


# Genres and radio language as keys to the success of branded podcasts in Spain

## *Géneros y lenguaje radiofónico como claves de éxito del Branded Pódcast en España*



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### Abstract:

The expansion of radio signals on the Internet and the emergence of new on-demand audio formats, such as podcasts, have revolutionised audio consumption, especially among new generations. This work analyses the concept of branded podcasts as an evolution of branded content, a genre through which brands create audio content to connect emotionally with the audience, without intrusive advertising. The genre has been positioned as a key content strategy, attracting the attention of marketing experts and the general public. In particular, this study analyses five award-winning examples of branded podcasts in Spain to identify any common elements and the keys to their success. Using a mixed, quantitative and qualitative

### Resumen:

*La expansión de la señal hertziana en internet y la eclosión de nuevos formatos sonoros a la carta, como el pódcast, han revolucionado el consumo de audio, especialmente entre las nuevas generaciones. Este trabajo analiza el concepto de branded pódcast como una evolución del branded content, un género con el que las marcas crean contenidos de audio para conectar emocionalmente con la audiencia, evitando la publicidad intrusiva propia de la radio. Este género se ha posicionado como estrategia de contenido clave en los últimos años, capturando la atención de expertos en marketing y del público en general. Particularmente, este estudio analiza cinco ejemplos premiados de branded pódcast en España para identificar los elementos comunes y las claves de su éxito. Se emplea una metodología mixta,*

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methodology, we conduct a detailed analysis of the structure, scope, and components of audio language. Variables such as subject matter, narrative genre, characters, music, sound effects, silence, and technical resources are examined. The study shows that the creators of branded content integrate the brand into the narrative but rely on conventional radio genres, offering non-disruptive innovations in their use of radio language.

**Keywords:**

Podcast; branded content; digital communication; radio transformation; online radio.

*cuantitativa y cualitativa, con un análisis detallado de la estructura, el alcance y los componentes del lenguaje sonoro. Se examinan variables como las temáticas, el género narrativo, los personajes, la música, los efectos de sonido, el silencio y los recursos técnicos. El estudio revela que los creadores de branded content innovan en la integración de la marca, pero mantienen la base de los géneros radiofónicos convencionales, sin presentar rupturas destacadas en el lenguaje sonoro respecto del modelo tradicional.*

**Palabras clave:**

*Pódcast; branded content; comunicación digital; transformación de la radio; radio online.*

## 1. Introduction

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have brought about significant changes in traditional media, particularly radio, which has had to adapt to new forms of content distribution and audience engagement (Barrios Rubio & Gutiérrez García, 2021). This change was driven by the expansion of the Hertzian signal on the internet and the emergence of on-demand audio formats, evolving toward multimedia expression on digital devices. That has led to an increase in the time spent listening to online content (Barrios Rubio & Gutiérrez García, 2021).

The convergence of media and platforms has led to the appearance of new business models in radio, most notably the emergence of the podcast as a flexible and personalised service that allows for the distribution of multimedia files on demand (Barrios-Rubio, 2016). The phenomenon has awakened the interest of new generations compared to traditional radio, highlighting a shift in the consumption habits of younger audiences (Infoadex, 2023). Branded podcasts are popping up in this context, one where brands create audio content linked to their values and offers, aiming to non-intrusively connect with audiences (Llanos-Martínez, 2023).

Podcasting, as a phenomenon of on-demand multimedia content distribution, boomed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Spain, in particular, leads podcast listening in Europe (Infoadex, 2023). That development has marked the dawning of a new era in digital communication, characterised by an abundant supply of content and audiences, known as “big podcasting” or the “audification era” (Quah, 2019; Espinosa de los Monteros, 2020).

The genre has its roots in the convergence of diverse technologies and phenomena, such as the expansion of the internet, the emergence of on-demand radio, the development of digital audio formats, and the rise of blogs. The term “podcasting” was popularised in the 2004 BloggerCon conference, being coined to designate the new form of audio distribution (Hammersley, 2004; Gallego-Pérez, 2010). However, the conceptual origin of the audio phenomenon, today represented by the podcast, has its roots in radio (Murray, 2009; Edmond, 2015) and dates back in the digital environment to the early 2000s, with Adam Curry and Dave Winer, who built the technology for subscribing to audio content (García-Marín, 2019).

