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Podcast: Expanding Access to Legal Research

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Abstract: Many research units or Faculties have been using podcasts to communicate research with their peers and society. However, little is known about the use of podcasts to communicate legal research. A desk-based research was conducted to map existing podcasts in the legal research promoted by research centres funded by FCT in Portugal and describe their characteristics. We identified 4 podcasts promoted by 3 Portuguese research units in the field of law. The findings demonstrate that only one of the four identified legal research podcasts remains active. The absence of detailed information about the target audience, publication frequency, and specific objectives of the podcasts hindered a thorough analysis of their impact and reach. We concluded that podcasts are underused for communicating legal research. Future studies should include qualitative content analysis and audience interaction studies to understand better and enhance the effectiveness of legal research podcasts.

Keywords: Podcast; Legal Research; Science communication.

Basic ideas:

- Technological advances have transformed communication.
- The podcast emerges as an accessible instrument for communication content.

Further research should be conducted on the use of podcasts in legal research communication.

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1. Introduction

Communication has acquired renewed facets and modalities. With the rise of social networks, the prolific production of content, and the rapid dissemination of information, a significant transformation has been observed in the communicative landscape (Dantas-Queiroz et al., 2018). There is no way to ignore new media and explore the potential of the digital sphere.

The media format known as Podcast emerged at the beginning of the 21st century, and the origin of its name is attributed to the British journalist Ben Hammersley (2004), through the article «Audible Revolution», published in 2004 in The Guardian, which he proposes the terms «Audioblogging», «Podcasting», and «GuerillaMedia» (Galán, 2023). The podcast is a combination of the words «broadcast» and «iPod», the latter being Apple's most renowned media playback device (Bodart & Silva, 2021; Fox & Ciro, 2005; Lezme & Quaglia, 2014; Martins et al., 2020). According to Santos and Barros (2023), the first record of a podcast produced dates back to 2004 and originated in the United States, being developed by Adam Curry, who is credited with being the father of podcasting. The aforementioned Apple iPods feature a different podcast format, called Enhanced Podcasts, which only works on the IOS system (Laaser et al., 2010; Martins et al., 2020).

Podcasts represent audio or video files disseminated via the Internet, using RSS (Really Simple Syndication) (Medeiros, 2006). This content can be accessed and reproduced on different electronic devices, ranging from computers and iPods to smartphones and various categories of portable players. Podcasting constitutes a method of disseminating digital content in video and audio format via the Internet (MacKenzie, 2019). Each file of this nature is called a podcast or episode, and a podcasting service usually provides periodic sequences of episodes. In other words, the podcast is the audio file while podcasting is the distribution mechanism for this file (Galán, 2023). Each episode is usually accompanied by a feed, which outlines the contents of the archive (Lazzari, 2009). As elucidated by Santos and Barros (2023), individuals equipped with a computer with a microphone, recording software, and internet access can produce content in this form (Dantas-Queiroz et al., 2018). Podcasts can assume different natures, such as entertainment, information, training, educational, etc., and can be presented as a monologue (when only one person speaks), interview (when there is a person in the role of the interviewer asking questions about the topic) or conversational (with two or more people talking, conversing or debating the topic). There is no limit to the nature of podcasts as they vary according to infinite themes (Galán, 2023).

Originally, podcasting was primarily associated with listening to music. Oliveira et al. (2023) explain that in origin, the podcast emerged as an on-demand transmission to distribute music and content similar to radio programmes. However, the versatility of formats warrants the expansion of disseminating varied content (Martins et al., 2020). Technological progress and the advancement of digital media have led to the growth of this form of media (Santos & Barros, 2023).

In recent years, there has been a significant expansion of this media format. MacKenzie (2019), points out an exponential growth in scientific content podcasts between 2010 and 2018.

One of the predominant advantages of this format is its remarkable ease of creation, accessibility, and dissemination.

The public gains access to information without being in a specific place or time (Evans, 2008; MacKenzie, 2019). According to Galán (2023), the main benefit of this media is that it allows the listener to choose the content they want to hear, and where and when they will listen, which is called transmission or distribution on demand. And, most podcasts are free of charge. Access is allowed in a non-conventional environment, for example at home, at gyms, in personal vehicles, or on public transport, among others (Santos & Barros, 2023).

