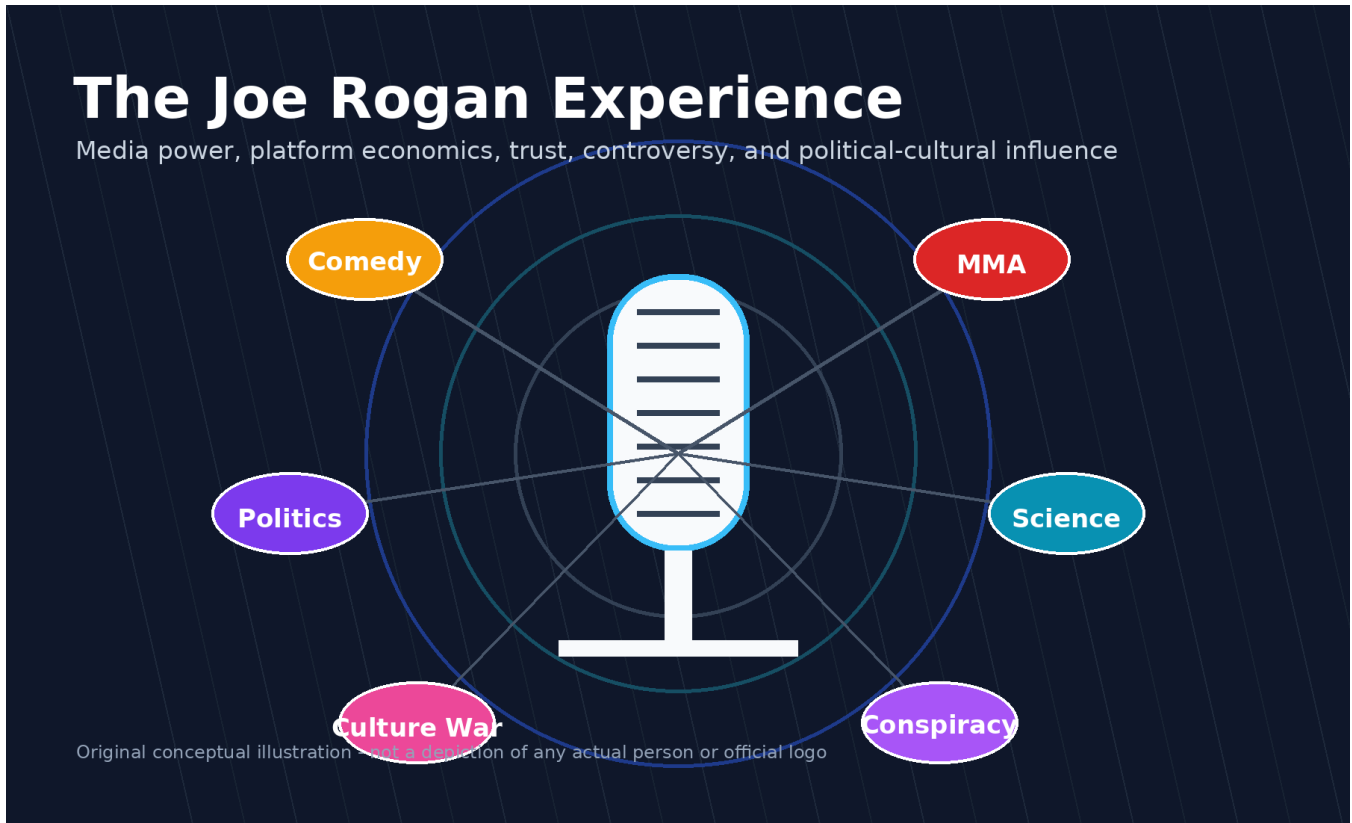


The Joe Rogan Experience

A Strategic Analysis of Media Power, Platform Economics, Listener Psychology, and Political-Cultural Influence



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Executive Summary

The Joe Rogan Experience did not become influential simply because Joe Rogan was already famous or because the show booked prominent guests. Its advantage came from a compounded media system: long conversations that create intimacy, a host persona that signals curiosity and anti-institutional independence, a guest network broad enough to bridge entertainment, science, politics, combat sports, comedy, and conspiratorial subcultures, and a distribution architecture that converts three-hour episodes into short clips, social controversies, and political relevance. Spotify described JRE in 2024 as having debuted in 2009, having been exclusive to Spotify since 2020, and remaining one of podcasting's most listened-to franchises globally [2]. Edison Research ranked JRE as the number one U.S. podcast by reach among weekly podcast consumers ages 13+ in Q1 2026 [3].

