
Miscellaneous

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Audio journalism as a vector of strategic, narrative, and commercial transformation for Spanish print media

Abstract

This article examines the role of audio journalism in the strategic transformation of daily print media in Spain. Within a context of sectoral reconfiguration, this study analyses how newspapers are using podcasts as a tool to diversify their news offerings, strengthen audience engagement and explore new editorial dynamics. The study used an *ad hoc* questionnaire addressed to heads of audio departments in national and regional newspapers. Using a qualitative and exploratory approach, the methodology identifies organisational patterns, professional profiles and functions assigned to audio journalism production and the factors which influence its development. The findings show that while there is broad agreement on the strategic value of podcasts, initiatives still rely on limited resources, small teams and show varying degrees of integration into the structure of media organisations. Audio content is primarily oriented toward informational and analytical genres, increasingly focussed on narrative quality and audience connection. Most audio projects also reveal an effort to develop a distinctive identity. The study concludes that audio journalism represents an emerging avenue of development with significant potential within the digital media ecosystem and suggests future avenues for research related to sustainability, professionalisation and integration into transmedia strategies.

Keywords

Audio, journalism, podcast, digital narratives, business models, engagement.

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1. Introduction

“This is how the news should sound”. With this emphatic statement, declaration *The Daily* declared its mission. The news podcast was launched by the prestigious *The New York Times* on February 1, 2017, offering a summary of the most important news stories of the day in just twenty minutes. “Those who clicked play that day heard something remarkable: the authority, curiosity and humour of the *NYT* came to life in a new and intimate way”, noted two years later the renowned podcast host, Michael Barbaro (Leoz-Aizpuru & Pedrero-Esteban, 2022). By then, the podcast had accumulated over one billion downloads (*The New York Times*, 2019).

Today, daily news podcasts stand as the most recognisable evidence of the integration of the press into the digital ecosystem, to the point where the term “*daily*” has practically become shorthand for “*daily podcast*” (Carvajal, Marín-Sanchiz & Navas, 2022). Although they are the most widespread audio format across major news outlets, they coexist with other genres, such as documentaries, reports, debates, or interviews, aimed at different audiences, like sections or supplements in traditional print media. From a strategic perspective, on-demand, spoken-word content amplifies the voice of media brands, expanding their user base and diversifying revenue streams: advertising, sponsorship, *branded* podcasts, audiovisual rights, and content created for other entities.

Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, daily podcasts foster the establishment of closer and more direct engagement with readers, now become listeners: the sense of personal connection and intimacy produced by this type of news format allows them to be seamlessly integrated into the daily routine of the audience. As noted by García de Torres et al. (2025), this intimacy is based on four key elements: first-person storytelling, authenticity, empathy, and an emotional truth able to capture the listener’s attention through carefully crafted personal experiences, sounds and music.

There is also the notable degree of empathy inherent to audio content, able to amplify the credibility, rigor, and authenticity of news reporting. With the combination of voice, music, sound effects and silences, the intrinsic elements of radio broadcasting for over a century, news outlets are producing content reminiscent of radio reports and features but now based on different logics and expressive tools, oriented less towards immediacy and saturation and more focused on providing context and in-depth reporting, akin to long-form journalism (Martínez-Graña, Elías & Soengas-Pérez, 2023; Ruiz-Martínez, 2024).

From a narrative perspective, podcasts facilitate the credible presentation of personal lives and situations, unravelling unsolved cases, offering alternative approaches to previously explored topics, revisiting past events, and analysing the long-term consequences of past events. This transformation of journalistic language, understood as the incorporation of expressive tools and resources proper to the audio medium, and the adaptation of narratives to the characteristics of digital content consumption, permits the creation of innovative forms of storytelling. Thus, the conversational intimacy of a *daily*, combined with the immediacy of sound features and the tension of an investigative audio documentary, elicit an emotional response in listeners which transcend mere reading comprehension (Lindgren, 2021; Areñse-Gómez et al., 2024).

Thus, audio journalism is a form of journalism that makes use of sound as its primary vehicle to inform, narrate and analyse issues of public interest. In a broad sense, the *daily* encompasses the forms of both traditional radio broadcasting and other digital formats, such as podcasts. However, within the scope of this study, the term *daily* will be used specifically to refer to journalistic podcast production by news organisations, considered

one of the many forms of audio journalism. The ever-growing, and increasingly diverse experiences across print and digital media, national and local, general-interest and specialised, converge in identifying audio as an effective tool for bridging the gap between journalism and the public. Given its adaptive character, compatibility with any technology, channel or platform, personalised form of consumption, alignment with contemporary habits of digital consumption and its capacity to assimilate innovations, such as AI or synthetic voices, one may predict widespread expansion and (re)connection with readers who are now increasingly listeners.

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study is structured around two main axes which contextualise and support the analysis: firstly, journalistic innovation as a process associated with digital transformation of the news sector; and secondly, the podcast as a strategic driver of change in news delivery and the organisational dynamics of print media. This dual approach permits the changes in audio journalism in Spain to be situated within a larger process of reconfiguration taking place within the media ecosystem, while also determining the selection of the variables which will guide empirical analysis.

