

**EVALUATION OF PODCASTING AS AN INDEPENDENT AND UNIQUE COMMUNICATION
MEDIA COMPARED TO TRADITIONAL RADIO**

**Valoración del podcasting como medio de comunicación independiente y singular
frente a la radio tradicional**

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

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The study analyzes the nature of podcasting as an independent communication media compared to radio. The problem posed is to determine whether podcasts establish a unique relationship with their audience, differing in terms of credibility, influence, validation, etc., from conventional radio. The methodology used is qualitative, based on a “personality test” designed by the authors that compares ten key areas. The results show that independent podcasts exhibit eight notable particularities, highlighting thematic flexibility, investment, or interaction. In contrast, radio and podcasts from large networks show greater similarities to each other. This work concludes that independent podcasting constitutes a unique communication media due to its ability to address alternative topics, the absence of significant legal restrictions, and its democratization of content creation access. However, podcasts from networks reflect radio patterns. The research reveals that, although both formats share a common foundation and use words to convey messages to the audience, they do so through different emotional connections.

RESUMEN

Palabras clave:

podcasting, pódcast, radio, medios
de comunicación, audiencias.

El estudio analiza la naturaleza del podcasting como medio de comunicación independiente frente a la radio. El problema planteado es determinar si el pódcast establece una relación única con su audiencia, diferenciándose en términos de credibilidad, influencia, validación, etc., de la radio convencional. La metodología empleada es cualitativa, basada en un “test de personalidad” diseñado por los autores que compara diez áreas clave. Los resultados muestran que los pódcasts independientes presentan ocho particularidades notables, destacando la flexibilidad temática, la inversión o la interacción. La radio y los pódcasts de cadenas muestran, en cambio, mayores similitudes entre sí. El trabajo concluye que el podcasting independiente constituye un medio de comunicación singular por su capacidad para abordar temas alternativos, la ausencia de restricciones legales significativas y su democratización en el acceso a la creación de contenido. Los pódcasts de

cadena, sin embargo, reflejan los patrones de la radio. La investigación revela que, aunque ambos formatos comparten un tronco común y utilizan la palabra hablada para hacer llegar mensajes a la audiencia, lo hacen mediante vínculos emocionales diferentes.

Introduction

The problem to which this research provides an answer is to assess the nature of a sound format that is gaining followers every day, but has not yet defined its place in the media landscape. Due to its characteristics, the podcast could be decisive in conditioning the way radio is understood, or represent only a useful resource. Pedrero Esteban et al. (2023, p. 62) indicate that:

The podcast has established itself as a key medium in today's media landscape, offering an intimate and personalized narrative that connects with diverse audiences, from entertainment to education, in a context where traditional radio is losing sync with digital consumption habits.

The appearance of a different media always generates a new link with the audience, attracts new segments of the public and reinforces the assumption of a particular language. In addition, with a different media and a changing audience, the door is open to innovative advertising investment strategies. Let's remember that the media are the main supports used by brands to promote themselves. This is recalled by Rodríguez Ardura (2011, p. 142):

There is a strong symbiosis between advertising and the media. Advertising needs the medium, takes advantage of it, squeezes every last drop of its capacity to provoke and inform. The media needs advertising; advertising revenue is a resource that is hard to refuse.

Although radio maintains a solid position in social customs, it cannot be ruled out that we are at the dawn of a different medium, inspired by radio broadcasting, but with its own characteristics, functions, audience, nature and identity. Costa-Sánchez and Piñero (2022, p. 103) state that:

The podcast is positioned as a disruptive medium in the media ecosystem, as its flexible and accessible format allows creators to experiment with unique narratives, differentiating itself from traditional media by prioritizing authenticity and closeness to the audience,

The main novelty of this work is the approach to which the podcast is subjected, since it is a phenomenon that has been studied from different perspectives, but in general, its expansion, consumption, language and potential have hardly been examined. A review of previous research revealed the existence of a scientific gap, since the essence of the format's character, i.e. its capacity to generate a relationship between the transmitter and the receiver different from the one offered by radio, is often overlooked. Rojas-Torrijos and García Marín (2022, p. 127) state that:

The nature of podcasting lies in its ability to democratize content production, allowing diverse voices to generate authentic and accessible narratives, breaking with the hierarchical structures of traditional media and consolidating itself as a space for communicative innovation.

