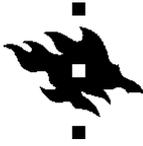


*“Voice Inside My Head”*  
*– Productive Agencies in Talk*  
*Audio use*

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>This study/research is an explorative work examining the effects of the use of talk audio digital products on agency. Visual products are most often the focus in discussions on human-computer interaction (HCI) and Science Technology Studies). Therefore, an examination of agency in the context of voice-based talk-audio products has remained a minority but is necessary in the era of digital services. The thesis explores the use of products in two environments with different cultures; urban Bangalore in India and urban Stockholm in Sweden where semi-structured interviews with undergraduate students were conducted. The concept of agency builds on Anthony Giddens' classical approach. The concept of talk audio was created in the context of data collection and refers to talk-based auditory products.</p> <p>Inspired by studies of personal stereo use by Michael Bull and music sociology by Tia DeNora, the thesis explores how individuals construct their agency both consciously and less consciously when using talk audio products. Young people use talk audio products when constructing their agency consciously to manage it in relation to their environment (e.g. to avoid noises of the city, or to escape the repetitive elements of urban life), and to manage their inner reality inside their heads (e.g. manage their thoughts and feelings, avoiding feelings of loneliness, escaping to an imaginary place). Young people also constructed their agency less-consciously in order to manage their mood but they, in part, struggled to express how. By comparing talk audio use to music listening, the students described to attain a "normal" level of mood and thoughts instead of strong emotional states they get when listening to music. When choosing between music and talk audio products, the students aimed to attain a mood that was, in their minds, suitable for the current or future social situation.</p> <p>With talk audio, the interviewees describe getting a chance for a change of thoughts to feel less stressful or to gain perspective on their daily issues through the talk audio content and voice of the talk audio host. The young people also describe finding perspective e.g. on political topics from talk audio, while they also simultaneously learn, are entertained, get information and develop their social skills. The perspectives and information the students described to receive through talk audio were always <i>curated by the talk audio host(s)</i>.</p> <p>All of the young people also said to have experienced talk audio products as distinctively personal and intimate. In contrast to music use, they described it to "feel strange" to listen together, and they only listened to talk audio alone or with a significant other. According to previous literature on radio and podcasts, the sense of "being there" in a talk audio product can create a sense of a two-way communication for the audience. The relationship my informants described with talk audio hosts was perceived as distinctively personal; many would describe how they would feel <i>being addressed exclusively</i> or that they would <i>take part in the discussions</i> themselves. They also described talk audio to be more "authentic" than other mediums (e.g. in comparison to social media).</p> <p>With these findings I argue that the primary material for constructing agency through talk audio use builds from, in light of this data, the perceived relationship the listeners have with the talk audio host. The young people would describe talk audio hosts of something similar as talking or hanging out with friends or having a mentor. The phenomenon of an always-available human-presence decreased the level of loneliness for some participants and thus <i>extended their sociality with technologically mediated content</i>. Nevertheless, since the talk audio hosts are mostly unaware of the listeners' reactions to their content, the social encounter is <i>controlled solely by the listeners</i>, unlike in a traditional interpersonal encounter. This creates one form of agency the students build with talk audio; <i>a form of parasocial agency</i>.</p>			
Keywords Talk audio, Podcast, Podcasting, agency, parasocial relationship, aesthetic material, radio			
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Tiivistelmä Tutkielma tarkastelee puheperusteisten (eng. <i>talk audio</i> ) digitaalisten tuotteiden käytön vaikutusta toimijuuteen. Human computer interaction (HCI) ja Science Technology Studies (STS) -keskusteluissa visuaaliset tuotteet ovat useimmiten keskiössä, minkä vuoksi toimijuuden tarkastelu myös puheperusteisten tuotteiden yhteydessä on tarpeellista. Eksploraatiivisen työn aineisto kerättiin puolistrukturoiduilla haastatteluilla kahdessa kulttuuriltaan ja yhteiskuntarakenteeltaan erilaisessa ympäristössä: urbaanissa Bangalossa, Intiassa (n=8) ja Tukholmassa, Ruotsissa (n=8). Käsite <i>talk audio</i> luotiin aineistonkeruun yhteydessä, ja sillä viitataan puheperusteisiin tuotteisiin. Näkökulma sosiaaliseen toimintaan ja toimijuuteen pohjautuu Anthony Giddensin lähestymistapaan. Toimijuuden rakentumista tietoisella ja vähemmän tietoisella tasolla analysoidaan puolestaan Michael Bullin ja Tia DeNoran kuvaaman käsitteistön avulla.  Tutkielman tavoitteena on selvittää, miten nuoret rakentavat toimijuuden muotoja puheperusteisten tuotteiden käyttäjinä ja miten he liittävät toimijuuden muotoja näihin tuotteisiin. Tuloksista selviää, että tietoisella tasolla nuoret pyrkivät kuuntelemaan puheperusteisia tuotteita, jotta he voivat hallita toimijuuttaan ympäristönsä ja ajatusmaailmansa suhteen. He haluavat esimerkiksi välttää kaupungin melua, paeta arkisen elämän toistuvuutta tai koettavat kontrolloida ajatuksiaan, tunteitaan tai yksinäisyyden kokemusta. Vähemmän tietoisella tasolla nuoret rakensivat toimijuutta hallitakseen tunnetilojaan, mutta kokivat, että toimintaa oli vaikea pukea sanoiksi. Kun siirryttiin vertailemaan musiikin ja puheperusteisten tuotteiden kuuntelua toisiinsa, nuoret kuvasivat saavuttavansa puheperusteisten tuotteiden avulla normaalin tunnetilan voimakkaiden tunnekokemusten sijaan. Valintaa puheperusteisten tuotteiden ja musiikin välillä pyrittiin ennen kaikkea suhteuttamaan tunne maailman käsityksiin siitä, millaista olotilaa ja tunnetta ympäröivässä tilanteessa tulisi ylläpitää.  Toinen keskeinen havainto oli puheperusteisten tuotteiden, kuten podcast-ohjelmien, juontajien merkitys. Nuorten mukaan puheperusteisten tuotteiden keskustelijat antoivat heille vaikutusmahdollisuuden ajatuksiinsa, minkä seurauksena nuoret kokivat esimerkiksi vähemmän stressiä tai saivat etäisyyttä arkihuoliinsa. Puheperusteisista tuotteista nuoret kertoivat myös oppivansa uutta, saavansa tietoa ja näkökulmia poliittisiin aiheisiin sekä kehittävänsä sosiaalisia taitojaan. Huomionarvoista on kuitenkin, että puheperusteisissa tuotteissa sisältö on aina ohjelman juontajan valitsemaa ja määrittämää.  Nuoret kokivat puheperusteiset tuotteet erityisen henkilökohtaisina ja intiimeinä tuotteina verrattuna musiikkiin; he kuvailivat kuuntelevansa musiikkia mielellään muiden kanssa, mutta puheohjelmia ainoastaan yksin tai kumppaninsa kanssa. Aiemmissa tutkimuksissa on osoitettu, että puheperusteiset ohjelmat voivat tuottaa kuuntelijalle kaksisuuntaisen vuorovaikutuksen ja läsnäolon kokemuksen. Nuoret kuvasivatkin suhdettaan puheohjelmien juontajiin ja keskustelijoihin henkilökohtaiseksi: monet kokivat, että keskustelijat puhuivat ainoastaan heille ja että he olivat itse jollain tavalla mukana keskusteluissa. Nuoret myös pitivät puheperusteisia tuotteita aidompina kuin muita medioita.  Johtopäätöksenä voidaan todeta, että toimijuuden rakentuminen puheperusteisissa tuotteissa määrittyy puheohjelmien juontajien ja kuuntelijan välisessä suhteessa. Nuoret kokivat "hengaavansa" puheohjelmien juontajien ja keskustelijoiden kanssa ikään kuin he olisivat ystävien tai mentoreiden seurassa. Tällaisten alati saavutettavissa olevien mediapersoonien läsnäolo myös vähensi joidenkin nuorten yksinäisyyttä. Väitänkin, että nuoret laajentavat sosiaalisuuttaan puheperusteisistä tuotteista kuuntelemalla. Puheohjelmien keskustelijat eivät voi vaikuttaa tai olla tietoisia kuuntelijoidensa reaktioista keskusteluiden aikana, mikä antaa kuuntelijoille täyden vallan hallita vuorovaikutusta - toisin kuin perinteisessä sosiaalisessa kanssakäymisessä. Tämä dynamiikka mahdollistaa puheperusteisten tuotteiden käyttäjille uudenlaisen, <i>parasosiaalisen toimijuuden</i> muodon.		
Avainsanat Agency, Talk audio, Podcast, Podcasting, parasocial relationship, aesthetic material, radio, medium, audio		
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## 1. Introduction

In a newspaper opinion piece, journalist Lexi Mainland describes how headphones take her to another space, which she calls “the intimate audio experience in a moment of solitude” (Mainland 2018). The audio she refers to is not music – it is someone *talking* into her ear. This phenomenon of *talk audio products* has not gone unnoticed by academia, as scholars such as Robert MacDougall (2011) and Richard Berry (2006, 2016) have dived deeper into studying these in-ear talk products. MacDougall (2011) argues that *podcasts* have become the ‘*village whisperers*’ of the modern world. This thesis focuses on the experiences young people in India and Sweden have with talk audio products. The concept *talk audio* refers to various types of talk-based products, such as podcasts, audiobooks or talk shows like Ted Talks.

Many scholars have acknowledged the ever-increasing role of digital technologies in our lives. Technologies are not just helping us communicate with each other and to transmit information, but they also transform human consciousness – our thoughts, feelings, social encounters, and ways to observe the surrounding world (McDougall 2012). Some argue, that the use of auditory technological devices transforms the traditional forms of social encounters (Bull 2000, 147). This thesis focuses on the *constituting effects* of digital technology use; how people both *consciously* and *less consciously construct agency* by using these products. Both in public debates and academic discussions concerning the digital age, visually centered products such as social media or news platforms are in focus repeatedly (e.g., Couldry 2012; Rettberg 2014; Sauter 2013), while research about audio technology remains scarce. Thus, the thesis sets out to investigate how the digital audio world can be experienced in urban India and Sweden and what that entails for the constitutive features of talk audio products in relation to human agency.

Michael Bull (2000) has studied the nature and influence of audio in everyday life through personal-stereo use. His typology for what role personal-stereo technology plays in the construction of auditory experiences acts as one frame for my analysis of talk audio use; I am interested in features of agency in the auditory experience that are originally drawn from music use. Music, as the most studied form of audio, is a part of the cultural constitution of subjectivity, that is, of “*how individuals are involved in constituting*

*themselves as social agents*” (DeNora 2000, 47). I complete Bull’s typology with an approach by Tia DeNora (2000, 53) who claims music to be “a resource for modulating and structuring the parameters” of agency. The goal is to widen the understanding of the role of digital audio through an empirical approach with a specific focus on talk audio products: podcasts, audiobooks and talk shows. Talk audio products create opportunities to connect with people beyond one’s immediate physical environment. The significant characterization in talk audio products in contrast to music listening is *the presence of a talk audio host* (MacDougall 2011). Therefore, I also complement my theoretical framework with an updated version of Horton and Wohl’s (1956) concept of *parasocial relationship*, offered by Hartmann (2008), to understand how the relation between the listener and the talk audio host affects the perceptions the users have of talk audio use.

The thesis sets out to understand *how individuals construct their agency with talk audio products* empirically through 16 semi-structured interviews conducted in Stockholm, Sweden and in Bangalore, India. Based on these empirical data, I argue that in talk audio use the products play a role in cultural social formations as individuals construct their agency by filtering their environments, emotions, opinions and thoughts with talk audio products. I claim that relationship the listeners form with talk audio hosts makes the primary aesthetic material of agency in talk audio social in nature.

A popular modern talk audio product in the Western(ized) world, *a podcast*, acts as the foundation of the thesis work, as it is a clearly distinguishable product for consumers, academia and market actors. In recent years, it has caught the interest of consumers and, consequently, the media-services, such as global music streaming service Spotify. Spotify claims to want to take over the whole “audio world” in the upcoming years (Ek 2019). The empirical material for this thesis was collected in collaboration with Spotify during the exact time it launched its service in the Indian market. Another distinct talk audio product is a Ted Talk show that emerged from the empirical material. Ted Talks are talk-based digital media products in which experts and inspirational speakers present their ideas. The speakers can vary from researchers to Hollywood actors and, thus, there is also a diverse variety of topics available.

## 1.1. Research questions

The research question when collecting the research material was open, as the approach to the topic was explorative. The question ‘*how do young people in India and in Sweden use talk audio products, and why?*’ led the collection of the data. Now, after using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006) as a content analysis method to drive this open approach forward, my new research question, based on the interview material and theoretical framework, became to be: *How young people deploy different forms of agency through talk audio use and onto talk audio?*

In order to answer this research question, I need to define my approach to agency and pose three complementary questions. My first approach to agency derives from Bull’s (2000, 2) notion. He builds his approach to agency from certain Critical Theorists in order to distinguish how personal stereo use transforms the ‘site’ and the ‘horizon’ of a user’s experience in urban surroundings. His approach to agency is all about the personal stereo users’ conscious strategies, their inner and outer management of the self. In pursuance of understanding how talk audio use relates to the spatial and cognitive transformation of a user, I ask; *how does talk audio use play a role in the management of everyday life?*

Second, I aim to understand the aesthetic dimensions of agency through DeNora. According to DeNora (2000) aesthetic materials, such as talk audio, bestow perception, action and feeling for the listener. DeNora’s stance to agency takes a *less-intrinsic* notion of agency into account as users may, in addition of using conscious strategies, also be only *semi-conscious* about the motivations of their construction of agency. Aesthetic materials, such as music, can be used as an ordering device if listeners mobilize it to enhance or alter aspects of self, such as attaining a feeling. In light of DeNora’s approach, I also ask; *how is talk audio used as an ordering device of the self?*

After collecting my empirical data, it became clear that for my informants the unique features of talk audio were, inherently, the presence of the talk audio host and the connection they experienced with these hosts. Therefore, I complete the presented theoretical approaches with another research question by building on Hartmann’s (2008) concept of *paracommunication* that stems from Horton & Wohl’s (1956) concept

parasocial relationship; *how does the parasocial relationship between talk audio characters and listeners affect the agency of the listeners?*

## 1.2. Thesis structure

The thesis starts by distinguishing the talk audio concept first through existing literature to new media and then, by presenting talk audio's characteristics in light of previous literature about radio, podcasts and Ted Talks. Next, in chapter 2.2., I will present the selected theoretical concepts for my analysis. First, I identify my approach to agency in chapter 2.2.1. Then, I distinguish ideas by Bull (2000), DeNora (2000) and Hartmann (2008) that will provide my frame of analysis. Then, in chapter 2.3., I present the two countries, India and Sweden, that were studied, and their relevant characteristics in order to contextualize the research. In chapter 3, I outline the thesis process and its methodological setting. In chapter 4, I present and analyze my material. Finally, in chapter 5, the conclusions of the thesis and suggestions for further research are presented.

## 2. Agency and the auditory – theoretical approach

In this chapter, I will present the theoretical approaches I use to analyze the interview data collected for the thesis. First, in order to understand the empirical experiences of young people in India and Sweden, talk audio needs to be defined as a specific medium. The context of its use will be understood by locating the talk audio medium as a form of new media through considering literature by Schroeder (2018), Hjarvard (2008) and Sundar (2008). Next, in section 2.1.1. Marshall McLuhan's approach to media will provide an understanding of the roles of media in individual consumption. I will also outline the characteristics of talk audio's ancestor, radio, by considering Andrew Crisell's (1986) approach, and I will then briefly present the characteristics of podcasts (chapter 2.2.3.) and Ted Talks (chapter 2.2.4) as they are the distinctive talk audio products in my empirical data.

Next, in chapter 2.2. I dive deeper into the theoretical concepts I use in my analysis. I will start by identifying my approach to agency in chapter 2.2.1. Then, since the thesis investigates talk audio use in urban surroundings, Michael Bull's approach (2000, 2001, 2007) to urban sound culture will give an understanding of how individuals *construct*

*parts of both their cognition as well as their urban surroundings through personal-stereo use.* Then, in section 2.2.3. Tia DeNora's (2000, 2016) ideas of constructing agency with music provides me another set of analytical tools; how aesthetic materials contain specific features and characterizations of which individuals pull in order to use them as referents or representations of where they want to go physically or mentally.

Talk audio as a medium has one key characteristic that, at least in part, makes it distinctive from music: the human voice and the feeling of presence it produces (MacDougall 2011). Therefore, in chapter 2.2.6. I will present Horton & Wohl's concept (1956) of *parasocial relationship* through the lens of Hartmann (2008), whose ideas will be connected with DeNora's (2000) and Bull's (2000) approaches. DeNora and Bull offer an explanation to understanding the construction of agency with audio products. By completing my theoretical framework with Hartmann's ideas, I aim to provide one perspective for understanding why characteristics in talk audio products provide a chance in constructing agency during use. In subchapter 2.3. I will briefly outline main differences of Sweden and India as cultural surroundings of talk audio use.

## 2.1. Defining talk audio

Robert Logan (2010, 4) claims new media to be the successors of traditional media and defines them as “digital media that are interactive, incorporate two-way communication and involve some form of computing as opposed to ‘old media’ such as the telephone, radio and TV”. Over the past quarter-century this digitally-based new media has been involved in some of the most wide-ranging changes in our society (Schroeder 2018). The changes take place in the everyday life of people as social interactions, and, in consequence, “society at large – take place via the media” (Hjarvard 2008, 113). This *mediatization* is “the process whereby society to an increasing degree is submitted to, or becomes dependent on, the media and their logic” (ibid. 113). The culture of everyday life is where culture is shaped by the internet and where the main changes are more mediated engagement with others and with information (Schoeder 2018, ibid. 8). Talk audio products, being highly dependent on the internet and digital technology, are forms of new media and, as we will see through my empirical data, *part of the mediatization of everyday life.*

In new media services and products, a heightened sense of agency for individual users is the key characteristic. Sundar (2008) claims through examples of CMC (computer mediated communications) that “the history of mass communication technology is one of increasing personalization of media, wherein the user is made to feel less and less like a passive receiver and more like a participant” (ibid. 61). On digital mass media platforms, the messages are tailored for users in order to imitate interpersonal communication; the goal is to make each audience member feel like the message is directed explicitly for her/him alone – (s)he is the only receiver of the message. In this context, agency, in short, means that the user feels relevant as an actor and has *a sense of control*. The key in the individualization of customized media lies in the fact that the self acts as the sender and source of the messages. Therefore, the exact nature of the desired individualization and the aim when building CMC for users is no longer to approximate traditional face-to-face encounters, as it used to be; *it is to create as heightened a sense of agency as possible*. Thus, Sundar claims that “[t]echnological variables embedded in media systems affect the nature and psychology of our interactions with content as well as other humans by essentially highlighting the importance of our own selves” (ibid., 72).

Even the music industry bases its online services on user data, since users can pick and play songs or albums, create their own playlists and pay no attention to how the artist has packaged the songs originally (ibid.). This is the service, e.g., Spotify sells to its users on its digital platform. Instead of acknowledging how this is the result of a well-defined and managed data-base, the individual user feels unique and distinct. Some have claimed that since the mediated content the users receive is through a method in which self acts as the source of individualization, the system “does not only mediate users’ relation to their socio-cultural environment but it might also mediate their relation to themselves” (Karayali et al. 2018, 6). In turn, recommendation systems, the providers of specific contents, become companions in everyday life for users; *“the intimate experts of their selves”*. (ibid.) In this thesis, most of my informants use platforms based on customized services (e.g., Youtube, Spotify, Acast, Podcaster, Reddit, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Google, etc.) when listening to talk audio.

### 2.1.1. Characteristics of audio media

*“For twenty five centuries Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand that the world is not for beholding. It is for hearing. ... Now we must learn to judge a society by its noise.”*

(Attali, 1985, 5)

French sociologist Jacques Attali (1985) claimed that instead of the eye, it is the ear that holds the path to power. Attali suggests that our sight has become dimmed, and thus, the world is for hearing and music is an instrument of understanding the world. Most theorizations about urban daily life has been formed based on visual epistemologies even though, when studying the auditory experiences, the sound has different and more relational qualities; it is, for example, more intangible than sight (Bull 2000, 116).

As the thesis aims to understand talk audio products as mediums empirically in the everyday life of young people in India and Sweden, media theorist Marshall McLuhan (1964) offers a starting point for understanding how mediums build the experience the users have when listening to different kinds of content. McLuhan (1964) emphasizes that since humans aim to divide all things as tools of control, *also media are operationally and practically operators of control*. Media are extensions of our senses, and they “configure the awareness and experience of each one of use” (1964, 23). For McLuhan, media extends individual’s capabilities and attributes which create “perceptual environments”. These environments affect what facts and stimuli are emphasized as important and which are ignored. Thus, “the medium is the message” – since the medium creates and controls the forms of human action. If something exists and operates it also intrinsically takes part in the process of shaping objects, roles, distinctions and classifications around it.

McLuhan has been widely influential for both media intellectuals and digital journalism ever since his emergence and peak of influence in the 1960s but his approach has been widely criticized especially in the academia. Fishman (2006) argues that as the time from 1765 to 1800 is known as the age of industrialization, the time from 1965 to 2000 will be known as the age of communication. No matter what one might conclude about

McLuhan's approach per se, Fishman argues that it is clear that McLuhan has been "the foremost press agent for the concepts that (a) society is fundamentally based on its system of communication, and (b) the communication system creates a foundation for the type of sensory perceptions existing within a particular era" (ibid. 569). However, McLuhan was one of the first to identify the role of communication in information processing, and, thus, his work echoed the effects of digital culture ahead of his time. He was also able to reveal the influence of senses in communication. One of his biggest weaknesses, in turn, was to ignore the media's effects on social organizations and through his work he legitimized the power of advertising and broadcasting. (Fishman 2006, 572–573.)

Radio is the ancestor of all talk-based audio content, and thus, understanding radio's unique characteristics as a medium is crucial in identifying talk audio as a unique medium. McLuhan claimed that although orality became secondary to sight through the development of letters, the sense of presence encoded in the human voice is still more powerfully immediate and enhanced when the sound is intimately fed into the ears. Radio turns "the psyche and society into a single echo chamber" (ibid., 327), and that the ear is "intolerant, closed and exclusive", while the eye is "open, neutral and associative" (ibid., 330).

Media scholar Andrew Crisell (1986) has identified the qualities of the radio medium by comparing it to other mass media communication tools such as television or newspapers. In line with McLuhan, Crisell claims that the most special characteristic of radio has since its emergence been *blindness* – we cannot see the content which consists only of noise and silence. Unlike in television, there is no image or text, which makes the broadcaster invisible for the receiver and, unlike with newspapers, there is no visually lasting message – the messages exist in *time, not space* (ibid. 45). Since messages in radio consist of words expressed only in voices, more context has to be given by the broadcaster to provide a pleasurable experience for the listener. However, the blindness of the medium also provides some advantages for the listener, such as the possibility to supplement the information through *imagination*. The possibility to imagine is also present in visual-based mediums, since not everything is apparent in films, television or theatre. Nonetheless, Crisell claims that the visual is our dominant function of imagination, and without direct visual cues, the space left for creative imagination is greater. Flexibility is

also an advantage of this blindness – listeners can see and do things in their physical space while listening. Thus, in contrast to McLuhan, Crisell claims the blindness can create *a more participatory role for the listener*. (Crisell 1986, 8, 12.)

Another distinctive feature of radio medium according to Crisell (1986, 13) is that even though the audiences of the medium are masses, the reception is very much individual and is often *perceived as more personal* by the listener, since the broadcaster can deliver messages directly to an isolated person. Thus, the intimacy of the radio medium is not caused only by the spationary trait of “being inside someone’s head”, but also the fact that the listener is most of the time reached during a private moment. Sound is one of the unique characters of audio mediums like radio or talk audio. However, sound is not “just a sound”, since it can also have characteristics. According to Crisell, spoken content is less objective in comparison to written content; when words are spoken, the voice gives them an index of the person or the character speaking, and a voice can be interpreted as the *index of a human presence* (ibid. 47). This is not the case with literary content, since text and images are outside the individual. Crisell also claims that sounds are not natural sounds; they are more concise. In a “natural” situation, a person can select which noises one takes into consideration from the surrounding, whereas with radio the listener cannot select the area of attention in a similar way because the broadcaster prioritizes all sounds for the listener. Since we mainly navigate with vision, our sense of hearing is not as precise, and, therefore, sound-based products create a set of requirements in order to work. The soundscape must be made as clear as possible, and conscious decisions about the nuances of the content are very precise and thought-through. (Crisell 1986, 47-48.)

Music and radio as audio media have some similar characteristics and since my theoretical approach builds on music sociology, similarities with music and radio as media should be identified. Music sociologist Tia DeNora (2016) claims that music as a medium is nearly always a temporal medium; it exists as a *real time cultural action*. This was what Crisell (1986) also identified about radio; the messages exist in time. Due to its temporality, DeNora (2016) claims that music as a cultural medium provides a qualitative template to be together in time, which simultaneously makes music a tool to understand how culture operates in individuals and organizes the body and the mind. Music can also embody modes of experiences, which can result in bodily reactions such as attacking and

touching or singing in unison. Since radio can consist of music and talk, it might involve similar communicative and synchronic features.