Given the ease of producing content through the podcast, as well as the ease of access by the public, it is important to point out a problem that is related to the source of the information that is conveyed in the episodes. Mainly, regarding educational and scientific podcasts, there is a risk of putting bibliographical sources and other reliable sources aside, without any mechanism for checking the information. The ease of access from any location and while carrying out other activities only generates the absorption of the content (Galán, 2023).

Focusing on podcasts promoted by the Portuguese research units funded by Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT), especially in law research, this exploratory study aims to map existing podcasts and describe their main characteristics.

We start with a literature review on podcasts in science communication. Then we explain the desk-based study we conducted to describe 4 podcasts promoted by FCT-funded research units in Portugal, and the results and directions for future research.

2. The use of Podcasts in science communication

As Gregory and Miller (1998) point out, the communication of scientific knowledge is a practice as old as science itself. In this sense, Kunth suggested a distinction between three types of scientific communication, each aimed at different audiences: 1. diffusion of specialized scientific information: carried out between researchers in the same scientific area; 2. interdisciplinary scientific diffusion: carried out between researchers in different scientific areas; 3. scientific diffusion: aimed at the general public, involving scientists and society (Kunth, 1992, as cited in Fernandes, 2011).

The public communication of science refers to the process by which the producers of scientific knowledge (scientists) disseminate the results of their research to a non-specialist (lay) public (Fernandes, 2011). According to Burns et al. (2003), science communication (SciCom) can be defined as the application of suitable skills, media, activities, and dialogue to elicit one or more of the following personal responses to science: awareness (familiarity with new aspects of science), enjoyment or other affective reactions (appreciating science), interest (voluntary involvement with science), opinions (forming, reforming, or confirming of science-related attitudes), and understanding (the content or the processes).

The report of the Royal Society of London (1985, p. 9) states "that better public understanding of science can be a major element in promoting national prosperity, in raising the quality of

public and private decision-making and in enriching the life of the individual". Based on the report, the public should understand more of the scope and the limitations, the findings, and the methods of science. Science is impregnated in the day-to-day life of every citizen, so understanding science enables people to gain knowledge about everyday occurrences and make better choices, whether individual or collective (Fernandes, 2011).

In this context, the production of science is aimed at improving and advancing society, which is why science communication is essential. Thus, science communication aims to reach the lay public, since in general, society is the final recipient of scientific productions. It is important to note that some authors have different definitions. For example, Bueno (2010) defines scientific communication as the transmission of scientific information to a specialist community, using technical language at events and scientific journals. On the other hand, the author points out that scientific dissemination occurs when scientific content is presented to the lay public in accessible language, through various communication channels, such as books, newspapers, television, radio, and, in addition, social media. Given these divergent conceptualizations, this paper adopts science communication as communication to the lay public.

It should be noted the discourse used for communicating with the lay public aims to popularize information, therefore avoiding the use of technical terms and complex definitions, so those elements can lead to a loss of public interest. In this context, it should be noted that the main objective is to stimulate the public's curiosity and not necessarily provide an in-depth educational understanding of scientific subjects (Bueno, 2010).

Scientific public communication, often conducted by the main media outlets, involves the role of the journalist as an intermediary between the scientist and the public, called science journalism (Fernandes, 2011). However, many scientists are reluctant to participate in these initiatives, fearing the distortion of their statements and information (Bueno, 2010). In response to this concern, researchers seek independent ways to communicate science, such as through books and lectures. With the emergence of the internet, an increasing number of scientists, teachers, and students were publishing the results of their research through blogs, using their 'own voice'. This movement can be considered a precursor to the use of other media in scientific communication (Dantas-Queiroz etal., 2018)².

Between 2010 and 2018, there was an exponential growth in the number of podcasts dedicated to scientific content (MacKenzie, 2019). The reason for that is mainly one: its format is not subject to the limitations inherent to large media, like television and radio, which allows wide use (Santos & Barros, 2023). Furthermore, Dantas-Queiroz et al. (2018) point out that there is considerable public interest in scientific content, despite this kind of media still being underused for scientific communication purposes.

