

**Day 2, April 22, 2017: Morning Session – 11:00am-12:15pm**

***The Podcast Boom: Prospects for News Organizations***

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**Chair: Joshua Benton, Director, Nieman Lab at Harvard**

- **Eric Nuzum**, Senior Vice President of Original Content Development, **Audible**
  - **Nicholas Quah**, Founder, **Hot Pod**
  - **Andrew Silenzi**, Host/Producer, **Why Oh Why**
  - **Lisa Tobin**, Executive Producer for Audio, **The New York Times**
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**Lisa Tobin:** My voice is a reflection of launching a daily news show two months ago. So, it actually did not exist yesterday, so I'm doing better, but it may give out a couple of times. As Josh eluded to, the audio efforts at The New York Times are quite new. I came in about seven months ago, and The Times had a truly open-ended question that it had not yet begun to answer. And that was, what should The New York Times sound like. And The Times had seen the recent success of the Modern Love podcast, which was a partnership with WBUR, where I had previously worked. And they had done some research, and they believed that audio was a good opportunity for The Times. But what that meant and what form that should take was totally, totally open-ended.

And so, one of the first things that we started doing when I arrived was thinking about what The Times can do that no one else can in this space. And for me, I thought at first it would be narrative series. Because as I was meeting with all the different desks and the sections at The Times, with foreign, with national, with enterprise, with investigations, with the magazine, I could not believe the number of incredible stories inside this organization. And having spent more than ten years in public radio, generally speaking, you have sort of an inverse situation to that, which is, you have a building that's filled with talented audio producers and editors, but you're always looking for great stories and great talent to tell the stories.

And this felt like being a kid in a candy store as we were going around with all these meetings. You have 1,100 of the best journalists in the world doing the best journalism. And the challenge is instead to build an infrastructure to tell great stories, to tell those great stories in audio to support those great journalists. And once you've done that, you can pretty much take your pick of the biggest and the best stories out there. And so, narrative felt like it allowed — to me, it felt like that that's the thing, it lets you get the closest to doing justice to those types of stories. You know, sort of like documentary and video. That's a form that makes sense to The Times in the sort of intuitive way that it's doing justice to the level of quality going into the journalism.

But the problem is that there's too much journalism at The Times and narrative series are incredibly labor intensive. They take months to make. And incredible stories are being told and world-class journalism is being done every day inside of The Times. And so, how do you tap into that? And maybe Daily News seems like the obvious answer to you, but it didn't seem like it to me, because having worked in a daily newsroom, there's a reason no one had launched a daily news show on demand yet. And that is that it takes a ton of resources and infrastructure, which we didn't have. We were the opposite. We were a startup. And too, because daily news does solve the volume problem—the tons and tons of great journalism—but it doesn't typically, by necessity of making a show every day, solve the quality problem.

And so, the breakthrough for us in the form of The Daily was a new form of daily news, which we are calling narrative news. It's daily news that doesn't just capture the volume of journalism being done, but also the quality, or at least we like to think so. One or two stories a day told by journalists in a narrative form.

And that is what we aspired to and what we tried — what we believe we launched in February with The Daily. On February 1<sup>st</sup>, we launched The Daily, 20 minutes a day, 5 days a week, hosted by Michael Barbaro, and powered by New York Times journalism.

And I'm going to, for the rest of this presentation, show you a few examples of what it means to be powered by New York Times journalism on a daily news show. I think they show, these examples, not just why The New York Times newsroom turns out to be uniquely positioned to make the show, which it does, but even more importantly, why the show is actually now showing us that it's uniquely positioned to transform the way that people are now interacting with The Times.

And so I'm going to start. This is an example of a recent story. Maggie Haberman and Glenn Thrush, our White House reporters, recently had a sit-down interview in the Oval Office with President Trump. And in principle, the interview was supposed to be about infrastructure. It went in a lot of different directions. But if you look at this, this is a pretty straight-ahead account, written by Maggie and Glenn, of the interview. It shows that they do have great access. That comes through. But I think mostly I'm expected to sort of just understand that as a reader. Compare that to Maggie and Glenn coming onto The Daily the following morning to talk about that.

And they had brought in—to their great credit—they had brought a recorder into the Oval Office specifically for The Daily, and they had recorded the interview. Glenn Thrush then sat down with Michael and talked about the experience. And it was woven through with audio of the interview as it happened. And I'll just play a very short sample of that. Susan Rice was in the news at the time, and so this refers to some claims that President Trump was making about that.