Both music and radio are *materially flexible*, since they are invisible and easily portable (DeNora 2016, Crisell 1986, 12). Flexibility can make music imposing as it can fill a space and create bodily reactions. DeNora points out that music is not only a form of communication or a sonic representation of meaning; “it is a constitutive ingredient of association” (ibid 397). In light of this literature, radio-like products could possess similar features. DeNora urges us to understand music *as a social condition*; “a means of being social and being affected and for continuing to produce sociality situated in real time” (ibid. 397). She urges to investigate how other aesthetic media, such as talk audio, enter into action and prepare individuals for action as well as give social life structure and texture. In subchapter 2.2.3. I will dig deeper into DeNora’s approach, in order to identify how it can be used as a theoretical frame for understanding the aesthetic dimensions of agency in talk audio products. But before that, I will present some characteristics of talk audio mediums that emerged in my empirical material – podcasts and Ted Talks.

### 2.1.2. Characteristics of podcasts

Sellas (2012) claims that the emergence of podcasts is part of the development of digital internet radio. Internet radio differs from traditional radio since it does not require a license, it does not require territorial features, the demands of the infrastructure are minimal, the content can go beyond audio, as the station websites are more like multimedia platforms, there are no linear requirements as for time and communication with the audience is possible. Podcasting also goes further with the on-demand aspect, as listeners can subscribe to their favorites and get content onto their portable devices. There are also no time and space limitations, because the ‘tyranny of radio station programming schedules’ is broken – users decide when, how and what they listen to. Furthermore, the users’ interest turns to specific content instead of particular radio stations. Sellas (2012) proposes that instead of referring to radio, we should talk about ‘audio media’ and ‘audio programmes’, which would refer to radio and podcasting as one of radio’s extensions. Also Berry claims, that podcasting disrupts the radio since with podcasting there is no

producer who owns the technology, and broadcasting is free and available for everyone. (Berry 2006.)

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a podcast is “a digital audio file that can be taken from the internet and played on a computer or a device that you can carry with you” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, June 2019). *Podcasting* as a concept formed in 2004, when Ben Hammersley, a journalist for *the Guardian* newspaper, published an article about the growth of audio content being published in mp3 format around the internet (MacDougall 2011, Berry 2016). Hammersley claims that with weblogging and carriable mp3 players “all ingredients are there”, referring to the upcoming phenomenon of amateur broadcasting (Hammersley 2004). Most academic research has covered podcast products only from an advertising or educational perspective in the fields of business, pedagogy and medicine (Berry 2006); they have intrigued scholars, but not many have taken on the profound examination of the podcast phenomenon. Although Robert MacDougall’s (2011) work about podcast use in the United States offers one empirical approach, wide coverage of empirical research around the world about the use of this medium has been lacking for a decade.

For MacDougall podcasts are “complex cognitive and cultural processes and consequential to the reconfigurations of everyday experiences and the personal and political significances bound up in them” (2011, 719). Because humans are incapable of experiencing the world out of context, and the world around us is always present only in the immediate moment, the media product will always be filtered through the consumer’s physical surroundings, personal history and the medium of choice. Since this is nowadays a daily activity of many urban citizens, it concerns aspects of an individual’s subjective perspective of the world lived as a real-time experience and, most importantly, because it *conveys meanings and imports specific content*; “the mobilization of such content has been shown to reorient the listener to the world and the world to the listener” (ibid 2012, 170).

In line with Crisell (1986), MacDougall claims that the sense of hearing is more open to active association and referencing through the mental inputs, such as memory, of an individual than sight is. Hearing is an organic connection, since sound is profoundly inside a human ear and not separate *from self* like visual images are from the eyes. For

him, key distinction of audio-products is self-consciousness; we “become the nexus of all that is occurring” (2012, 178). The consequences of using hearing as the primary sense in talk audio products is two-fold. Firstly, due to the tendency of the auditory sense being “particularly open to active and addictive referencing”, an individual often selects a podcast that entails and heightens the perception of the world one already has (2011, 718). Secondly, MacDougall (2012, 179–180) argues that as the visual image is left blank for the perceptions of the receiver’s imagination, the power and presence of the relation of the messenger and the message is enhanced (ibid., 180), and, thus, podcasts are often highly persuasive socio-political events (ibid., 167).

MacDougall (2012, 167) believes that the popularity of the podcast phenomenon can be explained “due primarily to the power of the human voice”. Listening to human talk on radio or watching television obtains a sense of *being addressed personally* for the receiver. Thus, for the receiver this sense of ‘being there’ can create an illusion of a two-way communicative encounter; since hearing is a highly resonating sense, the encounter between the media personality and the receiver experienced through headphones can be even more engaging than through a television screen (ibid. 178).

### 2.1.3. Characteristics of TED Talks

Ted Talk is “*video series of great talks and performances, filmed at TED conferences, independent TEDx events and on other stages worldwide*” (Ted website March, 22, 2020). TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) is a non-profit media organization that emerged to challenge traditional channels for spreading ideas (Aspden 2010), and *TED Talk* is TED’s main media product in which experts and inspirational speakers present their ideas, most often based on their personal experiences. The speakers can vary from company executives to scientists and local heroes and, thus, there is also a diverse variety of topics available.

In an interview of TED’s European director Bruno Giussani by *Financial Times* journalist Peter Aspden, Giussani claims TED’s statement “ideas worth sharing” to summarize TED’s mission to disseminate innovative and alternative ideas (Aspden 2010). TED started as a conference in 1984 in California as the idea of the American architect and designer Richard Saul Wurman. At first it was a conference concept for innovators of Information Technology where only the audience could hear the ideas of the speakers, who at the time represented Macintosh computer

demos and Sony products. Later, in 2001, after ownership changes, the TED organization wanted to democratize the access to information it produced, so it started recording and spreading inspirational speeches on its website for free. Giusanni claims TED's mission is to feed information and knowledge in the form of ideas for a world that is overwhelmed by bad news. For him, TED's success can be explained by *the failures of other media*. (Aspden 2010.) To conclude, TED distributes "*novel*" information that reaches people across the world digitally. These days TED also helps its communities replicate the TED Talk concept through TEDx Program, which is a TED-like event that is independently organized by the public (Ted website March, 22, 2020). The student participants of the thesis both organized and participated TEDx events in their schools in India (e.g., Mohit 19, India).

Julia Ludewig (2017,3) who has studied the rhetoric features in TED Talks conceptualizes them as "a practice, that is, as a discursive pattern through which speakers create and interpret the social world" and calls TED conference also a "rhetorical community" as it invokes a moment of bonding and collectivity among a group of strangers. Ludewig identifies TED Talks' characteristics to be *an enthusiastic and optimistic spirit* which creates inspiration for the audience. Ted talks can be considered to be somewhat similar with sales pitches since the two most common rhetoric tools used are *anecdotes* and *humor* and the goal of the presenter is to *convince the audience that (s)he is trustworthy and ingenious*. Also the *educational undertone* of TED Talks is a distinctive characteristics; the presenter engages with the audience by standing on a stage which is a representation of a traditional academic lecture. In addition to presenting novel ideas, TED Talks promote speakers' achievements and feature persuasive goals of convincing the audience of an idea or a product. Instead of having a loose frame for its presenters, TED Talks are "perfectly designed 'knowledge snacks'", in which the delivery is structured in a precise manner. (Ludewig 2017.)

The distinction between a Ted Talk and a podcast is the visual features; Ted Talks are presented as videos both in Youtube and in TED's own application. Even though, they are also available without a video for example in TED application, most interview participants of this thesis used Ted Talks primarily as video-based products. Thus, they need to be understood as a more visually-centered forms of talk audio products than podcasts and thus, most characteristics about the invisibility lack in case of Ted Talk use.

However, the talk-based feature and the fact that they are consumed on a digital platform online are all similarities between these two types of talk audio. Similarities in use was found in my data and thus, in this thesis, they are a vital part of the talk audio concept.

## 2.2. Theoretical perspective

In this subchapter I will first present my position to agency. Then, in order to locate the thesis theoretical framework, the key analytical tools will be presented. Since I use three separate theoretical approaches in order to analyze my empirical material, I have provided the main concepts in tables to present my approach as transparent as possible.

### 2.2.1. Agency

Before presenting how the thesis situates methodologically regarding agency, I first need to identify my perspective on the how to conceptualize human social action. In the social sciences, one traditional way of dividing theoretical approaches is to classify them either as *methodologically individualistic* or *methodologically holistic*. Methodologically individualistic theories refer to explanations of the world that can be disassembled into actions of an individual, whereas methodologically holistic theories start from understanding societal structures (either cultural networks of meanings or institutional structures) as things that exist before an individual and therefore shape actors and their actions. This theoretical contradiction between methodological individualism and methodological holism, that is actor-driven theoretical approaches and structure-driven theoretical approaches, is an ever-lasting debate in social sciences (Heiskala 2000, 13-14.)

Anthony Giddens (1979) has provided a distinctive approach to understanding this contradiction. Giddens (ibid. 49) connects human action and social structures by forming a theory of human agents and agency. He does this through “an account of the conditions and consequences of action”; in his analysis, an interpretation of ‘structure’ involves considering the conditions and consequences of actions. Therefore, the key is to locate the *interdependence* of both agent’s actions and structures as they “presuppose one another” (ibid 53) as Giddens refuses to give primacy to either social structures or agents.

To him, action takes place in *contexts* which include actions of other people as well as opportunities and constraints of social structures.

I will draw upon Giddens's concept of agency. He defines agency as follows

*“‘Action’ or agency ... does not refer to a series of discrete acts combined together, but to a continuous flow of conduct. We may define action ... as involving a ‘stream of actual or contemplated **causal interventions** of corporeal beings in the ongoing process of events-in-the-world’.” (Giddens 1979, 55.)*

*The causal interventions* Giddens refers to are forms of actions agents take in order to achieve purposes that can be either more *fully conscious* or more *semi-conscious*. Agency is investigated here through the lenses of Bull's (2000) analysis of personal-stereo user strategies in urban surroundings, as well as the understanding of the aesthetic capacities of agency in talk audio products which I derive from DeNora (2000).

By focusing on the auditory and technologized nature of everyday use of personal stereo, Bull (2000, 2) demonstrates how the use of personal stereo is simultaneously management of space and time as well as boundaries around the self. Through use of personal-stereos, individuals manage contingency and regulate interpersonal encounters in urban surroundings. By building on Critical Theorists such as Adorno (1991) and Kracauer (1995) Bull questions the assumption that they have evaded 'agency' and focuses on *how the transformation of experience through the act of listening* gives users a chance to *prioritize their experience socially*; individuals retreat “into mediated forms of public inwardness which transform both the ‘site’ and ‘horizon’ of their experience” (ibid. 8-9). Therefore, Bull's approach to agency refers to a *relatively conscious forms of agency* in order to achieve certain pragmatic purposes. As I investigate the transformation of agency with talk audio products, the focus of investigation is, in light of Bull, somewhat instrumental and calculative forms of action.

As stated, agency may, however, be also less conscious. DeNora's (2000) approach to agency is less conscious and more fine-grained than Bull's. DeNora (ibid., 20) studied music's effects on social life and defines agency as follows:

*-- music is in dynamic relation with social life, helping to invoke, stabilize and change the parameters of agency, collective and individual. By the term 'agency' here, I mean feeling, perception, cognition and consciousness, identity, energy, perceived situation and scene, embodied conduct and comportment.*

Therefore, in light of DeNora, aesthetic materials bestow perception, action and feeling, and are a vital part in the process of articulating and experiencing the social world with self and others; listening to music assists in creating aesthetic environments and social outcomes. To her, an aesthetic material, such as music, is “a resource for modulating and structuring the parameters of ‘aesthetic agency’” (ibid., 53) in which individuals pull from specific features and characterizations from a musical artefact and use them as referents or representations of where they want to go physically or mentally, what they want to achieve. Thus, as a medium, talk audio does not simply deliver the content – “the message” (McLuhan) – for its users, but it also potentially has a capacity to contain and constitute agency for its receivers.

In my analysis section I aim to distinguish both fully conscious and semi-conscious user strategies in relation to transforming one’s agency. In order to understand the perceptions my informants attached to talk audio use, I will distinguish both the attributions of agencies, the *forms of agency the students described talk audio to contain on a general level*, after which I focus on their subjective agencies in talk audio use. My research does not aim to capture all existing dimensions of instrumental and less-instrumental forms of agency in talk audio use in light of DeNora and Bull, but it creates an empirical, explorative window from which future research can benefit. In the following subchapters I will present approaches by DeNora and Bull more distinctively.

Like stated through ideas of Giddens, action takes place in *contexts*. Since talk audio products are consumed through technological devices, such as mobile phones, in this thesis *technology sets one context to understand the use of the content they produce*. This is emphasized by Bull (2000), who locates technologies as something that are always embedded in social structures and systems, but that simultaneously can be articulated only through analysis of everyday forms of use. My focus lies solely in analysing experiences in everyday use of talk audio use. The boundary context technologies set for talk audio

use should be a topic of another investigation. Also, another distinguishable context for talk audio use is the cultural and social surrounding in India and Sweden of which I, in part, aim to distinguish through my empirical data.

### 2.2.2. The mediated urban experiences of the auditory – the work of Bull

Michael Bull (2000, 2001, 2007) has contributed to the understanding of an urban sound culture. He focuses on the nature of the auditory in everyday life, the role of technology in the prism of auditory experiences, and the roles personal stereos, such as the Sony Walkman or the iPod, play in managing everyday life. As the thesis sets out to investigate how talk audio decorates the interiors of the urban audio experiences of young people in Sweden and India, Bull's approach to urban world through personal-stereo use helps set the context of understanding audio product use in everyday life.

Bull (2000) argues that audio technology has cognitive, aesthetic and moral meanings, as it affects how users relate to themselves, others and their surroundings. By studying iPod use empirically in the United States, Bull (2007, 4) claims that self-distancing is a trend in urban cities – a 'mediated urban isolation'. All urban spaces are 'non-spaces' because individuals construct malls, libraries, streets and airports subjectively as they move through them in their own privatized sound-bubbles. Bull's studies have focused on auditory mobile device use, but he has mainly theorized about music. I argue that this 'technologically mediated solitude', as Bull puts it, refers also to talk audio products in addition to music.

Bull builds on earlier literature about the auditory world and thus, I must first outline some relevant perspectives by certain Critical Theorists. Critical Theorists of media, such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, acknowledged that human senses have a central role in constructing the horizon of experience for individuals, which is key in their understanding of the relationship between agency and structure (Bull 2000, 120-121). The notions we take for granted, such as 'hearing', 'seeing' or 'remembering' are culturally-derived, mediated practices that play a part in the constitution of everyday experiences. Critical Theorists give communication technology a key role in constructing the

cognitive, aesthetic and moral spaces of the everyday experiences that take part in constructing the subjective horizons people have within urban surroundings.

Bull adopts from Critical Theorists the how the individual experience is perceived as technological experience; technology “becomes central both in terms of the constitution of, and as the object of, volition” (ibid. 122). For Adorno (1976, 46) the social transformations urban citizens are seeking is a “utopian sense of habitation”. This fragile space becomes more secure when occupied by signifiers of imaginary and presence. Music can fill this space as it encircles the individual, and ultimately transforms a *listener into a participant*. In consequence, music creates an illusion of *immediacy* in this subjective space – one that evokes memories, thoughts and emotions here and now. For Adorno (1991) the subject has an intrinsic ambition to transcend everyday life through auditory products, which keeps the subject attached to these cultural products. The connection to the cultural product aggregates a sense of “weness” — a state of belonging. Thus, communication technology affects the subject’s internal space. The relationship between the auditory products and the “we-ness” is intimate but simultaneously distinctively collective; an anticipation of a collective state. In line with Adorno, Bull claims that the senses of immediacy and intimacy are crucial in personal-stereo use. (Bull, 2000, 122-123.) The sense of immediacy can be considered to be somewhat similar with what both Crisell (1986) and DeNora (2016) pointed out about auditory content existing in *time*, not space.

Bull (2000, 137-138) does not ignore the visual epistemologies, unlike some visually-oriented theorists have done when theorizing the auditory. For example, Simmel’s (1997) ‘blasé attitude’ theorizes how the urban citizen navigates in its surroundings; (s)he is in constant retreat of overload of sensory stimulations and when moving around the city creates strategies to enable the ease from this overload. However, the strategies an urban citizen has when using personal stereo can be multiple and various instead of summarizing it as simply ‘blasé’. Bull (ibid) claims that in urban surroundings individuals combine visual and auditory tactics in everyday behavior, such as trying to remain ‘invisible’ or unseen by other citizens by using a personal stereo as a shield against attention. Music can also, for example, accompany the visual experiences people have in urban surroundings; just as in a movie, the music creates the soundtrack and adds aesthetic

elements, for example a narrative or an emotion, for what the person sees with his or her eyes. Therefore, visual and auditory elements are intertwined aspects of strategic behaviour among urban people today.

The motivations for personal-stereo use should be understood as an *effort to avoid the apparent contingency of the everyday to reach forms of habitual cognitive management*. For example, in order to reach forms of cultural “we-ness” and to avoid distinctions between inner and outer areas of everyday life. For Bull, the use of personal stereo devices is simultaneously both management of subjective as well as the environment. (ibid. 154-160.) To contribute to the understanding of these management strategies, Bull (2000, 186-190) constructed a typology on grounds of earlier literature by urban theorists such as Simmel, and Critical Theorists such as Adorno, as well as based on his own empirical data. Some parts of his typology are relevant for my analysis. I divide these into two sets of management strategies: *managing the outer reality* and *managing the inner reality*.

Firstly, in line with Simmel’s blasé, personal stereo users aim to replace unwanted sounds around them in the city with their own personal sound space; users try to gain control over the sounds they hear. Secondly, users want to escape the people around them in crowded spaces; especially their gaze. In lack of personal space, the users take part in somewhere else than their physical surrounding; in the sound space of their own choice. Thirdly, users can make use of personal stereo to avoid unwanted attention; a tool of managing contact with other unknown people. As users free time from encounters in public spaces they create spaces where they can “be themselves”. Fourth, the boring urban life routines, such as commuting, become more interesting for individuals as they manage segments of their daily routines through personal-stereo use. To summarize, individuals look for *a heightened sense of being in control spatially* when they experience their surroundings.

However, the users do not use personal stereos only to manage their outer environment; they also wish to gain control cognitively in their subjective minds (ibid. 156). Individuals may use personal stereos alone in order to enjoy the experience of their own music. The auditory experience then has intrinsic, rather than instrumental value for them. They may also try to organize their thoughts and feelings to avoid “internal chaos”. Some may also

escape loneliness and as such reformulate their current experience through the sense of “we-ness” (Adorno) as *personal stereo provides company*. Through the sense of “we-ness” users may also attend to their own sense of narrative; their own imagined biography. Also, the aesthetic dimensions of experiencing the personal sound spaces are one vital strategy of use according to Bull; personal stereo use may create energetic moods, a greater sense of meaning or constitute a group exclusivity when listening together with others.

In order to distinguish the relevant parts of Bull’s typology, I have presented them in a diagram below.

<b>Management of the outer</b>	<b>Management of the inner</b>
Managing one’s auditory experiences	Enjoying the experience of one’s “own” music
Escaping the gaze of others	Managing thoughts and feelings
Avoiding unwanted attention	Sense of “we-ness”: avoiding feelings of loneliness through a technologized sense of companionship
Escaping the repetitive elements of urban life routines and boredom	Sense of “we-ness”: attending own sense of narrative
	Aesthetization: escaping to one’s imaginary space
	Personal-stereos as activators: users feel more energized when accompanied by music
	When listening as a joint activity, personal-stereo use constitutes a form of group exclusivity

Bull claims that as individuals form rituals into everyday practices through use of personal stereo, they set out “real life” to be somewhere else and use personal stereo to reclaim the meaning of current moment. These moments can signify an escape from the system world

formations in the everyday lifeworld of subjects; “users operationalize prescribed forms of individualism which condition subjective forms of escape from routines deemed threatening to their status as an individual user” (ibid. 163). Therefore, Bull focuses on investigating fully conscious, pragmatic level personal-stereo user strategies in an urban environment; users transform their actions by using personal-stereo in an instrumental tool of managing their agency.

Bull argues that “the desire to maintain forms of experiential control is expressed precisely through forms of dependency on technologically mediated forms of company” (ibid. 156). By escaping physically from the surrounding, the personal-stereo users escape “to be oneself” and as such through the construction of auditory sense of “we-ness” the users are simultaneously isolated and accompanied. (ibid. 154-160.) Thus, “iPods are by their very nature primarily a privatizing technology” (2007, 5), as everyone can choose her/his own noises to escape from others and – even more importantly – silence. Personal-stereo use thus, must be located in historical and cultural processes in which face-to-face encounters and forms of communication compete with technologically transmitted forms of social action and experiences. The technological forms of experience are more attractive, more secure and more predictable and as such are often prioritized; individuals retreat from traditional forms of social interaction to increasingly identify themselves with a mediated sense of “we-ness”, such as, a musical space. (Bull 2000,147-149.)

In addition to music use, prioritizing a virtual experience in domestic sphere can be found for example in Sherry Turkle’s (1995) approach to MUD (Multi-User Domains or Multi-User Dungeons) communities. In these digital platforms, the digital environment is not only a reflection of the ‘RL’, real physical world but instead, people can identify digital environments as “more true” for them than real physical environments and they can build aspects of their being in the digital world. Turkle claims among many postmodern thinkers, that “we are moving toward a culture of simulation in which people are increasingly comfortable with substituting representations of reality for the real” (1995, 21-23). Both Turkle and Bull claim that these technologies, MUDs and personal-stereo use, contain privatizing as well as transformative communicative elements which have consequences for traditional forms of communication practices. In my thesis data, the young people compared their relationship to talk audio hosts with their relationships with

their friends which makes the presented approach to social relations relevant, and which will provide an interesting and new starting point to Bull's and Turkle's claim.

### 2.2.3. Music as an ordering device of everyday life – the work of DeNora

Tia DeNora is a later contributor to music sociology in which scholars such as Theodor Adorno (1976) and Paul Willis (1978) have studied the relation of music and a social being. For DeNora, the challenge of the approach is to distinguish how at the same time “music articulates the social life and social life articulates music” (DeNora 2000, 5). DeNora (ibid. 156) claims that after Adorno scholars contributing to music sociology have turned away from analyzing music's social power to analyzing music as an object and dives deep into identifying both what music “does” as well as what it “means” to its listeners. Music listening is private and plays a crucial role in the constitution and regulation of self. DeNora points out that by distinguishing the nature of musical power, other non-human and human relations and the roles of other materials in social life may unravel themselves.

With her empirical data, DeNora (2000, 151) explores aspects of self-production with music on different levels. Firstly, how music acts in *relation to self – emotions, memories and self-identity*. Secondly, music's *interrelationship with the body*, and thirdly, music's *role in social interaction*. However, using some of DeNora's key findings I focus only on *how aspects of agency are produced through her concepts*.

DeNora (2000, 110) claims that social sciences are often reluctant to acknowledge that aesthetic materials, such as music, can afford modes of action, feeling and embodiment. Music is a constituent of and a resource for agency – “a medium with a capacity for imparting shape and texture to being, feeling and doing” (ibid., 152–153). DeNora calls music a *medium of moods*. In DeNora's study individuals described music as an “ordering device” in their lives, meaning that they were aware what kind of music they *needed* in certain situations, for example, what mood they were aiming for with music. In a way, they mobilized music to enhance or alter aspects of themselves, like attaining a feeling and a bodily reaction of relaxation or maintaining a feeling of energy. Vice versa, they also described how they consciously avoided some music or tried to remove a feeling of

stress with it. As a result, individuals ‘reconfigure’ themselves with music; ‘get into the mood’ or ‘get out of moods’. Thus, music provides a way for mood management, with which you can tune up or diffuse your mood in ways you prefer. When managing the self with music, subjectivity is presented as an object of self-knowledge and music as a tool for “care of self”. (DeNora 2000, 50–56.)

When identifying how one feels with music, it is used as a way of self-expression and can be understood as a building material of ‘subjectivity’. Through this setting one can create habits or styles of emotional states with music and use it as both as “an instigator and a container of feeling” (DeNora 2000, 57–58). DeNora questions Adorno’s (1991) concept of music as a ‘musical work’ and having power in itself. She argues that for her informants the music-produced effects presented above emerge from *the meanings and orientations individuals give to specific music pieces* instead of music simply ‘acting upon’ individuals. These effects are born when *individuals interpret* the music and locate it in the web of their associations. (DeNora 2000, 61–62.)

Furthermore, individuals can find themselves in specific musical structures, which makes music a mirror for identity to identify itself through. It is not enough to understand music as a way to experience culture – it must be also be understood as a vehicle to generate culture into “being, doing and feeling” (ibid., 62, 70). Thus, like stated, music can act as a resource for ‘aesthetic agency’ (ibid., 53); actors distinguish articulations of musical artefacts and relate modes of agency into those artefacts, as they decide to listen to that specific piece of musical artefact.

