Podcasts as Perception Shapers: Examining the Influence of YouTube Podcast Videos on Youth Perception in Pakistan

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Abstract

YouTube has become the dominant home of video podcasting, and a growing number of Pakistani creators now use long-form conversation to discuss society, economics, politics, and personal development with young audiences. Despite the rapid growth of this format, little empirical work has examined how young viewers themselves judge its capacity to inform them and to shift the way they see social issues. This study investigates whether YouTube podcast videos are perceived by youth as capable of shaping and changing perception, which podcast formats they favors, and whether they believe the medium deserves wider promotion. A descriptive, quantitative, cross-sectional survey was carried out with a structured questionnaire completed by young people, most of whom were undergraduates aged 20 to 25. The analysis was framed by the hypodermic needle (magic bullet), agenda-setting, knowledge gap, and social responsibility theories of mass communication. In data collection 73% of respondents agreed that podcasts highlight major social issues, 84% regarded YouTube podcasts as an effective source of knowledge, and 68% believed that podcasts can change a viewer's perspective. Interview-style (52%) and conversational (42%) formats were preferred, and 68% supported wider promotion of the medium. The results suggest that dialogue-driven formats carry considerable perceived persuasive and educational value for young audiences. The paper discusses implications for communication design, creator practice, and media literacy, and notes that perceived influence should be tested against behavioral measures in future work.

Keywords: *YouTube podcasts; youth perception; media effects; agenda setting; communication design; Pakistan*

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1. Introduction

Digital video platforms have reshaped the way young people find information, form opinions, and take part in public conversation. Among these platforms, YouTube occupies a particular place. It was created in 2005 by former PayPal employees and acquired by Google in 2006, and it has since grown into a global participatory media environment with an audience of more than two billion active users (Burgess & Green, 2009). Its influence on media consumption and on advertising has been profound, and it now serves as a primary channel

through which many young people learn, relax, and encounter ideas they might never meet through traditional media.

Within this environment, the podcast has become one of the most visible long-form genres. The word "podcasting" entered public use in 2004, when journalist Ben Hammersley proposed it in *The Guardian* as a label for the emerging practice of distributing audio programmes over the internet (Hammersley, 2004). Around the same time, former MTV video jockey Adam Curry and software developer Dave Winer developed the "iPodder" programme, which allowed listeners to download internet radio programmes to portable players. The term fuses "iPod" and "broadcast" (Berry, 2006). Podcasting began as an audio-only medium, but the spread of broadband and smartphones has encouraged many podcasters to adopt video, which lets them stand out and reach a larger audience. Scholars have described this shift as a "second age" of podcasting, in which the format moves from a niche practice to a mass digital medium (Bonini, 2015). Video is also highly attractive to audiences, and many podcast producers now add visual elements to their shows in order to widen their appeal and grow their communities and revenue.

Pakistan has taken part in this transformation. A new generation of creators has emerged who use YouTube to host conversations on topics ranging from entrepreneurship and psychology to economics and women's stories. Several channels attract substantial youth followings. Taimoor Salahuddin, widely known as Mooro, hosts conversations with business figures and motivational speakers and reports more than 1.1 million subscribers. Junaid Akram, whose relaxed but informative style spans many subjects, has more than 912,000 subscribers. Muzammil Hassan's *Thought behind Things* (TBT), with more than 234,000 subscribers, takes apart a public idea or event in each episode. Humna Raza's *Happy Chirp* (more than 81,800 subscribers) invites women from different fields to tell their stories under the banner #WhereWomenDoTheTalking, while *Pakistonomy*, hosted by Uzair Younus and supported by Tabadlab, examines the intersection of economy, society, and politics for an audience of about 27,700 subscribers (subscriber figures are those reported at the time of data collection and change continually). Audiences of this size give such creators the capacity to inspire viewers and potentially to alter the way they think.

Although podcasting has attracted growing scholarly attention, the existing literature on YouTube podcasts and young people concentrates largely on language learning and on political participation. Far less is known about how youth in South Asia perceive the capacity of podcasts to shape their own perspectives on social issues. This gap is significant for

communication and design research. A podcast is not only a body of content; it is a designed communicative experience in which the choice of format, guest, setting, camera framing, and conversational tone all influence how a message is received. Understanding which designs young viewers prefer, and how powerful they believe the medium to be, can inform both creators and educators.

