

# EXPLORING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SAUDI PODCASTERS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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## *Abstract:*

*Podcasting as a platform that can transmit media content via audio files, exemplifies its creative character. Within the context of Saudi Arabia, it has become a new pathway for business opportunities for Saudi content creators and podcasters. Thus, the study aims to explore the challenges and opportunities for Saudi podcasters. The study used the qualitative method and recruited six podcasters. The results showed that content production, consistency, production quality, and marketing were the most pressing challenges for podcasters. However, podcasting has prospects of job creation and social relationships for the Saudi population, pivotal for developing business opportunities. The study found that the Saudi podcasters used two effective techniques of digital marketing to promote their podcasting such as capitalizing on YouTube as a global platform for wider access to their content and generating audience interaction through Electronic Word of Mouth on their social media accounts such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, LinkedIn.*

*Keywords: Podcasting; Saudi Arabia; Digital Marketing; Qualitative Analysis.*

## **1. Introduction**

Podcasts brought innovation in the media content which was initially available in its audio forms. Nowadays, millions of consumers have access to podcasts in both audio and visual forms. The concept originated from two words, iPod and broadcasts, starting from on-demand radio programs for individuals to listen to those broadcasts when they were aired through iPods (Cloud, 2022). Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feed was used to prepare and distribute those audio files online. These files are detailed audios which are then uploaded to streaming services from where users through their smartphones, digital music applications, computers, and multimedia players access them. The content producers usually make use of different conversational genres and storytelling methods to make the detailed content appealing. In the Middle East and Northern African region (MENA), podcasting has grabbed the attention and popularity among the different factions of the masses. For instance, the Clubhouse was downloaded 1.1 million times in the countries of the Middle East which was published in January 2021 which was 7 percent of global downloads (Yee and Fassihi, 2021). According to a survey conducted in the Middle East by Professor Everette Dennis at Northwestern University in Qatar (2020), a trend of decline was observed in screen time and most

people now prefer audio content. The advent of political podcasting led to massive growth in this culture in the entire global south where a massive hike of investment was observed by the new publishers in such podcasting and attracted young individuals as they were more active in consuming such content and data, forming new engagement trends and revenue streams (Jin, Segal and Carroccio, 2020). Despite all the popularity, new podcasts only 6% of the existing podcasts which were 770,000 (Newman and Gallo, 2019) due to several content distribution formats available for the wider public (Jham et al., 2008; Lundström and Lundström, 2021). There is a steady growth in the Arab countries in terms of engagement with podcasts. As reported by Podo, a Lebanon-based platform, it recorded 700% growth during 2019-2020 and the growth was on a month-on-month basis (Desai, 2021). It projected an increase in the trend of audio rather than videos in the future in the wake of Clubhouse launching voice-only social networking applications, and Twitter's launch of voice-based Twitter Space which will affect trends in the MENA region toward orality. For media companies, podcasts are a cost-effective way to produce content to reach wider segments of society. For brands, it is a useful tool for brand awareness as well as for the content creation that is within the reach of thousands of people easily with the help of marketing (Arab News, 2021). The study of Harharah et al. (2024) discussed the origin of podcasts in Saudi Arabia, in particular, the study explored the role and influence of Candid Podcast Cafe. The study delineated that the trend of podcasts is higher in the country where most of them are usually consumed through mobile phones or other audio devices. The most popular topics of the choices are environmental, social situational, or current affairs in Saudi Arabia which makes podcasting a thriving opportunity to make a profitable business in the Kingdom. Furthermore, the study determined that "The Mo Show Podcast" is the greatest English podcast in Saudi society. The findings of this study demonstrate how popular and widely used podcasting is in Saudi Arabia as a mode of communication and information sharing. The study highlights the rising market for podcasts in Saudi Arabia, as well as the audience's interests and habits, which can assist build company structures, marketing plans, and content in this field. The study by Al-Asmari (2023) stated that through podcasting, linguistic and geographical breaks down could be transcended. It revealed that podcasts are consumed by Generation Z as a modern media platform for audio-visual content and they have an ever-changing ecosystem that has been gaining prominence for advertisement and marketing (Al-Asmari, 2023). They are also an influential teaching strategy for the students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Chaves-Yuste and de-la Peña (2023) in their study, assessed the effectiveness of podcasts, available in audio form for dealing with social inequality. The study was conducted with the students of secondary education who had been studying to gain linguistic competence. The students were divided into two groups, control and experimental in a high school, situated in Madrid. The results of pre-and post-tests showed that listening to podcasts was beneficial for the students in gaining mastery over linguistic skills and improving their speaking and listening skills for the English language (Chaves-Yuste and de-la Peña, 2023). Podcasting was also found helpful in improving pronunciation in English for Saudi EFL students for Saudi EFL students (Al-Harbi, 2019).

