



"IS THIS MIC ON?"

Exploring how podcasting is taking root across Africa.

A December 2021 Report

In collaboration with:





behind the scenes

Copyright: Africa Podfest

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executive note



When we joined forces in 2019, it was with a clear vision: To create a sustainable and inclusive podcasting industry across Africa, serving the under-resourced voices who are opening space for freedom in society, including youth, low-income communities, women, activists, LGBTQA+ people and people with disabilities.

Africa Podfest has since grown into a community platform with year-round programming in its two years of existence, running an annual international podcasting festival, carrying out original research, maintaining the African Podcast Database, hosting regular events, and telling stories of African podcasting through our newsletter, our blog, and via social media.

— Pictured: Josephine Karianjahi (left) and Melissa Mbugua (right), Co-Founders of Africa Podfest.

The need for reliable information on the African podcasting space soon became glaringly apparent, as podcasters, podcasting innovators, and the ecosystem supporting them scrambled and scraped to find trustworthy sources that would aid them in making informed decisions. With this realisation, research became a central part of our work at Africa Podfest.

Over the years, we've sought to explore podcasters' needs, to examine the relationship between podcasts and their audiences, as well as looking into the possibilities towards sustainability within the African podcasting space, and the hurdles facing inclusive growth in the podcast ecosystem.

Through our exploration into how podcasting is taking root across Africa, this report will showcase themes that emerged as shared by creators & enablers in podcasting, with a shared optimism in the possibilities that the space holds for creativity, expression, inclusion, and representation - a sense of optimism not dulled by the hurdles that have to be surmounted as herebefore under-represented voices take their space, and as audiences connect with both like-minded and diverse communities across the continent.



A sense of community.

Podcasters are aided in their drive by the existence of their audience - not simply passively, but actively. An active and participatory audience is repeatedly cited as a key motivator in their continued involvement in podcasting.

Hello, autonomy.

The room for authenticity that the podcasting space offers is a major draw for both those seeking to and those already active within the podcasting space. Podcasters cite a freedom to be their true selves, away from employer and/or regulatory demands.

Expression. Inclusion. Representation.

Podcasting has afforded many the space to tell stories that have been otherwise neglected and/or marginalised, allowing them to articulate the world and their experiences.

Barriers: Resources & infrastructure.

Being a podcaster does present its own set of challenges - such as the need to split time between generating other forms of income and podcast production, as well as the never-ending tight-rope that is balancing the books to plug in the money required to fund a good-quality production. These, in addition to the twin banes of inconsistent internet connections and high data costs.



Josephine Karianjahi (left) and Melissa Mbugua (right), Co-Founders of Africa Podfest.
(Image by Marcus Olang' / Stills by Marcus)

introduction

Since its emergence, podcasting has evolved into an increasingly familiar industry, a multifunctional medium, and a significant part of our audio cultures. The growth of podcasting has seen it become a preferred source of entertainment, storytelling, entrepreneurship, information-seeking, scholarship, awareness-raising, cultural production around the world and increasingly in Africa. Podcasting has built onto long-standing practices that have defined media as well as brought forth alternative practices to them. Understanding podcasting and how it continues to unfold—globally and more specifically within African contexts—can therefore provide insights not only into media ecosystems, but into the various interrelated ecosystems and practices it shapes.



"How has podcasting taken root in Africa?"

This is the central idea we sought to dig into to examine the forces shaping African podcasting, which include:

- African podcasters and their listeners;
- Challenges African podcasters face and their responses to them;
- What monetizing and sustaining African podcasting looks like;
- Community-building in the African podcasting ecosystem.

This report is an analysis of interview transcripts from virtual conversations that Africa Podfest had with twelve independent African podcasters from the following countries: Cameroon, Nigeria, Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, Egypt, Zambia, Sierra Leone, and Botswana.

methodology

This report is a compilation we put together following comprehensive reviews of literature and online publications that situate African podcasting, also drawing from previous Africa Podfest research reports, as well as data from SemaBOX and the African Podcast Database.

Additionally, we reviewed interview transcripts from virtual conversations that Africa Podfest had with twelve independent African podcasters (from Cameroon, Nigeria, Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, Egypt, Zambia, Sierra Leone, and Botswana) as our qualitative process.

Eleven of these podcaster interviews were conducted on Instagram Live, and one of them was conducted live on the video conferencing platform, Zoom. Africa Podfest sought to interview African podcasters to learn more about the African podcasting ecosystem from podcasters' experiences.

The interviews were semi-structured in format, with Africa Podfest's Co-Directors Josephine Karianjahi and Melissa Mbugua guiding the conversations with prepared questions, as well as with follow up questions that sought to expand on podcasters' responses. Since the interviews were conducted live and online, they were simultaneously being broadcasted to Africa Podfest's online communities both on Instagram and on Zoom. As such, the conversations were interactive in nature with Africa Podfest inviting participants to join in the conversations in various ways.



before we proceed...

We do acknowledge that there are limitations to the findings herein, as the research mostly focused on data already existing in the African Podcast Database, a limited Africa Podfest audience survey, and data shared with us from one of our partners and friends within the space, SemaBOX - this, in addition to the limited survey of the 12 podcasters earlier mentioned. Thus, we cannot claim that this report is fully representative nor comprehensive, but it does form a foundation upon which to further understand the African podcasting space, as well as to continue our pursuit of evidence-based investments into the ecosystem.



Josephine Karianjahi (left) and Melissa Mbugua (right), Co-Founders of Africa Podfest.
(Image by Marcus Olang' / Stills by Marcus)



our findings, part one: by their words.

We interviewed creators and players in the podcasting ecosystem in Africa.

Here's what we heard.



1. A desire for community is a driving force.

Throughout the interviews, podcasters share—either directly or implicitly when talking about other aspects of their podcasting journeys—that their audiences are core to why they podcast.



"[Audience feedback] is what excites me the most."

- Gushin Emce Gush, Kenyan journalist and podcaster (*Dandora HipHop City*)

"Oh, they notice! Because I didn't think anyone [would] notice. So when someone noticed that I was like, 'Oh, okay, okay. I have to do this right. I have to commit to this a hundred percent.'"

- Munira Kaoneka, Tanzanian podcaster (*Kaya Sessions*), on her audience noticing her absence from podcasting

Being encouraged by knowing that someone is listening is a sentiment that comes up across all interviews as a core driver to continuing to create and put out content.


It's worth noting, however, that it goes beyond the audience simply being present - rather, the participatory culture with audiences who can give podcast producers feedback not only reassures them that someone is listening, but also informs what podcasters produce, proving to be as a strong motivator for podcasters' continued involvement in podcasting (*Markman 2011; Markman and Sawyer 2012; Berry 2016; Wrath 2016; Chan-Olmsted and Wang 2020*).



