

A Sense of Belonging Using Podcasting Technology

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The podcast series referenced in this paper, The Business Buzz: Forbes School of Business and Technology Corner, is available on the Spotify for Podcasters platform:

<https://open.spotify.com/show/7hbZ9Q3nNgPtPficybUOYR>

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Abstract

There is an opportunity for higher education institutions to increase students' sense of belonging seamlessly by using digital technology tools. This paper examines podcasting, a digital technology tool that can be used in higher education to foster the feeling of belonging.

Podcasting can be used as a way of supporting mobile interactions since it enables learners to access material on portable devices in any location. Two research studies are covered in this paper: The research questions for the original research study focused on flexible learning opportunities and the use of digital tools, specifically the podcast, and the current study focused on using digital technology tools to create a sense of belonging along with providing learning opportunities beyond the online classroom.

A Sense of Belonging Using Podcasting Technology

Can higher education institutions seamlessly enhance a sense of belonging by utilizing digital technology tools? Podcasting is one such tool that supports mobile interactions, allowing learners to access material on portable devices from any location. The aim is to introduce podcasting technologies as an extension of the learning environment. Podcasting is intended to create a positive experience for student learning (Guedes & Almeida, 2010). A key question to consider is how online higher education institutions can leverage digital technology tools to provide students, faculty, and staff with opportunities to foster a sense of belonging outside the online classroom setting. This paper examines the use of podcasting technology to increase belonging at the individual course level as well as the academic program level.

Literature Review

Digital Technology Tools

The ongoing advancements associated with "Industry 4.0," which encompass digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, 5G wireless networking, augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and innovations in cybersecurity, require a comprehensive approach to the transformation of higher education through these tools (Reis et al., 2018; Teixeira et al., 2021; Rosmansyah et al., 2023). This fundamental shift acknowledges technology as a dynamic and interconnected ecosystem that promotes digital learning, influencing how institutions adopt these technological advancements (Mahlow & Hediger, 2019). Embracing digitization is essential for higher education institutions aiming to attract more qualified students while enhancing the overall quality of their courses, instructional materials, and training programs (Gurung & Rutledge, 2014).

Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging refers to how included and welcomed individuals feel within specific environments, such as their family, a physical space, or an academic institution (Allen et al., 2021). According to Garrison et al. (2010), students experience a sense of belonging when faculty facilitate discussions that encourage participation and model authentic discourse that promotes critical thinking and student success. In online learning settings, a sense of belonging can be fostered through frequent positive interactions between faculty and students (Garrison, 2011; Rovai, 2007; Yuan & Kim, 2014). Recent research has demonstrated that commitment from educators, along with well-designed online curricula, learning activities, and assessments, combined with technical support, can enhance student retention and contribute to a stronger sense of belonging (Al-Kadri et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2021) and assessments, combined with technical support can assist retention and development of a sense of belonging (Al-Kadri et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2021).

Podcasting

A brief review of the literature on podcast usage highlights a research gap regarding the use of podcasting as an informal learning tool. While numerous studies have investigated podcasting within formal higher education settings (Chung & Kim, 2015; Ferrer et al., 2020; O'Connor et al., 2020; Padayachee, 2017), there remains limited exploration of its informal applications. Shamburg (2020) conducted multiple case studies examining successful and diverse independent educational podcasts. The findings indicated that podcast creators were primarily motivated by a desire to address gaps in existing media content, the flexibility of their programming, and a strong appreciation for their editorial independence. Additionally, Drew (2017) analyzed the genres of the most downloaded educational podcasts, employing iterations of textual analysis to establish distinct categories. This analysis revealed three primary categories of educational podcasts: the quick burst, the narrative, and the chat show.

Methodology

Original Research Study

The original study was conducted in the researcher's online classroom. The four-part podcast series titled "Dr. Cappa's Podcast Series" was made available through an announcement posted in the undergraduate capstone course BUS402: Strategic Management & Business Policy, as well as on the Spotify podcast platform, from March 16, 2024, to July 29, 2024. All podcast sessions were recorded using the Spotify for Podcasters platform. The research questions for this original study focused on flexible learning opportunities and the utilization of digital tools, particularly the podcast format. The specific research questions were as follows:

- Research Question #1: Does podcasting facilitate more flexible and mobile learning?
- Research Question #2: Does the use of podcasting enhance the learning experience in the online classroom?

Current Research Study

This research study expands the podcasting application from a researcher-led classroom to all students enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration (BABA) program. The monthly podcast series titled The Business Buzz: Forbes School of Business and Technology Corner has been in operation since July 30, 2024. All sessions are recorded using the Spotify for Podcasters platform. The study's research questions aim to explore the use of digital technology tools in fostering a sense of belonging and providing learning opportunities beyond the traditional online classroom setting. The specific research questions were as follows:

- Research Question #1: Does podcasting foster a sense of belonging among students in the Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration (BABA) program?

- Research Question #2: How do students respond to podcasting as a digital technology tool?