The present study therefore asks five research questions. **RQ1:** Do young viewers believe YouTube podcasts play an important role in highlighting major social issues? **RQ2:** Do they regard YouTube podcasts as an effective source of knowledge? **RQ3:** Which podcast formats do they prefer? **RQ4:** Do they believe podcasts can change a viewer's perception or mindset? **RQ5:** Do they believe the medium should be promoted on a larger scale? The remainder of the article reviews relevant theory and prior research, describes the survey methodology, reports detailed findings, and discusses their meaning for communication theory and design practice.

2. Literature Review

2.1 YouTube podcasts as a communicative form

A podcast is generally defined as a digital audio or video programme that can be streamed or downloaded and that is typically released in episodes over time. Berry (2006) argued that podcasting should be understood in relation to radio, yet its on-demand, subscription-based, and niche character separates it from broadcast media. When podcasts move to YouTube, they also acquire the platform's participatory affordances, such as comments, recommendations, and sharing, which turn viewers into a community rather than a mass audience (Burgess & Green, 2009). Research on podcast users shows that listeners are motivated by information seeking, entertainment, and a sense of social connection, and that these motives shape how often and how attentively they consume content (Chan-Olmsted & Wang, 2022).

Podcast genres are commonly distinguished by their conversational structure. Interview podcasts invite a guest to speak about a specific subject or issue. Conversational podcasts feature two or more personalities in relatively free-flowing talk, sometimes with audience participation. Storytelling or investigative podcasts present narrated accounts, which may be haunted, fantasy, crime, or mystery stories. Round-table podcasts bring several speakers together to discuss a current topic, and hybrid podcasts combine elements of all of these. Monologue podcasts rely on a single speaker. The dialogic genres are especially interesting for perception research because they stage the kind of intimate, unscripted exchange that encourages what Horton and Wohl (1956) called para-social interaction, the one-sided but

emotionally real relationship that audiences form with media personalities. Such relationships can increase the credibility of a speaker and the willingness of a viewer to adopt that speaker's views.

2.2 Theoretical framework

Four mass communication theories guided the design of this study, and two complementary perspectives were used to interpret its results.

Magic bullet (hypodermic needle) theory. This early model holds that media messages are very powerful and act on audiences in the way a bullet acts on a body or a needle injects a substance, producing rapid and uniform effects. Its roots lie in post-First World War concern about propaganda (Lasswell, 1927). Later research, notably the two-step flow of communication, showed that audiences are not passive and that personal influence mediates media effects (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). The model is therefore best treated as a statement about *perceived* media power rather than as an accurate account of how effects occur. That is exactly how it is used here: the study asks whether young people themselves believe a podcast can penetrate and redirect their thinking.

Agenda-setting theory. McCombs and Shaw (1972) proposed that the media do not tell people what to think but are remarkably successful in telling them what to think about. The theory distinguishes a media agenda, a public agenda, and a policy agenda, and suggests that over time the priorities of the media become the priorities of the public. When a podcaster devotes an episode to a crisis, an economic policy, or a social problem, that issue gains salience among viewers. This logic underpins RQ1.

Knowledge gap theory. Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien (1970) argued that as the flow of media information into a social system increases, groups of higher socioeconomic status acquire that information faster than groups of lower status, so that the gap in knowledge widens rather than narrows. For podcasts, the theory raises the question of whether a freely accessible platform democratises knowledge or whether its benefits flow mainly to those with the education, connectivity, and language skills to use it. This logic underpins RQ2 and the profile of the respondents.

Social responsibility theory. Developed in *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956), this theory permits a free press without censorship but expects media to accept obligations to society and to subject their content to public discussion, professional self-regulation, or both. Applied to YouTube podcasts, which are largely self-regulated, the theory

frames RQ5: if podcasts exert real influence, then questions of promotion, quality, and accountability become matters of public concern.