### 1.1. *The impact of podcasts on multimedia communication*

The internet has revolutionised communication, creating new media that transform both platforms and content. Podcasts, in particular, have established themselves as a key evolution in digital audio, closely linked to communication technologies.

Although the term podcast derives from the combination of iPod and broadcasting, its reach extends beyond those devices. Cebrián-Herreros (2008) proposed terms such as “personal radio,” “recorded-played radio,” or “created-recreated radio” to describe this form of radio made by and for users.

Conceived as a means of distributing on-demand audio content on the internet, podcasts can be listened to online or downloaded from the web, or through aggregators such as *iVoox*, *Spotify*, *Google Podcasts*, or *Apple*. They allow asynchronous listening and facilitate subscription and mobility, overcoming the limitations of traditional streaming and giving users the freedom to choose what to listen to and when.

Podcasts have developed their own narrative, distinct from conventional radio, thanks to the transmedia configuration of their content and multiplatform strategies. Multimedia communication explores formulas that integrate mobile devices and transmedia narratives, fostering the participation of a socially active audience through social media.

The era of big podcasting (Quah, 2019) has come about due to the global dimension of an audio universe in which the ease with which podcasts can be created, distributed and listened to has meant that this format, with over a million titles registered on Apple Podcast and “an increasingly heterogeneous panorama on a global scale in the models of creation, distribution and marketing, has a turning point that frames it in a growing market.” (Espinosa de los Monteros, 2020).

The proliferation of this type of content on YouTube, websites, and social media since 2015 has given podcasts a transmedia character that transcends the limits of audio language, enabling their use as a channel for broadcasting audio fiction, entertainment, and, increasingly, for valuable advertising strategies for companies seeking to enhance their brand image.

However, quantifying its media and economic impact in Spain is complicated due to the lack of precise audience data. The IAB Spain 2023 Digital Audio Study (2023) estimates 19.3 million digital audio listeners nationally, with podcasts attracting the attention of 54% of consumers, a 10-point increase on the previous year.

Spanish-speaking countries are among the world’s leading podcast producers (Espinosa de los Monteros, 2020). Following the impact of *Serial* in the United States, Spanish-speaking creators have become more ambitious, and a process of professionalisation is apparent in Spain with networks such as Pódium Podcast (part of the PRISA Group) and *Cuonda* (Izuzquiza, 2019).

### 1.2. *The birth of branded content*

Branded content is a marketing strategy that focuses on the creation and distribution of entertainment and informational or educational content closely linked to a brand, without being presented as direct advertising (Castelló-Martínez & Del Pino-Romero, 2019). Rather than openly promoting a brand’s products or services, its purpose is to establish an emotional connection with the audience, providing value and ensuring that the brand is naturally integrated into the content (Rogel & Marcos, 2020).

The essence of branded content is to tell stories that truly engage the audience, allowing the brand to be naturally integrated into the content. The approach seeks to create a positive association between the brand and the audience's values, interests, or needs, rather than simply conveying advertising messages through a radio spot.

The strategy can manifest in formats such as videos, articles, podcasts, events, or interactive experiences, among others. Beyond promoting products or services, it seeks to generate engagement, that is, to build a long-term relationship with consumers, convey the brand's values, and differentiate itself in an overcrowded market (Scopen, 2020) by fostering brand loyalty and increasing its recognition and reputation. Furthermore, it aligns with the company's overall objectives and is often consolidated as a form of storytelling that humanises the brand message (Hernández, 2018).

This paradigm shift also affects radio advertising (the main source of funding for Hertzian radio), which has traditionally relied on repeated spots or commercial breaks. The effectiveness of advertising creativity has diminished in the age of globalisation, as audiences perceive it as a self-serving attempt at persuasion. Entertainment programs in audio-visual media such as radio and television are frequently interrupted by one-way advertising messages, despite audience resistance.

