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*The power of audio journalism and its connection with
young audiences: a case study in Spain through
the daily newspaper El País, the documentary El Yunque
and the commentary with Saldremos Mejores*

ABSTRACT: Podcasts have become a new narrative format for the consumption of information and news. On the one hand, and within the media landscape, they are revolutionising and developing a new genre such as the “daily”. On the other hand, and from within the podcasting industry itself, creating documentary projects or adapting information to communities by commenting on current news. By analysing these three types of formats in relation to audio journalism and by studying specific cases, the aim of this study is to determine whether there is a pattern between the different news formats and their relationship with younger audiences.

KEYWORDS: podcasting; community building; audience; audio journalism

Introduction

The podcast format is beginning to become part of the daily listening routine. According to data from the *Edison Research Share of Ear 2023* report (2023: 9), there has been an increase in consumption since 2014, rising to 55% by 2023.

In June 2023, the Reuters Institute warned that interest in news had fallen by 34 points since 2015, with more visual social networks such as TikTok, Instagram or YouTube being the main platforms chosen by younger audiences to get informed. In the same report on digital journalism and reviewing trends since 2018, the stable consumption of audio news is also observed at the same time as the overall podcast market has grown; specifically in Spain, 14% of podcast users who listen to news are young adults between 18 and 34 years old (Reuters Institute, 2023: 28). A year later, in the new Reuters Institute *Digital News Report 2024*, the journalistic podcast is one of the positive elements for the media, as it attracts a young and highly educated audience. «But overall, it is a minority activity. In 20 countries, just over a third (35%) consume a podcast on a monthly basis, and only 13% listen to a programme linked to news and current affairs» (Reuters Institute, 2024: 11). However,

Spain is an exception, with 44% of listeners having listened to a podcast in the last month (*Ivi*: 105).

In the era of the attention economy and fragmented consumption, the «snack culture» (Scolari, 2020), podcasting has become a narrative format that reflects an underground media subculture that is gaining popularity among a younger and loyal audience. Particularly noteworthy is the daily news podcast (daily), which is expanding in the media industry and has created new narrative opportunities (Carvajal, Marín-Sanchiz & Navas, 2022: 1), not only for traditional media but also for indigenous media in Spain. Beyond the daily, the creation of other audio journalistic formats and on current affairs is promoted as a product or service of journalistic production, representing an opportunity to «inform through narrative modes and different styles compared to traditional media, and to explore other formulas» (Martínez-Costa, Amoedo & Moreno-Moreno, 2022: 4).

Audio journalism through three formats: Daily, Documentary and News Commentary

Podcasts have revolutionised the way we consume news and information, offering «accessibility, diversity, perspectives, rich content, authenticity, global reach and have become an influential medium that complements and challenges traditional media» (Dhiman & Bose, 2023: 4). Online audio opens up a new narrative space for communication companies, especially print media, and for journalists and communication professionals, allowing them to tell stories that would not have a place on the news agenda, either because of time, subject matter or format.

According to the Listen Notes website, the total number of active podcasts indexed by its software was 3.438.068 in October 2024, with an estimated 222.594 in the news category, or 6% of the total. In other studies, and analyses, news podcasts represent about 21% of all podcasts in the United States (Harutyunyan, 2024), being the second most popular category after humour and true crime. In Spain, according to the 3rd Annual Report of the iVoox 2023 Observatory, podcasts published by this platform in the «news and events» category represent 6.7% and have grown compared to other years, while Podtrac's ranking of Spanish podcasts shows that 28% of the titles published in September 2024 were news podcasts.