The justification for this article lies in assuming the importance of whether or not podcasting is a communication medium different from radio. If this format constitutes a different way of communicating with respect to previous ones, it will bring with it a theoretical universe. New forms of communication "create new audiences, have new forms of rhetoric and content and even provide new forms of knowledge" (Cardoso, 2010, p. 128). And, on the other hand, new media "attract innovators, iconoclasts and risk-takers, i.e., some of the most active creative minds" (Manovich, 2005, p. 15).

This research may also break new ground in the study of social interactions and provide guidance on future communication trends. The nature of a medium forces us to review our vision of its use and can lead to unsuspected discoveries. Bonini and Sellas

(2024, pp. 24-30) advance that broadcasting and podcasting "point toward greater personalization and use of immersive technologies such as artificial intelligence and 3D audio."

The main objective of this research is to assess the nature of the podcast as a means of communication different from traditional broadcasting. That is, to determine whether it generates a link between the sender and the receiver other than the one established by the radio. Each media outlet builds its own interaction with its audience, but not only in terms of the language codes that unite them, but also in much deeper aspects such as credibility, influence or validation. If the podcast can provide a novel relationship, it may also generate new approaches that lead us to think of it as more than just an advantageous resource. Santos Díez assumes it (2023, p. 89) when he states that podcasting "redefines the relationship with the public by offering an intimate and personalized experience, where the audience feels directly challenged, fostering an emotional connection that contrasts with the more impersonal nature of traditional media".

Our secondary objective is to compare the distinctive features of podcasting and radio in order to understand their respective reactions to different areas of interest, such as legal aspects, content structuring, financing, etc.

In the background to the problem, in February 2004, British journalist Benjamin Hammersley published an article entitled *Audible revolution* in *The Guardian*, in which he used the term podcast. He did not write this word in the first instance, but when he handed in the note, the proofreaders asked him for one more sentence to complete the text.

Hammersley added: "What might we call this new phenomenon, how about podcast?". Months later, Oxford Dictionary officials contacted him and assured him that they had not located any previous citation of that word and asked him if he himself had read it before. Hammersley said no and, in 2005, the Oxford Dictionary referred to the term -podcast- as the most important entry added to its publication that year. According to Mendoza (2021, p. 26), "amateurism is behind the genesis of podcasting, since many podcasters today recognized, started their projects without sufficient technical knowledge to develop them".

Three aspects contributed to the emergence of the podcast: one technological, one related to accessibility and one historical. Regarding the former, the most widespread audio format of all is the so-called mp3, launched in 1993, which triumphed due to its versatility. Lopez (2015, p.180) adds quality and compatibility:

The mp3 data loss only affects frequencies inaudible to the human ear, so its audio quality is very similar to CD quality. It stands out for its high comprehension capacity and its wide hardware and software compatibility, being the digital audio format par excellence in the Internet world.

Once the technical problem was solved, the second difficulty was accessibility, that is, achieving multiple use of the information contained in an audiovisual document. So, once computer files capable of transporting quality sound were available, how could they be massively consumed and shared? The answer was brought by the concept of syndication, which consists of periodically reviewing files in their download sources to see if any new ones have been added. This is achieved through documents called *feeds*, which are accessed through aggregators.

The third part of the process is of a historical nature, since a success story was needed to attract the attention of the audience, as reported on the UNESCO website in a text by Siobhan McHugh, professor of journalism and co-producer of podcasts. McHugh is referring to the work he developed in 2014 an independent radio program called "Serial" about the murder of a Maryland student, Hae Min Lee. Sarah Koenig, author of the program in podcast format, obtained five million downloads in one month, but also

discovered a way of radio expression. According to McHugh (2016, pp. 65-82), the investigative journalistic approach, combined with an intimate and thoughtful narrative style "not only humanized the news, but also redefined how real stories can be told through audio, inspiring a new generation of podcasters."