Complementary perspectives. Uses and gratifications research emphasises that audiences actively select media to satisfy needs for information, identity, and entertainment (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). Social cognitive theory explains how people learn attitudes and behaviours by observing models in the media and by seeing how those models are rewarded (Bandura, 2001). Both perspectives temper the strong-effects assumption of the magic bullet model and help to explain why a persuasive podcast host can influence some viewers but not others.

2.3 Previous empirical research

Three earlier studies are particularly relevant to the present investigation. Bouradji and Hattab (2022) examined the effect of using YouTube videos and audio podcasts imitation (YAPI) on the oral proficiency of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. Using a questionnaire administered to master's students of linguistics at the University of M'sila, Algeria, they found that learners held positive attitudes towards YAPI. Watching YouTube videos and listening to podcasts gave students new vocabulary, helped them improve pronunciation and grammar, and supported fluency. The authors concluded that these media are useful authentic materials and that imitation of native speakers helps learners overcome the fear of mistakes and speak with greater confidence. Their study supports the view that YouTube and podcast content can change learner behaviour, although its focus is linguistic rather than attitudinal.

Lee (2021a) investigated the influence of social network services (SNS) and political podcasts on the participation of Korean youth in the candlelight rallies that preceded the 2017 impeachment of the Korean president. Political discussion with friends or parents and the use of news media had a strong positive influence on participation in the rallies, whereas SNS use had a negative influence and podcasts had no significant direct effect. However, both SNS and podcasts had a positive influence on online participation, and structural equation modelling showed that their effect on SNS participation was mediated by political discussion and political efficacy. In a related survey of 734 news podcast users, Lee (2021b) found that discussion of issues raised in podcasts was a positive predictor of online and offline participation and mediated the relationship between time spent with podcasts and participation. Together, these

findings suggest that podcasts exert influence less through direct persuasion than through the conversations and sense of efficacy they stimulate.

Yaacob, Amir, Mohd Asraf, Mohd Yaakob, and Mohamad Zain (2021) used an action research design with 40 Year 4 primary pupils in northern Malaysia to examine whether YouTube and video podcasts could improve listening comprehension. Pre-test and post-test data showed a statistically significant improvement in listening scores, and observation data indicated that the intervention increased pupils' engagement, understanding, and motivation. Their results show that video podcasts can have measurable cognitive effects even among very young learners.

2.4 Research gap

Taken together, the literature shows that YouTube and podcast content can influence learning, motivation, and civic behaviour, but it leaves three gaps. First, the studies are concentrated in language education and political participation, and none directly measures how young viewers perceive podcasts as agents of attitudinal change. Second, little research addresses the Pakistani context, where Urdu-language and bilingual creators have built large youth audiences in a short time. Third, few studies connect audience preferences for podcast format to the theoretical question of perceived media power. The present study addresses these gaps by surveying young viewers about their perceptions of the issue-highlighting, knowledge-giving, and perception-changing capacity of YouTube podcasts and about the formats they prefer.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study used a descriptive, quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. A descriptive design was appropriate because the aim was to document and describe how young viewers perceive YouTube podcast videos at a single point in time, rather than to test a causal model. The approach follows a post-positivist orientation in which perceptions are treated as measurable attitudes that can be summarised statistically. The questionnaire was the sole data collection instrument.

3.2 Unit of analysis, population, and sampling

The unit of analysis was the individual respondent. The population of interest was young adults who watch YouTube and have some exposure to podcast content. A non-probability,

purposive and convenience sampling strategy was used, and the questionnaire was distributed to respondents through online channels and among university students. Screening questions on age and educational level ensured that respondents could be classified as youth. The sample comprised **[N = ___ valid responses]**. As is usual with non-probability samples, the results describe this group and should not be generalized statistically to all Pakistani youth.

3.3 Instrument

The questionnaire was organized in four sections. The first collected demographic information: gender, age group, and educational level. Gender was included to examine which groups are most attracted to podcast content, and age and education were used to confirm that respondents belonged to the youth category. The second section asked about social media use, whether respondents watch YouTube podcasts, and how frequently. The third section measured perceptions through closed-ended statements concerning (a) the role of podcasts in highlighting major issues such as crises and celebrations, (b) their value as a source of knowledge, (c) their capacity to change a viewer's perspective, and (d) whether the medium should be promoted on a large scale. These items used an agree, unsure, disagree response structure. The fourth section asked respondents to select the podcast formats they prefer from interview, conversational, monologue, investigative or storytelling, and round-table or hybrid. Because respondents could select more than one format, the format percentages do not sum to 100. The questionnaire also asked whether respondents considered the effects of podcasts to be positive or negative.

