

ACADEMIC PODCASTING

A Guide From
THE GOOD ROBOT PODCAST

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Foreword

WE are delighted to be bringing you this report on academic podcasting. When we first started *The Good Robot* Podcast back in 2021, we never could have imagined that it would turn into a multi-year project and become a key way that we disseminate our research on gender, feminism and technology around the world. One of the most unexpected and joyous aspects of podcasting has been the community of feminist scholars and activists that we've built around us. We're incredibly grateful to all of the inspirational feminists who've donated their time and expertise to the podcast, and it's a privilege to be able to share their work with you. When we first started out, we sought out advice from successful academic podcasters whose work we admired (and never thought we'd ever be able to emulate). Now that we've been podcasting for several years, we're regularly contacted by academics in the arts and humanities who want to enter the podcasting world, but are a little intimidated by what it entails. That's why we produced this report on academic podcasting: to act as a guide and a friend to new podcasters, reflect on the strengths and limitations of podcasting as an academic medium, and raise awareness about all the different ways that academics are using podcasting to disseminate their research to different audiences.

We'd especially like to thank the AHRC Impact Fund, whose funding allowed us to explore new ways of advertising and disseminating the podcast, and provide the financial support necessary to produce this report. We'd also like to thank Raphael Hernandez for joining our small team to write the report. Raphael just graduated as the inaugural Huw Price Scholar from our MPhil programme in AI Ethics and Society at the Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence (LCFI). He was hired primarily to support the Narratives and Justice programme at LCFI, and with his background in journalism and media has been indispensable to our work on the impact of AI on journalism, PR, and communications practices and strategies. His input and support for *The Good Robot* Podcast has been invaluable. Our final thanks go out to all of our listeners and readers, from those who've just come across our podcast in recent times to those who supported us from the very beginning. We are really beyond grateful to do this, and we hope you enjoy the report.

Eleanor and Kerry x

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Introduction

Podcasting has emerged as a powerful medium in academia, offering another medium to communicate research, enabling scholars to engage directly with their audiences, and making academic knowledge more accessible to a broader public. Unlike traditional scholarly publications, which can be restricted by paywalls, formal tone, and limited accessibility, podcasts offer a flexible, engaging, and intimate form of communication that can reach listeners far beyond academic circles. The ease with which podcasts can be produced and disseminated makes them a valuable tool for democratizing access to academic content, fostering collaboration, and encouraging public engagement with critical research.

However, this potential does not mean that every educator should start their own show, or that this is a whimsical solution for every communication challenge in academia. Podcasting comes with its own time and resource investment requirements, making it unsuitable for some academics, and does not replace other forms of engagement with students and the broader public.

This report focuses on the role of podcasting within academia, specifically examining its potential to enhance educational practices, create new pathways for scholarly communication, and contribute to social change. It builds on the experience of producing *The Good Robot* podcast to suggest strategies to other scholars willing to engage with this format to reach wider audiences.

In addition to an exploration of the content and themes of academic podcasts, this report presents insights from the show's download statistics and a listener survey providing qualitative feedback from educators and students. These data points help assess the reach, relevance, and effectiveness of podcasts as educational tools and scholarly outputs. As podcasts continue to gain legitimacy as scholarly tools, their potential to bridge the gap between academia and the public grows, offering a more inclusive and dynamic model for the dissemination of knowledge.

About *The Good Robot*

The Good Robot is a podcast on feminism, gender and technology. It brings the voices of leading academic experts and technologists and makes their cutting-edge research accessible to the general public. It asks: **what is good technology? Is it even possible? And how can feminism help us work towards it?**

Hosted by Dr Eleanor Drage and Dr Kerry McInerney, *The Good Robot* was founded in 2021. New episodes come out every two weeks and they contain interviews with leading experts on feminism and technology and disseminate publications on feminism, race, gender and AI to wide audiences. An alternative episode format, called *Hot Takes*, has the hosts discussing a particular topic of their research between themselves.

From the podcast, Dr Eleanor Drage and Dr Kerry McInerney co-edited the book "*The Good Robot: Why Technology Needs Feminism*", published with Bloomsbury Academic in 2024.

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Podcasting in Academia: Key Insights From Previous Research

Benefits and Applications

Scholarly podcasting has gained attention in recent years as a tool for enhancing education and disseminating academic work, leveraging a format of audio communication that is becoming increasingly popular around the world [1, p. 162]. Podcasts can have a positive impact by expanding knowledge beyond the written language and beyond university teaching contexts [1, pp. 166–167], [2]. With regard to feminist and other social justice-related content, podcast formats that favour conversations and generate attachment to the hosts can make the content more relatable and foster reflection among listeners [1, p. 171]. For academia itself, podcasts can also serve as a pedagogical tool, as we outline further below [1, pp. 165, 171], [3].

A Growing and Impactful Format

Its potential to disseminate academic knowledge can be seen in educators and activists increasingly engaging with this medium [1, p. 162]. For example, podcasts are accepted for publication in *The British Columbian Quarterly*, a peer-reviewed journal [4, p. 27], which notes that this format can reach wider audiences than traditional academic articles [5]. Other academic publications, such as *Oxford Academic* journals and *Nature*, also offer their own podcasts [6], [7]. This highlights the growing recognition of podcasts as a legitimate form of scholarly communication.

One of the significant benefits of academic podcasting is its potential to diversify the voices and perspectives shared within academia. Traditional academic platforms, such as journals and conferences, may limit the representation of minorities due to various structural constraints, including paywalls, jargon, and familiarity with academic writing. In contrast, podcasts can serve as an inclusive medium, allowing scholars from diverse backgrounds — including women and gender minorities — to participate in and contribute to scholarly discourse. This inclusivity comes from podcasting being able to challenge the spatial and temporal limitations of traditional academic formats. In contrast to the centralized nature of a conference happening in a specific venue, a podcast can be recorded from multiple locations and then distributed globally, helping scholars overcome some of the geographical and visa-related challenges that affect their ability to take part in international conferences and other scholarly events. It can also help female scholars circumnavigate certain tensions that arise from speaking at academic conferences, such as performance anxiety, emotional labour, and caring responsibilities, which might limit the access to such environments. While not fixing the underlying issues, this

Podcasts' Benefits Summary

- **Expanding Reach:** Disseminate academic knowledge beyond classrooms and written formats.
- **Relatability and Reflection:** Conversational format fosters relatability and deep reflection.
- **Legitimacy:** A medium that is increasingly recognized by journals, enhancing its role in scholarly communication.
- **Inclusivity:** Offer a platform for diverse voices.
- **Flexibility:** Provide creative freedom in format and content.
- **Personal Connection:** Intimate nature strengthens connections between speakers and listeners.
- **Open-Access:** Remove barriers to academic content, making complex topics more accessible.
- **Community Learning:** Serve as entry points for social issues and foster community-based learning.
- **Pedagogical Tool:** Can support teaching as a supplementary or creative tool.

ability to at least go around them can make podcasts a useful alternative [8, p. 7], [2, p. 285], [9, p. 213].