Method

To address the problem of this research, a qualitative methodology has been chosen, constructed by means of a "personality test" designed by the authors to test the parallels and differences between radio, podcasts produced by radio networks and those generated by independent podcasters. Moreno García (2023, p. 837) clarifies that:

Independent podcasts stand out in the media landscape for their creative freedom and ability to address niche topics with authenticity, while network podcasts, backed by large platforms or media outlets, tend to prioritize professional production and scalability.

To analyze the differences, the test compares ten areas of interest, configured by a set of criteria that includes accepted notions of what a media means and the functions it fulfills. It is inspired by the conception that some thinkers developed around the concept of communication -Lazarsfeld, Lasswell, Merton or Wright-, the approaches that Dominick develops as characteristics of the media and a decalogue that the British Broadcasting Company proposes to distinguish a radio program from a podcast.

The first step was to review the concept that these theorists ascribe to the media and examine the functions they assign to them. We intended to test whether podcasting is compatible with these functions or simply presents some overlaps. In 1948, Harold Lasswell, an expert on the relationship between media and propaganda, explored these functions in an article entitled "Structure and function of mass communication", identifying three, as Lopez (2004, p.159) reports:

The monitoring of the environment, revealing everything that could threaten or affect the value system of a society; the bringing together of the different parts of society to produce a response to the environment and the transmission of the social inheritance.

With respect to surveillance, Lasswell believes that the media warns of natural hazards, wars or news that may affect the economy and admits to a moralizing role. At the individual level, it refers to opinion leadership and status transmission. It also highlights some dysfunctions, since they promote panic and produce a narcotizing effect. Within the framework of correlation, he believes that the media support mobilization, combat threats to social stability, help preserve power and maintain cultural consensus.

In parallel Abelino (2017, p. 50) points out that "the functions of the media enable standardization and the maintenance of cultural consensus. On the other hand, they reduce the variety of subcultures". Two sociologists, Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton, in their study of the effects of radio during the Second World War, developed between 1940 and 1945, identified an additional function that Lopez (2004, p. 159) picks up "entertainment and complicates the scheme by distinguishing the possibility of dysfunctions, as well as latent and manifest functions". Similarly, in an essay entitled "Functional Analysis and Mass Communication", published in 1960, Charles Wright adopts the four functions and stresses that the media produce mass entertainment, but entail passivity.

So far we have talked about the media, but it is necessary to specify that our work is oriented towards a specific typology: mass communication. Reviewing the works of McLuhan (2009, p. 11), we find that it makes no sense to measure the audience for a

medium to be mass or not since the expression mass media refers "not to the size of the audiences but to the fact that everyone is involved in them at the same time".

This ambiguity is underscored by the ideological component that conditions it. Thus, Lucas (1976, p. 128) believes that the expression *mass society* has no scientific character and the word *mass*, "in spite of its abundant use in sociological writings, does not have a precise meaning and becomes intelligible only when used in a precise context and related to certain kinds of behaviors, institutions and structures". For his part, Parra (2000, p. 131) considers that mass society has already been surpassed and circumscribes it to the audience influenced by cinema, radio or television. For this author, we are already immersed in a "new mass society" framed by globalization.

We speak today of this new mass society because modern communication techniques simultaneously address masses of listeners or viewers who are bombarded with ideas to arouse aspirations or needs through advertising. Artero Muñoz and Martínez Costa (2022, p.55) place the podcast at the epicenter of these changes and believe that "podcasting transforms mass communication by allowing segmented and personalized distribution, challenging the unidirectional model of traditional media and promoting a closer and more participatory dialogue with global audiences".

Another author who has influenced our check table is Dominick (2000, p. 16), who refers to the media as "channels of mass communication. It includes not only the mechanical devices that transmit and sometimes store the message, but also the companies or institutions - public or private - that use these devices to transmit messages." Dominick proposes a series of traits to identify a media outlet and it will be our job to check if the podcast fits them:

- Mass communication is carried out by complex organizations.
- They have gatekeepers.
- They need large resources.
- They are for profit.
- They are highly competitive.

