Podium Podcast and the freedom of podcasting: Beyond the limits of radio programming and production constraints

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Abstract

The evolution of the Internet and the impact of digitalization have led the radio industry to try new production, distribution and commercialization strategies. In Spain, radio on the Internet began in the mid-1990s, and years later, in 2005, broadcasters incorporated podcasting. For more than a decade, they have used podcasts as a distribution tool, but in recent years, they have started to offer new content through podcasting. In June 2016, PRISA, one of the main Spanish media groups, took a step further with the launch of Podium Podcast. It is a new brand and platform, with a specific catalogue of native podcasts created and delivered taking podcast listeners into account. Podium Podcast is part of PRISA's digital strategy, but it also shows a new approach to podcasting by the radio industry. Podcasters in Podium Podcast feel free of radio programming conventions and have the opportunity to experiment with content that does not fit into current radio stations' schedules. Podium Podcast expands the Spanish podcasting sphere and contributes to the popularization of podcasts. However, we wonder to what extent it is a threat to independent podcasters and if it might contribute to the colonization of the field by the mainstream.

Keywords

Podcasting, podcasters, radio, Podium Podcast, podcast production, cultural industries

Introduction

In June 2016, PRISA, one of Spain's leading media groups, launched Podium Podcast, a global network of podcasts in Spanish (Morla 2016). Podium Podcast was the culmination of a process aimed at incorporating podcasting into the digital strategy of PRISA Radio, the company's radio division: a specific catalogue of podcasts generated exclusively for this platform. In the first two years, it exceeded 24 million downloads (Espinosa de los Monteros 2018), playing a leading role in the popularization of podcasting in Spain. Among other media, PRISA is the owner of Cadena SER and Los 40, the Spanish talk radio and music radio stations with the largest audiences in Spain. Despite this, the company decided to launch a podcasting platform with its own personality and as a new brand, differing from that of its stations. It was conceived as PRISA Radio's first pure digital product within the group's digital transformation plan, with the aim of looking towards the future of the medium and exploring digital formats (Espinosa de los Monteros 2018).

This article analyses Podium Podcast within the context of the evolution of podcasting in Spain and framed within cultural industries research tradition (Bonet 2017b). It furthers Spanish scholarship on podcasting (Bonet and Sellas 2019; Gallego 2012; García-Marín and Aparici 2018; González and Salgado 2009; Sellas 2012, 2018), and contributes to previous research that has studied the evolution of the Spanish radio industry and its structural changes (Bonet 2007, 2017a; Bonet and Arboledas 2011; Gallego and García-Leiva 2012).

The article addresses the reasons and strategies that led PRISA to launch Podium Podcast, a move that positioned the company as the first Spanish media group to create a digital-native podcast platform. Furthermore, it analyses the relevance of this project in the evolution of podcasting in Spain within the radio industry but also considering its

implications for independent podcasting as a cultural product. At the same time, we approach the object of study as the result of a sum of decisions taken by certain actors and the production dynamics of a particular context. In this sense, the article addresses production, an area of study that aims to investigate what lies behind the content of the media and cultural industries (Shoemaker and Rees 1996). We explore podcasters' perspectives taking into account working conditions, autonomy and self-exploitation (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2013). Our aim is to contribute to incipient podcast studies (Berry 2018) by analysing the relationship between the nature of Podium Podcast as a project located industrially within the radio sphere and the practices and approaches of its podcasters, who view podcasting as something quite different from radio.

The study method incorporated a combination of analytical tools. On the one hand, we carried out a quantitative study of the podcasts offered by Podium Podcast through a content analysis performed by means of a minimal code scheme that included the number of podcasts, the title of each podcast, its category – which used the tags established by the platform itself – the number of podcasts of each category, the number of seasons it had run and the number of episodes per season. The data source was the main Podium Podcast (2018). In addition to this, we conducted telephone interviews with seven of the main figures involved in Podium Podcast. The sample of interviewees (Table 1) included the project manager and a group of complementary podcasters in terms of the type of podcast that they produced, production dynamics, their professional careers and their previous experience in radio and/or in the sphere of podcasting. The study is based on a qualitative-interpretative approach, which focuses on human behaviour in a particular context and on how people make sense of their personal experience (Deacon et al. 2007; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012; Terre Blanche et al. 2006). To this end, semi-structured interviews were carried out addressing the following

four main areas: the politics and culture of podcasting, production, content and narratives. Some questions were adapted to the specific characteristics of the interviewee and the data collected, with the aim of identifying their motivations, experiences and perspectives (Wimmer and Dominick 1996).