There is a similar trend of podcasts in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) where they are on varying topics such as technology, music, culture, and current affairs, generally hosted by either expatriates or locals (Haque and Zdravkovska, 2023). A study examined the factors that led to an uprising in this culture in the country and

conducted in-depth interviews with stakeholders, and pioneers of this domain in the UAE. The results showed that the underlying factors were the urge to consume local content, prospects for community building, pursuit of interaction on different topics, and creativity and opportunities for monetization (Haque, and Zdravkovska, 2023). Moreover, Akkof and Lugo-Ocando (2023) asserted that podcasts played a vital role in increasing the political acumen and plurality in the Arab and MENA regions. Another study conducted in Saudi Arabia concluded that through recordings of their own, the EFL students were encouraged to improve their listening skills and speech. The students derived their motivation to unfold their knowledge base on different topics and domains and to launch their podcasts. They learned a great deal about using the vocabulary and structures in the practical world. Hence, it can be concluded that podcasts have marked their significance in Saudi society in different ways (Al-Harbi, 2019). A plethora of studies have affirmed the vitality of podcasting in Saudi Arab in different contexts (Al-Ahdal, 2020; Akkof and Lugo-Ocando, 2023; Khaled Mohammed Al-Mohawes, 2023; Harharah et al., 2024; Snoussi et al., 2024). However, to date, no study has investigated the challenges and prospects of podcasting in Saudi Arabia. To fill this gap, this study attempts to figure out the challenges faced by Saudi podcasters and highlight the opportunities for them in the digital world.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 The History of podcasting**

Podcasting has become more and more popular and consumed by different audiences or listeners globally (Sullivan, 2019; McCarty, 2005). Bottomley indicated, 'Is it merely an extension of radio or a distinct "new" medium of its own?' (2015, p.166). Similarly, Marcu said, 'A newer form of spreading the radio message is the podcast' (2019, p.80). On the other hand, some scholars believe that podcasting is different from radio in several viewpoints. For example, a podcast is designed for a particular audience that shares similar interests, podcast producers believe their broadcasts will have a longer lifespan due to the ability to make them downloadable or reused (Louderback, 2008). Additionally, based on the Geoghegan and Klass (2005) as far as podcast production and delivery are concerned, specialized tools are not required. It seems that consuming podcasting is a modern type of radio as well as the emerging smart TV based on TV; traditional media versus digital media. In other words, digitalization as podcasting could provide specific features for an audience such as transferring them from the schedule to the catalog (Bonet and Sellas, 2019; Sellas and Solà, 2019).

In the context of podcast engagement, Menduni defined it as a 'niche prosumer activity' (2007, p.16). Thus, podcasting is a sort of digital media that enables individuals to create and distribute audio content globally (Dhiman, 2023; Spinelli and Dann, 2019; McHugh, 2016; Cook, 2020). Bonini provides a thick descriptive definition of podcast as saying, 'a technology used to distribute, receive, and listen, on-demand, to sound content produced by traditional editors such as radio, publishing houses, journalists, and educational institutions . . . as well as content created by independent radio producers, artists, and radio amateurs' (2015, p. 21).

Indeed, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the term podcast alludes to the combination of "iPod" (Apple Computer portable music lecturer) and "casting" or "broadcast" (meaning represents transmitting (e.g., Marcu, 2019)). However,

podcasts do not supplant broadcasts; rather, they coexist within the expanding media market (Marcu, 2019). In 2003, the first podcasting platform was created by Dave Winer, Adam Curry, and Christopher Lydon (Dhiman, 2023). Aufderheide (2020) and his colleagues indicate that due to Apple included a Podcast Directory in its iTunes 4.9 program in 2005, the year that marked the beginning of the widespread popularity of podcasting; Users were able to have access to the company's products and services were.