*[Podcast plays.]*

*Glenn Thrush: We went in, Maggie and I, for what was billed as a wide ranging discussion of his infrastructure plans, and boom—*

*President Trump: I think the Susan Rice thing is a massive story.*

*Glenn Thrush: —we couldn't get a word out before he started hitting on Susan Rice.*

*President Trump: I think it's a massive, massive story all over the world. I mean, other than The New York Times.*

*Maggie Haberman: We've written about it twice.*

*President Trump: Now?*

*Maggie Haberman: We've written about it twice.*

*President Trump: Yes, a bigger story than you know, I think.*

*Maggie Haberman: You mean there's more information that we're not aware of.*

*President Trump: I think it's going to be the biggest story.*

*Maggie Haberman: Hmm. Why? What else?*

*President Trump: I mean, what do you think? Take a look at what's happening. I mean, first of all, her performance was horrible yesterday on television even though she was interviewed by Hillary Clinton's PR person, Andrea Mitchell. Of course, you've been accused of that also, so, you know....*

*Maggie Haberman: Mostly by you though.*

*President Trump: Huh? No, no, no. Mostly by a lot of people.*

*[Podcast stops.]*

So, I think that's just an incredibly different relationship to that interview. The access could not be clearer. The interplay. These reporters clearly have a relationship with the president. The authority. You think you might have an idea of what it's like to interview the president. For me, at least, hearing this, no, I didn't—I didn't know it was this. I didn't know that they were fact checking in real time. They were interrupting him. They were holding him accountable for the things he was saying as he said them. That's, you know, I don't think a short clip can fully demonstrate that, but it gives you a sense of that. And also, there's just some serious transparency behind that. A sense of, I know what it looks like for two reporters to go into the White House and interview the president. I have a very clear sense of what they were up to. And the feedback on that interview was that it gave people a whole new level of respect for these reporters, who President Trump,

you know, every day is going on Twitter to directly attack these two people. And then, I think it really challenges your understanding of what that relationship is to hear that.

The next example I'm going to give is of a reporter, Rukmini Callimachi, who's sort of the leading terrorism expert, terrorism reporter. She reports on ISIS. This is a recent story on the ground in Mosul. And this is.... I wanted to show this, because if you read this story, you get a sense.... It does a great job of reporting what's going on. It gives you a lot of information that you need, a lot of important information and context. It does not give you the sense that Rukmini is there. It does not give you the sense that Rukmini is sort of one of a kind in her understanding of her beat. It does not give you an on-the-ground sense of what she's up to, or even, honestly, that she's there at all. Erbil is in the dateline, but I think most readers, that doesn't mean much to them. Just because it says you're there doesn't really mean to most readers that they are, in fact, there or give them an understanding of what that would mean to be there. This is Rukmini talking on The Daily about the idea that.... I'm just trying to think of how best to set this up. This is her talking about there were some civilian casualties, and she's talking about how the Obama administration is seen by many to not have been forceful enough, not to have acted swiftly enough.

*[Podcast plays.]*

*Rukmini: One example that I think really brings us to the fore is the story of Junaid Hussain.*

*Reporter: Junaid Hussain is a 21-year-old hacker turned Jihadist from Birmingham, who runs the ISIS information and recruitment arm from Syria.*

*Rukmini: He's linked to numerous attacks in America and beyond.*

*Reporter: Known as Abba Hussain, he has been identified by the United States Secret Service as a top five target for elimination by drone strike.*

*Rukmini: According to the reporting of our colleagues, the coalition knew where he was in Raqqa and wasn't able to take the hit for week after week, because he kept on going outside in the company of his elementary-school-aged stepson.*

*Michael Barbaro: So strategy works.*

*Rukmini: Right. So, he knew. He knew that if the child is with him the coalition won't take the hit. And they finally got him on the one day he went outside without the kid.*

*Michael Barbaro: What you just said about how ISIS believes that the US won't attack a fighter, even a fighter who really values and wants to take out—*

*Rukmini: Yes.*

*Michael Barbaro: —if a child is present.*

*Rukmini: Right.*

*Michael Barbaro: It makes me wonder if this most recent attack which killed so many civilians—*

*Rukmini: Yeah.*

*Michael Barbaro: —will challenge that assumption.*

*Rukmini: Mm. Right.*

*Michael Barbaro: And challenge it in a way that might ultimately, if perversely,—*

*Rukmini: Right.*

*Michael Barbaro: —benefit the United States and Iraq. Will it dispel the ISIS belief—*

*Rukmini: Mm-hmm.*

*Michael Barbaro: —that human shields work?*

*Rukmini: Right. Um, well, probably not, because look at the fallout from this incident. I mean, I think it already has changed something. We've heard that the fighting in Mosul has not been paused.*

*[Podcast ends.]*

So, you can hear the authority in her voice. You understand how much of an expert she is. You understand that this is really her life, is in service of reporting this beat. But you also hear her grappling with—with real questions about what it all means, and in a way that I think also sort of deeply humanizes her as a reporter covering this incredibly confusing and sensitive topic.