Interviewee	Professional profile	Role in Podium Podcast
Ana Alonso	Philologist, journalist, actress	Director of the audio dramas *El gran apagón* ('The great blackout') (2016–2018) and *Guerra 3* ('War 3') (2018–present)
María Jesús Espinosa de los Monteros	Journalist, radio producer and writer	Project manager
Francisco Izuzquiza	Journalist	Host of the entertainment podcast *La escóbula de la brújula* ('The *escóbula* of the compass') (2013–present), included in the Podium Podcast catalogue in 2018 after five seasons as an independent podcast
Carles Porta	Journalist, writer	Director and writer of *Le llamaban padre* ('They called him father') (2016), a narrative journalism podcast dealing with a case of child abuse
Teo Rodríguez	Writer, scriptwriter and sound producer	Creator, writer and sound editor of the podcasts *El club del terror* ('The terror club') (2016), *Leyendas urbanas* ('Urban legends') (2017), *Ovni* ('UFO') (2017), *Informe Z* ('Z Report') (2018) and *El colegio invisible* ('The invisible school') (2018–present)

| Mona León Siminiani | Journalist, presenter, scriptwriter | Director of the podcast *Negra y Criminal* ('Black and criminal') (2016–present), which was included in Podium Podcast in 2017 after two seasons as a radio programme on Cadena SER |
| Eugenio Viñas | Journalist | Author of the narrative journalism podcast *Valencia Destroy* ('Valencia destroy') (2017) |

Table 1: List of interviewees, their profile, role and podcasts produced.

A set of practices, cultural meanings, and distribution systems: The maturity of podcasting

It has been fifteen years since Ben Hammersley published the article 'Audible revolution' in *The Guardian*, acknowledged as the first public reference to podcasting. Hammersley set out the case of some pioneers, pointing out that the sum of MP3 players, accessible software and weblogging opened the door to a 'new boom in amateur audio'. The article then pointed to the potential of podcasting as a medium that would change not only the dynamics of listening but also the possibilities of producing content (Hammersley 2004). The latest academic literature shows that podcasting has evolved to maturity in recent years. Bonini uses the expression 'second age of podcasting' to designate this stage, which he describes as 'the transformation of podcasting into a commercial productive practice and a medium for mass consumption' (2015: 22). He argues that this evolution has taken place as a sum of technological, creative and economic reasons, including several factors such as the rise of smartphones, the development of podcast networks, the success of crowdfunding campaigns and the work of independent podcasters, many of whom have emerged from

public radio. Podcasting apps, the hosts' personality, the social nature of the medium and the success of narratives in the style of US podcast *Serial* (2014–present) are other elements that explain this momentum (Morris and Patterson 2015; Markman 2015).

The evolution of podcasting is not due to technological reasons alone. From a constructivist perspective, it can be understood as a polyhedral process that derives from the tensions and negotiations between the various social, political and economic forces that, with divergent interpretations, may influence the consolidation of technologies (Campostrini 2015). In the case of podcasting, one of these forces is radio. In fact, the earliest academic studies on podcasting took its radio-ness into consideration. At that time, podcasting was still an emerging technology, which could be considered another step in the technological evolution of radio as a medium (Menduni 2007), with the potential to make the radio business 'reconsider some established practices and preconceptions about audiences, consumption, production and distribution' (Berry 2006: 144). Over time, it has become clear that podcasting 'has come to mean much more than just a delivery mode for audio content' (McHugh 2016: 78). Podcasting has generated a new audiosphere (Madsen 2009), characterized by a diversity of providers, topics and functions (Heise 2014).

Podcasts certainly share an aural nature with radio. Besides this, radio programmes are also distributed as podcasts, and the radio industry has started to offer specific content through podcasting (Bonet and Sellas 2019). As noted by Bottomley (2015), the reality of podcasting can be understood better if the history of radio is taken into account, considering 'the full range of radio's forms, not only those that are the most recent or the most culturally mainstream' (2015: 186). This extended vision of radio is what Sterne et al. argue in considering podcasting as 'not an alternative to broadcasting, but a

realisation of broadcasting that ought to exist alongside and compete with other models'
(2008).

Podcasting shares characteristics, practices, and institutions with radio, but 'it also
presents itself as a collection of practices, cultures, institutions and distribution systems'
(Berry 2016: 8). The evolution of independent podcasting and expansion of podcasts
beyond the radio industry, not only in the amateur scene but also in areas such as
education, marketing, arts and public relations, and the consolidation of a podcasting
culture (Llinares et al. 2018) show the progressive construction of a self-identity for
podcasting. Thus, we might consider it to be established in a space that Berry describes
as liminal, that is, influenced by radio but not the same because 'whilst in places it is
institutionally the same, it should not be seen as *actually* the same' (2018: 16, original
emphasis). Born within the radio industry, but also taking into account the sphere of
podcasting, Podium Podcast inhabits this liminal space, both refashioning radio's
cultural heritage (Bottomley 2015) and feeding from online media practices and
cultures.

Podcasting within the industry: From radio podcasts to digital-native podcasts

Within the approach of the political economy of cultural industries, radio is related to
continuous distribution. In terms of Flichy's (1980) classic segmentation between
merchandise culturelle ('cultural goods') and *culture du flot* ('flow culture'), radio is
one of the cultural industries characterized by a flow production. It broadcasts
ephemeral content, disseminates prototypes and organizes the flow into a programming
grid (Bonet and Sellas 2019). However, when digitalization took its first steps in
Spanish radio in the 1980s and the 1990s, the boundaries between the flow model and

the stock model gradually blurred (Miège 1992). Therefore, digitalization has led radio to take on some of the characteristics of the cultural industries that work with a stock programming model, like the music industry or cinema, in which the management of a catalogue plays a fundamental role in the value chain (Bonet 2007).