Revising the literature reviews of podcasting, there have been three main spotlights of research into podcasting: as an audience's studies, specifically, the podcasts via using the uses and gratifications of (Perks and Turner, 2019; Perks, Turner and Tollison, 2019b; Alshibani, 2022), for podcasters and digital marketing (Lögberg and Wahlqvist, 2020; Resilient, Kurtis and Ohlau, 2022) and in terms of education with podcasting (Shahid and Ali, 2017; Alzabidi, 2022).

## **2.2 Podcasting in Saudi Society**

Interestingly, the podcasting industry covered MENA countries in 2018 (Akkof and Lugo-Ocando, 2023) while it emerged in Saudi Arabia quite early (Alshibani, 2022). For example, in 2008, the first Saudi podcasts launched as Fakhri noted that 'the "Saudi Gamer" podcast and "Kshkool"'. Those are among the oldest shows in Saudi Arabia. Both shows focus on the video game industry (2019a, p. 2). Move to Kuwait, Sciware emerged in 2009 by Mohamed Qasem, from the United Arab Emirate (UAE), in 2014, Root Quest was created to focus on the area of gaming and video games by Saeed al-Shamsi who was positively enthused by the Saudi Gamer As he noted that 'I used to listen to Saudi gaming podcasts like "Saudi Gamer"' (Fakhri 2019b, p. 4). In the same year, Saudi podcasting, Shuffle Cast was created by Khalid al-Araifi based on his experience with the podcasting industry in US, as he said, 'I've been listening to English podcasts since 2005 when I was studying in the United States' (Fakhri, 2019a, p. 2). Indeed, the Shuffle Cast podcast was also concentrated on games in addition to other lifestyle issues such as films, technology, and television series. Indeed, those earlier Saudi podcasters inspired their podcasting from their living for studying abroad in the US.

In 2015, podcasting in Saudi Arabia was extremely rising with several podcasts on diverse topics; it seems the peak of Saudi podcasting was produced between 2015-2016. For instance, from the sport, specifically football, Alkora M3na (Football with US) was crafted by Abdullah Al-Rashed and Abdul Aziz al-Muaygil; it highlights the sport's business and marketing components on a global scale, and it has garnered a large following.

Unexpectedly, the podcasting of Mustdf (Nerdsters) by Ammar al-Sabban explored several themes such as science and technology, sex harassment, and movies. Move on to the more engaging podcasting House Zofi by Fowzi Mahsoon, who chose to share her chats about gaming, manga, and anime, in the manner of a brief video posted on Snapchat (Fakhri 2019a).

With more popular Saudi podcasting, "Fnjan" (A Cup) was created by Abdulrahman Abumalih who started his podcasting in 2015 from his home, car to be a large successful company of podcasting in the MENA countries Thmanyah (Eight) (Alshibani, 2022) that includes several Saudi podcasting that discussing different topics and presenting in types of podcasts (solo, conversation, and hybrid).

From this context, Salim Basheer, an Omani broadcaster who was inspired by "Fnjan" (A Cup) to commence his podcast Qafeer as Fakhri (2019) indicated, 'I