2.1. Digital transformation of the journalism industry

The digital transformation of the journalism industry became an essential project in the wake of the global financial crisis beginning in 2008, which resulted in a significant drop in advertising revenues for traditional media, especially print media. The financial crisis, external to the sector, coincided with the sustained decline in newspaper circulation and sales, impacted by digital convergence and rapid changes in the news consumption habits within the new media ecosystem.

Following an initial phase during which traditional media companies implemented strict cutbacks and rigorous cost control measures, journalistic innovation emerged as a key strategy for adapting to the new competitive landscape. In a market environment characterised by ever-lower barriers to entry, greater immediacy, interactivity, and an oversupply of news content, the ability to adapt and innovate has become essential for news organisations seeking to remain relevant and retain the loyalty of audiences.

According to Pavlik (2013) innovation in the media is a process of adopting new approaches to journalist practice, formats, and systems, encompassing four broad dimensions: the creation, dissemination, and presentation of high-quality news content; audience participation in an interactive news discourse; the use of informational methods optimised for the digital environment; and the development of advanced management and organisational strategies. In turn, journalistic innovation is understood as the ability to respond to challenges and changes in products, formats, channels, processes, organisational systems, and business models through the deployment of creative skills in the development of solutions, resolving problems and addressing needs, thereby creating value to both audiences and news organisations (García-Avilés et al., 2018; García-Avilés, 2021).

Current studies on journalistic innovation acknowledge the complexity of overlapping and interrelated contextual factors, including the intersection of information and technology, an evolving professional environment and organisational structures and innovations. This comprehensive approach underscores the fact that innovation in journalism transcends simple questions of products or technologies and encompasses issues of information quality, social impact, and professional ethics (García-Avilés et al.,

2023). These aspects pose a critical challenge for contemporary media: the integration of innovation and the ethical and social responsibilities of journalistic practice. Schmitz Weiss and Domingo (2010) highlight the need to approach innovation as a cultural process, as more than a mere adoption of new technologies. News organisations have been forced to reinvent themselves, to adopt multiplatform strategies and to foster a culture of experimentation and innovation (Doyle, 2014).

This need for more structural and profound innovation is also confirmed in the context of local news. A study by Ali et al. (2018) explores how small-market media outlets, while recognising the urgency of adapting to the new digital environment, are limited in their capacity for innovation by constraints on personnel, resources, and organisational culture. The lack of adequate infrastructure prevents these newsrooms from adopting more ambitious narrative and strategic transformations, thus highlighting the importance of building the internal capacity for sustained innovation.

In recent years, innovation in journalism has evolved as a response to the challenges of financial sustainability and digital transformation. Knowledge transfer, both internally and externally, is an essential element in fostering an organisational culture which effectively integrates and harnesses these innovation processes (Valero-Pastor & Carvajal, 2019). Within these processes, emerging trends can be identified which are redefining journalistic practice, formats, and business models, revealing an increasingly close interaction between new technologies and the dynamics of news production and consumption. Among these trends are the development of digital subscription models and the diversification of revenue sources through new digital adverts forms, *crowdfunding*, content production and distribution for third-parties, donations, events management, and e-commerce, among others (Arrese, 2015; Küng, 2019; Tejedor & Pla, 2020).

This process of transformation has required organisational restructuring and profound changes in business culture, involving the adoption of emerging technologies and the forging of strategic alliances as crucial elements in fostering innovation (Westlund & Krumsvik, 2014). The building of significant relationships with audiences has become an important driver of innovation in the field of journalism, and one of the key factors in stimulating growth in the sector. This includes the development of personalised news products, based on an analysis of consumer preferences and habits, as well as the creation of digital spaces that encourage active and continuous interaction between media outlets and their users. These spaces enable audiences to participate in the creation, selection, and interpretation of content, reinforcing feelings of belonging and building brand loyalty (Larsson, 2011; Marchionni, 2015; Robledo-Dioses et al., 2022).

Over the last decade, media labs have become important spaces for experimentation and innovation within the journalism industry, designed to explore emerging technologies and digital applications, develop new languages, narrative techniques, and multimedia formats, support entrepreneurial projects and commercial initiatives and to provide training and build literacy in digital communication (Salaverría, 2015). Although these spaces have played an important role in the transformation of the sector, their history has been difficult and their future is uncertain due to issues of financial sustainability, changing organisational priorities and the lack of reliable indicators of their impact on the business (Herrera-Damas & Satizábal-Idárraga, 2023).

The integration of advanced tools, such as artificial intelligence (AI), has become the dominant trend in innovation processes in journalism. These new technologies allow for the optimisation of processes: from content generation to the personalisation of

information for specific audiences (Codina et al., 2022; Mayoral et al., 2023; Lopezosa et al., 2024; Sánchez-García et al., 2023; Túnñez-López & Tejedor, 2019).