Pioneers of journalistic podcasting

Journalistic content has been produced since the beginning of podcasting, such as the famous *The Gillmor Gang* by technology journalist Steve Gillmor (launched in 2004) or the first journalistic podcast by WNYC's *On the Media*,

also launched in the early 2000s. Among related journalistic milestones, however, there are three key dates from an international and industry perspective:

- October 2014, when Chicago public radio station WBEZ released *Serial*. This weekly programme, narrated by journalist Sarah Koenig, became a viral phenomenon thanks to word of mouth and interaction on social networks such as Reddit, reaching five million listeners in six weeks and 170 million downloads a year later, setting a new standard in audio storytelling and being considered the pioneering podcast of investigative narrative journalism (McCracken, 2017: 1).
- March 2016, the date set by Professors Martínez-Costa and Lus-Gárate as the origin of daily news podcasts, linked to the launch by *The Guardian* of the daily news podcast *Newsdesk*, later retitled *Guardian Daily* (2019: 320-321).
- In February 2017, *The New York Times* would become a model for daily news podcasts with *The Daily*, analysing a single news story in about 20 minutes and «in depth, produced five days a week» (Dalrymple, 2019).

From a professional point of view, the daily news podcast is considered an online informative audio content with a regular periodicity (generally from Monday to Friday), a limited duration (around 20 minutes) and a singular narrative treatment linked to its host or hostess, who tries to emulate the personality of the medium that produces it (Espinosa de los Monteros, 2018). In Spain, the first experience with news podcasts dates back to 2018, with *El País Noticias* and *Las Noticias de ABC*: «unlike the Anglo-Saxon daily news, the bulletins of *El País* and ABC were broadcast on the weekend, with topics from the supplements of both newspapers» (Martínez-Otón *et al.*, 2022: 6). In terms of the daily format, *El Mundo* was the first newspaper to produce a daily informative podcast under the modality of in-depth analysis on 15 June 2021, *El Mundo al día*. The first daily digital newspaper in Spain was produced by ElDiario.es, which launched *Un tema al día* on 21 September 2021. The first episode of *Hoy en El País* would not be published until 2 March 2022.

As far as the format of long-form audio journalism is concerned, there are several typologies:

- On the one hand, a format in which journalists «break down the week's news, but in a deliberately informal way. The listener feels part of the programme» (McHugh, 2020). *Slate's Political Gabfest* is considered the first news commentary podcast, launched in 2005 by the US magazine *Slate*, and is still on the air. David Plotz, Emily Bazelon and John Dickerson take a relaxed, conversational approach to covering US politics and news, combining critical analysis with humour.
- Meanwhile, podcasts with the narrative format of journalistic nonfiction, the sound documentary or COHRD (Crafted Oral History Radio Documentary), heirs of radio journalism, combine a more creative treatment

of both personal narrative and sound design with the editorial seriousness of documentary (McHugh, 2012: 1). In addition to the aforementioned *Serial*, another forerunner of the documentary podcast was *S-Town*, released in 2017 by the same team behind *Serial* and *This American Life*. The podcast's seven chapters use a criminal investigation as a premise to address issues of life and death, sexuality and identity in the culture of the southern United States.

- In Spain, among the pioneering podcasts of these two types, *La cafetera* by Fernando Berlín in 2015, a hybrid between online radio and podcast, and José Ángel Esteban Carles Porta in 2016 with *Le llamaban padre*, produced by PodiumPodcast in 2016, which received a special mention at the Ortega y Gasset Journalism Awards in 2017.

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the production of audio journalism in its three main formats: Daily, News Commentary and Narrative Non-Fiction Documentaries.

On audiences and audio news and information content

One of the major challenges facing the podcasting industry is the transparency and consolidation of official data on audiences and content consumption. While in other media and entertainment industries there is information on public audiences, verified by different measurement systems, in the case of podcasting there is no such standard and public information is produced by each platform or content provider, publishing their own statistics and trends.

In early 2024, streaming, podcasting and monetisation solutions provider Triton Digital published a report on US podcast consumption in 2023, which included some updated data. The trends it identified were a 12% increase in the number of monthly podcast listeners, with a profile that was «increasingly younger, more affluent and more educated», and content preferences that included news, true crime and humour (Triton Digital, 2024). According to reports published by Edison Research (2024), a leading provider of audio research, news podcasts were the third most listened to genre in the US in the first quarter of 2024 among people aged 13 and over, after humour and society and culture.