3.4 Procedure and ethical considerations

Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study before beginning, were told that they could withdraw at any time, and were not asked for identifying information. Responses were collected through self-administered, survey-based questionnaires and then coded for analysis.

3.5 Data analysis

Responses were tabulated and analyzed using descriptive statistics, namely frequencies and percentages. Results are reported item by item and are interpreted against the theoretical framework in the discussion section. Percentages for the agree option are reported directly from the data; where respondents' remaining answers were not reported separately, they are described as a remainder.

4. Detailed Findings and Results

4.1 Respondent profile

Approximately 79% of the responses were provided by young people aged roughly 20 to 25 years, and most were at the undergraduate level of education. This profile matches the population the study set out to reach. It confirms that the data represent a youth category with a high level of digital media access and fits the expectation, drawn from knowledge gap theory, that early adopters of an information-rich platform are likely to be educated, connected young adults.

Table 1. Profile of respondents

Characteristic	Category	Share of responses
Age group	Approx. 20 to 25 years	≈ 79%
Educational level	Undergraduate (majority)	Predominant
Sampling frame	Youth with YouTube exposure	Purposive / convenience

4.2 Podcasts and the highlighting of social issues (RQ1)

When asked whether podcasts play an important role in highlighting major issues such as crises, celebrations, and other matters of public interest, 73% of respondents agreed. A further 21% were unsure, and a very small remainder disagreed. In practical terms, nearly three-quarters of the sample credit podcasts with bringing issues to public attention, while one in five has yet to form a firm view.

4.3 Podcasts as a source of knowledge (RQ2)

The strongest agreement in the survey concerned knowledge. Some 84% of respondents considered YouTube podcasts to be an excellent source for finding out about topics of concern and gaining more information about them. About 15% were unsure, which leaves only a negligible share in disagreement. This was the highest level of consensus recorded on any perception item.

4.4 Preferred podcast formats (RQ3)

Format preferences were clearly differentiated. Interview podcasts were the most popular, selected by 52% of respondents, followed by conversational podcasts at 42%. Investigative or storytelling podcasts were chosen by 26%, round-table and hybrid podcasts by 10%, and monologue podcasts by only 5.3%. Because respondents could choose more than one format,

these figures indicate the reach of each format rather than a division of the sample into exclusive groups. Table 3 and Figure 1 present the distribution.

Table 3. Preferred podcast formats (multiple responses permitted)

Podcast format	Selected (%)	Rank
Interview podcast	52	1
Conversational podcast	42	2
Investigative / storytelling podcast	26	3
Round-table and hybrid podcast	10	4
Monologue podcast	5.3	5

Note. Percentages exceed 100 in total because respondents could select more than one format.

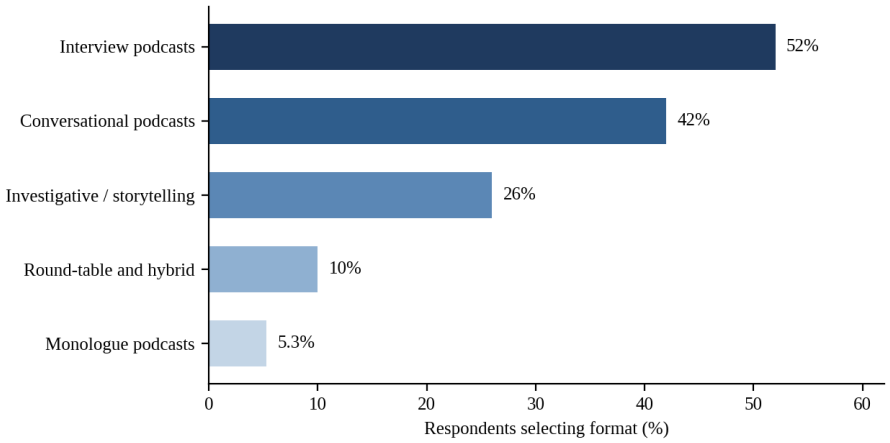


Figure 1. Preferred YouTube podcast formats among youth respondents (multiple responses permitted).