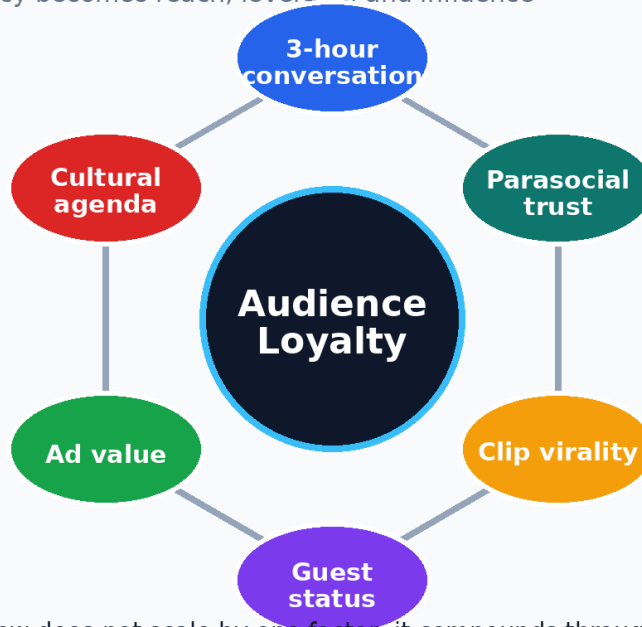
The strategic core is not just reach. It is trust-as-attention. Listeners often experience the show as a room they enter repeatedly, not a program they consume passively. The lack of a rigid script, the length of the interviews, the recurring conversational rhythm, and the host's willingness to ask naive, skeptical, or taboo questions make the show feel less like institutional journalism and more like informal truth-seeking. That creates loyalty. But the same mechanism also creates risk: controversial guests or weakly challenged claims can be perceived by critics as misinformation laundering, while fans interpret backlash as proof that legacy media and elites are trying to suppress open conversation.

JRE's business value comes from five conversions: loyalty becomes repeat listening; repeat listening becomes market power; market power becomes guest-booking leverage; guest-booking leverage becomes cultural agenda setting; and agenda setting becomes advertising and platform value. Spotify's 2020 exclusive deal gave the platform a flagship asset and helped define Spotify as a podcast/video-podcast company [1]. The 2024 renewal shifted the logic from exclusivity to expanded distribution, allowing the show to regain wider reach on additional platforms while Spotify kept a relationship with the most important podcast brand in the market [2].

The deeper lesson: JRE is a creator-era media institution. It uses intimacy instead of formal authority, duration instead of brevity, persona instead of newsroom brand, cross-platform clips instead of a single publishing channel, and controversy as both cost and fuel. For media startups and independent journalism, the model is powerful but dangerous: trust must be earned through authenticity, but protected through editorial discipline.

JRE Compounding Flywheel

How long-form intimacy becomes reach, leverage, and influence



Strategic point: the show does not scale by one factor; it compounds through reinforcing loops.

Figure 1. Original conceptual diagram: JRE's influence operates as a compounding flywheel, not a single tactic.

I. The 9 Core Success Pillars

JRE is best understood as a system with mutually reinforcing pillars. Each pillar does specific strategic work: it increases loyalty, creates shareable moments, strengthens booking power, raises advertising value, or expands political-cultural influence.

Pillar	Strategic mechanism	Business and cultural outcome
1. Long-form format	Three-hour conversations lower the pressure of the interview and allow digressions, corrections, humor, disagreement, and narrative arcs.	Listeners build habit and intimacy. Guests get room to present themselves outside TV sound-bite constraints.
2. Host persona	Rogan performs curiosity, skepticism, comedy, physical-culture credibility, and anti-elite informality rather than institutional expertise.	Audience sees him as an honest proxy asking questions elites avoid. Critics see inadequate gatekeeping.
3. Guest network	Comedians, fighters, scientists, authors, entrepreneurs, politicians, contrarians, and internet figures create a constantly refreshing content supply.	The show becomes a status platform. Appearing on JRE can signal relevance across multiple audiences.
4. Thematic flexibility	The show can move from MMA to psychedelics, comedy, AI, diet, health, politics, ancient civilizations, and culture-war issues.	A wide issue surface lets the show capture multiple algorithmic and cultural waves without changing format.
5. Male affinity stack	Fitness, fighting, comedy, anti-PC humor, self-optimization, entrepreneurship, guns, masculinity, and outsider politics create a strong identity cluster.	Edison reported the potential candidate-reach audience as 80% male and 51% age 18-34 in 2024 [4]. This creates a highly attractive political and advertising niche.
6. Clip ecosystem	Long episodes generate hundreds of short moments for YouTube, X, TikTok, Instagram, Reddit, and news aggregation.	Clips become discovery ads for the full show; outrage clips and expert clips both expand reach.
7. Platform leverage	JRE was valuable enough for Spotify to use as a strategic podcast anchor in 2020 and to renew in 2024 while broadening availability [1][2].	The show gained bargaining power against platforms; platforms gained differentiation and ad inventory.
8. Trust and controversy	The show's credibility with fans is partly reinforced by institutional criticism. Controversy becomes identity confirmation.	This drives loyalty and attention, but creates brand safety, moderation, and misinformation risk.
9. Alternative media power	In a low-trust media environment, JRE functions as an alternative public square outside legacy television and newspapers.	Political actors treat the show as a route to voters who may distrust traditional institutions; the podcast becomes a campaign and culture-war arena.