Finally, media convergence has transformed the production and consumption of journalistic content, favouring the expansion of transmedia narratives and immersive formats. This new approach combines various formats—video, audio, text, interactive graphics, and augmented reality—to create richer and more engaging experiences (Scolari, 2013). According to Jenkins (2006), transmedia narratives are characterised by the dispersion of content across multiple platforms, allowing audiences to actively participate in the creation and expansion of narratives.

Thus, the aim is to adapt the production and distribution of journalistic output to the demands and needs of the digital consumer (Calvo & Serrano, 2020). Garcés and Mendieta-Briceño (2024) note that transmediality is already a common element in news coverage, although the industry does not explicitly identify it as such. This suggests that media outlets are integrating multiple formats and platforms into their narratives. Transmedia storytelling not only redefines how journalism is produced and distributed but also opens new avenues for diversifying formats and new monetisation strategies in digital media.

In this context, podcasts have become a strategic tool for digital media outlets to diversify their content, increase user engagement and to open new revenue streams. Podcasts strengthen the digital subscription model and help generate additional revenue through mechanisms such as direct sponsorship, programmatic advertising, and branded podcasts, which combine narrative content with brand promotion (García-Estévez & Cartés-Barroso, 2022; Fitó-Carreras et al., 2024).

The success of the podcast as a journalistic format lies not only in its ability to expand media business models but also in its capacity to foster a deeper connection with audiences. Using an intimate narrative approach, on-demand spoken-word content allows media outlets to experiment with innovative narrative genres ranging from first-person storytelling to long-form audio reportage.

2.2. Evolution of the consumption and offer of audio journalism

In June 2023, the Reuters Institute reported that interest in the news had dropped by 34 percent since 2015, with the most prominent social media platforms, such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, becoming the main sources of information for younger audiences (2023:11). The study also highlights a steady trend in audio news consumption since 2018, coinciding with the overall growth of the podcast market (Newman, 2023). According to the data, in Spain, 14% of podcast users between 18 to 34 years of age listen to news content (Reuters Institute, 2023:28).

A year later, the *Digital News Report 2024* confirmed that journalistic podcasting has become one of the most effective drivers of transformation in news media, attracting young and highly educated audiences. Nonetheless, growth has slowed despite the notable increase in content in recent years: news content now competes for attention with highly specialised programs, often dealing with current affairs, business, technology, or health. Although podcasting is not a medium for reaching mass audiences, the profile of listeners remains attractive to editors and advertisers. As the report notes, in Spain, younger audiences tend to listen to podcasts on other topics, while those over 65 prefer current affairs content (Novoa-Jaso et al., 2024:142). In other countries, according to a report by Edison Research (2024), consumption of “spoken-word content”, such as news,

conversation, and sports, among young people aged 13 to 34 has seen a notable increase, rising from 11% in 2014 to 23% in 2024.

Regarding types of news podcasts, Newman and Gallo identified four variants in 2019 and 2020, in ascending order of length. These also differ in their narrative and expressive approaches, as well as the timeliness of the topics covered:

1. News summaries: These podcasts offer a summary of current events, presenting several news items. There are many examples of this format, including *Up First* from NPR, *5 Things* from CNN, or *Tagesschau* from ARD. In Spain, the first experiences in audio news bulletins from newspapers were *Las noticias de El País* and *Las noticias de ABC*, both launched in 2018.
2. Explainer or in-depth podcasts: These focus on a daily news story, explored through a calm dialogue between the podcast host and the reporting journalist. The conversation is structured around a script and incorporates interviews, sound effects, and music; that is, featuring full production and sound design. This format is exemplified by *The Daily* (The New York Times) and *Global News Podcast* (BBC), among others.
3. Documentary podcasts: These are journalistic audio productions dedicated to investigating and contextualising news events, either current or historical, across multiple episodes. As Gutiérrez, Sellas and Esteban explain, “they allow for the explanation of lives and situations, the exploration of unsolved cases, the revelation of the unknown, the presentation of new angles on previously covered topics, the exploration of past events, or the analysis of their long-term consequences” (2019: 45). This format is among the most demanding given the level of research, scripting, production, and sound design they require. However, it also represents a compelling and widely acclaimed innovation in audio storytelling (McHugh, 2022).
4. Extended conversations: These are journalistic productions based on talk formats such as interviews, debates, or roundtable discussions; that is, spontaneous and often informal dialogue among the invited participants, typically under the direction and moderation of a well-known personality. The duration of these podcasts often extends to several hours. *The Joe Rogan Experience* in the United States and *The Rest is Politics* in the United Kingdom are examples of this format.

Considering the growing size and diversity of the podcast market, recent studies have proposed theoretical approaches for understanding the podcast beyond its form or format. Among these, Rime, Pike, and Collins (2022) propose a conceptual framework based on six basic tensions: between amateurism and professionalisation, entertainment and information, fixed and fluid structures, original and adapted content, individual and collective authorship, and editorial versus commercial objectives. These tensions illustrate how the podcast is a hybrid, dynamic medium in constant redefinition.