The flexibility of podcast formats also contributes to their appeal in scholarly contexts. Unlike traditional academic publishing, which often imposes strict limits on content length and style, podcasts are not bound by such constraints. This freedom allows for the exploration of various formats—such as solo monologues, co-hosted conversations, and non-fiction storytelling—each of which can be tailored to suit the specific needs of different academic disciplines [4, p. 13], [8, p. 7]. This adaptability enables scholars to choose the format that best fits their production context (e.g., how much time they have to invest), content, and audience, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of their communication [10, p. 58]. They also offer a venue for communicating with audiences directly, without a gatekeeper, such as a journal editor [11, pp. 88–89].

Fostering reflection. The conversational nature of podcasts fosters a sense of intimacy and relatability often absent in other academic media. The presence of the human voice in podcasts can create a more personal connection with listeners, making the content more engaging and impactful [1, p. 15]. An example of this usage is provided by Richardson and Green [2]: "whereas monographs, journals, and other traditional textual scholarship employ the quotation, the podcast is able to utilize the sound bite, embedding clips from original radio broadcasts, television interviews, and related media. As we select choice quotes to build our argument, this process allows scholars to sift out important recordings for the listener's benefit. This is vital, as hearing the voice of Virginia Woolf talking about craftsmanship on the BBC or listening to H.D. reading from *Helen in Egypt* (1961) affects an aural response and realizes these women as embodied figures."

In some cases, podcasting can even be reimagined as a medium for scholarly communication itself rather than merely a tool for discussing pre-existing academic work [12, p. 518]. In that spirit, podcasters report the medium's function in sensemaking through conversation, which can improve their thinking or as a stepping stone in a larger process, such as publishing an episode about a topic while working towards a paper. It can serve, for example, as the first arena to debate ideas that end up later summarized in a book chapter or journal article [11, pp. 115–122].

The Role of Podcasting in Disseminating Academic Knowledge

Podcasting has increasingly been recognized as a valuable tool for disseminating academic knowledge. As the medium grows, educators and activists have started to explore its potential for reaching and engaging different kinds of audiences [1, p. 6]. Being conversational makes it a natural way for people to engage with content. Unlike traditional academic publications, podcasts allow for a more personal connection between the speaker and the listener, which can be instrumental in building communities of learning and practice [8, p. 8].

Podcasting's open-access nature can help remove barriers to scientific and scholarly knowledge. This accessibility helps make complex academic subjects more digestible and relatable to a broader audience. Thus, podcasts can play a role in breaking down the exclusivity of academic discourse, making it more approachable and humanized [8, p. 7]. At the same time, the authority that comes from expertise in their fields might help differentiate the quality of content in the podcasts created by academics from those produced by people who are not domain experts [13, p. 178].

Hence, podcasts can serve as valuable entry points for discussing important social issues. For example, they can introduce topics like gender equality to new audiences, providing a starting point for individuals or groups to explore these issues further. This informal and accessible format can be particularly useful for community-based learning and discussion, where podcasts can serve as a basis for collective exploration and dialogue [1, p. 15]. Podcasts have been shown

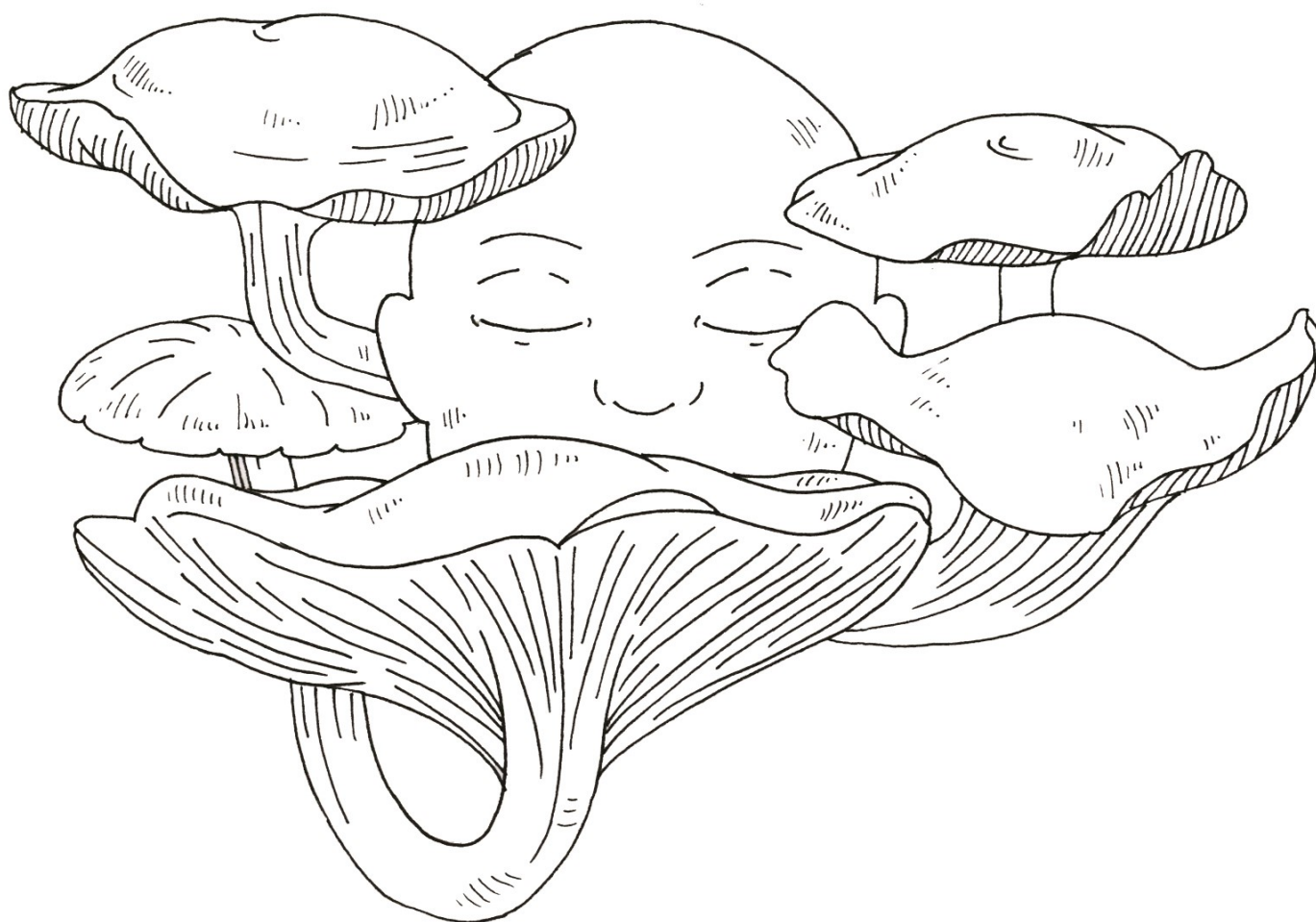
to be particularly effective in fields where scholars are interested in engaging learners and the public in intimate and creative ways. In disciplines ranging from Peace and Conflict Studies to Gender and Critical Race Studies, podcasting has been used as a tool to amplify marginalized voices and build communities of resistance [1, p. 11].