As for podcasts as a source of news and information, according to data published by the US think tank Pew Research Center, «most podcast listeners say they listen to news stories discussed in podcasts; however, only one in five listeners say they listen to a podcast affiliated with a news organisation» (Shearer *et al.*, 2023) and 87% expect the content to be accurate.

In terms of updated data on podcast consumption in Spain, beyond the aforementioned iVoxx Observatory, in October 2024, at an event hosted by

Spotify in Madrid, Next in Podcast, an increase in consumption was highlighted, with the number of podcast listeners in Spain increasing by more than 30% year-on-year and Spain being «the second fastest growing video podcast market in Europe» (Spotify, 2024). However, no data was provided on news-related topics. On this particular aspect, information is only available from 2022 from the IV State of Audio and Voice: 25.2% of respondents admitted to listening to news-related content (Prodigios Volcán, 2022).

The lack of qualitative and quantitative, consolidated and specific, comparable and extrapolable data on podcast consumption limits the in-depth understanding of the specificities of news podcast consumption in the Spanish context and highlights the importance of research focused on this market.

Methodology

In this research we propose to review the consumption of journalistic podcasts in Spain through the study of three different cases/formats. For this purpose, data from a total of twentyone episodes will be analysed, eleven episodes of *Hoy en El País* that coincide with the publication dates of the other two programmes, five episodes of the documentary *Dios, Patria, Yunque* and the talk show *Saldremos mejores*.

Special attention will be paid to the cross-media between *Dios, Patria, Yunque* and the other two podcasts, in order to broaden the scope, since the first episode of *Dios, Patria, Yunque* was published as one of the episodes of *Hoy en El País* (27 February 2024) and in the programme *Saldremos mejores* (27 March 2024), including an interview with Miguel Ramos, the author and screenwriter of the documentary.

The aim is to verify whether the journalistic podcast format in Spain attracts younger audiences, to what extent and how long they listen to it. As developed in the previous section, this is a novel aspect as it will provide internal information on the audiences of the proposed cases.

In addition to the quantitative data, the aim is to identify the differences and similarities between different audio news narratives. To this end, three different podcast projects will be analysed according to the typologies developed in *News Podcasts and the Opportunities for Publishers* (Newman & Gallo, 2019: 9): *Hoy en El País*, a daily immersive narrative podcast produced by the newspaper *El País* (PRISA Audio); *Dios, Patria, Yunque*, a weekly audio documentary series produced by PodiumPodcast (PRISA Audio); and *Saldremos mejores*, a weekly podcast of news commentary and long conversations produced by PodiumPodcast (PRISA Audio).

Typology	Description	Lenght	Podcasts
Deep immersion	Explores one or two topics in depth with a narrative sound design	Approximately 20 minutes	<i>Hoy en El País</i>
Audio documentary	Narrative series on the same subject in several episodes	Episodes between 30 and 40 minutes long	<i>Dios, Patria, Yunque</i>
Long conversation	Informal round-table discussions on topical issues	Up to 4 hours	<i>Saldremos mejores</i>

Table 1 – Typology of formats analysed, according to Nic Newman's terminology (2023).
Source: elaboration by the authors on internal data (2024)

The analysis focuses on consumption on the Spotify platform alone, which is currently the most used digital audio platform in Spain with more than 16 million unique users per month (GfK DAM, 2023), and during a specific period between 26 February and 24 March 2024, the dates of the documentary series' release, in order to extract results and make comparisons.

The analysis of the quantitative data for each episode will be on the basis of the following parameters:

- Starts: the number of times the episode was played.
- Plays: the number of times the episode was played for at least 60 seconds.
- Listeners: the number of different people who have played this episode.
- Impressions: the number of times the episode or programme was shown to users on the platform.

To collect the data, two dates were set, 31 March and 30 April, in order to determine the latency and interest rates of the content published after 30 and 60 days.

For the qualitative part, the «episode performance» in the first 7 days will be studied in order to check the audience retention rates, i.e. the point at which the listener stays at four moments of the episode (quartiles) and to determine the percentage of people who listen from the beginning to the end, in order to determine the listening fidelity.