These tensions illustrate the unstable yet particularly ideal nature of podcasting as a space for narrative and expressive innovation in the digital environment, especially when adopted by traditional media outlets. From this perspective, the podcast should be understood not merely as a content format, but as a medium in constant evolution and where different processes of content production, circulation, and consumption converge. Thus, podcasts are ideal in providing insight into the transformation of contemporary journalism.

Considering this evolution in the production and distribution of media content, the aim of this study is to determine the extent to which podcasting has emerged as an innovation in Spain in response to the challenges of digital transformation. It has been noted that this narrative format is effective in attracting new audiences, developing innovative themes and approaches to storytelling, enhancing audience engagement, while also spurring a reconsideration of business models and a reconfiguration of newsroom dynamics (Martínez-García & Navarro-Bosch, 2019).

Several studies have analysed the expansion of podcasting within Spanish print media organisations, including both legacy media and digital-native outlets (García-Avilés et al., 2023; Martínez-Costa et al., 2022; Martínez-Otón, Leoz-Aizpuru; Pedrero-Esteban, 2022). In evaluating journalistic innovations in Spain during the second decade of the 21st century, Carvajal et al. (2022) consider podcasting one of the most significant developments, reviving the importance of niche content, journalistic authorship, and voice, along with distinctive narrative features such as serialisation and personal intimacy (Perdomo & Lingren, 2025).

Other recent studies have noted that podcasting is not only an innovative tool from a narrative and strategic standpoint, but also a key vehicle in creating a distinctive voice for media outlets. A study by Martínez-Costa, Amoedo-Casais, and Moreno-Moreno (2022) notes that podcasts strengthen the identity of digital news brands through editorial coherence, narrative style, and sound design, crafting a storytelling approach that connects with audiences by offering content that is both distinctive and recognisable. This identity-building is particularly important in an ecosystem increasingly characterised by information overload and audience fragmentation.

In other markets, such as the United States, the growth of journalistic podcasting in local and regional newsrooms has often been the result of individual initiative or the professional interest of specific journalists, rather than due to top-down strategic business decisions (Radcliffe, Ali, & Donald, 2017). This illustrates how podcasting can serve as a form of bottom-up innovation, driven by the desire to experiment with new audio languages and connect with specific audiences, even where resources or organisational support are limited.

A similar trend is found in other international studies which emphasise how journalistic podcasting has led to new forms of professionalisation and a high degree of narrative and editorial independence that is far from the traditional logic of mainstream media. According to Katzenberger, Keil and Wild (2025), podcast-producing journalists are generally highly experimental and reflective, characterised by a convergence of aesthetic exploration, community engagement and digital entrepreneurial strategies. This evolution has reinforced the value of podcasting as a space for narrative, relational and strategic innovation within the contemporary media ecosystem.

In this study, the term *audio journalism* is used to refer specifically to the production of journalistic podcasts by print media outlets. Although, broadly speaking, audio journalism encompasses traditional radio and other forms of audio content, our research focuses on analysing how newspapers have adopted podcasts as a strategic tool to diversify their news content and address the challenges of digital transformation. In this context, we define *audio journalism departments* as the organisational structures created within news outlets to produce journalistic audio content, primarily podcasts, oriented towards editorial, narrative, and strategic objectives and towards building audience engagement and diversifying information products within the digital environment.

From this perspective, the analysis focuses not on the format or sound narrative, but rather on the strategic role that audio journalism departments play in the digital transformation of print media organisations. These units can be viewed as new spaces within traditional newsrooms, with a degree of institutionalisation, output and editorial orientation that make it possible to assess their relevance within media organisations. According to the *Marco General de los Medios en España 2024* (AIMC), 32% of Spaniards aged 14 and over read a digital newspaper daily, and 40% access a newspaper in either print or digital format. In a media landscape marked by the proliferation of channels, social media and connected environments, there is a clear need for empirical research into how audio journalism projects are being integrated into the editorial strategies of Spain's leading newspaper brands.

3. Methodology and objectives

This study takes an exploratory and descriptive approach, analysing the development of audio journalism as a vector of strategic, narrative, and organisational transformation within the daily press in Spain. The objective is to examine how audio production departments have been integrated into the structures of print media organisations, as well as the functions, formats, achievements, and challenges associated with these teams.

Based on this general research objective, the following specific objectives were proposed:

1. Identify the professional profiles and organisational structures that characterise the audio journalism units within the selected news outlets.
2. Describe the sound formats produced and their degree of specialisation, innovation, and narrative importance.
3. Analyse the value proposition of these projects within the editorial, communication, and commercial strategy.
4. Identify the principal milestones achieved by these units since their implementation.
5. Identify the challenges faced by these teams in terms of consolidation, visibility, and sustainability.

In line with these research objectives, the following research questions are proposed:

- RQ1. What professional profiles and organisational structures define the audio journalism teams in the analysed Spanish newspapers?
- RQ2. What sound formats are being produced in these units, and what value proposition do they represent for their news outlets?
- RQ3. What achievements and challenges do the audio managers identify in the development and consolidation of their audio projects?

To address these questions, an *ad hoc* questionnaire was developed as a tool to collect primary data. This method meets the need for structured and comparable information about an emerging practice that has yet to be widely systematised in scientific literature. The questionnaire includes both closed and open questions, allowing for the collection of both structured data and open descriptions, which were analysed through thematic coding and qualitative interpretation.

