“You’re the Gatekeeper”: Exploring Open-Access Podcast Creation in the Sport and Exercise Sciences

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the motivations of individuals producing open-access podcasts related to sport and exercise science. Following interviews with 14 podcasters, we found that the podcasters demonstrated various gatekeeping practices, such as selecting and excluding interview guests based on academic credentials, to ensure credibility. Despite being independent from traditional media outlets, the podcasters imposed self-regulatory editorial decisions when sharing knowledge, challenging the notion of complete independence in new media. The findings highlight the tension between democratization and gatekeeping in contemporary knowledge dissemination, suggesting that constraints shape content creation practices in specialized fields such as open-access podcasts with educational focuses.

Introduction

Podcasts are now a mainstream, billion-dollar, media (Rime et al., 2022) with internationally recognized actors, musicians, comedians, and athletes all hosting their own podcasts. The majority of these podcasts are *open-access* (Fronek et al., 2016; Shaw et al., 2021) in that they are freely available to the public via platforms such as Apple Podcasts. Many of the most popular podcasts in the world are entertainment-related content such as celebrity guest interviews. However, open-access podcasts are not restricted to entertainment, and it is possible to find podcasts dedicated to a range of subjects, fields, and disciplines that have a more educational focus.

The academic literature indicates a market for such podcast content. The medical profession, in particular, has embraced podcast listening as a means of information seeking, with emergent literature examining the "Free Open-Access Medical Education" (FOAMed) movement (Cadogan et al., 2014; Chartier & Helman, 2016; Nickson & Cadogan, 2014). Sport and exercise practitioners (e.g. sport scientists, nutritionists, and personal trainers) also listen to open-access podcasts as a means of developing esoteric knowledge (Shaw et al., 2021). We found that they consume podcasts instrumentally (Rubin, 1984), i.e. they listen intentionally and selectively. This is in contrast to what Rubin (1984) termed "ritualized," i.e. passive background listening more typically associated with radio listening (Berry, 2016). The unique characteristics of podcast consumption in professional contexts necessitate moving beyond outdated associations with radio broadcasting when scrutinizing podcasting (Berry, 2016; Chan-Olmsted & Wang, 2022). Yet, despite this call for scrutiny

and further research, and despite the abundance of discipline-specific podcasts currently available to the public, the topic remains largely under-explored.

Much of the existing literature on educational podcasting, including some of our own work (McNamara & Shaw, 2020; McNamara et al., 2021), has primarily focused on teacher-created, institutionalized podcasts that are typically only available to registered students. To our best knowledge, Drew (2017) made the first attempt to examine non-institutional (i.e. open-access) podcasts, arguing they were *edutaining*; educational *and* entertaining, incorporating humor and informal discussion. We have previously put forward an argument for how the majority sport- and exercise-related podcasts fall under such classification (see Shaw et al., 2021).

In addition to being *edutainment*, we argue that sport- and exercise-related podcasts are also *independent* (Adler Berg, 2021; Millette, 2011; Tennant, 2023). Independent podcasters are nonprofessional, non-institutionalized producers unaffiliated with traditional media outlets, operating without gatekeepers (Adler Berg, 2021; Jorgensen, 2021; Millette, 2011). Independent podcasters are driven by creative desires (Markman & Sawyer, 2014), with Jorgensen (2021) defining independent podcasters as uninterested in generating income. However, many of these podcasters are "amateurs working to a professional standard" (Leadbeater & Miller, 2004; Markman, 2012) which means investing in audio equipment and editing software and, as Adler Berg's (2021) informants noted, "It costs money to make a podcast." The "pragmatic realities" (Spinelli & Dann, 2019) of sustaining open-access podcasts therefore creates tensions in what it can mean to be an independent podcaster, as monetization can become a necessity (Adler Berg, 2022). Therefore, despite their best intentions, when a podcaster seeks to monetize (even on the basis of simply keeping their podcast running), there *will* be gatekeeping (Sullivan, 2018). This is perhaps why Tennant (2023) suggested that complete independence is an "unobtainable ideal," offering a revision of previous definitions of independent podcasting. Although there were no editorial filtering from third parties, the podcasters interviewed by Tennant (2023) imposed editorial responsibilities on themselves, based on a combination of personal ethical values and media legislation. The podcasters were mindful of their role as an employee, despite acknowledging no gatekeeping from their employer. Even in the absence of explicit gatekeepers, the concept of *independence* is contentious.