Podcasting as a Pedagogical Tool

Podcasting has significant potential as a pedagogical tool, offering various ways to enhance teaching and learning when used effectively. Student acceptance of podcasts as an asynchronous learning format can be seen in studies about their usage in teaching multiple subjects, as noted in a literature review by Jerez, Sarmiento, and Salazar [14].

The use of podcasts in education can be divided into three broad categories: substitutional, supplementary, and creative [3, p. 317]:

- **Substitutional** is the most basic level and involves replacing traditional lectures with recordings in podcast format, allowing students to access the content at their convenience. While this approach can help students who miss classes or need to review material (especially useful for nonnative speakers), there is a risk of reinforcing passive learning if not carefully managed [3, p. 317], [15, p. 1066].
- **Supplementary** podcasting involves using podcasts to provide students with additional learning materials. This can include explanations of complex topics, interviews with experts, or discussions that delve deeper into course content. This approach can enrich the learning experience by providing multiple perspectives and making challenging material more accessible [1, pp. 9, 15], [3, p. 317], [16], [15, p. 1066].
- **Creative** podcasting has the students create the audio shows themselves as a way to engage with what is taught. In order to construct knowledge rather than simply receive it, students need to develop a deep understanding of the subject explored in their podcasts [3, p. 317]. There is evidence that creative podcasting can help learning, relating to better understanding and retention [17, p. 142]. However, as discussed in the section "*The Impact of Podcasting on Other Learning Styles*", this improvement might come from how learners are engaging with coursework rather than the technology itself.



This artwork was inspired by the excerpt "You have to make the first move, and ask, 'Can I come visit you in your lab?' Once you're there, you can begin to pose questions... possibly intervening at the point where designs are still being forged and thought through," from N. Katherine Hayles's essay in "The Good Robot" book. *Accessibility caption: Illustration of a face peacefully resting among large mushrooms that surround it, blending with their shapes.*

How to Make an Academic Podcast

Starting a podcast comes with a few considerations regarding format and style, as well as some equipment needs. Copeland and McGregor [4] have created a useful guide for academics who want to get into the podcasting space. It's important to first identify where a gap exists in the academic podcasting landscape. Understanding this gap can help ensure that the podcast fills a unique space and serves a specific need within its target audience. Once this gap is established, selecting the podcast's format and style is crucial as it sets the tone and direction for the entire project. Decisions include whether the show will focus on fiction or nonfiction, and whether it will consist of **interviews**, **narrative storytelling**, or **roundtable discussions**. It may also be formed by repurposed content (e.g., giving a new life to archived interviews). The style and feel should not only align with the personality of the host and the team's expertise, but also resonate with the identified gap and cater to the target audience's needs and interests. For those uncertain about the format, conducting test recordings or pilot episodes can be beneficial [4, pp. 4–6], [13, pp. 178–180]. Carefully listening to other podcasts while taking notes of what is happening and for how long it is happening can be a helpful exercise in those decisions [11, p. 132].

Planning involves outlining the specific content, determining the number of episodes, and setting a release schedule. It also includes creating a budget and scheduling tasks associated with podcast production, which helps balance podcasting with other academic responsibilities [4, pp. 7–11]. When thinking of structure, Cook [11, p. 134] notes these are the elements a show might include:

- **Narration:** Scripted or freestyle talking of the host. It can include context for the audience or be used for engagement.
- **Interview:** With guest or guests; can be in the studio or on the field.
- **Group Discussion:** Different dynamic from interviews, often led by the host.
- **Readings:** An actor or the host reading materials such as book excerpts or letters.
- **Sound:** Ambient sound, sonic phenomena, etc.
- **Music:** Songs or instrumental pieces relating to the topic (not background music).

In terms of equipment, the guide suggests starting with basic yet essential tools such as a good-quality microphone and a portable recorder. These are critical for capturing high-quality audio, which is the backbone of any podcast. For those on a limited budget, it recommends exploring public and university libraries, which might offer podcasting studios or equipment rentals. As the podcast grows, upgrading to more advanced equipment like broadcast-quality microphones or field recording tools can enhance the production quality [4, pp. 12–16]. Furthermore, the guide stresses the importance of mastering the technology involved in podcasting, including the use of digital audio workstations (DAWs) software for editing. For beginners, free options like Audacity are suggested, while more experienced users might consider investing in professional tools like Adobe Audition or Hindenburg [4, pp. 19–21]. This editing and post-production step could include the usage of music and sound effects, which do not need to be costly as royalty-free options are available [13, p. 181]

Other aspects to consider are the podcast’s visual design used in the cover art and branding for social media [4, pp. 22–24]. Promotion through social media is an important aspect of building a community around the podcast and reaching the desired audience, which is discussed in the section “*Reaching Audiences*”.

Shows are published through specialized hosting services that manage the podcast’s RSS feed¹ and distribute it to platforms like Apple Podcasts and Spotify, the two most popular services among listeners [18], [4, p. 25]. The guide also addresses the importance of preserving podcasts for the future. Proper archiving, including storing high-quality audio files, transcripts, and metadata, ensures that shows remain accessible and discoverable over time. This can be achieved by submitting the podcast to institutional repositories, which can provide a stable URL or DOI, enhancing its academic credibility and visibility [4, pp. 32–34].

¹ An online page which includes the podcast episodes’ audio files and descriptions to distribute them to the apps listeners use to access shows.

Challenges

While podcasting offers exciting opportunities for academia, it also comes with significant challenges. Producing a podcast requires time, financial resources, and technical skills to ensure consistent quality. Academic podcasters must also strike a balance between making content accessible to a broad audience and maintaining scholarly rigour. Reaching and engaging listeners, especially in niche or sensitive areas, can be difficult. Additionally, issues of inclusivity — such as language barriers and accessibility — must be addressed. Finally, public-facing content exposes podcasters to personal and professional risks, including online harassment. This section explores these key challenges and strategies to overcome them.