4.5 Perceived capacity to change perception (RQ4)

Approximately 68% of respondents accepted that YouTube podcasts have the strength to change a young viewer's perspective, thoughts, or mindset. Around 31% were not sure about this claim. As with the earlier items, outright rejection was very low, and the sizeable group of unsure respondents is better read as caution than as opposition.

4.6 Promotion of the medium (RQ5)

Roughly 68% of respondents felt that YouTube podcasts should be promoted on a large scale so that more people can benefit from them. Their reasoning was mainly educational. They saw promotion as a way to help young listeners explore specific subjects in greater depth. Table 2 summarises all four perception items.

Table 2. Perceptions of YouTube podcasts among youth respondents (%)

Statement	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
Podcasts play an important role in highlighting major issues	73	21	≈ 6 (remainder)
YouTube podcasts are an excellent source of knowledge	84	15	≈ 1 (remainder)
Podcasts can change a viewer's perspective or mindset	68	31	≈ 1 (remainder)
Podcasts should be promoted on a large scale	68	Not reported	Not reported

Note. "Disagree" values are the remainder after the agree and unsure responses and are approximate.

In summary, the data point to a consistent pattern. A clear majority of young respondents see podcasts as a credible informer, an issue highlighter, a potential changer of minds, and a medium worthy of promotion, with the interview and conversation formats favoured above all others. On every perception item, the proportion who actively disagreed was marginal, and the main alternative to agreement was uncertainty.

5. Discussion

5.1 Perceived power and the magic bullet debate

The finding that 68% of respondents believe podcasts can change a viewer's perspective appears, at first glance, to support the hypodermic needle view that media messages are powerful. Yet two features of the data counsel caution. First, the item measured *perceived* influence, not demonstrated attitude change. Second, almost one-third of respondents were unsure, which suggests that many young viewers regard themselves as active evaluators and not as passive recipients. This pattern is consistent with the two-step flow tradition (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955) and with uses and gratifications research (Katz et al., 1973), in which audiences choose content that fits their needs and filter it through personal relationships. It also resonates with Lee's (2021a, 2021b) findings that podcasts act mainly through discussion and political efficacy rather than through direct persuasion. In the Pakistani setting, a podcast may well be a starting point for conversation among friends and family, and it is in that conversation that perceptions are modified.

5.2 Agenda setting and issue salience

The 73% agreement that podcasts highlight major issues provides audience-side support for agenda-setting logic (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Creators such as the hosts of *Pakistonomy* and *Thought Behind Things* explicitly choose public-interest topics, and viewers appear to

recognize this role. The 21% who were unsure may reflect the fact that podcast agendas are far less uniform than those of television news: each creator sets a personal agenda, and viewers move between channels. YouTube podcasting thus fragments the agenda-setting process into many micro-agendas, which may increase the diversity of issues but weaken the shared public agenda that traditional media once produced. This is a promising direction for future research that tracks specific issues across channels and audiences.

5.3 Knowledge, access, and the knowledge gap

The 84% who describe YouTube podcasts as an excellent source of knowledge is the most striking result of the survey, and it aligns with earlier educational studies in which YouTube and podcast content improved vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency (Bouradji & Hattab, 2022) and listening comprehension (Yaacob et al., 2021). The result supports the broader claim that social media platforms have become a principal route to education and skill acquisition. However, knowledge gap theory warns that free access does not guarantee equal benefit (Tichenor et al., 1970). Because the sample was composed overwhelmingly of undergraduate students, the enthusiasm recorded here may reflect the advantages of an educated group with the digital skills and language fluency to profit from long-form, often bilingual discussion. Whether the same view is held by youth with limited schooling, patchy connectivity, or little English remains an open question, and it is a question with real consequences for the claim that podcasts democratize learning.