In addition, the socio-demographic profile of the listeners of each podcast is examined to confirm whether young audiences under 34 years of age actually participate in listening to journalistic and informative podcasts.

Results: Three different audiences and ways of consuming current affairs content

An initial approach to the three projects analysed reveals important differences in terms of quantitative and qualitative consumption by their respective audiences.

The programme with the highest average number of starts, reproductions

and listeners is the conversational news commentary podcast *Saldremos mejores*, with 50% of the total reproductions, followed by the documentary *Dios, Patria, Yunque*. Therefore, the content with the highest number of episodes analysed and the highest frequency of publication is the one with the lowest number of reproductions and listeners in the period studied. Furthermore, it can be seen that although the *El País* daily generates 99% of the impressions on the platform, it only converts 10% of the listeners.

Programme	Launches	Replays	Listeners (starts)	Impressions	Format
<i>Hoy en El País</i>	7%	7%	10%	99%	Daily
<i>Dios, Patria, Yunque</i>	42%	43%	42%	0%	Documentary
<i>Saldremos mejores</i>	50%	50%	48%	1%	Conversational

Table 2 – Average percentage of listeners for each of the three programmes
Source: elaboration by the authors on internal data (2024)

In the comparative analysis to determine the loyalty rates for listening to the episodes, the average performance of each episode was examined to determine the intention to listen to an episode. The documentary episodes had the best average listening performance, with over 80% of listeners starting an episode and listening until the third quartile. In this sense, it is the conversational podcast (with durations of around one hour per episode) that shows lower episode performance rates, although, with a complete episode performance of 55%, it is similar to the documentary and slightly lower than the daily.

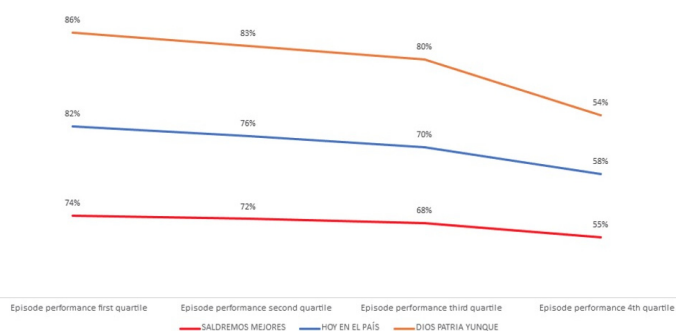


Figure 1 – Comparative chart with average episode yields
Source: elaboration by the authors on internal data (2024)

One aspect of the distribution and promotion strategy for the *Dios, Patria, Yunque* podcast was a cross-media in *Hoy en El País*, the publication of the episode in PodiumPodcast the day after the premiere and an interview with the director in ‘Saldremos mejores’ the day after the publication of the last episode of the series. Looking at the listening data, there is a higher percentage of starts, replays and listeners in the conversation than in the daily, so it can be concluded that the audience of the documentary and the conversation have a greater interest in this topic.

Release date	Podcast	Episode title	Starts	Plays	Listeners (starts)	Impressions
26/02/2024	<i>Dios, Patria, Yunque</i>	<i>First episode El silencio</i>	64,2%	52,4%	40,6%	0,2%
27/02/2024	<i>Hoy en El País</i>	<i>‘Podcast’ First episode Dios, Patria, Yunque: El silencio</i>	8,2%	6,7%	5,5%	8,3%
27/03/2024	<i>Saldremos mejores</i>	<i>Saldremos del yunque 3x23</i>	27,5%	25,4%	16,3%	0,3%

Table 3 – Percentage of listeners of the cross-media action carried out on the documentary *Dios, Patria, Yunque*
Source: elaboration by the authors on internal data (2024)

If we zoom in on the individual projects, starting with the daily *Hoy en El País*, which represents 10% of listeners, we can see several patterns in terms of audience and consumption. On the one hand, the most listened to programmes, with an average of 9.1% of listeners, correspond to international affairs and social issues.

