

## Brazil's pioneering role in podcasting research

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*Brasil, pionero en la investigación sobre podcasting*

Marcelo Kischinhevsky

At one of the social moments at the 7th Radio and Sound Conference, organised by the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) in Barcelona, Spain, in 2023, American colleague Kim Fox, from the American University in Cairo, Egypt, unpretentiously commented that she had been surprised by the volume and quality of Brazilian research into podcasting. I added that we had pioneering studies on the subject, published since 2005. And she replied something like: 'what a shame we don't have access to those texts'.

On the way back from the event, I spoke to the co-editor of **Radiofonias**, Debora Cristina Lopez, about the possibility of doing something about it.

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### Sobre o autor

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We soon came up with the idea of inviting the people who wrote these first articles on podcasting to translate their original texts into English, so that we could circulate this material internationally, precisely in 2024, when the neologism ‘podcasting’ – a combination of iPod, a reference to the late Apple multimedia player, and broadcasting – turns two decades old (KISCHINHEVSKY, 2024).

We invited Alê Primo (UFRGS), André Lemos (UFBA) and Gisela Castro (ESPM-SP), who promptly volunteered to take care of the translations and also proofread the texts, occasionally adding postscripts.

One of the authors responsible for spreading the concept of cyberculture in Brazil, André Lemos was one of the first to write about podcasting in the country, in July 2005, in an electronic magazine published by his research group at the Federal University of Bahia. In his text, Lemos hailed the novelty for representing a supposed ‘liberation from the transmitter pole’, recognising podcasting as a space for internet users to express themselves without the mediation of traditional radio stations. Although he prioritised the possibilities brought about by listener-generated content, the author highlighted the obvious complementarity between the forms of broadcasting, anticipating that podcasting would not replace radio on the airwaves.

In the first article on the subject to be published in Portuguese in a peer-reviewed reference journal – and the second in the world in the area of Communication, according to a survey carried out on the Capes Periodicals Portal – Gisela Castro highlighted the instance of the consumption of sound files, which were lost after being broadcast on airwaves, characterised until then by their elusiveness. For the author, the possibility of on-demand listening addressed this characteristic limitation of AM/FM radio. More than that, she said, podcasting could have a pedagogical character, guiding listeners to consume content sanctioned by the recording industry, at a time of struggle over copyright and audio sharing via the internet on services such as Napster.

Although it was linked at the time to the perspective of cyberculture, Castro also stressed the appropriation of this form of sound content distribution by large companies interested in establishing direct relations with their audiences (both

with potential consumers and in organisational communication actions).

A few weeks later, another article was published in a leading scientific journal, signed by Alex (now Alê) Primo. The text pointed out the changes introduced by podcasting in the spheres of production, distribution, reception and the new interactions it established, stressing that broadcasting on this new medium remained, at the time, the privilege of the more favoured classes – after all, it required equipment such as a computer with internet access and a multimedia kit, including a microphone and headphones, and skills in operating specific software for editing and distributing audio in digital formats. Primo was perhaps the first person to emphasise, based on Bolter's (2001) reflections, that podcasting was a remediation of radio.

Primo uses the discussion of Sarah Thornton (1996), who studied clubber culture, to argue that the media system of the time already went beyond the broadcasting/narrowcasting dichotomy. Thornton proposed three media levels: in addition to the mass media, which included broadcasting, there were the micro-media and the niche media. Micromedia would be a set of low-circulation media aimed at small audiences, including flyers, fanzines, free radio, etc. Niche media, on the other hand, would target very specific audiences, but with greater reach and sophistication, such as segmented magazines and web radio. Niche media work to produce content for a well-segmented target audience, whose profile is assessed through constant marketing research. For Primo, the production conditions of niche media are more similar to those of mass media, which are often exploited by large business groups.

Primo recognised that, at the time, podcasting could be understood as both niche media and micromedia, but he chose to focus the discussion in his article on the latter category, showing interest in the possibility of ordinary people expressing themselves. But he didn't romanticise this autonomy, realising that most podcasts were influenced by the mainstream media of the time. He also anticipated the problems that would arise years later, with the appropriation of podcasts by far-right digital influencers, anti-vaccine deniers and other actors dedicated to profiting from disinformation.

It is an extremely rich collection of texts, which anticipate issues that would arise in the following decades and still guide podcasting research today. For this reason, we have chosen to publish them in their English versions together with the texts in Portuguese, with the appropriate authorisation and credits from the journals in which they were originally published. In doing so, we hope to contribute to the international projection of Brazilian studies dedicated to the practice of podcasting, as well as offering a guide to pioneering works to the new generation of people interested in researching the subject.

The issue also features the articles “Mídia sonora e ficção – uma análise da audiossérie Sofia”, by Diogo Barbosa, Thelma Panerai and Raldianny Pereira, which finds parallels between today’s sound fiction in podcasting and the radio drama of the days of the radio show, between the 1930s and 1950s, and “O rádio militante de Walter Benjamin”, by Cida Golin and Claudio Celso Alano da Cruz, which systematises key elements of radio communication outlined by the German researcher between 1929 and 1934. It also includes Julia Ourique’s review of *A indústria fonográfica digital: Formação, lógica e tendências* (Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Mauad X, 2023), Leonardo De Marchi’s second (unmissable) book.

This issue marks my farewell as co-editor of **Radiofonias**, an activity I took on in 2020 at the invitation of my heart sister, Debora Cristina Lopez. I’m very proud of the work that went into transforming the former **Rádio-Leituras** into **Radiofonias – Journal of Audio Media Studies**, a publication co-edited by the Postgraduate Programme in Communication at the Federal University of Ouro Preto (UFOP) and the Radio and TV Centre at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), which has established itself as an international reference in our field of research. It’s been four and a half years of intense learning and partnership, but the time has come to focus on other work fronts, such as setting up Radio UFRJ FM, which I currently have the honour (and responsibility) of directing.

I would like to thank Debora Cristina Lopez for the opportunity and all the people we had the chance to work with, especially Lena Benzecry, our former co-editor and responsible for the journal’s visual identity, and our editorial assistants

during the period: Camille Vizzoni, Maíta Carvalho, Yasmin Montebello, Ana Beatriz Pinheiro, Lara Machado and Emanuelle Oliveira.

Have a good read!

## References

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