2. Autonomy and experimentation are deeply-ingrained desires in podcasting practice.

A review of literature on podcasters' motivators reveals that independent podcasters, particularly those with media backgrounds, start podcasting out of a desire for the autonomy and creative freedom promised by podcasting and unafforded to them by other media forms (Berry 2016; Sullivan 2018).

In terms of creative freedom, podcasters can create original content that represents their 'authentic' selves," (Sullivan 2018) and can run their episodes for durations they deem most fit.



"I got started because my background is in television. So I'm a broadcast journalist. And the problem that I had was that my TV show is only about 25 minutes, but we were having really, really fantastic conversations that I felt like I'm cheating the public out by cutting out this content."

- Vickie Remoe, *Make Sierra Leone Famous* podcast

Podcasting has a greater degree of autonomy in terms of how podcasters can express themselves: they can do so in intimate, nonchalant and humorous ways that are often uncharacteristic in other media (Vrikki and Malik 2019).

Podcasters also have the ability to work on their own schedules, and with minimal regulatory control (Berry 2016).

"[Podcasting] was sort of a place where people could kind of do good feature journalism and kind of really immersive narrative journalism in a way that hadn't really been seen, I mean, at least in South Africa, we don't have a written form of like long form feature journalism,"

- Paul McNally, For South African podcaster and co-founder of the podcasting company *Volume*, on how he felt he would have more room for experimentation in podcasting



3. Podcasting opens the door to accessibility & inclusivity on several levels.

Podcasting is characterized as being easy to enter into because at a preliminary level, anyone with access to a smart phone can start a podcast and distribute their content; it is accessible because it can be “self-organized, low-budget, and [operates] outside of traditional regulatory structures,” (Vrikki and Malik 2019).

From the interviews, podcasting’s accessibility is a key motivator to getting African podcasters started due to its low budget requirements and the accessibility it offers as an audio medium as opposed to, say, visual media.



“I had a blog I used to write in Arabic, but the podcast thing was so appealing to me. Well, I don't need lighting. I don't need, you know, an expensive camera. Literally this is the piece of microphone that I started my first like, six episodes [with]. I recorded them on my phone and sent them to a friend to put them together.”

- Riham Jarjour, *Rihamiat* podcast

Another aspect to the inclusivity and ease of entry that podcasting affords new players is expressed by Tanzanian podcaster, Munira Kaoneka:

“I chose [podcasting] because I feel it's more open...it's more welcoming... because you don't get judged by your looks. You don't get judged by the color of your skin. You don't get judged by your outward appearances. You just get judged by the content that you create, because all they hear is your voice and that's all that matters. Nothing visual, anything like that. So that's why it's inclusive. I think it's more inclusive than other media outlets. Like let's say videos or YouTube or anything like that. It's very much more inclusive.”

- Munira Kaoneka, Tanzanian podcaster, *Kaya Sessions* podcast



4. Podcasting as an authoritative way to affirm presence: "We are here."



Along with podcasting's accessibility, podcasts' voice-driven content have interrupted practices, cultures and distribution systems in media landscapes, by creating spaces for conversations that are often excluded from, cut short, or misrepresented in mainstream media.

Voice-driven content has enabled podcasters, particularly those whose experiences are often structurally excluded or misrepresented by dominant gazes, to have space to articulate the world from their experiences and share them with the wider public (Vrikki and Malik, 2020).

"So she [her co-founder] would always hold these talks, these live talks where you go there and you listen to her tell stories and she'd tell amazing historical narratives, not just interesting ones, but also actual practical knowledge, indigenous [knowledge]. I always wondered, like why don't we have these [historical] narratives mainstream and circulated? You know, it can't only be in these private conversations. More people need to know about this because it changes the way we understand our identity, who we are, you know, and validates us because we found that a lot of African history, a lot of African knowledge and [intellectual property] is not validated,"

- Samba Yonga, Zambian podcaster, *Leading Ladies* podcast

"We need a place, even as activists, even if you're fighting on a daily basis, protesting, raising funds for women, for black women, for queer people, for trans people. Even if you do that, we still need a place where we can be at peace really. It's like so difficult to imagine that there are people who just like don't belong anywhere."

- Jo Güstin, Cameroonian podcaster, sharing her reasons for starting *Contes de Legendes du Queeristan* as being tied to her experiences of being considered as "not belonging" in places she lived in as a black queer woman.



5. Infrastructure can be a constraint...

While podcast technology is low-budget and accessible, not all audio technologies translate to good quality audio.

Additionally, technical issues such as server errors, unsteady internet data and bandwidth restrictions (which are also tied to broader infrastructural constraints) also inform podcasters' production capacities. Technical disruptions impact podcasters' ability to put out content, the quality of their shows, as well as their distribution capacities.



Talking about how challenges of internet connectivity and power disruptions impact her production process, Munira Kaoneka of the *Kaya Sessions* podcast shares that she has to upload her podcasts at her place of work when she has access to Wi-Fi because cellular data “always, always” fails to upload (*Africa Podfest and Kaoneka, 2021*). She also shares about having to consider planning around accidental power cuts.

Nigerian podcaster Sele Got, *Naija Filmmaker Podcast*, also speaks to how unstable internet connection often leads to low quality audio, saying that, “dodgy connection means that you have to get rid of content,” (*Africa Podfest and Got, 2021*).

This very constraint has led to some players opening up spaces in a bid to bridge such gaps, such as SemaBOX in Kenya:

“The reason that we were inspired to do this is we saw a gap in the market where we had a lot of creators, that there was a lack of infrastructure. And the question really for us was that a lot of these podcasters are young, just emerging, but just started to make [podcasts]...And the biggest challenge they have is they don't have equipment.”

- Dan Aceda, founder of SemaBOX

6. ...and so can the time, effort & resource that consistent podcasting demands.



Interviewed podcasters also brought up inconsistency as a major challenge in their podcasting journeys.

Podcasters share that their ability to put out content consistently is informed by factors such as other time commitments they have and the state of the world (global and local contexts)

“Podcasts take time to research, write, and produce, often require working to tight deadlines, and can take time away from other activities. Time and effort were also linked with the editing process; participants talked about the tedious nature of editing mistakes, breaths, and hesitations, as well as the challenge of trimming material into a manageable size. Editing, frequently cited as a source of enjoyment for podcasters, was also a major source of displeasure,

- Markman, 2011

Financial insecurity also makes podcasters’ experiences demanding. African podcasters face financial constraints such as having to fund their podcasts from personal savings, and difficulties in monetizing podcasts through advertising or syndication with other networks, with a few podcasters being successful in doing this. (Rogo 2020; Van Der Merwe 2021).