While Tennant (2023) has advanced the academic discussion around podcasting practices, the existing literature on podcasting is still relatively sparse, with much of the literature available on podcasting, including our own work, focused on consumption, not creation. The growing prevalence of podcast consumption in professional and educational contexts means podcasters are increasingly more significant agents in knowledge dissemination; they can "control or influence" (Merton, 1973) what we do and do not know about a discipline such as sport and exercise science. This raises concerns about potential gatekeeping practices that may amplify select voices – a criticism previously noted by physical education podcast listeners (McNamara et al., 2024). Educational podcasters may feel obligated to produce credible esoteric information given existing concerns around the accuracy of information presented in open-access podcasts (Hendry et al., 2022; McNamara et al., 2024; Shaw et al., 2021). In doing so, they may inadvertently reinforce traditional academic hierarchies, functioning as contemporary "gatekeepers of science" (de Grazia, 1963) preferentially selecting guests with more established reputations. This is the "Matthew Effect" (Merton, 1968a), whereby more eminent academics receive

disproportionate recognition, leading to cumulative advantages in visibility and influence. Essentially, the more frequently someone appears on podcasts, the more likely they are to be a guest on other podcasts. The medium's ability to perpetuate established power structures in knowledge dissemination warrants deeper examination, particularly when considering how guest selection might be influenced by factors such as institutional prestige (or in our context which professional sports club they work for) or prior recognition – replicating the problematic nature of peer-reviewed publishing (Crane, 1967). Despite the intention to democratize knowledge, greater scrutiny of podcasting practices is warranted. Given the influence open-access podcasts can have on the field of sport and exercise science, it is essential that the practices of such podcasters are scrutinized. The aim of this investigation is to examine the practices of individuals producing open-access podcasts related to the field of sport and exercise science.

Methods

A qualitative descriptive approach was used as it allows for insight into the open-access and commercial podcasting phenomenon that is occurring across fields that still remained largely unexplored (Sandelowski, 2000, 2010), despite some recent work focused specifically on sport science podcast listening (e.g. Shaw et al., 2021). Our research is grounded in ontological relativism and epistemological social constructionism (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). We align with the perspective that an external world exists beyond the individual, comprised subjects and objects, and that meaning is constructed through interactions with these entities. Therefore, what our participants perceive as "real" emerges from their interactions with fellow podcast creators, listeners, collaborators, and others in their networks. We do not aim to "discover the truth" because there is no single truth; rather, there are multiple individual truths, each shaped by the participants' lived experiences (Papathomas, 2016). As such, we collected qualitative data to build a rich, nuanced understanding of the ideologies, values, practices, and representations related to open-access podcasting. Since we interpreted the production of knowledge as contextual, we were mindful of how our experiences with podcasting influenced the entire research project – from the framing of the research question and the development of the interview guide to the data analysis. For example, the lead author asked participants about specific elements of their podcast such as the title of their podcast, and the use of certain terminology in their introduction.

The relevance of the podcasts, and therefore the potential participant, was initially determined by the lead author engaging in podcast ethnography (see Lundström & Lundström, 2020), having being a habitual podcast listener for several years, with some existing relationship to many of the podcast creators. Following this, a shortlist was put forward by the lead author to all coauthors, to determine if the podcasts were related to the sport and exercise sciences. This was then supplemented by the rest of the author team, and a total of 45 open-access sport- and exercise science-related podcasts were shortlisted. Despite some contention, the sport and exercise sciences have some common features globally (Armour & Chambers, 2014) with traditional emphasis on biomechanics, physiology, and psychology (as an example see British Association of Sport and Exercise Science - https://www.bases.org.uk/sspage-about_us-about_bases-our_vision_and_objectives.html). We therefore agreed that if the podcasts, from the list of 45, were rooted in one or several of

these branches (e.g. injury and rehabilitation focused podcasts), it was deemed relevant to contact the podcast creator.

A combination of recruitment strategies was employed. First, many of the participants were purposively sampled from our professional networks. Two of us host our own podcast, and all of us have been guests on other podcasts. Furthermore, we have all worked in the field of sport science as well as in sports-related academia, at institutions in the US and across Europe. We have significant reach with the sport and exercise science community. Snowball sampling was then used whereby participants recommended, or directly contacted, other podcast creators. Only one participant was unknown to the author team. All participants were initially contacted via email and invited to participate before receiving a participant information sheet and informed consent form. Once participants provided consent, an interview time was arranged. The interviews were semi-structured in nature, with the questions structured around the participants' motivations for developing podcasts specific to sport and exercise science. Inclusion criteria consisted of being over the age of 18 and producing an open-access podcast, in English, primarily focused on the intersecting fields of sport and exercise sciences. Fourteen (male = 9, female = 5) participants agreed to be interviewed. We feel that by giving comprehensive demographic information, we may compromise participants' anonymity. For occupation, we have generalized the participants to whether or not they work in academia. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants.