While the Spanish radio industry digitalized production, editing processes and infrastructures during the last two decades of the twentieth century, broadcasting is still analogue and Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) has been on continuous stand-by. Early trials of DAB in Spain began in the late 1990s. Two decades later, there is not yet a market for it, and we may consider DAB to have failed (Bonet 2017a). Meanwhile, the Internet, and podcasting as part of it, is in the sights of industry as the real digital radio in Spain. Spanish broadcasters started to incorporate podcasting in 2005, and for more than a decade they have primarily used podcasts as a distribution tool (Gallego 2012; Sellas 2012). At first, podcasts were integrated in an inconsistent and insufficient way due to structural factors and the lack of a clear strategy for their use: 'while radio stations maintain their current model of making radio, consideration of exclusive content for podcasting can be nothing more than a thought experiment' (Sellas 2012: 19). Although podcasting as technology was in place more than a decade ago, it is only in recent years that broadcasters have begun to explore new production, distribution and commercialization strategies to manage not only linear radio, but also a catalogue of digital audio content that forces the industry to rethink the traditional value chain (Bonet and Sellas 2019).

Podium Podcast fits into the evolution of radio as a cultural industry and is an attempt by PRISA Radio to explore the podcasting business. With a mid-term positioning strategy, the media group is attempting to reach younger listeners, expand its market focusing on the global Spanish-speaking world and launch new lines of business. There

are also some points of reference in other countries that show the opportunities that podcasting brings to the industry. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) has been successful in using podcasts to consolidate Radio 3 as a radio-like platform, attract young audiences and draw users to the broader Radio 3 universe, even from outside Canada (Cwynar 2015). Meanwhile, in the United Kingdom, media and entertainment group Global has added a catalogue of 1500 podcasts to its Global Player app, which includes not only those from Global brands, such as Heart, Capital, Smooth and others, but also from a variety of publishers that Global has a commercial relationship with. Its aim is to attract investments in digital audio through its advertising platform, DAX (Stassen 2018). With a podcast team consisting of between six and twenty people, Global's podcasting unit works to drive incremental listening and new audiences (Southern 2018). For its part, Podium Podcast is testing its own business model by seeking sponsorship of the entire platform, individual podcast sponsorship, advertising pre-roll in episodes, and branded podcasts co-produced in collaboration with a commercial brand (Sellas 2018).

Podium Podcast: A digital-native product for the podcasting arena

Podium Podcast is a project instigated by PRISA, one of Spain's leading media corporations, which has a presence in over twenty countries and especially Latin America. PRISA's business spans several sectors, including newspapers, radio, television, publishing, education and advertising. Its radio division, PRISA Radio, is the largest Spanish radio group. It owns or has a holding in over 1200 stations in Spain and twelve other countries (PRISA 2018).

Although PRISA began life in Spain, it is a global media group, which is one of the reasons why its first digital-native podcasting project was launched as a new brand,

instead of using the historical and prestigious Spanish station Cadena SER. According

to Espinosa de los Monteros (2018), Podium Podcast is an international start-up focused

on the Spanish global market. Indeed, the platform will be launching new podcasts

produced in several Latin American countries, including Chile, Argentina, Mexico,

Colombia and Panama, as part of its strategy to address Spanish-speaking audiences.

Since its birth in June 2016, Podium Podcast has continuously grown in terms of the

number of podcasts that it offers and has achieved great results in downloads. In the

first two years, Podium Podcast drew more than 24 million downloads, with an increase

of 184 per cent between the first and second years (Espinosa de los Monteros 2018).

Data gathered on 9 November 2018 showed that the catalogue of Podium Podcast

included 71 productions and 1681 published episodes (Podium Podcast 2018). The

platform structures its products into four main categories (Figure 1): Entertainment

(niche content), Essentials (based on the historical archive of Cadena SER), Fiction
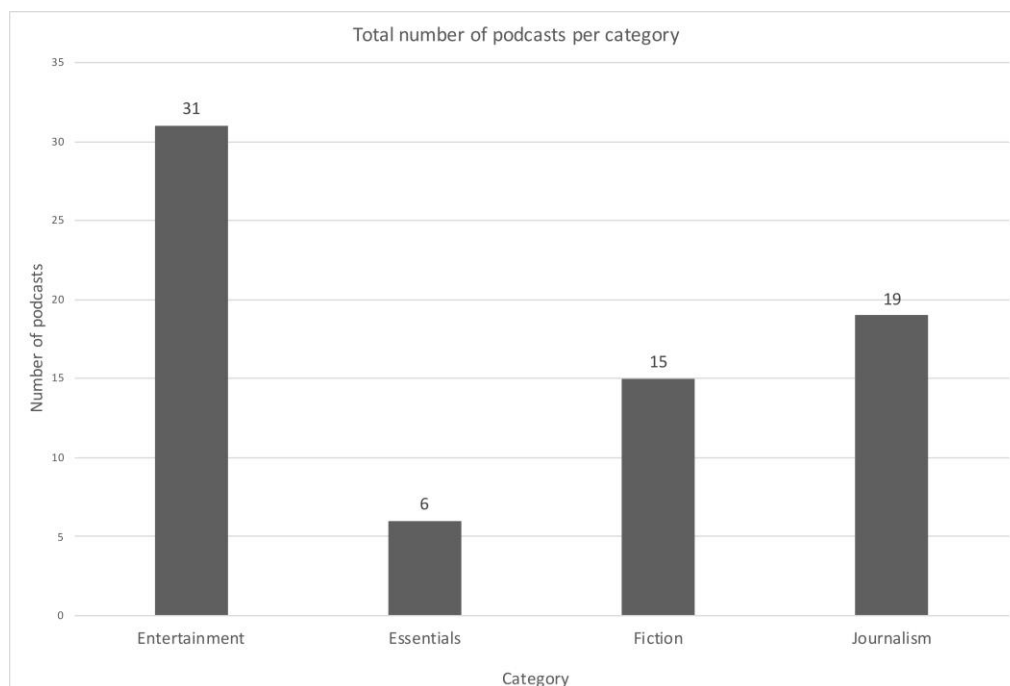
(audio drama) and Journalism.