Episode title	Percentage of listeners
<i>¿Hasta dónde puede influir un juez?</i>	8,8%
<i>‘Podcast’ Primer episodio de Dios, Patria, Yunque: El silencio</i>	9,1%
<i>¿Cómo pasó Senegal de democracia estable a país en crisis?</i>	9,2%
<i>Alquileres disparados, alquileres regulados</i>	10,2%
<i>Escudo social: ¿estamos listos para quitar la red?</i>	8,0%

<i>Biden, Trump, la edad y la salud: ¿hay plan B?</i>	10,2%
<i>España y Reino Unido: maneras de lidiar con los asesinatos de desertores</i>	8,5%
<i>El aborto, un derecho de ida y vuelta: formas de blindarlo más allá de</i>	7,7%
<i>El caso alemán en Namibia: ¿quién decide cuánto cuesta un genocidio?</i>	8,3%
<i>Quién es Koldo García: de escolta en tiempos de ETA a presunto</i>	8,4%
<i>¿Quién usa hoy las agencias de viajes?</i>	11,7%

Table 4 – Average percentage of listeners per episode of ‘Hoy en El País’
Source: elaboration by the authors on internal data (2024)

In the case of *Dios, Patria, Yunque*, which represents 42% of listeners and is a complete series with five episodes on the same subject, listeners’ behaviour is different. Although the first episode has the highest number of listeners with 31.1%, the retention rate from the first to the second episode is 74.5% and 38.3% finish the whole series.

Episode title	Percentage of listeners
<i>Primer episodio. El silencio</i>	31,1%
<i>Segundo episodio. La llegada</i>	23,2%
<i>Tercer episodio. Rituales, campamentos y captaciones</i>	18,4%
<i>Cuarto episodio. El Yunque se expande</i>	15,4%
<i>Quinto episodio. La amenaza</i>	11,9%

Table 5 – Average percentage of listeners per episode of *Dios, Patria, Yunque*
Source: elaboration by the authors on internal data (2024)

Saldremos mejores is the podcast with the highest average number of listeners per episode (20%), with 48% of the listeners in the sample analysed and five episodes published with different topics and interviews, with the episode featuring the well-known journalist Iñaki Gabilondo standing out.

Episode title	Percentage of listeners
<i>Saldremos andaluzas</i> 3x19	21,8%
<i>Saldremos al campo</i> 3x20	20,3%
<i>Saldremos con Inaki Gabilondo</i> 3x21	24,8%
<i>Saldremos menopáusicas</i> 3x22	20,0%
<i>Saldremos del Yunque</i> 3x23	13,1%

Table 6 – Average percentage of listeners per episode of *Saldremos mejores*
Source: elaboration by the authors on internal data (2024)

The data is also contrasted to determine cumulative audience growth, comparing March to April. At this point, the average growth of *Hoy en El País* is 4%, compared to 22% for *Dios, Patria, Yunque* and 25% for *Saldremos mejores*, so the conversational project is the one that manages to attract and add more listeners over time to the episodes published.

Looking at the qualitative part of the audience of the three projects, both the daily and the documentary have a slightly higher percentage of male listeners (51% and 58.7%, respectively), compared to *Saldremos mejores*, with an imminently female audience (76.4%).

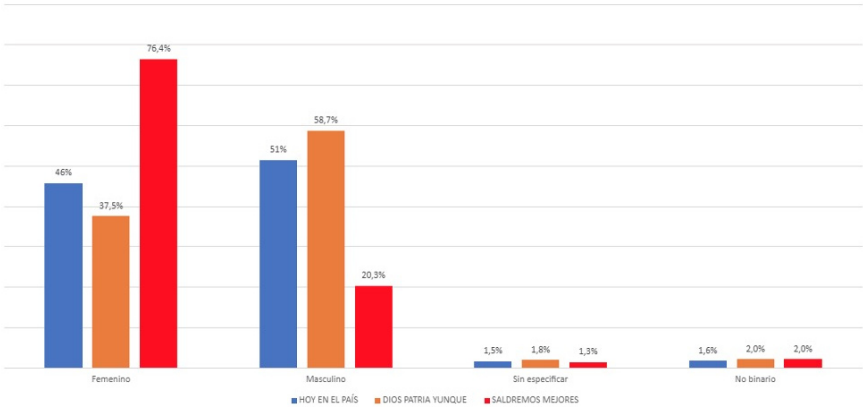


Figure 2 – Audience graphs with percentages of listeners by gender
Source: elaboration by the authors on internal data (2024)