Guiding interview questions were adapted from a recent study focused on physical education podcasters (McNamara et al., 2024) and based on the current research question. Example questions included "Why did you begin podcasting?," "How does developing podcasts benefit you professionally?," and "How do you interact with this community and how does this community impact your podcasts?." Interviews were between 60 and 115 minutes in duration and recorded via video conference recording software (Zoom). All interviews were transcribed verbatim. All procedures were approved by Sheffield Hallam University.

Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2021) six phases of reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) were used to analyze the data and develop comprehensive themes. Initially, the data were coded in an

Table 1. Participant information

Pseudonym	Level of education	Occupation	Podcasting since
Alex	Postgrad diploma	Non-academic	2013
Bryan	Doctoral	Non-academic	2022
Charles	Doctoral	Academic	2021
David	Master	Academic	2019
Ethan	High School	Non-academic	2019
Frank	Doctoral	Non-academic	2018
Grace	Doctoral	Academic	2020
Henry	Master	Academic	2019
Ian	Doctoral	Academic	2021
Julia	Doctoral	Non-academic	2020
Emily	Master	Non-academic	2020
Liam	Master	Non-academic	2017
Sophie	Doctoral	Academic	2020
Lillian	Doctoral	Non-academic	2019

inductive manner, to identify all relevant codes. It is essential to be transparent about one's theoretical orientation, as RTA is grounded in the researcher's reflexivity (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The researcher's subjectivity is the essence of robust RTA and should be considered a strength, not a weakness (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Creswell, 2013; Finlay, 2002). Peer debriefing was carried out throughout the data analysis and representation process by the secondary members of the author team. The peer debriefing process entails sharing and consulting with professionals with enough expertise in the area to provide feedback on the themes to refine and, often, redirect the interpretation process (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Results and Discussion

Three broad and intersecting themes emerged from the analysis. First, "(In)dependence" allows us to describe our podcasters and challenge traditional notions of what it means to be an independent podcaster. "Just a master's student" reflected the podcasters' gatekeeping practices when it came to platforming guests that met their selective eligibility criteria. This was, in part, justified by the participants in our final theme, "It's for me, but I share it" whereby participants were primarily motivated by sharing knowledge with a lay audience.

(In)dependence

Our participants aligned with Adler Berg's (2021) and Millette's (2011) definitions of independent podcasters in that there was no third-party involvement or formal connection to a traditional media outlet that could exert editorial power as gatekeepers (we discuss theories of gatekeeping in more detail later). Yet, despite such freedom, the podcasters still imposed editorial decisions on themselves. Ian acknowledged his podcast being independent independent, yet still with self-imposed editorial decisions:

> Yeah, it's an independent podcast . . . I'm still very aware of what I was saying. . . I don't want to say anything untoward here and bring the employer into disrepute. We're employed by someone, and so if you bring the employer into disrepute by saying something a bit silly, then we get sacked.

Emily was also conscious of how her local community perceived her podcast:

> I'm from a small town. There's definitely taboo topics here, where you just don't talk about things. And I'm very aware that I would have local listeners. And sometimes I'm aware of, gosh, what will people think when I'm covering a topic on something controversial.

The podcasters imposed considerable editorial filters on themselves, carefully considering how their content might affect their professional standing. This echoes recent interview data from Tennant (2023), demonstrating how independent podcasters in New Zealand imposed editorial responsibilities on themselves, mindful of their role as an employee, despite acknowledging no gatekeeping from their employer.

All but one of our participants were "non-professional" Jorgensen (2021), podcasting as a hobby alongside their primary occupations. Despite this, there was divergence from Jorgensen's suggestion that independent podcasters are uninterested in generating income. Many of our participants monetized their podcasts in various ways: episode sponsorship,

paid subscription memberships, and commission via discount codes, and others used their podcasts to help generate business leads. Our data suggests participants were mindful of sponsors. Alex, who monetized their podcast through sponsorship, was conscious of how interviewing certain individuals would be negatively perceived by their sponsors:

> If you're gonna say something daft on social media with me, and a couple of sponsors go, what are you doing with this guy? Things can happen quickly can't they. Very quickly.