Although data was collected by means of a questionnaire, the overall methodology of the study is qualitative, based on inductive logic aimed primarily at understanding the experiences and perspectives of participating professionals, without intending to produce statistical generalisations. The purposeful selection of cases, the inclusion of open-ended

responses, and the thematic interpretation of the results all reinforce this qualitative approach.

The sample was created using intentional selection criteria. Only media outlets with a specific unit dedicated to audio production and having continuous podcast development projects with a recognisable editorial identity were included. After a preliminary analysis of the audio ecosystem in the Spanish press, outlets in which audio activity lacked a consolidated or sustained structure over time were excluded. The corpus was thus composed of ten daily newspapers in Spain: national outlets (*El País*, *El Mundo*, *El Español*, *El Confidencial*, *elDiario.es*), regional newspapers with strong national reach (*La Vanguardia* and *El Periódico*), and territorial newspapers from the Vocento Group, whose audio unit operates in a coordinated manner. This configuration provides a representative view of the different organisational models and levels of consolidation in the sector.

The questionnaire was sent to the heads of audio departments at each of the newspaper outlets. The profiles of the respondents combine high-level management roles with specialised functions in audio production, including heads of audio production units, editors of daily audio products, editorial coordinators, project managers and journalists with experience in the creation, scripting, and oversight of audio content.

The specific roles of the participants are not homogeneous but vary depending on the degree of consolidation and integration of the audio department within each media outlet. Nevertheless, all participants hold strategic or editorial positions within the newspaper's audio ecosystem. Some professionals are part of the media outlet's in-house staff, while others collaborate as external specialists or are part of cross-functional units within larger media groups. Their experience in the fields of journalism and audio journalism generally ranged from between five and twenty years.

Fieldwork was conducted between September and October 2024. The questionnaire was distributed digitally, and individual follow-up was carried out via email. Ten complete responses were obtained, corresponding to the ten selected newspaper outlets. The questionnaire included nine questions structured into five analytical dimensions, defined based on the theoretical framework:

1. Value proposition of the audio division within the media outlet
2. Types of formats produced
3. Structure and size of the team
4. Roles and responsibilities of the team members
5. Milestones and strategic challenges

In this study, the term *milestones* is used to denote significant achievements achieved by audio journalism units, reflecting structural, editorial or internally impactful projects, such as the launch of new audio products, audience retention, team professionalisation, or the integration of audio into the outlet's overall news strategy. These dimensions made it possible to examine the development of audio journalism as an innovative phenomenon from a threefold perspective: a) narrative, b) organisational, and c) strategic.

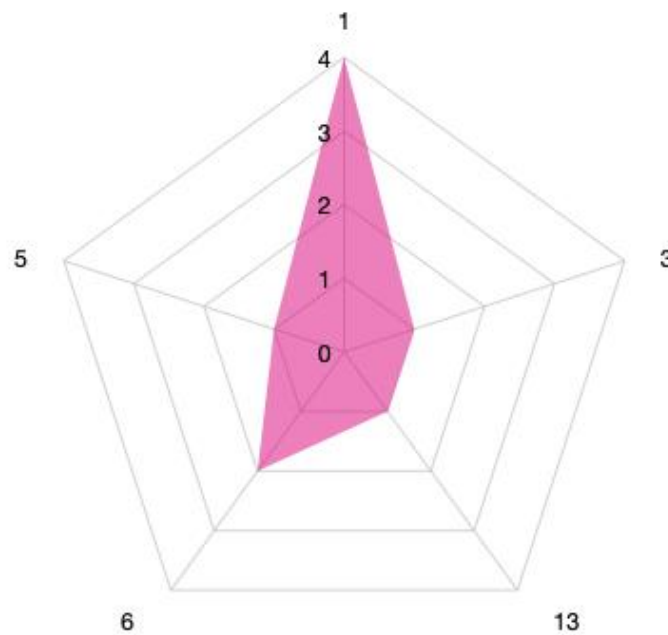
The collected data were organised into an analytical matrix and interpreted using thematic categorisation techniques, identifying emerging themes, and providing a qualitative synthesis. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the limited sample size, no inferential statistical techniques were applied, nor were percentages used in presenting the findings. This approach is consistent with the methodological principles of qualitative research using open questionnaires.

