



The Journal of *News Science*

Vol. 15, No. 2, Ser.58, summer 2026, P. 5- 9

Journal homepage: <https://www.mjourcom.ir/>

DOI : <http://doi.org/10.22034/lrsi.2025.540506.1415>

Open Access

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Revisiting Cultural Capital Within the Framework of Podcasts: Toward a Critical Understanding of Media Hegemony

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Received: August 10, 2025

Accepted: October 22, 2025

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Introduction:

The accelerated growth of podcasting as a digital medium has significantly transformed contemporary modes of cultural production, dissemination, and consumption. Despite its growing prominence, scholarly understanding of how podcasting contributes to the formation and reproduction of cultural capital and ideological hegemony remains underdeveloped. This study seeks to address this void by conceptualizing podcasting as a critical site for the generation of cultural capital, as theorized by Pierre Bourdieu, and the subtle reproduction of cultural hegemony, in the sense articulated by Antonio Gramsci. This critical investigation arises from the necessity to clarify the subtle mechanisms by which podcasting mediates cultural stratification and ideological maintenance within digital societies. The primary objective of this research is to propose a comprehensive conceptual model delineating the communicative practices and content strategies through which podcasts facilitate the cultivation of cultural capital and reinforce hegemonic cultural narratives. Central to this investigation is the analysis of specific podcasting tools, including educational discourses, narrative storytelling rooted in historical and cultural memory, the strategic incorporation of music, the deployment of an intimate and conversational tone, and the affordance

of temporal and spatial fluidity. These elements collectively contribute to the shaping of listeners' cultural dispositions and identity formations. Considering that podcasts possess a relatively independent and more informal structure than other traditional media, this study aims to answer the question of how cultural capital is distributed and reproduced in this emerging medium and what role this process plays in the formation of media hegemony.

Method:

This study employs a qualitative conceptual analysis informed by critical cultural theory. It synthesizes extant literature at the intersection of digital media studies and podcast scholarship, grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Bourdieu and Gramsci. This integrative approach enables a rigorous examination of the dialectical relationship between podcast content, audience reception, and prevailing socio-cultural power relations. Furthermore, to facilitate a more objective analysis, a table was prepared detailing the content of the top ten Persian-language podcasts (ranked by number of followers) obtained from the Castbox platform on August 9, 2025. This table includes information on topic, number of uploaded episodes, number of plays, and narrator name. These podcasts were selected purposefully, based on their relevance to the theme of "superiority in terms of followers as a symbol of power." The data were subsequently subjected to conceptual coding. First, key concepts related to cultural capital and media hegemony in podcasts were extracted and categorized. Accordingly, podcast content elements - including informal education, fictional and historical narratives, appropriate music, informal tone, and the absence of spatial and temporal limitations for the listener - were identified as primary tools. Subsequently, the functional mechanisms pertaining to hegemony and cultural capital - namely, the internalization and reconstruction of values and knowledge, the creation of a shared cultural space, the stabilization of dominant discourses (hegemony), and culture-building toward participation - were analyzed as factors emerging from the field created by podcasts, ultimately resulting in the reproduction of cultural capital and media hegemony.

Findings:

The discussion elucidates several key mechanisms through which podcasts engender cultural capital and sustain cultural hegemony. Educational components embedded within podcast content serve as informal pedagogical instruments, enhancing listeners' cultural knowledge and symbolic competence. Narrative storytelling, particularly when anchored in collective historical and cultural narratives, functions as a pathway for the transmission of dominant cultural meanings and collective memory, fostering communal identity and social cohesion. The curated use of music within podcasts intensifies affective engagement and reinforces cultural symbolism, while the adoption of a conversational and intimate vocal style diminishes the structural divide between producer and audience, cultivating trust and participatory engagement. Moreover, the temporal and spatial flexibility inherent to podcasts facilitates uninterrupted access to cultural content, enabling sustained and diversified cultural participation. These communicative strategies collectively operate to internalize dominant cultural values and reproduce social distinctions aligned with cultural capital. From Bourdieu's theoretical framework, podcasts legitimize particular forms of knowledge as instruments for the accumulation and display of cultural capital within digital public spheres. Concurrently, through Gramsci's analytical lens, podcasts act as subtle vehicles of cultural hegemony, reproducing dominant ideologies via affective, linguistic, and narrative modalities. The informal and dialogic nature of podcasts conceals the coercive aspects of ideological transmission, enabling hegemonic narratives to permeate listener consciousness with minimal contestation.

Conclusion:

This study has demonstrated that podcasting constitutes a critical cultural apparatus wherein processes of cultural capital formation and hegemonic reproduction are dynamically enacted. By examining ten podcasts - including 'Aknoon', 'Jafekri', 'Radio Rah', and 'Radio Marz' - the findings indicate that Persian-language podcasts, as a cultural field (in Bourdieu's terms), create a space for competition, legitimization, and

reconstruction of cultural capital. They have served as a means of representing alternative discourses (distinct from common and dominant discourses), have paved the way for the internalization of ideas and values through the expression of narratives in informal language, and have thus reproduced media hegemony. By leveraging educational content, narrative forms, musical elements, and dialogic interaction, podcasts not only facilitate individual cultural empowerment but also contribute to the reproduction of dominant social orders. This dual role underscores the necessity of critical engagement with podcast media to apprehend its broader societal and cultural consequences and to foster media literacies capable of contesting hegemonic influence.

proposed conceptual framework lays the groundwork for future empirical research aimed at exploring the collaborative construction of cultural capital and hegemony through podcast production and reception. This integrative inquiry holds considerable promise for advancing theoretical and practical understanding within media studies, cultural sociology, and digital communication scholarship.

Data Availability Statement.

Data available on request from the authors.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank anonymous reviewers.

Ethical considerations

Not applicable.

Funding

Not applicable.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Cite this article: Shahid Zadeh, P. (2026), Revisiting Cultural Capital Within the Framework of Podcasts: Toward a Critical Understanding of Media Hegemony, *News Science*, 15 (2), 5-9.

DOI : <http://doi.org/10.22034/Irsi.2025.540506.1415>



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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22034/Irsi.2025.540506.1415>

Publisher: Press Institute for Contemporary International Journalism (PICIJ)