Investment

The actual investment required for creating a podcast might vary based on its creators' decisions in terms of format and equipment (section "*How to Make an Academic Podcast*"). However, some degree of time and financial resources will always be necessary [1, p. 17]. Ensuring high-quality audio output is particularly crucial for a professional feel, as audio content is less forgiving of technical flaws compared to other media forms. Making it sound good will require specific equipment and software and learning how to work with them [13, p. 181], [1, p. 18].

The time commitment involved in producing a podcast is substantial. Setting up and maintaining a podcast requires the regular recording, editing, and releasing of episodes. Since it is key to ensure a regular output of content with a regular host while also keeping consistency of style and structure, it may be particularly challenging for small teams or individuals who may already have other significant commitments [13, pp. 179–181]. This time investment is necessary not only to produce content but also to ensure its quality. It must be engaging, informative, and concise enough to maintain listeners' interest without being overly lengthy. Striking a balance between regularity and high quality is a constant challenge for podcasters, particularly those operating with limited resources [1, p. 18].

The format and style of a podcast can significantly affect the amount of time and effort required to produce it. For instance, interview-based podcasts may require substantial time for guest coordination and editing, while narrative storytelling podcasts may involve intensive scriptwriting and production work. Therefore, scholars need to carefully consider the time they can realistically commit to a podcast project [8, p. 7].

These challenges might be topped by the lack of financial incentives in the area, especially for those dealing with niche subjects, such as religious studies, as noted by Altman [12, p. 582]. Finding financial support from listeners can be hard for small podcasts, with endeavours such as applying for grants or crowdsourcing funds also demanding scholars' time [8, p. 7].

Podcasts' Challenges Summary

- **Investment:** Requires time, financial resources, and specific equipment for high-quality audio. Balancing consistency with limited resources is hard.
- **Reaching Audiences:** Competing for attention against other media can be difficult, particularly for niche or sensitive topics.
- **Balancing Depth and Accessibility:** Making complex academic topics understandable without oversimplifying.
- **Exclusion Risks:** Format can exclude non-English speakers, those without reliable internet access, and the deaf community.
- **Impact on Learning Styles:** Ensuring audio is not used to replace traditional teaching formats to maintain student engagement and learning quality.
- **Vulnerability:** Podcasters face personal and professional vulnerability, including potential identity-based harassment.
- **Institutional Support:** Lack of financial incentives and institutional recognition limits academic podcasting.

Thus, for academic podcasting to grow and establish itself as a recognized form of scholarly output, there is a need for more formalized support from academic institutions. This could involve institutions using their communication channels to promote their scholars' podcasts, providing resources and infrastructure for podcast production, and recognizing podcasts as legitimate academic contributions. Such institutional support could help overcome some of the resource and time constraints that individual scholars face when creating podcasts [8, p. 8].

Reaching Audiences

A podcast's impact hinges on people listening to it, especially if its goal is to engage with audiences beyond the scholarly world. In that arena, any show is competing for users' attention against a wide pool of content — other podcasts, but also other media, such as TV and streaming. This can be more problematic for content addressing sensitive or challenging topics, such as profeminist podcasts, that need to overcome some level of listener resistance, such as men who are reluctant to engage with discussions on gender equality [1, p. 17].

This limitation means that people choosing to listen to this kind of content are likely supportive of gender equality in a "preaching to the converted" situation, and comes with the risk of contributing to polarization as audiences are only listening to ideas they already agree with. An alternative might be to present these topics within wider series that include other subjects, and use that as an entry point for the discussion [1, pp. 16–17].

Given how crucial reaching and engaging audiences is to academic podcasting, careful consideration of who the intended listeners are and how to best communicate with them is needed. A key initial step is identifying the target audience for the podcast. Scholars must ask themselves who they want to communicate their research to and what these listeners might be interested in. This audience-centred approach helps in tailoring the content to meet the needs and expectations of the listeners, thereby increasing the podcast's relevance and impact [13, p. 177].

Then, other strategies might help grow and captivate these audiences. Consistency and regularity are fundamental. Episodes should be released at regular intervals, following a particular style and structure and having a host with whom listeners can familiarize themselves [13, pp. 179–180].

Numbers may take a while to build up. Cook [11, p. 183] interviewed 101 podcasting academics for his book, *Scholarly Podcasting: Why, What, How?*, and notes that most reported having between 200 and 700 downloads per episode. While some shows get to the tens of thousands, in another text, the author notes that a few hundred listeners are more than most conference keynotes would get [19].

Promotion, Audience Engagement and Fostering Communities. One criticism of the podcast format is that it can be a pedestal for the hosts. Fostering a community around it is a counter to that, leveraging the format's potential for audience participation. This might mean creating virtual communities around relevant topics [1, p. 15].

A critical aspect of building and sustaining an audience for an academic podcast is leveraging social media. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are helpful to engage with listeners and establish a loyal base. However, given the vast number of social media platforms available, podcasters might find it more effective to focus their efforts on one or two platforms that align best with their target audience. Consistency in posting, such as sharing new episodes, announcements, or related content, is vital to maintaining interest [4, p. 38]. However, simply posting new episode alerts might not be enough to engage with the audience. Podcasters must think about creating a community through social media and maintaining conversations with listeners [11, p. 183].

Other practices from the podcasting world can be handy. Creating a trailer is an effective promo-

tional strategy. Additionally, cross-promotion with other podcasts can be valuable in expanding the reach of a show by tapping into existing audiences [4, pp. 37–38]. One step further might be to join a podcast network to seek support [8, p. 8].

The Good Robot



The Good Robot logo. Accessibility caption: Dr Eleanor Drage and Dr Kerry McInerney's faces appear in the background, overlaid with a starry, cosmic theme. The podcast's name is centred in the image, written in white with a purple outline.

Balancing Depth and Accessibility

An important challenge for podcasts, particularly those dealing with complex subjects (such as scientific content), is to strike the right balance between providing in-depth, high-quality information and ensuring that it is accessible to a broad audience [1, p. 18]. There is demand for such content, which has been met by poor yet accessible "pop science" shows [20, p. 276].

Striking the right balance between the quality of content and its accessibility means serving this audience with better information.

Scholars who are experts in their fields will possess the knowledge to produce quality shows [13, p. 178]. Academic communication, however, is not always done in a way that is palatable to most audiences. In the medical field, for instance, articles published in the last century increasingly included jargon and decreased in readability [20, p. 276]. Thus comes the challenge of balancing that expertise and disseminating content in a way people understand.