However, the goals of the self-transformation are not born in a vacuum but are heavily based on how the individuals described how they should feel in different situations, for example, when going to a party. In relation to this, DeNora refers to Arlie Hochschild’s term emotion work. (DeNora 2000, 50–56.) Hochschild (1979, 2012) studied this tension by trying to understand how individuals tune their emotions to be “appropriate” in given social situations. Hochschild claims that rules determine how people ought to feel in different situations and uses the concept of “emotion work” to distinguish how we try to tune our feelings to line up with what we think we ought to feel. This means that emotions are highly social. Thus, there is also a societal level to mood, as individuals feel obliged

to feel a certain way in certain situations and they change their behavior and ultimately, their own mood, to fit these requirements. Consequently, music-like products, such as talk audio, can act as cultural artefacts in between the society and an individual.

From DeNora (ibid., 109), I also borrow the understanding of music’s role as “a device of social ordering”, in order to distinguish whether similar aspects arise from talk audio use. As a resource of social order, DeNora argues (ibid., 110) that with music actors take part in “materially and aesthetically configured spaces” at a *collective level*. Music is used to “regulate and structure social encounters” to which it builds aesthetic texture. Music can act as a template on which “styles and temporal patterns of feelings, moving and being come to be organized and produced in real time”. For example, music sets a collective scene in an aerobics lesson and acts as a template for action.

In order to distinguish the relevant parts of DeNora’s approach, I have presented them in a diagram below.

Music as an ordering device; container of feelings or bodily reactions
Music as a mirror for identity; building material for subjectivity
Music as a tool for emotion work (Hochschild)
Music as a “device of social ordering”; music regulates and structures social encounters

#### 2.2.4. Parasocial relationship and audio products

A large part of interpersonal communication is mediated through technology these days, and, therefore, computer-mediated technologies challenge our traditional interpersonal encounters. New technologies can be seen as *relationship enablers*, as they do not only add new forms into how we interact, but they fundamentally change our ways of communicating. (Konjin 2008.) This change expands to how we interact with media personalities such as podcasters and Ted Talk speakers. What is key in the evolution

toward podcasts for McDougall (2011), is “the broadcasting-qua-publicizing of private thoughts”, which refers to long-distance but real-time referencing of events, addressing audiences directly and the *parasocial relationships* between the audiences and media personalities (ibid., 171).

Parasocial relationship is a notion of Horton and Wohl (1956) with which they refer to the key characterizations of mass media in which the audience has an illusion of a face-to-face relationship with the performer. They describe the experience to be like “men are met as if they were in the circle of one’s peers” (ibid., 215). To Horton and Wohl the described mass media were mainly radio, television and the movies, but from McDougall’s empirical findings, similar characteristics in the relationship with the podcast host and his listeners can be found. In Horton and Wohl’s original formulation, *parasocial relationship is a form of asymmetrical interaction*, since the user responds to the encounter without the media performer realizing this. Thus, the relationship and the encounter are, in a sense, “illusory”.

This concept by Horton and Wohl (1956) was created long before the advent of interactive computer technology (Hartmann 2008) and focused on the mass media performers of the time. Hartmann (ibid.) claims that the concept was based on vague assumptions, since analysis of the social perceptions of mediated characters was lacking. Thus, Hartmann argues that new media characters differ from mass media personalities and suggests a way the concept of *parasocial relationship* could be used when analyzing the interpersonal communication of the new media of the current time. Hartmann revisits Horton and Wohl’s (1956) concept and iterates the new concept of “paracommunication” in which the user’s perception of distance with the media personality is key and the interaction is not necessarily bound to noninteractive settings as new media characters can at least partly communicate with their audience. The users also need to perceive the mediated characters to be authentic enough to foster paracommunication, since less authenticity can lead to more “automatic” parasocial reactions. Paracommunication refers to the extent of resemblance the interaction between a media character and the user of the content produced by this character has with actual interpersonal communication. (Hartmann 2008.)

Because an expectation of a reaction is a vital part of communication, and in the social world the expectations often follow norms, the reaction to a media character’s behavior can also be appropriate or inappropriate. For example, when a comedian tells a joke, the expectation is to feel entertained, which is the “appropriate answering role” (Horton & Wohl 1956, 191) for the receiver. Since the parasocial encounter, according to Hartmann (2008), is “playful” and “as if nature”, users are freer to choose their answering role. In the ever-expanding new media landscape, users can also choose the recipient role among an endless amount of media characters. Hartmann also points out that some of these can “match the self-image of the users but move beyond the ones available in real life” (ibid. 183). Thus, Hartmann claims that *paracommunication is a distinct form of interpersonal communication because of the freedom it offers to engage with a conversational encounter without any responsibility for social consequences*. For example, in real interactions there might be sanctions when rejecting the “answering role” in the context of a social encounter. Thus, in paracommunication, there is a “lack of reciprocity” and more playful opportunities. However, with new media characters the reaction by the user is taken into account and, thus, Hartmann questions the applicability of these opportunities with new media personalities. Instead of claiming the “lack of reciprocity” to be a built-in part of parasocial encounters, Hartman suggests it to be “the perceived inability of the character to monitor the user’s behavior that allows a playful interaction” (Hartmann 2008, 183). In paracommunication, the user’s perception of distance with the media personality is key. If the character or the media setting does not feel authentic for the users, they also may switch to a more critical or analytical mode, which results in greater distance between the user and the mediated personality. (Hartmann 2008, 184–185).

In order to distinguish the relevant parts of Hartmann’s concept, I have presented them in a diagram below.

Perception of distance: the intimacy of the auditory
Perception of distance: “knowing” the talk audio host
Communication

Authenticity
Resemblance to actual interpersonal communication

Instead of using Hartman’s parasocial relationship for trying to understand all aspects between the relation of a talk audio host and her/his listener, I use the concept to complement the presented approaches by DeNora and Bull in order to understand how my informants deploy agency to talk audio use.

### 2.3. Two cultural spheres – India and Sweden

The implications of digital media, such as talk audio, are dependent on national differences (Schroeder 2018). As the cultural settings in the thesis are Sweden and India, it is important to acknowledge that the two countries have very different political systems; Sweden is mostly thought to present a “social democracy”, whereas India, with its historical background, is described to be an “elite-skewed democracy” (e.g., Schroeder 2018). However, in both countries the internet is becoming more market-oriented even though it is shaped by very different media and market systems. Schroeder (2018) studied new media’s political effects in both countries and argues that the internet and social media play a greater role in India, since the traditional media upholds the power of the elites, while the internet as a new feature provides freedom for citizens as it is closing the divide between rural and urban India.

Next I discuss some differences between these two cultural and societal settings that should be taken into consideration when aiming to understand talk audio use in India and Sweden. However, the thesis sets out to understand empirical data of talk audio product use in two different cultural areas but does not set the comparing aspect to its focus per se as I do not claim to provide a full analysis of comparing technologically mediated products in two differing cultures.

#### 2.3.1. India

The modern India of today was built through several phases as part of South Asian history and it has been an area of interest for the West ever since the Silk Road was founded to connect the Western and the Eastern worlds (Thomas, M 2012). In fact, the West have been interested in India for millennia, (Kumar & Sethi 2005, 1) and this interest has left its effects on modern India, e.g., through the fact that Britain ruled India from 1858 to 1947 (Buettner 2016). Even though India struggles with severe poverty and food deprivation, it is also one of the world's fastest growing economies measured by growth in GNP (Tenhunen & Säävälä 2012, 118). As the thesis data was collected in collaboration with music streaming company Spotify when it was launching its first services in India, this thesis is also one representation of the interest Western based actors have for India.

As a country of diversity India has also been called “one Europe in one country” with its 28 states and ten official languages, with over 1000 languages in total. The states are different culturally, socially and economically, and there remains a tension between the nation and seven union territories. The north and south India are also seen by most as two different cultural spheres, the south being economically and socially more evolved than the north. Karnataka, a state of Bangalore from where the thesis data were collected from, is from the south and one of the middle-income states. From 1997 to 2007, Karnataka was one of the fastest-growing states, and its prosperity is mainly due to growth in the sectors of service and information technology. (Tenhunen & Säävälä 2012, 14, 16, 18–20, 22.)

India is also a country of inequality. According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in 2015 the top 1 percent earned more than 20 percent of all income in the country, which makes it one of the most unequal countries in the world (World Social report 2020). Due to the diversity of the population, India's social classes are hard to characterize. Therefore, the current size and form of the middle class is hard to determine and remains a topic of debate. Tenhunen & Säävälä (2012, 134) point out that sociologically these kinds of categories based on household income and consumption level, often used in the West, are artificial. They claim that “Indians themselves define the class by referring to education, English proficiency, regular income and a certain respectable way of life, and many different kinds of people see themselves as middle

class: a high-school graduated office clerk with a low-caste background who has put his children into a private school is just as middle class as an affluent Brahman programmer in an IT company who can afford to go to abroad for his holidays” (ibid.). These groups have something in common, however: they value higher education, and they want to see themselves as morally respectable representatives of the Indian nation – and distinct from both the elite and the poor.

Udupa et al. (2019) have put forward the idea of “Millennial India” with which they establish a historically specific sociopolitical moment that should be perceived through processes of digitalization affecting constantly on politics, market and culture. Millennial India also refers to a generation of digital savvies whose political mindset is defined by digital cultures. These millennials come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and can be from both the urban or rural areas of India. The momentum of Millennial India has grown beyond the government driven “digital India” initiative (Udupa et al. 2019), which started after the first technological initiatives during the Nehru government (Bassett 2016).

Since all of the interviewees of this thesis attend university studies, they can be considered to be at least to some extent middle class Indians. Due to their age, they can also be considered to a part of the momentum of Millennial India, as they all used digital technology (social media, news in digital form, music and talk audio) in their daily lives and live in urban Bangalore. Thus, the data is representing somewhat privileged group in India which must be taken into consideration as the data is analyzed.

#### 2.3.1.2. Information Technology and New Media in India

Since the use of digital technology in India is more unfamiliar to Westerners than its use in Sweden, some of its aspects will be presented next to understand the context more fully. Firstly, the information technology sector has been acknowledged to be the ticket towards development in India; it is considered to be the face of India’s brand (Thomas, P 2012). Thomas (2012) claims that “digital is part of the story of globalizing India” while it is also an important part of localizing India. The officials in India believe that economic growth will happen through further developing the information technology sector that has already contributed to India’s economic growth greatly (Tenhunen & Säävälä 2012).

Additionally, as the use of social media has increased, globalization has deepened in an unforeseen manner. This belief in information technology also expands to social life, as families believe that their children will get better lives by engaging with information technology through use and education. However, the wealth created by information technology is not evenly distributed, and in some cases, might even increase poverty when current jobs are lost. (Tenhunen & Säävälä 2012, 17, 157, 184.)

Second, technology is still expensive in India, so the use of information technology varies between classes (Narayan & Narayanan 2016). Also, being illiterate or not having a constant access to electricity affects the use of technology in the country. Narayan & Narayanan (2016) claim that one of the most vivid changes in India during the last decade has been the arrival of mobile technology. Tenhunen and Säävälä claim that India's mobile phone sales rates have been "record breaking" ever since 1995, when mobile phones were first introduced. As in other part of the world, youth has adopted new technologies into their lives more than the previous generations. (Tenhunen & Säävälä 2012, 17, 157.) According to the Indian CNN journalist Rishar Iyengar, India is the world's second biggest market of smartphones after China and calls India the "next frontier of the Internet" (Iyengar 2018). This alone makes the country very seductive for technology companies looking for growth, such as music streaming company Spotify.

In 2016, Mukesh Ambani, the owner of Reliance Jio, changed internet use throughout India, as expensive and slow internet connections were replaced by a fast and cheap option that is available for everyone (Purnell 2018). Later, according to some news sources, Jio has partnered with Facebook in order to monetize and analyze its customer data (Parkin 2020). Before Jio, consumers could not use internet cost-effectively outside their homes without a wifi connection and, thus, they preferred downloading content and not streaming news, music, social media or anything else for that matter. Jio changed their possibilities and now they can act like consumers in most Western countries – streaming content wherever they go.

### 2.3.2. Sweden

In the Westernized world, Sweden is known as a flourishing Nordic welfare state that has succeeded in maintaining a capitalist market economy while simultaneously offering

generous welfare benefits to its residents. The Swedish welfare model is considered to be a prototype of the Social Democratic Welfare state (Lundberg & Åmark 2010), as the social security system has been built on universalist values and as social rights have guaranteed income security for all inhabitants since 1960 (Lundberg & Åmark 2010). The model has been seen as a utopia of a sort, as the economy has been able to sustain the costly social security system (Andersson 2009).

The well-known welfare theorist Gösta Esping-Andersen (1990) identifies Sweden as a member of the universal welfare state regime because the country believes in equality and its social system takes responsibility for its citizens' welfare on an extended level. This principle of equality of social rights is acknowledged and has been studied by many scholars (e.g., Freeman et al. 2010). Sweden is considered to have a unique position as a European country since it has not been at war for two hundred years and, thus, for many people it symbolizes a prosperous country of harmony. The social welfare infrastructure was advocated after the Second World War, which then created the archetypical model of the welfare state. (Kent 2008.)

Many scholars have used Sweden as a comparison when examining information technology services (e.g. Nilsson 2007). Scholars such as Schroeder (2018) have used Sweden as an example of a nation which has adopted technology rapidly and is on an advanced level in adapting and enhancing digital technology in several ways within the society. Technology has not been adapted at the same time or in similar ways in countries around the world. As we can see from India's journey towards becoming an information technology super giant, every country has its own story. However, what is apparent is that the development of digital technologies started in Western countries and has spread in multiple ways to other parts of the globe. In the thesis, I aim to see the cultural traits of the Swedish interviewees as representatives of the more developed West, but also of their own country. It is important to avoid cultural stereotypes, but one can also see through them when the empirical evidence is used in a subtle way.

### 3. Method and methodology

This chapter explains how the data were collected and how they are analyzed by using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006). Here I also outline the collaboration with

Spotify which in the field of sociology can seem unusual. I will first present the process of the thesis work and the collaboration, after which I will present the methods of data collection and give an overview of the data. In the last part of this chapter, I will evaluate the thesis approach and go through the limitations of the choice of method and analysis.

### 3.1. Collaboration with music streaming service Spotify

Spotify is the world's leading music streaming company founded in 2008, and its services are currently available in 79 countries and have over 207 million users around the world (BBC News Business June 2, 2020). For Spotify, India is a market with a huge growth potential due to its enormous population. Spotify launched its music streaming service to Indian customers in February 2019 (BBC News Business June 2, 2020), which was during the time I was building up the topic of my thesis work. The data collection was in part planned to create more insights about the Indian consumers and their behavior with audio products.

The thesis work started with an urge to produce social scientific knowledge about the effects digital technologies have on people's perceptions of the world. By collecting data in collaboration with a prominent technology company, I believe I am able to understand the world in which the technological artefacts are produced on a more practical level, which compliments my understanding of the phenomenon at hand. After Spotify announced that its future goal is to take over the audio market of the whole world (Ek 2019), I decided that my focus should be in talk-based product use in India instead of music. I believe the world of "audio" Spotify is stepping into – which covers all talk-products like podcasts and audiobooks in addition to music – engages it as a digital platform and as a contributor of content to a wider sphere of *responsibility*, because podcasts can consist of news, spread information and symbolize various things for their users. The thesis' purpose is to apply a new approach to research of talk-based products and widen the concept of podcasts empirically to understand the phenomenon that started originally in the United States (Berry, 2016).

The collaboration with Spotify set the cultural focus area to be in major cities in India. In public discussions at the time, podcasts were claimed not to have entered the Indian market fully, as their consumption was relatively low in comparison with Westernized

countries (Farooqui 2019). However, some technology journals claimed that podcast consumption in India will rise in years to come, because ‘millenials’ are already using the product (Aravind 2019). According to my knowledge, podcasts have not been empirically studied in India or Sweden. For Spotify the goal of collecting this qualitative interview material was to gain a deeper understanding about the Indian ‘early adopters’, the young students in the biggest cities in India which were part of the first audience Spotify aimed to serve with its services on the Indian market. In order to do reliable research about talk-based products and avoid my possible personal biases in the analysis, I collected a set of interview material also from Sweden.

Spotify provided for the costs of the data collection for this thesis work, including the fees for the interview participants in Stockholm and Bangalore, recruitment fees for the recruiting companies in Bangalore (Peepal Design) and Sweden (Norstat), the transcript costs for DataGain and my trip to Bangalore. Peepal Design and Norstat are Spotify’s research partners in India and Sweden, and DataGain produces transcripts from recordings. I received a small compensation for the collected insights, but no salary was paid for my research work. For me, the most meaningful element of the collaboration was that Spotify gave me full freedom with the data gathering and analysis. Since both India and podcasts were somewhat new to Spotify, I could choose my approach with the data collection freely. The interview participants were in no way connected to Spotify and the name of the company that was to use the data was revealed to them only after the interview.

At least in these cultural spheres within social sciences and according to my knowledge, this thesis is a pioneer study. Thus, as both cultures and the concept ‘talk audio’ were new to me, for the academia and for Spotify, I decided to collect the data with an open, data-driven approach, which resulted in a strong empirical emphasis in this thesis. Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006) was most suitable for the thesis methodology for several reasons, and the following subchapter discusses the process and outlines the rationale behind my choices.

### 3.2. Thematic Analysis as a methodology

Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006) is an analysis method that identifies patterns in data. One motivation to use the thematic analysis approach in the thesis is that the phenomenon of podcasts and talk audio content is not well-known or a widely covered topic in academia. Thus, the thesis does not set out to prove or disapprove a hypothesis or to test a specific theory. Instead, the thesis aims to generate data to create a broader understanding of the empirical aspects of talk audio use, which can be developed further with future research. One of the biggest benefits of the thematic analysis method for the thesis is its *unboundedness*. Since the data is collected from two different cultural spheres the fruitful approach is to let the data direct the analysis and provide possible new outcomes instead of using a predetermined theoretical frame.

While it is mainly used in psychology, thematic analysis is partly similar to other qualitative methods which aim to find patterns from data and comes close to *Grounded Theory* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which is more often used in social sciences. However, as a method, thematic analysis does not aim to produce a theoretical frame from the data during the analysis, which is the main aim in Grounded Theory. Grounded Theory was originally created by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) to challenge the arbitrary differentiation between theory and research. When working with an open approach, the empirical emphasis of Grounded Theory would have supported my data collection. However, Braun and Clarke (2006) claim that grounded theory is often used as a “lite version” without a full theoretical output, when it actually strongly resembles the thematic analysis approach. In this thesis work, the limitations in length and scope motivated me to choose a lighter methodological approach instead of Grounded Theory, and I do not aim to produce a new theory or concept(s) with this thesis. Braun and Clarke (2006, 8) argue, that since “thematic analysis does not require the detailed theoretical and technological knowledge of approaches such as grounded theory and DA [Discourse Analysis], it can offer a more accessible form of analysis, particularly for those early in a qualitative research career”. They emphasize that Thematic Analysis provides flexibility, since it is essentially independent of theory and epistemology. It is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns in data, and thus that part of the analysis comes close to content analysis, where the researcher also finds themes within the selected data.

Thematic analysis can be used in an inductive or in a theoretical manner. As previously stated, my research approach was more open and data-driven and, thus, I applied thematic analysis in an inductive “bottom up” way. Therefore, the themes are strongly linked to the data and may not link to the specific interview questions directly. For example, in my interviews I did not specifically ask about the aspects of agency with talk audio products, but, instead, I identified these themes from my interview data after. Burke & Clarke also identify two levels of Thematic Analysis; semantic and latent levels. The semantic level refers to investigating themes that are used in an explicit manner in the analysis of the data, which are interpreted in order to theorize the patterns in the data. The latent level works to identify underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualizations in order to seek features that give a particular meaning to the identified patterns, and often overlaps with discourse analysis. I use the experiences of the interviewees as a relatively transparent window to their world, and, thus, I do not aim to question the discourses they use during the interviews. Therefore, my approach is closer to a semantic one. (Braun & Clarke 2006.) Braun & Clarke present practical steps of data collection and analysis which I aimed to follow step by step and which will be presented in the next sections.

### 3.3. Methods of data collection

My data set, thus, comprises eight individual data items from Bangalore and another eight individual data items from Stockholm, which in total create my data corpus of 16 semi-structured one-on-one qualitative interviews. Finding both similarities and differences in talk audio use in these countries that are different as for their culture and political and societal structure can bring light on previous talk audio studies, which have (according to my searches) collected their empirical data mainly from the United States (e.g. MacDougall 2011).

Before collecting the research material, I conducted three rehearse interviews in order to practice my approach. Interviewing at least two to three people similar to the participant profile is recommended by Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2015, 72) when conducting qualitative interviews. I first interviewed one of my thesis trainee colleagues, who was a Swedish student finalizing her studies at the KTH university. After that I conducted two virtual

rehearse interviews in Bangalore. Hirsjärvi and Hurme (ibid.) emphasize that rehearse interviews help to test the research topics and language used in the interviews.

The first set of actual research interviews was collected from Bangalore, India and the second set from Stockholm, Sweden. The participants were found by the local business partners of Spotify in the regions, Peepal Design in India and Norstat in Sweden. Peepal Design (Peepal website May, 8, 2020) is a user research consulting company operating in Bangalore and Pune, India. Norstat is a research consultancy company operating in Stockholm (Norstat website March 30, 2020). These partners were selected by Spotify as it had used them before in its user research projects. The companies recruited students from campus areas in person. The interviewees made a contract of consent with the recruitment companies, Peepal Design and Norstat. The contracts were designed by Spotify, and I was able to check and adjust them. The contracts presented the main goals of the project, the use of the data, and information how their personal information (name, contact information, etc.) will be used. I will first present the process of collecting data from the Indian participants, since it was carried out first and, therefore, also affected the interviews in Sweden.

### 3.3.1. Interview participants in India

The interviews in Bangalore were conducted in late March 2019, during which time I was in Bangalore. As previously stated, Spotify's strategy and presupposition was that the young students would form the vanguard when it comes to digital products like talk audio. The Indian market is commonly divided into three parts based on the size of the cities (Ministry of Finance, Government of India website, June, 5, 2020). The first one consists of the biggest metropolitan areas or 'Tier 1 cities', such as Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore. These areas are expected to drive the development in the country financially and technologically and thus, according to Spotify's strategy, I started looking for podcast listeners in the biggest metropolitan cities and ended up finding the suitable participants from Bangalore.

As I began to recruit participants in India in collaboration with Peepal Design and partly by snowballing through Spotify colleagues and acquaintances, I compiled a set of criteria (appendix 4) for the recruitment process; for example they had to use talk audio products

regularly and use English. After sending the first set of criteria with the goal to find podcast listeners from Universities in Pune, Bangalore or Delhi, it soon became clear that the participants were hard to find using the podcast-concept that was unfamiliar to many students, according to the recruiters. Thus, I created the concept of *talk audio*, which is based on audio but also covers talk-based videos that the rehearse interviewees claimed students to use in India. Peepal scheduled the meetings with the interviewees; five men and three women.

My additional criterion was that the students would not be only from technological universities, so that I would have students studying different subjects. The students in India were from Christ University, BNM Institute of Technology Bangalore, Dr. Ambedkar Institute of Technology and PES University. Most universities were technical schools (BNM Institute of Technology, Dr. Ambedkar Institute of Technology, PES Institute of Technology). Even though all universities were private, some of them received assistance from government (Dr. Ambedkar Institute of Technology website June, 5, 2020). As I was looking for non-technical universities in the region, Peepal Design suggested that we could find participants from Christ University since it is the only university they know of that offers non-technical studies (humanities, business, social science) in Bangalore. One of the core values of Christ University is “Faith in God” (Christ University website June, 5, 2020), which points to a somewhat Christian education.

There were differences between the students, since some of them were able to plan studying abroad after their Bachelor’s studies and had chauffeurs, while some of them emphasized how they were very happy to even have the chance to study for a Bachelor’s degree. Some of the universities were also considered to be better than others, for example Christ deemed to be University and PES Institute of Technology were described to be the best in the region by Peepal Design recruiters, which reflected the socio-economic backgrounds of the student participants. Thus, some of them were much wealthier than others. This fact was also reflected in the way they talked and in how they reacted to the research questions: how they described the products they used, which news they were reading and how Western-oriented they were. However, in comparison to many people their age in India, they can all be regarded as somewhat privileged due to their education.

### 3.3.2. Interview participants in Sweden

I created and edited the participant criteria first to work in India and then used the same set of criteria when recruiting participants in Sweden (appendix 5). All the Swedish participants were recruited through Norstat. They followed my criteria and instructions, planned the research schedule and handled the participant fees. As in the Indian case, three of the interviewees were women and five men. The interviews were conducted in the end of April at university campuses or nearby. Four of the Swedish interviewees studied at the University of Stockholm and the other four at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, since I also wanted variety among the Swedish students; e.g., in their field of study, university and gender.

University of Stockholm (University of Stockholm website June, 5, 2020) and KTH Royal Institute of Technology (KTH Royal Institute of Technology website June, 5, 2020) are among the best universities in Sweden. The students in Sweden can be considered to be very talented, as they study at these prominent universities, but their relation to their surrounding society and their age group can, due to the welfare and free education system in Sweden, be more equal. As stated in chapter 4.2, Sweden is considered to have one of the most progressive welfare models in the world (Lundberg & Åmark 2010) in which higher education is free and accessible for all. Therefore, the socio-economic situation of the students in these universities is harder to distinguish. In comparison to the Indian participants, the Swedish students can be considered to represent a more heterogeneous group as for their socio-economic background, even though they also will in the future be among the higher educated segment of their society.