Results

Original Research Study Findings

The initial findings supported the first research question: Can podcasting facilitate more flexible and mobile learning? As seen in Table 1, a total of 72 students participated during the study period, with 42% listening to the podcast sessions on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

Table 1

Podcast Participation Rates

Weekend Participation	# of Weekend Plays	Total # of Plays	Usage %
	30	72	42%

Note. This chart provides the number of podcast plays on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays during the study period.

The subsequent findings addressed the second research question: As a digital technology tool, can podcasting enhance learning in the online classroom? The four-part podcast series encompassed five of the six intended learning outcomes. Table 2 demonstrates the participation breakdown: Episode #4 addressed Course Learning Outcome (CLO) #5 and achieved a 28% participation rate. Episode #2 covered Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) #2, 3, and 4, with a 19% participation rate. Episode #3 focused on Course Learning Outcome #1.

Table 2*Podcast Episode Usage by Course Learning Outcomes*

Dr. Cappa's Podcast Series -- BUS402: Strategic Management & Business Policy			
Topic	Total # of Plays	% of listeners	Course Learning Outcomes (CLO's)
Dr. Cappa's Podcast Series Episode #2 The External Environment & The Organization	14	31%	CLO# 2. Determine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and distinctive competencies of an organization CLO# 3. Conduct an environmental analysis for an organization. CLO# 4. Examine the global environmental influences on a firm's strategic decisions.
Dr. Cappa's Podcast Series Episode #3 The Mission Statement Myth	11	24%	CLO #1. Examine the role of mission statements, including the manner in which the mission statement guides all organizational activities.
Dr. Cappa's Podcast Series Episode #4 The Strategic Plan	20	44%	CLO #5. Recommend how to best implement strategic planning in an organization, considering implications for structure, personnel, financial implications, marketing position and opportunities, and impact on the organizational culture.

Note. This chart provides the number of plays and percentage of listeners per podcast episode and as aligned to the Course Learning Outcomes.

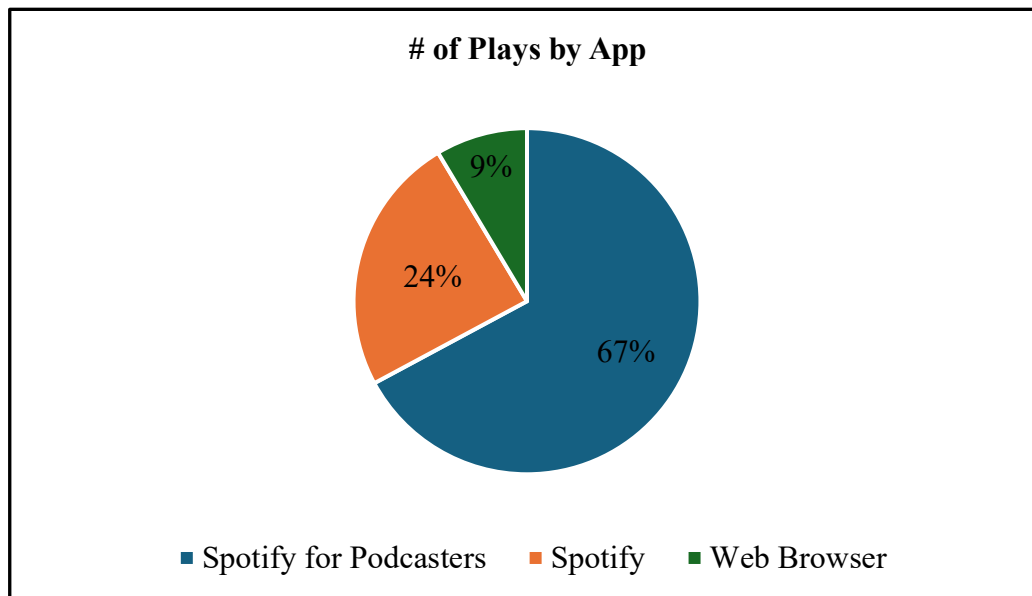
Current Research Study Preliminary Findings

The initial set of preliminary findings laid the groundwork for the first research question: does the use of podcasting foster a sense of belonging among students in the Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration (BABA) program? Table 3 demonstrates that as of September 18, 2024, 13 students have listened to the first podcast episode, while 6 students have engaged with the

second episode. The subsequent findings supported the second research question: how do students perceive podcasting as a digital technology tool? Currently, the usage rate for the Spotify platform stands at 81%.

Table 3

Podcast Episode Usage by Modality



Note. This graph demonstrates the percentages of podcast usage accessed through three different modalities: Spotify for Podcasters, Spotify, and web browsers.

Next Steps

The findings from both the original and current research studies highlight the significance of continuing the podcast series. The next phase will introduce a student feedback mechanism via a brief poll, allowing students to indicate whether the podcast has fostered a sense of belonging by connecting real-world events and applications to their weekly assignments. Based on this feedback, the strategy will involve implementing methods that actively engage students to

achieve the desired course-level outcomes, essentially starting from the learner's perspective. By ensuring that the content is accessible at the most fundamental level, we can then advance to more complex concepts. All podcast sessions were recorded using the Spotify for Podcasters platform: <https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/dashboard/home>.

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