Figure 1: Number of podcasts on Podium Podcast.

Entertainment is the most extensive category, with more than 40 per cent of the podcasts. Journalism represents the 27 per cent of the total, while Fiction is the 21 per cent. Essentials is the lowest percentage (Figure 2). The number of seasons and episodes is very variable. However, most of the podcasts tagged as 'Fiction' and 'Journalism' have only one season and less than ten episodes for each one. *El gran apagón* (2016–18) – which is one of the star products of Podium Podcast – is a meaningful exception, with three seasons. Podcasts tagged as 'Entertainment', which offers specialized content, have more seasons and episodes than the rest of the categories.
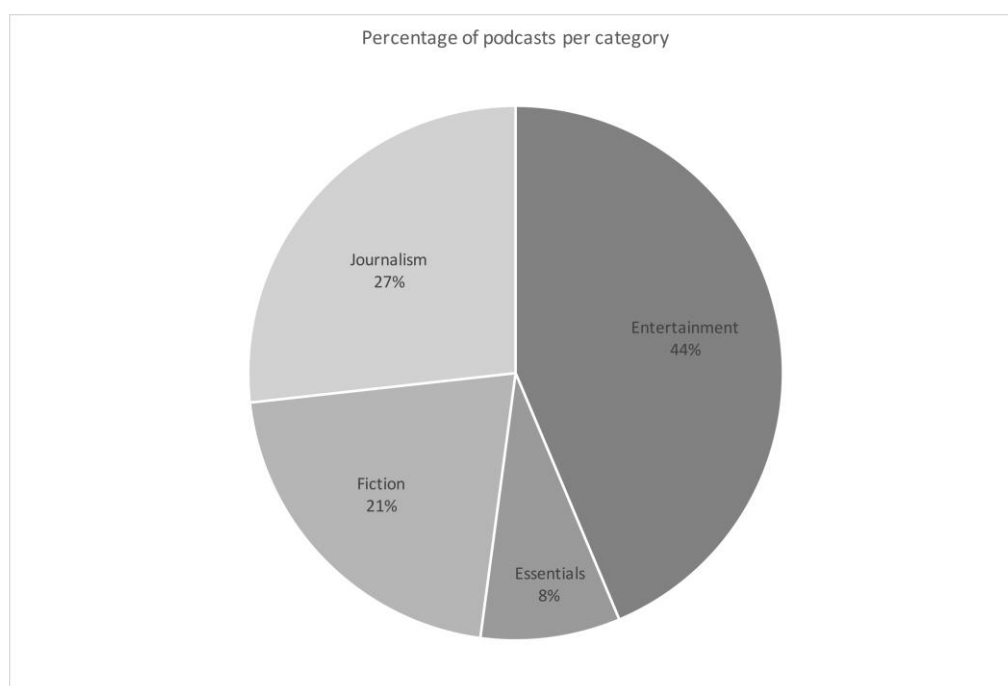

Figure 2: Percentage of podcasts on Podium Podcast.

Aside from these four thematic categories, Podium Podcast conceptualizes its productions in four main areas depending on the terms of the production (Espinosa de los Monteros 2018):

- Editorial production: The main product of Podium Podcast, which includes a variety of podcasts in terms of production, cost or number of people involved in them.

- Synergies: Podcasts produced in collaboration with other media within the PRISA group, like the publisher Alfaguara or the Cultural section of the newspaper El País.

- Branded podcasts: Produced in partnership with a commercial brand that sponsors the production.

- Syndications: Podcasts produced in collaboration with an external agent, such as independent producers or podcasters.

All the above is accessible via the Podium Podcast website, organized by category. Listeners may subscribe to podcasts through RSS syndication, listen to them online via streaming or download content in MP3 format. In addition, each podcast also displays links to iTunes and iVoox, two of the main platforms in the Spanish podcasting arena. Podium Podcast also allows users to take content away, embed it in third-party websites and share podcasts through social networks. In this sense, Podium Podcast is facing the emerging ecosystem that Nieborg and Poell have identified as the 'platformization' of cultural products, which 'marks the reorganization of cultural production and circulation, rendering cultural commodities contingent' (2018: 4289). This process forces producers to deal with complex multisided platform configurations, changes in platform governance and the contingency of content, both in the sense of platform dependence and as a product informed by datafied user feedback. Podium Podcast has to operate within this framework, but at the same time it tries to add value to its own platforms with enriched content in addition to podcasts. This is the purpose of the weblog, where Podium Podcast reveals details and internal issues related to production, explains the making of some podcasts and offers interviews with producers, actors and

podcast hosts. The platform also has its own mobile apps, both in the Apple Store and the Play Store, and its own profile on several social networks.

