroup in question, seemingly discontinued their relations with programs who altered their means of distribution between platforms that were free of charge. With the economic strain of these alternatives being equal, one might naturally theorise that any related discontinuation of

listener loyalty would likely be based upon the presence and evaluation of a different set of elements, thus lending further support to the role of host-listener relations in the matter. This notion may be exemplified through the following quote from Erik, wherein he details his termination of a relation with a program that changed its means of distribution from the free RSS based Podcast Addict, to the free NRK Radio app:

I used to listen to "Politisk Kvarter", every single day. Well, more or less. But I stopped listening to it... when it switched to the NRK (Radio) app. (from the RSS based Podcast Addict)

Erik (22)

However, I would nonetheless emphasise one rather prominent difference between the two subgroups, namely the manner in which the challenges of platformisation were assessed in regards to the perceived value of content. In other words, whether or not they were willing to accept additional economic costs in order to maintain access to their content of choice. Once again, the perceived value granted by the informants to their content of choice, being largely based upon the state of their host-listener relations, exhibited a distinct correlation with their willingness to undergo economic strain in order to pursue it. Hence, if these relations were not adequately developed, the informants' perceptions of content value would presumably not be sufficient in order to justify an increase in economic costs, thus potentially provoking a termination of the listening relation in question.

Lastly, I would once again like to highlight the interrelated nature of the factors outlined above, and how they seemingly affect one another in shaping the basis of long-term listener loyalty. Indeed, the manner in which the state of host-listener relations and subsequent perceptions of content value exert an influence on both program and platform selection, has manifested itself as a common thread throughout my thesis. As such, it is no wonder that we observe such distinct correlations and interconnections between the experiences of the various subgroups of informants, both in relation to the perceived effect of each element independently, and their collective influence on listener loyalty. Consequently, I would argue that the combined presence of these elements may serve as potent indicators in identifying the strength or fragility of listener loyalty, and how it may be affected by the process platformisation, thus culminating in the continuation or discontinuation of existing listening relations.

9.4 - On the importance of a continuum in host-listener relations

Throughout my thesis, I have argued quite extensively for the significance of host-listener relations in the nurturing of listener loyalty. Based upon the views expressed by the informants, I believe the cultivation of such relations may play an important part in influencing the choices made by podcast consumers, regarding their preferences and subsequent selection of both programs and platforms. Making use of theoretical perspectives regarding parasocial interactions and relations, as well as perceived ethos and trust, I have attempted to analyse the informants' experiences regarding the perceived effect of platformisation on their listener loyalty. In doing so, the importance of long term parasocial relations, and their role in strengthening the perceived bonds between listeners and podcast hosts became evident. In fact, a number of informants explicitly pointed towards the long-term development of such relations as being a key factor in their evaluation and subsequent selection of content, which in extension displayed an effect on their general sense of listener loyalty in the face of platformisation.

In fact, this time related effect of parasocial relations would be highlighted on a number of occasions, as exemplified by a rather particular subgroup of informants. These individuals had reported suspending their listening relations to various programs in the past, due to various alterations made to their means of distribution. It is important to note that the programs in question were considered some of their absolute favourites at the time of discontinuation, hence indicating the presence of well-developed host-listener relations. However, in the timeframe between the break off and the focus group interviews, these informants reported having appropriated subscriptions for a new set of platforms. In fact, they had commenced to utilise the very same platforms on which their previously favourite programs had moved their content.

Despite this, the informants in question did not express any distinct wish to recommence these previously terminated listening relations. In fact, some of them reported a sense of confusion as to why they did not view these programs in the same light as before, being highly aware of their close relations in years past, as exemplified in the following quote by Simen:

So, I used to listen to "Friminutt", and then I stopped right before they switched to PodMe. But I have PodMe now, and I still don't listen to it, so it's a bit weird. I think I just kind of fell off a bit, even though I now have access to it.