Offering more insight into the sometimes-taxing nature of podcasting, Nigerian podcaster Sele Got speaks on how finding guests is particularly difficult because he is at the start of his career; this further impeding consistency in output.

“I don’t think I have met a podcaster who doesn’t struggle with that consistency issue. Mainly because also a lot of times it’s not a full time job, it’s not full-time work, so everyone is doing other things. So that bit about remaining consistent is, you have to make the decision and it’s quite hard work, you’re tired, and you’re like, ‘Okay, I have to keep to my schedule.’”

- Sele Got, *Naija Filmmaker Podcast*



7. So where is the money? Is there money even?

Amongst the interviewed podcasters, South African podcaster and founder of the podcast company POC podcasts, Simmi Areff, is the only one who shared about being able to generate revenue through advertising.

Areff shared that with the growth of his company, licensing content and advertising have been able to earn his company revenue (*Africa Podfest and Areff 2021*).



Although Areff is the only interviewed podcaster who shares about being able to finance his content through advertising, Dan Aceda, SemaBOX, shares that with his podcast production company's growth, advertisers have begun to take interest in partnering with SemaBOX (*Africa Podfest and Aceda 2021*).

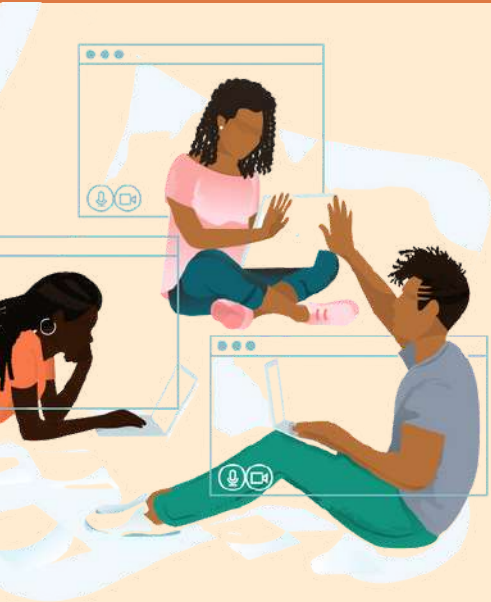
Aceda says that going from producing a few podcasts to having more podcasts within the SemaBOX network has seen advertisers consider their numbers more significant.

"People are calling us, telling us we want to be able to advertise on [SemaBOX's] one hundred podcasts, not on just one. So we want to, if you can plug us, give us a 30 second, pre-recorded thing on every podcast. And we have a conversation that we're interested in having now, as opposed to 30 seconds in just the one podcast... we've got these 10 podcasts, your advert can go on all ten podcasts. And now we can tell you that we have 2000 people who are going to listen through your advert for reals, and they're going to be tuned in. Radio can't do that, so we have an edge over radio...Radio can't really tell you how many people are listening. Podcasting can. And I think if we start doing at scale, we might be able to find a better value proposition to advertisers."

- Dan Aceda, founder of SemaBOX

Podcasting's audience culture has a more "focused, loyal, and engaged" audience than any other medium's and this has given rise to conversations around exploring how the medium can be used to make revenue through advertising in the global podcasting ecosystem (IAB Tech Lab 2021).





8. Metrics maketh the money.

In Africa Podfest's interview with Dan Aceda (*SemaBOX*), Simmi Areff (*POC Podcasts*), and Vickie Remoe (*Make Sierra Leone Famous* podcast), and Remoe, all the three podcasters talk about how audience numbers are of importance when seeking monetary partnerships.

They discuss ways in which metrics such as "episode downloads" and "duration of listening" feature in conversations around monetization.

"If people are actually listening to your podcast that's the most successful podcast... Because that is the most important metric for you to learn where to place your adverts."

- Dan Aceda, founder of SemaBOX

Aceda shares that podcast downloads can be used to guarantee commercial partners of an estimated number of people that their content will reach.

Aceda considers podcasts' audience metrics one of the advantages it has over radio in terms of appealing to advertisers. A metric such as duration of listening gives more detailed information on where an advert can be placed and has a stronger guarantee to commercial partners.

Speaking on what podcasters can approach monetization when they don't have audience numbers, Remoe proposes that podcasters "lead with their best numbers" (*Africa Podfest and Remoe 2021*).

"...you may not have a lot of likes, but your reach may be different. Maybe your engagement is different. So you have to focus on your strengths and use that to lead conversation and build a whole narrative as to why that is the most important thing about podcasts."

- Vickie Remoe, *Make Sierra Leone Famous* podcast



9. Position. Promote. Innovate.

Vickie Remoe (*Make Sierra Leone Famous* podcast) suggests that podcasters strategize around making their content relevant to partners' needs.

She also suggests promoting and building a podcast's brand even when download numbers are not yet significant. She shares that podcasting not only involves producing content, but promoting it as well.



The interviewed podcasters also revealed innovative ways to build awareness for their podcasts, inform their content, distribute their podcasts, and to collaborate during their podcasting journey, revolving around discovery, channels of distribution, and variations in presentation.

Podcast discovery for podcasters sometimes entails not only building awareness for their podcast, but also building awareness for what podcasting is, as Kenyan Dandora HipHop City podcasters, Gushin Emce Gush and Kenyan Mwangi share. The two podcasters reveal that they build awareness for their show and what podcasting is through doing live shows in their community (*Africa Podfest and Dandora HipHop City, 2021*). During their live shows, they share stories or narratives that their podcast aims to create space for and explain that these stories will be recorded and can be accessed online as "podcasts." Emce Gush states that they prioritize getting the stories out to their communities and then listeners increasingly learn of what a podcast is.

"Instead of [telling] them it's a show, [we] get the story and put the narrative out there. So then later on that's when people come to realize oh [a] podcast is something like this. We're still not there yet fully. They have not [yet] fully understood what a podcast is...They have an idea of what is a podcast. So it has been very hard to try to tell them what's a podcast, but in the long run...they [understand] what is a podcast, and at the moment, I think we just broke the ice of what is a podcast."

- Gushin Emce Gush, *Dandora HipHop City* podcast



9. Position. Promote. Innovate. (cont'd)

On innovation in distribution, Paul McNally, *Volume*, shares about how amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, his podcast company started a podcast that addressed misinformation about COVID through WhatsApp. The podcast, *What's Crap on WhatsApp* was widely distributed, McNally sharing that, "about 6,000 people receive it every two weeks, like straight into their WhatsApp feeds" (*Africa Podfest and McNally 2021*).