As the data was collected in cooperation with Spotify, the participants received a nominal sum for attending the interviews, adjusted according to the level of prices in both countries. This has probably affected the participation motivation of the poorest Indian students the most. Interview participants in Sweden and India are presented in appendix (appendix 2. & 3.) in tables.

### 3.3.3. Interview process

The interviews were semi-structured and each one lasted for 50–65 minutes. Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2015, 66) argue that when planning semi-structured interviews, one should not write up a list of questions, but, rather, come up with a list of themes that are to be covered during the interview. These themes then drive the interviews. By compiling the main themes and subthemes based on instructions by Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2015), I aimed to achieve a more naturally proceeding conversation, instead of collecting monotonous answers from the students. By naming different themes, the interview situation can spontaneously go deeper into themes that are meaningful for the participants and interesting for the researcher. This supported my open approach and also proved to be a fruitful when trying to understand the world of the participants.

The interview outline (appendix 1.) focused on the interviewees' perceptions of talk audio use – practices of use, favorite talk audio shows, motivations of use, the effects of the use etc. – but also covered the use of other digital products, such as social media, news and music, in order for me to understand the interviewees' relation to digital products. Since using digital products on your mobile phone or laptop is all intertwined, at least in my personal use, I believed these were themes that should be understood and taken up shortly in the interview outline as well. Comparing their use with talk audio was more useful than, for example, comparing the latter to watching television. I started with short and easy questions about the interviewees' daily use of social media and news in order to understand their digital media product use and to help them get used to the interview situation and the level of questioning and deepness I was aiming for. Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2015) call this “teaching the interview participant”. Since talk audio was a new concept, it was also easier for the participants to start with more familiar topics.

In order to keep the interview participants autonomous, I made sure I did not share the identities of the interviewee participants at Spotify or when presenting thesis writings and findings at our Faculty in seminars or during courses. To protect the interview participants, I and the recruiting companies were the only ones with access to the file with their personal information (name, email address, phone number and answers to the screening material). Recording the interviews, I used participant numbers when saving the files in order to protect the interviewees' identities (#1st India, #1st Sweden, etc.).

After I had collected the interview material, I destroyed the listings of the participant information and only saved the relevant parts for my analysis. During the analysis, I created pseudonyms for each participant in order to tell their stories in a more approachable manner.

I used two recording devices in case there would be any problems, and made notes during the interviews just in case, which turned out to be very useful. The transcriptions of my interview recordings were done by DataGain (DataGain website May, 22, 2020), a research company in the United States. After receiving the transcripts, I checked each one by listening to the original recordings line by line and corrected all the material, which was very important, as there were multiple mistakes in each interview. This was also a useful way to compare my interview notes with the transcripts and familiarize myself with the data. Familiarization with the data is, according to Braun & Clarke (2006), the first phase when doing thematic analysis.

### 3.4. Coding and analysis

Braun & Clarke (2006) criticize scholars who deny the active role of the researcher in selecting themes and patterns from the data. By following a set process and a practice when collecting and analyzing qualitative data, the researchers understand their responsibility and do not claim that themes “emerge” from the data passively. Thus, for a qualitative researcher, it is important to acknowledge one’s theoretical positions and values, as the researcher cannot objectively and naively “give voice” to their participants. Throughout the data collection and analysis, I aimed to reflect on my position and ambitions when coding the data and searching for the analytical perspective for the thesis. Next I will present some of these reflections.

After checking the transcripts and recordings I started the first round of my analysis by coding the data line by line, which is the second phase of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006). This phase is, in practice, mostly about organizing the data into meaningful categories. Braun & Clarke (2006) emphasize that during the research process there should be an ongoing discussion and vision about what counts as a theme; a patterned response in the data set. Before the analysis I knew I would find themes related to four different aspects in the interview data: material about the interviewees’ talk audio use,

their comparison of talk audio use to visual products and music and their use of digital services in general. Thus, I first coded the data as a whole, and not just the parts of talk audio use. This was the first round of identifying the initial codes and organizing them under the topics of specific digital products. After the initial coding I ended up having 1500 different codes in Atlas.ti since I needed to find also practical level information from the material for Spotify. However, most of these were not related to my research interests and those codes were later cut down.

After the initial coding phase I proceeded to the next phase (Braun & Clarke 2006), as I organized and merged parts of the data into separate networks, which started my search for more specific themes. I started finding themes that were related to the use of several digital products and themes that were specific to talk audio. The themes I identified were “mood”, “agency & control”, “me-talk”, “others” (friends & family & surrounding society), “information & opinions”, “entertainment”, “time-use”, “relationship to podcaster” and “personal & mine”. These were then later combined into four big topics in order to understand the specific characterizations of talk audio in relation to these themes; talk audio use, social media use, music listening and news reading. After selecting my narrower focus, I reviewed the themes, as Braun & Clarke encourage, and dropped some irrelevant ones to serve only in the context part of my analysis (e.g. “time use”).

What inspired my choice of focus in colliding these themes into a coherent research approach was a realization I had after reading an article by Uski and Lampinen (2016). They argue that in social media people *promote aspects of self* and maintain social relationships with others. Uski and Lampinen call this action “profile work”. As I was narrowing down my thesis focus, I came across their article and connected it to a notion mentioned by my trainee colleague in the rehearse interview in Sweden. When I asked her to compare visual and audio products, she noted that, for her, podcasts and music are “*input products*” whereas social media is an “*output product*”. An idea about an ‘inward-directed profile work’ with these “input”-like products struck me, and after going through several phases of analysis possibilities with the interview data, I felt the urge to come back to it.

This idea of profile work with input-like products was also apparent in the interview material, as I checked, e.g., my “mood”, “me-talk”, “agency & control” and “personal & mine” themes, which were all very much related to the construction of self of the interview participants. Braun and Clarke (2006, 14) argue that “although all projects are guided by research questions, these may also be refined as a project progresses”. Thus, based on the themes presented above, my focus towards agency and management with talk audio started to form, which was later strengthened through previous research (Bull 2000 & DeNora 2000).

### 3.5. Critical evaluation of the research method and ethical considerations

I will first consider the reliability of the research approach and evaluate the research setting after which I will consider the ethical aspects and biases of the thesis.

One aspect that can immediately be questioned is the collaboration with the music streaming company Spotify. It is obvious that in order to write my thesis in such a setting, I needed to be on board with the fact that my research will benefit the collaboration partner. Before applying for the thesis trainee position, I gave this some thought. However, after I had met with my potential manager at Spotify, I was sure that criticism would be welcomed in the company as long as I would not leak information. My manager at Spotify respected my wish to first and foremost write a solid sociology thesis, thus, our collaboration was smooth and respectful.

Collaborating with Spotify did not create a bias in the data collection phase, since the interviewees were unaware about Spotify’s connection with the research project until I revealed the name of the company to them at the end. Thus, Spotify’s brand or the interviewees’ attitudes towards it did not affect the interview data. Instead, the collaboration gave me a chance to collect my thesis data from two cultures I would not have had access to otherwise, taught me how the company works with qualitative insights, and gave me a chance to write my thesis on a phenomenon that is very much in touch with the current time as India’s podcast market is emerging and music streaming companies such as Spotify are beginning to provide talk-based products as well. I also witnessed that with my thesis analysis of the data, Spotify is able to understand notions

of agency related to the content they share in their platform and the responsibility that providing talk-based products entails.

One of the biggest learnings during the thesis project is related to my work with the data and an open approach. I could have chosen a theoretical approach before collecting the data, which would have steered the data collection more systematically towards a pre-identified theme which would have made my thesis process more fluent. And, as the approach is open, it is also theoretically wider - I acknowledge that I draw from several theoretical approaches in my thesis. However, I believe that in the end with an open approach, I was able to find nuances and use theoretical approaches (e.g. DeNora 2000) in the context of talk audio use that I might have not thought of by pre-selecting my theoretical setting. Thus, I believe that in consequence, my approach was an important one in order to create insights about areas new to the interests of the academia.

Since my study is qualitative and the interviewees are all students at the top universities of their region, the generalization of the results should be considered critically. Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2015) suggest that since in qualitative research a researcher cannot aim for a representative sample, a researcher should aim to prove that there is no systematic bias. Since the students are in privileged positions due to their educational backgrounds, they may, for example, have a biased relation to receiving information and opinions in relation to their non-educated peers or the rest of their society. Thus, the findings should be considered as representative of only that specific demographic background, and further research should be conducted on participants from different backgrounds.

The fact that I used recruitment companies and snowballing as a method of finding participants in India and Sweden may also have had some effect on the communication with the participants. I did, however, make sure I knew everything I could about the communication between the recruiting companies Peepal Design and Nordstat and the students. It is also possible that some of the interview participants knew each other or that they are from the same group of friends, as I did not contact them personally. This became apparent when one of the Indian participants mentioned that her/his friend had already attended the interview and, thus, the two had discussed the interview and the possible topics before this second interviewee talked with me. This, however, should not affect

directly the interview data per se, but it is possible that the interviewee then knew that the interview was for Spotify and what questions I would ask.

In qualitative research a primary principle for source criticism is that if there is no specific reason to question the information interviewees give, the information can be considered to be relatively reliable (Alasuutari 1994, 93). According to my own perception, and due to the language used (English), it was obvious for the participants that I was new to their country both in India and in Sweden; but, of course, much less so in Sweden. The participants did explain aspects of their country and their lives for an outsider, which was apparent especially in India. Thus, it is possible that they may have had different motivations to manage the perception they gave me about their lives in their country. However, I tried to avoid this by creating trust between the interaction parties by asking my questions directly and clearly and aimed to direct the talk always to the personal experiences of the students.

When reviewing qualitative research, already Weber (1946) considered the critical aspects of this and pointed out how all research is contaminated to some extent by the values of the researcher. As we analyze the society we live in, it is important for me, the 'practitioner', to discuss how the data processing and analysis I conduct is conditioned by my identities, values and norms, my lived experiences and the reality I live in, and how I attach meanings to the data (Bridoux & Kurki 2014: 35). When a university-educated researcher from a developed country like Finland does research in "emerging economies", the tension between the global North and the global South cannot be totally avoided. My data collection trip was my first visit to the country. As will be stated in the findings, some of the Indian participants specifically stated their country to be "behind" in development in comparison to the Westernized world. Even though I collected part of my data also in Sweden, as a researcher I am unable to acknowledge all the prejudices and preconceptions I have especially about India as a country, of its people or the feelings of inferiority that might arise during the interviews.

When making the interviews in both countries, I wrote down notes both before and after each interview about my perceptions and my feelings of the situation that could affect the data. For example, in India I had written down a very passionate remark after a specific

interview during which I experienced that the interviewee “mansplained” as he questioned my understanding of certain issues and then explained them to me in great detail. My journey to India alone as a young western-looking woman was also in many ways disturbing, even though I knew to expect this after having travelled alone in various non-Western countries. I did not want experiences like these to affect the analysis of the interview data, or, at least, I wanted to try to control my bias, e.g., as regards certain interviewees, and, thus, it was important to go back to my notes and review my analysis in order to seek for biases towards specific people or situations I reported.

#### 4. Analysis and findings

In this section, I will present my findings by reflecting on the interview data. In the first part of my analysis, chapter 4.1., I distinguish the differences in the social circumstances of digital products use between the participants from Sweden and India. In chapter 4.2., I will shortly present what talk audio products the participants used. These two sections will act as a root of the analysis, as I then begin to analyze the interpretations of agency in relation to talk audio use.

In the second section of the analysis, I distinguish how the sense of agency occurs in use of talk audio. In chapter 4.3. I will first present how talk audio takes place in the everyday practices of the students; in what situations talk audio is used and why. I will then present how the students used talk audio to manage themselves. Finally, in chapter 4.4. I will discuss the relationship the interviewees described having with talk audio hosts by aiming to understand the significance of human voice in talk audio, the personalities of the talk audio hosts, the roles of the talk audio hosts the listeners described to give for them in their lives and the feeling of presence that affects the experience with talk audio. Then I will shortly summarize the intrinsic motivations of using talk audio, the content; getting information and perspectives in an entertaining manner.

I will present most findings through examples from the interviews and use letters “*I*” to refer to “*Interviewee*” and “*JH*” to refer to my initials (*Juuli Hilska*).

#### 4.1. Digital service use as a source of independence

As I stated in chapter 2, especially the Indian interviewees are in a societal position which facilitates their digital product use; as they are well-educated and from middle- or upper middle-class families they, unlike many others in their country, have access to talk audio products. From the interview data, I have been able to distinguish certain differences in the social circumstances of digital product use between the students from India and Sweden, which creates the context for their talk audio use and, thus, will contribute to the understanding of how agency is constructed with the products.

In this chapter, I will first present the differences I found in the digital infrastructure and the emphasis in importance of access to digital products in the empirical material. Then I will present how the social and cultural circumstances directed the ways the students formed opinions through news use and receiving information. I will then distinguish how the students related to their current life situation.

##### 4.1.1. Using digital services

In India, the use of digital technologies turned out to be different from Sweden both due to differences in the digital infrastructure and because the meaning of access to digital products was emphasized differently within the countries. In both countries, all interviewees used talk audio products, social media, music and news in a digital form weekly. However, the extent to which the students were able to stream digital content had changed recently in India, which became apparent in my background research before the interviews. As described in chapter 2.3, Reliance Jio changed the streaming practices of Indian consumers by reducing the price of data in 2016, and now digital content is available to a larger number of people at a lower cost.

In consequence, many Indian students described that they used to download content like music through a Wi-Fi connection, so they could listen to it on the go, since streaming used to be so expensive. For example, Rahul (20, India) described the internet connection in India to be “very reliable” for streaming now, but earlier he had been forced to download content onto his phone so he could listen to music when taking the bus to school. *Due to the changes in data prices, streaming services like Spotify are becoming*

*more appealing for Indian consumers* and listening to talk audio or music outside one's home is now possible. *Content like talk audio, which is often streamed, also becomes more appealing.* However, not all of my Indian interviewees streamed content using their data plans; for example, Arjun still downloaded all his music onto his phone and listened to Ted Talks at home through a Wi-Fi connection. In Sweden, streaming content of one's choice wherever one happened to be was a given element to all of the interviewees, and streaming was not even mentioned explicitly, since they did it all day long with their data plans, starting at home, throughout the day at the university and then at night at home again.

The importance of access to digital services was emphasized differently in these countries, too. For many Indian interviewees, access to these digital services meant *freedom and independence*; the smartphone opens them a possibility to look and find, browse and select and watch and hear the outside world beyond their own social circles. This was highly affected by the perceptions the students in India described to have of their surrounding society and institutions, which were different from the experiences of the Swedish students.

For example, for Ananya (19, India), the smartphone symbolizes access to information from multiple sources *of her choice*. She describes how before she got her phone she could only rely on other people such as her teachers or parents to be her sources of news and information or read about a topic from a physical newspaper that was delivered to her home, which would only provide one perspective on said topic. Now, with her phone, she describes that she is “not ever restricted to one way of thinking about things”, since she now has access to all possible sources, and she can read or listen to content about topics of her own choice. She also *‘feels’* that the information she receives is “much more right now” and, for her, it is important that *she does not have to rely on anyone else* when it comes to receiving information. Now, she gets to have her “*own opinion and something that's not restricted or heard mentality*”. With her smartphone, the internet becomes the primary source of information, and she experiences this as *freeing and empowering*. For example, Google News' recommendation system gives her *control*, and with it, it is easier “to be well aware”.

Also, for Arjun (19, India), being able to scroll Youtube and listen to Ted Talks whenever he wants is his way to connect with the world beyond his immediate surroundings. He can get advice and motivation when he needs it to succeed in his schoolwork. Another interviewee, Tejas (19, India), subscribed to Reddit, a social media platform, a year ago out of curiosity, and he now finds his news, memes and Youtube videos through it and takes part in interesting discussions on his favorite subreddit channels. Reddit also got him to *place more importance on reading news* and he enjoys “the diversity” of it.

The urge to feel empowered and to have control over their own lives was on many levels apparent among the Indian participants. They described to *receive this control through digital products*. The significance of access to digital services was not emphasized in a similar way by the Swedish interviewees. This was partly due to the fact that they did not describe to have experienced a change in their access to digital services. When I asked if something had recently changed in their use of digital services (e.g., in news reading, social media use), most Swedish students described no significant change. Some claimed to read more news now that they are older and that they are studying at the university. Sven (19, Sweden) said that his music taste has become “more mature” after his teenage years. Sam (21, Sweden) described that he is now more interested in Martial Arts and, thus, he reads a lot more news related to that sport. However, the Swedish interviewees’ relationship to the surrounding society and its institutions was, as will be presented below, different from that of the Indian interviewees, and the emphasis about being able to connect with the world outside their apparent social surrounding was not as strong.

#### 4.1.2. Having own opinions and claiming independence

Another distinct element which was emphasized by the Indian participants was the *importance of their own opinion*. As stated above, Ananya emphasized that it is “important to have my own stance” which is not just an opinion heard from others. In fact, all participants in India pointed out specifically how these days one should always form one’s own opinion on topics and not solely rely on others. During the interview, Tushar (19, India) explicitly stated that in India “*it’s the trend these days that everyone has to have their own opinion about everything*”. For him, this trend was irritating because most people around him do not have their own opinions but, in his words, instead “twist and turn” information and opinions they have heard from elsewhere.

Related to the emphasis of *their own opinion*, when talking about news reading and talk audio use with the Indian participants, *the fear of being manipulated* became very apparent and was one of the biggest reasons why the students described feeling that reading news was important. For example, Lekha (20, India) emphasized that “it’s just good to be in the know”, which is a phrase that was also repeated in a few other interviews with the Indian participants. The expression implies that there would be a special *place of knowledge*, which you can be either inside or outside of.

Rahul (20, India) explicitly stated that he thinks that people in India “are easily manipulated”. For him, having his opinion and being more exposed to things is extremely important because he wants to *avoid naïve-ness*. He describes how digital products and especially talk audio give him exposure to things that people around him do not have and “that’s a good feeling to have”. For him, it gives *comfort* to know that he knows about certain things and he has his own point of view, instead of just listening to others and being naïve which is *uncomfortable*. He describes that he was forced to choose a subject in university he didn’t want to choose and because he was “influenced by naïve opinions” by his parents who claimed that if he had taken the subject he wanted, he would graduate unemployed in India. Thus, he took electronics and communications like was urged by his parents and regrets it every day because it effects his motivation and ultimately, his grades. That is why, for him, being in control gives comfort and security. For him, naïve-ness exposes to *manipulation* which is what he consciously tries to avoid. Being “informed on things” is how he thinks one can avoid being ignorant. Rahul’s main, and these days the only, source of digital content is Youtube, which provides him news, music, podcasts and memes.

*I: I wouldn't say that I'm uncomfortable with not knowing things, I'm uncomfortable with people trying to project their -- view point on things -- so it helps not to be naïve in that case, so -- I find being naïve (...) a very bad aspect to have in today's world, because it's so easy to be manipulated in the world we live in because of social media and yeah, -- I don't get a thrill out of not being naïve but it's great to know that I'm informed on*

*things. (...) I'm not comfortable in not knowing how something may affect me in the bigger picture, I'm not comfortable with ignorance.*

(Rahul, 20, India)

The relation the Indian participants had to information sources was not simple. As described above, the Indian participants believe that information can be manipulated, and they state that, for example, social media has biased bubbles of information. Another example of the relation to information sources came up when Lekha (21, India) named her family Whatsapp group as one of her primary sources of information. Whatsapp is an online application owned by Facebook (Shead, 2019), and meant for direct communication between people through private messages and group chats. She says she understands that news sent through a family Whatsapp group will often be framed by the sender's own perspective and that through Whatsapp groups "there is a lot of propaganda going on in the country". However, Lekha claims that because of technology and how people use it, "every person gets affected by propaganda" and that is why she also uses the Whatsapp group for information. This builds up the context of information sources available for the Bachelor's students in this thesis; *they understand the risks related to receiving information from various unofficial sources*, such as social media in Rahul's (21, India) and Tejas's (19, India) case, and a family Whatsapp group in Lekha's (21, India) case, *but they use the sources they have access to, as everyone is affected by propaganda anyway.*

The Swedish students I interviewed also believed that it is important to have your own opinion, but they did not refer it to be to a trend. The Swedes emphasized their relation to the surrounding democratic system when they talked about the importance of having their own opinion. It was also more like a given thing that came up when they explained why they read news. For example, Maja (20) emphasized in her interview how she feels like she needs "her own standing point" to things in her social circles and, thus, she reads the news. She had her own opinions already before she started reading news, but through reading more about current events she was able to see "where they land in the different political groups". She believes that it is important to have a point in everything you say, and identifying your own ideology helps with that.

Liam (19, Sweden) felt that it is important to have your own opinion about things instead of listening only to others and, for him, it is “a big part of democracy that people have their own opinion and just not like consume what like political leaders say”. Both Maja (20, Sweden) and Lucas (19, Sweden) pointed out that, for them, with their age it became more important to understand and know about politics and read news, since when they turned 18, they received their *right to vote*. For both Maja and Lucas, the right to vote was a turning point, when they felt that they had *the responsibility to know* the basics of politics, which is why they needed news and information to fulfill their responsibility as voters, even though, for example, Maja finds this “boring”.

For the Swedish students, information had values that were not related to their personal futures, but, instead, had more to do with how they experienced their responsibilities as Swedish citizens, their personal ideology and their personal safety. For example, for Maja (19, Sweden) the information she receives from the news did not have an intrinsic value, but, instead, what she can learn from herself and others by reading them had value to her. Instead of describing how news and information are important for her future or her development, as did the Indian participants, she believed that everything should be grounded in an ideology, and every person should have one.

Sven (19, Sweden) believed that being cultivated is important, but the motivation comes from outside. He believed it’s ‘*common sense*’ to read the news and know about the current events of your own country. For Sven and most other Swedish participants, however, “being in the know”, as Madhavi (19, India) described it, is not a matter that they should stress or emphasize specifically. Most Swedish participants would emphasize the content they got from news and other digital platforms to be related to their hobbies.

For example, for Sam (21, Sweden), Martial Arts (MMA) news brought him “true value”, whereas daily news were “shirt and tie” and formal for him. He preferred reading about his primary interest “MMA” all the time from social media or websites and listening to podcasts about it. He described that news related to his Martial Arts interest to be, “just a part of my life”, whereas news he described to be “mom & dad stuff”. He believed he could read more news, but he did not since his circle of friends does not talk about news that much unless something very significant – “like the New Zealand terrorist attack” –

has happened. Important news had to find him, instead of him seeking out and reading about them purposefully. He explained reading more news to be “not vital” for him.

In contrast, the significance of information and knowledge seemed crucial for the Indian participants – almost like a symbol of the most important form of personal capital one can have in life. In fact, Madhavi (19, India) explicitly stated that, for her, “*knowledge is power*”. Therefore, the role of sources of the information they emphasized was crucial in forming their own opinions. Even though the interviews were conducted at four different universities, and the students studied different disciplines, most students described that they needed “extra knowledge” (Madhavi, 19, India) in addition to the information they get from their universities. Madhavi describes that this is especially important after the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, after they have taken the big tests at school, so they have time, which is also when she describes to have found talk audio products such as Ted Talks, podcasts and learning applications like Khan Academy, which is, according to her, famous among students in India. She believes that content in learning applications, podcasts and Ted Talks *helps you in your studies since you need more than “what’s written in the book”*. Thus, the Indian students take an active role in looking and finding information that will carry them forward in their lives. The Indian interviewees never emphasized how the education they get in their universities is developing them. However, many described the yearning to go study outside India to get a better Master’s degree. Below, Rahul describes how the quality of the education system in India is not as good as it is abroad.

*I: (...) but I would like to study abroad, I don’t find education -- even close in comparison to the level abroad like – it’s just done so monotonously, and it’s done in a very pretentious manner in our country, so fine students get good at mugging (memorizing), at absorbing information maybe, but they just don’t know how to apply it.*

(Rahul, 20, India)

All Indian student participants emphasized in one way or another, how information from outside their social circles and official institutions such as their college or their kin, was more reliable. The fact that the information was, in a way, *outside information from different sources seemed to be of intrinsic value to them*. Students in India connected the

naiveness to their perceptions of older generations and the education system in India. The motivation to have an own opinion, at least in part, is *related in their sense of independence*. The students emphasized their independence in multiple ways, which was not apparent in Sweden in a similar manner.

This was firstly since the Indian interviewees experienced to be in a competition with other Indian people and, consequently, they needed to separate themselves from others. For example, Rahul explicitly described that he is “competing with a population of 2 billion in India”. Others described this competition in a more nuanced way. For example, Tushar stated that “some people have jobs, but other people have careers”, and he has decided to study to become “a career driven person”.

*I: I should find my calling now, soon, otherwise it's going to be a tough life especially if you're competing with a population of 2 billion in India...*

(Rahul 20, India)

Some students in India described their whole surrounding world to be a very competitive place. For example, Tushar (19, India) described that since “the world becomes a smaller place” because social media and the internet as a whole “connects everyone” he believes that “living in India I need to know what's happening (...) with international news as well”. His image of the current demands the society has for individuals was very strict, as he claimed that “if you don't keep up then there's no place for you in this world”. When asked what happens when one is unaware, he claimed that “you fall behind, you lose opportunities and will become irrelevant for the society”. He also believed that most people would agree with him and claimed that the politics in India is not to be trusted.

