The branded podcast as a new brand content strategy. Analysis, trends and classification proposal

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Abstract

Podcasting is all the rage. The distribution of audio content has recently gained great momentum on a personal, media and business level. In this context, brands have begun to see the opportunity to use this communication tool to connect with the audience and generate emotional bonds through attractive content. However, there are still few studies that take a rigorous look at branded podcast. This research explores the phenomenon of podcasting as branded content in Spain and Latin America, making a radiography of the current situation of the branded podcast, from a mixed approach, delimiting its features, observing some trends and making a proposal for classification (according to the type of brand involvement, according to formal criteria and basic descriptors of the podcast, according to content, functional and narrative criteria, and according to the nature of the sponsoring company and its relation to the production of the podcast). The search for and analysis of branded podcasts is the main work of this research, with a sample of 100 podcasts, differentiating the branded podcast from other typologies such as podcast sponsorship, corporate podcasts and institutional podcasts. Among the results we highlight the variety of styles and themes in their own sound content, all of them linked to a greater or lesser extent to the business sector of the companies. In addition, these podcasts are broadcast on their websites and audio platforms and are more educational and informative than entertaining. It is therefore an approach to branded podcasting with a proposal for classification that aims to be a first conceptualisation of this phenomenon.

Keywords

Podcasting; Podcasts; Sound content; Audio; Audio branding; Strategy; Branded content; Branded podcast; Corporate communication; Brands; Digital audio communication.

1. Introduction

At this time of profound changes in the world of communication, especially following the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic crisis, digital audio is booming and constantly evolving, playing a leading role in this unusual communication landscape as a companion during household chores, travel, and other activities (*IAB Spain*, 2020). The successive lockdowns and the increased number of hours that millions of citizens spend daily on modern mobile devices, within the dynamics of today's digital and hyperconnected society, have precipitated a new context for voice. This has already become known as the audification era (**Pedrero-Esteban**, 2021).

For thousands of years, human beings have used sound to communicate and transmit knowledge to their fellow human beings. Over the centuries, the printed word and the image coexisted with the voice and reduced its prominence, although digitalization, mobile phones, and connectivity are restoring its previous relevance (**Legorburu-Hortelano**, 2021). One only has to look at the growing trend for audio use and consumption on social networks through voice channels, for example, on *Telegram* and *WhatsApp*, as well as the proliferation of specific audio chat social networks such as *Clubhouse* or *Stereo*. In addition, the use of smart speakers, audiobooks, and, especially, podcasts is also well recognized (**Ormaechea**; **Fernández-Delkader**, 2019).

> This paper explores the phenomenon of podcasting as branded content, with the aim of capturing the current state of affairs while also detecting some trends

Beyond the personal use of audio as a system of communication between citizens, brands have identified an opportunity to use it in their strategies for a variety purposes. In fact, formats related to voice and digital audio, such as the aforementioned audiobooks, smart speakers, and podcasts, as well as voice assistants, are becoming increasingly important in the brand universe –all this, moreover, in the context of the growing relevance of audio branding for consumers (**Bronner**; **Hirt**, 2009; **Piñeiro-Otero**, 2015; **Minsky**; **Fahey**, 2017; **Puerta**, 2020), that is,

> "the business process of generating the sound expression of a brand" ["*el procedimiento empresarial de generación de la expresión sonora de una marca*"] (**Vidal-Mestre**, 2017, p. 105).

Using sound to increase brand equity has a number of benefits. It offers greater power of attention, improves brand recall, facilitates the transmission of the brand's objectives and values, drives and captures its personality, enhances the experience, and fosters greater emotional loyalty (**Puig-Falcó**, n.d.).

One of the most current of the aforementioned audio formats is the podcast, which first, we can define as the publication or digital audio files, composed of episodes that can be listened to virtually or downloaded, thus differentiating podcasting from on-demand radio and streaming, its most direct technological ancestors (**Gallego-Pérez**, 2010a).

> "Podcasting is more than just an audio or video file on the Web that can be viewed or listened to. This type of technology has been around for many years. [...] what makes podcasting different and more powerful is that it allows the content creator to syndicate their message, and allows the listener to subscribe to that content and consume it at their own leisure" (**Cangialosi**, 2008, p. 9).

It is a new medium or channel for audio communication that has grown continuously in recent times in practically every part of the world, in terms of not only consumption but also demand and creation. Along with its asynchronicity, it is important to highlight its mobility, providing content on digital devices for consumption entirely at will (**De-Lara-González**; **Del-Campo-Cañizares**, 2018).

In Spain, for example, although the trend for podcast consumption was already on the rise, it became even more pronounced from March to April 2020 as a result of the lockdown. This can be seen in reports such as that of *Spotify* (*Reason Why*, n.d.), which revealed that 38% of the Spaniards surveyed had started listening to podcasts as a new form of entertainment since April. In fact, in the first quarter of 2020, its consumption grew by 25% compared with 2019 (*Voxnest*, 2020). On the other hand, the *Pod2021 survey* (2021) –organized by *Podcaster@s*, with the support of *Acast*, *Adonde Media*, *Sonoro*, and *SquadCast*– confirmed that almost 73% of Spanish-language podcast users increased their listening time during the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, according to the *Digital News Report Spain 2021*, podcast consumption has stabilized, with Spain being one of the countries in which they were most popular during the month prior to the survey date at the beginning of 2021. Specifically, they reached 38%, that is, almost four out of every ten Spanish Internet users (**Amoedo**; **Moreno**, 2021). There has also been a notable increase in podcasting platforms, including *SoundCloud*, *Spotify*, *Apple Podcasts*, *Spreaker*, *Audible*, *iVoox*, *Optimo*, and *Megaphone*, for example.

Among audiences, podcasts do not yet seem to be of much interest to younger population groups, such as adolescents (**Pedrero-Esteban**; **Barrios-Rubio**; **Medina-Ávila**, 2019). However, this picture changes in other older age groups. According to *Spotify*'s previous report (2020), 45% of young Spaniards between the ages of 18 and 35 became podcast listeners during the lockdown. This is of particular interest as this is an interesting –and difficult– profile to reach:

> "A new generation, perhaps more removed from radio, but which already sees in this new format an easy, multichannel, and digitally native way of listening to stories, for the most part, much more niche (less mainstream) and designed for listening spontaneously and in installments" ["*Una nueva generación quizá más alejada de la radio pero que ya ve en este nuevo formato una forma fácil, multicanal y nativamente digital de escuchar historias, en su mayoría mucho más nicho (menos mainstream) y pensadas para una escucha más flash y por fascículos*"] (**Cortés**, n.d.).

Brands have not overlooked these findings and are increasingly paying more attention to what is happening with podcasts. Indeed, they themselves are participating and have begun to use and create them to develop branded content –rather than advertising– representing an innovation in their communication and advertising strategy, by adopting them as novel audio channels (**Orrantia**, 2022). This is what is known as a branded podcast, within the scope of branded content, which we can briefly describe as

"a general concept that refers to content generated from and around a brand" ["*un concepto general que se refiere a los contenidos generados a partir y alrededor de una marca*"] (**De-Aguilera-Moyano**; **Baños-González**; **Ramírez-Perdiguero**, 2015, p. 523).

Indeed, as with series, short films, movies, short stories, etc., podcasts are also pieces of branded content, a current corporate communication strategy that

"aims to contribute to the consolidation of a defined and distinctive brand identity, strengthening its ideology and style, conveying what a brand is, not what it sells" ["*busca contribuir a la consolidación de una identidad definida y distintiva de la marca, afianzando su ideología y estilo, transmitiendo lo que es una marca, no lo que vende*"] (**Rogel-del-Hoyo**; **Marcos-Molano**, 2020, p. 68).

The brand's universe is thereby communicated to consumers through various languages.

Podcasts therefore represent a new means of communication that brands can use to reach consumers. Moreover, they know that their production is relatively simple and economical and that this format is highly valued by users. Indeed, according to Ignacio Bernabéu, CEO of *La fábrica de podcast* (*MarketingDirecto.com*, 2020),

> Podcasts represent a new means of communication that brands can use to reach consumers

"there is a greater commitment, emotional intensity and long-term memory with branded podcasts" ["*existe un mayor compromiso, intensidad emocional y memoria a largo plazo con los podcasts de marca*"].