discovered podcasting after I listened to the Saudi show "Fnjan" [A Cup] in 2015' (2019a, p.2). In addition, in the last of 2017, Thmanyah podcasting "Fnjan or a Cup" is the first Saudi podcast broadcast on Saudi Airlines. In 2017, also, Ghaima (A Cloud), another Saudi podcast was founded by two females Shahad al-Tukhiam and Noura al-Shubaily to represent psychological concerns through their podcast. Ubjura also became one of the famous Saudi podcasts launched in 2017 by the Saudi female podcaster, Lubna Alkhamis, Ubjura fruitfully podcasted to more than 50 million passengers of United Arab Emerita Airlines (Abd Elzaher, 2018) to be the first Saudi podcast broadcast on this Airlines. In the last of 2017, both Saudi podcasting "Fnjan or a Cup" and Ubjura earned awards in social media around the MENA countries (Fakih, 2019a). In 2018, the Similarly, Thmanyah became the first investigative journalism project, Mustdfir became the first Arabic podcast, and both Mohtwize and Maix became some of the largest companies in podcast production. In 2023, according to the recent financial report of Radio Thmanyah 5.8 million Saudi Rial of the Thmanyah productions, and around 56% of the audience were outside of Saudi Arabia. In essence, the podcasting industry in Saudi Arabia has constantly grown in comparison to other regions of the Arab world or MENA countries. There are only two studies that highlight podcasting in Saudi Arabia. For example, a quantitative study by Alshibani (2022) looks at the reasons for the Saudi audience's exposure to the podcast and measures their satisfaction with it, analyzing its effects and identifying the variables that affect the choice of content. The study conducted a questionnaire that consisted of 220 podcast listeners in Saudi Arabia. The study results showed that the most common reasons people use podcasts are to learn from them, to follow events and educational series, to subscribe to national podcasts, to develop their ability to think and innovate and to comment on and engage with the topics. The study found that the less common reasons include hobbies and leisure, regular internet use, and the desire to feel good about themselves to fight feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Generally, most Saudi studies examined podcasting and the EFL (Al-Ahdal, 2020; Alkhelaiwi, 2023), while very few literatures regarding the podcasting of Saudi Arabia presents either Saudi audience's uses and gratification or international podcasts as Podcast Cafe's role and impact on Saudi audiences. However, no studies examined the Saudi podcasters either their challenges or opportunities. The current study fills this gap by managing qualitative thematic analysis (TA) to study the main challenges and opportunities for Saudi podcasters in the digital age, and to study how podcasters can be used digital platforms.

The findings of the present study will add to the academic literature about Saudi podcasters, challenges, and prospects for them in starting their podcasts in the digital age. Therefore, this study contributes to the corpus of existing literature about podcasting challenges and prospects in the Saudi region.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Study design and setting**

The current study uses the qualitative method approach that assists the researcher in acquiring an in-depth understanding of participants' thoughts and interactions. As Baker and Edwards indicated, 'with qualitative approaches that attempt to generate a subjective understanding of how and why people perceive, reflect, role-take, interpret, and interact' (2012, p.4). Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) suggested that the interview procedure is the most often utilized technique for

gathering data in qualitative research. Thus, this study used semi-structured interviews with Saudi podcasters to reveal the experiences of podcasters. Additionally, the interviews enabled the researcher to comprehend the interviewee's experiences with clarity (Johnson and Christensen, 2008).

### 3.2 Study sampling

Because of the limitation of interviewing some podcasters who live in different places in Saudi Arabia, the present study overcomes this limitation by applying online interviews with five Saudi podcasters via Zoom. These podcasts used in the present study were randomly selected from the category of the podcast platform. Table 1 below delivers the list of podcasters' names (creators), podcasters' gender, podcasting name, years active, and logos, and highlights the independent/dependent podcasting for each.

**Table 1. Demographic information**

#	Creators	Gender	Podcasting Name	Years Active	Podcasting Logo	Independent/Dependent
1	Maram	Female	Shaihabak	2019		Independent
2	Khalid Moussaid	Male	Alaa Alraf	2020		Independent
3	Reema Aljerraid	Female	Kaalshams	2020		Dependent
4	Anas bin Hussein	Male	PaperSamwich	2016		Dependent
5	Amani Aljohani	Female	Sulwan	2021		Independent

### 3.3 Study tool and procedure

Semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interviews began in late March 2024 and were completed in April 2024. Interviews were between 50 to 80 minutes with each podcaster, and they were followed by thematic analysis (TA). Braun and Clarke (2006) state that TA adhered to the stages of thematic analysis, which included acquainting oneself with the data, creating preliminary codes, looking for themes, evaluating themes, clarifying and labeling themes, and creating the report. Regarding interrater reliability, Lombard and others (2002) indicated that 'the extent to which independent coders evaluate a characteristic of a message or artifact and reach the same conclusion' (2002, p. 589). Therefore, an interrater reliability test was performed on the data to guarantee the accuracy of the results. The topics that emerged from the interviews were revised by the two Saudi coders who checked intercoder reliability. Coders used the coding equipment for the preliminary intercoder reliability test. Intercoder dependability was determined when the minimum Krippendorff's Alpha was 0.83, the highest value was 1.00, and the standard deviation was 0.92. Thus, it determined that there was an adequate degree

of consistency and agreement among the many coders, and it was suitable to proceed with the variable's coding for the challenges and opportunities of podcasters.