The concept of branded content proposes replacing the repetition and interruptions of advertising typical of radio with the integration of content aligned with the brand's values and audience interests. The goal is to create messages that the audience wants to receive, not avoid (Regueira, 2012).

An example of branded content is Popeye, created in the 1930s by the U.S. Chamber of Spinach Growers to encourage children to eat spinach. PRISA Radio did something similar in 2016 with the launch of the Podium Podcast platform, which offers original content in fiction, journalism, culture, technology, entertainment, lifestyle, and humour. PRISA Radio also ventured into branded content by creating and distributing entertainment content associated with brands.

### *1.3. Definition of the concept of branded podcasts*

Branded podcasts emerged as an evolution of branded content, adapting to changing consumer preferences toward advertising. Instead of simply showcasing the features of their products or services, brands are adopting strategies that seek to create emotional bonds and shared experiences with their customers.

The format, as a subtype of branded content, is attractive to brands due to its relatively low cost and ease of production. The transition from sponsored podcast to branded podcast has been remarkable in recent years across the digital audio spectrum (García-Estévez & Cartes-Barroso, 2022).

The definition of a branded podcast encompasses a variety of formats, from short-episode series to longer programs, designed to meet specific brand needs and connect with consumers (IM Digital Business School, 2020).

The birth of the branded podcast dates back to 2015, when Steve Pratt, co-founder of *Pacific Content*, launched the "Slack Variety Pack" jointly with Slack. The program contributed to the company's success and played a crucial role in popularising the term (Pratt, 2018).

The individual nature of audio consumption and the use of direct speech create a close bond with the audience, generating a sense of belonging to a community (Russell *et al.*, 1993). Such intimacy, compared to believability by Méndiz *et al.*, (2018),

becomes a powerful vehicle for listener participation. Furthermore, the audio medium encourages creativity by challenging the listener to visually reconstruct the narrative, while its mnemonic function improves message retention (Rodero Antón, 2008; Balsebre, 2006; Sánchez-Cid, 2006; Romero-Valldecabres, 2017; Vidal-Mestre, 2018).

Podcasts, as an on-demand audio format, offer brands the opportunity to reach their audience anytime, anywhere, through digital devices, promoting loyalty and building a sense of community (Nafría, 2007; Barbeito-Veloso & Perona-Páez, 2019).

Digital platforms' global reach and ability to segmentise allow brands to reach their target audiences in an effective and personalised way. Furthermore, podcasts take full advantage of the resources of language and audio techniques, offering unlimited space for creativity and storytelling (Roca-Bardají, 2023). The technical execution of the format, being pre-recorded, allows for meticulous post-production that optimises the quality of the content.

Consequently, branded podcasts are emerging as a powerful tool for brands, offering an emotional connection with their audiences and a unique opportunity to convey promotional messages in a subtle and authentic way. By enhancing corporate identity and generating meaningful conversations, branded podcasts are positioning themselves as an effective and important advertising strategy in the current panorama (García-Estévez & Cartes-Barroso, 2022). In short, the use of informative and audio fiction genres in audio offers brands a dynamic and creative platform to connect with their audiences in a meaningful and lasting way.

Branded podcasts distinguish themselves from conventional sponsorship and thus avoid the intrusive advertising typical of radio by not inserting ads during the program, focusing instead on creating branded content and storytelling that appeals to the audience. The fundamental difference is that branded podcasts depend on the presence of the brand for their meaning, unlike sponsorship, the absence of which would not affect the essence of the program (García-Estévez & Cartes-Barroso, 2022). Furthermore, those authors highlight that they are audio series made up of several episodes which seek to entertain listeners, allowing for slow and unhurried consumption (as opposed to *fast content*) and avoiding intrusiveness, a quality highly valued by contemporary listeners (García-Estévez y Cartes-Barroso, 2022).