² The aforementioned authors do not distinguish between dissemination and communication of science. Bringing to the distinction presented here, the authors refer to scientific podcasts with the purpose of scientific communication.

As elucidated by Dantas-Queiroz et al. (2018), podcasts are not yet widely used in scientific communication despite their use being more widespread in entertainment. However, the same authors highlight the existence of some scientific podcast content in the USA, such as «Radiolab» (WNYC, New York, USA) and «Startalk», presented by astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson. Moreover, they mention podcasts created by renowned scientific journals, such as «Science Podcast» from the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and «Nature Nature Podcast» Publishing Group (NPG).

Dantas-Queiroz et al. (2018) in their research called «PodPesquisa 2014» observed a significant number of listeners with interest in scientific and technological content, which suggests a demand for a Scientific podcasts focus. Consequently, podcasts reveal considerable potential in science communication, because it's easier to produce and make content available to society, mainly via the web, which means there are no geographical limitations (MacKenzie, 2019).

When using the podcast as a vehicle for communicating scientific content to the public, the need to adapt the language emerges. This task, which may not be trivial, involves simplifying subjects that are often complex and full of technical terminology into a language accessible and understandable to a non-specialist audience. It is imperative to emphasize the primary objective: the transmission of knowledge which is only effective if the recipient can assimilate the content presented (Dantas-Queiroz et al., 2018).

From this perspective, it is observed that humorous language is often used as a strategy to establish effective communication and cultivate an emotional relationship with the public (Dantas-Queiroz et al., 2018). It is well known that creativity and the use of humour tend to be well-received by the public (MacKenzie, 2019), whether in scientific or educational podcasts. However, it is essential to maintain a balance to avoid exaggerations that could become vulgar and, consequently, alienate the audience (Goodwin & Dahlstrom, 2014). Therefore, it is up to the communicator, aware of his target audience, to establish an appropriate language and connection. Although the podcast's audience is usually young people and adults, aged between 15 and 29, the audience for scientific podcasts is mostly people with a level of education, who have already completed college and/or postgraduate studies (Dantas-Queiroz et al., 2018).

Besides the need for accessible language congruent with the podcast format, the relevance of the careful selection of topics to be discussed is highlighted. Preference for popular or trending subjects can significantly facilitate content absorption and promote greater public engagement with the scientific material presented (Santos & Barros, 2023). The ability to create intelligent and often highly complex content is essential. In other words, transmitting it in a light manner and uncomplicated language is the primary goal of arousing the public's curiosity (Martins et al., 2020).

Therefore, the use of podcasts in science communication deals with scientific content for different audiences, where it is necessary to adapt the language to the profile of the audience.

3. Methods

This study aims to map existing/identify podcasts in the legal research promoted by research centres funded by FCT in Portugal, and describe their characteristics. Our research questions are:

- Which FCT-funded law research centres in Portugal promote podcasts in the area of legal research?
- What are their main characteristics?

We conducted desk research to identify the research units funded by FCT, listed in the Atlas of Research Units 2022 (Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, 2022). According to Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), desk-based research is a type of research that "involves collecting and examining information that already exists and is easy to get, such as company records, published government reports, and information in newspapers, magazines, and on the internet".

We identified 10 research units in law, and of those 4 promote podcasts.

The data was collected in June 2024 from the research unit websites, and from de podcast platform (broadcast), focusing on when the podcast appeared, the last episode, frequency, the number of episodes, running time, the broadcast, visitors, and the target audience.

4. Results

Four podcasts were found: Quid Juris, Common Home Conversations, Pluralismo Jurídico, and *Direito e Lusofonia*.

The *Quid Juris* Podcast³ is a project of the JusGov School of Researchers (Research Centre for Justice and Governance), at the School of Law of the University of Minho. It aims to discuss old and new challenges in legal issues, to encourage debate on issues relevant to scientific research in the legal field, and to contribute to the development of new lines of scientific research. Periodically, a prominent personality is invited to discuss relevant legal issues.

This podcast has 13 published episodes. The first was in October 2021 and the last in May 2024, the longest being 1h12m and can be listened to via Spotify, google podcast, and Castbox. The content is debated with guests. Regarding the frequency, the research centre's website does not give information on the frequency of its episodes. Looking at the posts of the episodes, they were posted on Spotify around every 2 months. However, there have been periods without episodes. For example, podcast n.11 is from July 2023, and episode n.12 is from January 2024, with a gap of approximately 5 months between one episode and the next. Nothing was found about the target audience.