The third pillar on which the table is based is a decalogue that the British Broadcasting Company developed to differentiate a radio program from a podcast. This research has another purpose, but given the quality of the source and the content of the proposal, it is a valuable support. The mention is made by Orrantia (2020, p. 38) and, because of its relevance to this study, it is transcribed below:

- A podcast is not a radio program; even if radio programs are consumed in podcast format.
- For the younger generations, who will never own a radio, podcasts are their radio.
- The story and theme will always be the guide to determine the length of the podcast.
- They are designed for the headphone generation and so we must be respectful, warm and soft inside their heads.
- Be informal, be intimate, but remember that the freedom to use other language is not an obligation.
- Podcasts are a visually powerful form of audio. It is cinema for the ears.
- The "angels" are in the details and the podcasts tell big, emotionally complex stories, real or invented.
- The podcasts offer clarity within the chaos. They offer focus and context.
- They are tribal. They create community. Unen.
- Regardless of where podcasts emerge, digital forms of audio are native worldwide.

With these considerations, we present the criteria that make up the media personality "test" in Table 1.

Table 1

Criteria of the media "personality test" and objectives to be pursued

Differential Aspect	Objective of the Comparison
Legal	Reflect how laws adapt to changing technologies.
Technological	Know the technical solutions used by each format to reach their listeners.
Investment	Compare how resource efficiency is maximized.
Financing	Understand how changes in consumption patterns and technology impact the media industry.
Channel	Clarify how content is distributed within the audience and observe the impact of the audio.
Public interaction	Highlight the parallels and differences in the way of connecting with the public.
Content organization	Observe how their spaces are arranged and verify whether their behaviors are parallel or differ significantly.
Genres	Understand how technological changes and the distribution of sound content influence the way stories are told.
Themes	Clarify aspects such as thematic flexibility, innovation in creation and the difference between fixed programming and on-demand content.
Language	Identify the predominant forms of language because they establish the relationship with the audience.

Note. Table prepared by the authors.

To validate the "personality test" as a methodological tool, author reflexivity, "a method that critically examines the role of the researcher in the construction of knowledge" (Finlay, 2002, p. 531), was used. Through a reflective journal, it was documented how the experience of the main author of this paper, both in the area of professional journalism and in the creation of podcasts, influenced the selection of the ten criteria (legal, channel, language, etc.). It is true that there was an initial inclination towards the hypothesis that podcasts are inherently independent and this led to the prioritization of criteria such as "content organization" or "language", focused on creativity. However, when this bias was identified, the items were adjusted by reviewing the literature on regulation and financing, ensuring greater representativeness.

During the application of the test, we meditated on how to reduce our own influence on the subject, interacting with other journalists and podcasters, who provided balance with different perspectives. It should be noted that there was a much less enthusiastic tendency among journalists than among content creators to consider podcasting as an independent media, a value that has been assumed in the critical spirit of this analysis.

The sample on which the test has been applied has had two aspects, a generic one, since during ten months, numerous radio programs and podcasts of different themes and nature were monitored and listened to. The second route has been more specific, focusing on three podcasts (two independent and one network) and two radio programs (also available as podcasts), which are described in Table 2.

Table 2

Radio programs and podcasts analyzed

	RADIO PROGRAMS			PÓDCASTS	
Title	Weekend with Cristina López Schlichting	It's morning of Federico	Libros de arena (Spain)	Sayonara Baby (Spain)	Let's talk of what does not exist

(Mexico)					
Emitter/ Location	COPE (Spain)	esRadio (Spain)	RNE Audio	Ivoox, Apple Podcasts, YouTube	Spotify, iVoox, Amazon, Apple Podcasts, YouTube
Broadcast	Saturdays and Sundays (10-14 hours)	Monday to Friday (6-12 hours)	Weekly	Variable	Variable
Typology	Magazine	Magazine/ Informative	-	-	-
Financing	Advertising	Advertising	Public, RTVE budgets	Monetization, listener support	Monetization, listener support
Other considerations	Also available in podcast	Also available on podcast	It is also broadcasted on Radio 5	-	-

Note. Table prepared by the authors.