### **3.4 Ethical consideration**

Before conducting the study, the author obtained the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Media and Communication at the University of King Abdulaziz, Saudi Arabia on 21/3/2024. Each of the respondents received information either in writing or verbal agreement directly once the interview began.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

From the thematic analysis of the in-depth interviews, challenges and opportunities that facing Saudi podcasters were divided into two main themes. Four sub-themes were recognized under the theme of challenges namely, Content, Production Quality, Consistency, and Marketing. While, the opportunities covered two sub-themes were creating social relationships, and providing job opportunities based on the interview responses of Saudi podcasters.

### **4.1 Challenges Faced by Saudi Podcasters**

#### **4.1.1 Content**

During the interview, most participants indicated that creating content as a podcaster is one of the difficult basics that faced both before creating the podcast and after two different perspectives. For example, one participant, Amani indicated;

I remember when I was preparing for the first episode of my podcast, I was afraid to provide words that did not refer to references, I was extensively concerned about both the religious and scientific references as a basic besides the ethical reference. I think these references are so important when I want to say any sentence, or when anyone asks me why did you say this sentence. I spent sometimes three or four months just reading books or articles about the topic of the podcast to make me strong when I talk in my podcast based on the references (Amani, female). This female participant describes her difficulty with creating the content of podcasters based on the time consuming to be more confident.

However, one of the participants faced difficulty with creating content because of the chosen topic. As Khalid said,

When I finish the manuscript of my episode, I feel less confident with the content quality, I think my words are very weak, particularly with the last episode of my podcast where I received many criticisms from audiences who told me the content was negative. I said, yes because the topic portrays a man who did not get a job, and felt negative, it is normally to be negatively, at that time I thought about the topic that should I select for the podcast, it would vary in topics, it doesn't focus on one area such as self- esteems. Thus, choosing different topics is hard to deal with, but it is important to have very good content.

As a result, most Saudi podcasters may consider it time-consuming. The topic selection was also cited as a major challenge for creating content. However, they could overcome this risk by improving their confidence and having verities of topics.

#### **4.1.2 Production Quality**

Participants indicate that production quality means main elements such as; sound quality, and editing. The majority of the Saudi participants indicated that producing the production in high quality needs have good experience in these elements because poor production is based on less experience in these elements, especially in the beginning. For example, one participant noted,

Explicitly, the first problem is the technical problem, I was learning myself through watching on YouTube many videos about how to deal with editing, and I benefited much more from YouTube. I learn how to remove the white noise from the sound. I mean, I learned from it the basics. Even though I was not be the professional level (Reema, female).

Similarly, Khalid positively said,

I benefit from learning the skills of podcast Alaa Alraf in the area of sound quality. Today, I deal with three sound programs of the CC channel.

On the other hand, one participant had another opinion regarding the production quality. Amani (female) notes,

Usually, my brother helps me to record my podcast because I want it in high quality, I record in the studio with Mr. Adel Barabaa who works in the atomically voice message in Al -Rajhi Bank, he is a professional in this area. I did the recording with Mr. Adel Barabaa and his brother who also is a voice engineer, I paid for them for the tenth episode, to help me record my podcast.

Predictably, the Saudi podcasters faced challenges in editing or sound quality to produce the production in high quality, but they overcame this risk by self-learning or paying specialists in editing and sound quality. A recent study by Dhiman (2023) might corroborate this finding that production quality (editing and sound quality) is one of the most common risks that podcasters face.

#### **4.2 Consistency**

This term means that people as podcasters can create their production consistently based on their schedule, monthly or weekly based on the system of podcasting. Interestingly, all podcasters faced this challenge mainly. The result revealed that all Saudi participants asserted that consistency in providing their podcasts was a large encounter for them. Maram indicates:

The large challenge in creating a podcast is consistency, I see it as the key to providing your podcast consistently. From time to time, maybe I stopped providing my podcast, especially in this March, when I would be completing five years with my podcast. Sometimes, after this long period, I need some modification, at least finding a sponsor or earning money. I mean, this point, sometimes drives me to have depression because I would like to earn little money for providing this podcasting effort, and time. However, finally, I back to my first point, I see that consistency is a large challenge for any podcaster.