Here, choices of format might play a role. Interviews with experts, for example, might provide high-quality and detailed information, but the use of jargon might limit potential audiences for requiring some previous knowledge for understanding. A counter to that might be offering analogies and explanations [20, p. 277]. Exploring multiple modes appears as an alternative to appeal to different audience needs. Besides interviews and panels, their most popular format, Yankura Swacha and Heim [21] report a successful engagement with shorter synopsis episodes with the main point of longer academic articles [21, p. 227]. However, it varies with content and audience. A similar approach did not provide good results for Marty Martin, co-host of the *'Big Biology Podcast'*, who describes producing two versions (short and long) of their first ten episodes to try to appeal to a broader public. Despite the efforts in creating a distilled-down version of each episode, the download statistics showed an overall preference for the long-form [19].

Addressing Exclusion. Despite the potential of podcasts to democratize access to academic content, there are significant concerns about who may be excluded from this digital medium. Podcasts are predominantly recorded in English, which can alienate non-English speakers. They also require reliable internet access, which is not always the case. Additionally, many podcasts lack written transcripts, making them inaccessible to members of the deaf community [1, p. 11], [2], [22].

To mitigate these exclusions, podcast creators must consider incorporating practices that enhance accessibility. Examples include providing transcripts, ensuring clear audio, and describing imagery [21, p. 227].

The Impact of Podcasting on Other Learning Styles

Scholarly podcasting poses challenges in relation to its impact on traditional learning styles. The shift toward podcasting and other net-based learning formats introduces new dynamics into the educational process. On one hand, these technologies can enhance learning by making content more accessible and allowing students to review material at their own pace. On the other hand, they may discourage traditional learning methods that require real-time interaction and attendance. Rather than conducting a synchronized reading of a text, educators may explore different uses of the time shared with students during lectures to better integrate this technology in teaching [15, p. 1066].

The availability of video podcasts, for instance, has been associated with a decline in student attendance at traditional lectures. This trend suggests that some students may prefer the convenience of on-demand video content over attending in-person classes, potentially undermining the value of synchronized, face-to-face learning experiences. However, it is important to note that not all students share this preference; some still favor the traditional lecture format despite the availability of video podcasts [23].

Complement, not replace. Though evidence of the use of podcasts in education assisting student performance is still weak, its potential for enhancing learning is well documented. Using the tool rationally as a supplement to studies appears as a means to harness this medium's

benefits [17], [1, p. 9], [15].

When integrating podcasting into educational settings, it is important to consider how students will use this material. A frequent word of caution is to use podcasts to complement learning rather than replace existing methods, as they might diminish the learning experience if seen as the primary source of material for students. Educators should provide policies and guidance on how to best use podcasts for study to ensure that these resources are properly integrated into the broader learning experience [3, p. 319].

Podcasts can enhance learning by providing additional resources, enabling flexible access to content, and encouraging student engagement through content creation. The benefits of podcasting, however, in education might stem from how the technology is used rather than from the technology itself. For example, repeated listening to podcasted lectures can aid in comprehension, and student-created podcasts can foster deeper understanding as communicating information increases retention [15, p. 1066]. The same idea applies to its role in promoting social change, with authors like McInerney and Burrell [1] warning against exaggerating its transformative effects and having the medium as a supplement rather than an engine [1, p. 21].

Podcasters' Vulnerability

Podcasters are exposed to significant personal and professional vulnerabilities. The public nature of podcasting means that creators must navigate how their voices and ideas are perceived by a broad audience, often beyond the traditional academic circles. This exposure can bring about unique challenges, particularly for those who are already navigating the pressures of academic norms and expectations. Podcast creators report a personal challenge of resisting the social norms associated with voice in the academy. For some, podcasting becomes a form of resistance against the conventional academic voice—often steeped in jargon and gatekeeping—that can alienate broader audiences. However, this resistance is not without its difficulties. Podcasters may struggle with their own insecurities about how they are perceived, both within the academic community and by the public [24, pp. 1, 3].

The competitive nature of academia often drives scholars to be more protective of their work, prioritizing clear authorship and guarding their findings to prevent them from being 'scooped' or undermined by destructive feedback, in contrast to the open and collaborative nature of podcasting. While it can be challenging to deal with the intimacy that podcasts bring, this vulnerability can be leveraged in knowledge creation and when engaging with the audience by creating a circle of trust with the listeners. Still, its less structured way of engaging with information (as opposed to writing an article once you have all the findings, for example), can be troublesome for some academics [11, pp. 12–14].

Moreover, scholarly podcasters, much like influencers and content creators, are vulnerable to identity-based harassment. Research from Cornell University highlights how the personal nature of online content can lead to targeted harassment, which is often deeply harmful both psychologically and professionally [25]. This type of harassment is not confined to celebrities; it also affects activists, journalists, and academics. It includes tactics such as doxxing² and coordinated harassment campaigns, which can severely impact the safety and well-being of those targeted [26]. Digital sanitization and online safety techniques can help mitigate those attacks. These include technical solutions, such as setting up multi-factor authentication³, using password managers to create strong passwords for accounts, and limiting messages on social media [26, p. 207]. Doing the reverse process of doxxing oneself, i.e., scrubbing the internet to find

² Publishing private, potentially sensitive information about someone. These can include address and contact details in a compendium of data posted to a single place, like an online forum, to expose the victim [26], [27].

³ An authentication method that requires the user to provide two or more verification factors, like a password and a token sent via SMS, to gain access to an account.

information about themselves mimicking what an attacker could do⁴, and using that to remove sensitive information that is available online is also recommended [26, p. 207].

Incorporating Feminist Practices

Incorporating feminist practices into academic podcasting goes beyond simply labelling a show as "feminist" or "profeminist." To genuinely reflect feminist values, these principles must be embedded in all aspects of the podcast's production and dissemination, which includes not only the content but also the structural and operational aspects of how the podcast is created and managed. Operationally, embedding feminist values into a podcast involves thoughtful consideration of who is involved in the creation and hosting of the podcast. This means not only including women and other marginalized voices as guests but also ensuring that they have significant roles in the production, decision-making, and direction of the podcast [1, pp. 19–20].

⁴ See *The New York Times's* 'A Guide to Doxxing Yourself on the Internet'

Listener Trends

Overall, *The Good Robot's* monthly episode downloads⁵ have increased since launch and show a trend of growth (Figure 1). The data, obtained from Buzzsprout⁶, includes all podcasting platforms — which excludes YouTube, where video versions of the episodes get hundreds of additional plays.