Recent years have witnessed a transition from the sponsorship of podcasts to the creation of original podcasts, a phenomenon that is becoming increasingly common among brands. However, we believe that this medium is still in its infancy and, at the same time, a very attractive format to use, because although a large number of Spanish and global companies already include podcasts in their strategies, we believe that they still have great potential, in either audio or video form (vodcasting). In fact, the consulting firm *Deloitte* (2020) indicates that the podcasting business could grow beyond $3.3 billion by 2025. Isn't it then a good space for brands and their advertising actions?

Although podcasts were introduced some years ago, academic studies on podcasting related to the advertising world and corporate communication are very scarce, at least in Spain. Among such work, one can highlight the doctoral thesis of **Aguayo-López** (2015), the work of **Sellas** (2018) on the "Airline moments" [*Aerolínea momentos*] podcast, a co-production by *Podium Podcast* and *Iberia*; that of *Blink*, the corporate podcast of *BBVA* (**Barbeito-Veloso**; **Perona-Páez**, 2019); or those of *IBEX 35* companies (**Parra-Valcarce**; **Onieva-Mallero**, 2020). However, there is barely any research on branded podcasting, with the exception of **Boracchi** (2020), **Sellas**, **Martínez-Otón** and **Ortega-Seguí** (2021), and **Orrantia** (2022).

1.1. Branded podcast: a necessary definition

The term "podcasting" is a portmanteau of "*iPod*" (*Apple*'s mp3 player) and "broadcasting," although other theories point to various meanings, such as the combination of "personal" or "public on demand (pod)" and "broadcasting" (**Gallego-Pérez**, 2010a). Whatever the case, this term first appeared in an article published in *The Guardian* by Ben Hammersley, a writer specializing in technology, on February 12, 2004 (**Hammersley**, 2004).

Although the dictionary of the *Royal Spanish Academy* does not yet recognize the term "podcast" –instead indicating that it can be adapted to the Spanish language by adding an accent: *pódcast*– other sources such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* do include it, as both a noun and a verb. The definition of the noun is as follows:

"A digital audio file of speech, music, broadcast material, etc., made available on the internet for downloading to a computer or portable media player; a series of such files, new instalments of which can be received by subscribers automatically."

Despite being a current concept, the topic of the branded podcast has barely been analyzed by Academia. However, it has been addressed from a professional point of view –especially by agencies and production companies specializing in audio. For example, *Sherezade Branded Audio*, a content agency focused on the production and distribution of podcasts and voice content for brands, defines it this way:

"It's your brand thinking and acting like a media company, putting on a real show that real people, voluntarily, will spend their valuable time listening to" ["*Es tu marca pensando y actuando como una compañía de medios, haciendo un espectáculo real que personas reales, voluntariamente, pasarán su valioso tiempo escuchando*"] (*Sherazade Branded Audio*, 2020a).

One should clarify that the intention of a branded podcast is not as a mere advertisement by brands to sell or create an image but rather for the brand to to be heard. More than just that, it is the creation of stories and content for these brands. According to the director of *Podium Studios*, María Jesús Espinosa de los Monteros (**Corcobado**, 2019),

"the idea of this format is not to produce podcasts for brands to advertise directly, but rather for these brands to create extraordinary series for their current and potential customers" ["*la idea de este formato no es producir podcasts para que los promocionen directamente las marcas, sino que estas marcas creen series extraordinarias para sus actuales y potenciales clientes*"].

In this sense, we are talking about the generation of content of interest using techniques such as content marketing, branded content, and especially, storytelling (**Fernández-Lores**; **De-Garcillán-López-Rúa**, 2017). In fact, part of the success of a podcast comes from its ability to tell and narrate good stories (**Orrantia**, 2019), which can convey the values and other elements of a brand's identity.

> ' Sound has become an increasingly important element for people and for brands in the current era of audification '

The branded podcast is aimed at a wide, but also targeted, audience since the receivers of this format must be truly interested in listening to them, regardless of whether they are thematically related to the products or services provided by the company. In any case, it must be taken into account that

> "the brand must be identified with the content of the podcast and with the audience at which it is direct, and the format must be aligned with the values and the mission and vision of the company" ["*la marca debe estar identificada con el contenido del podcast y con el público al que va dirigido y el formato debe estar alineado con los valores y la misión y visión de la compañía*"] (*Universo Media*, n.d.).

For Kevin Geets, CEO of *Madzuli Agency*, the underlying objectives of brands that broadcast podcasts include generating brand awareness, engagement, and brand positioning. In addition, other reasons may be to share information, increase site traffic, increase revenue sources, or create an online community. Thus, according to the cited author, brands are relying on podcasts to create an emotional bond with the target audience, generate a conversation about recent news and topics of interest, help position the brand as an expert in the sector of such topics, and reach the interested target audience in an easier way, thanks to podcast directories (**Geets**, 2019). In short, the branded podcast

> "will provide knowledge, information, or entertainment to society and clients, and potential clients will spend time listening to it and indirectly identifying with the brand, with the benefits that this entails" ["*aportará conocimiento, información o entretenimiento a la sociedad y los clientes y clientes potenciales pasarán tiempo escuchándolo e identificándose indirectamente con la marca, con los beneficios que esto supone*"] (*Universo Media*, n.d.).

1.2. Recent history of the branded podcast: advantages and opportunities

Together with his team, Steve Pratt, co-founder of *Pacific Content* –a Canadian podcasting services company– popularized the term "branded podcast" starting from 2015 (**Espinosa-de-los-Monteros**, 2020). Their first product was the podcast series launched for *Slack*, *Slack variety pack*, a creative and fun concept they called a branded podcast. At that time, it seems this was something unique: a brand that made a podcast. However, from that point on, other companies such as *Gimlet Creative*, *Panoply*, *Pineapple Street,* and *Midroll* started to produce branded podcasts, as well, and the term went global. It was in 2017 that *Pacific Content* abandoned this concept because they believed that the term "brand" would deter part of the audience, who might think that their content was second-rate and more similar to a marketing piece than a customer-focused program. **Pratt** (2018) himself announced the death of the concept of the branded podcast and, in its place, began to talk about original podcasts with brands, thus trying to reaffirm their character of collaboration and teamwork with customers.

Since then, their success has been remarkable. One of the most listened to, and also considered to be the first major branded podcast*,* is *The message*, an audio series launched in 2015 and produced by the agency *BBDO* and *Panoply* for *General Electric*.

Alongside this, a number of podcasting companies and production companies have sprung up around the world. In regard to Spain, one should mention *Podium Podcast*, launched in June 2016 by *Prisa Radio*. In addition, *Podium Studios*, an audio production company focused on branded content and audio branding, emerged in 2019 (*Prisa*, 2019).

As we argue, since the creation of podcasting and its application in the field of advertising, audio content for brands has grown continuously, although it is true that lately brands seem to be focusing more attention on creating their own podcasts, also in line with the new habits and tastes of their potential customers. This relates to audio series composed of several episodes with stories to entertain, that can be listened to in a relaxed way, without hurrying, while doing another activity. This is thus the opposite of fast content. What takes precedence here is having interesting content, which does not necessarily have to be linked to current events, for the audience. In conclusion, these are stories with a hook to be listened to voluntarily by listeners, making this format or medium unintrusive.

According to Espinosa de los Monteros, there are several reasons that incline brands toward opting for branded podcasts over other advertising formats:

> "It complements your content strategy, it creates loyalty in a very different way from other media, it goes directly to the ears of your clients, it is a convenient format because it does not have a schedule and can be combined with other activities, it is still an incipient medium and therefore has much greater visibility, and besides it is a format with potential, so opting for a branded podcast differentiates us from the competition." ["*Complementa su estrategia de contenidos, crea fidelización de forma muy diferente a la de otros medios, va directamente a los oídos de sus clientes, es un formato cómodo porque no tiene horario y se puede compaginar con otras activida-*

des, es un medio aún incipiente y por ello tiene mucha mayor visibilidad y además es un formato por explotar, por lo que apostar por el branded podcast nos diferencia de la competencia."] (**Corcobado**, 2019)

Thus, podcasts –and specifically audio podcasts– offer a number of advantages for brands. For example, one can highlight the ease and cost-effectiveness of their production and editing, more so than for other audiovisual formats, while not requiring significant effort, since the equipment and technological means for recording are affordable; they also help to build long-term audience loyalty and, finally, they increase brand recall (**Llonch**, 2019). In addition, by creating or participating in podcasts, brands have guaranteed control over their content, as well as their distribution on different platforms. Another important point is their ability to reach new, specific audiences, because as mentioned above, these are audiences that are truly interested in this audio content, whether fiction, entertainment, outreach, etc. To this point, in accordance with the founder of the podcast production company *Yes we cast*, Francisco Izuzquiza, we share the idea that

"advertisers and communication platforms are finding that podcasts have a very loyal audience, so their investments enjoy good returns with the right strategies" ["*anunciantes y plataformas de comunicación están encontrando que los podcasts tienen una audiencia muy fiel, por lo que sus inversiones tienen buenos retornos con las estrategias correctas*"] (**Gaspar**, 2020).