II. Content Format: Why Duration Became a Moat

Most media optimizes for compression. JRE optimized for immersion. A television segment might deliver five minutes of message control; JRE often gives guests two to three hours of narrative space. The result is a different kind of media product: not a headline, not a debate panel, not a prepared interview, but a long social encounter. Spotify's 2020 announcement emphasized that JRE had built a loyal and engaged fan base and combined topics ranging from neuroscience and sports to comedy, health, infectious disease, and culture [1].

How long-form structure translates into loyalty

- Time creates perceived authenticity. Over hours, guests can contradict themselves, relax, joke, and reveal personality. Fans often interpret this as more truthful than edited TV.
- Repetition creates a ritual. Recurring listeners learn the host's rhythms, references, producer dynamics, recurring friends, and conversational norms.
- Low production friction increases volume. The format can absorb many guest types without needing a new format for each episode.
- Depth creates clipping inventory. A three-hour episode contains multiple viral candidates: a joke, a political line, a scientific claim, a conflict, a confession, or a strange tangent.

The host persona as interface

Rogan's role is not that of a neutral journalist. He is a cultural interface. His credibility comes from several overlapping identities: stand-up comic, UFC commentator, fitness and martial arts enthusiast, psychedelic-curious seeker, skeptical everyman, anti-elite conversationalist, and wealthy creator who still performs informal authenticity. This mix lets him speak to people who distrust professionalized media but still want contact with experts, celebrities, fighters, scientists, comedians, and politicians.

The weakness is the same as the strength. The host's open-ended curiosity can make listeners feel respected, but it can also make weak claims appear plausible when expert challenge is insufficient. The brand therefore depends on a delicate balance: enough skepticism to feel independent, but enough openness to avoid looking like a gatekeeper.

III. Guest Network and Male Listener Base

The show's guest network acts as a compounding asset. Every major guest increases the probability that future guests will appear because JRE is known to deliver a large audience, long attention, and a less adversarial environment than traditional news interviews. That makes it valuable for people who want persuasion without interruption and for figures who feel legacy media will frame them negatively.

The demographic profile magnifies the show's political and advertising importance. Edison Research reported in October 2024 that the potential JRE audience for presidential candidates was 80% male, 51% age 18-34, and politically mixed: 35% independent or something else, 32% Republican, and 27% Democratic [4]. That is not just a demographic profile; it is a strategic audience: younger, male, less institutionally attached, culturally skeptical, and important for turnout, consumer brands, gambling, sports, crypto, fitness, supplements, gaming, finance, and political persuasion.