In addition, one of the participants noted,

Today the consistency, the person could be available for one year, after this year, everything with the podcasting is ok, but I don't have enough time to provide more podcasting. Sometimes, I reduce the number of episodes, or I remarket just to provide something, I surely believe the real challenge, specifically is consistency (Khalid, male).

As can be seen, all participants consider consistency as one of the large challenges for them without any financial repercussions. Perhaps, podcasters who have a good salary, do not worry about earning money from providing podcasting. This result seems to be consistent with a study by Dhiman (2023) that suggested overcoming this challenge by saying, 'To ensure high consistency, podcasters can create a production schedule, use templates for each episode, and invest in tools that automate certain parts of the production process' (2023, p.9).



### **4.3 Marketing**

Marketing is an enormous issue that is based on the style of podcasting, which may appear as a category or classification, does not provide the list of most viewing, most listening as well as other digital platforms such as YouTube. That means audiences should select what they want to listen to from the list of categories such as; Society and Culture, Sleep, Top Chart, Podcasts in English, Education, Language Learning, fiction, ...etc). One of the participants explained this point by saying,

This could be a feature of the podcast, if you know about the algorithms method until now the podcast does not have algorithms. I mean, until now, podcasting has worked by categories or by classifications. You access my podcast via my journal. I should say the podcast platform is far more than others, the opposite of YouTube and TikTok (Maram, female).

Further, podcasters face marketing issues, especially those who are independent Amani describes her method of marketing,

As you know if you would like to provide your podcast, you have to pay for the platform or host, I pay for the host to provide my podcast in Google podcast and Apple podcast, but I did not earn money from my podcast, I have to pay for it, also, we have several hosts such as Mohtwize, many podcasters use this host; it is a real challenge (Amani, female).

Additionally, one participant noted,

The podcast as you know is free, and the most important thing to market my podcast is an ad. The whole world depends on the advertisements that are available on the episodes, or the homepage. But I try to do something new regarding the marketing issue before the COVID-19 issue in the last of 2019, specifically. I did an application that assumed to collect the largest number of attractive podcasters with little money for subscriptions. However, I did not complete that project because of COVID-19, then there were several applications emerged from others who did not need any money; it is free because these applications were based on advertisements and sponsors. After seven or eight years, PaperSamwich becomes a digital platform or host that can allow many podcasters (Anas, male).

However, others think that marketing could be under the large company to overcome this challenge. For example, Khalid suggests,

Marketing is an issue for podcasters, and most of them prefer to be under the company or host to overcome this issue. However, the company should benefit from podcasters who have a large number of listeners as 1,000,000; that means, the company prefers to get a strong podcaster to avoid being at risk. It is a kind of beneficial relationship, I get the benefit, and the company gets it also. I create the podcast with a person who has social relationships, can make a conversational podcasting, and can benefit from his audiences, and his content. However, the company became a host for beginner podcasters to improve them as Mohtwize did. The company invested around 5 million SR in advertisements, and it has around 70 podcasters, who have met monthly together as a type of podcaster community; each one of the podcasters offers their relationships to pay for their podcast. For example, if the client selected five episodes or ten with the contract, you get a percentage, and the host gets a percentage.

As can be seen, the marketing as a key challenge covered different thoughts based on the participants above, it seems based on the podcaster type (independent/dependent). Most independent podcasters face this issue (Amani),

and others may know that marketing is an issue for podcasters, but they solve this constraint through their host who becomes their sponsor to provide advertisements (Reema, and Anas). The results are aligned with the previous studies, which revealed that marketing is one of the largest issues for podcasters (Sullivan, 2019; Välimäki, 2018).

#### **4.5 Opportunities for Saudi Podcasters**

Through interviews with Saudi podcasters, the result found that even though podcasters faced some challenges as noted above, they might benefit from their podcasts as follows;

##### **4.5.1 Creating Social Relationship**

Having social relationships was one of the biggest benefits of Saudi podcasters, as one of the participants indicated,

You cannot imagine what happened to me yesterday when I was in Jeddah, I went to a Cafe, and I saw nine guys who knew me, and they asked me are you the podcaster of PaperSamwich, then they invited me to their food, they paid for me, then, we hang out in Taif city, and we talk together about my podcast experience. I feel Oh I am famous because of my podcast, yes, I have strong relationships because of PaperSamwich (Anas, male).