So, the last example I'll give is of — has less to do with the reporters; although, certainly, that, too; and more to do with a traditional source relationship. One of the unexpected and powerful benefits of The Daily has been that reporters—these 1,100 journalists all over the world—are constantly interacting with people and interviewing people for their stories, but the result of that often, in service of a daily news story, is a line or two to support a thesis. It's very unusual in a daily news format, I would say, for a source or a character to really come to life. They are used in service of illustrating a point.

And one of the amazing things about working with Times journalists has been how willing they are to share those sources with The Daily and to let us speak to them

or to interview them themselves in a deeper format in audio, in a way that can bring an understanding to a story, and audio that's really difficult to accomplish in print, which is a truly human relationship to what's going on to the news.

So, in the case of this story, this is a story by Monica Davey, who is the bureau chief in the Midwest, and she went to this town in West Frankfort, where the county had voted 70% for Donald Trump, but they had really come head to head with some of the results of that when a beloved member of their town, who no one had known was an undocumented immigrant, had been detained and was being threatened, could face deportation. And so, Tim Grigsby is—this man, Carlos, who was detained—it's his best friend, a white, small business owner in this town who did vote for Donald Trump, and he's just a line in the story. We interviewed him for 45 minutes. And he became sort of the narrative spine of the story on The Daily along with Monica Davey, the reporter. And here he is on The Daily.

*[Podcast plays.]*

*Michael Barbaro: Have you written a letter yourself?*

*Tim Grigsby: Yes, I have.*

*Michael Barbaro: And what does it say?*

*Tim Grigsby: [sighs]*

He's writing a letter asking that his friend, Carlos, be released.

*Tim Grigsby: I can pull it up here. Just one second. I mean, do you just want me to read the letter to you?*

*Michael Barbaro: I mean anything. If you think there's a.... If you think there's a passage that is—that's important to you.*

*Tim Grigsby: You know, Carlos and I have been in business together for over ten years now, La Fiesta, since they came to our town and built the restaurant. Throughout the years, I became best friends with a person that has made one of the biggest impressions on my life. His demeanor is a perfect example of what every person in this world should be and how they should act. His contributions are immeasurable here in Southern Illinois. You know, he's no way any danger to our community. He's nothing but an asset. And truthfully, if we lose him, our community is going to have a hole in it that will be very difficult to fill, if we'll ever be able to fill it.*

*Michael Barbaro: So, do you continue to support the president?*

*Tim Grigsby: Yeah, I continue to support the president. Do I continue to support him on these immigration policies? No, I do not.*

*Michael Barbaro: Mm-hmm.*

*Tim Grigsby: I guess the whole thing is kind of—I don't know—woke—I'm not saying woke us up, but a lot of things don't necessarily touch your life immediately. This actually, you know, reached out and grabbed us and said, "Hey, this is your buddy."*

*[Podcast stops.]*

So, how's it going? Two months, two-and-a-half months in, we just hit a big number, 20-million listens, which far surpassed our expectations on this show. The show has sat at or near the top of the iTunes charts since launch. Obviously, there's some movement, but it's always up there. But more importantly, all of this that I've just talked about is we're seeing transforming audience's relationships to The Times. We have the youngest ever audience of any Times products for Times Audio. So, that means that the audience listening to Times Audio is younger than any audience for any other Times product. We are getting strong evidence that this is becoming a daily habit in people's lives very quickly and very powerfully.

You can see some of these texts that are directly texted to Michael through.... Michael has a.... You can subscribe to receive texts from him. And the texts we give back are just giving us an idea of how important he's become in people's lives on a daily basis and very quickly.

And most importantly, I think, as illustrated here, is that people's ideas of who Times journalists are, what it means to be one, and what their relationship is to those journalists is being transformed. These are really deep relationships that are being forged. They are not just bylines. And so, by changing relationships to the journalists, we're changing relationships to the journalism and ultimately, we think, to The Times. Thanks.

*[Applause.]*

**Andrea Silenzi:** So, I produce a show called Why Oh Why, but that's not really what I'm going to talk about today. We launched in September. We were named the best new podcast in 2016 by The New York Times. It's going great. And part of Panoply, we have over 100 shows, about 50 staff members. Panoply is also a technology company. We built a publishing platform for podcasts. But before Panoply was born, before Serial existed, before The Times was doing The Daily, before Gimlet was born.... I mean, going to—this is, god, like so long ago—May 2014, [chuckles], we created The Gist.

