

The Epstein Files: the AI podcast that sounds like journalism but isn't

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Author: Kathryn McDonald

Podcasting has become one of our most intimate cultural forms. We often listen alone, through headphones, to voices that guide us through complex or deeply personal stories. Over time, we come to trust these voices not just for the information they convey, but for the sense that someone has listened, selected and shaped what we hear.

That relationship is unsettled by The Epstein Files, a new AI-generated podcast series that promises to process millions of Epstein-related documents into a coherent narrative. But when no one is clearly responsible for what we hear, the authority of the voice becomes harder to trust.

Created by data entrepreneur Adam Levy, the series draws on more than three million documents linked to Jeffrey Epstein and presents them as a "forensic audit" in the form of a conversational podcast between two AI-generated hosts.

Launched in February 2026, it's had more than two million downloads so far. It's a daily, self-updating show built through an automated pipeline that ingests, cross references and scripts material using AI systems, operating at a speed that traditional newsrooms could only dream of.

At first listen, The Epstein Files works, sounding like a carefully crafted podcast. But despite the jokes, cross-talk, hesitations and filler words that mirror shows like This American Life, Serial or S-Town, there are no identifiable human speakers behind the voices. From research to publication, the process appears to be largely automated, in line with Levy's intention to "strip the emotion" from the story.

The hosts also claim that the podcast acts as a filter, combining AI-assisted processing with "human analysis" to review the records rather than speculate. But this distinction is harder to verify when the processes behind selection, interpretation and emphasis remain largely invisible.

Emotion, judgement and interpretation are seen here as irritations or threats. However, systems that select, rank and narrate information do not become neutral simply because those decisions bypass direct human involvement.

The series presents itself as "the first AI native" investigative documentary. Yet it lacks many of the features we've come to expect. There are no interviews, no location recordings, and hardly any sonic cues to guide the listener. Instead, it relies almost entirely on simulated conversation.

## Scale is not judgement

The use of AI in podcasting is not simply a technical development. It disrupts the way shows are produced, structured and distributed. Rather than acting as a tool, these systems are beginning to reshape or obscure editorial processes that usually rely on human judgement.

The Epstein Files demonstrates how effectively AI can process vast quantities of material, producing a narrative that sounds coherent. But coherence is not the same as sense making, and pattern recognition is not interpretation. Deciding what matters, what is credible, and what should be left out remains a human task.

Automation does not remove judgement. Instead it relocates it, often in ways that are harder to see. Decisions are embedded in training data, system design and weighting mechanisms while appearing as neutral or unbiased outputs.

When information can be processed at scale, the question is no longer just what we know, but how we decide what counts as knowledge. Editorial standards don't disappear, but they become harder to identify.

## Why audio makes this harder

The human voice carries assumptions of authenticity. It signals presence, experience and connection. When we hear someone speak, we tend to assume a relationship between voice and responsibility. That assumption becomes more difficult to sustain when the voice is artificial yet sounds convincingly human.

These nameless hosts are not neutral. They are modelled on familiar broadcast styles associated with authority in western media. In doing so, they reproduce ideas about professionalism and trust, while remaining detached from any identifiable speaker.

What is striking about The Epstein Files is how persuasively authority is performed. The conversational structure suggests multiple perspectives, the tone implies neutrality, and the pacing suggests careful deliberation. But none of this guarantees that the material has been critically evaluated.

## Content that creates itself

It could be argued that automation results in more transparency. But this relies on the assumption that volume can substitute for editorial oversight. When material is misinterpreted, stripped of context or simply wrong, it's often unclear how those mistakes might be identified or addressed.

This is particularly troubling with material such as the Epstein case, which centres on human harm and exploitation. Such stories demand sensitivity, restraint and clearly traceable accountability. The way these stories are processed and retold can also feel detached from the people most affected by them.

At the same time, AI generated podcasts are growing. They are cheap to produce and increasingly difficult to distinguish from human made content. Their appeal may lie in speed, availability and the impression that someone has already done the work of sorting through chaos.

For audiences, the question is not only how to identify what is true or false. It's also about recognising what is missing. Listening has typically meant encountering different voices, perspectives and forms of responsibility. When those elements are reduced or removed, the act of listening itself begins to change. The Epstein Files offers little sense of a right of reply for its audience. There is no clear editorial voice and no visible chain of accountability.

Broadcasting always depended on relationships between voices and listeners, and between storytelling and editorial judgement. This is beginning to change. The Epstein Files does not signal the end of podcasting or investigative journalism. But it marks a moment in which the cultural meaning of the voice is being tested.

Co-presence and community is central to radio and podcasting. But in The Epstein Files, nobody is there. There may be voices but if you listen very closely, you'll notice that no one ever takes a breath.