Results and Discussion

The first comparative level is the **legal aspect** that regulates broadcasting and podcast transmissions. Taking the Spanish legal system as a reference, there are complex legal regulations for starting up a radio station, especially if national coverage is sought. In addition, there is one area in which the provisions are vague, and that is timing. The granting of a license has a duration of fifteen years, but does not require deadlines for the state to offer new licenses (or even the same ones). All this gives an idea that broadcasting over the airwaves has legal requirements that are not easy to meet. Gallego and Leyva (2012, p.34) indicate that:

In order to protect the plurality of information, the law establishes a series of restrictions. It is not allowed to directly or indirectly control more than 50% of the hertzian radio administrative licenses, nor more than five licenses in the same area of coverage.

The same is not true for podcasts. Those produced by broadcasters are stored in their own repositories, where listeners can easily locate them, but since they are downloadable sound documents, the legal requirements almost disappear. It is even easier for independent podcasters, who simply deposit their podcasts on their own websites or on hosting platforms created by third parties their own websites or on hosting platforms created by third parties. Campos Freire and Fernández Alonso (2023, p. 19) reaffirm the particularity of podcasting when analyzing its status:

The consumption of podcasts poses new legal challenges in the media landscape, especially around copyright and content regulation, as their decentralized nature complicates the application of traditional regulations designed for mass media.

The platforms only impose minimum standards that have more to do with the inner workings of the website or app than with the regulation itself. In general, they refer to copyright, intellectual property, permitted content and monetization. Spotify states that creators must hold the rights to uploaded content, including music or material from third parties. It also prohibits content that violates local laws or international regulations; allows monetization of podcasts through subscriptions and advertisements, but charges fees and requires compliance with its Monetization Terms.

Ivoox allows creators to control the privacy of their episodes, including restricting content to subscribers, but they must ensure that it does not infringe on third party rights or local laws. Content considered "illegal" is removed.

Apple Podcasts has a stricter approach to content control, especially for paid programs in the Apple Podcasters Program, focusing on copyright, explicit content and regional restrictions. The two independent podcasts analyzed are hosted on one or more of these platforms, while "Libros de arena" is hosted on RNE Audio, Radio Televisión Española's repository.

The second differential aspect—the **form of broadcasting**—is of a technical nature and states that traditional radio transmits by means of electromagnetic waves put into the air by a powerful antenna that are picked up by listeners through their receivers. More precisely, the radio, according to Iglesias (2021, p. 66) "emits sound waves that a receiver picks up and recovers so that the listener only receives the transmitted signal." This definition highlights the technical nature of radio as a one-way transmission system, where the quality of the listener's experience depends on the accuracy of signal retrieval. However, in the current context, where podcasts and digital radio have transformed audio consumption, Iglesias' description could be expanded to include non-traditional formats that transcend conventional sound waves. This observation suggests that, although traditional radio maintains its relevance, its technological evolution poses new challenges for its definition and use in modern communication.

Álvarez-Chávez et al. (2022, p. 773) state that podcasts are "audio files, whose length and style vary according to the needs of the sender and receiver" "are audio files, the length and style of which vary according to the needs of the sender and receiver". In addition, they can be reproduced by means of programs and applications that are intuitive to use and, in many cases, free of charge and accessible in seconds.

Our third measure is **investment**. This aspect is usually high in traditional radio, even for a simple municipal radio station. Expenses start with a legal team to ensure legal management and compliance with regulations to access the license and continue with the provision of a studio to produce programs. In addition, a transmission antenna must be installed, which also requires permits, maintenance, operators, etc. Once this investment has been made, personnel capable of putting it into operation are needed.

The teams of radio companies, warn Gallego and Leyva (2012, p. 38), "have a clear multidisciplinary character, made up of professionals with different profiles and skills who assume all the necessary functions in the production and marketing process: journalists, broadcasters, technicians, IT, commercial, financial, etc."