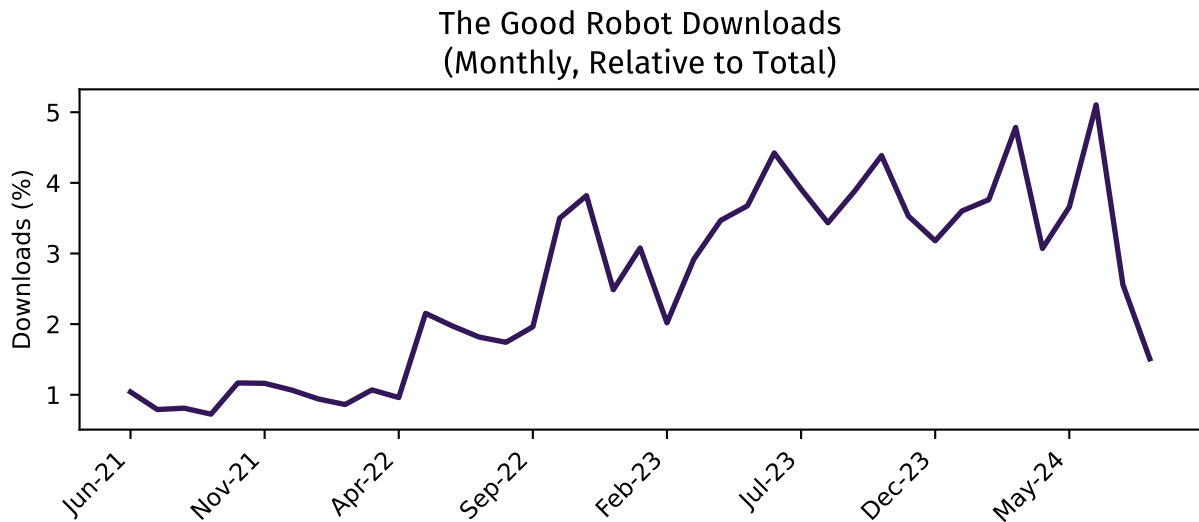


Figure 1: Podcast downloads over time show an overall growth in monthly downloads.

These monthly downloads include both newly released episodes and older ones. The latter has a significant impact on overall listenership. In June 2024, the audience peak, 57.5% of the downloads came from episodes released previously, and the rest came from the two episodes released in that month. The same phenomenon is seen in previous months as well. Besides, the average number of monthly downloads when taking into account the number of episodes released in each period shows a less clear pattern of growth (Figure 2). Episodes released in 2024 performed better on average than in previous years.

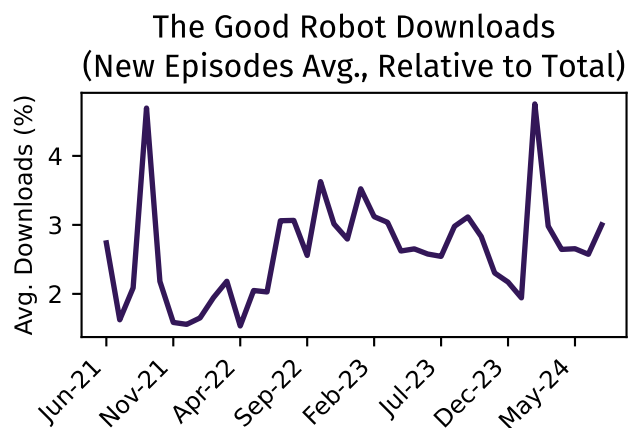


Figure 2: Podcast average downloads per episode show a modest increase over time.

Still, speaking to the importance of regularity, releasing new episodes has a significant impact on the audience for two reasons. The first is that content gets more plays when it is fresh. The numbers are bigger during the first few days after an episode is released, following a pattern that has a peak in the beginning and slowly diminishes over time, and that adds up to a significant share of monthly downloads.

⁵ A basic metric when discussing podcasts audience. Means that a user saved the episode to their device, but not necessarily that it was listened.

⁶ RSS service *The Good Robot* uses to distribute its episodes.

Also, recent months with fewer episodes also had smaller audience numbers, including fewer downloads of older episodes. For example, in July 2024, when only one episode was released due to the podcast going on a break, the downloads of older content were less than half of those from the previous month (which had two new episodes). In August 2024, when no episodes were released, the level remained low. An explanation for that is the release of new content also drives audience to older episodes. The available data does not allow to determine the most relevant factor, but this might be explained by the fact that new episodes are promoted more frequently (on social media or by appearing first on podcast platforms), which might make the podcast known to new listeners or act as a reminder to existing ones.

Countries

The country with the highest number of downloads is the United Kingdom (UK), where the podcast hosts are based. Overall, around 32% come from the UK, followed by the United States (20%) and Germany (7%). However, that pattern is slowly changing as *The Good Robot* becomes more popular in the US. In the last 5 episodes, as of September 4th, 2024, 29% of downloads came from the UK and 27% from the US.

Data from Apple Podcasts, the most popular platform for *The Good Robot* listeners (about 35% listen through the app), provides additional insight (figure 3). It shows that audience from the US grew after January 2024. [Explain about consultancy].

Yet, the data shows a gap in the distribution of content, which is still concentrated around Europe (62%) and North America (25%). Language barriers might be an issue, as *The Good Robot* is in English, and these numbers reflect the challenge of accessibility faced by podcasters (section “*Addressing Exclusion*”). Asia (5%), Oceania (4%), South America (1%), and Africa (1%) account for a small share of the audience.

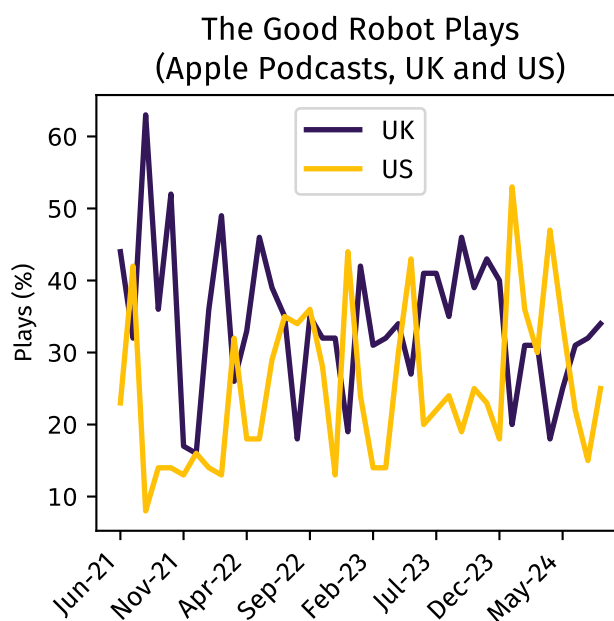


Figure 3: The percentage of monthly plays by users in the UK and in the US, according to Apple Podcasts data, shows an increase in US listenership in 2024.

Listener Survey

The Good Robot team conducted a survey to gather feedback and insights directly from listeners. It was distributed through various channels, including social media, newsletters, and the podcast episodes. It received a total of 30 responses.