³ Extracted information: Gonçalves, A. & Costa, T. B. da. (org.) (n.d.). *Quid Juris Podcast*. Jus Gov: Research Centre for Justice and Governance. Retrieved June 23, 2024, from https://www.jusgov.uminho.pt/quid-juris-podcast/. *Podcast Quid Juris: JusGov.* (n.d.) Spotify. Retrieved June 23, 2024, from https://open.spotify.com/show/2pttICfbWzbd609ctno6DR.

The Common Home Conversations⁴ podcast is promoted by Common Home of Humanity and The Planetary Press news agency. Common Home is an international network of scientists and jurists, the result of a protocol established between the Portuguese Ministry of the Environment, the Porto and Vila Nova de Gaia City Councils, the NGO Zero, and is based at the CIJ (Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in Justice of Faculty of Law of the University of Porto). The podcast aims to discuss the Earth System as a Common Heritage of Humanity to change our relationship with the planet.

This podcast has 62 episodes published. The first was in September 2020 and the last was in May 2022, the longest being 50 minutes long. It can be listened to via iHeartRadio, Apple podcast, Spotify, and Google podcast. The content is debated with guests. The frequency was weekly. Nothing was found about the target audience.

The *Pluralismo Jurídico* (Legal Pluralism)⁵ podcast addresses the various dimensions, geographies, and chronologies of legal pluralism. It was developed as part of the research project Legal Pluralism in the Portuguese Empire (18th-20th centuries), funded by the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) and carried out at CEDIS (Research & Development Centre on Law and Society of NOVA School of Law) and the Social Sciences Institute of the University of Lisbon. It consists of three episodes, which are part of another programme *Impérios, Colonialismo e Sociedades Pós-coloniais* (Empires, Colonialism and Postcolonial Societies).

This podcast has 3 published episodes. The first and last episodes were published in November 2022, the longest being 1h07m. The content is discussed with guests. All three episodes were posted in November 2022. The website does not mention the broadcast that holds the programme. But, we found it on Spotify. Nothing was found about the target audience.

The *Direito e Lusofonia*⁶ (Law and Lusophony) podcast was developed by CEDIS (Research & Development Centre on Law and Society of NOVA School of Law), the Faculty of Law of the University of Lisbon, the *Salvo Melhor Juízo* podcast, and JOTA.info. The programme features interviews with law professors from Angola, Brazil, Mozambique, and Portugal. It aims to address

- ⁴ Extracted information: Magalhães, P. (org.). (n.d.) *A Casa Comum da Humanidade como uma Construção Jurídica Baseada na Ciência*. Centro de Investigação Interdisciplinar em Justiça. Retrieved June 23, 2024, from https://cij.up.pt/pt/client/skins/geral.php?id=383. *Common Home Conversations Primeiro Episódio (Will Steffen)*. (n.d). Centro de Investigação Interdisciplinar em Justiça. Retrieved June 23, 2024, from https://cij. up.pt/pt/noticias/noticias-2020/common-home-conversations-primeiro-episodio-will-steffen/. *Common Home Conversations Pathway to 2022*. (n.d.). Spotify. Retrieved June 23, 2024, from https://open.spotify.com/show/1pb1lB5YAB29gVSdK3Elst.
- ⁵ Extracted information: CEDIS & Instituto de Ciências Sociais (n.d.). LEGALPL Pluralismo Jurídico no Império Português (séculos XVIII-XX). Retrieved June 23, 2024, from https://cedis.novalaw.unl.pt/legalpl-pluralismo-juridico-no-imperio-portugues-seculos-xviii-xx/. *Império, Colonialismo e Sociedades Pós-coloniais*. Spotify. Retrieved June 23, 2024, from https://open.spotify.com/show/4UXfK2qD5oKjECck7Hvb7u.
- ⁶ Extracted information: Centro de I&D sobre Direito e Sociedade(n.d.). *Podcast Direito e Lusofonia*. Retrieved June 23, 2024, from https://cedis.novalaw.unl.pt/podcast-direito-e-lusofonia/. *Salvo Melbor Juízo*. (n.d.) Spotify. (2024 Jun 23). https://open.spotify.com/show/3md3su9I22yCLLlxMa8eSg. Silva, C. (n.d.) (org.). Pluralismo Jurídico no Império Português (séculosXVIII-XX). Retrieved June 23, 2024, from https://pluralismojuridiconoimperio.fd.unl.pt/.

the similarities and differences between Portuguese-speaking legal cultures. The episodes are posted within another podcast, called *Salvo Melhor Juízo*.