Genres and narratives that go beyond the rigidity of radio programming

The status of radio in Spain has its roots in the turbulent Spanish history of the twentieth century (Bonet and Arboledas 2011). At the end of the Civil War, the Spanish radio system became a political tool in the hands of the dictator Francisco Franco. The dictatorship (1939–75) introduced censorship and forbade news on all stations except the official Radio Nacional de España (RNE). As a result, private broadcasters had to focus their efforts on entertainment and fiction. At the end of Franco's regime, when democracy was finally established, there was a boom of news programmes, while other genres, such as audio dramas, virtually disappeared. The current model of programming is a legacy of that time. In this context, podcasting represents an opportunity for genres, formats and narratives that do not have space on radio broadcast schedules. The Spanish radio industry is conservative in terms of programming models and content, which is why the heads of PRISA Radio considered it strategically necessary to create a new brand for its native digital podcast platform. Talk radio in Spain is very much linked to immediacy and news, even in entertainment programmes, and all schedules have a very closed and rigid structure. Rodríguez, who has launched several podcasts on Podium Podcast, but also works for Cadena SER as a sound producer, points out how immediacy has conditioned radio in Spain:

> From the time you turn on the radio in the morning until you turn it off at night, it
> is as if there was not a moment to stop, to say, 'Stop, let me disconnect for a

moment and listen to something other than all this news'. This is what podcasting

gives you.

(Rodríguez 2018)

Alonso (2018), director of two of the most popular fiction podcasts, *El gran apagón* (2016–18) and *Guerra 3* (2018–present), sums up the situation as follows: 'It is as if talk-show has eaten the radio'.

Budget is also another reason for Spanish radio's rigidity. In the opinion of Izuzquiza (2018), host of *La escóbula de la brújula* (2013–present), radio in Spain still suffers from the effects of the economic crisis, which explains why 'it is impossible to maintain the same level of quality with half the staff of some years ago' (Izuzquiza 2018). He concludes that the situation has opened the door for podcasting to recover some genres such as investigative journalism and focusing on niche content, while talk radio stations are not able to take such great risks. This is precisely why PRISA Radio decided to move *Negra y Criminal* (2016–present) from the Cadena SER programming grid to the Podium Podcast catalogue. León Siminiani (2018) believes that it was a decision by the managers due to economic reasons, because *Negra y Criminal* is expensive to produce.

In this context, PRISA's managers saw podcasting as an opportunity to test new territories for audio. According to the former director of Cadena SER, Antonio Hernández Rodício, podcasting is a format for subscription, serialization, loyalty and fragmentation (MAC 2018). This is the reason why PRISA decided to create a new brand for a catalogue of digital-native podcasts different from radio podcasts. Based on an analysis of some podcast platforms focused on content, production, advertising and distribution, and following previous studies about radio genres and formats, Martí and Ribes proposed a breakdown of podcasts that identifies twelve main genres deployed in

several formats. Their study reveals that 'we might be seeing new genres and formats that differ from those we find in conventional broadcasting, so that podcasting may be a suitable landscape for developing new narrative models' (Martí and Ribes 2018: 1891).

Audio drama is one of the leading genres in the Podium Podcast catalogue under podcasts tagged as 'Fiction'. According to Espinosa de los Monteros (2018), Podium Podcast's managers have focused on fiction because they wanted to bring a modern aesthetic and sound production approach to a genre that had its golden age in Spanish radio in the middle of the twentieth century. Despite being key content on Spanish radio stations for years, radio drama has all but disappeared since the 1980s. During recent decades, only some isolated initiatives kept the genre alive, and some of the Podium Podcast producers had been involved in these islands of resistance. They therefore take into account the radio cultural heritage that Bottomley discusses when analysing *Welcome to the Night Vale* (WNV) (2012–present) as a remediation of radio (2015). As in the case of WNV, podcasting opens the door to the recovery of a genre that was successful decades ago but that finds minimal space on today's radio schedules. Although the Podium Podcast podcasters fully appreciate the influence of the radio's history and tradition, at the same time they highlight influences from outside the medium:

> Now, an audio drama must have a very good script, great actors and a production that does seem more like cinema than what we understand as the old radio theatre. It must sound modern, similar to the Netflix series style. Even with more natural 'waterfall' voices […]. We have multiple references; today's sound fiction has its referents in many languages and media, not only in radio.

(Alonso 2018)

By producing radio drama that differs from that of the mid-twentieth century, Podium Podcast contributes to giving podcasting its own space. As Berry points out, 'while listeners may appreciate such revivalist approaches, there is a need for podcasting to further develop its own identity' (2016: 16). Therefore, Podium Podcast audio dramas do not only satisfy listeners who are familiar with the radio tradition, but also allow the discovery of a genre by generations of young listeners who do not identify it with the radio medium, but with podcasting. Moreover, PRISA's powerful economic and material resources allow it to produce high-quality audio dramas – *El gran apagón*, *Guerra 3* and *Bienvenido a la vida peligrosa*, among others – with renowned directors, actors and writers and a large number of professionals.