*I: Because in India, really politics is a game for the crooked, is what the general opinion. But I'm really interested in how the politics, the way the people really mislead others just to be in power. I'm also a huge Game of Thrones fan as well so I think it has spilled it our into interest as well being into politics.*

(Tushar, 19, India)

In addition to stating the competition directly, the students in India emphasized their individuality in several manners, for example, by *pointing out explicit interests*, which also made the competition apparent. For example, Ananya (19) loved cooking and especially baking. She had an Instagram account for her baking, and her favorite podcast was about a famous Indian baker who moved to the United States to go to culinary school. She wished to go to a culinary school in the United States after finishing her Bachelor's degree. Almost everything I asked in relation to her using digital services was about food, which was a thing that *makes her unique*. Food, "is very special" for her, which originally happened due to "the influence of media, like why it has created so much my interest towards food".

In India, the interests were also more often related to future plans or school than in Sweden, and thus *the role of their interests* in the interviewees' lives was more significant: For Tejas, newspapers and social media such as Reddit, since he studied media and communications. Tushar's interests were technology and mechanics, since he studies that field, and, thus, he explicitly stated that he should focus on that instead of watching, e.g., medical Ted Talks, which for him was "not a good use of my time". However, some of the Indian participants also had interests that were not related to their future plans, like football for Tejas and history for Madhavi. In Sweden, the participants would describe their interests to be hobbies or something very specific and they would be separate from their studies or in no way emphasized to be related to their personal future. For example, Lucas used his time for tabletop painting and computer games, which he enjoyed. For Emma, feminism and environmental issues were important although not directly related to her future plans or studies, and, for Maja, old cars had always been a passion even though she did not own one. This, entails a difference both in societies as well as in socioeconomic positions; for Indian students everything in their lives was related in creating a best possible future for themselves whereas in Sweden the students were also able to "enjoy" their interests and school years with less pressure.

#### 4.1.3. The importance of the current life situation

Another difference between Sweden and India was how the importance of the interviewees' life situation was emphasized. As Rahul described earlier that "he should choose his calling now", many participants in India described that this time in their life is

crucial in determining the course for their future. Studying in a top university certainly must have been important for the Swedish students as well, but they did not seem to feel or at least express feeling stressed or anxious about how crucial their current life situation was for them. In contrast, the Indian students were very cautious of what they should and should not use their time for, since during this life stage everything counts, and time should not be wasted, for example, for consuming irrelevant digital content. Both Ananya (19, India) and Turshar (19, India) emphasized how the topics they choose to listen to and read about need to be important for their future.

In Sweden, the pressure, for example, for Emma (19), was not as fundamental and related to her future possibilities but instead something more social. She described how social media used to bring too much pressure for her and, thus, she had had to quit following specific channels. Through Instagram she felt like she always needed to do better, which for her was “good things” for the environment or for women – e.g., to not consume in a certain way or think in a certain way, but eventually she did not have time to do everything in addition to her school work. She described a feeling of always wanting to be the best, and because she “has a good life and all the tools to do good” she felt a responsibility to do so.

The notion of wasting time became relevant in most interviews in India. When the interviewees, for example, chose between music and talk audio, or social media use and talk audio, the talk audio product would not make them feel like they were wasting their time. Ananya continued that when listening to a podcast instead of music it *feels like she is doing something with her time*.

*I: (...) what I listen to, I can listen to an ample amount of music but like a podcast is more interesting because I feel like I'm doing something with my time instead of just listening to music just (...) I find time to do that, you make time for this (...)*

(Ananya 19, India)

For Swedish participants, university and studying were more like background elements in their lives rather than a strong emphasis during the interviews. University studies were

probably important for all the interviewees, but these were not heightened as a life event that would change their behavior for the time being or determine their future. For most, university studies were a context – it was like their current job that set the rhythm of their lives and the social context in which they belonged to with their “school friends” (e.g., Sven, 21, Sweden).

#### 4.2. Talk audio products

The main products within the talk audio category my interviewees consumed can be identified to be podcasts, TED Talks and radio shows. Prior to the interviews, I expected also other talk audio products such as audio books to emerge in the participants’ descriptions of use, but they did not, even though examples were given when presenting the concept. In Sweden, for most of the students the concept *talk audio* was synonymous with podcasts, and when I asked about other possible talk audio products, the students most often directed their talk back to podcasts. For example, in the discussion quoted below, 21-year-old Sam from Sweden starts straight away to describe his podcast use when asked about talk audio, without even mentioning that it is his primary talk audio product. Only through the applications he described to use I was able to confirm that he was talking about podcasts:

*JH: (...) and talk audio content, so describe to me how do you use talk audio products?*

*I: Oh, it's all the time, geez. On my way here, when I go to bed every time usually for like an hour. You want to know apps that I use or stuff like that?*

*JH: Sure, and content as well.*

*I: Yeah. That main app I use now is Acast.*

*JH: Acast?*

*I: Yeah, and the Podcaster app. Or, I actually switched from Podcaster [...]*

(Sam 21, Sweden)

Later during the interview, I asked whether Sam used Ted Talks in addition to podcasts, and he describes using them as a “stationary activity” at home. Sam described to use the most popular Ted Talks that Youtube recommended to him “once a month, or once every two months”. Below Sam describes how he would not even compare Ted Talks and

podcasts, since, for him, podcasts are always entertaining and Ted Talks are information-based:

*I: Yeah, a TED Talk is scripted. A TED Talk is about a specific subject and I wouldn't even compare the two. They're two vastly different things. That's more... It's way more information-heavy (...). But the ones that I actually enjoy listening to usually have a fun element to it. But I wouldn't really say there are... There are few common denominators between the two apart from that it's people speaking*

(Sam, 21, Sweden)

Ted Talk was another distinguished talk audio product that students described using. Whereas in Sweden all of the students described podcasts as their main talk audio product, only half of the students in India described to use podcasts. All of the students in India used Ted Talks in addition to podcasts, and four described to use only them. In India, Ted Talks are a big phenomenon, and according to the participants, they are used for learning at schools. In addition to watching Ted Talks at school, teachers encourage students to watch Ted Talks also at home to support their learning. In some schools in India, students also organize big Ted Talk sessions for the other students of the school. Mohit (19, India), one of the Indian interviewees, described how he organized a Ted Talk session at his school with his idol, a famous Indian notion photographer called Anup J Kat:

*I: (...) (Anup) is probably the first Indian notion photographer and I really admire his work. (...) In fact, I got him for a TED Talk in our college through Instagram. (Mohit, 19, India)*

The students used Ted Talks mostly through Youtube, since Youtube is free and, according to research by Spotify India team, Indian people are not used to paying for applications, since a while ago they still paid a lot for their data packages. Some also described to use Ted Talks through the Ted application, where they had tried some episodes with just as an audio recording without the video, making the content very much like a podcast. However, most described the topics in Ted Talks to be so complicated that they preferred the video “to understand the message” (Tushar, 19, India).

All other students in India and Sweden would describe using either podcasts or Ted Talks, except for Maja (19, Sweden), who mentioned an Australian digital radio show as one of her favorite talk audio products. She found the show through Instagram, which is where she listens to the highlights of the show every morning. Because of the interviewees' above-described consumption habits, my analysis mostly focuses on examining the use of podcasts and Ted Talks as talk audio products in India and Sweden.

In India, the amount of talk audio use varied. Lekha had found podcasts in early 2019 and claimed that she mostly listened to them at the time of the interview "because there is a lot more depth to them", but when she wanted to "reaffirm (...) motivation" she used Ted Talks for that. Ananya (19, India) listened to podcasts "almost every day" and to Ted Talks sometimes, whereas Madhavi (19, India) described to "watch Youtube a lot" and "on a daily basis" because she pointed out that "I really like watching TED Talks, so whenever I get time I like to watch Ted Talks". Madhavi only listened to her favorite podcast "Revisionist history" when she had free time and when commuting, but it was not the primary way to use her time. Tushar (19, India) said he listened to "Ted Talks mostly" both through Youtube and through the TED application. He was introduced to Ted Talks when he was on 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and they stuck with him since "there's really quality content" which for him was "better than most content I learned back in school because it's very well put". Some participants in India, like Mohit (19, India), only listened to Ted Talks.

In Sweden, talk audio use varied from listening to podcasts once or twice a week to listening to them for hours every day. For example, Sven (19, Sweden) listened to a Swedish football podcast made by a fan club and a Swedish crime podcast a couple of times a week. Maja (19, Sweden) listened to the Australian radio channel's morning show every morning and to the Swedish podcast Dilemma once or twice a week. Sam (21, Sweden) and Liam (19, Sweden) described to listen to podcasts for hours each day. Sam admitted to being addicted to podcasts: he was following more than six podcasts, and all released new episodes every week.

The talk audio shows the Swedish participants described to be listening to were mostly entertaining Swedish podcasts with recognizable hosts who would talk about current

events or their personal lives with their co-hosts (e.g., Filipp & Fredrik). Another clear category was hobby-related podcasts, such as Youtube podcasts about table-top-painting or computer games for Lucas. Murder came up with Sven, Liam and Ella, and seemed to be a popular podcast scene in Sweden. The Indian podcast listeners described to listen podcasts from the United States, such as Revisionist History, Joe Rogan Experience, Bill Burr's Monday Morning podcast, Philosophize this! and some Indian podcasts, such as Pooja Dhingra.

The podcast market clearly varies between the two countries I investigate, which partly explains why the Indian participants would listen more to international podcasts than the Swedish interviewees did.

#### 4.3. Talk audio and agency

In this subchapter I analyze how the agency of students in Stockholm and Bangalore was constructed in use of talk audio products. I will first outline the attributions of agency in talk audio use the students described after which I will present their personal use of talk audio more distinctively.

##### 4.3.1. Attributions of agency in talk audio products

Before diving deeper into the subjective strategies of my informants in relation to constructing agency with talk audio, I will shortly distinguish the *attributions of agency* they related to talk audio use. With attributions of agency I refer to the *forms of agency the students described talk audio to contain on a general level* before they distinguished their personal strategies in relation to their agency.

In relation to space, the students would explain some socially acceptable patterns of behavior in relation to controlling their personal space. For example, Sven (19, Sweden) describes below how it is acceptable to take distance with audio products from unknown people around you in public spaces, whereas with a friend it is not acceptable. Some students also related some attributions of agency in relation to controlling the mundane routines of their daily lives; Sam (21, Sweden) describes that he believes most people

“feel like they have to do something all the time, not to just sit on the subway and look into nothing” – and added that nowadays “everyone has to do something all the time”.

*I: “It’s because when – it’s not that acceptable to, like if you’re sitting with a friend just to be distant, have like a distance from the friend, and like the social part. But when you’re alone then you can be – then you can have distance from the people around you.”*

*JH: “So you can be distant even though you’re not really alone?”*

*I: “Yeah.”*

*(Sven, 19, Sweden)*

The attributions of agency in relation to controlling their cognition; their thoughts and feelings were somewhat more unclear. The attributions related to controlling moods my informants gave were much more conscious with music listening than with talk audio content. *Music was described to be especially “for mood”* whereas talk audio was also used for mood, but not as *consciously*. The students would, after giving it some thought, express they *receive some moods*, e.g. entertainment (Sam, 21, Sweden) from talk audio, but they wouldn’t claim that to be their primary motivator to use talk audio. Overall, the attributions the students gave to talk audio seemed to be somewhat unclear in comparison to music.

However, for most students in both countries, music was considered to be “just music” (Lekha, 21, India) – a medium they took for granted, and a thing they first thought they did not need to explain distinctively to me. Even though not everyone could distinguish why music and podcasts were different in comparison to e.g. the mood they expected to receive, Lekha (21, India) divided the products clearly. In her opinion, it is clear that music “*is feelings*”; “mood based and less serious”, whereas podcasts are “*knowledge*”; “more serious” and “more refined” and “useful”. Receiving information was a distinction all the students did between talk audio and music.

Sven describes below the mood attributions he expects from talk audio by comparing it to visual products such as news or social media. With talk audio he can relax, since with audio products like podcasts or music, one knows what one gets and for him, it was positive, “not stressed out” content. Also Lekha (21, India) pointed out that in comparison

to Instagram, for example, in a podcast you can only focus on one thing, whereas with Instagram she described that “when you’re shifting through everything, you (...) absorb all the content there is”. With podcasts she emphasized that “you’re talking about just one thing at a time”. Thus, with podcasts she was able to control what topics she wanted to know and hear about, whereas social media was just a continuous stream of un-controlled content. This could be in relation to the attributions Lekha attached to receiving information through talk audio.

*I: “I will probably say like the visual products can either get you relaxed or stressed. And I would probably say the audio products will always get you relaxed, not stressed out.”*

*JH: “Why do you think there’s a difference?”*

*I: “Because on a visual product you can either get good news or bad news. With an audio product, like music or podcasts, you can – you always get like good news”*

*(Sven, 19, Sweden)*

However, most distinctive character the students would be able to distinguish about talk audio, was “*interesting*” which refers to strong attributions in relation to the content itself. As will be distinguished in chapter 4.4. most would describe podcasts to give information in an entertaining way for them. In a general level. for example, Oliver (19, Sweden) describes that podcasts give information and “different kind of entertainment”.

*“Because I think the way we listen to podcasts, before podcasts were a thing we listened more to music; and now people listen sometimes to podcasts instead of music. But it’s a different kind of entertainment and it gives you more information, it depends on what podcast (...) I feel like with podcasts, it’s usually I’m trying to like get something out of it or I’m interested in the people who make the podcast and I want to hear about their experiences.”*

*(Oliver, 19, Sweden)*

Ted Talk listeners all described the talks firstly as “motivational”. For example, below Madhavi describes what features she explicitly relates to Ted Talks, even though she also listens to podcasts. Podcasts to her are *audio insights to specific topics*, like for example, history. Lekha (21, India) shares Madhavi’s opinion and claims that she mostly uses

podcasts since there is a large variety of topics and “a lot more depth to them”, but she listens to Ted Talks “when I’m feeling really motivated and I want to reaffirm, that motivation”. However, the Ted Talks are, just like podcasts, also “entertaining” (Tushar, 19, India).

*“the purpose is to motivate. So you do get information, but it is more like you can do this -- so, when you are not feeling up to the limit like if you think that you cannot do something, or you are like okay, if the day went pretty bad, I couldn’t do something, and you listen to a TED Talk, you feel, "yeah it's fine, everyone is going through failure and everyone is trying their best to do something". So, I think TED Talk is quite motivational in nature and when you want motivational content, you go for TED Talks.”*

*(Madhavi, 19, India)*

I tried to unravel what kind of people the participants thought listen to talk audio. In Sweden, the students explained that most people in Sweden listen to some podcasts, whereas in India I received a different answer. Most students would claim “students” (Ananya 19, India) and “young professionals” (Tushar, 19, India) listen to podcasts; people who wish to learn and develop themselves. Most in India would also claim to become personally more “knowledge oriented” (e.g. Lekha, Tushar) after listening to talk audio, so the attributions are, in some ways, *information related* at least in India.

To conclude, there was some direct attributions of agency even though for most informants, the attributions were somewhat hard to explain in relation to talk audio use. This, in turn, indicates that the students would use talk audio possibly both *consciously* as well as *less consciously* in constructing their agency.

#### 4.3.2. Talk Audio in everyday practices – managing space

One of my first explicit findings from the interview material was how *talk audio affects its users’ order of social practices in everyday life*. This occurred through the management of both space as well as time with talk audio use.

Podcast listeners described commuting to be a situation where they most often used music or talk audio. One of the reasons for this for both Indian and Swedish interviewees was the possibility to *distance themselves from others*. In Sweden, this was done especially when using public transportation. The Swedish participants described the outside ‘noise’ or even ‘silence’ as something unbearable and often elaborated that they would want to listen to something at home or on the metro just so *they can choose what they hear*. For them, it was very important to be in *control of their own sound space*. Sven described listening to a podcast being like “focusing and listening to yourself” – as if music or talk audio were tools for isolating oneself and aiming one’s focus *inward*.

*I: “Probably like there’s a lot of people around me. So (...) then you can focus on yourself instead of how to listen to other people having a conversation. (...) it’s more like listening to myself instead of having a big input from everyone around. (...) It probably takes me to like another level, a place that I can focus on myself instead of just being annoyed at the people around me.”*

*JH: “Why do you think you’re focusing on yourself when you’re listening to podcasts?”*

*I: “It’s because – where you can just listen to a podcast, use the phone to (...) feel more like (...), you’re just looking for the sources that you want to get input from, instead of getting input from, the people around you.”*

(Sven 19, Sweden)

Emma (19, Sweden), for example, described that when commuting to Stockholm by metro she felt like people almost invaded her privacy and personal space. Talk audio products offered her an escape from it all. Others around her, referred to ‘funny people’ as, which she described to be old men and drug addicts, were noise and something that were not a part of her world *by choice*. For her, it was relaxing to go to a “place for relaxation” instead of being present on the train. In a way, with talk audio products *she could actively filter the outside world away whenever she chose*. This was common among the Swedish participants; the use of talk audio in urban surrounding helped them control how they engaged with public spaces, which was also described to be the reason for the intimacy of the experience with talk audio products.

In India, talk audio was also used to distance oneself. For example, Ananya (19, India) describes how she “stopped noticing people” and the “surroundings”. For Rahul (21, India), the distancing happened beyond public spaces. Rahul described that he used talk audio when he was doing his work, and he was “plugged in” almost the entire day. With his headphones, he distanced himself from his colleagues in a similar manner as Emma described to do in the subway. During these moments his colleagues were more “wary about coming and disturbing you” and he believed that when he was wearing his earphones, people thought he was “paying a lot more attention to his work”. Thus, the headphones were a symbol of Rahul’s attention being elsewhere for his colleagues as well.

To conclude, with talk audio the students were able to *control their space* and choose what they wanted to listen to – wherever they were. This was emphasized more by the Swedish participants, which could be since all of them listened to talk audio mostly “on the go”. As stated above, most Ted Talk users watched the videos mostly at home in their own rooms, where the privacy is already a given element of the surrounding.

#### 4.3.3. Talk Audio in everyday practices – managing time

For some of the podcast listeners, talk audio would change some patterns of behavior by affecting their weekly or daily schedules, since they would prefer to listen to podcast shows as soon as they were released. For example, below Sven describes how he listens to a podcast *instead of music* when the new episode of a specific talk audio show is released weekly. Thus, when my interviewees would choose between listening to music and talk audio, the release schedule would create a sense of rhythm into their daily activities and, thus, affect the order of their practices. For the 20-year old Swede Sven, the situations of listening to his favorite podcasts about sports and crime are situations when he could otherwise be listening to music:

*JH: So where are you using podcasts?*

*I: Like at the same moments as I used music, like in the same situations as I used music.*

*JH: when are you choosing podcasts and when are you choosing music?*

*I: (...) when I really like listening to podcasts instead of listening to music.*

*JH: So what kind of things affect that?*

*I: It's probably as soon as they release a new episode of podcasts (...) meanwhile with music you just go in and listen to whatever you want to.*  
(Sven, 20, Sweden)

This, podcasts creating a loose rhythm of one's weekly practices was similar for most Swedish podcast listeners. In India not all podcast listeners described listening to the episodes the exact day they are released, but they seemed to be aware of the release schedules. This is partly understandable because of the time difference, as many of them listened to podcasts from the United States. Tejas knew the release schedule of his favorite podcast show – Bill Burr's Monday morning show – but he did not listen to it when it was released. Tejas listened to it at home always when he could.

*I: "He just rants about things that he feels are -- His podcast is called "The Monday Morning Podcast" and it releases on Monday mornings. So, that's a period in time that you are like the most pissed off and it's Monday and you don't want to go to work or college and he is very angry about it and he talks about things that make him angry at that point (...)"*

*JH: "When do you listen to his podcasts?"*

*I: "Whenever I can because he has been doing podcasts from 2007 (...), I listen to a lot of his old podcasts sometimes. I don't really have a set pattern"*

(Tejas, 19, India)

Some interviewees listened to podcasts only when they needed to *fill in time*, so the episode did not dictate their daily practices per se. Madhavi (19, India) described to listen to podcasts when it suited her other daily practices; when she commuted or when she was *waiting* for a friend to come over. So, as with Tejas, talk audio did not meddle in her routines or change her behavior patterns. She later continued that she chose between music and a podcast by evaluating the amount of concentration she needed for the content; for example, when commuting, if she needed to be mindful about the traffic, she could not focus on a podcast and she chose music. However, she said she *needed something in the background anyway*.

This need of having always something in the background was summarized well by Sam (21, Sweden). Like stated in 4.3.1. he believed that for him and his peers the need to be occupied with something all the time was a constant feature. Sam described that walking on the streets without anything to listen to was *boring*. This *need for being occupied* was emphasized especially in Sweden during the interviews, but also mentioned in India (e.g. Madhavi and Rahul). Sam also described “not feeling comfortable” with silence, which was mentioned multiple times also in other Swedish interviews.

*I: I'm bored. I'm just super-bored without anything that's keeping, yeah, keeping me occupied. I just want to be occupied with stuff. (...) Like before it wasn't like that at all. Before podcasts and music, like when I was a kid I wouldn't even have thought about buying a headset and listening to anything. And now, (...) I'm sure most people feel like they have to do something all the time not to just sit on the subway and look into nothing. You have to like... It's the instant gratification — everyone has to do something at all times. Like back in the day (...) It was just more of like a waiting lifestyle. Things didn't have to happen all the time. But now, when we have everything at all times at least I can't get enough of it (...) like the whole silence thing. I just don't like it, I'm not comfortable with it at all.*

(Sam, 21, Sweden)

Ted Talks were described to be used at home when the interviewees had the time for this. Tushar (19, India) described listening to Ted Talks alone during the weekend, “on Saturdays mostly”, because he is free and thus has the time for it. Arjun (19, India) watched Ted Talks a couple of times a week and had the same habit of watching Ted Talk shows when he was “free”, which was often during the weekends. For Arjun, the fact that he could get the content when he wanted and needed *was empowering*. When he compared a situation of getting moral guidance from Ted Talks or from a Facebook video to getting advice from his father, he explicitly said that with talk audio he could *choose*. He also believed that the instructions needed to come from something like a Ted Talk, which *gave him the choice of listening* to the content.

The way the students used time with talk audio became very apparent also through comparison with the use of visual products. Many participants described to be “checking”

social media or news even when listening to a podcast – just to briefly know what is happening – which is similar to what some of them described with news applications. Thus, the amount of time they would invest was considerably lower. For example, Liam (19, Sweden) described that social media was “a quick break” from whatever he was doing at the moment, whereas with talk audio he would specifically *make time for the content* and choose specifically in the application what he wanted to listen to during this time he had cleared up for the podcast.

*I: Like an Instagram post or something then it's more like I said before like I consume that during quick pauses and just when I have spare time. While podcasts it's like I make myself time during exercise and so on like combining it with traveling with the subway.*

(Liam, 19, Sweden)

Both students in India and Sweden described a need to use social media less, and some of them consciously tried to cut down the use with various methods, such as deleting applications from their phones. This was mostly done because the content was described to be “not relevant for me” or “distracting me from other stuff I am doing”, or the whole social media scene being “a façade”. This restricting of use did not concern talk audio products, however. In contrast, many of the students believed that talk audio is “good use of their time” (Tushar, 19, India). Thus, talk audio products were experienced as *useful* and as products they wanted to use, since they, for example, were entertaining and gave the students information and perspectives. The motivations of use will be presented later on in this chapter.

To conclude, for some students the release schedules of talk audio products determined their time of use and, therefore, their schedules, as listening to these talk audio products was an important part of their routines. Some used it to “fill in time” and not to feel bored in their daily routines (e.g. commuting). For others, the opportunity to use the content whenever they wanted created a sense of empowerment; they were able to listen to the content *whenever they wanted*. Thus, the students used talk audio to manage segments of their daily routines, for example when commuting.

#### 4.3.4. “I only use talk audio alone” – the personal emphasis of talk audio

Most of the interviewees in both countries and using both products, podcasts and Ted Talks, said they listened to talk audio products alone. Listening to podcasts together with another person received reactions such as “it feels weird” and how “it is my time” and how “the other person is only interrupting”.

For example, Emma (19, Sweden), described listening to podcasts as “me time”. She had tried to listen to her favorite podcast show once with her boyfriend, but he disturbed her by talking, and that is why she wanted “to listen to it by myself”. When she was listening to a podcast alone at home, it was a *special moment of solitude*, as she might treat herself by putting on a facial mask or paint her nails.

The exception to listening alone was Sven (21, Sweden), who shared talk audio listening with his girlfriend. He described that he needed to be able to feel “*secure*” to listen to a podcast with another person. He, just as many other participants, described using music when he is having friends over, because it is “socially acceptable”. He later described that he could try a podcast with a close friend, if he knew that the friend listened to the same podcast. This was in line with Ella (19, Sweden) who also described trying to listen to a podcast with a friend, but she felt like it was *too intimate* for her and she wouldn’t do it again.

*I: “It felt strange to sit together and listen to two people talking and not watch anything, only listening. So, we sat there just looking at each other while listening instead of looking at a computer or anything like that. It felt like intimate.”*

*(Ella, 19, Sweden)*

Others would not try to listen to a podcast with a friend, but they would talk about the podcast with their friends after listening to it if they liked the same podcast show. For example, Lucas (19, Sweden) said that listening to a podcast together is “not really something that I find altogether to be a very social experience”. Madhavi (19, India) agreed, but could not distinguish the specific reason why she did not listen to podcasts with friends: “you share with them, but you don’t listen with them”. Also, Sam (21, Sweden) points out that for him, podcasts are “way more personal than any other medium that I’ve found” because “it’s more similar to how people actually talk” in real life”.