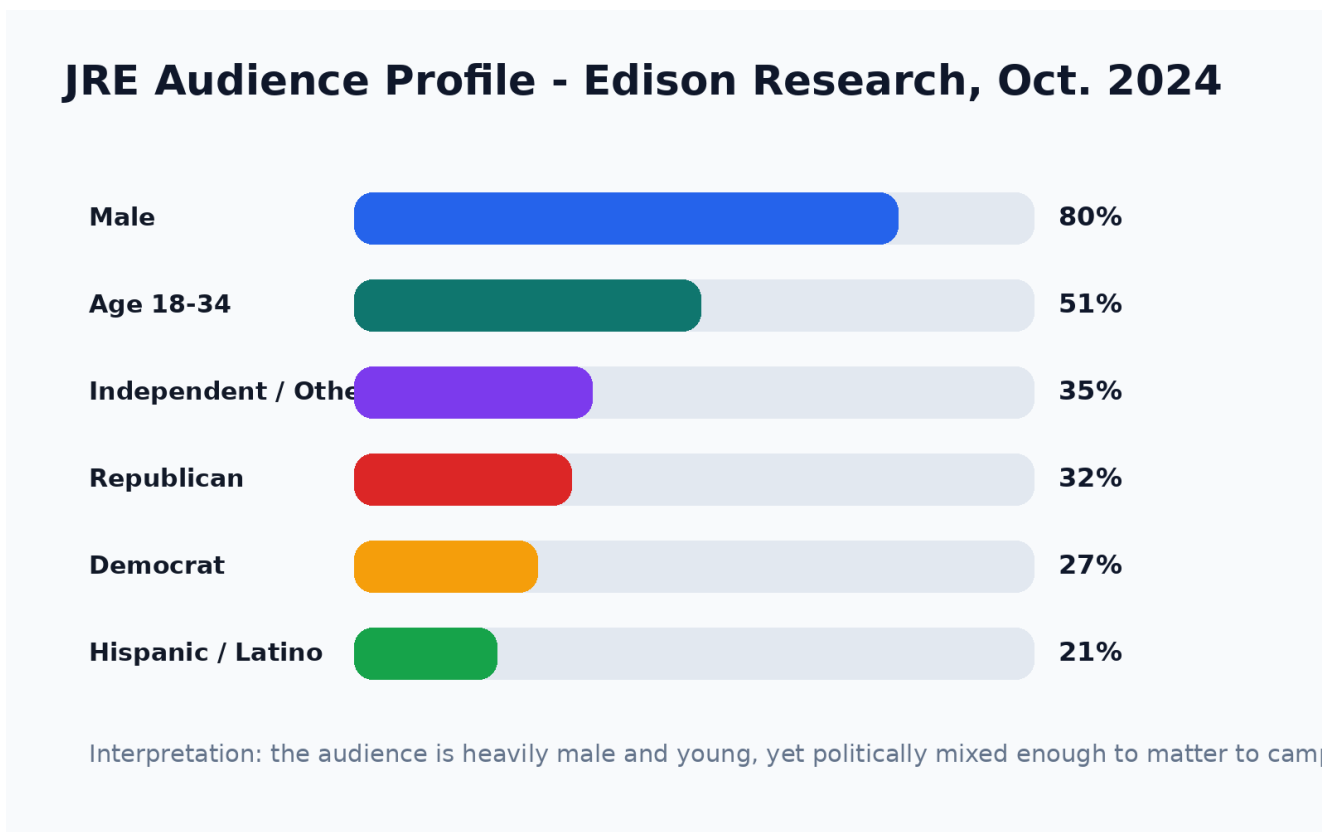


Figure 2. Original chart based on Edison Research's October 2024 JRE audience profile for political candidate reach [4].

Why the male audience base matters

- Identity density: MMA, comedy, hunting, fitness, contrarian politics, self-improvement, and anti-institutional skepticism overlap strongly in parts of the male podcast audience.
- Advertiser precision: A large male audience with long listening sessions supports host-read ads for products that benefit from trust transfer.
- Campaign value: The audience includes independents and lower-trust voters who are difficult to reach through cable news or newspaper endorsements.
- Cultural influence: JRE does not merely report culture-war issues; it provides a social space where listeners rehearse their interpretations of them.

IV. Thematic Flexibility: The Show as a General-Purpose Attention Machine

A narrow podcast can dominate a niche, but JRE built a broad attention market. The same feed can host a comedian, a physicist, a nutrition influencer, an MMA fighter, a politician, a historian, a tech founder, a journalist, a psychedelic researcher, or a conspiracy theorist. This lets the show attach itself to many cycles of public curiosity.

The strategic value of mixed categories

Category	Audience function	Strategic effect
Comedy	Creates ease, humor, recurring social bonds, and insider language.	Prevents the show from feeling like a pure political product.
MMA / combat sports	Gives Rogan authentic expertise and a loyal male subculture.	Anchors the brand in embodied credibility rather than only talk.
Science / health / optimization	Feeds curiosity, self-improvement, and expert access.	Raises perceived intellectual value, but creates misinformation exposure in health topics.
Politics	Transforms the show into a campaign-relevant arena.	Builds agenda-setting power and attracts media coverage.
Conspiracy / fringe / heterodox topics	Satisfies taboo curiosity and anti-establishment identity.	Creates viral clips and backlash; raises reputational and accuracy risks.
Culture war	Lets listeners process conflict around speech, gender, race, institutions, and elites.	Strengthens tribe formation and political signaling.

The real innovation is not topic variety alone. It is the ability to keep the same conversational container while changing the cultural object. That makes JRE more resilient than a news show tied to one beat or a comedy show tied to one format.

V. Platform Strategy: YouTube, Spotify, Social Media, and the Clip Economy

JRE's distribution logic evolved through three eras: open web and YouTube growth, Spotify exclusivity, and post-2024 cross-platform expansion. Spotify's 2020 announcement made JRE an exclusive distributor asset while preserving free access and video episodes inside Spotify [1]. Spotify's 2024 renewal announced a new multiyear partnership and said the show would soon be available on additional platforms [2]. That shift is important: the first deal tested whether a platform could buy podcast scarcity; the renewal recognized that a mega-podcast's power depends on being discoverable wherever attention lives.