At *Sherezade Branded Audio*, they point out two important characteristics that lead brands to opt for podcasts. The first is the degree to which the connection between brand and audience is deepened, since by listening to the different episodes of the podcast, they end up spending a considerable amount of time with a brand, with a better impact on the topics and issues being perceived than can be attained via social networks or video content. Meanwhile, according to the very nature of podcasting, listeners and target audiences of brands can voluntarily decide whether they want to listen to these podcasts and engage with brands through them, something that does not happen in advertising campaigns based on interruption and intrusion. Thus, they conclude that

"a brand should think like a media company that builds its own audience over time rather than stealing time from it for a moment" ["*una marca debería pensar como una empresa de medios de comunicación que construye su propia audiencia a lo largo del tiempo en lugar de robarle tiempo por un momento*"] (*Sherazade Branded Audio*, 2021).

2. Objectives and methodology

This paper explores the phenomenon of podcasting as branded content, with the aim of capturing the current state of affairs while also detecting some trends. Considering the above considerations, it can be stated that there is no single type of branded podcast; rather, we find a wide diversity of branded podcasts with their own characteristics and features. The objective of this research is thus to propose a classification structure for branded podcasts that allows us:

a) to cover the largest possible number of branded podcasts;

b) to regroup these audio productions into homogeneous categories according to objective discriminating criteria; and

c) to establish the attributes and delimitations that characterize each of these categories.

This work is based on the premise that branded content, in general, and branded podcast, in particular, are booming and that more and more brands are opting for this type of strategy to connect with audiences and create engagement and lasting emotional bonds.

This topic is relatively new and insufficiently studied, so this research is exploratory, adopting a mixed approach. In a first phase, we approached the phenomenon of branded podcast by using a qualitative methodology. On one side, we conducted a narrative review of the sparse scientific literature that currently exists on the subject to understand the state of affairs of the object of study and set out the theoretical and conceptual framework of our research. This review, with an open and flexible structure, included both full-text papers and articles, identified using the *Google Scholar*, *Dialnet*, and *ISOC* (*InDICEs.CSIC*) databases, as well as digital publications and specialized web portals using *Google*'s general search and news search options. This search was carried out in both Spanish and English, using the search terms "branded podcast," "audio branding," "*branding sonoro*," "podcast" [*pódcast*], and "digital audio" [*audio digital*]. Although a date limit was not applied, the results obtained are not from before 2008, with the majority being from after 2018, again indicating the novelty of this phenomenon.

On the other side, we carried out a search and analysis of branded audio content in the podcasting sphere through an exploratory phenomenological study, to identify the descriptors required to propose a valid classification. We used nonparticipant observation to develop conceptualizations, recognize properties and dimensions, and inductively categorize the data. The constant comparative method (**Glaser**; **Strauss**, 1967) served as a guide for this qualitative research, especially with regard to sampling and theoretical saturation, since these aspects are fundamental when carrying out the data collection and analysis process simultaneously. The sampling aimed to capture the variety and dimension of the phenomenon, with the

> Companies have started to create their own programs with audio content of all kinds in an attempt to connect with their audiences, increase their brand recognition, and generate engagement

goal of describing it in the most comprehensive fashion. The size of the sample in this case is defined not by probabilistic calculations but rather by theoretical saturation criteria, that is, when collection of additional data does not add significant information to what is already available.

We carried out this research using a quantitative approach to the phenomenon, choosing to carry out a numerical quantification of the elements studied, classified in each of the identified categories, to determine their scope as well as the most popular trends and types.

The most important task to carry out in this work was the search for and identification of branded podcasts. At this stage, it was important to determine whether we were actually dealing with a branded podcast offering, which is indeed our object of study, or a podcast sponsorship, corporate podcast, or other type of podcast such as those from public institutions. This fieldwork, carried out from August to December 2021, focused on branded podcasting in the Spanish and Latin American landscape. Overall, we obtained a set of 100 podcasts ($n = 100$) from 63 different brands, with more than 2,000 episodes in total, that fit our object of study and thus represent the research sample. As mentioned above, in selecting these, a nonprobabilistic convenience sample was chosen, since there is no sampling framework, that is, no complete, updated, and reliable list of all the branded podcasts on the market. Thus, we do not know the number of elements that make up this universe, making it unfeasible to determine a representative sample. Indeed, this work aims to provide insight in this regard by proposing a list of 100 elements chosen after a thorough search and verification based on the sampling assumptions and theoretical saturation approach explained above. Attentive listening was used as a content analysis technique (**Rodríguez-Reséndiz**, 2022) of these audio files as an essential method to analyze their main characteristics and determine their nature and role as a communication strategy of the promoting brand.

We begin the study of this content by considering the formal aspects and basic descriptors of the multimedia file. We examined the podcast by observing the function, subject matter, and format chosen, also taking into account other variables of audiovisual narratives (**Moreno**, 2003), multiplatform production (**Bolin**, 2010), and transmedia narratives (**Jenkins**, 2003; 2006; 2006; 2008; 2009). Finally, we analyzed the nature of the promoting brand and its link to the subject matter of the podcast.

This approach led to a classification proposal that aims to provide a first conceptualization of this phenomenon, also quantifying it based on the (absolute) frequencies found (n_i) for each category. To build the framework of our taxonomy and determine the criteria that would be useful in establishing the categories, we found the following research and studies to be useful: **Arense-Gómez**, **Terol-Bolinches**, and **Pedrero-Esteban** (2019) on the indexing taxonomy of podcasts; that of **Gallego-Pérez** (2010a) on the forms of distribution of audio content on the Internet, based on his doctoral thesis (2010b); that of **Piñeiro-Otero** (2021), which proposes a classification of feminist podcasts; that of **Martí-i-Martí** and **Ribes-i-Guàrdia** (2018) on the typology of radio podcasts in Spain; that of **Cabeza-de-Vaca-Ruiz** (2019), which proposes a thematic classification of podcasts; that of **Beltrán-Ferreira** (2017), which analyzes the case of *Podium Podcast*; and that of **López-Villafranca** (2019), which addresses audio fiction in public radio and the *Podium Podcast* platform, among others.

3. Results: a taxonomy of the branded podcast

3.1. According to the type of participation of the brand in the production and distribution of the podcast

We must emphasize an idea mentioned above and that is crucial to tighten the definition of the branded podcast: It is easy to confuse this type of content with other similar ones such as sponsorship of podcasts, corporate podcasts, or those from public institutions. We therefore began our study by analyzing the nature of brand participation and involvement in podcast production and distribution, selecting only branded podcasts for this work.

Podcast sponsorship involves a relationship between the content producer and the sponsoring brand, who enter into a partnership agreement. According to **Sellas**, **Martínez-Otón**, and **Ortega-Seguí** (2021), through sponsorship, products are advertised and advertising is inserted into existing content (within programs), with the brand seeking a sponsor. This sponsorship may be per episode, in packages of episodes, or annual or for longer periods. In addition, each of these can include a minimum duration and number of mentions of the brand, which normally occur at three time points*:* pre-roll, i.e., during the introduction of the podcast; mid-roll, i.e., in the middle of the podcast and usually with a longer duration; or post-roll, briefly at the end of an episode. In this sense, metrics are of great importance when it comes to setting rates and measuring the effectiveness of these marketing actions. Metrics in the podcasting universe are usually based on the average number of listens for each episode, the number of downloads, or the number of subscribers; even so, it is

difficult to measure the real return on investment (ROI), even more so considering that podcasts are eternal and many people may listen to them long after the sponsorship relationship ends. However, beyond the recovery of the investment, these types of actions taken by brands are usually very positive in terms of branding, achieving greater visibility and recognition.