The survey included questions related to listeners' preferences, satisfaction, how they engage with the podcasts, and suggestions for improvement. All of them had a positive overview of the podcast informational output⁷, rating it either 4 or 5 out of 5. The same goes for the likelihood of recommending the show⁸, with all answers being 4 or 5 out of 5.

Demographics. Listeners identified themselves as coming from multiple countries and cities, providing different global perspectives in the survey. In terms of gender, most (19) identified as female, 6 as male, 3 as non-binary, 1 as gender-fluid and 1 did not identify.

The age profile concentrated around the 25-34 age group, with 16 respondents, followed by 11 in the 35-44 group, 2 in the 18-24 group, 1 in the 55-64 group.

Half of the respondents reported following *The Good Robot* on social media, besides their podcast apps or YouTube.

General Feedback

The general comments section⁹ reflected a strong appreciation for the podcast's content and the efforts of its hosts. Many respondents expressed gratitude, highlighting the informative nature of the discussions and their personal enjoyment of the episodes.

This relationship speaks to the feeling of attachment to hosts, the conversational aspect of podcasting, and the connections academics are able to create with listeners directly through their podcasts discussed in section "*Podcasting in Academia: Key Insights From Previous Research*".

"I see technology as an integral part of access [to abortion and healthcare] as we move forward and I have been so grateful for the people you've had on your show as they have opened up more resources for the work I am doing. Thank you."

The next section will discuss the value the podcast adds to listeners and its role in pedagogical settings. It will be followed by another section presenting suggestions for improvements made by the listeners, which contain insights that other scholarly podcasters might find useful.

⁷ Question: From 1-5 (1 = least, 5 = most), how informative have you found *The Good Robot* podcast on the intersection of feminism and technology?

⁸ Question: From 1-5 (1 = very unlikely, 5 = very likely), how likely are you to recommend *The Good Robot* podcast to a colleague?

⁹ Question: Is there anything else you would like to share?



This artwork was inspired by the phrase "Imagine a future beyond escape or dystopia" from Hannah Holtzclaw and Wendy Hui Kyong Chun's essay in *The Good Robot* book. *Accessibility caption: Illustration of a creature with leaves growing from its body emerging from water, surrounded by aquatic plants.*

What is Working

Based on the feedback about what listeners enjoy most¹⁰ and their favourite episodes¹¹, the following key strengths of *The Good Robot* podcast emerge:

- **Diverse Perspectives:** The variety of guests and the inclusion of feminist, non-Western, and critical viewpoints.
- **In-Depth Analysis:** The thorough exploration of complex topics.
- **Challenging Norms:** Episodes that challenge mainstream narratives, particularly around surveillance, AI, and geopolitics, leave a lasting impact.

¹⁰ Question: *What do you enjoy most about the podcast?*

¹¹ Question: *What's your favourite episode(s) of our show? Why do you like it?*

What Listeners Enjoy Most

Respondents shared recurring themes about what they appreciate most about the podcast. Some emphasised the variety of guests and perspectives, as well as the critical approach to discussing technology, which are some of the podcast's pillars. These were highlighted by multiple listeners. For example, one listener said, "The critical approach to AI, the hosts, the feminist perspective."

The feminist take, which is at the heart of the podcast, comes up many times. Listeners mention enjoying episodes with high-profile feminists.

Others highlighted how the podcast helps them stay updated with new research and ideas in the field, which can also be tied to listeners enjoying the breadth of topics (including some that might seem unrelated to technology at first, like needlework). This feedback suggests that respondents appreciate both the intellectual depth of the discussions and the diversity of voices featured on the show. The emphasis on critical thinking, particularly from feminist and non-mainstream perspectives, is also a key strength:

"Discovering new research, learning new ways of seeing the technological evolution from a feminist perspective."

One respondent also noted the importance of having transcripts available, which shows that the strategy has an effect in increasing accessibility. This person mentions reading the podcast instead of listening to it due to not knowing English very well.

The conversational and less formal tone also makes an impact, with listeners noting that this characteristic makes the podcast engaging and fun and that it is easy to understand. Also, the *Hot Takes* format, in which the two hosts discuss a particular topic — often related to their own research — between themselves, has come up multiple times as a fan favourite. One highlighted its potential role in filling gaps where there is a lack of people to discuss these subjects:

"I really appreciate the addition of 'Hot Takes'. I imagine especially if I couldn't discuss some of these issues at work, I'd appreciate listening to your conversations."

Favourite Episodes. Listeners' favourite episodes provide insight into the kind of content that resonates with them. Episodes that delve into underexplored or politically charged topics, such as surveillance in Palestine and in China and militarised applications of technology, appear multiple times.

One pattern that emerges from the responses is that listeners might enjoy the episodes for the guest or for having a topic that either provides less explored information or perspective (e.g., discussing Buddhist ethics for a Western audience) or that includes discussions on real-life impacts (e.g. large language models).

"The episode with Pedro Oliviera [...] made me think about how many access technologies (voice recognition) can be repurposed for militarised ends. Touching on the ways that tech can operate across social justices and injustices is exciting."

Pedagogical Use of *The Good Robot* Podcast

The survey examined how students and educators might use *The Good Robot* as a resource in academic settings. The feedback shows that the podcast is used in different settings and levels, highlighting its potential as an educational tool.

Use by Educators. Fourteen respondents identified themselves as educators, teachers, or professors. Half of them report¹² using the podcast in their teaching or knowing someone who does, a clear recognition of its value as a pedagogical resource. These educators include different levels of educational settings: schools, undergraduates, and postgraduates.

One of the respondents reported having an episode listed in the recommended reading list. Others mention using episodes as starting points for class discussions on the intersectionality of technology, ethics, and society.

Use by Students. Ten respondents reported being students, seven of whom mentioned using *The Good Robot* in their classes. These uses include it being part of coursework or as a complement to the existing syllabus.

The podcast is also referenced by students¹³. In that setting, the podcast can serve as a discovery tool for information, serving as both a direct and indirect reference in academic work.

"[I] used many [episodes] as preparation, stimulation, and context for my course (AI Ethics)."

¹² Question: *What age group do you teach, and what episode did you use in your class? Do tell us which school it is taught at if you are happy to share that!*

¹³ Question: *Have you listened to or referenced *The Good Robot* in any of your classes? Which episodes?*



This artwork was inspired by the phrase "Our obsession with intelligence as an individual property residing in a single brain" from Blaise Agüera y Arcas's essay in "The Good Robot" book. *Accessibility caption: Illustration of a contemplative figure inside a brain.*

Steps Forward

The survey directly asked listeners for suggestions of topics and guests they would like to hear¹⁴, and for suggestions on how to reach more people¹⁵. The following key themes emerged from the responses:

- **Ethics of AI in practice:** Many listeners are keen to hear more discussions on the ethical implications of AI with practical implications and empirical cases, such as in sectors like healthcare or applications like surveillance.
- **Diversity and Expert Guests:** Several listeners highlighted the importance of including non-Western perspectives and diverse voices to enrich the conversations. Suggestions for specific experts indicate listeners want even more interdisciplinary voices and high-profile names in their fields.