Platform Distribution Architecture

Long-form hub + video discovery + social controversy + algorithmic clips

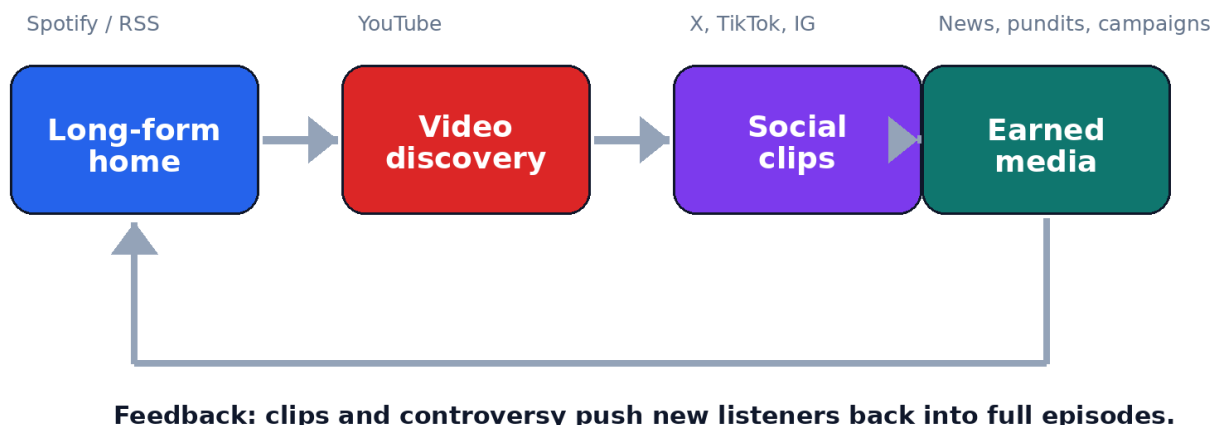


Figure 3. Original conceptual diagram: the post-2024 logic is not pure exclusivity, but platform anchoring plus broad distribution.

Spotify exclusive deal: positive effects

- Validation: The deal signaled that podcasts could be strategic platform assets, not just open RSS feeds.
- Capitalization: It turned a creator-led show into institutional platform leverage and helped Spotify make podcasting central to its identity.
- Production and monetization: Spotify gained ad sales, analytics, video-podcast infrastructure, and a flagship relationship.

Spotify exclusive deal: negative effects

- Discovery loss: Exclusivity reduced open-platform exposure and weakened the YouTube full-episode habit during the exclusive window.

- Platform-responsibility risk: Because Spotify had a paid exclusive relationship, controversies became Spotify controversies, not merely creator controversies.
- Censorship-frame vulnerability: Any moderation, missing episode, or search/distribution issue could be interpreted by fans as suppression.

YouTube and video-podcast significance

Video is increasingly central to podcast growth. Spotify reported in June 2024 that more than 170 million users had watched a video podcast on Spotify and that more than half of its top 20 podcasts had video, including JRE [12]. Edison's Q2 2025 podcast ranking methodology began incorporating individuals whose sole podcast consumption in the past week was through video [13]. This matters because JRE is naturally visual: facial reactions, studio atmosphere, clips, guest chemistry, and producer interactions all become shareable social objects.

VI. Advertising and Revenue Model

JRE sits at the intersection of four monetization layers: host-read ads, platform licensing, video inventory, and indirect brand power. The show's long duration creates more ad inventory, but its more important value is trust transfer. A host-read ad inside a show built on repeated parasocial intimacy can carry more persuasion than a generic display ad.

The broader U.S. podcast ad market supports this logic. IAB reported that U.S. podcast advertising revenue reached \$2.43 billion in 2024, up 26.4% year over year, within a digital advertising market of \$258.6 billion [6]. That gives JRE a strategic position: it is not just a large podcast in an emerging ad channel; it is a flagship asset inside a fast-growing format.

Why advertisers value JRE

Advertising value source	Why it matters	Risk
Host trust	Listener trust can transfer to products, especially in categories such as health, fitness, finance, sports, and lifestyle.	Controversy can create brand-safety concerns.
Long attention	Three-hour sessions create deep attention and multiple ad slots.	Measurement across platforms can be fragmented.
Audience specificity	Young male skew allows precise reach for certain advertisers and political communicators.	Audience concentration can limit broad-brand suitability.
Cultural heat	Ads appear inside content that news, clips, and online discourse amplify.	Heat can quickly turn negative during health or political controversies.
Platform leverage	Spotify and other platforms can package JRE inside broader podcast/video-podcast strategies.	The platform becomes exposed to creator controversies.

The JRE model also shows that creator businesses can monetize beyond direct ads. A show can increase the value of live comedy, clubs, tours, guest books, documentaries, political campaigns, related podcasts, social-media accounts, and the host's broader reputation as a cultural gatekeeper.

VII. Trust and Controversy: The Double Engine

JRE's brand is built on a paradox: the show is trusted by many fans because it is not institutionally controlled, but it is criticized because the absence of institutional control can allow questionable claims to circulate with limited challenge. The audience often sees openness as honesty. Critics often see openness without rigor as irresponsibility. The result is a durable conflict that keeps the show culturally relevant.

