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Innovation > Computing & Tech > US startup creates Arab-language platform for podcasts

US STARTUP CREATES ARAB-LANGUAGE PLATFORM FOR PODCASTS

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Language has been a barrier for the creation and promotion of Arab-language podcasters, which the PODU platform seeks to fix

Spotted: US-based startup PODU is developing one of the first platforms to promote and develop Arab-language podcasts. Its creator, University of Chicago student Wessam Abozeid, said he was inspired to create PODU after he realised language was a barrier for Arab-language podcasters. The lack of English-language skills made it harder for them to find a platform.

Eventually, PODU will help podcast developers earn money from their content. While at least one other Arab-language podcasting platform has recently started, Sowt, PODU is different because it will focus on comedy, sports, education and storytelling, not politics.

"We want it to be something that unites the Arab world," Abozeid, who is originally from Egypt, told americaninno.com. "We will try to avoid any contentious political topics on our podcasts... I think there's a middle ground where we can offer something of value that is not censored."

PODU is already gaining traction. The podcast platform won $15,000 from the University of Chicago's 2019 College New Venture Challenge in March. Now, PODU is reaching out to popular YouTube personalities in Egypt. It seeks more funding to expand into Algeria, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syria and other Arabic-speaking countries next year.

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Takeaway:

The podcast industry is having a "Netflix" moment, as major platforms like Spotify are buying up popular podcast content. Industry experts estimate the podcast market will be worth $1 billion market by 2020, up from $490 million in 2017. That trend is slowly picking up speed in the Arab-speaking world as well. The first ever Middle East Podcast Forum was held in Dubai in 2018 and a recent report estimated that there are currently over 300 podcasts in Arabic and English in the Middle East. Springwise has spotted several innovations targeting the growing interest in podcasting, including an audio-based social platform and one that allows podcast listeners to interact with podcasts.