5.4 Format preference and communication design

The dominance of the interview (52%) and conversational (42%) formats is central to the design implications of this study. Both formats are structured around dialogue between people, and both create a sense of overhearing an authentic, unscripted exchange. They offer the conditions in which para-social relationships flourish (Horton & Wohl, 1956) and in which social learning from credible models is most likely (Bandura, 2001). The low preference for monologues (5.3%) suggests that young Pakistani viewers value interaction, perspective, and personality over lecture-style delivery. The moderate interest in investigative and storytelling formats (26%) indicates a complementary appetite for narrative, while the modest figure for round-table and hybrid formats (10%) may reflect the relative scarcity of such productions rather than lack of appeal.

For communication designers, these findings suggest that persuasive and educational impact is tied to the architecture of the conversation as well as to its topic. Decisions about

guest selection, pacing, the visual staging of speakers in a shared frame, thumbnail and title design, subtitling in Urdu and English, and the use of on-screen text to anchor key claims all contribute to how credible and memorable a message feels. Because these are design choices, they can be made more deliberately. The results therefore invite closer collaboration between content creators and communication design researchers, including experimental work that compares how different staging and framing choices affect comprehension and attitude.

5.5 Social responsibility and the case for promotion

That 68% of respondents support large-scale promotion should be read together with the finding that 68% also believe in the medium's capacity to change minds. Viewers who credit a medium with real influence may reasonably want it expanded, but influence cuts both ways. A medium that can inform can also misinform, and YouTube podcasts are largely self-regulated. Social responsibility theory (Siebert et al., 1956) therefore becomes directly relevant: freedom to publish is valuable, yet it is best accompanied by norms of accuracy, transparency about guests and sponsors, and openness to public scrutiny. Respondents' own reasoning about promotion centered on education, which suggests that a socially responsible podcast ecosystem would emphasize verified information, diverse voices, and topics of public benefit. Educators and institutions that wish to promote podcasts may also consider media literacy training that helps young viewers evaluate sources and distinguish informed analysis from opinion.

5.6 Relation to previous studies

The present results extend earlier work in three ways. Bouradji and Hattab (2022) and Yaacob et al. (2021) showed that YouTube and podcast media can support skills, and the present study shows that young viewers extend this belief to knowledge and perspective more generally. Lee (2021a, 2021b) found that podcasts operated through discussion and efficacy, and the present data, with their high proportion of unsure respondents, are consistent with a view of podcasts as influences that work on, and through, an active and reflective audience. Unlike those earlier studies, however, this study contributes a Pakistani sample and an explicit focus on format preference, thereby linking audience attitudes to the design of the medium.

6. Limitations and Conclusion

6.1 Limitations and future research

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The non-probability sample, dominated by undergraduates aged 20 to 25, limits generalisation to the wider Pakistani youth population. The study relied on self-reported perceptions, which may not match actual attitude change, and a descriptive design cannot establish causation. The agree, unsure, and disagree structure, while easy for respondents to complete, offers less sensitivity than a multi-point scale. Future research could use probability sampling across educational and regional groups, adopt validated multi-item scales, and test inferential relationships between exposure, discussion, and attitude change. Experimental or longitudinal designs that expose viewers to different podcast formats and measure subsequent attitudes would provide stronger evidence for the influence suggested here. Qualitative interviews or focus groups would help explain why so many respondents were unsure, and content analysis of leading Pakistani channels would reveal how topics and framing practices relate to audience response.

6.2 Conclusion

This study set out to examine how young viewers perceive the influence of YouTube podcast videos. The survey indicates that they see the medium as a significant force: most respondents agree that podcasts highlight major issues (73%), serve as an excellent source of knowledge (84%), can change a viewer's perspective (68%), and deserve wider promotion (68%). Interview and conversational formats are the clear favourites, which points to the importance of dialogue, personality, and authenticity in the design of persuasive digital communication. At the same time, the substantial share of unsure respondents and the dominance of educated participants remind us that perceived influence is not the same as measured effect, and that the benefits of the medium may not be evenly distributed. YouTube podcasts, in short, are a promising and powerful communicative form for reaching young people, and the responsibility of creators, designers, educators, and media regulators is to ensure that this power is used to inform, to stimulate thoughtful discussion, and to widen access to knowledge.

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