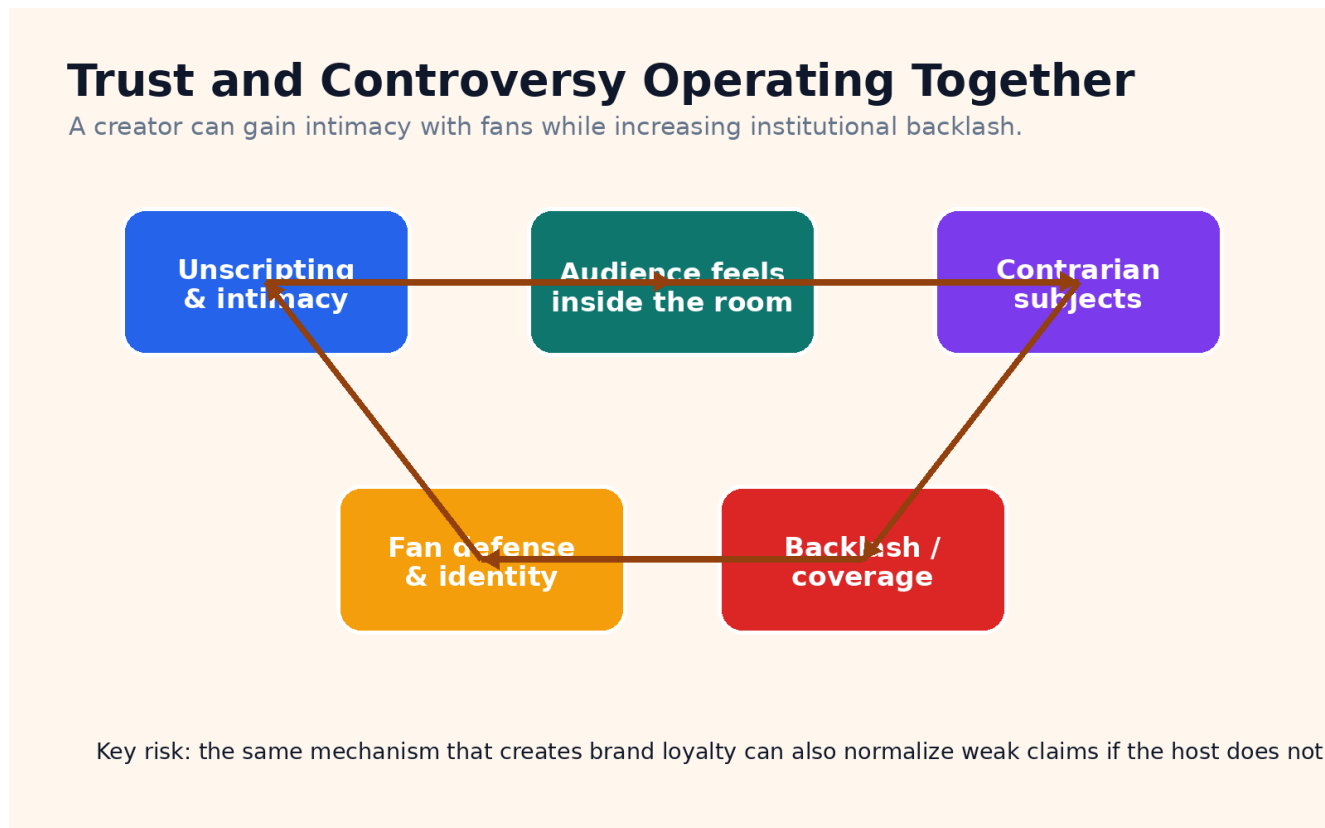


Figure 4. Original conceptual diagram: controversy can reinforce fan identity while increasing institutional scrutiny.

COVID-19, vaccines, and content moderation

The 2022 COVID controversy was a turning point because it made Spotify's role visible. Reuters reported in January 2022 that Neil Young's music was being removed from Spotify after he called out a podcast hosted by Joe Rogan for spreading false information about vaccines [8]. Spotify then published a statement saying it would add content advisories to podcast episodes discussing COVID-19 and direct listeners to a COVID-19 information hub, while also saying it did not want to take the position of content censor [7].

The impact on the brand was mixed. The negative effect was reputational: JRE became central to debates about misinformation, platform responsibility, and whether a paid exclusive podcast should face higher editorial standards. The positive effect, from the perspective of loyal fans and anti-censorship audiences, was identity reinforcement: criticism from artists, journalists, and medical experts could be read as elite pressure. The controversy did not simply damage the show; it clarified the show's symbolic position as an anti-institutional arena.

Censorship debates

Censorship debates are structurally useful to JRE because they shift the question from whether a claim is accurate to whether the speaker is being suppressed. This changes the battlefield. A factual dispute

becomes a status dispute: Who gets to decide what can be discussed? For fans, this can increase attachment. For platforms and advertisers, it increases risk.

VIII. Political and Cultural Influence in the 2020s

JRE became politically important because it offers candidates something legacy outlets increasingly struggle to provide: access to politically mixed, younger, male, institution-skeptical listeners for an extended period. Edison's 2024 audience profile emphasized the show's value for candidates, especially with independents and younger voters [4]. Newsweek reported that Donald Trump's 2024 JRE interview reached more than 26 million YouTube views in its first 24 hours [9]. Even if platform view counts are imperfect indicators of persuasion, the episode showed that a podcast could become a campaign-stage event at national scale.