4. Results

4.1. Composition and professional profiles in audio journalism departments

On average, the audio journalism teams of the analysed news organisations consist of five members, although in half the outlets this number was between one and three people. While a quarter of the company's report having more than six individuals dedicated exclusively to this task, in the remaining newspapers, audio content production involves collaboration from other newsroom personnel or external contributors. In one specific case, there is no dedicated audio journalism team, and audio production is handled by journalists who also carry out other duties (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Average staff in audio journalism department in Spanish print media (2024)

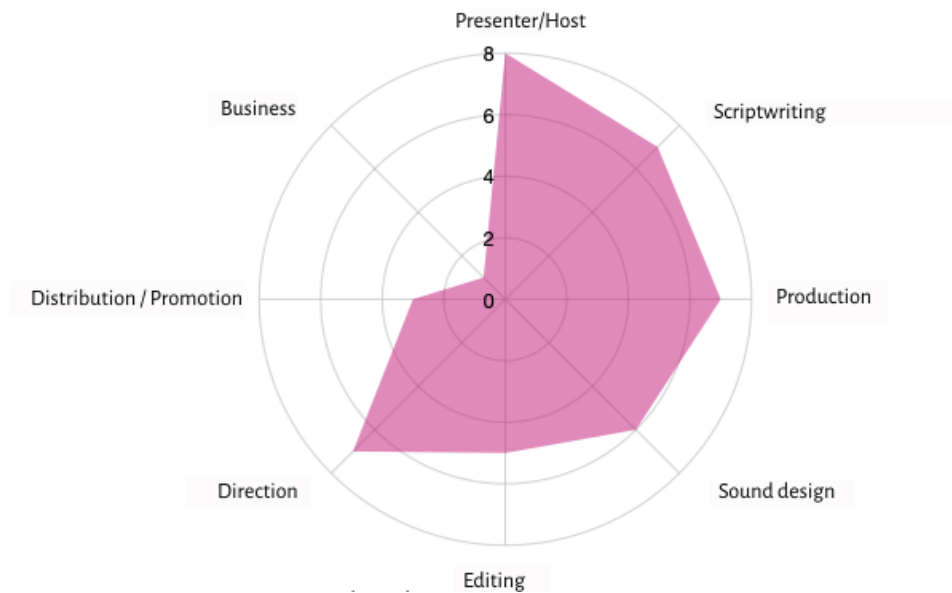


Source: the authors

According to staffing data published by the media outlets (in the cases of *El País*, *ElDiario.es*, *El Mundo*, and *ABC*), these teams account for, on average, 1.8% of total newsroom staff. In terms of roles in audio journalism projects, the presenter was identified as the most prominent in eight of the surveyed media outlets. Similarly important are the roles of scriptwriter/editor, director, and producer.

Functions related to sound design are particularly significant in one out of every six cases, while editing is highlighted in half of the departments (Figure 2). Other important functions, although less frequently cited, are those related to distribution and promotion, as well as business, marketing, and product-related tasks. In many instances these are handled primarily by dedicated departments within the organisation.

Figure 2. Profiles in audio journalism departments of Spanish print media (2024)



Source: the authors

The limited number of professionals assuming a variety of different roles, apart from those outlets where only one person dedicated to this area, suggests that most members of audio journalism teams have multiple responsibilities within each project. For example, many presenters also take on directing, editing, production, and scriptwriting. Similarly, scriptwriters often perform tasks in production and/or distribution.

4.2. Production projects: genres, formats, distribution, and reach

In 2024, the most significant achievements in these areas were linked to growth and diversity of formats: across the ten media outlets surveyed, an average of 4.4 projects were produced per outlet. The most common formats were conversational podcasts (36%) and daily news podcasts (27%), followed by reports and documentaries (23%).

Among podcasts, one may highlight the interview podcasts from *El Confidencial: Pausa*, hosted by Marta García Aller, and *Punto Ciego* with José Antonio García Zarzalejos. Conversational podcasts are also the narrative formula for *Economía para GenZ* and *Lo más odiado* from *El Confidencial*; *Oído clínico*, *Arréglate que nos vamos*, *En marcha*, and *El foco* from *El Español*; *Sopa de ganso*, *Quédate a comer*, *Carlin y Castaldi (amores que matan)*, and *Historia y vida* from *La Vanguardia*; and *Mamarazzis* from *El Periódico*.

Seven of the ten newspapers analysed currently offer daily news podcasts: *El Mundo al día* (*El Mundo*), *Un tema al día* (*ElDiario.es*), *Hoy en El País* (*El País*), *En la sabana* (*El Español*), *El podcast de El Periódico* (*El Periódico*), *Las noticias de ABC* (*ABC*), and *La Voz de El Independiente* (*El Independiente*, launched in September 2023 and discontinued in June 2024). At present, *El Confidencial*, *La Vanguardia*, and the regional newspapers of the Vocento group do not produce a daily.

In the narrative genre, reports and documentaries, newspapers have made a decisive commitment to podcasts, enabling them to showcase the depth of their investigations and, above all, expand their narrative scope using sound language. As journalist Daniel Alarcón, creator of the podcast *Radio Ambulante*, notes, “a written testimony doesn’t convey the accent, pauses, hesitation, emotion, or joy of a voice: that is the essence of audio journalism” (AudioGen, 2025). In 2024, the 6th season of *Fuera del radar* was premiered, one of the productions which best exemplifies the potential

of local newsrooms to identify and transform seemingly minor or limited events and stories into universal narratives. Under the direction, narration, and executive production of José Ángel Esteban, head of Vocento's audio department, this documentary series has released more than 50 episodes in three years.