> We designed a classification proposal that is able to cover the broad nature of these programs, defining specific and useful parameters that will serve as a basis for future research in this field

As an example of sponsorship, we can mention the case of *Spotify*, which launched an original Spanish-language podcast series entitled "Come and tell a story" [*Ven con un cuento*] in December 2018, sponsored by *Vodafone*. The sponsorship of this series was integrated into the audio format of the podcast itself, with the presenter mentioning *Vodafone Pass* at both the beginning and

> *According to the type of participation of the brand, we distinguish the branded podcast from the sponsored podcast, the corporate podcast, and the institutional podcast*

the end of each of the seven stories. Another recent example is the *Runnea* podcast, specifically on April 24, 2021, when the sports brand *Puma* exclusively sponsored that episode. The supermarket chain *Mercadona* was also the sponsor of a set of 10 episodes under the title "What do sportsmen and women eat?" [*¿Qué come un deportista?*], which kicked off on May 27, 2021, on *Eurosport.es* and ended on July 22, one day before the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Olympics.

The difference between podcast sponsorship and branded podcast is that the latter, as mentioned above, is branded content created by the brand, that is, a program produced by the company and aimed at listeners, thus turning customers into an audience. Meanwhile, a branded podcast brings value to the brand through new content created together with the brand or with production companies. In this case, without the presence of the brand, the podcast would be meaningless, whereas if there were no sponsorship, the program or episodes would still work. To provide a few examples, one can cite the branded podcasts "Chronicles of the future" [*Crónicas del futuro*] (*Coca-Cola*), "Be wherever you are" [*Estar donde estés*] (*Banco Sabadell*), FutbAll (*Iberdrola*), or "Airline moments" [*Aerolínea momentos*] (*Iberia*). There are many examples of branded content today, as it is a growing trend, each having different characteristics and features that we will define below.

The corporate or company podcast is distinguished by the fact that it focuses not on customers or the general public but rather on the company's own employees and members. Many companies use it as an internal communication channel, as a way to build company culture, as a method for learning strategies and skills development, as a sign of engagement with new employees, and to differentiate themselves (*Sherazade Branded Audio*, 2020b). Thus, in this format,

> "they talk about the business, its employees, the products and services it offers, its objectives and mission or they tell stories about the company" ["*se habla del negocio, de sus trabajadores, de los productos y servicios que ofrece, de sus objetivos y su misión o se cuentan historias de la compañía*"] (*Universo Media*, n.d.).

We identified a clear example of this type of podcasting in the action carried out by *Ernst & Young* (*EY*) coinciding with the start of the lockdown in Spain owing to the pandemic in 2020, when most of its employees began to telework. They then launched *#EYPodcast: the radio of the #EYFamily*, with the aim of providing a nexus for workers to keep up to date with company news. Another example is "*Uber* radio" [*Frecuencia Uber*], the podcast for driver-partners from the ride-sharing company *Uber* in Argentina. Although the majority of corporate podcasts are usually external and open to the general public, regardless of whether or not they are employees of the company, note that this typology also includes internal podcasts that are only accessible to employees, through either internal platforms and intranets or other distribution channels or messaging services such as *Telegram*.

Meanwhile, an institutional podcast is like a branded podcast but comes from a public organization or administration. In fact, their subject matter may be related more or less to matters that fall within the purview of the institution. We cite here "The art of knowhow" [*El arte del saber hacer*], a podcast from the Spanish *Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Food*, which promotes the consumption of foods from the Spain; "A health podcast" [*Un podcast de salud*] from the *Reina Sofía University Hospital* (Córdoba), which offers information of interest to the general population, patients, and professionals; and "Terrace Europe" [*Terraza Europa*] from the *European Parliament Office in Spain*, which helps listeners learn more about Europe.

3.2. According to formal criteria and basic descriptors of the podcast

Regarding aspects related to the form and presentation of podcasts shown in Table 1, we first focus attention on the periodicity of the broadcasting of the episodes. Most of the podcasts (60) are high frequency, appearing weekly or fortnightly, whereas fewer appear at low frequency such as every month or longer (16) and even fewer with irregular frequency (24), i.e., at random or with undefined periodicity.

In this sense, we identified podcasts that are broadcast weekly with strict regularity, such as *Vets&Clinics* (*Advance*), which makes podcasts with highly qualified content available to the veterinary community; "Nothing like that" [*Nada que ver*] (*Netflix*) from Mexico, available to all Latin America, which offers reviews of new series and movies on the platform; "Historical curiosities" [*Curiosidades de la historia*] (*National Geographic*), where some of the most interesting moments in history are recounted; "Inspirational Monday" [*Lunes inspiradores*] (*Cyberclick*), a program that seeks to help establish a business culture based on happiness; and *FutbAll* (*Iberdrola*), the first program dedicated to women's soccer in Spain. "Learning together" [*Aprendemos juntos*] from *BBVA* and "*Telefonica Foundation* connections" [*Encuentros Fundación Telefónica*] from *Espacio Fundación Telefónica* have an even faster publication rate, around twice per week, the highest frequency among the branded podcasts analyzed. "Daily economy" [*Economía cotidiana*] from *CaixaBank*, "The near future" [*Un futuro cercano*] from *Correos*, and "Think then act" [*Pienso, luego actúo*] from *Yoigo* offer their listeners new content every two weeks, with fortnightly frequency also being quite frequent.

However, it is much more difficult to find branded podcasts with a frequency every month or longer; these include "Simple and effective" [*Sencillo y efectivo*] and "Voices" [*Voces*] (*BBVA*). The frequency of publication is usually weekly or biweekly, albeit with breaks on some dates, owing to either holidays or the end of a program's season. It is somewhat more common to find podcasts with an irregular frequency, where a well-defined periodicity was not observed, publishing for example three episodes in one month, one in another, and none in the following month. As examples of this type, we mention "Better to be connected" [*Mejor conectados*] from *Telefónica*, which published five episodes per month and fewer in the following ones, or "Let's open the opera" [*Abrimos la ópera*] from *Endesa*, which broadcasts between one and five episodes per month.

Another criterion we can consider when describing branded podcasts is the average duration of each episode. Of the five categories defined (short, medium, long, very long, and of irregular duration), podcasts of medium duration (57), with episodes ranging from 10 to 30 minutes, were most prevalent. Long duration, between 30 and 60 minutes, was found in 12 cases, whereas short (less than 10 minutes) or very long (more than 60 minutes) podcasts were less common, with 7 and 6 cases, respectively. Finally, 18 podcasts fell into the category of irregular duration, having episodes of very different lengths.

Examples of short podcasts were found in episodes of "Hit 'play'" [*Dale al play*] by *Fisher-Price* and "A sustainable future" [*Futuro Sostenible*] and "Creating the future" [*Creando futuro*], both by *BBVA*, all of which are between six and eight minutes long. The "Podcast about climate change" [*Podcast sobre cambio climático*] from *Iberdrola*, "We move forward when we're connected" [*Conectados progresamos*] from *Telefónica*, "Accents" [*Acentos*] from *BBVA*, and *Moving forward* from *SEAT* are podcasts that last between 10 and 30 minutes, and we classify them as of medium length. Long audio content, from 30 minutes to an hour, includes "Sports market" [*La bolsa de deporte*] by *Mapfre*, "Who decides?" [*¿Quién decide?*] by *Seagram's Gin*, and "White noise" [*Ruido blanco*] by *Greenpeace*. Very long podcasts such as *Noosfera* from *La Razón* or "Direct marketing" [*Marketing directo*] from *MarketingDirecto.com* exceed one hour in length. Finally, *L'Orèal Mexico*'s podcast, "Cultural world" [*Ámbito cultural*] from *El Corte Inglés*, and "Perspectives" [*Perspectivas*] from *BBVA* are examples of podcasts of irregular duration.

Regarding the distribution platforms used by brands to publish their podcasts, it is most common for them to use a combination of those that exist in the market to give the content greater visibility and adapt to audience preferences; this occurs for the vast majority of the analyzed podcasts (92), as it is common for the podcast to be located on the brand's own website; in audio aggregators such as *Apple Podcasts*, *iVoox*, *Listen Notes*, *Google Podcasts*, and *Audible*; as well as music platforms such as *Spotify* or *SoundCloud*. This is the case, for example, with "Financial education" [*Edufin*] (*BBVA*), "Efficiently" [*Eficientemente*] (*Endesa*), and *Beauty talks* (*Sephora*). Without being strictly a podcast channel, some brands also host their audio content on *YouTube*, as is the case with "Positive energy" [*Energía en positivo*] (*Naturgy*).

