

A Historical View of Library Instructional Podcasts Demonstrating They Were Beneficial to Students and Staff at a New Zealand College of Learning

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Volume 16, Number 3, 2021

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1082684ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18438/ebliip29948>

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Publisher(s)

University of Alberta Library

ISSN

1715-720X (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Kathmann, M. (2021). Review of [A Historical View of Library Instructional Podcasts Demonstrating They Were Beneficial to Students and Staff at a New Zealand College of Learning / Jowitt, A. (2008). Perceptions and usage of library instructional podcasts by staff and students at New Zealand's Universal College of Learning (UCOL). *Reference Services Review*, 36(3), 312–336. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00907320810895396>]. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 16(3), 160–162. <https://doi.org/10.18438/ebliip29948>

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Evidence Summary

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Received: 30 Mar. 2021

Accepted: 12 July 2021

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Abstract

Objective – To examine usage of a specific set of library instructional podcasts and the potential of the format for effective library instruction.

Design – Concurrent mixed methods survey.

Setting – Multiple campuses at a polytechnic college in New Zealand.

Subjects – A total of 86 self-selected, non-random students and staff.

Methods – Web-based survey, piloted before a broader launch, with open and closed questions in one survey instrument (SurveyPro) regarding six sample podcasts accessible via the college's library website. The researcher used closed questions to gather quantitative data with Likert and verbal frequency scales and used concurrent triangulation to ensure balance with qualitative open-ended question responses for proper later interpretation.

Main Results – Of the 86 participants in the study, 71.1% responded that the five library podcasts were “very good.” The study determined that the most useful podcast was

called “My account” and helped students and staff activate and use their library accounts. Overall, students enjoyed the five library podcasts slightly more than staff. The orientation walking tour was the least popular podcast. The researchers hypothesized that this was because the podcast did not fit the users’ preferred medium, which was computer based. Even listeners who owned a portable media device preferred using a media player on their computer to access the podcasts. The participants preferred to listen to the podcasts during the day. The participants found that the 24/7 availability and the ability to listen to the material repeatedly were particularly helpful features.

Conclusion – Based on the research results, students and staff found library instructional podcasting advantageous because of its ease of access and constant availability. Some participants mentioned ways to improve the quality of the podcasts, but they found them to be an effective new medium overall. Additional research is needed to evaluate podcasts as an instructional medium.

Commentary

The study builds upon the body of research around podcasting, podcast users, podcasts as educational tools, and new technologies in libraries (Nelson, 2021) and recognizes a gap in the knowledge available about New Zealand podcast users and those in other countries. The study uses Rogers’ diffusion of innovations theory as its framework.

The research was thorough when appraised with a critical review checklist for mixed methods studies (Hong et al., 2018). The researcher noted a potential shortcoming in that people who are familiar with podcasts could be more inclined to respond to the survey, and therefore the results could be biased towards that group. The researcher encountered issues regarding the sample, and the participants are not necessarily indicative of their target group of students from diverse backgrounds, including online and distance learners. The author of the study noted that

technical issues with the survey impeded distance learners’ ability to complete it. Online students were a key demographic that would benefit from podcasting technology, and so their input was crucial to the study. Although the researcher attempted manual solutions where possible, this is a drawback of the study. Further, while 200 participants began the survey, only 86 entered more than their ID numbers. This indicates that the survey was somehow inaccessible or turned the participants off from responding after they had begun. The researcher did not explore this avenue further to identify why the response rate was low.

Considering Rogers’ diffusion of innovations theory framework, the findings of this study are useful when considering how much podcasting has grown since this study was conducted in 2008. Now that podcasts are considered mainstream technology, it would be interesting to investigate whether the researcher’s theory, that podcasting would follow Rogers’ five-stage decision-making process, was correct. This article provides an important historical perspective on the ever-evolving world of new media.

The author’s findings encourage libraries to adopt new technologies for student learning. The study shows that students and staff appreciated podcasting as an educational tool. These findings are relevant to the modern student, as podcasting is still used in education today. With that said, other mediums are becoming more popular. For example, short videos and video-recorded lectures are being used more frequently. In fact, in my experience, video-assisted learning is more common than podcasting for educational purposes and visual aids are highly beneficial to learning. As such, it would be useful to investigate the benefits of podcasting versus the benefits of video learning. Those potential findings, along with the findings of this study, could be used to make budgetary decisions and to support librarians requesting funding for new technologies. Almost 15 years later, it would be useful to investigate whether the findings

of this research were applied in New Zealand schools and what the status of this technology is today.

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