Simen (21)

I find the opinions presented by these informants to be quite intriguing, as they further highlight the role of host-listener relations in the sustainment of long-term listener loyalty. Viewing them in extension of the framework of parasocial interactions and relations, I would argue that they lend further support to the proposed relevance of the time related aspects of parasocial relations. Consequently, the development of such relations over longer periods of time, appears to provide a stronger sense of listener loyalty compared to those developed within shorter time frames. Furthermore, I would argue that these observations serve as an indicator, not only of the benefit of long-term parasocial relations, but more specifically the extended, uninterrupted nature of these relations in the form of a continuum, as proposed by the likes of Giles. (Giles, 2002, p. 293) Hence, the discontinuation of parasocial relations appears to exhibit clearly deleterious effects upon their possible reemergence at a later stage.

In fact, the already deteriorated parasocial relations did not seem to improve in any notable manner with the newfound potential of accessing the content in question. One might assume that a recommencing of previous relations would take place somewhat spontaneously, given the perceived value placed upon them in the past. However, as displayed by the data above, I have not been able to draw any such conclusion. If anything, the opposite seems to be more accurate, with the reemergence and continuation of past parasocial relations being particularly challenging following prolonged periods of dormancy. As such, it would seem the unaltered, stable continuation of host-listener relations to be of notable importance in shaping the perceived effect of platformisation on the listener loyalty of podcast listeners, exemplified by this final quote from Annabelle:

I used to listen to them ("Papaya"), before they switched to Podme (which she now has access to) ...I don't do that anymore, and I haven't really thought about it until you mentioned it. And that is a podcast I've listened to a lot! But when I tried listening to "Papaya" (on PodMe), I didn't think it was as... as fun. It wasn't as entertaining anymore, or as funny or catchy, I'm not sure why though.

Annabelle (25)

Chapter 10 - Summary and conclusive reflections

Reviewing the central findings of my thesis, I have attempted to identify various key components influencing the creation, continuation and possible discontinuation of listener loyalty, as expressed by the informants of my project. In doing so, the relevance of long-term parasocial relations, being contingent upon numerous parasocial interactions, as well as the perceived ethos and trustworthiness of a host, have appeared to be of prominent importance. In other words, the formation of relations between hosts and listeners seem to play a significant role in the development of the listener loyalty of podcast consumers. As such, these findings lend support to the role of parasocial interactions and relations in the formation of listener loyalty, as proposed by researchers such as Schlütz and Hedder, thus suggesting the influence they may exert in the face of platformisation.

Furthermore, the role of platforms, and in extension, the process of platformisation has also been a central theme throughout the thesis. Having identified the defining elements of the modern digital platform landscape, I subsequently wished to comprehend the elements present in the deliberation and selection of platforms by the informants, otherwise referred to as the perceived value of platforms. Although displayed somewhat differently across the various focus groups, some noteworthy examples of such elements would be: the quality and quantity of available programs, being linked to the general adoption, accumulation of content and market shares of platforms, user friendliness, being linked to the technological framework within each platform, and the general economic considerations of each informant.

Lastly, combining the aforementioned themes of listener loyalty and platform selection, I attempted to discern the perceived effect of platformisation on the listener loyalty of the informants. In doing so, it became evident that the majority of the informants had experienced an effect of platformisation on their podcast consumption, contrasted by a minor subgroup who had not. Identifying the main differences between the informants whose loyalty had broken in the face of platformisation, and those who had not, the role of perceived content value, corresponding with the previously identified components of listener loyalty, once again became evident. In fact, although the majority of the informants reported having experienced an effect of platformisation, the manner in which they perceived and subsequently reacted towards it differed quite substantially. Further supporting said notion, these differences seemed largely contingent upon the condition of their host-listener relations

and perceived value of content, more so than any previously mentioned assessment in relation to platform value.