Ted Talk users in India also only listened to the content alone. For example, Mohit (19, India) listened to his Ted Talk content normally “alone at his house” because he needed to focus. For him, it was important to “pull his full attention to that” and he did not want any distractions. Arjun (19, India) agreed and stated that “my feelings, my videos”, as he went through his motivational videos at home. He stated that “I want to keep it to myself” because “it’s personal”.

#### 4.3.5. Talk Audio as a mood manager

Like stated, the students who identified podcasts as their primary talk audio product used them mostly in the same situations as when they described to listen to music *alone* in their daily lives – they just sometimes chose talk audio and sometimes music. They often claimed “mood” to be the differentiating feature that made them choose between the two – what they described to *need* in that specific moment. Thus, through a couple of examples I next identify what ‘moods’ made the students choose music and what moods demanded talk audio.

Sam (21, Sweden) believed that music was more “mood-dependent” than talk audio, and he used music to calm himself down before a test or make himself “hyped” before going out with friends. He first claimed that podcasts were not mood changing in a similar way as music is. However, he agreed that he can get happier by listening to a podcast. Below, he describes that for his mood there is a spectrum in which music fills the ends of the spectrum; soothing music, which he earlier states to be “even calmer than a podcast”, is at one end and exciting, uplifting music at the other. Podcasts, for him, filled out the 80% in the middle of the spectrum, since they were his favorite products and he was “addicted to” them. Thus, for him, as he describes below, podcasts were his “everyday choice” – for his normal mood – and music fills in when needed. Music acts as a tool to activate the extremes of his mood spectrum when he needed to tune his mood to be what is needed in the current social context – like going out or preparing mentally for a test situation.

*I: “Podcasts, my everyday choice. Music, it’s more mood-dependent. I feel like if I’m going out or doing a specific thing, let’s say if I’m going for an exam then I might put on very calm, soothing music that’s even calmer than*

*a podcast. And when I'm going out then it's usually more upbeat that makes me, I guess hyped in a sense.*

*(...) I wouldn't say that a podcast changes my mood. Yeah, if it's funny then yeah, I can get all of it, I can get a little bit happier I suppose. But if there is a deviation curve – you know about a deviation curve, like the ends of each spectrum. (...) Like the soothing music on the left and then the exciting music on the right and then the whole main, like 80%, 90% part in the middle – that's for podcasts, yeah.”*

(Sam, 21, Sweden)

Even though the “deviation curve” Sam describes above is mainly a feature that illustrates his use of audio products, it is in line with what other students stated about the difference between music and talk audio. Most students claimed to use music for a more “up-beat” mood, whereas talk audio for a calmer mood. However, they would not claim talk audio to be “a tool for mood” (Lekha, 21, India) per se, which is what most students claimed about music. As Emma (19, Sweden) in a similar manner describes what feelings she gets by listening to audio products, she states that music had more extreme levels of emotions, and that she used talk audio to return to an “average level of mood” from a more negative or positive level. For Emma, podcasts are also “in the middle” of her mood spectrum – her *normal state of mood*:

*I: “Ironically if I'm in a bad mood I will listen to music because sometimes I don't want to be in a good mood. So, I could listen to a podcast and maybe get happier but I choose to listen to music instead to go deeper in my feelings.”*

*JH: “Okay. So, music doesn't make you happy?”*

*I: “It can do both I think. Some music makes me happier and some the opposite, and sometimes it's quite nice to be sad and listen to sad music.*

*(...) I think music has higher highs and lower lows if you understand what I mean. (...) So, if I'm happy I can get more happy when I listen to music but a podcast is more in the middle.”*

(Emma, 19, Sweden)

The specific modes of feelings most participants in India and Sweden described to get while listening to a podcast were *comfort*, *security* and *relaxation*. For Sven (19, Sweden), podcasts had a similar effect as relaxing and relieving music. Because “life can be stressful” talk audio was a way to feel secure and “relieve the stress”. He stated that podcasts are so calming that “you can even sleep through them”. Sam (21, Sweden) agreed and pointed out that he recently changed his podcast application, since his old application removed a sleep feature in which the application automatically turns off the podcast after 30 minutes. He described using podcasts to fall asleep quite often.

Sven pointed out that the feeling of relaxation and calmness happens in music because of the rhythm, but with podcasts because “you get into *what they are discussing* and then you like have to think about something else”. Thus, eventually “they fill out the same purpose” except that music can also boost your motivation, for example, when exercising which was emphasized, for example, by Liam (19, Sweden). Similarly, Maja (20, Sweden) avoids listening to her music at work because she gets too emotional.

The Indian participants also started by describing that music is mostly for moods and talk audio is for something else. However, most participants would describe that a podcast pulls them from a surrounding situation and their thoughts, which gives them a chance to go in *their own headspace*. However, this action of “pulling me away from my thoughts” (e.g., Ananya, 19 India) was *used consciously*, especially to avoid the feeling of stress. Ananya first pointed out that music was to boost her mood, whereas talk audio, for her, was about *learning*. But, also with talk audio, when she felt negative, she “can just put on something that’s a little more motivational, more positive” talk audio content to “boost her mood” and “lock her thoughts” to something else than her own thoughts at that moment. Talk audio provided *a chance to change perspective* from her college life. As a result, talk audio becomes a window she can open during her daily life that connects her to something beyond her current situation. This, ultimately, also affects her mood through a change of thoughts. Therefore, talk audio does change one’s mood from, for example, feeling stressed to feeling something else, depending on the content.

For Lekha (21, India), this mood was related to her sense of effectiveness. On her way to college, she wanted to ‘*feel productive*’, which she described to be a separate mode she

could get into by listening to talk audio. She explicitly described a feeling, instead of, for example, ‘being effective’. That feeling helped her set the motion and mindset, in her own words, ‘for the rest of the day’. She used the word ‘space’ with talk audio use to describe a specific scene inside her head where she “can think”. She also points out that her trip to school was “the time when I’m (...) the most alone”, which was essential for her mind to be in a space where she can think of something very specific. And during that moment, it was not music she wanted to accompany her – she chose to feed talk into her ears. This, getting into specific mode in the morning, is in line with what also Liam (19, Sweden) described as an “easy transition” into study mode with podcasts in the morning. Lekha (21, India) and Liam (19, Sweden) both wanted to *set their minds into a specific mode or space in the morning*; they use talk audio to orient themselves into something they believe was needed as a *cognitive gear* of some sort when starting their days at the university as Bachelor’s students in Stockholm and Bangalore.

When Lekha described why it is important to be productive, she firstly emphasized the life situation she is currently in; in her final year of college. She believed that if she was “lazy now, she will be lazy for the rest of her life”. She explained how she used to have more schoolwork to do and now she needed something else to occupy her, “to compensate it”. For her, “that kind of not being as active as I used to be” does not suit her because she starts to feel “completely useless”. She then continued that ‘a couch potato’ is not something she wants to be, because for her ‘feeling busy’ was what *she needs in order to feel like herself*. She described herself to be “a workaholic” and that is why she “needs to be engaged from 9 to 9”. She also described a moment when this kind of a feeling emerged; when she had a day off and she just sat watching television and eating pizza. When experiencing that specific moment, she *needed* something. However, being occupied with housework or art did not bring the needed satisfaction, and, thus, she *needed talk audio to occupy her* – to bring her into a separate space where she felt like she was herself. Thus, for Lekha, using talk audio was directly related to how she felt *about herself*. The mood she wanted to achieve was her ideal sense of what she wanted to be and believed she was.

*I: So I have always been actively engaged, so now that kind of workload has reduced completely, so I’m just compensating it with this, because I still wake up at 5:30 every day, but at the same time I do not do the kind of things*

*I used to do, I'm not as active as I used to be and that kind of doesn't sit right with me, because I feel completely useless, just recently I was telling my friend that we had a extended weekend holiday and the first day I was bingeing out on pizza, I was just watching all the movies I wanted to, the next day by afternoon I felt like a useless tart, I felt so completely useless -- why I'm in bed, I need to do something, need to be productive, like I was coloring, I was making food, I was doing my laundry, I was changing sheets, but still that -- that kind of satisfaction didn't come.*

(Lekha, 21, India)

Ted Talk listeners also referred to music as something that “covers a lot of emotions” whereas with Ted Talks “it’s about a certain topic and you get to know about a certain niche” (Mohit, 19, India). In line with podcast-listeners, Mohit also describes that “I can’t listen to a Ted Talk when I’m totally excited” because “I will listen to music then”. Ted Talks for him, are an experience, but he wouldn’t also claim them to be as mood-related as music.

To conclude, the students *knew the effect of music*, and, thus, they consciously controlled their mental and bodily reactions by listening to talk audio instead. Thus, music and podcasts are in the same spectrum of diffusing or tuning up your mood – music at the extreme ends of the spectrum and talk audio in the middle. Talk Audio was used by the students to control and transfer their mood from stress or from a negative self-feeling like “feeling useless” to a normal or a more positive one. However, this was not as conscious as music-use.

#### 4.3.6. Emotion work with talk audio

What was highly connected with the practical use of the mood spectrum among my interviewees was the formation of the goals of their self-transformation.

Maja (20, Sweden) described with music; “when I’m working I can listen to podcasts because I get too – if I listen to a good song I get too pumped up” and thus she preferred a calming podcast to “have in the background” while working. Similarly, for Emma (19, Sweden), podcasts gave a “bubbly feeling”.

One of Emma's favorite podcasts, called Tänkemedjan, made her "always laugh" because its hosts talk about serious topics can make these funny by joking about them. For her, it "*feels light*" as she sits in the train and laughs at their jokes. However, she also believes everyone else around her in the train "turn their head" and think "why is she laughing" because she is not with someone. When I asked how this made her feel, she said that it could be a bit *embarrassing*, since the people might think her to be "strange", but she believed that it is not the most serious thing that can happen, and "life goes on". Thus, Emma was after a less serious and "light" social situation which would pull her away from the social situation on the train after a stressful day at the university. She knew that the emotional presence *she was supposed to practice* on the train was perhaps calm and silent, but, instead, she decided to entertain herself with Tänkemedjan podcasts even though other commuters might think her mood to be unsuitable for the social context of the train.

Even though through my data the level of emotion work cannot be identified more deeply, the fact that the students identified different emotions with talk audio use became clear, which proves, in part, how agency is constructed with talk audio: in the spatial and social context of the use just like music.

#### 4.4. Talk audio is listening to *people*

In this subchapter, I describe how the talk audio host is a vital part of the experience the interviewees had with talk audio products and how this affected their agency. I will first distinguish how the human voice was described as a distinct character of talk audio content in relation to other audio products, such as music. Next, I will present how the personality of the talk audio host was emphasized as significant factor in using the product, and then will dive deeper into the *relationship* between the talk audio host and the listener.

##### 4.4.1. Human voice as a distinct character of talk audio

The distinction between music and talk audio for the students was primarily the human presence. The cause of the 'moods' the participants described when listening to talk audio

varied, but the fact that enhanced the wanted mood was in all cases the other human being – the talk audio host(s). For example, Lekha (21, India) described that the feeling of productivity she was after was enhanced, since “there is another human being there” who has “accomplished things in his life”. For her, talk audio provided a voice inside her head, which encouraged her and gave her ideas and direction. She described that the other person, the talk audio host, was a “distraction-mechanism” for her own thoughts.

Most interviewees believed that the relaxing feature in podcasts was the voice of the podcaster(s). Liam (19, Sweden) described listening to podcasts “even for hours a day” because he thought “it’s very relaxing like just listening to other people’s voices”. He categorized his podcasts into three different groups: “crime, law and free discussion” podcasts. He loved crime movies and television shows, so he started to listen to murder podcasts because of the *thrill* he got from them. He related the thrill with the voice of the hosts of the podcasts – “they have very good narrative voices” – and described the voices to be calm, which he believed to create the tension in the podcast. He concluded that “I think it’s the tension and like excitement and the voices too”. Below, Liam describes how there is a pattern in his podcast use: most of the hosts have a calm voice. By listening to the voice Liam also gets calmer and can replace his stressful thoughts with something else:

*I: Well, like the persons that are discussing tend to have a like calm voice often. I don't think that I pick the podcasts according to which person that is like talking calmly and so on. But maybe that has just being a theme (...) they're often talking like quite slow and calm. So that's how at least myself I get like calmer and get my thoughts of things that maybe is stressful and so on. So, I think that's how the podcast fills its purpose for me.*

(Liam, 19, Sweden)

Podcasts were relaxing and soothing for Madhavi (19, India) too. She believed that since in a podcast there is a person talking and it has “narration” with “pauses”, “enunciations” and “vocalizations”, the structure is more complex than with relaxing music which has, for example, beats and lyrics. She believed the “voice modulation” to be the key in podcasts – they help structure the content and help the listener to come back to the show if (s)he loses focus. Lekha (21, India) also claimed that a podcast host’s voice has to be

“pleasant”, and she preferred “like a deep voice” since she associated “deep voices with authority”. Ted Talk listeners did not explicitly describe the voice of the show hosts to be significant for them, but emphasized their characters which will be presented in the next subchapter.

As described above, both podcast listeners in Bangalore and in Stockholm described one of the defining elements of talk audio to be the fact that other people are talking and that takes their thoughts from their daily lives to something beyond. The voice is the distinctive feature in podcasts that makes it special as a medium for my informants. I will next analyze the relationship between talk audio hosts and listeners further.

#### 4.4.2. Personalities of the talk audio hosts

Many interviewees in both countries described the experience of reading about a topic in the news and hearing about it in a podcast to be different, since podcasts are more dynamic and less strictly formulated as a medium. These characteristics were claimed to be based on *the personalities of the podcast hosts* – the host was the key reason the podcast listeners gave for listening to the shows. This was similar among Ted Talk listeners. When asked to compare Ted Talks with news, the comparison was seen to be “far fetched”, as the information was never about current news, but more about novel ideas. Just like with podcasts, the speakers of Ted Talks were seen as one of the attractions of the concept.

For example, Lucas (19, Sweden) told he listened to a comedy podcast by the Swedish National Radio because “it’s more the actual people why I watch or listen to”. He believed that podcasts in general are more based on the people in the shows, which for him was “*the staying power*” – why he keeps listening to certain podcasts. Even when Lucas was listening to news-related podcasts, he most of the time had heard the news already and with the podcast could “get people’s opinions on something and (...) why they think that way”. He believed that people who have podcasts “are usually very good at discussing why they like or don’t like something (...), they’re analyzing or doing things that appeal or don’t appeal to them” and Lucas felt that this is important.

Oliver (19, Sweden) agreed and told that when he listened to Swedish political podcasts from the “left-leaning” side “they dig deeper somehow and they make it fun”. The reason

he listened to them was the personalities: "they're basically comedians talking about politics, and politics need to be a bit more simple, a bit more fun to be more enjoyable". Oliver described to read more news, but *the people* are the reason why he listened to podcasts sometimes: "Reading (news) is text and it's there and a podcast isn't always just script; it's the personalities, it's the scripts that they choose and the dynamic between the different personalities that are in the podcast." Sam (21, Sweden) added that for him, the podcasters need to be good "story-tellers" and they need to talk in an entertaining way.

Also Ted Talk listeners found the personality meaningful for their interest in listening to the shows. Most Ted Talk-listeners who wouldn't listen to podcasts would find the Ted Talk through the personality. For example, Tushar (19, India) describes to listening to a talk by Simon Sinek since "he's really an inspirational personality" and his specific talk "really changed" him. He mostly listens to Ted Talks by famous Indian actors, such as Shahrukh Khan. Also, Mohit (19, India) describes that Ted Talks are made by "people who have a lot of fame, who are known by a lot of people" are inspiring, since it makes the story is interesting.

#### 4.4.3. The relationship with talk audio hosts

In this section, I will focus on how my interviewees perceived their relationship with talk audio hosts to be. The hosts were experienced to have several different kinds of roles in the lives of the students, such as those of *authorities*, *mentors* or *friends*.

Especially in India, the podcasters were described as role models of some sort. For example, Ananya (19, India) described how Pooja Dhingra moved to United States to attend a good culinary school, which was her dream as well. The podcast is one of the most famous ones in India (Aravind 2019). Tushar (19, India) also emphasizes how specific Ted Talks has encouraged him to start his engineering career.

Arjun described how, for him, Ted Talks and 'moral videos' in Facebook gave advice and acted *as authorities* comparable to his father; he used to get moral advice from his father, but now he wanted to get them through motivational videos. With Ted Talks he was mainly looking for a confidence boost. He described how his parents did not support his dream of becoming an entrepreneur, but experienced entrepreneurs in Ted Talks gave

him the confidence he needed when making decisions about his future. He preferred the Ted concept: it was the source from where the advice *should come for him*, because then it would be his decision. Thus, instead of getting moral advice from his father, Arjun wanted to feel empowered by the decision of *when he wanted to get the advice*. Therefore, *his own choice* played a crucial role in how he received “moral values” for his life.

*I: Some motivational things, some confidence boost up or some kind of things where I recently watched the video wherein he says, “When you need to take a stand for yourself”. So those things cannot be taught to you, those things has to be injected to you via a video or via someone so that it lasts. When it is coming from your parents, it’s a different perspective, when it is coming from something official -- something like this, you will listen to it. (...) it should be your interest to watch it. (...) your decision. When it is coming from someone else we usually don’t pay attention (...) But now since it’s my decision, whatever I want -- yes my dad is available to me -- but I would prefer something like this so that it would be taught in an informal way, so that I get convinced. It’s a part of a boost (...) it suggests me based on my interest*

(Arjun, 19, India)

For Liam (19, Sweden), especially the law-related podcasts acted as career-motivators because the hosts are prevalent lawyers in his field. For Sam (21, Sweden), the Swedish podcasters were also like *role models*, even though he himself described them to be more like “friends”. He claimed that the podcasters Filip and Fredrik have interesting lives, which is the primary reason he listens to them. The show resonated with him, and he claims that probably with other people as well, since one of the podcasters lives an *ideal life* with social and financial capital to do exciting things in his life in a “spontaneous” manner. Sam also pointed out that the podcasters travel a lot and one of them lives in New York “as a Swedish person”, which both were dreams of some sort for him:

*I: It’s probably ‘cause of their lives. One of them lives in New York as a Swedish person. I feel like that is something that most people, at least I have always had an idea of moving to the US especially when I was younger – so that resonates with me. And the other person, he’s just a funny guy that lives a life I feel like a lot of people want to live kind of. He has a lot of*

*connections, a lot of big parties with a lot of big events. He has a lot of money, which I guess that probably makes it more fun. He does a lot of things and they're also very spontaneous (...) they usually travel an insane amount. I love to travel; that's probably something that resonates with me. So, there isn't anything necessarily super-specific but it's just lifestyle I guess (...)*

(Sam, 21, Sweden)

For some of the students (e.g., Maja, Sam and Ella), the relationship with talk audio hosts reminded them of the relationships they have with their friends. Ella (19, Sweden) started listening to podcasts in high school when she found out that three guys who she follows in Instagram had a podcast. She described this podcast as “amusing and funny” as they talked about “not important issues”. During that time, it was good for her since “guys are sometimes (...) easier to listen to because (...) guys can be much easier about everything”. For her, it was a discussion that “doesn't have to be serious all the time” and, thus, she felt like “*I want to hang out with them*, because they're so funny (...), it was like when I talk to my friends” since the podcasters were around her age and, thus, “relatable” to her. For Ella the podcasters were like an addition to the friends she already had, since she was able to relate to them and hear their thoughts about daily matters and laugh *with them* when listening to their shows.

Maja and Sam explicitly described to feel like they almost *have a relationship with the podcasters*. Maja tended to “think about them (podcasters) in different (...) situations” and she felt like “I know them” since she has heard their opinions, their talk and their thoughts about different things in the podcast. For her, those characters felt genuine and alive. She also admitted to going back to the things she has heard in the podcast, as she might think, “what would they say about this situation”, and she described it to be like “I go into their mindset in the podcast”. She described a situation she had experienced lately in her life that would be a “kind of subject they would talk about”. However, Maja believed that the relationship with the podcasters still differed from the relationships she had with her friends; it is “very specific” and, thus, more one-dimensional than what she had with her friends of whom she knew “every side” of:

*I: (...) Yeah, if I meet them on the street or something (...) I would probably go and talk to them (...) I would act like I know them. Yeah, they don't know me but I think I would act like I know them, because I do. I've heard their opinions and I've heard them talk and what they think and what they don't think (...). Because I know like every sides of my friends and I know a lot of different sides to them, but the podcasts, I only just know what they would answer in those kinds of subjects. It's like very specific, I know that person in those questions; I don't know where they live, how low they are. Like (...)they're my friends, I know them well.*

(Maja, 19, Sweden)

Sam (21, Sweden) believed that he preferred podcasts to music because there are people talking and *it is "social"* and it is people who make him feel entertained. He admitted that even though "it sounds depressing" *podcasts make his life more social*. For him, it was similar to having "a real conversation" even though it was not exactly the same since he could not replace his friends with the podcasters. He also believed to "know them now" and, thus, "it's almost like me calling a friend and seeing what's up with them like if I haven't been in touch with them for a while".

*I: It's some kind of interaction (...) It's similar to having a real conversation. For sure, but I wouldn't say it... I wouldn't just be able to substitute the two. Like if I went a week without talking to people and my friends like I would get depressed 100%. (...) it's an alternative, a short-term alternative, a constant void-filling substitute.*

(Sam, 21, Sweden)

Sam started listening to podcasts when he was 13. When he was younger his parents told him that after listening to Filip and Fredrik's podcast, *he started to talk like them*. Sam said that he is be "super-impressionable" and, thus, he believed that "everything that I do a lot has an impression on me". Below, Sam shares his thoughts about how everyone in his life has had an influence on him. He places podcasters in the same category as his friends and peers, since they will have an influence, and that is why his podcast use has possibly changed "some outlooks" Sam has on certain things. Thus, Emma, Maja and Sam all experienced the encounter with the talk audio host(s) to be something very social.

*I: (...) Everything that I do a lot has an impression on me; I feel like that's for everyone. And yeah, that's... It's probably changed some outlooks that I've had or have on things and the way that... Any peer, like it's almost like I consider them like a friend; so like any friend or peer influence, any time spent on something or with someone that you respect and kind of look up to or just feel as big as them, then that's for sure gonna have an influence on you.*

(Sam, 21, Sweden)

The relationship to these talk audio personalities was especially meaningful for some students. For example, Tejas (19, India) believed that his favorite podcaster, Bill Burr, connects with his audience: “*knows his audience*”. Tejas claimed that podcasts are more personal than Ted Talks, “because the speaker knows who he is talking to”. He says that with Ted Talks, it is not the same since “they are not necessarily speaking because they know the audience, they are speaking because they are invited to that event and they are talking about their experiences”. Podcasters, however, have the “creative freedom” to curate their content to people who are listening to them. Tejas describes below how he believes that with podcasts, the audience can reach the podcaster through different channels, like social media, and, thus, the relationship can partly be, more interactional:

*I: But for the podcaster, their thing relies on people continuing listening further. So, the podcaster tries to understand what his audience wants and when he tells something and people agree to it or people are like, “Yeah, I like what he is doing.” So, the podcaster knows what his audience wants, so he can constantly give it to them.*

*(...) I think it's true with any podcaster and obviously, they have open streams, I mean, they have social media accounts. Even if they post a picture that is unrelated to the podcast, you comment something on it, they'd still have a chance where they are like, “Oh, this is what he thinks about my podcast.”*

(Tejas, 19, India)

Thus, for Tejas, the relationship with podcasters is more intense than it is with Ted Talk hosts. Tejas believed that Bill Burr has a “very real manner” when he talks about things in his podcast and thus, “he gets real with you”. Tejas believed that this is possible because “the people who share his opinions are the ones that listen to him”. When I asked Tejas to describe the audience of Bill Burr, he said it to be “people who aren’t offended (...) easily”. Below, Tejas describes a case so I would understand what he means with the notion “he talks to people who can listen”, and people “who don’t dismiss opinions as soon as they hear them”. Tejas identified himself strongly through Bill Burr’s audience and for him Bill Burr seemed to be a rather close media character. When I asked if Tejas listened to podcasts with friends, he said that he cannot “force him (his friend) to listen to Bill Burr ranting” because “*it is personalized for me or the kind of audience that is like me*” and, thus, he “can’t expect all my friends to like it”.

*I: (...) So, if he starts off by saying all men are idiots, he doesn’t talk to people who will immediately react to all men are idiots. He is talking to people who are like, “Okay, why do you think men are idiots?” That’s the kind of people he is talking to. And he doesn’t dismiss anything. (...) he is a very rational man I think and that’s the kind of content. (...) he just lets his frustrations go on his podcasts. That’s his thing. (...) And they are not always politically correct or they are not always right in the factual sense too, but he is very open about what he feels.*

(Tejas, 19, India)

Also, in relation to social media influencers, some students described podcasters to be “more real” (e.g., Sam, 21, Sweden and Tejas, 19, India). Below Sam (21, Sweden) describes that podcast personalities feel more sincere to him in comparison to television producers, and their shows do not feel “forced”. Like stated previously, for him, the podcast concept is more real and personal than any other media and it is due to the personalities. In line with Sam, Liam (19, Sweden) also feels that podcasts are “more free” than, for example, the television – at least in terms of the production of the content and topics.