I knew I wanted to work on The Gist with Mike Pesca when the Joe Romenesko blog posted his exit letter from NPR. And in it he said that he's always wanted NPR to be a wee bit more ambitious or daring, willing to take risks outside of our comfort zone. And I could completely connect with that. I was excited to see what Mike Pesca would create. He's been a long-time NRP journalist. He was mostly like in the sports corner, but we knew we had a much larger range. So, we had this question

like, what does a daily news show sound like in podcast form? Because up until that point, the only news you could get in podcast would be like a weekly roundup kind of a show or an NPR show that offered the full audio of the radio version kind of as a podcast. So, we kind of.... It was fun to think podcast first.

So, one of the things we did is we made up our own format. So, an NPR show has an ABCD segment, and we just kind of arbitrarily decided we would have PQRS, [laughs], so the 'P' would be like Pesca's thoughts on the news of the day. A 'Q' would be a question/answer or sometimes we do something called a one question, one question only, where we call up a journalist and ask them exactly one question, and obviously, it turned into more sometimes. And then the 'R' is, these 'r' things we find interesting. And that would be kind of an arts and culture interview. And we would always end with the spiel. And the spiel is the real joy of listening to The Gist. And this is one of my favorite spiels of all time, where he announced. And the spiel usually just Mike Pesca's voice, which as a producer makes it incredibly easy for me that we're working just with this tool, which is his pacing his—he will throw the clips, we'll use music, we'll do sound design sometimes, but it's mostly his voice is about 75% of the show, and he has a real craft in how he uses it.

So, this is one of his spiels. He announced that The Gist is radio show not a podcast. I nearly flipped, but I was listening to a podcast.

*[Podcast plays.]*

*Mike Pesca: If this is radio, and it is, so what's that thing with the dial in the cars with all the static? That's over-the-air radio. Like, we now refer to day baseball or acoustic guitars. We need to apply that retronym to over-the-air radio to distinguish it from this form of radio which you get via devices whenever you want without static. Rewind-able. Stop and start-able. A little more niche. Less traffic and weather on the eights. Playing less Iggy Azalea. Talking for 25 minutes without having to take a break that you can't get out of. Isn't radio great?*

*[Podcast stops.]*

So, that's a little spiel for his voice, and I do hope that catches on. I do hope we stop calling these podcasts someday.

*[Podcast plays.]*

*Mike Pesca: If this is radio....*

*[Podcast stops.]*

Oh, there we go. [laughter] So, but the spiel is also very specific to Mike's experience as a long-time NPR reporter. When the spiel arrives in our in-box, in this case it's at 3:39 p.m. with goal of getting the show up by 5:00, it's just gibberish. [laughs] It's very much out of Pesca's head. And then we work together to translate



that into the show. But [chuckles] those weird... The spiel is, like, it really comes down to how he performs it.

Something else that we did that I'm proud of is that we gave the show tropes. So, if you are a Gist completist, and there are tons of them, just like how people listen to The Daily every day, the Gist completists always know that we always compare things to the size of Belgium, that every episode ends with the phrase Um Peru, De Peru, Do Peru, which means Peruvian turkey penis or something? Like, no one knows what it is. It's a top core or cube[?].

We also, like, a long-time producer trick is you have regular guests. So, Maria Konnikova started doing a segment called Is that Bullshit? where we take apart kind of a scientific question, and then you can give your guests their own podcast, so Maria just came out with The Grift about con-artists.

And this is, like, not a new thing at all. I used to work with this 92-year-old host Walt Bodine at KCR in Kansas City, Missouri. And regular guests are a staple of daily news. This is like the oldest thing we know going way back. And he would have the food critics. He's have the movie critics. He had the computer guys who would answer your computer questions. And they were all local celebrities. And I think about that now, like, we have those podcast formats, too. Like, how is that different from pop-culture happy hour or something? So, it's an old format that we're doing in a new way.

Something else we do at The Gist that I'm really proud of is we let Pesca be vulnerable, so he'll often turn the day's headlines into a song. Like, he'll turn it into his own little Bruce Springsteen or Billy Joel [song]. And we got so many complaints about his singing that I decided to get him a singing lesson.

*[Podcast plays.]*

*Mike Pesca: [Vocalizing off-key.] No. [Vocalizing off-key.]*

*Teacher: [Playing notes on piano.] What is it from there? You're going down? But it's up.*

*Mike Pesca: [Vocalizing off-key.]*

*Teacher: You know when that's right.*

*[Podcast stops.]*

Yeah, so, [laughs], that's a very podcast thing, right? It's mostly caught up in the news, but sometimes we can take a break from the news and get him a singing lesson. And something else he does, we sometimes break from our formula. So, I think we did one week where he only interviewed other podcasters. You know, sometimes we'll totally ditch the QRS thing. Like, sometimes, he'll be guest hosting. "Wait, wait, don't tell me." And he'll do the whole show from his hotel room. And

while he's doing an ad for Harry's Razors, he's actually shaving. So, we've felt freedom to experiment.