A valuation by the Exonegocios website estimates an investment of "between five thousand and twenty thousand dollars to start a small but standard radio station that can only cover a limited location, such as a university campus. If we are talking about a medium scale station, but with the appropriate standards and levels, about \$350,000 will be required. But if the claim is to create a large-scale radio station with an unlimited coverage area and outlets in key regions of the United States, a radio chain that intends to sell franchises, then the initial budgetary requirements may have as a starting point no less than two and a half million dollars."

In examining the two radio stations whose programs were analyzed in this study, we found that COPE is the second most listened to general radio station in Spain, with almost 3.7 million daily listeners according to the 2025 General Media Study. Its revenues come from advertising, sponsorships and, to a lesser extent, agreements with religious institutions. There is no public record of its annual budget, although some reports based on data such as infrastructure, the number of local stations or the pension plans of its staff put it at just over twenty million euros.

For its part, Es Radio, being a smaller private company, discloses even less financial information, but again alluding to those reports that calculate figures based on similar data, its annual budget would not reach ten million euros.

When it comes to incorporating programs in podcast format, however, broadcasters do not have these problems because they take advantage of all the infrastructure they already have (studios, microphones, mixing desks, etc.) to produce other sound documents. And in the case of independent podcasters, they have significant competitive advantages: all they need is a computer, a medium-quality microphone and a rudimentary mixing desk, all of which are available for modest investments. We would be talking about amounts between 570 and 1,900 euros with brand new equipment and including subscription to distribution platforms. It was not possible to verify this with Ice Murdock, director of the "Let's talk about what doesn't exist" podcast, but it was possible to do so with Toni Moya, head of "Sayonara Baby", who indicated that "in the beginning, the equipment was minimal, just the bare essentials. At present, with more than two hundred chapters broadcasted and because of my love for technology, I always try to introduce improvements and I am aware of any new developments, but it is not essential to make a good podcast".

The fourth point is **financing** and it is the one with the greatest overlap. Both traditional radio and network podcasts, as well as independent podcasts, cover an important part of their costs through advertising, although this is an increasingly complicated market. Also relevant is the concept of monetization of the podcast, which is carried out not only through advertising promotion, but also through other means such as subscriptions, premium content, donations, crowdfunding or product sales. The first three were identified in the independent podcasts we have studied, "Hablemos de lo que no existe" and "Sayonara Baby", but also in other listening objects such as "Treki 23", "Hilos de Musicología", "Yo Virtualizador" or "Jugones". This is not the case of "Libros de Arena" which, belonging to the platform of Radio Nacional de España, is financed with public money.

Gómez Zurita and Pedrero Esteban (2024, pp. 1-20) admit the difficulties of independent creators to make their products profitable:

Podcast financing in Spain faces a complex landscape, where most of the revenues come from advertising (70% according to 2023 data), although diversification towards subscription and crowdfunding models is gaining relevance, especially among independent creators.

But how much does it cost to broadcast a radio spot? We are talking about a media that is cheaper than the press and extremely cheaper than television. However, the broadcast of a single commercial, even in a program with a large audience, has little effect. Therefore, although the fee for a commercial break can range from 18 to 60 euros for a private broadcaster, to obtain an acceptable result the break must be broadcast a reasonable number of times for a few days. These campaigns depend on the number of broadcasts priced, the time at which they are broadcast and the program in the course of which they are aired.

Public funding should also be pointed out as a solution for state broadcasters, whose survival depends on government budgets, with the servitudes that this entails. Independent podcasts, on the other hand, generate revenue through ads and sponsorships, but offer a more flexible format than radio and are always cheaper.

The fifth comparative level is the **channel** and is shared by all three formats; in this case it is the spoken word. Even the listening liturgy is similar in all three cases. Every day it is more and more unusual to turn the dial in search of a program, scanning through the airwaves, but rather using the scanner to pre-tune the frequency, or applications running

on the cell phone or computer. Once the chosen voice has been found, the charisma of the speaker, the thematic approach, the ability to finish the program, the interest of the data or the revelation of the interviews all come into play. The spoken word transferred to the medium, says Cortés (1998, p. 617), "provokes in the audience a personal relationship thanks to the quality of sound to be introjected, to the possibility for the listener to recreate the message according to his experience, his experiences, his history".