In her interview, Samba Yonga, *Leading Ladies* podcast reveals ways in which her podcast was a pioneer in creating animation vodcasts.

Yonga stated that at the time of starting *Leading Ladies*, animation vodcasts were largely not being made, and this gave them an opportunity to present their content in a new way that could be more compelling than just audio or voice-led vodcasts.

" [I had] seen that there are video podcasts, what they call vodcasts, there are animation podcasts and things...because the stories and characters were so, so compelling, we thought that it wouldn't do justice to [solely] have an audio. We needed to create the imagery as well. And we knew this would impact people much, much more. So I don't think [I had] ever actually seen an animation vodcast, I may be lying, but you know, the way we did it, during the time we did it, this was like, what two years ago? Yeah. So we thought let's try it, let's try an animation and combine it with a podcast and see how it works out. And I've seen lots of other formats like that come out as well,"

- Samba Yonga, *Leading Ladies* podcast

In addition, Samba Yonga shares one of the ways that the *Leading Ladies* podcast has been able to collaborate innovatively with a creative collective interested in their work. Artists in the collective presented *Leading Ladies'* content as poetry, music, and artwork in ways that the podcast's co-founders, "had not conceived of before" (*Africa Podfest and Yonga, 2021*).





Josephine Karianjahi (left) and Melissa Mbugua (right), Co-Founders of Africa Podfest.
(Image by Marcus Olang' / Stills by Marcus)



our findings, part two: by the numbers.

We looked into the numbers from 3 angles:

1. An audience survey by Africa Podfest
2. Data from the African Podcast Database
3. Data from SemaBOX

Here's what we found.

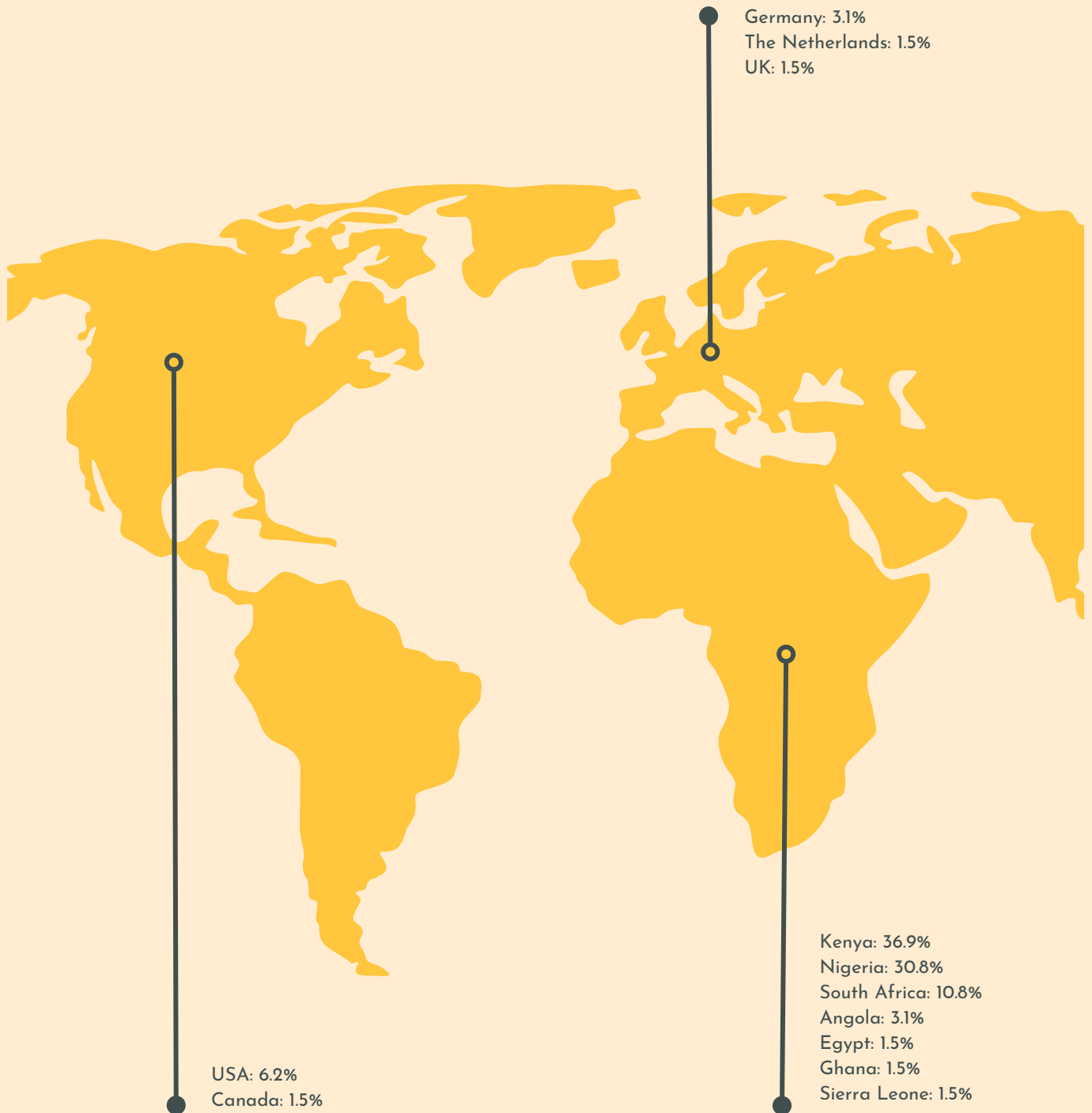


findings: by the numbers

a. Who's listening?