And I've taken a lot of that with me as I do my own show now, Why Oh Why. Like, I think everything I've learned about being a creative and innovative host has come from eight years of working with other hosts and seeing how they do it. So, I'll be working on this precious show that's deep in the audio session, and I'll miss Daily. I'll miss news. I'll miss the pace of working on a show, like, The Gist with Mike Pesca. So now, I'm thinking in terms of a news consumer.

And I have this day I think about a lot, which was the weekend after Trump's Access Hollywood comments happened. And it was Saturday. So, that happened late afternoon on a Friday, right? Saturday morning at 11:00 a.m., the FiveThirtyEight podcast, I was listening, and they started talking about it right away. By 1:30, The Gist came out on a Saturday, which normally we're a weekday show. And Mike Pesca memorably compared Billy Bush to Chester the dog in that kind of goading on, laughing, was so funny, and it helped me understand the news that day. 1:30, the NPR politics podcast came out. Then the next morning, on Sunday morning, I had a Trumpcast, then Politico Gabfest. None of these other shows used to be here for me. You know, when we started The Gist, I didn't have these voices and these friends to talk to the news about. And as a listener, I feel very served by that, and I'm really excited to see how we're going to innovate.

And so, this is my eagle wrapped in bacon. Pesca and I were once doing a live show, and it was like 20 minutes before the live show. He was like, "Andrea, we need to add this. We need this in the presentation. I need an American eagle wrapped in bacon." And it was such a weird request. And you can't google image search that. I had to scramble. But I think a lot about how a daily news show lets you come up with that eagle wrapped in bacon.

And I'm excited to see.... Like, it's a creative challenge every day. And I'm excited to see how other news organization are going to innovate in this format, because podcasting is.... If it's moving this quickly right now, I think we have a lot—we have a lot of places to go still. I think of it as a very young medium. And I think if we're all speeding up and we're all finding new ways to do news quicker in podcast form, we're going to find these eagles wrapped in bacon. Thank you.

[Applause.]

**Eric Nuzum:** All right. So, thank you for having me here. It's quite an honor to speak with you today. I want to talk to you a little bit about two pieces of advice [that] I'm going to give you as you're looking at podcasting as an opportunity as a news organization. Two things I need you to keep in mind.

So, I've started 140 podcasts. I realized the other day I was kind of totally it up. About 50 of them still exist. And I've made just about every mistake in the world, so hopefully you can bypass a lot of my mistakes. And I want to tell you a little bit about what inspires me to think about things in a way to cut through so much noise

that's in the podcasting industry. There are 350,000 podcasts in iTunes in 100 languages. 14-million episodes of content. So, why do we need 350,001 podcasts? And how can you find a way to distinguish yourself? It's actually pretty easy.

So, for those of you who don't know, this is Iggy Pop, punk icon. This picture has been hanging above my workplace for 20 years. I find him to be an inspirational character for a lot of ways, but the reason I keep it above my workplace is to make sure I'm keeping things real and I'm being honest with myself. And I want to tell you a story about Iggy—though there's lots of great stories—and that's really about his hatred of broccoli. And his writer for his contracts, he insists that a bowl of broccoli florets be placed in his dressing room so he can throw them away. [laughter] That's it. If you do a Google search or a YouTube search for Iggy Pop broccoli, you will see many videos taken in concert with him with a head of broccoli around his neck. He uses that broccoli to inspire himself to not settle for okay, not settle for fine.

I have my own version of Iggy's head of broccoli—Richard Branson. I'm sure Richard is a very nice guy, but to me Richard Branson is an avatar for saneness. Last year, Richard Branson appeared as a guest on a podcast more than 30 times. And I say more than 30, because as I went through and searched, I eventually got so depressed, I stopped counting. And I stopped counting in the 30's.

So, the reason that saneness is a problem is in a world of 350,000 podcasts, how do you find a way to create something that stands out? That is meaningful? That can find an audience? And so, this has led me to thinking that there's two pieces of advice I would give to a news organization that came to me and said, "We're thinking about starting a podcast." OK?

The first one, news is not inherently interesting. News is great. It's not just the fact it's news. I, myself.... And I have seen so many organizations make this mistake over and over and over again, of, "Oh, we have a feature coming out on Sunday? Let's start up a podcast." Or, "Let's take our podcast and let's have the reporter being interviewed by someone who they don't know. And we'll just kind of talk about the story to get people interested in the story that's coming out on Sunday." That's not inherently interesting. Just taking.... Public radio has time and time again made the mistake of compiling stories and just feeding it to the podcast. Right?

One of the reasons that I am so excited about Lisa's podcast at The Daily is that, to me, it's the first time someone has kind of cracked this open on a daily news basis. So, it's not the first people to try. This actually has been tried a number of times.