Public interaction is the sixth item and helps to understand the scope of the three formats. The radio has some spaces where the listener can participate live in the broadcasts. This is the case of the two programs we have studied, both "La mañana de Federico" and "Fin de semana con Cristina López Schlichting", usually open a short time to the listener's voice, although in the second case it is limited to banal topics.

It is always a risk and can cause uncomfortable situations, but it also brings closeness to the environment and even generates interesting contributions. Podcasting is more open to these initiatives, both network and independent, and since it is often promoted through social networks, this interaction can go viral. This has its positive side but also its opposite; the massive awakens the interest of advertising, but it is true that it can generate an adverse effect if the reaction of the listener is not as expected.

In one of the independent podcasts we have studied, "Let's talk about what doesn't exist", the host, Ice Murdock, offers listeners the opportunity to tell their own stories or propose topics for future programs. He calls this group of participants The Nocturnal Family. "Sayonara Baby" is also open to suggestions from the public, but you must be a subscriber to participate.

Martínez Costa and Lusarreta (2023, pp. 45-54) point out that podcasting creates a bilateral dynamic "that allows content creators not only to disseminate information, but also to build a relationship of trust and engagement with their audience".

The next criterion is the **organization of content**, ranging from the presentation of programming grids in traditional stations to the spontaneous and almost chaotic broadcasting of independent podcasts. Sellas and Sola (2022) observe an evolution "towards more flexible structures adapted to the demands of digital audiences. Podcast producers prioritize non-linear narratives and episodic formats that allow for greater thematic segmentation".

In September, the radio stations present their season's programming, and the stations' podcasts also maintain a certain order, almost like documentary collections. Independent podcasts, on the other hand, do not follow strict schedules; they appear and disappear according to their needs or as they have new content for their listeners. There are some *podcasters* who, according to Sellas (2022, p. 18), "advocate improvisation and lack of pre-planning as a style."

With respect to the **genres** that predominate -the eighth criterion-, the traditional networks are inclined towards the usual journalistic formulas: information, entertainment and opinion, because they prefer to be recognizable to the audience and to offer what listeners expect in the style of each company. Independent podcasts can be cut to any pattern, they are often unpredictable; sometimes they imitate the style of classic broadcasters, combining speech and tunes, and sometimes they break with the unwritten rules and try new formulas with varying degrees of success. Listeners reward with their attention those who connect with their tastes and move away from proposals they consider less attractive. For Lucas and Garcia (2013, p. 533) "the podcast is very free in topics and styles (...) and although it can be formal, it tends to the opposite".

Something similar happens with the **topics**, which constitute the penultimate section of the test, although it is important to highlight the greater boldness of independent podcasts in the way they approach content, since they are not subject to

ideological or economic barriers. This principle is often transmitted to those who participate as collaborators in the programs and the most tangible example is the interviews. This is what Terán (2021) quotes in an opinion article: "In the freedom of the podcast, unfiltered chatter shines again. The same one that is undervalued by the mass media".

For their part, Fernández-Sinde and Gallego (2023, pp. 123-140) praise the freedom of independent podcasters as it "allows creators to explore hyper-specific content, connecting with segmented audiences and generating active communities that value the authenticity and depth of the topics covered".

The last criterion is the **language** used in the three formats and the fact that conditions each one is the use or not of a style guide. In the case of traditional channels, but also in the case of podcasts produced by them, the use of the manual is mandatory.

Comparative formats	Overlapping aspects	Non-matching aspects
Independent radio / podcast	2	8
Radio / podcast network	5	5
Stand-alone podcast/chain podcast	3	7

This is not meant to imply that this fact is limiting, but a medium of a certain size imposes on its professionals a set of rules that make the chain recognizable. In contrast, freelance podcasters do not usually have a style guide, but work out the imponderables of voiceover as they go along. In the "Sayonara Baby" podcast, we have detected the use of expressions that are a little bit dirty, in an attempt to generate closeness with the audience. Possibly this "style" is intended to emphasize the difference with programs and even podcasts of a formal nature. Again, the intention is not to assess the effect of these decisions, but to record the differences involved. Sabés (2008, p 194) states that a style guide "is an instrument of consensus approved by the medium to be used by the editors".