In terms of age, the podcast with the youngest audience is *Saldremos mejores*, with 54% of listeners under the age of 34, compared to 32.7% for *Dios, Patria, Yunque* and 31.3% for *Hoy en El País*. Only the talk show has a younger audience; in the other projects, more than 60% of the audience is over 35.

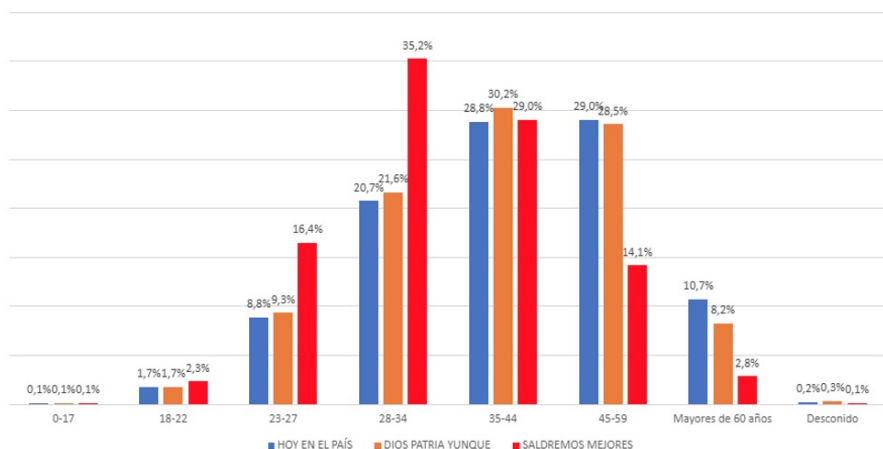


Figure 3 – Audience graph with percentages of listeners by age
Source: elaboration by the authors on internal data (2024)

Discussion

As with many studies, this research has its limitations. On the one hand, by analysing only data related to the consumption and audience of a single platform, Spotify, a global bias is committed and, for example, the daily newspaper *Hoy en El País* is a format that is more linked to the target audience of the media itself than that of the platforms, since it is an additional product for the readers of the newspaper *El País*. According to data published by GfK DAM on media users for the whole month of May in the news category, *El País* reached 14.87 million unique monthly users, placing it sixth in the ranking.

On the other hand, perceptions of journalistic functions and links with podcast listening have not been taken into account, and while some formats may have a greater affinity or relationship with the audience due to the presenters, in other cases the link may be due to interest in the topic or the journalistic brand, covariates that are difficult to equate in this study.

Finally, it was also not possible to establish a direct relationship between the conversion rate of the listeners and the number of impressions or the number of followers of each of the podcasts analysed.

Conclusions

Podcasts are consolidating their position as a highly versatile narrative format with great potential for exploring current affairs and news topics. Their

flexibility allows them to address complex issues from different perspectives, either through multiple episodes or by including different voices and experts, without the time constraints that limit other traditional media.

This research, which analyses three different journalistic formats, found that younger audiences, particularly those under 35, show a clear preference for the conversational podcast format for current affairs consumption. This format is characterised by its ability to create communities around hosts, topics and guests, fostering a sense of belonging and shared values, a key element of podcasting's identity and narrative.

As for the daily format, which is more directly linked to traditional media, it fails to capture the interest of young audiences on this audio platform, as does the narrative non-fiction documentary format, which attracts niche audiences interested in specific topics, but does not have a strong penetration among the under-35s. However, it stands out in terms of audience loyalty, recording the highest average listening rate, with over 80% of listeners completing up to the third quartile of episodes.

These findings underline the importance of adapting journalistic formats to the preferences of new generations, and highlight the role of the conversational podcast as a key vehicle for connecting journalistic content with young audiences.

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