Some of these audio dramas involve Latin American actors, the aim being to generate a catalogue with a wide range of Spanish accents. Indeed, Podium Podcast is a project aimed at the Spanish global market and will be launching new podcasts produced in several Latin American countries. Audio drama is also a way of exploring new business lines, such as branded podcasts. This is the case of *Aerolínea Momentos* (2017), a banded podcast created as part of the campaign to promote the 90th anniversary of Iberia, the main Spanish airline. It is a sci-fi audio drama based on the idea of travelling through time and space to recreate the company's history (Sellas 2018). This successful experience reaffirmed the desire of Podium Podcast managers to produce more fiction-branded podcasts.

Podium Podcast has also developed several podcasts tagged as 'Journalism'. Unlike audio drama, there is less tradition of the radio documentary in Spain, *Documentos RNE* by public broadcaster RNE being one of the few programmes based on this genre. However, podcasting has given a chance to new journalistic audio narratives and

approaches. Research on documentaries and features has shown how podcasting is influencing the evolution of the audio storytelling genre (Lindgren 2014, 2016; McHugh 2016, 2017; Lindgren and McHugh 2013). Narrative journalism podcasts on Podium Podcast – *Le llamaban padre*, *V, las cloacas del Estado*, *Valencia Destroy*, *Lo conocí en un Corpus*, among others – follow some trends highlighted by scholars. Free from the constraints of broadcasting conventions and schedules, podcasts enhance the personal narrative journalism genre identified by Lindgren in her critical analysis of US podcasts (2016) based on Coward's mapping of confessional and personal journalism as a new cultural form. Podcasts tagged as 'Journalism' on Podium Podcast display the same personal involvement of the presenter, with reporters sharing their experiences or taking a narrative approach to stories.

Spanish podcasts are not alien to the influence of US production styles (Lindgren 2014) and the evolution of the radio documentary 'towards a more-first person, explicitly narrated format favoured by American producers' (Lindgren and McHugh 2013: 101). This trend towards forms of personal narrative audio journalism 'can be conceptualised as radio format *upgrading* of metamorphosing on podcast platforms through changing production conventions and listener expectations into an emerging genre' (McHugh 2016: 37, original emphasis).

In Spain, it is more a mirroring of foreign productions than a remediation of a legacy. In this sense, Espinosa de los Monteros (2018) admits that after the success of *Serial*, it was clear that Podium Podcast had to make a commitment to narrative journalism. In addition, Porta (2018), an experienced journalist who had never worked in podcasting, wrote the script of *Le llamaban padre* (2016) after being impressed by the popular case of Sarah Koenig's podcast. *Le llamaban padre* deals with a case of paedophilia and sexual abuse uncovered in 2013. Three years later, in 2016, Porta published a book in

which he explained the case through the point of view of some of its protagonists. Now, the story has been serialized in a narrative style, and he explains how difficult it was to put himself 'inside as a narrator, in order to connect the different elements and to build a story, while at the same time trying not to induce listeners to judge in a specific sense' (Porta 2018). Podcasters involved in these journalistic podcasts feel that the format allows them to develop what each story needs for it to be explained in depth. Viñas (*Valencia Destroy*) emphasizes how the audience becomes immersed in the story: 'the success of my project lies in listeners' comments about the last episode, which show that they have fully experienced all the episodes and have gone through the story with me' (Viñas 2018). *Valencia Destroy* (2017) is a serialized narrative podcast that explains the roots of a countercultural movement that took place in the Valencia region during the 1980s thanks to the confluence of a new generation of musicians, artists, DJs, performers, playwrights and designers. Here, as with radio, the auditory nature of podcasting is key: 'this story needed to be explained orally, because it is a story based on sounds. I needed listeners to hear the voices of the protagonists and the music of that period' (Viñas 2018).

Audio drama and narrative journalism have generated some of Podium Podcast's most outstanding podcasts. However, the platform's catalogue also comprises a number of heterogeneous podcasts designed as niche content. While linear programming is defined by flow logic and its homogeneity, when adopting the stock production model, the radio industry has to deal with niche and heterogeneity (Bonet and Sellas 2019). This is the purpose of the category tagged as 'Entertainment'. These podcasts address specialized topics for smaller and more targeted audiences through a diversity of content that fits into most of the genres proposed by Martí and Ribes (2018). Audio drama, narrative journalism podcasts and niche content show how podcasting affords producers 'the

opportunity to explore topics, formats, durations, and approaches that would not normally find a home on broadcast radio' (Berry 2015: 172). In contrast, the category tagged as 'Essentials' is a way of bringing back the historical legacy of Cadena SER and highlighting its value. Thus, it is no longer a remediation of radio, but rather the direct recovery of the history of the medium. Despite PRISA Radio launching Podium Podcast as a new brand for the podcasting landscape, this media group is the owner of the first radio station to make regular broadcasts in Spain – that is, Radio Barcelona in 1924 – and it does not hesitate to highlight its history and expertise in this respect. Moreover, the move provides a potential means of exploring the commodification of nostalgia (Bonet and Sellas 2019).