On the other hand, few brands choose to use a single broadcast medium for their podcasts. Of the remaining 8 podcasts, 3 are located exclusively on the company's website –"What do sportsmen and women eat? [*¿Qué come un deportista?*] by *Mercadona*, the "Podcast about climate change" [*Podcast sobre cambio climático*] by *Iberdrola*, and *LearnEnglish podcasts* by the *British Council*– whereas 5 are found only on audio aggregators –"Against food wastage" [*Contra el desperdicio de alimentos*] by *Covirán*, "Cities in 48 hours" [*Ciudades en 48 horas*] by *Guía Repsol*, *Digital explained* by *ISDI*, *Field of stars* by *Real Madrid Football Club*, and "Innovation today" [*Innovación al día*] by *Red de Institutos Tecnológicos de la Comunidad Valenciana* (*Redit*). In our study, we did not find podcasts located exclusively on music platforms or elsewhere.

Table 1. Categorization according to formal criteria and basic descriptors

		Absolute frequency (n_i)
Periodicity	1. High frequency (weekly or biweekly) 2. Low frequency (monthly, bimonthly, or quarterly) 3. Irregular frequency (no defined periodicity)	60 16 24
Average duration	1. Short (less than 10 minutes) 2. Medium (between 10 and 30 minutes) 3. Long (between 30 and 60 minutes) 4. Very long (more than 60 minutes) 5. Irregular	7 57 12 6 18
Distribution platform	1. Audio aggregators (*Apple Podcasts*, *Spreaker*, *Audible*, *Listen Notes*, *iVoox*, *Google Podcasts*, etc.) 2. Music platforms (*Spotify*, *Deezer*, *SoundCloud*, etc.) 3. Own website or platform 4. Combination of various distribution platforms 5. Other	5 0 3 92 0

3.3. According to content, functional, and narrative criteria

We can classify the content offered by brands in their podcasts according to their function and purpose (**De-Fontcuberta**, 1993; **Calvi**, 2006), which are typically divided into one of three: informing, educating, and entertaining. Of the three categories considered, informative podcasts, whose mission is to educate and train, are the most abundant in the sam-

ple analyzed (57 cases), while those that seek to entertain, through fictional or nonfictional means, total 40. Podcasts whose objective is to inform are less prominent, with only 3 instances.

The informative branded podcast has a style similar to journalism, reporting news and current events, as in "White noise" [*Ruido blanco*] by *Greenpeace* and *FutbALL* by *Iberdrola*, or addressing an issue in great detail and with journalistic rigor, as in "On death row" [*En el corredor de la muerte*] by *Movistar+*, which is a journalistic investigation of Pablo Ibar, the Spanish-American who was sentenced to life imprisonment. The education and training of audiences, as indicated above, is a function that is very present in many of the branded podcasts, such as "Learning together" [*Aprendemos juntos*] from *BBVA*, about education for a better life; "Financial education" [*Edufin*] or "Accents" [*Acentos*], both also from *BBVA*, about financial education; "Chats" [*Charlas*] from *Fisher-Price*, an informative podcast in which experts in parent coaching and influencers share their experiences as parents; "Share as a family" [*Compartir en familia*] from *Santillana*, about the education of children and the family; and "Digital evolution" [*Evolución digital*] from *Vodafone*, which helps companies face the challenge of digital transformation. Offerings of branded podcasts for entertainment, which can fall into the genre of fiction or nonfiction, are becoming increasingly frequent. As an example of the former, we mention "Penelope's quests" [*Las pesquisas de Penélope*] by *Hermès*, which tells the adventures of the detective Penelope, or "100 years on the metro" [*100 años en Metro*], an audio fiction podcast that covers the 100 years of history of the Madrid metro. Some nonfiction entertainment branded podcasts are, for example, "Not so bad" [*Ni tan mal*] by *BBVA*, *Discoforum* by *Estrella Damm*, or "In Carlos Soria's mind" [*En la cabeza de Carlos Soria*] by *Correos*.

The theme of a podcast is the common thread and link between the different episodes that make up the program. It is not easy to establish a list of common topics in branded podcasts, as there may be an infinite number; however, we propose about twenty topics (**Rodríguez-Reséndiz**, 2022; **Cabeza-de-Vaca-Ruiz**, 2019; **García-Marín**; **Aparici**, 2018), which are included in Table 2 to serve as a guide to label existing branded podcasts. For example, in current affairs, news, and events (2 podcasts), we have "White noise" [*Ruido blanco*] from *Greenpeace* and "On death row" [*En el corredor de la muerte*] from *Movistar+.* In science, technology, and internet (8 podcasts), there are "Innovation daily" [*Innovación al día*] from *Redit*, *OpenMind* and "Data stories" [*Data historias*] from *BBVA*, and *Noosfera* from *La Razón.* In sports, video games, and e-sports (6 podcasts), we have, among others, *FutbAll* from *Iberdrola*, "Morse sound" [*Sonido Morse*] from *Mahou*, "The last on the list" [*Los últimos de la lista*] from *AS Audio*, and "Field of stars" [*Campo de estrellas*] from *Real Madrid Football Club*. "Hit 'play'" [*Dale al play*] and "Chats" [*Charlas*] by *Fisher-Price* and "Share as a family" [*Compartir en familia*] by *Santillana* fall into the category of education and pedagogy (5 podcasts). Content related to audio fiction and audiobooks (10 podcasts), such as "*Hermès*' world" [*Podcasts de le monde d'Hermès*] (*Hermès*), "The power of the web" [*El poder de la red*] (*Vodafone*), "Tales of digital humanism" [*Historias sobre humanismo digital*] (*Bankia*), "Welcome to a dangerous life" [*Bienvenido a la vida peligrosa*] (*BP*), and "Airline moments" [*Aerolínea momentos*] (*Iberia*), are more prevalent.

"Radical curiosity" [*Curiosidad radical*] from *Fundación Espacio Telefónica* and "Historical curiosities" [*Curiosidades de la historia*] from *National Geographic* are history, art, and humanities podcasts. We classify "Not so bad" [*Ni tal mal*] (*BBVA*) and "The *Chanel* podcast" [*El podcast de Chanel*] (*Chanel*) as humor and entertainment. Within the languages category, for learning a new language, we only found the *LearnEnglish* podcast from the *British Council*. There are also 2 children's podcasts: "Baby on board" [*Bebé a bordo*] from *Fisher-Price* and "Christmas stories" [*Cuentos de Navidad*] from *El Corte Inglés.* Some examples of literature, culture, and journalism (7 podcasts) are *Fundación BBVA Perú* by *BBVA*, *Hotel Jorge Juan* by *Seagram's Gin*, and "*Telefonica Foundation* connections" [*Encuentros Fundación Telefónica*] by *Espacio Fundación Telefónica*. The well-populated category of marketing and business (10 podcasts) includes "Sharing knowledge" [*Compartiendo conocimiento*] by *BBVA*, "Digital evolution" [*Evolución digital*] by *Vodafone Business*, and "Focuses" [*Enfocados*] by *BCMA Spain*. Meanwhile, content about the environment and sustainability (5 podcasts) includes "Oxygen" [*Oxigen*] and "Positive energy" [*Energía en positivo*] by *Naturgy* and one on climate change by *Iberdrola*. The music category (4 podcasts) includes *Discoforum* (*Estrella Damm*), "Singing the top 40" [*Cantando las 40*] (Los 40 Principales), "Enjoyable" [*Placentera*] (*Fisher-Price*), and "Let's open the opera" [*Abrimos la ópera*] (*Endesa*).

The topics of politics, finance, and economics are present in 10 podcasts, such as "Be wherever you are" [*Estar donde estés*] (*Banco Sabadell*), "Daily economy" [*Economía cotidiana*] by *CaixaBank*, and some of those from *BBVA*, such as *Blink*, "Accents" [*Acentos*], and "Perspectives" [*Perspectivas*]*.* The podcasts about psychology, personal growth, and self-help (6 podcasts) are "Agile snippets" [*Píldoras Agile*] by *BBVA* and "When resting is a dream" [*Cuando el descanso es un sueño*] by *IKEA*. More frequently found is content dealing with society, health, home, and consumption (12 podcasts), as in "I'll start tomorrow" [*Mañana empiezo*] by *Krissia*, *The lab* by *Sanitas*, or "Loving technology" [*Por un uso Love de la tecnología*] by *Orange*. "Cities in 48 hours" [*Ciudades en 48 horas*] by *Guía Repsol*, "*National Geographic* travellers" [*Viajeros National Geographic*] by *National Geographic Spain*, and "The near future" [*Un futuro cercano*] by *Correos* are three of the four podcasts about travel, leisure, and popular culture. In the last category, we include three podcasts on different topics, such as *Advance*'s podcast about veterinary medicine, "I want to change the tiles" [*Quiero renovar el tejado*] by *BMI*, and *The impulse* by *Cupra*. Finally, there is a thematic line that, although it

> ' Branded podcast remain at an initial stage of development, at least in Spain and Latin America, despite the advantages and the attractive nature of the format '

has been included, we do not illustrate with examples, as we did not identify any branded podcasts that dealt specifically with spirituality and religion. However, it is likely that, in the national and international content, such branded podcasts with this content will exist.