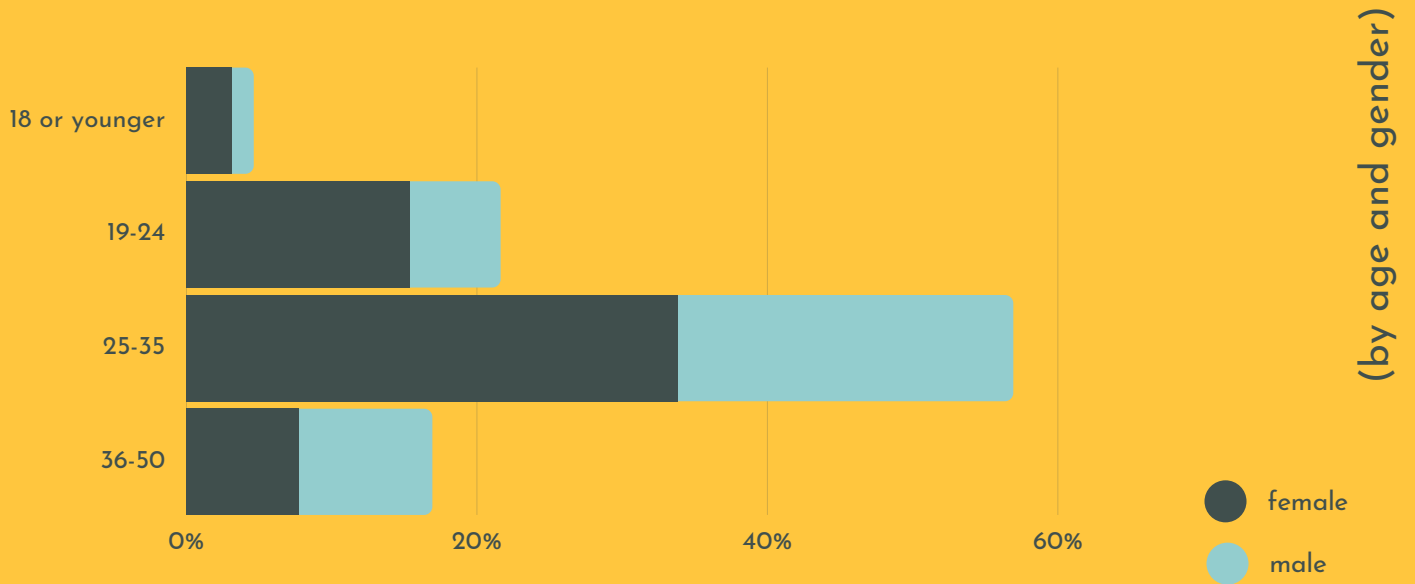


(by location)



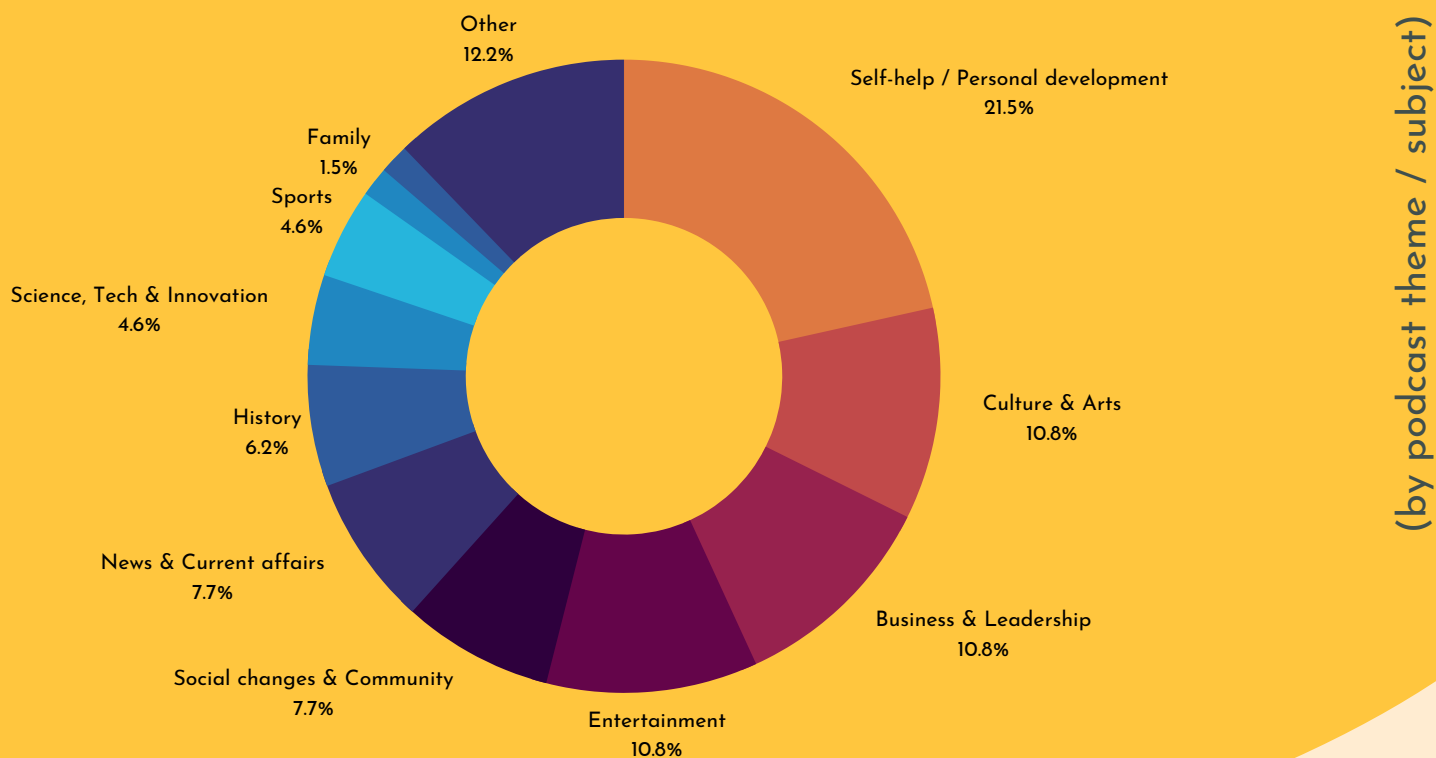
findings: by the numbers

a. Who's listening?