Podcasting dynamics: Leaving radio conventions and production routine constraints behind

Podium Podcast is a project that has been established within the structure of PRISA Radio. It therefore benefits from the resources of the leading media group in the Spanish radio industry. However, in terms of structure, Podium Podcast has a small team of four people involved in production. There is a project manager, who oversees the entire process and keeps an eye on the different aspects of each production. Then there is also a person in charge of executive production, who works with the creators and producers of each podcast. In addition, there are two professionals in charge of the online aspect: a community manager responsible for Podium Podcast activity and profiles on social networks, and a web manager, who manages the Podium Podcast website. Finally, there other agents are also involved in the value chain, such as the agency that produces the illustrations for podcasts and at least one person in every other department of PRISA Radio collaborating with Podium Podcast when necessary – this includes sound design,

marketing, sales, the newsroom, music and the library. Each podcast has its own team, some comprising professionals working on other programmes produced by Cadena SER, PRISA's main talk radio station, but others based on a co-production model, in collaboration with independent producers outside the media group.

The structure allows the production model to be adapted to the characteristics of each podcast, from the most complex productions such as *El gran apagón* (2016–18) – which involved dozens of professionals, including some well-known cinema actors – to smaller projects by professionals within Cadena SER. Projects flow from ideas by both the Podium Podcast project manager, who then looks for the most suitable professional profiles for them, and from Cadena SER professionals or external producers, who pitch their proposals to the Podium Podcast managers. In the case of people who work for PRISA's main radio station, podcasting is an opportunity for new ideas and creativity. But it is not easy to make it compatible with their job. Rodríguez, who is the sound producer of the SER weekend magazine *A vivir que son dos días*, acknowledges the additional cost of maintaining both profiles. His words reveal how passion is the counter side of balance: 'Now I'm part of Podium, and as a person who can never stop, and am very persistent, first I do something and then I show it to María Jesús [Espinosa de los Monteros]' (Rodríguez 2018). In terms of the difficulties, León Siminiani explains that the producer of her podcast works on four different Cadena SER programmes. Due to this, and also the sheer size of PRISA Radio, 'It is difficult to produce episodes. Also, you have to juggle the calendar, infrastructures, people […]. The process of producing *Negra y Criminal* is arduous and very difficult and it takes several weeks to do' (León Siminiani 2018). The absence of constraints related to time, structures or routines makes it possible to overcome these difficulties.

Podium Podcast has also opened the door to collaboration with external producers, a model that is characteristic of the Spanish television system but rare in the radio industry. *V, las cloacas del Estado* (2016) and *Le llamaban padre* (2016) were produced in this way. Finally, the platform has also incorporated independent podcasters, who take the opportunity to benefit from Cadena SER's human and material resources. Eugenio Viñas is a freelance journalist who produced *Valencia Destroy* (2017) for Podium Podcast using Radio Valencia's infrastructure. Most of the interviews for the project were carried out face to face at PRISA's radio station in the city of Valencia, but in some cases the interviewee was connected from other local stations or from the headquarters of PRISA Radio in Madrid.

La escóbula de la brújula (2013–present) is a clear example of what it means to be under the umbrella of PRISA Radio. This podcast started years ago within the sphere of independent podcasting, and the first episodes were produced at the home of one of the hosts. They then went on to produce it at several small local radio stations. Now it is incorporated within Podium Podcast; it is produced at PRISA headquarters in Madrid using Cadena SER resources. Izuzquiza maintains that this has not modified the spirit of the podcast, but acknowledges that being part of Podium Podcast does mean working under certain pressure as it is 'playing in the "Premier League" of podcasting' (Izuzquiza 2018). In addition, they have changed some elements of the podcast, such as its signature tune and music, to meet regulations and use the Cadena SER library. Nevertheless, the podcasters at Podium Podcast feel that they are a long way from radio production routines. As Berry remarks, podcasters 'are not constrained by the clock, where content must fit into regularly scheduled slots leaving space for news, travel, commercials and other elements of scheduled benchmarks' (2016: 15–16). In this sense, in relation to *El gran apagón*, Alonso (2018) explains that they 'did not want to

establish duration a priori, because these things can overload the scripts. Episodes can be of different lengths, depending on the story, on what it needs'. The director of *Guerra 3* (2018–present) compares her experience in podcasting to her previous career in radio:

> What podcasting has given me is not being subject to traditional radio programming and mechanisms. There are endless possibilities, but it must also be said that you can spend an hour setting up five minutes. It is another kind of product, and no one knows how long it will last, that is not subject to current logic. And in post-production work, we review it over and over again. We might even make twenty editions of an episode.

(Alonso 2018)

León Siminiani (*Negra y Criminal*) believes that the main difference between radio and podcasting is the frequency, 'the oppressiveness of radio broadcasting is the obligation of being there every day, every time' (León Siminiani 2018), while podcasting has no calendar. The nature of podcasting also generates a relationship based on internal confidence, as Viñas (2018) points out: 'I worked on the scripts with complete freedom and I wrote everything I had in my head in words, everything I wanted to be in the script'. Mutual reliance between podcasters and managers is basic in promoting creativity and encouraging creators to propose new ideas or experiment with sound production.

> Podium is absolute freedom. I am the one who writes it, the one who records with the actors, and then who assembles it. I pass the scripts to María Jesús [Espinosa

de los Monteros], she reads them and that is all. We have done so many things, that you gain trust.

(Rodríguez 2018).