This podcast has 6 episodes published. The first was in May 2019 and the last in May 2020, the longest being 55m and can be listened to via Apple podcast, and Spotify. The content is debated with guests. Regarding the frequency, the research centre's website does not give information on the frequency of its episodes. Looking at the episode posts, the *Direito e Lusofonia* (Law and Lusophony) podcast has a varied periodicity, i.e. it does not show regular intervals, as the episodes are from March 2019, April 2019, May 2019, December 2019, and May 2020. Two episodes were posted in April 2019. The content is discussed with invited people. Nothing was found about the target audience.

A general observation about the four podcasts presented is the absence and difficulty of obtaining information about the podcasts. The websites that present the podcasts do not have all the information about the programme, so it was necessary to link the information between the website and the podcast transmission platform (broadcast). For example, the websites do not list the episodes that have been published or they have fewer than there are in the broadcast (Spotify).

Based on the information collected on their respective websites and from the broadcasts, pointing out specific aspects of the 4 podcasts, this table was constructed as a summary of the data collected.

Table 1

Podcasts in the legal research promoted by research centres funded by FCT in Portugal

Name	Research center	First episode	Last episode	Frequency	Number of episode	Running time (longest episode)	Broadcast	Visitor / Speaker	Target audience
Quid Juris	Research Centre for Justice and Governance	Oct-21	May-24	2 months	13	1:12:00	Spotify, Google Pordcast, Castbox	yes	doesn't mention
Common Home Conversations	CIJ – Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in Justice	Set-20	May-22	weekly	62	0:50:18	iHeartRadio, Apple Podcast, Spotify, Google Podcast	yes	doesn't mention
Podcast Pluralismo Jurídico	CEDIS – Research & Development Centre on Law and Society	Nov-22	Nov-22	no periodicity	3	1:07:00	Spotify	yes	doesn't mention
Podcast Direito e Lusofonia	CEDIS – Research & Development Centre on Law and Society	Mar-19	Mai-20	a variety	6	0:55:23	Apple Pordcast, Spotify	yes	doesn't mention

Note – created by the author. Information collected on their respective websites and from the broadcasts.

5. Discussion

The use of podcasts for various purposes has been growing significantly (Santos & Barros, 2023). As Galán (2023) explains, podcasts can take on different natures, such as entertainment, information, training, educational, etc. The podcasts analyzed are scientific podcasts, which transmit content about the science of law. However, although all the podcasts are produced within the framework of research centres, Quid Juris is the only podcast that clearly indicates that its purpose is to communicate legal research.

Despite being configured as scientific podcasts because they transmit content related to the science of law, the lack of information about the target audience, it difficult to determine whether the purpose of these podcasts is to communicate or disseminate science. As Fernandes (2021) points out, public science communication involves scientists sharing their research with a non-specialist audience. Effective science communication is vital because it ensures that society, which benefits the most from scientific progress, remains well-informed (Fernandes, 2011).

The four podcasts developed within the framework of legal research centres have an average duration of up to one hour per episode. Most of them have only a few episodes, except Common Home Conversations, which has 62 episodes. The longevity of the podcasts also varied. As for the Legal Pluralism podcast, all (3) were posted in the same month, therefore, it was not a podcast with a periodicity. However, it should be noted that only the Quid Juris podcast was published in 2024. The other podcasts seem to have ended, as there were no publications in 2024.

The number of episodes and the longevity of the podcast can be related to the purpose of the research projects. Thinking about communicating legal research, podcasts might aim for constant communication on a subject, or transmitting specific content that concludes once exhausted. However, this can also be linked to the podcast's success or failure, a factor requiring further investigation based on the data collected.