None of our participants said that their sponsors were involved in editorial decisions, yet we find ourselves agreeing with Sullivan (2018) that there will always be gatekeeping. Independence is an "unobtainable ideal" (Tennant, 2023), and the self-regulation outlined by our participants challenges the concept of complete editorial freedom that was previously celebrated in podcasting literature (e.g. Berry, 2016). Independence in podcasting is, rather, careful negotiation of various professional and social constraints.

"Just a Master's Student"

Our next theme shows how the podcasters were gatekeepers themselves, functioning as contemporary "gatekeepers of science" (de Grazia, 1963), given that their podcasts were primarily educational podcasts (Drew, 2017). Many of the podcasters were, therefore, only prepared to speak to *certain* people and were "very selective" (Liam) about their guests, routinely researching their background, reading their academic publications, and listening to other podcasts within which they may have been featured. Many of the participants would refer to PhDs when talking about guest selection:

> So, you either need to be a practitioner with a lot of experience or you should have a scientific background with a PhD or be a professor. (David)

> We debunk the myths, and everything we're saying is backed up by science. And the reason why people can be confident that it's backed up by science is because somebody with a PhD is going out there and bringing that science in, it's not just another gym goer, who's done some bench pressing before. Right?(Charles)

References to academic credentials were perceived as a sign of credibility for the podcast:

> We are looking for the subject matter experts. For the likes of Dr [name], she's one of the leading researchers). . .there is a level of us wanting to make sure that our listeners understand the credibility of the guests and perhaps the information that they're providing.(Emily)

When asked why they mention their academic credentials in the name of the podcast and in the introduction of episodes Grace justified this:

> . . . I need to legitimize my knowledge . . . there's a lot of people who claim they know what they're talking about, and they have no idea. So that is why . . . I'm trying to put some legitimacy in there

Our participants created "educational podcasts" (Drew, 2017) with the primary motivation to empower listeners with new information for the purpose of, in some cases, behavior change.

> Our podcast is about translating the actual science into practice and making sure that everybody has that firm understanding that this is true information. The purpose of us doing it is to make sure that that is really secure information. (Sophie)

Therefore, a necessity to produce "credible" and "legitimate" information for their listenership is a reasonable position to assume, and many of the participants felt obligated to podcast as a means of providing "more accurate" information, much like the physical education podcasters interviewed by McNamara et al. (2024). Podcasting has previously been scrutinized for the lack of quality assurance mechanisms (Hendry et al., 2022; Zanussi et al., 2012), and data from our previous study (Shaw et al., 2021) shows that some listeners have concerns about the credibility of some guests invited to speak on sport- and exercise-related podcasts. Perhaps, this is why participants therefore felt that they needed to engage with, as Alex said, "the best." Henry also alluded to this:

> I'd like to think that I get those people on the podcast the people who are, the highest foremost expert in their area of study . . . I interview people who study rigorously and have read as much research that exists. . . So basically, it's people who are at what I would call, the cutting edge of what they study.(Henry)

So, when they were sent requests by people to be on their podcast, they were generally skeptical toward this:

> I had one guy who contacted me who said 'can I be on your podcast? Would you be interested in interviewing me?.' I had no idea who he was. I almost didn't do it. (Grace)

Several of the participants were instantly dismissive of individuals based on credentials:

> There has been some guy who we said no to. He was just a master's student (David)

We can analyze this preferential selection through Mertonian sociology of science (see *The Sociology of Science: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations*, edited by Norman Storer, Merton, 1973). Merton suggested that scientific achievement should be judged independently of an individual's social characteristics (Merton, 1968a) but suspected such characteristics did influence assessment of scientific achievement. Historically, it has been evidenced that acceptance of a scholar's work into peer-reviewed journals is influenced by characteristics such as the prestige of an academic's employer (see Crane, 1967). We found that this same principle applied when deciding who to platform on the podcast, with a preference for speaking to people with a PhD. A guest's place of employment, i.e. their level of prestige, was also important. Alex was immediately dismissive of a request based on the individual's current employer.

> You're not in the Premier League. I'm not quite sure you are up there with the kind of people that we want. (Alex)

Ethan felt he received requests from individuals who were not deserving enough to be interviewed by him.