Another of its traits is that it offers an engaging listening experience for listeners, making it an effective tool for building brand awareness, engagement, and positioning (Martínez Otón *et al.*, 2023). That approach has led to the creation of a dedicated category for branded podcasts in prominent industry awards, such as the Ondas Global Podcast Awards, and reflects their growing importance in the current media landscape (Martínez Otón *et al.*, 2023).

## 2. Materials and methods

This paper looks at five examples of branded podcasts that have received awards in Spain over recent years, seeking to identify their common elements and the keys to their success. To this end, the following general objective was proposed:

To analyse the genres, formats, and resources of radio language used in the main award-winning branded podcasts in Spain, to decide whether they introduce innovations compared to conventional radio genres.

Furthermore, the following specific objectives were established:

1. Describe the technical and narrative resources utilised in each podcast (words, music, effects, silence, etc.).
2. Examine whether the brand strategy is integrated non-intrusively into the narrative, not presented as direct or traditional audio advertising, as is done in conventional radio.
3. Determine whether branded podcast genres and formats represent an evolution from the conventional radio model.

The initial hypotheses were:

H1: Producers of branded content could incorporate creative genres that differ from classic radio genres (news, entertainment and audio fiction <sup>1</sup>).

H2: Despite the above, the use of genres specific to Hertzian radio may continue, with no significant changes compared to the traditional model.

A mixed, quantitative / qualitative methodology was adopted to test these hypotheses. The quantitative was based on the collection and analysis of data from the five podcasts analysed. The qualitative methodology employed content analysis based on active listening to the episodes (Bardin, 2002; Rodríguez *et al.*, 1996, p. 92). This methodological approach involves exploring various categories and variables related to the structure and scope of the content, the use and combination of characteristic elements of radio language, as well as the introduction of new genres or formats that could represent a new development with respect to the traditional advertising model in broadcast radio (Balsebre, 1994).

Content analysis, as a research technique, allows for inferences to be drawn by systematically identifying certain specific characteristics within a text (Krippendorff, 2013).

The sample includes the five branded podcasts that won various industry awards in 2022, 2023, and 2024, an intentional selection criterion that limits the study to productions recognised for their quality and impact. Although the sample size (five case studies) is small, it is considered sufficient for an exploratory analysis, as the goal is to identify common patterns in audio narrative and brand integration, rather than offer a generalisable statistical diagnosis. The branded podcasts analysed as a sample are presented below:

1. “La Suma” is an audio documentary that explores the fight against cardiovascular disease and cancer. As an added value for the brand, Novartis manages to convey its commitment to the health of Spanish society through this clearly-explained project.
2. “Blum”: Created by Carmen Pacheco and Manuel Bartual, this is a fictional thriller about Clara Pastor, an art history student, who disappears while writing a thesis on Ursula Blum, a 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde painter.

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1 Cebrian (1992) and Merayo Pérez (1992) state that informative genres of Hertzian radio are subdivided into expository (news, chronicles and reports, docudramas), opinion (editorials, commentary and criticism) and dialogic (interviews). Fiction genres include radio theatre, serials, radio soap operas and individual characters, presenters and listeners. Entertainment genres include magazines, sports, music programs, phone-ins, and talk shows.

3. **“Titania”**: Created by screenwriters Manuel Bartual and Juanjo Ramírez Mascaró, it premiered in 2023. It seeks to raise public awareness about the dangers of the digital world and provide simple, useful advice to avoid falling victim to online attacks and fraud.
4. **“Hotel Jorge Juan”**: Journalist and writer Javier Aznar, the host of this branded chat show, talks to a well-known guest in each episode of the series.
5. **“Veus, Mongrel Stories that Heal the World”** are 73 podcasts about global health from different perspectives and ways of building it.

With this selection, the final sample was made up of a total of 329 units broadcast between 2022-2024 as presented in the following table.