A significant challenge highlighted is the difficulty in finding information about the podcasts analyzed. They lack informativeness and do not specify their target audience. This absence of clarity makes it difficult to determine if the podcasts are aimed at a specialist audience, such as academics, professionals, and researchers, or a lay audience for broader science communication. Consequently, it is not possible to classify them definitively as educational or purely scientific podcasts.

An interesting observation is that two podcasts, *Direito e Lusofonia* (Law and Lusophony) and *Pluralismo Jurídico* (Legal Pluralism), have their episodes published within another programme, *Salvo Melbor Juízo* and *Impérios, Colonialismo e Sociedades Pós-coloniais* (Empires, Colonialism and Postcolonial Societies), respectively. This inclusion in programmes with different names might complicate public access and recognition. It can be seen that they are part of programmes with different names. This can make it difficult for the public to find them.

Another point to highlight is the fact that two podcasts, *Direito e Lusofonia* (Law and Lusophony) and *Pluralismo Jurídico* (Legal Pluralism), have their episodes published within another programme, *Salvo Melhor Juízo* and *Impérios, Colonialismo e Sociedades Pós-coloniais*

(Empires, Colonialism and Postcolonial Societies), respectively. It can be seen that they are part of programme with different names. This can make it difficult for the public to find them.

Although it is not possible to verify that these facts interfere with the success of the programmes, they can influence the reach of the audience, making it difficult for the public to perceive the framing of the podcast. Although it is not possible to verify that these facts interfere with the success of the programmes, they can influence the reach of the audience, making it difficult for the public to perceive the framing of the podcast.

Despite the growth in the use of podcasts for science communication (MacKenzie, 2019), only 4 podcasts were found in legal research, with only one active in 2024. This finding is in line with the view of Dantas-Queiroz et al. (2018) who pointed out that despite the considerable public interest in scientific knowledge, this kind of media is still being underused for scientific communication purposes.

The low use of podcasts by scientific careers may raise some supposed issues such as the possible difficulty of the language of legal science, permeated by formality versus the necessary clarity for public understanding. As stated by Dantas-Queiroz et al. (2018), this task may not be trivial, as it requires simplifying the content for a non-specialist audience. However, this would require a qualitative analysis of the content transmitted by the podcasts, which was not the subject of this investigation. Another question that arises in this scenario is whether the podcast is little used because it is underestimated or whether it is a platform that does not lend itself to communicating legal research. These questions open up gaps for further in-depth research in the future.

6. Conclusion

This investigation found four podcasts related to the communication of legal research. Only one of them, "Quid Juris", can be considered active, as it published an episode in May 2024. The others have not been published for a long time, which suggests that they may have been discontinued.

Considering that podcasts are a communication tool, it was expected that the information about them would be more accessible and detailed. However, the lack of clarity about the target audience and the absence of data on the periodicity and specific purpose of the podcasts made it difficult to fully analyze their impact and reach.

The lack of clear information and the possible absence of a specific objective for each podcast may have contributed to their discontinuation. It is possible that, without a well-defined purpose and a clear communication strategy, the podcasts failed to engage their target audience effectively. A more in-depth investigation into the subject is needed.

This study was limited to observing the presence and some basic characteristics of podcasts focused on legal research promoted by research centres funded by FCT in Portugal. It did not carry out an in-depth qualitative analysis of the content broadcast or a detailed study of audience reception.

In the future, it will be necessary to carry out more in-depth studies that include a qualitative analysis of the content of podcasts and an investigation into how different audiences receive and interact with this type of media in the communication of legal research. It would also be

interesting to explore how clear objectives and communication strategies can influence the success and longevity of podcasts.

The marked influence of the internet and new technologies on the evolution of communication is indisputable, especially through the growth and consolidation of podcasts as a means of disseminating information and varied content. Therefore, understanding and taking full advantage of the potential of this media requires a systematic and well-informed approach on the part of both content producers and researchers.

In short, although podcasts offer a promising medium for communicating legal research, we concluded that podcasts are underused for communicating legal research. Future studies should include qualitative content analysis and audience interaction studies to understand better and enhance the effectiveness of legal research podcasts, clearer strategies and a deeper understanding of their audience and impact are needed to maximize their effectiveness.

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