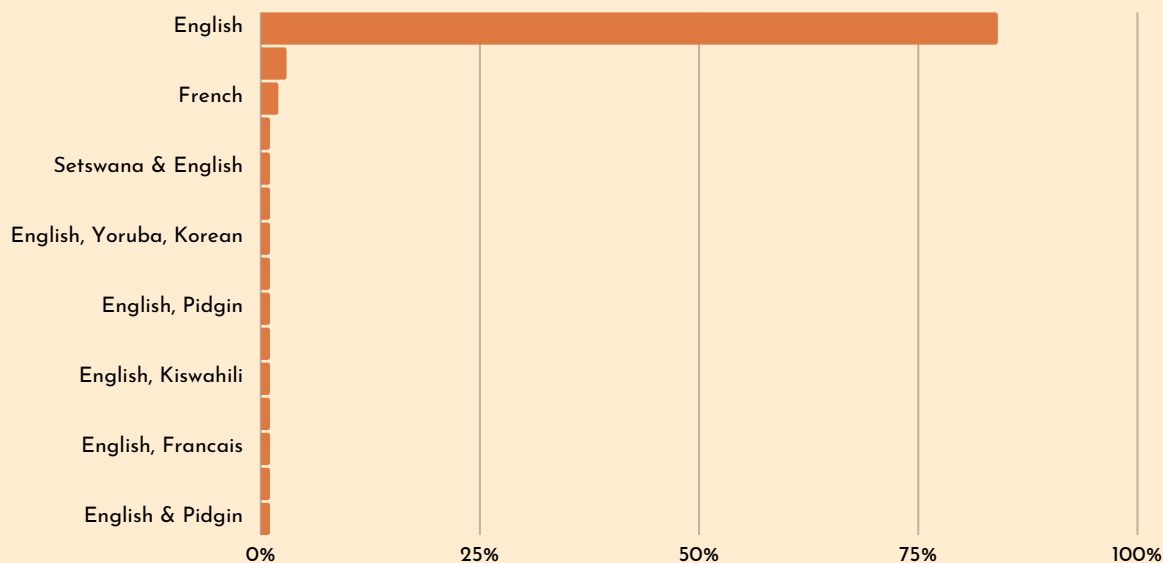


findings: by the numbers

b. What are they listening to?

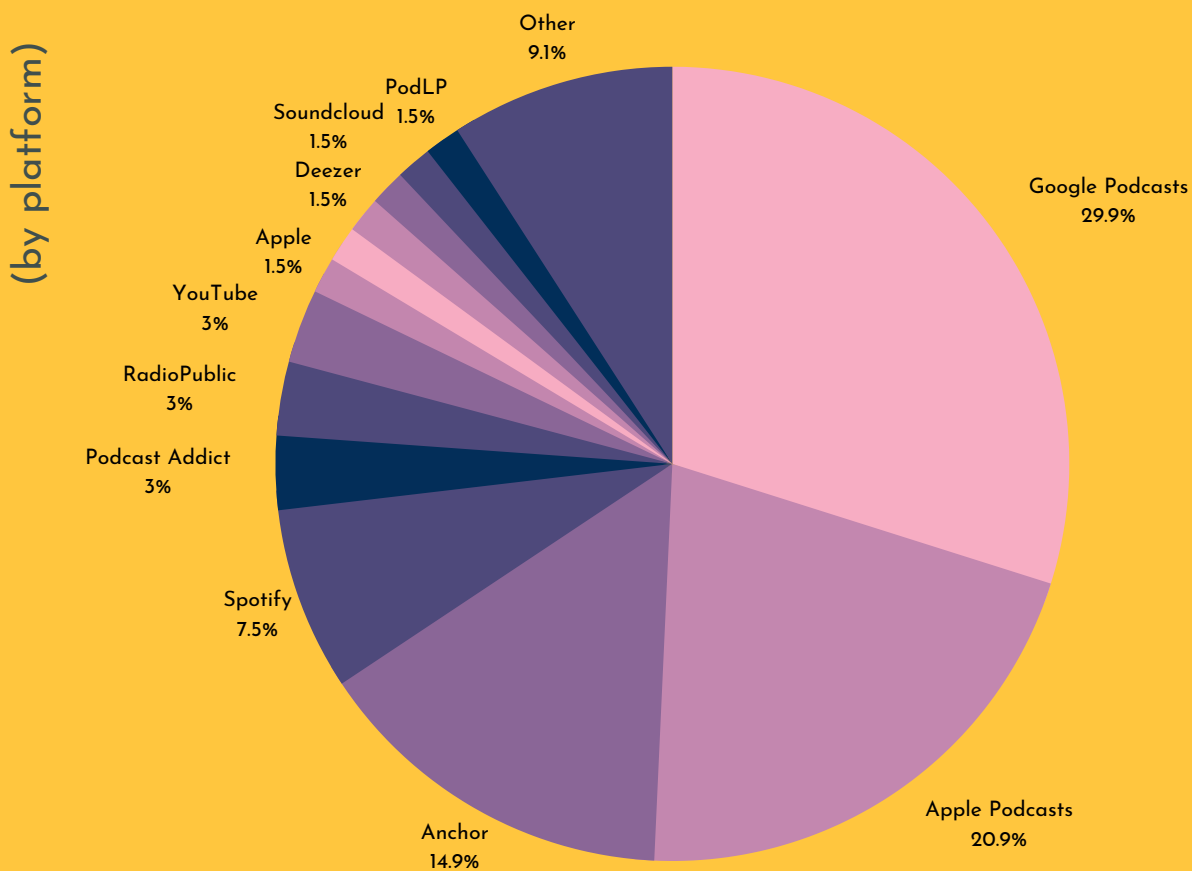


(by language)



findings: by the numbers

c. How are they listening?