**Table 2. Research sample data**

TITLE	CREATOR	Seasons and episodes	SPONSOR	Awards
La Suma	Pódium Podcast	1 Season (9 episodes)	NOVARTIS	Best branded podcast Ondas Globales del Podcast 2022
Blum	El Extraordinario	1 Season (9 episodes)	SWISS NATIONAL TOURISM OFFICE	Best branded podcast Ondas Globales del Podcast (2023)
Titania	Pódium Podcast	1 Season (8 episodes)	SANTANDER	Best branded podcast Ondas Globales del Podcast 2024.
Hotel Jorge Juan	Yes, We Cast	9 Seasons (221 episodes)	Seagram’s Gin and Vanity Fair.	Best branded podcast Ondas Globales del Podcast 2022
Veus, mongrel stories that heal the world	Medicumundi	3 Seasons (73 episodes)	Office of Participation, Transparency, Cooperation and Democratic Quality of the Generalitat Valenciana and the General Directorate of Cooperation of the Balearic Government.	“Best Brand Podcast 2023” from the Ivoox platform.

**Source: created by the author**

Regarding the research categories and variables, the study follows the categorisation of López-Villafranca (2019) and Hernando Lera *et al.* (2020), complemented by the proposals of Moreno (2003), Muela-Molina (2012) and Balsebre (1994) on radio language. Regarding methodology, another element of sound language (silence) has been included as a variable, and other functions of music as an element of sound language have been considered beyond those provided by the aforementioned authors. Moreover, the variable of brand identification has been added, so that the direct link with the sponsor can be seen.

**Table 3. Research categories and variables**

<b>A. Subject of the podcast: values, emotions and feelings linked to the brand that it tries to convey</b>	
1.	Science
2.	Technology
3.	Medicine
4.	Economy
5.	Art/Culture
6.	Entertainment
7.	Other
<b>B. Narrative genre used</b>	
1.	Informative: news, report, interview
2.	Sound fiction (hearing, Telling)
3.	Genres of entertainment and participation (phone-ins, game shows)
4.	Advertising genres
<b>C. Protagonists: Characters and Narrator. The possible combinations analysed in this paper are as follows</b>	
1.	Single narrator (monologue)
2.	Actors who play fictional characters

3. An actor who plays real characters without a narrator
4. Combination of a narrator with actors' dialogue
<b>D. Space, setting or context in which the action takes place</b>
1. Real places
2. Fictional places
3. No defined scenario
<b>E. Music: The established variables are based on the functions<sup>2</sup> of this element of radio language</b>
1. Ambient or descriptive
2. Expressive; evoking moods, sensations or feelings
3. Referential
4. Programmatic
5. Syntactic-grammatical
6. Absence of music
<b>F. Sound effects</b>
1. Ambient or descriptive
2. Expressive: conveying a mood, sensation or feeling

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Balsebre (1994) for a broader classification of music on the radio.

3. Narrative: describing key actions in the story
4. Ornamental: embellishing or accompanying other elements
5. Absence of sound effects
<b>G. Silence</b>
1. With a reflexive function
2. With a dramatic function (suspense, waiting)
3. With an emphatic function (heightening a moment of the message)
4. Absence of silence
<b>G. Technical resources<sup>3</sup>: incorporated in most audio editing programs, helping to nuance and enrich the expressiveness of the sound, support the characterization of spaces and characters, or distort and completely alter a sound's meaning</b>
1. Layering of sound effects: extreme close-up, close-up, foreground, background, and distance to place crowds, shouts or people speaking from a distance
2. Echo and reverberation: placing the dialogue off-screen or inside a cave. (Differences: reverb is a continuous, multiple reflection of sound in a closed space; echo is perceived as a distinct repetition of the sound)
3. Vibrato and Chorus (modulation effects that vary the tone or add nuances to voice or music)
4. Equalizers and filters to recreate radio, telephone, or television sounds, beeps, interference, etc.
5. Flangers: Sound effects that produce a characteristic oscillating, metallic sound, especially in the mid and high frequencies. (They mix the original signal with a very short, delayed copy, creating a metallic sound; e.g., used to simulate science fiction ambience)
6. Others, such as rocking and sound inverters to create a scratched record effect, pitch modifiers to recreate fantastic characters (monsters, aliens, etc.) and speed (Rodero, 2005:141-147)