Other illustrative examples include the investigative documentaries *El enemigo* and *El silencio roto* from *El País*; *Anguita y Julio* from *ElDiario.es*; *Muerte en el salvaje Ourense*, *Invasión de campo*, and *La herida abierta* from *El Confidencial*; *En fuera de juego* from *El Periódico*; *Los expulsados del paraíso* from *ABC*; as well as productions from newspapers in the Vocento group such as *Las dos muertes de Javier Ardines* (from *El Comercio de Asturias* and *El Correo del País Vasco*), *La cinta que pudo haber evitado el 11M*, and *Ferrándiz, alrededor de un asesino en serie* (from *Las Provincias* of Valencia). This last newspaper devoted extensive coverage to the tragic events of the DANA through a series of reports on the community response, collected under the title *La pasarela de la esperanza*.

Figure 3. Podcast cover art in audio journalism departments of Spanish print media (2021-2024)



Source: the authors

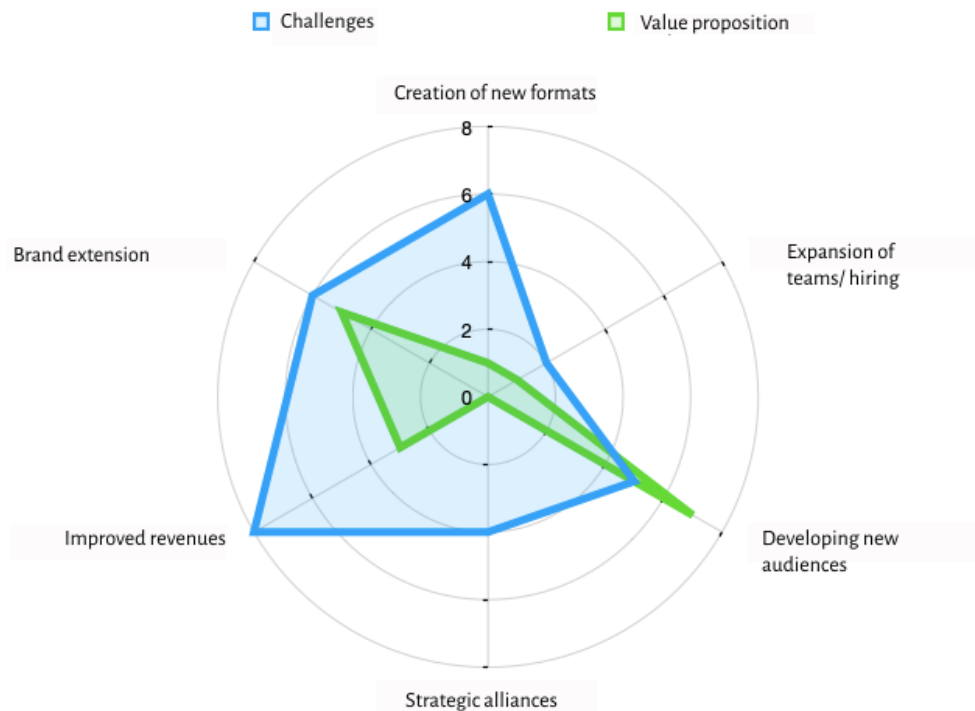
Among the most frequently mentioned milestones achieved by audio journalism departments in 2024 were a significant increase in audience and in downloads, as well as growth on video platforms such as YouTube. Participants also mentioned improved perception of the brand and content, as demonstrated by strong positioning in podcast charts on platforms like Spotify and Apple Podcasts, as well as the impact of certain productions being picked up by other media outlets or receiving national and regional awards and recognition. To a lesser extent,

participants mentioned progress in the economic sustainability of projects and the creation of strategic partnerships with production companies and platforms (Figure 3).

4.3. Value proposal and challenges for audio journalism departments

These results indicate that, in three out of four newspapers, the value proposition of audio projects is primarily focused on attracting new audiences, while seven out of ten consider podcasting mainly a strategic format. For half of the media outlets, additional distinctive values include brand development, and one third mention increased revenue as an added benefit. Less frequently, podcasting is also regarded to give voice to journalists and enable them to tell stories in a different, more personal manner.

Figure 4. Visualisation of the value proposition of the audio journalism departments within their companies and the challenges they face



Source: the authors

Among the challenges faced by audio journalism departments, most agree on the need to improve revenue, optimise processes, attract commercial brands, and work to develop derivative work or spinoffs. Other pressing issues relate to the creation of new formats and the expansion of the media brand. For half of respondents, the key goals were to gain larger audiences and establish strategic partnerships. Although most teams are small and often involve overlapping roles, only one-fifth identify hiring additional staff as an urgent need (Figure 4).

5. Discussion and conclusions

This study analyses the development of audio journalism as a process of organisational, narrative, and strategic innovation, linked to the digital transformation of the Spanish press. Using an exploratory and qualitative approach focused on the experiences and perceptions of those responsible for audio journalism production units, the study identified the structural characteristics of these teams and the formats they produce, while also identifying the principal achievements and challenges they face.