Establishing a typology of podcast formats is a complex task for which we found little literature and even less

> Brands offer their audiences original audio content with a wide variety of styles and topics that may be linked, to a greater or lesser extent, to the company's sector

consensus. In an attempt to provide a sufficiently broad and flexible list that fits the current state of podcasting, we established a total of seven formats from among those proposed by **Leonard** (2017). The formats most prevalent in our analysis were magazines (28 podcasts) and those with interviews (24), followed in order by panel or discussion (16), narrative fiction or radio art (14), narrative or creative nonfiction (10), solo commentary, monologue, or discussion (6), and content reused from other situations (2 podcasts).

The magazine-type hybrid format is the most widely used owing to its versatility, and it is the one used in *The impulse* from *Cupra*, "Focuses" [*Enfocados*] from *BCMA Spain*, and "Building your business's future" [*Construyendo el futuro de tu negocio*] from *AXA*. The other leading genre is the interview, which can be seen in podcasts such as *Deep talks*, "Creating the future" [*Creando futuro*], and *Design Wednesday* by *BBVA*; "The *Chanel* podcast" [*El podcast de Chanel*] by *Chanel*, and "Profiles" [*Perfiles*] by *Catalana Occidente*. The panel, discussion, or talk show is another of the most popular formats and can be found in "Cultural world" [*Ámbito cultural*] (*El Corte Inglés*), "Who decides" [*¿Quién decide?*] (*Seagram's Gin*), or "Hit 'play'" [*Dale al play*] (*Fisher-Price*). Narrative nonfiction includes documentaries or reports such as "Historical curiosities" [*Curiosidades de la historia*] from *National Geographic* and "On death row" [*En el corredor de la muerte*] from *Movistar+*. A format on the rise is narrative fiction, also known as radio art, which we have already referred to in previous sections and illustrated with numerous examples. The solo commentary, monologue, or discussion format is that used in *Vets&Clinics* from *Advance* and "Sustainable future" [*Futuro sostenible*] from *BBVA*. The final format we propose is called reused content and consists of, for example, live talks or live events that are subsequently uploaded as podcasts, such as "Martian radio" [*Onda marciana*] from *Espacio Fundación Telefónica* and "Direct marketing" [*Marketing directo*] from *MarketingDirecto.com*.

For branded podcasts, there are different options when it comes to establishing a host and/or presenter of the audio content, a role more commonly performed by personnel outside the brand (61 podcasts) –in the following order: journalists and communication professionals (41 podcasts), experts and disseminators (10), personalities and celebrities (1), and others (9)– than a company's own personnel (34) or a combination thereof (5). For example, "In first person" [*En primera persona*], the *Google News* podcast, is a show that analyzes Latin American journalism through the voices of journalists who are widely recognized for their excellence and leadership. A science expert is the host of *Orange*'s "Hello planet" [*Hola planeta*] program, a podcast about sustainability and technology. "When resting is a dream" [*Cuando el descanso es un sueño*] from *IKEA* is hosted by actress Llum Barrera, and among other examples, we highlight "Diary of a teacher" [*Diario de una docente*] from *Santillana*.

There are also brands that choose to put their employees and company personnel in charge of their podcast and have them act as its main voice, as is the case with "Sports market" [*La bolsa de deporte*], in which Luis García, a manager at *Mapfre*, interviews sports stars to talk about investment, or *The lab*, hosted by Jesús Jerónimo, Director of Digital Transformation at *Sanitas*. Finally, as examples of the use of a combination of some of the previous options, we mention "Inspirational Mondays" [*Lunes inspiradores*] from *Cyberclick*, led by radio broadcaster Eduard Pascual and the company's CEO, David Tomás, and "Hit 'play'" [*Dale al play*] from *Fisher-Price*, which features a journalist, Ana Uslé, together with a professional specialized in education and communication, Inma Marín, who host this podcast about the best toys for children at their different stages of development.

Another aspect on which we focus has to do with social outreach and the multiplatform and transmedia possibilities that the podcast offers. Most of the analyzed podcasts (82) are limited to having a presence on one or several audio platforms and, at most, some call to action on their corporate website. However, we discovered 18 podcast programs that opted to use the power of social networks, not only to amplify their influence but also to create community. *Yoigo* aims to offer an omnichannel experience with its "Think then act" [*Pienso, luego actúo*] platform, which is deployed through its website, on which a blog, among other things, is found; through the social networks on which it has a presence (*YouTube*, *Instagram*, *Twitter*, and *Facebook*); and through its podcast. It is even possible to go further and provide a transmedia experience, especially in fiction podcasts. The best example of this is "The power of the web" [*El poder de la red*], a Spanish series by *Vodafone* that can be viewed in three different formats: video, podcast, and comic. Daniel Sánchez Arévalo is the screenwriter and director of this production, while actors such as Quim Gutiérrez take part.

> Podcast production can be carried out by the company itself and its communication department, or they can hire external producers who work together with the brand

Table 2. Characterization according to content, functional, and narrative criteria

		Absolute frequency (n_i)
Function of content	1. Reporting (similar to journalism) 2. Educating and training (informative) 3. Entertaining (fiction or nonfiction)	3 57 40
Themes of content	1. Current affairs, news, and events 2. Science, technology, and internet 3. Film and television 4. Sports, video games, and e-sports 5. Education and pedagogy 6. Spirituality and religion 7. Audio fiction and audiobooks 8. History, art, and the humanities 9. Humor and entertainment 10. Languages 11. Children's entertainment 12. Literature, culture, and journalism 13. Marketing and business 14. Environment and sustainability 15. Music 16. Politics, finance, and economics 17. Psychology, personal growth, and self-help 18. Society, health, home, and consumption 19. Travel, leisure, and popular culture 20. Other	2 8 1 6 5 0 10 2 2 1 2 7 10 5 4 10 6 12 4 3
Podcast format	1. Interview 2. Solo commentary, monologue, or discussion 3. Panel or discussion (talk show) 4. Narrative nonfiction or creative nonfiction (essay, documentary, reporting, narrative chronicle, etc.) 5. Narrative fiction or radio art 6. Hybrid magazine type 7. Reused content	24 6 16 10 14 28 2
Podcast hosts	1. Company's own personnel 2. External personnel 2.1. Journalists and communication professionals and announcers 2.2. Personalities and celebrities 2.3. Experts and disseminators 2.5. Other 3. Combination of options	34 61 41 1 10 9 5
Multi-platform and/or transmedia	1. Yes 2. No	18 82

3.4. According to the nature of the sponsoring company and its relationship with podcast production

In this analysis and the proposed classification of the branded podcast, one final aspect that we can consider has to do with the nature of the company promoting the audio content and its relationship with the production and content of the podcast, as summarized in Table 3. Thus, the first thing that must be identified is the professional sector to which the brand belongs, for which we use the classification proposed by *Statista* (n.d.): agriculture and livestock, consumer goods, stores and establishments, etc. Although the branded podcast is a growing format used by all types of companies, we observed a certain predominance of banking, insurance, and real estate companies, such as *BBVA*, *DKV*, and *Banco Sabadell* (26 podcasts), over consumer goods companies such as *Coca-Cola*, *Covirán*, or *Hermès* (17); media and marketing companies such as *AS*, *ELLE Mexico*, and *Planeta Libros* (15); technology and telecommunications companies such as *Vodafone*, *Yoigo*, or *Movistar* and *Telefónica* (13); companies related to energy and the environment such as *Iberdrola*, *Naturgy*, and *Endesa* (8); stores and establishments (5); logistics and transport companies (4); the health and pharmaceutical industry (3); utilities (3); society (3); construction (1); sports and leisure (1); and tourism and hospitality (1). Note from the table that none of the brands behind the podcasts belong to the agriculture and livestock, e-commerce, international, Internet, metallurgy and electronics, chemical and raw materials, or life sectors.