So, a podcast needs to have one or more of three things in order to be successful. That's to have a compelling idea or story. It has to have engaging characters. And as Andrea pointed out, an engaging character can be a host. And it has to have a unique voice. And that unique voice is what's so critical. It has to have something that feels so right in that space, that feels to someone that's listening to it that this was made for me in this space.

The thing that's so interesting about a podcast, to me, having worked in radio for so long before I became so immersed kind of by accident in the podcasting industry in 1996—there was hardly anybody doing this at that time—is that it's not.... Radio has always been thought to be a really intimate experience, but for a podcast, someone's putting something in their ear. You are physically inside someone's body, and that's an amazing thing to me. And it breeds a kind of intimacy that even exceeds what we think of from traditional radio broadcasting.

That unique voice is so critical. It's what separates off things that people try from things that actually work. So while the compelling story is important and the idea is important, the engaging character is important, that unique voice. And when you listen to The Daily, you heard it in the clips there. You heard it, like, even that Trump clip, which I hadn't heard, that was amazing. I've been in the news industry...[mumbles]...I've been in the audio industry for more than 20 years, and I'd never heard anything like that until just now. It's a unique view. And starting with that question of, what does The New York Times sound like, is the same as trying to ask, what's its unique voice?

The second thing I want you to keep in mind, and again, you do these two things, you are in the door at the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile, by doing this, 99<sup>th</sup> percentile. When I started working a draft of this, I showed it to my wife, and it originally said, "You're in the top percentile," or I said, no, "the first percentile," thinking that was the top. She's like, "No, no, no, no, no, that's down here. You really want...." So, 99<sup>th</sup> percentile. The other one is, having a story to tell isn't as important as how you tell it. If you have a unique voice, you have engaging characters, and you have a compelling story or idea, just having an interesting story isn't enough.

One of the most common mistakes I've made in my life is I.... I have done this repeatedly. I've done some successful things, but I'm telling you about all these terrible things I did. But many times I would sit down and I would talk to someone about a story I was working on, and they would find it amazing. And then they would listen to my audio version of it, and they're like, "I don't care about this the way I did when you were telling me this." And I kept hearing this over and over and over again, "Your produced version isn't as good." And I realized that I didn't need to work on my story finding skills. I didn't need to work on my reporting skills. I needed to work on my skills as a storyteller, an audio storyteller.

So, I developed an exercise which I still use on everything I make called the Six Lunch Test Drive. What I do is, when I go out and I'm working on something or I have a new idea, I will take someone to lunch, and I will tell them the story. And then I will watch them very carefully while I'm telling the story, and I will watch where they kind of look at their watch or out the window or where they fidget with things or I listen to stories they—questions they ask me about the story. I listen to where they laugh, where they seem to be moved, where they have an emotional reaction, and I make all these notes in my head. Then I take a second person out to lunch and I tell them the story, too. And I watch. I've adjusted the story based off of what I experienced telling the first version. I do that six times. Then I write the story. And the seventh version, the one I write.... This is for audio, obviously.

You don't always have the luxury of doing this on a daily basis, obviously, but when you're dealing with a feature, you definitely do. That seventh version is as if I was taking the seventh person to lunch. It's finding the way to tell the stories that is important.

And I think that, you know, when I look at other people... Even at The Daily, there's been a number of other competitors that have come out there and tried to do what The Daily has done, even in this sort period of time, having a daily news podcast, and they are neglecting to think about what makes that unique in that space.

Now, how am I talking to someone in the podcast space? You just don't take.... I was quite successful during my years at NPR of taking shows that existed on the radio and putting them into podcasts. I am one of the people who did that. And it did really, really well, and still does really, really well. But the ones that do.... The new things that do exceptionally well are the things that are crafted and tailored for that space. They just aren't simply taking things and putting them in that new space.

So, I started podcasting—I was one of a group of people who started podcasting in 1996—no, excuse me—2006. What am I saying? Sorry. I was thinking what? 2006. I mean, what has it been? 20 years ago? So, 2006, we started podcasting at NPR. And the entire time we were working on that, we were just adding more podcasts to it, trying new things, and turning it on. And when, 2014, when a lot of things started happening in podcasting, you know, the IOS system and having the podcast app embedded in it, Serial came out, earlier that year, we were starting to pay a lot more attention to podcasting at NPR, because we were seeing a lot of growth before those things happened.

We had 115 podcasts. And the first thing we did was establish rules of what we wanted the values of our podcast to be. We didn't want things that were pieces of something else. We wanted things that felt right in that experience. So, that's how we created this list. And we ended up narrowing the list down to 30 podcasts. We decided that our pathway to success was by eliminating two-thirds of the podcasts we were distributing. We got rid of them and everybody thought, *this is a huge mistake*. Within two months, we had doubled our traffic, because we were able to then focus just on those 30 and really kind of invest and answer some of these questions about, what makes them unique? What are their engaging characters? What makes them compelling to listen to?