3 Definitions based on Rodero (2005) and Guarinos-Galán (2009).

<b>H. Language used: Language functions</b>
1. Referential, representative or informative: when the sender creates messages related to their setting
2. Expressive, emotional or symptomatic: transmitting feelings, emotions, moods and desires
3. Appellative or Conative: when the sender expects a response, action or reaction from the receiver
4. Poetic or aesthetic: language is used for aesthetic purposes
<b>J. Brand Identification</b>
1. Explicit mention (opening or closing)
2. Integration into the plot without direct mention
3. Reference to the product/service
4. Lack of mention

**Source: created by the author**

The success of these branded podcasts is measured through indicators such as the number of listeners, downloads, social media comments, and reviews on platforms such as *Apple Podcasts* or *Spotify*. Additionally, audience loyalty and recommendations from listeners reinforce the brand’s positioning.

Podcast hosting platforms provide audience statistics, such as the number of downloads per episode and the geographic location of listeners. Audience loyalty is measured by how often listeners repeat and whether they recommend the podcast to others. Furthermore, brands evaluate return on investment (ROI) by considering production and promotion costs versus tangible benefits (increased sales or brand awareness).

### 3. Results

The findings related to the categories and variables analysed are described below, highlighting some key aspects of radio language use and brand integration.

“La Suma” is focused on medicine and technology, launched on May 17, 2023, with 9 episodes posted fortnightly (20-30 minutes). It is hosted on Pódium Podcast and available on numerous platforms (*Spotify, Apple, Podimo, Ivoox, and Audible*).

It is an example of the informative genre of audio reports, looking closely at human aspects and statements from healthcare professionals. The subject matter covers medicine and science. Each episode begins with comments from healthcare personnel; the setting is real (hospitals), and the spoken word fulfils a fundamentally representative and appellative function, accompanied by ambient sound effects (hospital noises) with a descriptive and narrative function, and occasional instrumental mood music in the background that envelops the content of the spoken message. All episodes have an opening theme tune and do not feature audio advertising or direct references to the sponsor (Novartis). Brand recognition is achieved without intrusive advertising, that being limited to a mention at the end of each episode. Silence, on the other hand, is used reflectively, emphasizing the interviewees' words.

“Titania” addresses cybercrime and adopts the thriller genre that evokes audio fiction radio serials for the audience. Hearing technique predominates the eight episodes (without a main narrator; the plot flows through dialogue). Words are used for referential, narrative, and emotional purposes, and various artificial and digital sound effects related to computing (keyboards, alerts) are used. Music is used only in the intro, providing a narrative and appellative nuance. Silence is used as a dramatic resource, generating suspense. All episodes include a reverie or recap of the previous episodes, employing technical resources such as echo and reverberation that help to create an atmosphere of suspense or intrigue. Among the sound effects utilised in the branding, the incorporation of ADA, an artificial intelligence character, stands out. The brand (Banco Santander) is subtly integrated through references to cybersecurity and is explicitly mentioned at the beginning and end of each episode. Each episode begins with a short audio spot about internal artificial intelligence (ADA), which makes use of sound elements from radio language (spoken words, music, effects, and silence) that emulate radio advertising, but without intrusively interrupting the narrative.

“Blum” combines art, music, and tourism to showcase different Swiss cities over 9 episodes (18-23 minutes each). It is distributed on *Apple Podcast*, *Spotify*, *Amazon Music*, *iVoox*, *YouTube*, and the *El Extraordinario* Living App on Movistar. It employs audio fiction (a storytelling technique with a narrator as the protagonist) and recreates real-life Swiss settings through ambient effects. Music, with narrative and emotional functions, takes on great importance, almost as an additional character. Silence reinforces the tension at key moments in the plot. Voice filters are applied to phone calls. and the recorded testimonies compiled by the protagonist, along with reverberations and echoes to situate scenes in closed settings, or to add depth and realism to the soundscape that accompanies the locations. The podcast’s sponsoring brand (the Swiss National Tourism Board) is mentioned at the beginning and end of each episode, without traditional advertising inserts. The brand’s presence and the values it represents are perceived in each episode through words, with abundant descriptions of places, landscapes, and peculiarities of Swiss culture and art.