Consequently, I would argue that my findings lend support to the proposed correlation between the state of one's parasocial relations, preferably continually developed over extended periods of time, and the subsequent likelihood of maintaining them in the face of platformisation, thus constituting the strength of one's listener loyalty. As such, it would seem that the perceived effect of platformisation on the loyalty of podcast listeners' may vary greatly, being largely influenced by their perception of content value, which subsequently would be grounded in the perceived host-listener relations present within it.

10.1 - Possible limitations and suggestions towards future research

Regarding the possible limitations of my project, I would firstly like to highlight the somewhat limited timeframe and allocated resources available to it. In order to develop and implement the research suitable to propose an answer to my thesis question, I maintained a rather rigorous pace throughout the process. Hence, in combination with the previously presented methodological limitations, the geographical constraints of the recruitment process and physical implementation of the focus group interviews, may have negatively affected the representativity of my findings, in relation to the average Norwegian podcast consumer. Hence, despite the notable variations of sex, academic and professional background present within my selected group of informants, I decided to contextualise their expressed perceptions with the quantitative data from *Den Store Podrapporten 2023*, as a means of somewhat mitigating any potential lack of representability.

Lastly, the rather distinct theoretical perspectives provided through my selected thesis question, and thus permeating the project as a whole, may possibly have facilitated a lack of analytical focus towards other factors of potential relevance on the matter. Although the selected perspectives have previously been identified as key elements in the motivations and decisions made by podcast consumers (Spangardt, Ruth and Schramm, 2016, pp. 90-91), this does by no means exclude the potential relevance of other, differing points of view on the matter. Consequently, although the chosen perspectives arguably provided an intriguing insight into the dynamics I wished to examine, it would be interesting to explore the possible

role of other elements regarding effect of platformisation on the listener loyalty of podcast consumers, thus providing ample opportunity for further research on the field.

Hence, in presenting suggestions towards further research, I have chosen to focus on the central themes of my own project, as I find them well suited for any future attempts of advancing the field of podcast consumption. As such, I would find any projects further exploring the relations between media personalities and consumers to be of great interest. Despite exerting a well-known influence on the formation of perceived value of media consumption, as exemplified by the various sources of my thesis, I would still value further research on the subject. In fact, based upon the prominent role they have displayed in regards to the loyalty of podcast listeners, it would be interesting to assess their role in the formation of relations and consumer sentiment across other forms of modern, digital media.

Finally, I would like to propose further research on the formation of trust within the framework of media-based relations. As mentioned previously, I was able to identify an apparent lack of critical distance between the informants and perceived ethos of their hosts of choice, resulting in heightened levels of trust within said relations. Despite many of the hosts in question being well-known media personalities taking part in professional, high budget productions, the informants nonetheless displayed a clear appreciation towards their perceived honesty. In fact, they continuously highlighted the importance of this perceived sincerity when separating their programs of choice from other similar concepts. As such, acknowledging the apparent effect it exhibited in the evaluations of perceived value and listener loyalty, combined with the apparent lack of critical reflection displayed by the informants, I would argue for the need of further researching the dynamics present in the perception of ethos and trust within the frame of aural media consumption.