So, that's me. If you have more questions, we'll answer them during the panel. Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

**Nicholas Quah:** Morning. So, I'm going to depart from my co-panelists, because I haven't actually worked in the podcast space for very long compared to my three very esteemed co-panelists. And I've only been writing about podcasts aggressively

about the past two-and-a-half years. But I've been thinking a lot about it, of course, since way back in 2009, which is a little bit after Eric started working at NPR. I stumbled onto them as just an accident. I was in college. And I was sort of very much at a loss in the world trying to figure out some stuff that I'm interested in. And I think like many people who discovered podcasts around that time, it was sort of like a little sort of mysterious gem that I actually stumbled into that. And a lot of my sort of thinking and hopes around it and analysis of it comes from that feeling of whether, like, there's something of a weird opportunity and a fresh start that's embedded within the story of podcasting even ten years on. And, you know, it sort of varies, like this morning, for some reason, a lot's been going on in my life, but, you know, we'll just skip that life part and get straight to the meat of this.

So, I'm going to depart from my co-panelists and take a top/down view. And I'm going to try to provide a taxonomy of news podcasts. I know this is kind of like a tricky enterprise, because categorizing things can be over reductive, and it's somewhat of a political angst, and there's always going to be room to debate and quibble about certain phrases or names or nomenclature.

But I think a taxonomy is a productive exercise for two reasons. First, the podcast ecosystem is a weird, chaotic, and messy place. As Eric as alluded to, there are millions upon millions of minutes of essential things to listen to right now. And I think it's not unlike the early days of blogging, as Josh actually has written about before at Nieman Lab. And the news podcast genre, as relatively young as it is, is very much a microcosm of that dynamic. We're seeing a lot of news teams trying out a bunch of different things in different ways to probably achieve different goals. So, a taxonomy, I think, can give us sort of a baseline system to efficiently think about this expanding universe of news podcasts and news podcast experiments.

And secondly, for those of you in the crowd, who are thinking about developing projects in this space, I hope that this taxonomy can sort of serve as a menu of options that you can sort of choose from, think about, and sort of, like, you know, gel over and all that.

Two quick caveats. First, this taxonomy is distinctly American centric. Because very much like media is like culturally specific, I think it might be different or it might work differently in different countries or different languages. It really depends on the specific context you're working from. It's American centric, because like I work in this. Sort of like, that's my primary scope. It's focusing on American industry as it sort of emerges. And the second caveat is this is very much a work in progress. There's a couple of really neat phrases that Andrea, Lisa, and Eric sort of threw out over their perspective presentations. I really love the phrase *narrative news*. It's probably going to throw out my No. 7. I'll use yours instead. Fantastic.

The first category, first model, is what is called.... This is sort of a rough overview of the sort of models that I have in mind. We're starting off with the Gabfest model or the conversational format. This is sort of the prototypical art type of the podcast medium. It's literally.... At its essence, it's a bunch of people around mics, and then you cut it up a bunch of different ways. It's typically designed as a discussion that

recaps the news of the week or events of the week. And it generally functions to provide the listeners with context and commentary. And hopefully as a result of those things, it provides them with clarity. But most importantly, it also gives listeners a space to sort of feel out and process the news. And I think it's the most important aspect of, you know, conversational pockets, specifically, but podcast more generally, is that space of feeling and processing.

The conversational podcast is deceptively easy to set up. Much like many other podcasts where people talk about podcasts by saying, "Everybody gives out a podcast." It's deceptively easy to set up, but incredibly hard to do well, and it's incredibly hard to scale and in an effective way that makes sense and revenue, really.

Examples in this genre include The Slate Political Gabfest, which I think is sort of the exemplar of this model. Vox.com's The Weeds, Politico's Nerdcast, NPR Politics. There's a running list over there.

Next up, we have the documentary format. And this is sort of really, generally, the stuff that people talk about when they're talking about podcasts these days. And this is where the medium tends to get most buzz. The documentary podcast is often in-depth. It's deeply reported. It's a highly produced narrative project. And it also happens to be where the form really gets to flex its storytelling muscles. You could roughly sort of say that they perform around the same function or they sort of exist in the marketplace very similar to the magazine feature. More often than not, they are a deeper, longer story told within a full sense of context. So, that's sort of what they set out to do.

Examples in this category include the stuff that you probably have heard about— This American Life, In The Dark, Radio Ambulante, 99% Invisible. But you can also point to some specific collaborations between audio teams and more traditional publishers, like, the way This American Life has worked with The New York Times or ProPublica on some investigations in the past. They tend to sort of fall from that model.