“Hotel Jorge Juan” is a branded chat podcast based on interviews (an informative radio genre). It runs over nine seasons and 221 episodes, available on platforms such as *Apple*, *Spotify*, and *iVoox*, and often has a YouTube version. Its goal is to position Hotel Jorge Juan as a space for cultural and educational exchange, where the conversation between the host (narrator) and the guest (a real person) in each episode flows without background music or effects, except for the opening theme tune. Analysis of the nine episodes did not identify any sound effects or voice filters that altered the audio, suggesting a purist approach to production. Consequently, the predominant element of radio language is the spoken word, giving the podcast a direct, stripped-back quality. Words serve a representative, argumentative, emotional, and sometimes ornamental function, by virtue

of the beauty of the language used. The silences that occur during the conversation invite reflection or add to the message's persuasiveness. The interview takes place in a real setting, although the Hotel Jorge Juan is fictitious, with its lobby and rooms it forms part of the decor or atmosphere surrounding each episode. It is sponsored by *Seagram's Gin* and *Vanity Fair*, discreetly mentioned in the opening or closing remarks. The setting is presented as a fictitious "hotel" (but with references to real spaces in the hotel that invite the listener to learn about the brand's virtues and values), although the emphasis is on dialogic interaction. "Veus, mongrel stories that heal the world", uses sound reporting (a radio news genre). Each episode, lasting 8 to 22 minutes, begins with an opening theme that combines voices with music and sound effects. These play a fundamental role in the audience's auditive experience, serving a descriptive or ambient function that places the listener in a real space (a hospital). The use of silence introduces pauses for thought, inviting reflection and facilitating the transition between statements. The narrative is supported by a narrator and guests who share their experiences or humanitarian work. Mention is only made of *Médicosmundi* at the beginning and end of the episodes, with no commercials or interruptions.

#### 4. Discussion

The research results demonstrate the diversity of creative approaches and production techniques used to generate engaging content across a variety of topics and genres. Such approaches not only enrich the listening experience but also highlight the versatility and potential of podcasts as communication and marketing tools.

The five productions analysed use conventional radio genres (reporting, interviews, audio fiction), elements of radio language (spoken word, music, effects and silence) and some technical resources (reverberation, echo, and voice filters).

"La Suma" explores medical, scientific, and technological topics through audio reporting, one of the most widely-used news genres on conventional radio. "Titania" is an audio fiction thriller that uses *hearing*, where the narrative unfolds exclusively through dialogue, without the presence of a narrator. Audio fiction was also one of the most widely-used genres on conventional radio in postwar Spain, with examples such as Teatro del aire, on Cadena SER (1942–1973), or Teatro invisible, on Radio Nacional de España (1949–1969) in Barcelona, directed by Juan Manuel Soriano. This circumstance demonstrates that "audio fiction is not only recovering lost ground thanks to its symbiotic relationship with podcasts but is also undergoing a process of transformation that affects both its identifying features and its classification and nomenclature" (Ruiz-Gómez & Legorburu-Hortelano, 2023).

"Blum" uses the narrative technique of telling (the presence of a narrator), a common feature in radio, as Emma, the show's central character, introduces the other characters through her narration. Sound effects and the strategic use of silence are also typical elements of radio sound fiction.

"Hotel Jorge Juan" focuses on disseminating culture through interviews, the quintessential dialogic radio genre, according to Cebrían's 1992 classification of audiovisual informative genres; without the use of background music or sound effects, except for the opening theme that begins the piece. This minimalist approach emphasises the spoken word and informative content, offering a direct and unadorned platform for conversation and knowledge, a recurring trend in current conventional radio.