The nature of podcasting also allows for in-depth stories when investigating and producing narrative journalism. Unlike Spanish talk radio, podcasting is not linked to immediacy and news, and podcasters have a more open and flexible framework. When talking about *Valencia Destroy*, Eugenio Viñas remarks that he recorded more than 50 hours of interviews and researched to an extent that would not be possible with the daily radio production routines. Porta (*Le llamaban padre*) is a journalist with a long career in the media in both the press and the audio-visual sector. His answer on what podcasting has given him is conclusive:

Podcasting has shown me that it opens up a huge world. An incredible, endless window. Creatively, it allows receivers to get really close. It is probably the closest format to the people. The connection with the listener; of all the different things I've done, this is the most intense. The voice is an element that conveys passion in a fantastic way. I feel very comfortable with it.

(Porta 2018)

The podcasters interviewed for this article also mention creativity and self-realization when considering their motivations and the strengths of podcasting. However, there are also some drawbacks to think about in this otherwise seemingly liberating and ideal scenario, which reveal the conflicting experiences of working conditions in cultural industries (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2010). As explained above, podcasters who combine Podium Podcast with Cadena SER struggle to combine the two, often assuming the cost of hours and hours of work. This investment in time and extra effort

is common with freelance podcasters, who also have to cope with a context of uncertainty, conditioned by projects. Thus, we can state that there are different profiles of podcasters who share the same passion for podcasting, and this can even lead them to assume some forms of self-exploitation, an element characteristic of creative work, with its high degree of emotional involvement for those engaged in it (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2013). Since Podium Podcast is a project that aims to professionalize podcasting in Spain, working conditions for podcasters emerge as one of the challenges for the future of podcasting within the cultural industries.

Conclusion

In recent years, a convergence of factors has meant that podcasting has '(finally) arrived in mainstream consciousness' (Markman 2015: 240). This article studies Podium Podcast as a potentially disruptive project in the Spanish podcasting landscape as it reveals that media corporations have started to understand podcasting in its own terms. Although the radio industry has incorporated podcasting progressively as a cultural product, we may consider Podium Podcast to be innovative in that it represents the first attempt to convert podcasting into a product of the cultural industry, 'given its interest not only in exploring it but also in commercialising and positioning it in the market, promoting its consumption' (Bonet and Sellas 2019: 7). Although innovation is a complex process, it usually follows top-down decision-making schemes (Fernández-Quijada et al. 2015). In this case, the first native digital podcast platform within the Spanish radio industry was launched by a media group that had the means to do so thanks to its leading position in the sector, and only with the involvement of specific people who believe in a commitment to podcasting as a medium.

At the same time, Podium Podcast is a project instigated by a media group that is

playing the long game when it comes to thinking about the future of radio. The paradox

is that to expand its business, PRISA Radio, which has historically played a significant

role in the evolution of the radio medium in Spain, has launched a podcasting platform

and promoted it as something new and different to radio, investing a great deal of

resources in it. In doing so, PRISA Radio is contributing towards the shaping of a

market in which radio, with its expertise in audio, will have to share the space with

other agents of diverse origins.

In fact, the podcasters at Podium Podcast admit that their podcasts could have a place

on the radio if radio were different. In other words, while they agree that radio and

podcasting share the same nature, and some even have a foot in each camp, they

identify the current radio model in Spain as being very much corporate and

institutionalized (Sterne et al. 2008). As a result, they believe that podcasting is the best

place to do what they do. The Podium Podcast producers conceive podcasts as a craft

product endowed with a freedom of production and narrative, which therefore has no

place in radio programming and routines. Moreover, they define themselves as

podcasters.

In his analysis of *Serial* as an example of the evolution of podcasting, Berry emphasized

that while this podcast 'could represent an identifiable landmark, the reasons behind this

notability may be a combination of factors, in which technologies, brands, social

sharing, and engaging content all play a part' (2015: 171). Podium Podcast shares the

same logic, and through the strength of a group like PRISA, it aims to position itself as

a paradigm of the maturity of podcasting in Spain. We should keep in mind, then, what

this forceful entry by the radio industry represents for the podcasting landscape. As

noted by Bottomley, 'the fact of the matter is that, in 2015 the podcasting field has

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become highly professionalized and increasingly consolidated' (2015: 182). Podium Podcast plays a significant role in the popularization of podcasting in Spain and this contribution is significant. But at the same time, it is an actor framed within a cultural industry and one that responds to the interests of this industry. Among other things, this involves a certain quality and professionalism standards, which in some way 'institutionalizes' its podcasts. We might understand the recruitment of outstanding independent podcasters and progressive shaping of a type of 'star-system' as part of this commitment to podcasting by the industry. Nevertheless, we must not forget that beyond Podium Podcast, there are minority voices, alternative podcast networks and hundreds of independent podcasts. We may ask ourselves to what extent it might be a threat that podcasting may become 'colonized by the mainstream' (Markman 2015: 243) if listeners end up identifying the whole with only a part, that is, identifying podcasting with Podium Podcast. If, as pointed out by some of its podcasters, Podium Podcast is the 'Premier League' of podcasting, it is necessary to bear in mind that there are other leagues beyond modern football. In other words, that another type of podcasting is possible. More research will be needed in the sphere of Spanish podcasting in the coming years to observe whether Podium Podcast has contributed towards consolidating the field or whether it has been an agent of appropriation by the radio industry, while also keeping an eye on the evolution of independent podcasting.

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