The findings confirm that audio journalism has ceased to be a marginal or isolated initiative, becoming strategic units within the structure of media outlets, aligned with the pursuit of new audiences, diversification of formats and the redefinition of user engagement in the digital environment. This evolution corresponds to what Pavlik (2013) and García-Avilés (2021) describe as comprehensive innovation processes, encompassing changes both in content production and the internal organisation of media organisations. In this regard, audio journalism simultaneously represents an innovation in product, narrative, and processes.

Although audio journalism finds its roots in radio, podcasts have been embraced by the press as part of their digital transformation, offering new possibilities for narrative and strategic innovation. Within this framework, certain forms of audio journalism, especially documentaries and reports, have become increasingly prominent given their ability to offer more accessible, personalised, and immersive listening experiences (Pedrero-Esteban et al., 2023, 2024). However, this potential is not manifested equally across all formats: daily news podcasts (dailies) generally follow other, more functional strategies focused on content summaries and updates.

However, this study confirms that, despite operating with very small teams, new audio journalism units have demonstrated remarkable production capacity and a clear strategic orientation. This is in line with those of a study by Carvajal et al. (2022), which pointed to the limited size of audio teams as one of the main limitations for podcast development by print media organisations. Two years later, the data show no evidence of any substantial growth in this regard, suggesting that structural weaknesses remain unaddressed. Expanding staff and diversifying roles would further the professionalisation of the creative process while also enhancing adaptability to the present and future challenges within the digital ecosystem.

The leaders of these units considered them to be genuine engines of transformation within their organisations. This perception aligns with the conclusions of Rime, Pike and Collins (2022), who highlight the potential of podcasts to serve as a laboratory for narrative innovation in the news sector. Audio formats, especially narrative podcasts, not only offer more diverse informational products but also strengthen brand identity, connect with new audiences, and offer new financial opportunities such as sponsorships, branded content and distribution on external platforms.

Future consolidation will depend on establishing sustainable revenue models. However, given the current context of uncertainty in the sector, and the conservative financial strategies of many media companies, the pursuit of stability may clash with the need for innovation, brand expansion and content diversification which are essential for attracting new audiences, meet the challenges of increasingly segmented consumption habits, and securing news sources of revenue. The challenge, therefore, lies in striking an effective balance between financial prudence and strategic transformation

Within this context, audio journalism offers media organisations the opportunity to create a distinctive voice within the digital ecosystem while strengthening their brand identity. These types of projects can serve to increase the visibility of media outlets on digital platforms and to foster closer and more emotional relationships with audiences. Their consolidation as producers of original audio content can provide a competitive edge in a highly saturated and fragmented media landscape. Thus, the integration of audio journalism as a component of media brand identity will be the key to differentiation within the digital ecosystem.

Certain formats of journalistic podcasts, especially narrative formats, due to their intimacy and flexibility, have proven highly effective in attracting and retaining younger, digitally engaged audiences, essential for future sustainability. By offering a more personalised listening

experience, these formats forge an emotional connection with listeners and strengthen brand loyalty. Thus, audio journalism can help bridge the gap between traditional news practices and new patterns of media consumption, especially among users with established digital habits.

In line with the findings of Carvajal et al. (2022), this study confirms that informational, documentary, and investigative podcasts significantly expand the narrative possibilities available to newspapers. The wealth of different genres and approaches enables complex stories to be told with greater depth, particularly in long-form formats. Cases such as *Muerte en el salvaje Ourense* (El Confidencial) and *La pasarela de la esperanza* (Las Provincias) show how podcasts can combine the rigor of investigative journalism with immersive storytelling. In turn, the conversational format of the roundtable genre represents a renewed formula for addressing current affairs in a dynamic and accessible style, preserving the spirit of pluralistic debate while adapting to the expectations of new digital audiences.

This study presents certain limitations that should be considered. First, the sample is limited to Spanish newspapers, which limits the possibility of extrapolating the findings to international contexts where the dynamics of audio journalism adoption and development may differ. Additionally, the methodology is based on the perceptions of those responsible for audio departments, without including insights from other players within the ecosystem or audiences themselves.

Another significant limitation is the inability to disaggregate results due to confidentiality agreements with participants. Finally, the lack of longitudinal data on key aspects, such as the evolution of human resources or the direct financial impact of podcasts on these organisations, limits the depth of analysis and hinders a more comprehensive understanding of long-term trends.

However, these limitations serve to signal various avenues for future research. It is essential to analyse the impact of audio formats on audience retention and loyalty and compare these with other types of content offered by newspapers to determine their relative strengths and weaknesses. The diversification of genres and formats presents opportunities to identify those most effective in attracting different audience segments, particularly younger demographics. Equally important is the need to explore the economic sustainability of audio journalism, evaluating new monetisation models such as subscriptions, sponsorships, and branded content.

Another critical challenge is to analyse innovation within audio journalism productions, particularly in terms of emerging narrative forms and the embracing of new technologies that may transform the sector. Finally, it is necessary to explore how the integration of audio into transmedia storytelling strategies contributes to expanding the reach of news organisations, strengthening their brand identities, and increasing audience interaction and engagement within an ever-changing digital ecosystem.

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