Finally, “Veus” uses audio reporting to build a rich narrative with the help of statements and sound effects that enhance understanding and enjoyment of the content.

The results confirm that, despite the initial hypothesis (H1) that branded podcasts could introduce clearly novel and distinct genres, no notable paradigm shifts were observed with respect to the genres typical of broadcast radio. Therefore, the second hypothesis (H2) is largely confirmed: the branded podcasts in the episodes analysed do not represent a radical innovation in genres or in the use of audio language elements compared to traditional broadcast radio.

Nevertheless, the findings do show how the content integrates brand strategy organically and non-intrusively, taking advantage of the intimacy and personalisation podcasts offer. The absence of any repetitive advertising dissociated from the content is confirmed, thereby generating a more subtle approach to the target audience. Greater sophistication is also evident in the post-production of some products such as “Titania” or “Blum” (effects, mixing, use of reverberations, echo, voice filters, etc.), albeit within the classic patterns of conventional radio language.

## 5. Conclusions

This study shows that the use of radio language (spoken words, music, effects, and silence) is a common factor in the five branded podcasts analysed in this paper. Thus, words serve referential, narrative, emotional, and argumentative functions, depending on the type of podcast. “Hotel Jorge Juan” employs words as the primary vehicle of communication, while in “Titania” and “Blum”, they are combined with sound effects and music to enrich the narrative.

Sound effects are used both for setting the mood (as in “La Suma” and “Blum”) and to create specific, realistic atmospheres (as in “Titania”) and are essential in all the pieces to immerse the listener.

Music plays narrative and appellative roles, setting the tone and emotion of each episode. “Blum” has music almost as an additional character, while in “Titania”, it is used for the intros and outros, creating a coherent and evocative atmosphere. Finally, silence is strategically used to foster reflection, and create suspense or a pause for appraisal, adding emotional and narrative depth to the podcasts.

It is therefore evident that, far from breaking with tradition, the producers of the most successful branded podcasts continue to rely on traditional radio genres such as audio fiction, reports, and interviews, which have been characteristic of radio for decades. While the brand is integrated into the content in a coherent and non-intrusive manner, it is evident that there is no new repertoire of disruptive genres. Therefore, the hypothesis that the most successful productions present significant innovations in terms of genre is rejected, confirming the tendency to rely on established radio genres. However, the adaptation of these genres to a digital context and to an audience with asynchronous listening habits gives the branded podcast a prominent place in the brands’ communication strategy.

The use of news and audio fiction genres from conventional radio in the creation of branded podcasts offers brands a golden opportunity to attract new audiences. Thanks to the combination of credibility and emotional connection provided by news genres and the emotion and creativity of audio fiction, these brands have created listening experiences that captivate, inform, and entertain, strengthening the bond with their audiences and positioning themselves as leaders in their field.

Limitations and avenues for future research: the sample was limited to five specific cases, all of them winners of recent national awards. This criterion gives prominence to the productions but restricts the possibility of generalising the results to the entire branded podcast landscape in Spain. Furthermore, the study focuses on content analysis and does not look more closely at audience motivations or reception.

It would be desirable that any future research expand the sample with more branded podcasts, including other linguistic and cultural areas, and further analyse advertising effectiveness through metrics relevant to engagement, ROI, and brand perception. Another possible line of research might be to explore audience perception through interviews or surveys, identifying whether the absence of ad breaks and organic brand integration positively influence listener loyalty.

Ultimately, branded podcasts demonstrate their value as a communication and marketing strategy that utilises classic radio language in a digital medium. Their greatest strength lies in their non-intrusive brand integration, a factor that enhances the listening experience and strengthens the emotional connection with the audience.

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## 7. Specific contribution of each author

	Name and surname
Conception and design of the work	Concepción Gómez López
Methodology	Concepción Gómez López
Data collection and analysis	Concepción Gómez López
Discussion and conclusions	Concepción Gómez López
Drafting, formatting, version review and approval	Concepción Gómez López

## 8. Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest contained in this article.

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