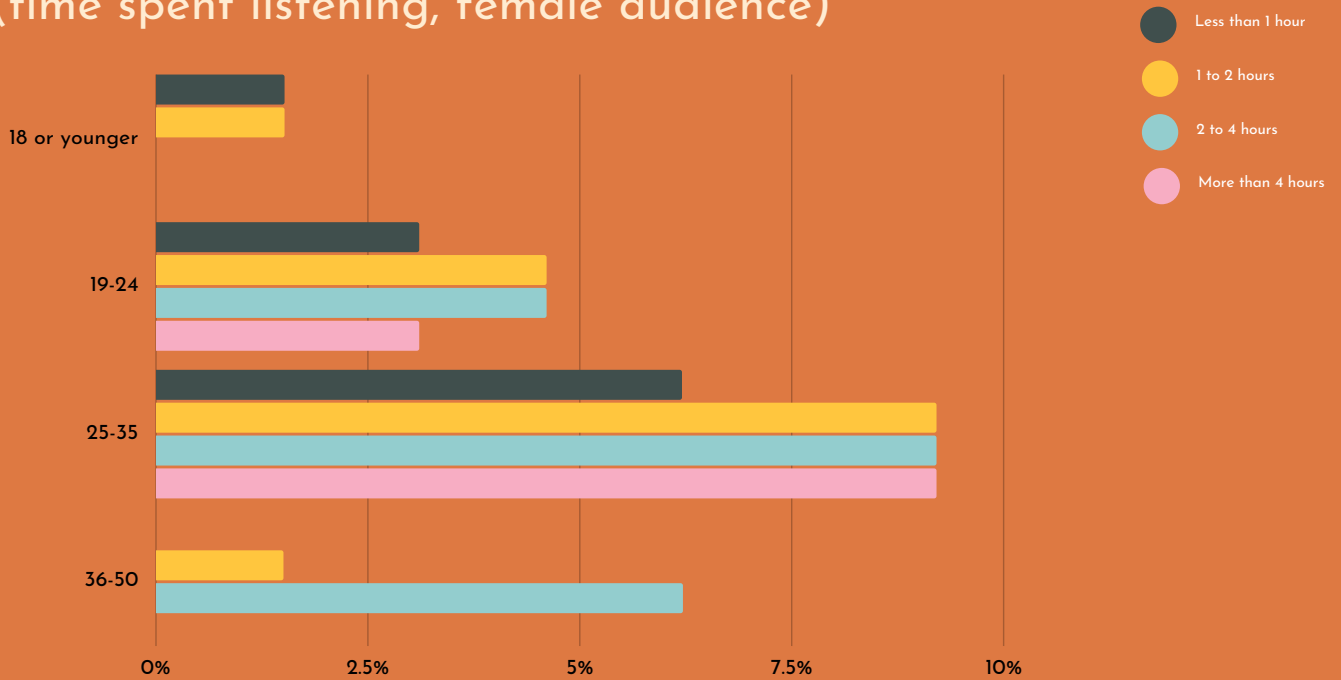


findings: by the numbers

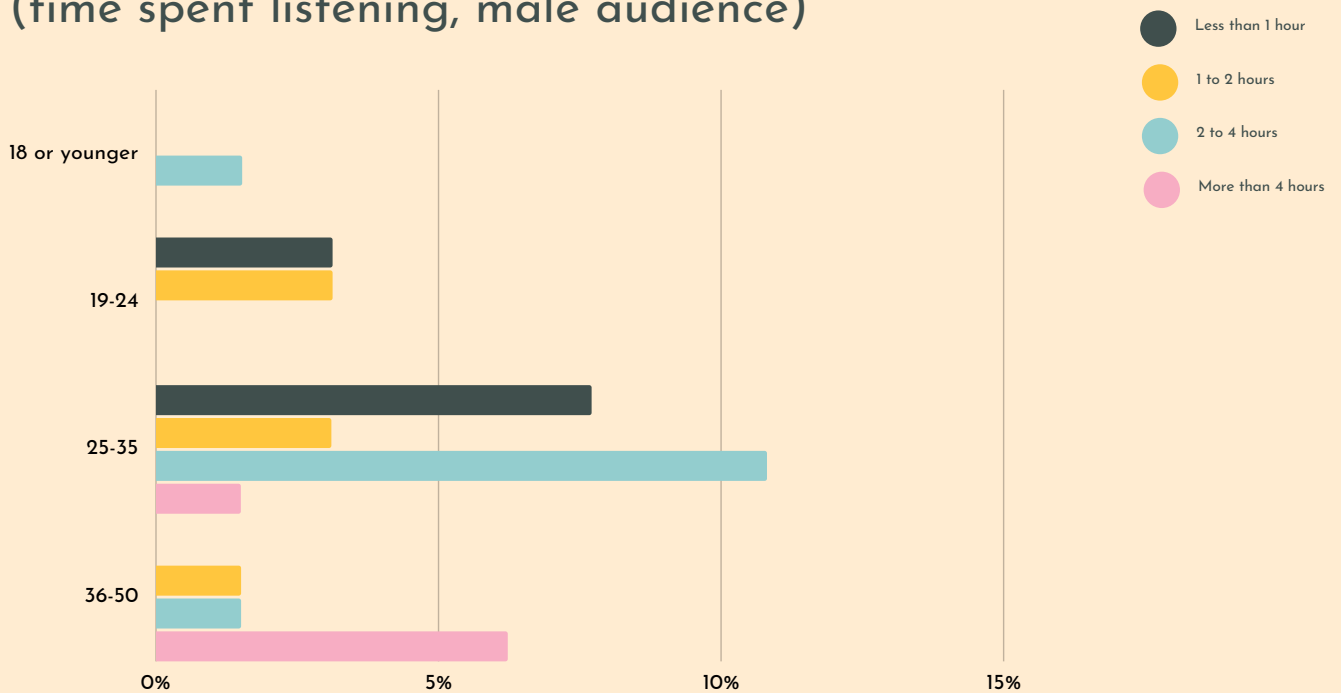
d. When are they listening?



(time spent listening, female audience)



(time spent listening, male audience)