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Focus group	Name	Age	Professional status	Profession or study	Current favourite podcasts	Reported listening frequency	Use of podcasting platforms
1	Tina	22	Working	Nurse	"Friminutt", and "Fetish+1"	2-3 times per week	Spotify
1	Marte	25	Working	Teacher	"Harm og Hegseth", "Psykt Interessant", "Friminutt", and "Jan Thomas og Einar blir venner"	2-3 times per week	Spotify and Apple Podcasts
1	Markus	28	Working	Teacher	"Berrum og Beyer Snakker om Greier"	Daily	Apple Podcasts and NRK Radio
1	Simen	21	Student	TV Production	"Papaya", "Berrum og Beyer Snakker om Greier", "Ukentlig med BMI", "Tore og Haralds Podcast", and "Hele Historien"	Multiple times a day	Apple Podcasts, Podme and NRK Radio
2	Mina	25	Student	Archeology	"Radio Mørch", and "Kladden har Daua"	1-3 times per week	NRK Radio, Apple Podcasts
2	Erik	22	Student	Philosophy	"Very Bad Wizards" and "Dialogisk"	Daily	The RSS based app Podcast Addicts
2	Per	24	Student	Media and Communication	"The Joe Rogan Experience", "Tris Past Weekend with Theo Von", and "G-Punktet"	Daily	Spotify, NRK Radio and Youtube
2	Martin	25	Working	Computer Security	"Ukraine the Latest", and "Norsken, Svensken og Dansken"	Daily	Spotify, NRK Radio and Youtube
3	Celine	30	Working	Movie Producer and Coordinator	"Berrum og Beyer Snakker om Greier", "Ologies", and "Radiolab"	Daily	Spotify and NRK Radio
3	Annabelle	25	Student	Media and Communications	"Harm og Hegseth", "Bitch Sesh", "Forklart" and "Oppdater"	Multiple times a day	Spotify, Podme and NRK Radio
3	Gard	23	Student	European Studies	"Krølla Laken", "Fladseth", "Radio Mørch", "Feedback", "Majones Mafaa" and "Time Out"	Daily	Spotify and NRK Radio
3	Tom	30	Working	Freelancing light and sound technician	"Papaya", "Ukentlig med BMI", and "TV2 B-Laget"	Multiple times a day	Spotify, Podme, NRK Radio and the RSS based app Podcast Addicts

Intervjuguide til informantintervju om podcaster og plattformisering

Innledende småprat

- En kort runde med introduksjoner, navn (vil endres etter transkribering), alder, studie/ jobb
- Hvilke interesser/ hobbyer driver dere med på fritiden?
- Hvilke medier bruker dere jevnlig? (på en daglig basis)?

Podkaster

- Hvor ofte hører dere på podkaster?
- Hvilke typer podkaster lytter dere til?
- Hvordan oppdager dere nye podkaster?
- Er det noen spesifikke programmer dere lytter jevnlig til, evt. hvilke?
- Har programmene dere lytter til endret seg over tid?
- Hva gjør at dere liker disse programmene (tematikk, programvert, lydbilde, varighet e.l.)?

Plattformisering

***forklare hva som menes med en plattform**

- Hvilke plattform/ plattformer bruker dere for å høre på podcaster?
- Hva gjør at dere bruker disse plattformene (oppfølging: økonomisk kostnad, brukervennlighet, utvalg av innhold mtp. kvalitet, kvantitet og variasjon)?
- Har noen program du lytter/ har fulgt endret sendeflate i din tid som aktiv lytter? (Følg opp på ett eller flere om passende)

- Har det påvirket deres forhold til det nevnte programmet, evt. hvordan?
- Kan dere trekke fram noen faktorer som kan bidra til at dere som lyttere skal følge et program til en ny plattform (økonomi, oppfattet tilhørighet, tematikk, innhold)?
- Hva forhindrer dere evt. fra å ta i bruk en ny plattform?
- Hvorfor betaler dere for annet innhold (Netflix, Spotify osv.), men ikke for podkaster?

Avslutning

- Er det noe dere ønsker å legge til før vi runder av?
- Forklare informantene hva som vil skje videre i prosjektet, og hva som vil skje med personopplysninger
- Takke for deltakelsen

Innledende spørreskjema - Podkaster og Plattformisering

Navn (vil anonymiseres i oppgaven):

Alder:

Studie/ jobb:

Husker du når du startet å høre på podkaster, og var det en spesiell podkast du først ble interressert i)?:

Hvor ofte hører du på podkaster per. dags. dato?:

Har du en eller flere favorittpodkaster, i så fall hvilke?:

Hvilke strømmetjeneste/ app/ plattform bruker du for å høre på podkaster? Sett et kryss ved de aktuelle, eller fyll inn andre i fritekst om relevant

Spotify

Apple (Apple Podcast og/ eller iTunes)

Podme

Podimo

NRK Radio

Andre:

- Betaler du for andre strømmetjenester (kan være hvilke som helst type media) som ikke allerede er nevnt, evt. hvilke?:

Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet

”Podcaster og Plattformisering”?