Moving on, we have the interview podcast, which is exactly what it sounds like. It's a pretty straightforward system. It's a podcast that's just an interview. The interview format, of course, is a tool that's commonly used in other formats, like documentaries, most especially. But an interview podcast itself is its own creature of its own dynamics, and that shouldn't really ever be forgotten. An interview podcast is also very, very much bursting in potential. It can break news. It can litigate an issue. It can create a biography as it's often used to do. And it can also be used to explain something.

Much like the Gabfest model, I think, the interview podcast is like often perceived to be easy to set up again. That's deceptive, because it's immensely difficult to make an interview. Interview podcasts or interviews in general are more valuable for a broad audience. Examples include Recode Decode, Terry Gross herself, so on and so forth.

Next, we have the news magazine, which is sort of like more of a traditional carryover. It's a multi-segmented variety show that's either built around a specific news topic or theme or around a central reportorial figure. The example here, of course, is Mike Pesca of *The Gist*. It's more of, again, as I mentioned, it's more of a straightforward carryover from traditional radio. It's what we think about when we think about NPR's *All Things Considered* or *Morning Edition*, only it's designed and structured very much as a standalone, on-demand, audio experience without the running sort of broadcast cloth to define its terms. Examples are on a list over here. I want to point out that I kind of, like, view *Trumpcast* and *On The Media* within this prism—that the sort of multi-segment or orientation structure is what is the most revealing thing about the news magazine, in my opinion.

Then we have the explainer podcast. And this is the part of the taxonomy where we get a little bit more granular. The explainer is defined less by its structure and format and more by the specific value it offers listeners, which is to imbue them with the fundamentals of a given topic. These podcasts provide listeners with meaning, context, and history. And at best, it's more evergreen than timely, even though topicality can be a very, very strong hook. The strongest example of this, in my mind, is the New Hampshire public radio *Civics 101* that kind of goes through the fundamental institutions of America. Each episode sort of, like, very, very broadly pegs to something that happened in a news cycle within a sort of one-to-two week period.

Moving on, we have the local podcast, which is a bit of a loose sub-genre. And it's one that's going to be particularly interesting to me. I'm planning on doing some research work with Democracy Fund on that subject and, in the fall, be a Nieman visiting fellow doing a bit more digging on this sort of growing sub-genre. The local podcast, obviously, is defined more by focus on its place, on a specific place and its residents, using them as subject matter, and also thinking about them as its constituency and consumer base. The local podcast tends to privilege community interaction, and to a large extent, it's community driven, and that's really, really important in this formula. And it's also more explicitly a civic-building tool.

Examples [are] WBEZ's *Curious City*, Oregon Public Broadcasting's *This Land is Our Land*, which followed the Bundy trial, and *The Rise of Charm City*, which is a very good podcast, in my opinion, about Baltimore.

And finally, we have the daily news/morning news/narrative news podcast, which is currently where we're seeing a lot more activity these days, as Lisa's discussion has brought out and Andrea's as well. It's an emerging, somewhat experimental form, and is best thought of as being defined by its, I mean, I like to think about it being defined by its relationship to how it fits a certain use case or how it fits into an intended consumer's user behavior. It varies some in analog to the morning news hour or the morning newsletter. And I think in its current iteration and the kind of streams that we're seeing, it feels like they are the strongest adaptation of the newspaper in the audio format.



Examples are, you know, kind of short at this point in time—The Daily, obviously, Up First, and something called The Outline World Dispatch, which came out—which was sort of premiered—they made it last week. Even though it's more magazine and less newsy, there are very strong news elements about that show.

So, two quick closing thoughts, before we get to the real meat of this which is the panel. Firstly, I think it should be noted that news podcasts are aggressively evolving, and they are evolving very, very quickly. As we move forward in time, we are seeing more intentionality in producing high quality experiments, in producing better show design, and in thinking more aggressively about the user experience and the casual audience.

And finally, I think podcasting is just like a weird medium in general. It is to an extent—a considerable extent—the forgotten child of Apple. It's not a particularly sexy media category. I've been told many times that, like, the podcast is unlikely to ever experience a hockey stick growth, which seems to be the kind of conversations that dominate media conversations. And it's still technologically underdeveloped in many ways. But because it's unsexy and it's slowly but steadily growing, and because it's still a place that's allowed for really interesting pieces of journalism and art and culture, despite all of its works, I do believe that the podcast media is something of an opportunity for a fresh start to realizing the original dream of digital publishing, which seems to have been *dearly* lost over the past 10 years. And I don't think that's a small thing, and I think it's really interesting to be starting at the forefront of this thing that we haven't fucked up yet. [laughter] And like, that is really a powerful thing, because we are living in such an imperfect, broken, fractured world. Like, let's not screw up this piece of land by drilling holes into the ground.

Yeah, that's all I got. Let's go straight to the panel thing.

[Applause.]