Regarding the size and dimension of the company, it is logical and indeed correct to think that large companies and multinationals will produce the most branded podcasts, being the case for 91 of the analyzed podcasts. However, the existence of branded audio programs from companies that are truly modest in terms of size and advertising budget is striking. Such is the case for 7 projects of small and medium-sized companies such as "Path to success" [*Camino del éxito*] from *Garoo Expositores* and "World travelers" [*Viatgeros por el mundo*] from the travel agency *Viatge*, as well as 2 initiatives from micro-enterprises or independent professionals: *Ocularis* by Dr. Rubén Pascual, a podcast on visual health, and "Emergencies and more" [*Más que urgencias y emergencias*] by nurse and teacher Elena Plaza.

Podcast production can be carried out by the company itself and its communication department (41 podcasts), or they can hire external producers who work together with the brand, as occurred in more than half of the analyzed sample (53 podcasts), in addition to other possible situations (6 podcasts). *BBVA*'s podcasts, for example, are made in-house as Fernando Morales, head of podcasts and member of *BBVA*'s Communications team, told *El País*:

> "In the communication department there are many very good journalists, with many ideas and with a great knowledge of our company and of the content that can attract the attention of the listeners" ["*En el departamento de comunicación hay muchos y muy buenos periodistas, con muchas ideas y con un gran conocimiento de nuestra empresa y de los contenidos que pueden atraer la atención de los oyentes*"] (**Espinosa-de-los-Monteros**, 2020).

Other brands, however, use production companies for this purpose, even more so in recent years, when specialized initiatives in this sector, such as *Podium Podcast*, have emerged. This is the producer of programs for *Fisher-Price*, *Sephora*, *AXA*, *Santillana*, and *Correos*, among others. Another independent production company, *La Fábrica de Podcast*, is responsible for the content of *Advance*, *Mapfre*, and *Marketing Directo*. There are also other scenarios such as that of "Freelancers" [*Autónomos*] from *Bankia*, presented by a freelancer, or the previously mentioned podcasts from Rubén Pascual and Elena Plaza.

Finally, within this block of analysis, we focused on checking the relationship that existed between the brand and its commercial activity and the thematic nature of its podcast's content. In general terms, the level of correspondence is practically the same in the three categories considered. There is a strong link when we find clear ties between the brand and the podcast (28 cases), as in the case of "I want to change the tiles" [*Quiero renovar el tejado*] from *BMI*, a company specialized in the sale of products and solutions for flat and pitched roofs, and *Vets&Clinics* from *Advance*. An average link is when the sector of the promoter brand and the content offered have somewhat of a relationship, but there is a broad perspective in which there is also room for other topics and issues of interest to audiences, something we saw in 36 podcasts, including some from *BBVA* such as "Financial education" [*Edufin*], *Blink*, and "From the bank" [*Desde la banca*], as well as "References" [*Referentes*] from *El País*, which covers Spanish journalism. Finally, low or no link (36 podcasts) is frequently found in fictional branded podcasts, in which the story narrated does not direct relate to the company's commercial activity, as in "Welcome to a dangerous life" [*Bienvenido a la vida peligrosa*] from *BP* and "Chronicles of the future" [*Crónicas del futuro*] from *Coca-Cola*. Such a weak link is also evident in nonfiction podcasts such as "Path to success" [*Camino del éxito*], which offers advice on how to develop and improve the lives and businesses of its listeners, whereas the brand responsible, *Garoo Expositores*, is a supplier of displays, especially cardboard displays. Other examples of low or no link are *BBVA*'s podcast "Agile snippets" [*Píldoras Agile*], which talks about techniques, skills, and tools for disciplined Agile, or *Start* from *Correos*, which depicts the beginnings of some startups.

Table 3. Categorization according to the nature of the sponsoring company and its relationship with podcast production

		Absolute frequency (n_i)
Professional sector of the company	Agriculture and livestock	0
	Consumer goods	17
	E-commerce	0
	Stores and establishments	5
	Construction	1
	Sports and leisure	1
	Energy and environment	8
	Finance, insurance, and real estate	26
	International	0
	Internet	0
	Logistics and transportation	4
	Media and marketing	15
	Metallurgy and electronics	0
	Chemicals and raw materials	0
	Health and pharmaceutical industry	3
	Utilities	3
	Society	3
	Technology and telecommunications	13
	Tourism and hospitality	1
	Life	0
Company size	1. Large companies and multinationals	91
	2. Small and medium-sized companies	7
	3. Microenterprises or independent professionals	2
Podcast production	1. Brand's communication department	41
	2. External agencies and/or production companies hired by the brand	53
	3. Other	6
Relationship of the brand and/or its commercial activity with the subject matter of the podcast	1. Low or no link	36
	2. Average link	36
	3. Strong link	28

4. Discussion and conclusions

In this time of visual saturation, sound has become an increasingly important element for people in the current era of audification (**Pedrero-Esteban**, 2021). This boom in digital audio has been augmented by social networks and modern technological devices such as smart speakers, voice assistants, and audio books. This is also true for podcasts, whose consumption continues to grow. This circumstance has not been overlooked by brands, as it is on par with the attention being paid to audio branding (**Bronner**; **Hirt**, 2009; **Minsky**; **Fahey**, 2017), from the jingle to new branded content actions (**Piñeiro-Otero**, 2015), as is our object of study.

With respect to the podcast, companies have started to create their own programs with audio content of all kinds in an attempt to connect with their audiences, increase their brand recognition, and generate engagement, something that was already observed, for example, in the work of **Sellas** (2018). This is how the branded podcast has emerged, whose meaning, features, and history we have examined in this research, in which we, of course, felt it was important to differentiate between podcast sponsorships, corporate podcasts, and branded podcasts themselves. The first of these is the traditional formula of sponsorship of content that typically already exists, in this case a podcast where the agreement involves naming the brand at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of the program. Unlike other forms of online advertising, in this case we do not find such well-defined and exact metrics. In turn, the corporate podcast is an internal communication strategy that, although it may be open to the general public, is aimed at a company's employees.

The production of branded podcasts is not very labor-intensive, and they are economical to make, while helping to build audience loyalty and improve brand recall (**Llonch**, 2019). However, at least in Spain and Latin America, they remain at an initial stage of development, despite the above advantages and the interesting and attractive nature of the format, which according to the consulting firm *Deloitte* (2020) can make them a profitable business for brands in the years to come. Although current, this topic has hardly been studied by academia, with very few contributions (**Boracchi**, 2020; **Sellas**; **Martínez-Otón**; **Ortega-Seguí**, 2021; **Orrantia**, 2022), although receiving more attention from agencies and production companies that work in audio branding.

For this reason, we point out not only the opportunity but also the need to study branded podcasts, focusing in this first approach on the Spanish and Latin American landscape. As expected, given the newness of this subject and the limited previous research, we faced some significant limitations. First, there are no complete and updated lists of branded podcasts to consult, which means that we do not truly know the scope of the object of study. This fact made probability sampling unfeasible and required the adoption of a qualitative logic based on a sample whose size was defined by theoretical saturation criteria. In addition, the process of identifying descriptors and classifying the podcasts into categories was also complex, since these audio files presented variations that may occur gradually over time, for example, podcasts that were originally short but have been extended in duration to become long or very long, or that vary frequently from one episode to another, demonstrating an irregular nature.

After analyzing 100 podcast programs from more than 60 brands, we designed a classification proposal that is able to cover the broad nature of these programs, defining specific and useful parameters that will serve as a basis for future research in this field. However, we must recognize that there are aspects that may vary and/or be expanded, such as, for example, the topics the podcasts cover, as well as their format and everything related to the company behind them. This is a broad classification including aspects addressed in other works on podcasts (**Gallego-Pérez**, 2010a; 2010b; **Beltrán-Ferreira**, 2017; **Martí-i-Martí**; **Ribes-i-Guàrdia**, 2018; **Arense-Gómez**; **Terol-Bolinches**; **Pedrero-Esteban**, 2019; **Cabeza-de-Vaca-Ruiz**, 2019; **López-Villafranca**, 2019; **Piñeiro-Otero**, 2021), as well as many other new ones specifically related to our object of study. Unlike these previous studies, our proposal, summarized in Figure 1, focuses exclusively on the branded podcast, attempting to fill an existing gap in this field, with specific and useful criteria and categories for its classification.