Some authors such as Pedrero-Esteban and Herrera-Damas (2022, pp. 849-860) note a formula used by independent creators that develops a narrative style that combines spontaneity with carefully designed structures. Its objective would be to "adapt the discourse to niche topics and to the expectations of specific communities, which reinforces listener identification and engagement".

Although its value is indicative, Table 3 shows, as a numerical summary, the parallels and dissimilarities of this analysis.

Table 3
Numerical summary of parallels between radio and podcasting.

Note. Table prepared by the authors.

Taking into account the ten points of comparison and the three formats examined, Table 4 has been constructed to highlight the particularities observed.

Table 4
Differential aspects between radio and podcasting.

Differential aspect	Traditional radio	Podcast chains	Independent podcasts
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Legal	Frequency concession	No prerequisite	No prerequisite
Broadcast	Electromagnetic waves	Through the Internet	Through the Internet
Investment	High	Media	Download
Financing	Advertising / public funds	Advertising / public funds	Advertising / sponsorship / membership / crowdfunding
Channel	Word	Word	Word
Public interaction	Media	Nearby	Very close
Content organization	Programming grid	File repository	Freedom of schedule and extension
Genres	Journalistic	Journalistic	Free
Themes	Generic	Generic and special programs	Total freedom, including variable
Language	Chain style guide	Chain style guide	Very close to the listener

Note. Table prepared by the authors.

Conclusions

The data provided by the "personality test" allow us to draw a series of inferences about the nature of the podcast and its potential entity to value it as an independent medium:

- The table of differential elements indicates that there are eight opposing variables between radio and independent podcasts, which gives a clear idea of the divergent realities in which they operate. Only two areas coincide: the use of words as a communication tool and advertising as the main source of financing. These differences are smaller when we compare radio and podcasts produced by broadcasters, but there are not only smaller differences in number, but also in intensity.

- The independent podcast is a unique and singular means of communication. This format has proven to be more than just an extension of radio. Our study shows that it presents a closer interaction with the public, taking advantage of the flexibility of digital platforms and the absence of significant legal and economic restrictions. This ability to connect with listeners without intermediaries or limitations imposed by large corporations, gives it its own identity as a communication medium. In addition, its independence allows it to address topics and approaches not explored by traditional media, constituting a fresh option for audiences.

- Radio and network podcasts share many similarities. Although network podcasts use digital platforms, their structure and operation still reflect many characteristics of radio. They share elements such as the organization of content in planned formats, the use of style books that guarantee editorial consistency and the use of the existing infrastructure of the radio stations. This allows them to maintain the quality and professionalism of their broadcasts, but limits their innovative capacity.

- Traditional radio requires high investments for licenses, as well as technical infrastructure and specialized personnel, but podcasts have low initial costs. With very

basic equipment, creators can produce quality content. In addition, the absence of complex legal requirements for issuance simplifies the process, which democratizes creation and allows anyone to share their ideas with a global audience.

- Podcasting offers greater thematic and format flexibility. Traditional radio tends to focus on familiar genres and topics, with predefined structures that seek to satisfy the general expectations of the audience. In contrast, podcasts, particularly independent ones, enjoy creative freedom. They can explore niche topics, break with narrative conventions and even vary the length and style depending on the content.

- Digitalization has a transcendental impact on the media. It has transformed communication, and podcasts are an example of this revolution. They have emerged as an accessible, global and adaptable format and have created communities, strengthening the link between senders and receivers. This phenomenon reflects a shift in the consumption of audio content, putting control in the hands of the user.

In view of the above, and in response to the question raised in this article regarding the potential of podcasts as a means of communication other than traditional radio, we can affirm that this is not the case when this product is produced by the large conventional channels. However, the independent podcasts generated by *podcasters* do have enough entity to meet the characteristics of a singular and independent media from traditional radio.

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