¹⁴ Question: *Any specific topics or guests you'd like to hear on The Good Robot?*

¹⁵ Question: *How do you think The Good Robot podcast could reach a wider audience?*

- **Increased Social Media Presence:** Listeners called for an expanded social media presence with frequent engagement, especially on visual platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.
- **Outreach:** Listeners suggested leveraging collaborations with influencers and other content creators to increase visibility and engage directly with stakeholders who might be interested in the podcast, such as universities and local authorities.

These suggestions will be further explored in the following sections, starting with the topics and guests listeners would like to hear more. Later, their ideas for how to increase the podcast's reach will be analyzed.

Topics and Guests

Listeners expressed a strong interest in hearing more about ethical and societal issues surrounding technology. They suggested topics related to the ethics of artificial intelligence, surveillance, social AI, and grief bots ("AI and tech used to 'revive' deceased people," as one respondent described it), environmental impacts of generative AI, and equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in technological development.

The listeners' responses point to a preference for topics with more tangible, practical, implications—the most frequent category of suggestions. This also reflects the topics that had already emerged when listeners were asked about their favourite episodes.

"I like when podcasts are focused on a specific location/cultural context/empirical case. E.g., facial recognition surveillance in Palestine."

One listener noted enjoying when episodes also have a focus on solutions and pointing towards positive outcomes with technology:

"I really like when you intertwine uplifting tech solutions with problems that affect people, particularly women, and how it can work towards systemic social change towards greater 'good!'"

There was also a call for discussions on colonialism and perspectives from beyond the English-speaking world. These include both non-Western perspectives and having episodes with speakers of different languages with the aid of translation, such as tech feminist collectives from South America.

Potential Guests. In terms of guests, the specific individuals suggested by listeners include high-profile names in their fields and reflect some of the topics of preference listed previously. The list includes names that discuss matters of race and colonialism, such as Alondra Nelson and Ruha Benjamin. The list also reflects the desire for critical perspectives, with names such as Brian Merchant and Meredith Whittaker, as well as diversity in terms of geography and field of expertise.

New Modes of Engagement

An increased presence on social media was a frequent suggestion on how to expand the podcast's audience, also indicating that listeners want to increase their level of engagement with the podcast. Visually-driven platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok came up multiple times.

Multiple respondents requested frequent engagement through these other formats. The kinds of content listeners suggested for sharing on these social media sites also suggest a desire for a closer connection. These include teasers from episodes showing the hosts and guests and more personable information.

"More personal information like the Reel on how to become an AI ethicist, more authentic insights behind the 'theories' and concepts, also faster edits on TikTok, other camera angles (like zoom in/out), more 'real life' examples."

Some suggestions focused on engaging directly with specific groups of people. One of them is other podcasters and influencers for collaboration. Another idea is outreach to groups that might be interested in the *The Good Robot's* content, such as universities and local authorities who work with technology and innovation.

For the podcast itself, one user suggested increasing the frequency of episodes. Another mentioned including shorter episodes, such as 5-minute summary podcasts for students or busy professionals. Incorporating more voices was also mentioned, including those from the Global South or listener participation.

Podcasting Lessons from *The Good Robot*

Eleanor Drage



*Dr. Eleanor Drage (left) and Dr. Kerry McInerney, hosts of *The Good Robot* podcast, in a BBC radio studio. Accessibility caption: The two women appear smiling, looking at the camera, in front of a table with microphones in a grey room with textured walls.*

Some lessons in this report can be helpful for *The Good Robot* and other academic podcasters moving forward. The responses to the listener survey suggest that the podcast has been successfully supporting the dissemination of relevant information and fulfilling a role in supporting educators and students. This provides additional evidence for this format's effectiveness in disseminating scholarly content and fostering debate.

- **Curriculum Integration:** Educators could be encouraged to integrate episodes into syllabi, particularly in courses on ethics, technology studies, or gender studies.
- **Student Engagement:** Students report using the podcast as a reference and means to discover information. Promoting the podcast as a resource for student research and assignments could foster greater engagement.
- **Diversifying Voices and Perspectives:** *The Good Robot's* role in including diverse and critical perspectives on technology discussions has been highlighted by listeners. This also appears as something they crave more in the suggestions for topics to explore.
- **Practical Element:** Listener preferences and suggestions for topics on

Continuous Engagement

One of the advantages of podcasting over traditional academic communication formats is the direct connection it enables with the audience. This can be seen as a desirable characteristic in the feedback provided in the listener survey, with many of them requesting additional content on social media that brings them closer to the show. This report also shows the importance of regularity in this endeavour, with periods without new episodes having lower audience numbers. Thus, both in the podcast itself and the communication ecosystem surrounding it, continuous engagement is key.

- **Publish Frequently:** Months with fewer episodes published also had fewer podcast downloads overall. This is to be expected in new episodes, as the audience traditionally is concentrated on the few days after a release. However, this analysis shows that fresh content also impacts the attention directed towards older episodes.
- **Long Shelf Life:** For episodes individually, listenership might be concentrated on the first few days after release. Though, possibly due to engaging with topics in depth, older content continues to engage for a long time. To the point that most monthly downloads actually come from archive content.

Challenging Upkeep. The need for an ongoing effort to publish content might not align well with some academics' time constraints. Producing episodes takes a lot of time, and so does distributing them. As noted, not keeping up with those needs directly impacts listenership numbers.

Improving Distribution

Reaching audiences is a challenge for podcasters. *The Good Robot's* experience and the listener survey provide insights on strategies, such as leveraging social media and further exploring older episodes.

- **Social Media:** Respondents of the Listener Survey indicate wanting further engagement through different social media to have more content from the podcast to consume. They also suggest this as a way to reach more users.
- **Redistribute Content:** Since older episodes are the main source of audience for the podcast, it might make sense to include them in the distribution strategy more often. They can be reshared on social media, leveraging spikes of interest in their topics (e.g., news events, special dates). Another strategy could be to refer to older episodes in new recordings more often.
- **Increase International Profile:** Strategies adopted following suggestions from a consultancy reflected on a smaller concentration of *The Good Robot's* audience in the UK by increasing listenership in the US. Some of these include advertisement swaps with relevant podcasting partners; creating collaborative content with like-minded podcasters; and expanding media production through platforms like *The Good Robot Podcast's* newsletter.

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