Why political actors care

- Low-friction persuasion: Long-form podcasts allow candidates to appear conversational rather than scripted.
- Audience trust gap: Voters skeptical of journalists may accept questions from a creator they already follow.
- Identity signaling: Appearing on JRE tells certain voters that the candidate is willing to enter hostile, informal, or non-elite spaces.
- Earned media: The appearance becomes news elsewhere, creating a second wave of attention beyond the podcast audience.

Public distrust as structural tailwind

JRE's rise fits a wider American trust crisis. Gallup reported in October 2025 that only 28% of U.S. adults expressed a great deal or fair amount of trust in newspapers, television, and radio to report the news fully, accurately, and fairly [10]. Pew Research Center reported in February 2026 that 57% of U.S. adults had low confidence in journalists to act in the public's best interests [11]. In that environment, a show like JRE can function as a substitute institution: not a newsroom, not a university, not a party, but a conversational authority space.

That is the central political-cultural insight. JRE does not need to be formally ideological to be politically powerful. Its power lies in shaping which questions feel legitimate, which experts feel trustworthy, which institutions feel suspect, and which guests get humanized in front of a mass audience.

IX. Brand Impact of Major Strategic Events

Event / mechanism	Positive effect	Negative effect	Net strategic assessment
Spotify 2020 exclusive deal	Validated podcasting as premium platform IP; delivered a flagship show to Spotify; gave JRE financial security and platform support [1].	Reduced open-platform discovery and tied controversies to Spotify's platform responsibility.	Strong business win, but exclusivity was strategically costly for clip-era reach.
Spotify 2024 renewal and wider availability	Preserved Spotify relationship while restoring broader distribution; recognized that mega-podcast power depends on ubiquity [2].	Reduced exclusivity value for Spotify and complicated measurement across platforms.	More strategically mature than full exclusivity.
YouTube clip/full-episode ecosystem	Restores discovery, search, and video virality; converts long-form into short-form funnels.	Clips can decontextualize statements and intensify controversy.	Essential to audience growth and political impact.
COVID/vaccine controversy	Reinforced anti-censorship identity among supporters; made JRE central to national media debate.	Created misinformation, brand safety, and platform governance backlash [7][8].	High-risk controversy that strengthened loyalty but raised reputational costs.
Political guest appearances	Elevated JRE from entertainment podcast to campaign infrastructure; produced massive earned media [9].	Increased political polarization and scrutiny of host responsibility.	A decisive shift toward public-sphere power.

X. Four Strategic Perspectives

Four Strategic Perspectives

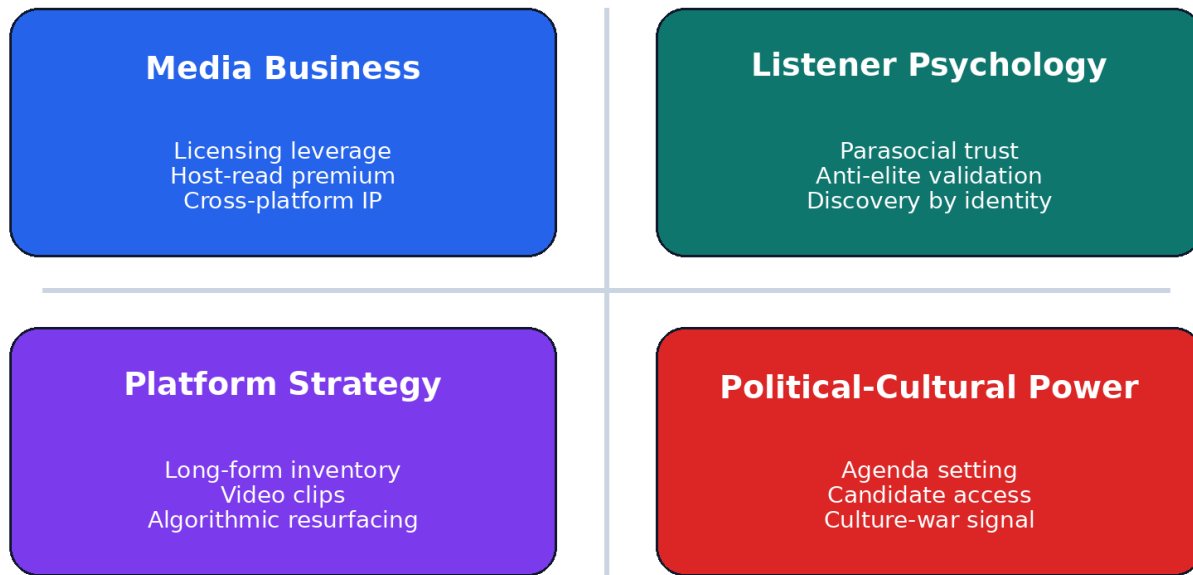


Figure 5. Original conceptual matrix: the JRE model works differently depending on the lens used.

1. Media business perspective

JRE demonstrates that a creator can become a media institution without owning a traditional newsroom. The business asset is not only the podcast feed; it is the audience relationship, the trust signal, the guest network, the clip archive, the controversy footprint, and the platform bargaining power. The show also helped prove that long-form podcasts could be licensed like premium entertainment assets.