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å *studere forholdet plattformisering og podkastlytting*. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

Formål

Formålet med studien er å undersøke hvordan plattformiseringen av podcastinnhold har påvirket lyttervanene til unge norske voksne. Ved hjelp av en rekke kvalitative gruppeintervjuer, vil datamateriale innsamles og analyseres for å undersøke hvilke faktorer unge norske voksne verdsetter og misliker mtp. podcast, og hvordan plattformisering av innhold potensielt påvirke lytters lojalitet mot deres foretrukne program.

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?

Universitetet i Bergen er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?

Prosjektet er ment for å studere unge voksne mellom 20 og 30 års lyttervaner til podcaster, og hvilken potensiell effekt nye plattformsystemer har på dette. Utvalget er ment å være representativt for målgruppen, med informanter fra ulike bakgrunner både mtp. studie, jobb og fritidsinteresser. Du er blitt vurdert til å være et medlem av denne gruppen, og blir derfor forespurt om å delta i prosjektet.

Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

- «Hvis du velger å delta i prosjektet, innebærer det at du deltar i et gruppeintervju, sammen med 3 andre jevnaldrende podkastlyttere. Det vil ta deg ca. 60 minutter. Intervjuet vil bestå av spørsmål knyttet til ditt forhold til podkastmediet, dine lyttervaner og hvordan de eventuelt har blitt påvirket av plattformisering. Dine svar fra intervjuet vil bli tatt opp som audio, og vil deretter transkriberes til tekst»
- Før intervjustart vil alle informanter bli forespurt om å fylle ut et spørreskjema, fokusert på grunnleggende personlig informasjon og bakgrunn som podkastlytter.

Det er frivillig å delta

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle dine personopplysninger vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

- *Det er kun studenten og veilederen for prosjektet som vil ha tilgang til dine opplysninger.*
- *Navn vil endres ved transkribering, analyse og utgivelse av datamateriale. Om ønskelig kan annen informasjon også endres, som eksempelvis alder, ved forespørsel.*

Hva skjer med personopplysningene dine når forskningsprosjektet avsluttes?

Prosjektet vil etter planen avsluttes *når oppgaven blir godkjent* [01.07.2024]. Etter prosjektslutt vil datamaterialet med dine personopplysninger forbli anonymiserte, og tilhørende lydopptak vil slettes.

Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra *Universitetet i Bergen* har Sikt – Kunnskapssektorens tjenesteleverandør vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Dine rettigheter

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke opplysninger vi behandler om deg, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene
- å få rettet opplysninger om deg som er feil eller misvisende
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å vite mer om eller benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- *Universitetet i Bergen* ved student Andreas Solberg Jensen (tlf. 91847880, eller e-mail: andreassolbergjensen@gmail.com), eller prosjektveileder Brita Ytre-Arne (tlf: 90932844, eller e-mail: Brita.Ytre-Arne@uib.no).
- Vårt personvernombud: *Janecke Helen Veim* (tlf: 93030721, eller e-mail: Janecke.Veim@uib.no)

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til vurderingen som er gjort av personverntjenestene fra Sikt, kan du ta kontakt via:

- Epost: personverntjenester@sikt.no eller telefon: 73 98 40 40.

Med vennlig hilsen

Prosjektansvarlig
(Forsker/veileder)

Eventuelt student

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet [*sett inn tittel*], og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- å delta i *gruppeintervju*
- å delta i *spørreskjema*
- at opplysninger om meg publiseres, hvor navn vi anonymiseres men alder og annen bakgrunn forblir som oppgitt.*
- Lydopptak og annet eksplisitt identifiserende materiale vil slettes ved prosjektslutt*

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)