> You have to earn the right to invite yourself on somebody else's podcast. And there's a few people that have reached out to me that had not earned that. (Ethan)

Interestingly, both Alex and Ethan (who have had the same guests on their respective podcasts) were open to potential requests if it was a *big name*:

> But, you know, Sheffield Hallam University writes to me tomorrow and says he wants to be on my podcast. . . let's go, buddy. I know who you are. I know what you do. I've been following you for years. There's no reason for me to say no. (Ethan)

Alex and Ethan were, in fact, referring to the same individual when explaining what kind of person "had the right" to ask to be on their podcast. This can be linked to Merton's (1968a) discussion on the social structures of science. When considering science as a system of communication, Merton (1968a, p. 59) posited "that a scientific contribution will have greater visibility in the community of scientists when it is introduced by a scientist of high rank than when it is introduced by one who has not yet made his mark." As noted previously, this is the "Matthew Effect" (Merton, 1968b); more eminent academics receive disproportionate credit, leading to a cumulative advantage in science, i.e. the more productive an individual, the more they are recognized, leading to further productivity. In our context, this essentially means the more frequently someone appears on podcasts, the more likely they are to be a guest on other podcasts. As shown in our data, some podcasters actively sought a "celebrity."

> And [ANONYMOUS] is a bit of a minor celebrity. So . . . someone like would probably bring us a little bit of, you know, a little bit of extra clout, so to speak. (Ian)

It is important to note that, through our recruitment methodology of listening to the participants' podcasts, several of the podcasts included the same guests. Sport- and exercise science-related podcasts may therefore echo the "ivory tower dynamics" (McNamara et al. 2024) of academia, which may not be a surprise given that six of our participants primarily work in higher education. So, while we have previously suggested that open-access podcasts may be a viable alternative to conference attendance (Shaw et al., 2021), without critically reflecting on who is invited to be interviewed, podcasters may be at risk of reproducing the "academic circle jerk" (mutually reinforced, self-congratulatory networks based on neoliberal ideologies of publication citation, grant funding, and career progression (Ivancheva et al., 2019; Mott & Cockayne, 2017)) observed at academic conferences (Oliver & Morris, 2022). We argue that podcasters are "gatekeepers of science" – a term originally attributed to editors of peer-reviewed journals (de Grazia, 1963) – as they decide who to "let in" (see Lewin, 1947 for original work on the concept of gatekeeping). A clear example of this in our data is from Ian, who did not want to platform a researcher who may contradict his research:

> We're not going to put someone on the podcast who has like, a dramatic contradiction with some of the research that we're trying to put out there . . . we're not going to pull someone into the podcast to talk about their views on the discipline, just for the time being, that are totally at odds to how we see the subject so because then we're sort of undermining what the value is that we bring to the research.

While it could be argued that the podcaster was mindful of not sending mixed messages out to their listenership, this is clearly gatekeeping. Alex explicitly acknowledged being a gatekeeper when discussing whether to platform someone he had a personal issue with:

> Like if you think someone's a dick, but he's really good. You're the one that decides. You're the gatekeeper to whether that information from that, the person that you've perceived as a dick, goes out or not.

Bryan also expressed how they may avoid certain topics if an individual was deemed too controversial:

> If it's both controversial author and controversial findings. We're at a point of just not interested in it being part of creating a larger online argument. Yeah, we're less interested in like, that kind of online drama, I guess.

Given that many sport and exercise scientists prefer informal sources of knowledge (Fullagar et al., 2019; Reade et al., 2008; Shaw et al., 2021), the podcasters are potentially "controlling and influencing" (Merton, 1973) the distribution of esoteric knowledge, i.e. what we do and do not know about the discipline of sport and exercise science.

"It's for Me, but I Share It"

Several participants were podcasters who worked primarily within academic spaces, and for many of them, podcasting was about disseminating knowledge and translating research to their listenership.

> Well, it comes back to wanting to battle pseudoscience . . . I want to get correct information out to the listener; I want to get that scientific information out there. And I think a podcast is one way to do it. (David)

> So basically, I was researching, doing my PhD . . . And I guess there wasn't really a space for researchers to translate or get their research out into, you know, more lay audience and more mass audience (Julia)

The podcasters perceived a lack of quality information, or no information at all about a topic and podcasting, that was primarily for sharing such information.