2. Listener psychology perspective

The audience relationship is based on parasocial repetition, not formal editorial authority. The listener hears the host process uncertainty in real time. That makes the show feel human, fallible, and trustworthy to fans. The psychology is especially powerful for listeners who feel legacy institutions talk down to them.

3. Platform strategy perspective

The show is a platform-native product because it can live as full-length audio, full-length video, short clips, transcripts, quote posts, reaction videos, news stories, and social controversies. Its archive is evergreen because old clips can resurface whenever a guest becomes newsworthy again.

4. Political-cultural power perspective

JRE is not just an entertainment channel. It is an agenda-setting arena in the American attention economy. It can normalize fringe topics, humanize controversial figures, force legacy media to respond, and give campaigns access to audiences that may ignore conventional political interviews.

XI. Strategic Lessons for Creators, Media Startups, Independent Journalism, and Political Communication

1. Build a repeatable container, not just episodes.

The strongest media brands create a format that can absorb many topics without losing identity. JRE's container is the long informal conversation.

2. Trust is a business model.

Audience trust lowers customer-acquisition cost, increases ad effectiveness, improves guest booking, and protects the creator during controversy.

3. Long form and short form are complements.

The full episode creates depth; clips create reach. Treat clips as distribution funnels, not leftovers.

4. Host persona is strategic infrastructure.

In creator media, the host is not merely talent. The host is brand, editor, distribution hook, trust mechanism, and controversy shield.

5. Niche identity can scale when it overlaps with broader cultural tensions.

JRE began with comedy, MMA, and outsider curiosity, then scaled because those worlds overlapped with distrust of institutions, masculinity debates, health skepticism, and politics.

6. Guest booking is cumulative power.

Every important guest makes the next important guest easier. High-status guests create status gravity.

7. Platform deals must preserve discovery.

Exclusivity can generate money, but it can also reduce open ecosystem growth. The 2024 wider-distribution logic is more compatible with modern attention flows.

8. Controversy is fuel, but not a strategy by itself.

Controversy can deepen fan loyalty, but repeated accuracy failures can damage advertiser trust, platform relationships, and long-term institutional credibility.

9. Independent journalism should borrow intimacy, not abandon standards.

JRE shows the power of conversational trust. Journalism startups can use that intimacy while keeping source discipline, corrections, transparency, and expertise.

10. Political communicators must understand creator legitimacy.

A candidate appearing on creator media is not just buying reach. The candidate is borrowing the creator's social trust and entering a community's identity space.

XII. Risks, Limits, and Strategic Warnings

Risk	Why it matters	Mitigation for creators/startups
Epistemic weakness	Long conversations can make unverified claims sound plausible through confidence, charisma, or repetition.	Use stronger prep, fact-checking notes, expert follow-ups, corrections, and source links.
Brand safety	Advertisers may pull back when controversy threatens reputation.	Segment inventory, create advertiser categories, and maintain clear standards.
Platform dependence	Exclusive distribution can reduce discovery or make a creator vulnerable to policy decisions.	Preserve direct audience channels: email, website, RSS, membership, live events.
Audience narrowing	A powerful male-skewed audience can become a ceiling if the brand alienates other groups.	Expand guest range without abandoning core identity.
Political capture	A show can become a tool of a political coalition even if the host does not formally join one.	Apply consistent standards across factions and disclose conflicts or relationships.
Controversy addiction	Outrage can train the audience to demand ever more provocative material.	Balance provocation with genuine inquiry, expertise, and constructive episodes.

The biggest mistake imitators make is copying the surface aesthetics - long episodes, controversial guests, male-coded jokes, studio cameras - without building the underlying trust, curiosity, guest network, and distribution flywheel. The second biggest mistake is believing that authenticity removes the need for standards. In high-influence creator media, authenticity and standards must reinforce each other.

Conclusion: Why JRE Became a New Media Institution

The Joe Rogan Experience became influential because it solved a structural problem in American media: many people wanted access to elites, experts, celebrities, fighters, comedians, dissidents, and politicians without the tone, compression, and authority structure of legacy media. JRE offered a different bargain: longer time, looser rules, fewer institutional filters, more personality, more risk, and more intimacy.

This made the show unusually powerful in the 2020s. It served entertainment needs, identity needs, information needs, and political needs simultaneously. It was a comedy show, a combat-sports community, a science-curiosity channel, an anti-elite salon, a culture-war amplifier, and a campaign-relevant media platform. Very few media products can occupy all those roles at once.

The strategic lesson is not that every creator should become Joe Rogan. The lesson is that modern media power increasingly comes from trust-based communities, durable formats, platform-native distribution, and the ability to convert attention into relationships. But the JRE case also proves that influence without editorial discipline creates recurring social costs. The next generation of independent media will win by combining JRE-level intimacy and distribution intelligence with stronger evidence standards and clearer responsibility.

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