RSS Podcast Feed Inefficiency

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Abstract

Centralised social media systems are somewhat out of favour in 2024 for reasons from fake news and privacy to the actions of single billionaire owners. Federated and more decentralised systems such as Mastodon and the Fediverse, plain old email, and RSS feeds including podcasts, are cool again. With much of the workings being out of sight for ordinary users, and in a system designed before intermittent renewable power generation was a thing, podcasting and RSS in particular are unnecessarily wasting an appreciable portion of their bandwidth and CPU time, and adding to climate change. Indeed, key players are consuming orders of magnitude more resources across their systems and others than necessary. There are already several simple and widely-used technical mechanisms that could help, but many participants are ignoring them. This paper suggests some sustainability improvements for various elements of the ecosystem that should be largely transparent to end users, including Cache-Control, conditional GET and skipHours, saving likely much more than 100kWh per day of electricity globally.