> . . . I went into (podcasting) to try and provide another source of quality information for athletes . . . if you look at where athletes source their information, it's predominantly through searching the internet and the internet is notoriously poor with quality information (Grace)

> We are all charged with the idea of knowledge exchange, and making an impact. So, we have to be more aware of how we can get the message to people. Engaging in a broader range of knowledge exchange is valuable. Podcasts are one way in which that can be done.(Charles)

Non-academic podcasters also felt it was important to share information with their listenership:

> The other thing was to create content that benefits people to try and make the world a bit better. So, it's quite altruistic in the sense. (Frank)

> I'm quite passionate and very aware that there's a lot of mixed messages and that people can speak with authority on areas, that they maybe don't have the credentials behind them, on. So, I'm very, much, like to promote the fact that our podcast strives for evidence-based practice (Emily)

Bryan transitioned from listener to creator of the same podcast when it was in doubt of continuation:

> Honestly, one of my driving factors for picking up the podcast was because I, as a listener, wanted it to continue. If I don't do this, then there's a pretty good chance that I don't get this podcast anymore.

While podcasters express motivations to share and translate knowledge to lay audiences, our findings suggest more this is nuanced. For some participants, their open-access podcast was a platform for strategic capturing of expertise that they felt might not occur through normal conversation. This is best exemplified by Ethan who said:

> I really use my podcast as a continuing education tool for myself. And that was one of the first reasons that I started … now I can go and request for experts to come on my podcast in different fields. And for me, it's just gold, being able to just ask them my questions, you know what I'm stuck on, what I don't understand, and then just trying to connect the dots. (Ethan)

So, when Ethan was asked, who the podcast was for he said:

> It's for me, but then I share it.

For many of the participants, the podcast was a mechanism for accessing experts within their respective disciplines:

> … this is, this is CPD on tap, to talk to the best experts in the world, and to have a privileged conversation, an hour of their time, to hear what they've got to say (Frank)

> I was just trying to get some information from people out there who were doing it. (Alex)

And the podcast acted as a "hook" (Alex) to capture experts:

> There's a benefit from sharing your platform with someone else and promoting what they do and how they do it and giving them access to your audience. (Henry)

> So, so I think that you wouldn't have access as a podcaster. You wouldn't have access to people in the same way at all. (Liam)

The data from this theme suggests motivations exist on a spectrum from altruistic knowledge democratization to self-interested pursuits of cultural capital and professional advancement. As McNamara et al. (2024) previously demonstrated, educational podcasts can often function as one-way communication as opposed to the participatory medium with which podcasts are previously credited with (Wrather, 2016). Podcasting potentially replicates rather than disrupts the normative, neoliberal power structures within academia and science communication, e.g. academic publishing. Here, we can paraphrase Buchheit's (2020) critique of academic publishing in the sport and exercise sciences and ask "To whom are we podcasting? Ourselves or others? Is it for science and understanding or for improving our LinkedIn profiles? The response is likely both." Regardless of whether podcasters' intentions are selfless or self-serving, they function as gatekeepers, selectively amplifying certain voices based on perceived expertise or personal interest in engagement. This raises critical questions about who truly benefits from these platforms, challenging assumptions about podcasting's potential for increased democratizing of knowledge translation.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore independent podcasters' motivations for producing open-access podcasts related to the fields of sport and exercise sciences. Using reflexive thematic analysis, we demonstrate three themes broadly related to normative power structures of scientific knowledge and science communication. Self-imposed editorial practices led to various forms of gatekeeping, deciding what to say and what not to say on a podcast, who to include and who to exclude. Independence, i.e. freedom from gatekeepers, in new media does not necessarily lead to more diverse voices or perspectives. Our participants typically "let in" the elites of the sport and exercise professions, perpetuating the normative, neoliberal power structures within academia and science communication.

The study focused specifically on sport and exercise science podcasters, and the findings may not be generalizable to other educational or professional podcasting contexts. Additionally, our sample primarily included podcasters from academic or professional practice backgrounds, potentially limiting our understanding of how other types of sport science content creators approach their work. Future research could productively explore these dynamics in other specialized fields or educational contexts. Furthermore, investigating how several types of gatekeeping practices impact content diversity and accessibility in educational podcasting could provide valuable insights for both media studies and professional practice. As podcasting continues to evolve as a medium for knowledge sharing and professional development, understanding these dynamics becomes increasingly crucial. This study suggests that while new audio media platforms may lower technical barriers to entry, social and professional gatekeeping practices continue to play a crucial role in shaping knowledge dissemination in specialized fields. Those looking to produce open-access podcasts with an educational focus, and those already doing this, need to ask themselves who their podcast is for and whether they are gatekeeping to protect their listeners or themselves. Our findings further our understanding of how specialized knowledge is disseminated through audio media in the digital age. The observed tension between democratization and gatekeeping speaks to broader questions about access, authority, and credibility in contemporary media production.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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