Similarly, Reema said, I see the most benefit from creating a podcast is the social relationship. Most people know who I am, Reema, that girl who created a podcast, they know how I think, and they know what is it my opinion regarding some topics that I like to talk about. It is unbelievable (Reema, female).

As it can be seen, being a podcaster perhaps allows for creating different social relationships, having friends, or being famous.

##### **4.5.2 Providing Job Opportunities**

The findings showed that podcasting has the potential for job creation. Some participants believed that being a podcaster could be a good job as Khalid suggested,

Being a podcaster can be a job if the podcaster mainly does not have any job, and he receives an offer to be a podcaster by the largest company or host as Maix or Thmanyah. They consider this a job opportunity full-time (Khalid, male).

On the other hand, other participants think, that even podcasters provide job opportunities for them, but it will be part-time, especially for those who are independent (solo); they have to pay to provide the podcast, and they do not have a large host to market for them. As Reema said,

I can say as a podcaster, I earn around 1% or 3% from advertisements; it is little. Sometimes, I wait between 6 and 7 months to get an advertisement. I mean, being a podcaster could be a job opportunity part-time, except, for working under the largest host Mohtwize (Reema, female).

Thus, podcasts could provide job opportunities either part-time or full-time based on working under the host (dependent), or solo (independent).

#### **4.2 Saudi podcasters using social media as an effective marketing strategy**

##### **4.2.1 From Audio Podcasts to Audio-Visual via YouTube**

Saudi participants used YouTube, specifically as one of the key marketing strategies. For example, recently, most podcasters have changed their podcasts from audio to audio-visual podcasts. It was necessary to enhance marketing and earn money through their podcasts based on views, subscribers, or advertisements on YouTube. Anas indicates,

For the first time, I rejected making my podcast on YouTube, but today, I say YouTube is essential because it is part of creating relationships with audiences to know your personality. Spreading through YouTube has become a more and more effective method to raise your viewing, and subscribe to podcasts even if your podcast is only audio on YouTube, the reaction, facial expression, actions...etc. all of these are factors that help to spread the podcast (Anas, male).

In this scenario, Adler Berg indicates that "paid subscription platforms might effectively help podcasters to be discovered and to increase their listener's engagements (2022, p.6)."

#### ***4.2.2 Interactive with Audience via the E-Word of Mouth (EWOM)***

Saudi participants contact, and interact with the audience via EWOM on the same homepage of their podcast, or they use social media as a marketing strategy to market themselves. For example, they create accounts for their podcasts on Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, and LinkedIn. They show a part of their podcast to contact their audience through EWOM. Perhaps, this is an effective marketing technique to make their podcasters spread among audiences. The result showed that Instagram was the most effective marketing technique for the Saudi participants. One participant expressed that

"When I visited Tukey for traveling, I kept contact with my audiences by using Snapchat, it seemed a window for them to see what my life in traveling be. It was amazing to share with my audiences the details that can provide my identity as well as in my podcast. Sometimes, I just provide my podcast with some meditation in attractive areas in Turkey. I received positive feedback on my traveling. I advise people as podcasters to share how they're traveling by using Snapshot, it is very easy to use (Maram, female).

In Saudi Arabia, social media is a major source of marketing where podcasters can advertise their content as well as use their podcasts for marketing products and services as a two-way path.

## **5. Conclusions**

This qualitative study provides insights into the challenges and opportunities for Saudi podcasters in the digital age. The results showed that on the one hand, Saudi podcasters faced several challenges such as quality content, production quality, consistency, and marketing. On the other hand, Saudi podcasters benefit from being podcasters by creating social relationships and getting job opportunities. Furthermore, Saudi podcasters employ social media as a marketing strategy, both to transition from audio podcasts to audio-visual via YouTube and to engage with their audiences via EWOM. Despite, this study being the first to figure out the challenges and opportunism for Saudi podcasters, it has certain limitations. The sample size of the interviews was small. It was difficult to contact the podcasters (creators) who consider the largest, and most popular podcaster as Thmanyah or Ubjura in Saudi Arabia. Future studies can conduct surveys with greater sample sizes and or conduct mixed-method studies.

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