*JH: Why do you think people are listening to podcasts?*

*I: I don’t know. I know why I listen to podcasts but personality – just like the whole personality vibe, I feel like it’s more real, it’s more sincere.*

*There's no TV producers like, "Yeah, commercial in 5, 4, 3..." like it's none of that. It doesn't seem forced. It seems very relaxed. It's almost like having a friend in most of these podcast personalities in a way. (...) It's just less-produced, more real, I feel like people are getting tired of the whole... The whole radio thing, it's always this guy with this archetypical radio voice and it's super-overly produced and just super-bad. Podcast (...) it's just more similar to how people actually talk. I feel like that's probably the main reasons why podcasts... It's more personal, way more personal than any other medium that I've found.*

(Sam, 21, Sweden)

For many students in both countries, social media seemed superficial and staged. Sam called it “*a façade*” because of the “whole influencer thing”. All the interviewees in Sweden claimed that they do not to follow influencers, even though most claimed their friends to follow some. In India, the students did not use the influencer concept, but most described social media to be superficial. For example, Lekha (21, India) bluntly claimed that social media is not “good for her”. Below, Sam (21, Sweden) tells explicitly why social media is not personal for him, whereas podcasts are. Podcasts make Sam feel more social, which is something that social media does not do.

*JH: More personal than social media?*

*I: Yeah. Yeah. I don't find social media personal necessarily at all.*

*JH: Why?*

*I: I feel like it's mostly a façade, mostly, like the whole like influencer thing. I know I don't follow influencers; that's not my cup of tea. (...) It's just other people, like my friends – since I don't really follow other friends as much, and I wouldn't really say it's personal still if it's a picture from a party or someone posting some food, that doesn't really say anything; whereas when you're listening to a two-hour podcast with people it's hard to keep up a façade for two hours every week for ten years. I feel like these guys, there has to be some reality in whatever they're saying.*

(Sam, 21, Sweden)

Thus, for the students who had all earlier described to cut down or restrict their social media use in one way or another, talk audio felt more authentic and personal as a medium. This was partly, because it didn't feel as produced as television or radio, but mostly because they emphasized the meaning of the talk audio characters' personalities.

#### 4.4.4. The feeling of presence with talk audio

In this chapter I distinguish how the experience with audio was described to be distinctively different to experiences with visually based products. The presence of another being was one of the explicit features that created a sense of personalized experience with talk audio; a feeling of being *addressed exclusively*. Tejas (19, India) described that, for him, visual products were more interactive and podcasts more personal since "with visual, (...) there are other people there". With podcasts "*it's like they are only talking to you*". Some students experienced the presence strongly and claimed to feel like they are engaging in a social encounter when using the products. The sense of engaging with talk audio hosts is next presented through examples given by Ella (19, Sweden), Maja (19, Sweden) and Lekha (21, India).

Ella (19, Sweden) described feeling "it feels like you are – well, in the group when they're talking" with one of the podcasts she listened to at the moment of the interview, DelaQ. Thus, she felt like *she was also engaging* in the discussion when she listened to the show. During the time of the listening she was usually alone at home and she explained that it is like "there's people and talk about different things". Concerning all podcasts she listened to she pointed out that "if you can't relate at all you will not find an interest in listening to it" and thus, one "needs to be able to *connect*" with the podcast content in one way or another.

Maja (19, Sweden) also told she listened to podcasts when she was alone at home and she wanted to feel that she was in a "social kind of group" – like she would have people in the house when she was alone. Earlier, as Emma (19, Sweden) described feeling like she is taking part in the discussion the podcasters are having while also acknowledging that she is on the train, she is in a way described to be *in between two social worlds*.

Lekha's favorite podcast, "Philosophize this!", is, according to her, run by a man who "speaks with experience". In that show and in Pooja Dhingra's cooking podcast, the hosts do not have a specific script, which gave *a personal feeling for her* in both cases, which she appreciated. Especially with Pooja Dhingra's podcast, she felt like she was "involved in it" since the interviews the host conducts with cooking professionals feel like you are "listening to people talk in real time".

To conclude, podcasts expanded my interviewees' sense of social being, as they experienced to be engaging in a discussion that takes place inside their heads.

#### 4.4.5. The content of talk audio – perspectives and information

The content was an important feature for the interviewees in their favorite talk audio shows. When I asked what kept Sam (21, Sweden) "hooked" on talk audio, he described it to be how the podcasters "dive fairly deep", which refers to the way they connect the micro and macro levels of information topics. As Sam, most participants in both countries *described getting perspective from talk audio hosts*. However, the characterization of perspectives varied: for some it was a motivating story or a life narrative, and for others it was information. Getting perspective was for some of the participants aligned with their emphasis of "pulling away from thoughts" (e.g., Ananya 19, India) or of getting motivation for their own life decisions (e.g., Arjun, 19, India).

Getting moral or social perspectives on things such as relationships or taboos was empowering for the interviewees. Some of them claimed to even "develop as a person" through talk audio use. For example, when asking if talk audio had changed something in Maja's (19, Sweden) life or in her, she described being more open towards other people's views and values. This was due to a Swedish podcast called *Dilemma* in which famous people face philosophical dilemmas and have to solve them together. For her, it opened up more about how other people think and, consequently, changed her "relationship to others" – she now felt like she understood other people better. Her friends and family had pointed out to her before that she should try to understand other people's opinions more, and she especially described that talk audio had helped her with that relationship goal. Maja therefore believed that talk audio had contributed in her change as a person. She felt more engaged with others as she was "more understanding" and less judgmental.

Ted Talks users in India expressed similar views. For example, Mohit (19, India) told that Ted Talks “improved him as a person” as they made him “more mature”. He strongly believed that the talks “inspired” him to be more around people, since he used to be an introvert, and taught him about “human values” as he learnt how to “treat other people”. He believed that it was important that he was able to maintain a “better relationship with everyone”. For him, Ted Talks were a vital part in his life, which he did not “want to change” – for example, he did not want to look for other talk shows. He concluded that Ted Talks had changed how he saw other people and his “perspective to life”, as he used to feel lonesome and depressed; he had become “more social” and “more mature”. Tejas (19, India) also stated that even though he listened to many podcasts, specific Ted Talks had changed his behavior and attitude towards watching pornography. After hearing a Ted Talk about pornography, he had stopped watching it, since the talk “really affected him” as pornography is “exploitation” and “damaging for our society”.

Emphasizing the *motivation and inspiration* the listeners get through role models in talk audio was apparent among Indian students, as well as for the Swedish interviewee Liam (19). For example, Tushar, Ananya and Arjun *empowered themselves* continuously by engaging with talk audio products. In addition to setting the course for his career, for Tushar (19, India), Ted Talks had made him more disciplined and organized, as he believed that at the time of the interview he needed motivation for his studies so he would be able to “stay on track”. Furthermore, as described in chapter 6.1., he believed some people have just jobs and others have careers – he wanted to have a career and, thus, he sometimes needed “*self-assurance*” from these Ted Talks to be able to remember that “I’m on the right path”. He claimed that one cannot get motivation “by listening to music all the time” and, thus, “*you need someone who have achieved to tell you that it’s ok*”, which is what helped him to continue forward. As a result, he got more empowered with talk audio to pursue a mechanical career, more disciplined, and on his chosen path, he uses Ted Talks to empower and motivate himself.

Thus, for Tushar, Ted Talks and, for Ananya (in the previous subchapter), a podcast had *offered perspectives on a different kind of life and images of inspiration* which had ended up paving a way for dreams, and possibly, careers. Liam (19, Sweden) also listened to podcasts by lawyers he finds inspiring career-wise. He believed podcasts taught him,

made him inspired about things he studied and gave him a chance to deepen his knowledge of his field of law. He described that it gave him *practical perspective* through actual cases regarding things he had been studying in class. For Liam, the information and the discussion in the law-podcast was his primary reason for listening to the content, as he got “a various overview of what you are going to study in the next course or something” or a repetition of what they have just gone through in class:

*I: (...) Lately, they have been like discussing commercial law and we are reading commercial law right now so it's like repetition (...) you have studied something in the books and you have talked in class and then you hear it in the podcast too when they are discussing it and then it's like oh that's how you should apply it or anything.*

(Liam 19, Sweden)

The perspectives the students received, however, were heavily based on the podcaster and his background organization. Thus, *the media characters, the podcasts hosts, act as filters of perspectives to the world*. The students also described the perspective often to be very *information-based*. It is not always “the most important information”, as Liam (19, Sweden) put it, but “general information”. The content of the important information varied significantly between the students, since the content available is so varied: for Sven (19, Sweden), it was about his favorite football team and for Liam about his studies. This information was, however, always *curated by the talk audio host* both in podcasts and in Ted Talks. Through Rahul's (21, India) example I will next demonstrate how he described the significance of the information he got from podcasts and how this changed his personal opinion about a political dispute in the United States. The opinion was highly dependent on the podcaster he respects, Joe Rogan: Rahul specifically described that he was able to get that middle-ground political opinion *only through Joe Rogan's podcast*.

For Rahul, podcasts give exposure that people around him do not have. With the help of the Joe Rogan Experience he is able to form his own opinion which “is what I feel is important, rather than hearing someone's perspective and trying to automatically convince yourself of certain things, because that's what people tend to do in any case”. With news he would have to read from several different sources to get the “middle ground

opinion”, which he gets from podcasts as “now I can say that I have heard both sides and I have an opinion on the matter, rather than projecting someone else’s opinion on it”.

Rahul listened to Joe Rogan because he had gotten bored with Ted Talks, since the content in Ted Talks could get “very bland” and dreary after a while because of the way they portrayed things – it was not entertaining enough. Rahul thought Joe Rogan’s show was a very casual way of “putting good information out there”. He also appreciated the guests on the show: “they are very well known (...) and very knowledgeable people”. However, Rahul felt the conversation to be relaxed and have “comedic elements to it”, which “keeps you hooked”. For Rahul, there was also “a two-way conversation” in podcasts and, thus, one does not only “hear his perspective and clap and take him off stage” as in Ted Talks. Joe Rogan interviews his guests for hours (Joe Rogan website June, 5, 2020) and, thus, it is a very interactive encounter between the podcast host and his guests. This was useful for Rahul, because he claimed that “you can then contradict what they are saying and a lot of unanswered questions get answered” by the other person in the room. Rahul felt that this prevented one from being “manipulated” by others:

*I: (...) that’s the main reason, so yeah a lot of questions that you may have on the topic, you don’t need to look it up, and see whether this guy is talking sense or he is just trying to manipulate your own views, so you get those answers very quick on podcast so -- yeah that’s a lot more.*

(Rahul, 21, India)

Rahul described how through the podcast he got the right perspective into “*the Antifa case*” happening on the border between the United States and Mexico. Rahul claimed this to be an example of a situation “where information was portrayed in a very wrong way in the news compared to what reality was”. Rahul believed that he got a better personal understanding of the case “when informed people came into the podcast”, of which he named Milo Yiannopolous. For Rahul, the show has “a lot of knowledgeable people who really know the workings of things”. He claimed that the podcast does not display extreme opinions as the mainstream media does. What is striking, however, is that Milo Yiannopolous, for example, is openly conservative on the political spectrum and used to

be an editor on the “Breitbart” website, which also is openly right-wing (BBC News World, June 2, 2020).

*I: “the Antifa -- the revolution or whatever you call them, so people viewed it in a good way, (...) saying that (...) you know the Mexican border situation where they were jailing people and making children live away from their families and all that sort of stuff. So (...) people were like, yes they should be protesting this sort of stuff, (...) when informed people came on the podcast, (...) Milo Yiannopolous (...) I would say misinformed people, in those groups itself, manipulated -- they in the rush of their own generation of not being able to cope with life coming out of college, the usual sort of troubles but -- there was a lot of misinformation on those aspects which has come out today (...) Main stream news was always hyping them up; since some channels are left biased to they try to talk up that side.*

*JH: And with the podcast ...?*

*I: It gave me a better perspective, like they delved into all perspectives, so that’s a great thing about them. You don’t hear only one side of the news, you hear it from all angles, so that’s kind of useful in developing your point of view.”*

A couple of interviewees also emphasized the importance of reading news about current affairs from beyond their own political perspective. However, with podcasts the students would not listen to perspectives that would contradict their personal opinions. For example, Oliver (19, Sweden) read right-wing news even though he identified himself to be “more left-leaning” and “a member of a party”, but he wanted to understand other opinions as well and challenge his own arguments. However, with talk audio, Oliver only listened to “left-leaning” political content, because in a podcast he did not only get specific arguments as in a news article. For him, podcasts were more about the personalities that go into a topic with “a lot more depth” and through the shows he was able to learn more about how to analyze political topics on a deeper level. Through podcasts he felt he deepened his political worldview, but he did not want to broaden it.

*I: "I might be a bit of a hypocrite though because when I listen to politics or news in podcast form I would mostly listen to views that I believe in I would say."*

(Oliver, 19, Sweden)

The information the students received through talk audio, no matter if it was information about a football game or a political dispute, can be considered to be displayed in a social form since it is *presented through a talk audio host*. When asked about the effects of using talk audio, most students in both countries answered *to receive more information*. Lekha (21, India), for example, described that she was more "oriented towards knowledge" because of talk audio, since she did not only follow trash talk" in Instagram, but now with talk audio she focused on learning. The information the interviewees described to get from talk audio, however, was most often expected to be delivered in an entertaining way. Some students also characterized talk audio as purely entertainment.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

The thesis set out to explain *forms of agency* young people in Sweden and India deploy in their talk audio product use. First, in order to make conclusions and answer the research questions, it is vital to return to the observations identified in the beginning of my analysis, in subchapter 4.1. As stated in chapter 2.1., Giddens (1979, 49) incorporates action and structure in his social analysis together; the conditions and consequences of human action are coupled with structure. Therefore, social action and agency take shape in contexts that involve the actions of other people as well as social structures. Based on the empirical data, the position and relation to the surrounding society described by the interviewees formed a somewhat different social context for the everyday talk audio use in Sweden and India. I will next summarize how.

In general, the Indian interviewees tended to emphasize their individuality more than the Swedish participants. They felt that the surrounding society and its institutions – their school system, their kin – had views and perspectives that were partially obsolete and, thus, they needed something more. To them, access to the world beyond their immediate surroundings was important, as they were building their futures during a crucial time in

their lives. With the help of digital services, the students loosen their ties to the surrounding institutions, previous generations, and partly even with their family and kin as the sources of information and worldview. Some of them, such as Rahul (20), did this in a conscious manner, and others, such as Arjun (19) did this only partly, and mainly when it was necessary, for example, for his studies.

The Swedish students did not emphasize that access to digital products opened a world beyond their social circles. They believed in their political system, and some emphasized their role as voters as having the responsibility to read news in order to identify their own political ideology, and that by reading about current events from various sources they should challenge their own views and try to understand others' opinions. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the Swedes would trust their school system any more than the Indian interviewees did, as this issue was not discussed specifically. However, it does suggest that the relation to the surrounding society is different which, at least in part, frames the students' use of digital products. In India, receiving information and staying updated was done to avoid being manipulated in a context where the news from government sources were questioned as propaganda. In Sweden the students trusted their system, and therefore believed, since they have the right to vote, that they should identify their personal political stances *to support the system* by participating in it. In total, *the students emphasized a different kind of context in which to exercise one's agency in relation to the surrounding society.* However, the ways in which the students referred to the forms of agency through the use of talk audio products were, in light of the selected theoretical frame, somewhat similar in both countries.

Next, I analyze the findings of my data with the selected theoretical concepts; Michael Bull's (2000, 2007) theory on the management of the inner and outer reality with personal-stereo use, Tia DeNora's (2000) approach to '*aesthetic agency*' with audio products and Hartmann's (2008) *parasocial communication* to understand the relationship between listeners and talk audio hosts. After the discussion part I will present my conclusions and possible next steps for future research.

The talk audio concept of this thesis refers to all talk-based products (e.g. radio, audiobooks, talk shows) but in this empirical data the participants used mainly podcasts

and Ted Talks. The podcast users and Ted Talk users have been mainly analyzed in a similar manner in this thesis. However, most Ted Talk users (total of three) *watched* their favorite shows in video form, and thus some aspects of their concrete way of use may be different. Even though the consumption method may vary, ultimately similarities in use did occur which were presented in chapter 4. The biggest differences between these users in relation to the theoretical frame will be presented in the next subchapter.

### 5.1. Agency with talk audio products

To enable individuals to consciously or semi-consciously manage their agency with talk audio products, they first need to attach attributions of agency to these products. Thus, I will first summarize what kinds of attributes of agencies I found from my empirical data before presenting how my interviewees used talk audio in relation to their personal agency.

First, I will distinguish the differences between Ted Talk listeners and podcast listeners in relation to my theoretical framework. The Ted Talk users did not use talk audio “on-the-move” like podcasts, and thus the strategies in relation to managing the outer reality in public places (Bull 2000) with talk audio become relevant only among the podcast listeners in my data (total of thirteen) since the Ted Talk listeners would use the products mostly alone at home. The conscious strategies of managing their inner worlds were, in part, similar among Ted Talk listeners and podcast listeners. Also, the less-conscious forms of deploying agency (DeNora 2000) with Ted Talks were somewhat similar with podcast users.

There were some distinct attributions of agency even though for most of my informants, the attributions were somewhat hard to recognize in relation to talk audio use. Some explained clear attributions to agency in relation to space and time (Sven & Sam) that are in line with their personal talk audio use. In relation to mood, the attributions were hard to distinguish directly, and they became clearer only after diving deeper into their personal talk audio use during the interviews. This was a clear contradiction between talk audio and music, since music was described by most as a distinctive medium for mood. However, what became clear is that the interviewees presume talk audio to be more content-related than mood-related. This perception guides their use; they listen to content

that they find interesting. Some (e.g. Lekha) distinguished information receiving to be a clear characterization of talk audio use in India. To summarize, the attributions indicate that at least in part, the students had clear attributions of agency in relation to music listening, but less clear when talking about talk audio use on a general level.

Next, I will present the forms of agency my informants deployed in their personal talk audio use starting from Michael Bull’s (2000) notions of agency. Bull focuses on deliberate forms of agency; how users *consciously* transform their focus spatially, temporally and cognitively. To support my discussion, I have outlined some relevant findings of my data below as examples of how they relate to the theoretical concepts offered by Bull.

<b>Management of the outer</b> (Bull 2000)	<b>Findings from data</b>
Managing space with talk audio: avoiding noise of others in public spaces	<i>“I would probably say they’re behaving quite stressfully, quite like annoying. So, yeah, to feel less annoyed at the people around me. (...) you can focus on yourself instead of have to listen to other people having a conversation”</i> (Sven 19, Sweden)
Managing space with talk audio: avoiding unwanted attention and gaze of others	<i>“I don’t like being around all funny people. (...) when all of the people go at the same time (in the metro) and you need to be pressed against the wall it’s better to listen to something so it feels like you’re not there.”</i> (Emma 19, Sweden)
Managing space with talk audio: avoiding gaze of others	<i>“You’re less accessible I would say like people would be vary about coming and disturbing you or something like that. They think that you’re paying a lot more attention to your work.”</i> (Rahul, 21, India)
Managing time with talk audio: creating a rhythm of weekly practices with talk audio	<i>“It’s probably as soon as they release a new episode of podcasts (...)”</i> (Sven, 20, Sweden)

Managing time with talk audio: escaping the repetitive elements of urban life routines and boredom	<i>“I’m just super-bored without anything that’s keeping, yeah, keeping me occupied. I just want to be occupied with stuff. (...) Like before it wasn’t like that at all. Before podcasts and music (...) I’m sure most people feel like they have to do something all the time not to just sit on the subway and look into nothing.”</i> <i>(Sam, 21, Sweden)</i> <i>“(I listen to talk audio) when I’m really bored.”</i> <i>(Emma, 19, Sweden)</i>
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The students, in line with Bull’s typology, use talk audio products in search of a heightened sense of being in control of the auditory in public spaces, thereby managing their outer reality. The place of talk audio use in daily practices was highly related to the needs the interviewees described, even though the needs were not the primary motivations to listen to talk audio. When in public, the students filtered out their surroundings and “withdrew” into their “own headspace” with talk audio – an alternative reality inside their minds. Personal-stereo users may have a need to escape the lack of their personal space and “the faceless hordes of the city” (ibid. 186). Especially Swedish students emphasized feeling uncomfortable with other people around them – sensing others’ attention and their behavior and thus, the students used talk audio to manage their private space. With talk audio, the interviewees could choose the content themselves, instead of being at the mercy of their current social situation. Thus, in light of Bull’s (2000, 2) approach, I can say that the students used talk audio to *create their own sound spaces* whenever needed, in order to control the voices and attention from others that they received.

The students also described avoiding “being bored” (e.g. Sam) by using talk audio. Especially students in Sweden aimed to be *entertained* or – as both Indian and Swedish students emphasized – *to feel like they utilize all their time with something of their choice*. Some students also described to creating a loose rhythm with talk audio content to accompany them in their daily routines. Therefore, in line with Bull’s typology (2000, 190), talk audio users aim to bring a heightened sense of meaning to mundane routines since “the use of personal-stereo is the only thing that makes the time pass bearably for these users”.

<b>Management of the inner</b> (Bull 2000)	<b>Findings from data</b>
Enjoying the experience of one's "own" talk audio	<p><i>"I'm not learning that much but it's just entertaining. (...) So, the main reason I listen to (...) interest, just interest"</i></p> <p><i>(Maja, 19, Sweden)</i></p>
Managing thoughts and feelings	<p><i>"you get into what they are discussing and then you like have to think about something else".</i></p> <p><i>(Sven 19, Sweden)</i></p> <p><i>"it's pulling me away from my thoughts"</i></p> <p><i>(Ananya, 19, India)</i></p>
Sense of "we-ness": avoiding feeling of loneliness through a technologized sense of companionship	<p><i>"I want to hang out with them, because they're so funny (...), it was like when I talk to my friends"</i></p> <p><i>(Ella, 19, Sweden)</i></p> <p><i>"It sounds depressing when I say it but, for sure. It's some kind of interaction that you get from... It's similar to having a real conversation (...) Like if I went a week without talking to people and my friends like I would get depressed 100%. But it's an alternative, a short-term alternative, a constant void-filling substitute, probably."</i></p> <p><i>(Sam, 21, Sweden)</i></p>
Sense of "we-ness": attending reconstructed biography	<p><i>"I have always been actively engaged, so now that kind of workload has reduced completely, so I'm just compensating it with this (talk audio), because I still wake up at 5:30 every day, but at the same time I do not do the kind of things I used to do, I'm not as active as I used to be and that kind of doesn't sit right with me, because I feel completely useless"</i></p> <p><i>(Lekha, 21, India)</i></p>
Aestheticization: escaping to one's imaginary space	<p><i>"(...) like maybe even if I'm feeling negative, you know, like I can just put something that's a little more motivational, more positive if someone is just sharing their stories about something, that they have been through as well."</i> <i>(Ananya, 19, India)</i></p> <p><i>"It probably takes me to like another level, a place that I can focus on myself"</i></p> <p><i>(Sven, 19, Sweden)</i></p>

Personal-stereos activate: users feel more energized when accompanied by talk audio	<p><i>“I opened a bunch of podcasts and it was like, it was literally Monday motivation and I felt better about going into the day, like I feel very -- you know, like college work so, I felt better going into the day to college just getting through the day, (...) I didn’t feel as negative as I would usually.”</i></p> <p><i>(Ananya, 19, India)</i></p>
When listening as a joint activity, personal-stereo use constitutes a form of group exclusivity	<p><i>“It’s not that you listen to podcasts when you have friends over. You use music (...) Because music is more like – it’s social, socially acceptable when you have – when there’s a lot of people there. But if you are in a very small group with – that you’re very close to and you know everyone likes this podcast, then you can use the podcast instead.”</i></p> <p><i>(Sven, 19, Sweden)</i></p>

Nevertheless, the students also aimed to control their own mindsets cognitively (Bull, 2000). First, the content of talk audio had intrinsic value for the users; most students emphasized that above else, they have a genuine interest in listening to their favorite talk audio show. Thus, like in Bull’s typology (2000, 187), the young people *enjoyed the auditory flow of experience* with their talk audio shows. The students also managed their negative thoughts and stressful feelings by listening to talk audio.

As the young people encountered the talk audio hosts, they experienced a strong sense of belonging in the audience. This creates an interesting perspective to Bull’s (originally Adorno’s) sense of “we-ness” and the user’s reconstructed biography that can be articulated through that sense. For example, Tejas claimed that his favorite podcaster builds content especially to audience members *like him*. He experienced belonging to the audience to be a differentiating characteristic from, for example, his friends. Also, Rahul stated that his favorite podcaster gives him exposure to information that the people around him do not have. Thus, in some ways he separates himself from his peers or kin because he listens to specific talk audio shows which is part of his self-narrative.

Also, for example Sam (21, Sweden) described that talk audio makes him feel social and may act as a short-term substitute for his encounters with his friends. This, in light of Bull (ibid. 189), could also be explained with the sense of “we-ness”: “The greater the craving

for solitariness the greater the fear of social isolation is resolved through the use of mobile sound media” (ibid. 5). Sam was the only one that claimed to be “addicted” to talk audio products and his perception of feeling less lonely with talk audio may, at least in part, contribute to his “addiction”.