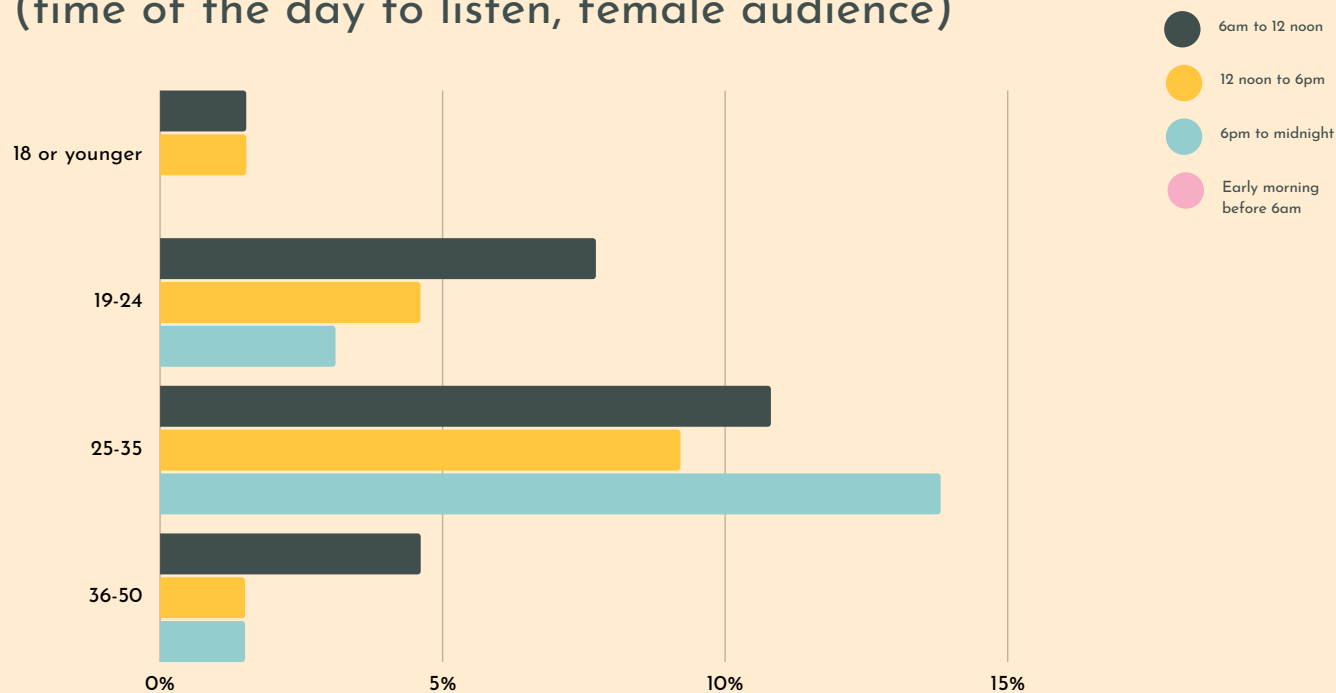


findings: by the numbers

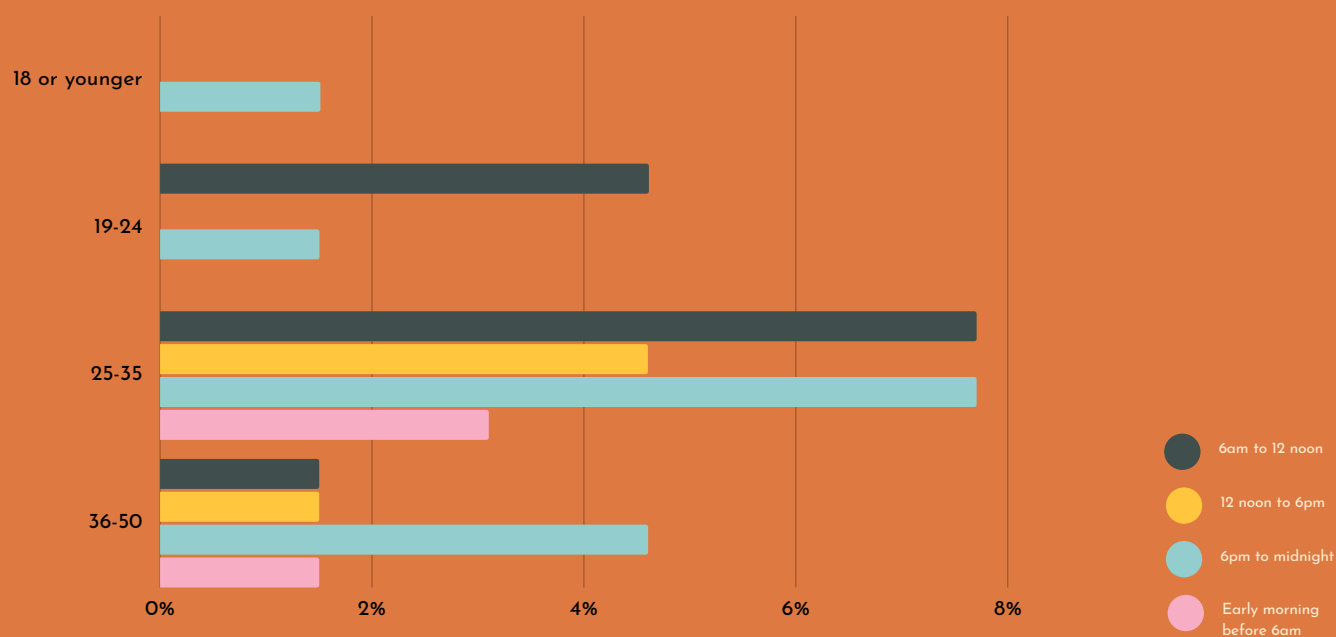
d. When are they listening?



(time of the day to listen, female audience)



(time of the day to listen, male audience)



inferences from the numbers

- A vast majority of African podcasts are consumed by audiences within the continent (86.1%), with a not-insignificant portion of listeners also represented by diaspora audiences.
- Female audiences make for a confident plurality of podcast audiences, only edged out in the 36-50yo demographic by 1.5 percentage points.
- Podcasts appear to be most heavily consumed by the 25-35yo demographic, male and female
- Even though consumption by them is led by "Self-help / Personal development", "Culture & Arts", and "Business & Leadership" respectively, there remains a significant spread in other themes across the board, further affirming the idea that otherwise niche subjects also have a place within the podcasting space in Africa.
- While English appears to be by far the most dominant language, there are significant audiences listening to podcasts produced in other languages as spoken across the continent: Setswana, Kiswahili, French, Yoruba, Pidgin, and Korean.



conclusion

This reports points to a promising possibilities of explosive growth in an ecosystem still in its nascent stages.

In reviewing material both from Africa Podfest interviews with players in the podcasting space, as well as in literature reviews, the evidence points to the incredible potential podcasting wields in its ability to reshape narratives by offering a canvas upon which hitherto under-represented voices and persons may use their voices to take ownership of their own stories.

On this path, as audiences get to discover new voices and as fresh perspectives continue to emerge through the medium of podcasting across the continent, it is evident through the podcasters' own experiences that audiences have a thirst for more, with the main barriers presently being access to resources that enable more creation by both existing and new podcasters, as well as infrastructural gaps that hinder continuous and consistent production.

Further research is required to dig deeper and wider, to better uncover and understand both motivations and challenges facing the production and consumption of podcasts amongst wider, more representative samples of the different population subsets across the continent.

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Africa Podfest is a woman-led Kenyan-based community-driven company which launched the very first Africa Podcast Day as a virtual event on February 12, 2020. Co-directed by Melissa Mbugua and Josephine Karianjahi, the company invests in our own value as Africans by inspiring and elevating African podcasters. Our vision is to create a sustainable and inclusive podcasting industry across Africa. We serve the under-resourced voices who are opening space for freedom in society including youth, low-income communities, women, activists, LGBTQA+ people and people with disabilities.

Although Africa Podfest as a company began with an annual event, it has since grown into a community platform with year-round programming in its two years of existence, running an annual international podcasting festival, carrying out original research, maintaining the African Podcast Database, hosting regular events, and telling stories of African podcasting through our newsletter, blog and social media. Learn more on our website: www.africapodcastfestival.com

about: baraza media lab

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Baraza Media Lab is a new and exciting space for networking, collaborating, and experimenting among Kenya's media practitioners such as journalists, bloggers, writers, artists, podcasters, filmmakers, animators and other cross-disciplinary collaborators.

We provide the space and resources needed to enable media and entrepreneurs to collaborate, innovate and drive the growth and capacity of independent media.

By supporting collaborative storytelling ideas, methods, and delivery platforms; raising the skill and capacity of media practitioners; and providing an environment for new business models to emerge, we aim to build a community of like-minded media practitioners committed to acting in the public interest.



"IS THIS MIC ON?"

Exploring how podcasting is taking root across Africa.

A December 2021 report by Africa Podfest
Created in collaboration with Baraza Media Lab