From this analysis, we have also obtained results regarding the current state of branded podcasting as well as trends. Brands are offering their audiences original audio content with a wide variety of styles and topics that may be linked, to a greater or lesser extent, to the company's sector and/or business activity. Thus, the educating and informing functions appear most frequently, although we also observed a significant increase in entertainment branded podcasts, often audio fiction, a genre on the rise in the branded podcasting universe. Apart from the fiction narrative, the most common formats are the magazine and the interview together with the talk show, which represent the format of most of the branded audio content.

These podcasts are aimed at broad audiences, but clearly targeted according to the topics they cover. In addition, they are not always related to the products or services of the companies that promote them –results that we have not found in other research on podcasting and corporate communication, where only podcasts with a strong or medium link between commercial activity and the subject matter of the audio files were analyzed (**Sellas**, 2018; **Barbeito-Veloso**; **Perona-Páez**, 2019). This therefore represents another relevant aspect of this work to highlight. Despite this, we observe a clear strategy on the part of the brands, since in any case the podcast will, of course, be aligned with the company's values. Moreover, to build a good branded podcast, brands must first define the value proposition, observe the market and the target audience, design a correct format, determine the objectives, and define its duration and distribution (**Orrantia**, 2022), which is not strictly achieved in the same way in all the analyzed podcasts.

Additionally, another finding to highlight from this analysis is that brands broadcast and distribute their podcasts through their own websites, where it is common to find a call to action or link, as well as through the wide range of audio
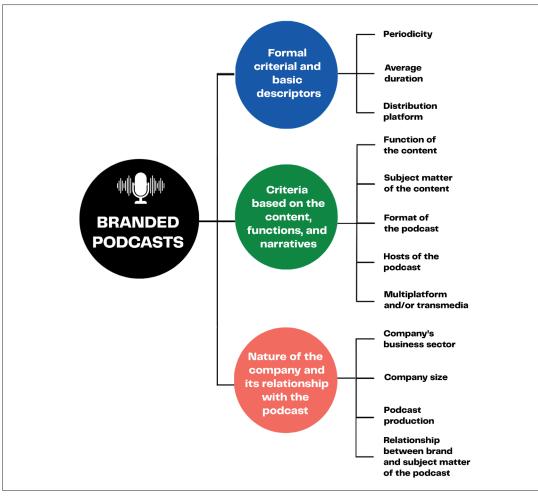
Figure 1. Infographic of the branded podcast classification proposal

and music platforms on the market, such as *Spotify*, *iVoox*, *Apple Podcasts*, etc. In this way, audiences can choose their favorite platform on which to enjoy such branded audio content. On some occasions, this multiplatform offering is transcended by incorporating the use of social networks, creating a truly omnichannel experience, as in the case of "Think then act" [*Pienso, luego actúo*] (*Yoigo*) or even a transmedia experience, as in the series "The power of the web" [*El poder de la red*] (*Vodafone*).

Brands have clearly understood that this communication format can be –and in fact is– an excellent tool for reaching their audiences and manage their branding. Companies of all professional fields and sizes are jumping on this bandwagon. Sectors such as banking and telecommunications are major sources of branded podcast production, but they are far from the only ones, as there are examples in a wide variety of fields, ranging from the food industry, commerce, marketing, to energy. While we find more of them in large companies and multinationals, there are also excellent podcast projects that come from modest and small companies.

This research confirms the investment in the creation of stories, as previously discussed by **Orrantia** (2019), which normally convey the values of the brands' identity. In fact, it is necessary to create this connection between content and brand, always bearing in mind the target audience, as this is the only way to create and reinforce effective bonds. In this regard, improving aspects related to the periodicity and distribution of the podcasts, in addition to their duration, is also recommended to achieve harmony and engage listeners. As noted by **Geets** (2019), with the use of podcasts, companies seek to create emotional bonds with their recipients, while reaching these target audiences more easily, thus helping to position the brand and stimulate conversation, among other things. These benefits surely bode well for the future of branded podcasts.

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6. Annex

Table 4. Brands and podcasts analyzed for the proposed branded podcast classification

Brand	Podcast title	Brand	Podcast title
Advance	Vets&Clinics	*Fisher-Price*	Placentera
AS	Los últimos de la lista	*Fisher-Price*	Bebé a bordo
AXA	Construyendo el futuro de tu negocio	*Fundación Telefónica*	Encuentros *Fundación Telefónica*
Banco Sabadell	Estar donde estés	*Fundación Telefónica*	Curiosidad radical
Bankia	Podcast para autónomos	*Fundación Telefónica*	Onda marciana
Bankia	Historias sobre humanismo digital	*Garoo*	Camino del éxito
BBVA	Aprendemos juntos	*Google News Initiative*	En primera persona
BBVA	Píldoras Agile	*Greenpeace*	Ruido blanco
BBVA	Edufin	*Guía Repsol*	Ciudades en 48 horas
BBVA	Blink	*Hermès*	Los podcast de *Le Monde d'Hermès*
BBVA	Desde la banca	*Hermès*	Las pesquisas de Penélope
BBVA	Voces	*Iberdrola*	Podcast sobre cambio climático
BBVA	Sencillo y efectivo	*Iberdrola*	FutbAll
BBVA	OpenMind	*Iberia*	Aerolínea momentos
BBVA	Acentos	*Ikea*	Cuando el descanso es un sueño
BBVA	Deep talks	*ISDI*	Digital explained
BBVA	Compartiendo conocimiento	*Krissia*	Mañana empiezo
BBVA	Data historias	*L'Oréal México*	Somos *L'Oréal México*
BBVA	Ni tan mal	*La Razón*	Noosfera
BBVA	Perspectivas	*Los 40 principales*	Cantando las 40
BBVA	Design Wednesday	*Los 40 principales*	Ídolos
BBVA	Futuro sostenible	*Mahou*	Sonido Morse
BBVA	*Fundación BBVA Perú*	*Mapfre*	La bolsa de deporte
BBVA	Creando futuro	*MarketingDirecto.com*	Marketing directo
BCMA Spain	Enfocados	*Mercadona*	¿Qué come un deportista?
BMI Cubiertas	Quiero renovar el tejado	*Metro de Madrid*	100 años en *Metro*
BP	Bienvenido a la vida peligrosa	*Movistar+*	En el corredor de la muerte
British Council	LearnEnglish podcasts	*National Geographic*	Curiosidades de la historia
CaixaBank	Economía cotidiana	*National Geographic España*	Viajeros *National Geographic*
Catalana Occidente	Perfiles	*Naturgy*	Oxigen
Chanel	El podcast de *Chanel*	*Naturgy*	Energía en positivo
Coca-Cola	Crónicas del futuro	*Netflix*	Nada que ver
Correos	Start	*Orange*	Por un uso *love* de la tecnología
Correos	Un futuro cercano	*Orange*	Hola planeta
Correos	En la cabeza de Carlos Soria	*Planeta de libros*	¿Leemos?
Covirán	Contra el desperdicio de alimentos	*Real Madrid C. F.*	Campo de estrellas
Cupra	The impulse	*Redit*	Innovación al día
Cyberclick	Lunes inspiradores	*Sanitas*	The Lab by *Sanitas*
DKV	Voces activistas	*Santillana*	Compartir en familia
Dr. Rubén Pascual	Ocularis	*Santillana*	Diario de una docente
El Corte Inglés	Ámbito cultural	*Seagram's Gin (grupo Pernod Ricard)*	¿Quién decide?
El Corte Inglés	Cuentos de Navidad	*Seagram's Gin (grupo Pernod Ricard)*	Hotel Jorge Juan
El País	Referentes	*SEAT*	Moving forward
Elena Plaza	Más que urgencias y emergencias	*Sephora*	Beauty talks
Elle México	Hablemos de moda: *Elle* podcast	*Telefónica*	Conectados progresamos
Endesa	Eficientemente	*Telefónica*	Mejor conectados
Endesa	Abrimos la ópera	*Viatge*	*Viatge*ros por el mundo
Estrella Damm	Discoforum	*Vodafone*	El poder de la red
Fisher-Price	Dale al play	*Vodafone Business*	Evolución digital
Fisher-Price	Charlas	*Yoigo*	Pienso, luego actúo