The ambition to control the subjective mindsets the young people had by listening to talk audio is in part due to the aesthetic features in talk audio, that is, the aesthetic fantasies users may have. Personal-stereo users may pick auditory content that suits their surroundings in order to experience the world as an imaginary space based on their aesthetic fantasies (Bull 2000, 191). The students described creating spaces of escape where they could listen to a story of another person (Ananya, 19, India) or where one “can focus on oneself” (Sven, 19, Sweden). Talk audio was also used for example to “activate” oneself in the morning when heading to university to escape “Monday [lack of] motivation” (Ananya, 19, India). In relation to creating a sense of group exclusivity (Bull, 2000, 187), talk audio products were most often used alone instead of in a group of people. Some, like Sven (19, Sweden) or Ella (19, Sweden) have tried to listen to talk audio as a joint activity, but they emphasized it to be an extremely intimate medium, which is not socially acceptable like music is when listening in a bigger group of people.

In DeNora’s (2000) notion of *ordering device*, the self is an object of care, and aesthetic material, such as music or talk audio, acts as a tool to transform its agency. In her thinking, an aesthetic material can contain habits, styles or an emotional state, and is used to enhance or alter aspects of one’s self (DeNora 2000). To support my discussion, I have outlined some relevant findings from my data below as examples of how they relate to the theoretical concepts offered by DeNora.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Notions of aesthetic agency</b> (DeNora 2000)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Findings from data</b></p>
<p>Talk audio as an ordering device; container of feelings or bodily reactions</p>	<p><i>“Some music makes me happier and some the opposite, and sometimes it’s quite nice to be sad and listen to sad music. (...) I think music has higher highs and lower lows if you</i></p>

	<p><i>understand what I mean. (...) So, if I'm happy I can get more happy when I listen to music but a podcast is more in the middle.</i></p> <p><i>(Emma, 19, Sweden)</i></p>
<p>Talk audio as a mirror for identity; building material for subjectivity</p>	<p><i>"I need to be busy, because otherwise I just feel like... (...) this is all because, I'm a very emotional person, so if I feel a certain way I want to either get rid of it, or do it. So if I feel uncomfortable with the kind of space I'm in I will get out of it. I cannot stay or I will get agitated, so if I'm in a space where I feel useless, it will just push me into rapid of thinking whatever I have done so far is just useless. So I want to keep defeating that thought, that no I'm not useless, I'm doing so many things, and listening to podcasts or like reading news just becomes that thing where I'm telling myself, that okay, I have this information, I will do something about it. And I will actively – do something"</i></p> <p><i>(Lekha, 21, India)</i></p>
<p>Talk audio as a tool for emotion work (DeNora 2000, 50-56, Hochschild 2012)</p>	<p><i>"The podcast I want to listen to when I'm doing something (...) When I'm working I can listen to podcasts because I get too... If I listen to a good song or something I get too pumped up or something when I listen to a good song at work. (...) I calm myself with this podcast, it is good."</i></p> <p><i>(Maja, 19, Sweden)</i></p>
<p>Talk audio as a "device of social ordering"; music regulates and structures social encounters</p>	<p><i>"It felt strange to sit together and listen to two people talking and not watch anything, only listening. So, we sat there just looking at each other while listening instead of looking at a computer or anything like that. It felt like intimate."</i></p> <p><i>(Ella, 19, Sweden)</i></p>

The students claimed "mood" to be the differentiating feature that made them choose between music and talk audio – what mood they wished to achieve in that specific moment. Music was called out to be "more mood-dependent" by almost all interview participants in both countries, as it would have a more varied spectrum of different moods on offer. Talk audio was, for most students, used to activate a calmer mood since the topic of a discussion would make them think about something else than what was in their minds.

Interviewees attached, for example, feelings of *security* and *comfort* to their use of talk audio products. These feelings did not activate high or extreme levels of emotion, as they described music to do, but, instead, brought them to a “normal level” through engagement with the content. The normal level was described to be neither sad nor extremely happy – it was something that pulled them back to a “normal state” from feeling hyped-up or very down. However, the students placed both auditory products – music and talk audio – on the same spectrum and described choosing between them *in order to evoke a specific mode of emotion*. Therefore, talk audio, like music, can act as an “instigator or container of feeling”; an ingredient to shift mood or energy levels (ibid. 58, 61). However, like DeNora points out, the effects of use build from the orientations of the individuals’; how they interpret specific shows and content (ibid. 61–62).

Some interviewees also used talk audio to develop themselves. Thus, talk audio is not only a container of a mode of feeling, but it can also be a device which individuals use to regulate themselves as acting, thinking and feeling agents (ibid. 62). Especially Ted Talk use was perceived to *reaffirm motivation* (Madhavi). Also, Lekha described vividly how her self-image – being a productive young student – emerged through podcast use, helping her avoid feeling like a “couch potato” or “a useless tart”; she attached an idea of herself to her practice of talk audio use.

The need for a specific mood the students described was, in most cases, social by nature. For example, before going to the university they would set their mind cognitively to a specific mode (Lucas), or at a workplace where they would listen to talk audio content instead of music while working, since the talk audio would be *more appropriate for the social surrounding* (Maja). Arlie Hochschild’s concept of “emotion work” (1979) is one approach to understand the relation between how one feels and how one thinks one ought to feel. With talk audio products the students prepare themselves to social situations by using the product as a *transition tool for emotion work* – for example to relax or to feel productive. However, it is crucial that they reflect the specific *need* in relation to their current or future social situation. Therefore, the attributions of agency that they attach to specific content and talk audio as a technology before use has to, in their minds, match with the current or future social circumstances.

As stated, the interviewees in both countries experienced that talk audio was *too personal to share*. DeNora (2000, 109) argues music to be “a device of social ordering”. With music, actors configure collective spaces in which music regulates and structures social encounters, styles and temporal patterns of feelings (ibid., 110). *The level of intimacy* the students described to have with talk audio use was distinctively higher than with music, as the students would describe talk audio rarely to be “socially accepted” as a joint activity with others. Thus, the talk audio medium as “a device of social ordering” is, in relation to music, exceptionally intimate and sets different social boundaries for a social situation.

Like I stated in chapter 4, most students attached social characteristics to talk audio products. This, in turn, creates a unique angle to the concept of *parasocial relationship*, originally formulated by Horton and Wohl (1956). To support my discussion, I have outlined below some relevant findings from my data as examples of how they relate to the theoretical concepts of Hartmann (2008).

<b>Paracommunication</b> (Hartmann 2008)	<b>Findings from data</b>
Perception of distance: the intimacy of the auditory	<i>“with visual, (...) there are other people there” (...) but with podcasts it’s like they are only talking to you”</i> <i>(Tejas, 19, India)</i> <i>“it feels like you are – well, in the group when they’re talking”</i> <i>(Ella, 19, Sweden)</i>
Perception of distance: “knowing” the talk audio host	<i>“He knows his audience. (...) it is (the content) personalized for me or the kind of audience that is like me”</i> <i>(Tejas, 19, India)</i> <i>“(if I met them on the street) I think I would act like I know them, because I do”</i> <i>(Maja, 19, Sweden)</i>
Communication	<i>“the podcaster tries to understand what his audience wants and when he tells something (...) I think it’s true with any podcaster and obviously, they have open streams, I mean, they have social media accounts (for communication)”</i>

	(Tejas, 19, India)
Authenticity	<p>"when you're listening to a two-hour podcast of people it's hard to keep up a façade for two hours every week for ten years. I feel like these guys, there has to be some reality in whatever they're saying."</p> <p>(Sam, 21, Sweden)</p>
Resemblance to actual interpersonal communication	<p>"it was like when I talk to my friends"</p> <p>(Ella, 19, Sweden)</p> <p>"It's similar to having a real conversation."</p> <p>(Sam, 21, Sweden)</p>

According to my empirical data, the feature that enhanced the wanted mood was in all cases the perceived presence of another human being – the talk audio host(s). The voice of a talk audio host was one of the reasons why interviewees felt, for example, more relaxed (Liam, 19, Sweden). This is in line with MacDougall (2012, 167) as he argues that the popularity of the podcast phenomenon can be explained "due primarily to the power of the human voice". To Hartmann (2008) *paracommunication* refers to the extent of resemblance the interaction between a media character and the user of a media has with actual interpersonal communication. In paracommunication, *the user's perception of distance or closeness with the media personality is key.*

The personalities of talk audio hosts were a distinctive feature in talk audio that makes the medium special for the users. For example, Oliver (19, Sweden), distinguishes explicitly that the people in talk audio are for him the most important reason to use these products. My interviewees described the talk audio hosts to be somewhat similar to *friends, role models, authorities, and mentors* as well as *sources of inspiration and information*. These characters provide material to develop the interviewee's agency in various ways that have partly been distinguished above.

In contrast to Horton and Wohl's (1956) original concept of *parasocial relationship*, Hartmann claims that the interaction is not necessarily bound to noninteractive settings, as new media characters can at least partly communicate with their audience. For example, Tejas (19, India) claimed podcasters to be in constant interaction with their

listeners through their social media. As a consequence, Tejas felt that his favorite podcaster “knows his audience”, which in part builds his personal relationship with the podcaster. Others, such as Maja (19, Sweden), claimed to know the podcasters herself, which built her relationship further with them; she almost felt like they were her friends and thought about them when she was not listening to their shows.

The users also need to perceive the mediated characters to be authentic enough to foster paracommunication, since less authenticity can lead to more “automatic” parasocial reactions (Hartmann 2008). Most students described talk audio to be more “authentic” in relation to production (e.g. in comparison to commercial television) as well as in relation to the personalities of the hosts (e.g. in comparison to social media). The students perceived social media characters as more spurious than talk audio characters since the content they share is more calculative and designed. In consequence, some claimed that the ability to relate to the hosts to be crucial when selecting talk audio shows; one “needs to be able to *connect*” with the podcast content in one way or another (Ella, 19, Sweden).

The perceived distance with talk audio hosts was also built through the sense of presence the students described to have when listening to talk audio; many would describe how they would feel *being addressed exclusively* or that they would *take part in the discussions* themselves. To MacDougall (2011), the sense of ‘being there’ in a podcast can create a sense of a two-way communication for the audience. In line with Adorno, Bull claims that an individual experiences an *illusion of immediacy* with auditory cultural products, which, in the case of music, evokes memories, thoughts and emotions in the current moment. This immediacy is created since, as stated earlier, the auditory content exists *in time* and not space (Crisell 1986, DeNora 2016), and because the talk audio content, in line with radio, has a strong index of a human presence (Crisell 1986).

*The sense of immediacy* builds the intimacy the students described with talk audio. Through my empirical data, it became clear that the students in both countries experienced the relationship with the talk audio hosts to be a *distinctively personal encounter*. Thus, as my interviewees created their personal spaces of intimacy in urban surroundings with talk audio, they were able to encounter a potentially endless amount of media characters of which they could choose to invite inside their ears.

I argue that as the aesthetic material of agency in talk audio is primarily social in nature, being created through the relationship the listeners form with talk audio hosts. Bull (2000, 6) claims that “music represents to the urban subject a utopian longing for what they desire but cannot achieve”. For Sam, for example, the lives of the podcasters he follows fill at least some longings he has about travelling and having a “spontaneous” lifestyle like those of the podcasters. Hence, in talk audio use, the utopian longing is experienced through the presence of, and the social encounter with, the host. This supports MacDougall’s (2011) claim about how talk audio-like products have become the village whisperers of the modern world.

The engagement with a talk audio host adds a new dimension to Bull’s understanding of technologically mediated sociality (2000, 195). Especially in Sweden, the students emphasized how they wanted to hear how the podcasters were doing, just as with friends. The phenomenon of an always-available human-presence decreased the level of loneliness at least for Sam (21, Sweden). Thus, these Swedish students *extended their sociality with technologically mediated content*. Nevertheless, since the talk audio hosts are mostly unaware of the listeners’ reactions to their content, the social encounter is *controlled solely by the listeners*, unlike in a traditional interpersonal encounter. This creates another form of agency the students build with talk audio; *parasocial agency*.

In line with previous academic literature, I claim that talk audio use contributes to the phenomena Bull (2000) and Turkle (1995) have identified; *our traditional forms of intercommunication transform as we increase our encounters online*. Bull argues that by using iPods or mobile technology “the etiquette of interpersonal relations is undergoing a period of change” as the users do not engage with others around them during their use. However, the change does not limit the subjectivity of an individual, but, instead, changes public spaces into “media-saturated places of intimacy” (Bull 2007, 10–11.). In personal-stereo use there are a “variety of strategies that enable the user to successfully prioritize their own experience personally, interpersonally and geographically” (Bull 2000, 9). With this empirical data it becomes clear that *talk audio products act as one enabler of this phenomenon*. In consequence, exercising parasocial agency with talk audio adds a new dimension to Bull’s conception of “media-generated sociality”.

I also argue that with more empirical research on the aesthetic dimensions of talk audio, the relation these products have with the constitution of agency of the users will emerge further. This is also in line with the sense of “we-ness” (Bull) as users may attend their own (imagined) biography through this sense, as well as with DeNora (2000, 68), since listeners may find themselves in the structures of aesthetic materials. Thus, talk audio as a cultural artefact similar to music, may contain “building material for subjectivity” that can build the self-narrative of a user.

## 5.2. Starting points for future inquiries

This thesis only offers a starting point for understanding talk audio products. First and foremost, talk audio products can be seen as aesthetic objects, which are a container and a resource for agency, and should be studied empirically with a wider demographic range than I did in this project. A deeper level analysis of specific modes of agency in and in relation to talk audio products should also be investigated with a more specific focus on the self-construction of the users – some dimensions of this were already distinguished in this empirical material (e.g. Lekha). Also, in comparison to music, talk audio addresses individuals more privately according to the interview data. Hence, in future research the question of why talk audio acts as an ordering device for an individual but not for a collective should be investigated as the level of intimacy talk audio products seemed to evoke among the users was striking.

Also, the market of podcast personalities has not yet been studied sufficiently; there needs to be more analysis of the ‘influencers’ of the talk audio world. The social impact of podcasters is, according to my empirical data, powerful in relation to thoughts, emotions, and worldviews (e.g. Tejas & Rahul). Also, the audiences of specific talk audio hosts have become a meaningful reference point to users, and thus, these community-like fan clubs should be investigated. The most famous podcasters in the world have become a notable social phenomenon. For example, Joe Rogan has received a tremendous amount of attention and lately received millions of Dollars in an agreement to present his podcast shows exclusively through Spotify’s platform. (Steele 2020). Thus, *podcaster influencers* as a distinct group should be studied further.

As McLuhan (1964) stated, *the medium is the message* – “if something exists and operates, it also intrinsically takes part in the process of shaping objects, roles, distinctions and classifications around it.” My interest was to understand what can be said empirically about the process of tuning personal agency with talk audio content that is delivered through customized platform services, such as Spotify. In future research, the context of customization should also be studied in relation to talk audio use – that is, the role of the platform and the recommendation system that, at least for the students in this empirical material, provided the talk audio content.

The customization in new media services, like talk audio products, is often used on a platform which bases its services on recommendation systems as users stream content online. Since the sense of hearing is so associative and “persuasive” (MacDougall 2012), the role and the responsibility of the content provider, which often recommends content based on big data, is enhanced. For example, Karakayali et al. (2018) claim that users can experience a music streaming service as a ‘companion’ in transforming aspects of oneself (Karakayali et al. 2018). According to Hilmes and Loviglio (2013), the radio has been a powerful tool for spreading ideological and national ideas, symbols and information ever since its emergence, and even today it remains as one of the most powerful media of global propaganda. Now that the responsibility of spreading ideas and information has shifted more from radio to talk audio and from nation states to media services, the effects of this change should be examined more thoroughly.

Talk audio products are a form of new media and contribute to the *mediatization of everyday life* (Schoeder 2018) in which individuals engage with others and with information increasingly through technology. Social sciences have been reluctant to acknowledge the need for auditory epistemologies when theorizing about urban experiences (Bull 2000, 116), and in noting the distinctive role hearing has as a sense when individuals navigate the world (Attali 1985). With my thesis, I express the need for further theorization of digital talk-based audio products as they shape the orientation the individual has to the world.

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1. Interview Outline

Key themes	Questions (summary format – follow up and elaboration questions are not included)
Talk Audio use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could you describe me your talk audio use?</li> <li>• Could you describe me what kind of talk audio products you use?</li> <li>• How would you describe the reasons you listen to or watch those specific talk audio products?</li> <li>• How would you describe the specific situations in which you use talk audio products and why?</li> <li>• How did you start listening to talk audio products?</li> <li>• How do you think listening to talk audio products has affected you or your life?</li> <li>• How did you start listening to talk audio products?</li> <li>• Have something changed in your talk audio use recently?</li> <li>• Visual &amp; audio product comparing / talk audio &amp; music listening comparing</li> <li>• Have you ever created any talk audio products yourself? Why or why not?</li> <li>• What do you think, what kind of people use talk audio products? / Do you think your friends or relatives use talk audio content? Has that affected your use?</li> <li>• What do you think, what kind of talk audio products are there?</li> </ul>
Social Media use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could you describe me shortly how do you use social media? (e.g. what services, posting)</li> <li>• Could you describe me the situations in which you use social media?</li> <li>• Has something changed recently in your social media use?</li> </ul>
News listening / watching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could you describe me, how do you read or watch news in your daily life?</li> <li>• What are your primary sources of news and why?</li> <li>• Could you describe me the situations in which you use watch or read news?</li> <li>• Has something changed in your news reading? (within a couple of years)</li> </ul>
Music ( <i>only if there is time or if it comes up</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you listen to music? Could you describe me your music listening?</li> <li>• Could you describe me in which situations you listen to music?</li> </ul>

Appendix 2. Interview participants in India

<b>Participants in India</b>							
<i>(Acronyms)</i>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>University</b>	<b>Living situation</b>	<b>Talk Audio products</b>	<b>News sources and services</b>	<b>Music and talk audio services</b>
Ananya	Female	19	Christ University of Bangalore	With parents	Podcasts about news, for learning French, No Sugarcoat podcast, Ted Talks	Google News, Inshorts	Google Podcasts, Spotify, Youtube,
Tejas	Male	19	Christ University of Bangalore	With parents	Ted Talks, Bill Burr, Joe Rogan Experience, Liverpool Football Club's Kopcast and Blood Red podcasts, Bengaluru FC, Schitzengiggles (SnG)	The Deccan Herald, The Hindu, The Quint, Huffington Post, Reddit,	Youtube, Website streams
Madhavi	Female	19	Christ University of Bangalore	With parents	Ted Talks, Revisionist History podcast (by Malcolm Gladwell)	Inshorts, The Hindu	Websites, Youtube
Lekha	Female	21	Christ University of Bangalore	With husband and kids	Ted Talks, Philosophize this podcast, Bollywood commentaries	Social media, Inshorts, Whatsapp groups	Spotify, iTunes, Youtube
Tushar	Male	19	BNM Institute of Technology Bangalore	With parents	Ted Talks	Inshorts	Youtube, TedX application
Mohit	Male	20	BNM Institute of Technology Bangalore	With parents	Ted Talks and Youtube	Inshorts	Youtube
Arjun	Male	19	Dr. Ambedkar Institute of Technology	With parents	Ted Talks, inspirational Youtube videos	Inshorts	Youtube, Tedx application
Rahul	Male	21	PES University	With parents	Sam Harris's podcast, Joe Rogan Experience	Social media, Inshorts, Google News	

Appendix 3. Interview participants in Sweden

<b>Participants in Sweden</b>							
<i>(Acronyms) Pseudonyms</i>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>University</b>	<b>Living situation</b>	<b>Talk Audio products</b>	<b>News sources &amp; services</b>	<b>Music &amp; talk audio services</b>
Sven	Male	20	KTH	With girlfriend	Spöktimmen, 0-8 podden	Aftonbladet, Mitt i (local newspaper)	Youtube, Spotify, iTunes
Lucas	Male	19	KTH	With parents	Podcasts about history, miniature painting (tabletop) and computer gaming in Youtube, Comedy podcast by Swedish National Radio	From his dad, Youtube, Google News	Youtube
Ella	Female	19	University of Stockholm	Alone	DelaQ, Tankesmedjan (by Swedish national radio)	Facebook, Youtube, Aftonbladet, Expressen, Dagen's Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet	Soundcloud, Spotify, Youtube, iTunes
Liam	Male	20	KTH	Alone	Crime podcasts (e.g., Mordpodden), law-related podcasts (e.g., rättegångspodden) and 'free discussion podcasts' (e.g., by two Swedish comedians). Follows 12 podcasts at the moment	Facebook, Dagens Nyheter, Aftonbladet, TV	
Oliver	Male	20	University of Stockholm	With boyfriend	Swedish National Radio's comedy podcast, Lilla Drevet	Swedish Television News (SVT Nyheter), Dagens Nyheter, local newspapers	Youtube
Sam	Male	21	University of Stockholm	Alone	MMA-related: The Fighter and the Kid, Joe Rogan Experience and interview podcasts: Värvet, Alex & Sigges, Filip and Fredrik	Instagram, Facebook, New York Times, Boston Globe, Financial Times, Google,	Acast, Pocketcast, Spotify, Youtube
Maja	Female	20	University of Stockholm	Alone	Australian radio show's podcast (Just the Gist), Medical talks in Ted Talks, Dilemma podcast	TV	Spotify, Soundcloud, Youtube
Emma	Female	19	University of Stockholm	With boyfriend	Skäringer & Mannheimer, P3 documentary (Swedish National Radio)	TV, Aftonbladet, Dagens Nyheter	

## Appendix 4. Project plan & Participant Criteria, India

### **METHODOLOGY**

- **In-person interviews** - on sight at campus or in cafés, easy access important
  - 60 min
  - 8 participants
  - Type of participants
    - College students in Universities (see options above)
    - Other criteria below

### **PARTICIPANT CRITERIA**

- Age split  
n=8 17-21 (undergraduates)
- Language: Use English as their second language in school or otherwise in their day-to-day lives
- Male / Female split  
50/50
- Talk audio use (e.g.podcasts, ted talks, talk shows in Youtube)  
n=8 already listen or watch talk audio products at least once a week
- Tech engagement  
n=8 Confident using a smartphone and download new apps regularly
- Reading news  
n=8 Follows or reads news about current affairs at least once a week
- Devices  
n=8 iOS or Android

### **SCREENING QUESTIONS**

**Questions A-D are required of the possible participants (Agree/Somewhat agree)**

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about reading news and listening to audio content. Note: Please circle and calculate answers

A. I am confident using smartphone

- Disagree
- Agree

B. I use streaming services in different platforms daily with my smartphone.

- Disagree
- Agree

C. I am an iOS user

- Disagree

- Agree

D. I am an Android user

- Disagree
- Agree

E. I use English in my studies or often in my daily life and I am able to express myself in English.

- Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- Somewhat Agree
- Agree

F. I listen\* to talk audio-based products\* such as podcasts, ted talks and talk-based radio shows *at least once a week*.

- Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- Somewhat Agree
- Agree

\* I listen intentionally by choosing a specific show (does not include radio playing in the background)

\*\**Audio-based products include for example:*

*Podcasts, Ted talks, talk shows (like Inktalk or Joshtalk), audiobooks, talk-based radio shows, comedy talk shows with several people etc.*

G. I read\* daily news about current affairs in my areas of interests\*\*

- Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- Somewhat Agree
- Agree

\**Reading*

\*\**Areas of interest include for example:*

*global or local politics, local or global events, science, etc.*

Appendix 5. Project plan & Participant Criteria, Sweden

## **METHODOLOGY**

- **In-person interviews** - on sight at campus or in cafés, easy access important
  - 60 min

- 8 participants
- Type of participants
  - College students in Universities (see options above)
  - Other criteria below

## **PARTICIPANT CRITERIA**

- Age split  
n=8 17-21 (undergraduates)
- Language: Use English as their second language in school or otherwise in their day-to-day lives
- Male / Female split  
50/50
- Talk audio use (e.g.podcasts, ted talks, talk shows in Youtube)  
n=8 already listen or watch talk audio products at least once a week
- Tech engagement  
n=8 Confident using a smartphone and download new apps regularly
- Reading news  
n=8 Follows or reads news about current affairs at least once a week
- Devices  
n=8 iOS or Android

## **SCREENING QUESTIONS**

**Questions A-D are required of the possible participants (Agree/Somewhat agree)**

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about reading news and listening to audio content. Note: Please circle and calculate answers

A. I am confident using smartphone

- Disagree
- Agree

B. I use streaming services in different platforms daily with my smartphone.

- Disagree
- Agree

C. I am an iOS user

- Disagree
- Agree

D. I am an Android user

- Disagree
- Agree

E. I use English in my studies or often in my daily life and I am able to express myself in English.

- Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- Somewhat Agree
- Agree

F. I listen\* to talk audio-based products\* such as podcasts, ted talks and talk-based radio shows *at least once a week*.

- Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- Somewhat Agree
- Agree

\* I listen intentionally by choosing a specific show (does not include radio playing in the background)

\*\**Audio-based products include for example:*

*Podcasts, Ted talks, talk shows (like Inktalk or Joshtalk), audiobooks, talk-based radio shows, comedy talk shows with several people etc.*

G. I read\* daily news about current affairs in my areas of interests\*\*

- Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- Somewhat Agree
- Agree

\**Reading*

\*\**Areas of interest include for example:*

*global or local politics, local or global events, science, etc.*