

## Podcasts in Bulgaria: An Alternative, Parallel or Flexible Approach to Changing the Media Ecosystem

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*Podcasts in Bulgaria have flourished and solidified their presence in the second and third decades of the 21st century across various dimensions. Firstly, they serve as alternative sources of expert information. Secondly, they offer a parallel platform for disseminating information alongside traditional media genres and formats. Thirdly, they contribute to the development of a flexible media market, accommodating both public and private media entities, as well as individual, corporate, institutional, or organizational channels. This analysis focuses on podcasts in Bulgaria spanning from 2021 to 2023, produced and distributed by diverse media outlets, individuals, and organizations. The hypothesis posits that podcasts function as both media and businesses, serving as communication channels and a model that blends information dissemination with shared experiences. They represent a product resulting from media, digital, and communicative literacy. The methodology employed adopts an interdisciplinary approach, encompassing media, genre, and discourse analysis. The conclusions drawn are based on a comprehensive study, although not claiming to be exhaustive. It is assumed that podcasts in Bulgaria offer a versatile means of positioning themselves alongside traditional media, thereby contributing to the creative industry and the media market simultaneously.*

**Keywords:** *podcast, media market, media ecosystem, media genre, creative industry, media content.*

### Introduction

In Bulgaria, podcasts have emerged as a significant phenomenon in both media and the virtual sphere during the second and third decades of the 21st century. Simultaneously, podcasting represents a distinct activity within the creative industry, contributing to notable shifts in the realms of creation, production, distribution, and funding. Podcasts are no longer solely the domain of journalists and media outlets; they are also produced by individuals, businesses, cultural and educational institutions, NGOs, and more. Podcasts serve to inform audiences about a wide array of subjects, offering news, commentary on societal trends, and interpretations of topics relevant to specific interest groups.

In recent years, podcasts in Bulgaria have turned into a significant communication channel for disseminating expert and alternative information. The creators and participants of these podcasts share success stories in business, the arts, media, public relations, and education, often framing these narratives through the lens of personal experience, lessons learned, and values acquired. While the

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participants are active creators of media content, not all claim a high level of professional expertise from a media perspective; however, they are actively engaged in societal processes.

The diversity of podcast topics is striking, encompassing everything from economics and international affairs to artificial intelligence, personal development, sports, psychology, arts, and personal narratives. Moreover, podcasts often facilitate mutual support and shared experiences among listeners. This study focuses on delineating the characteristics of podcasts from 2021 to 2023, examining their media format, genre diversity, and discursive elements. It explores how modern digital marketing techniques are employed to create and disseminate podcast episodes, catering to virtual audiences. While not aiming to provide an exhaustive analysis, this article seeks to shed light on key features of podcasts in Bulgaria within the realms of media and business. And it will therefore delineate shifts in discourse.

## Literature Review

The theoretical review delves into subfields derived from the specifics of the study: podcasts and the media ecosystem. Initially, an overview of podcasts is presented.

The term “podcasting” was first mentioned by Ben Hammersley in the British daily newspaper *The Guardian* in February 2004 (Hammersley, 2004). Etymologically, the term “podcast” is a composite word, combining “pod” (referring to a portable media player such as an iPod, an Apple product) and “broadcasting”. Over the two decades of development from 2004 to 2024, podcasting has undergone significant evolution. New content has been integrated into it in response to changing practices, leading to an expansion in the scope of the term.

Erin McKean defines podcast in *The New Oxford American Dictionary* (NOAD) as “...a digital recording of a radio broadcast or similar program made available on the Internet for downloading to a personal audio player” (McKean, 2005). This definition succinctly captures the process of creating, distributing, and listening to podcasts.

Tiziano Bonini offers the following definition: “Podcasting is a technology used to distribute, receive and listen, on-demand, to sound content produced by traditional editors such as radio, publishing houses, journalists and educational institutions (schools, professional training centers) as well as content created by independent radio producers, artists, and radio amateurs” (Bonini, 2015: 21). The author now expands the definition to encompass not only the creation but also the production and distribution of content through podcasts, considering their evolution across various levels.

Podcasts are studied by Andrew J. Bottomley; he compares them to the medium of radio and brings them to the level of a new medium in the article “Podcasting: A decade in the life of a “new” audio medium” (Bottomley, 2015: 164-169). Andrew J. Bottomley, in his dissertation, employs the term “internet radio”, recognizing the pivotal role of the global web in shaping the evolution of the media ecosystem (Bottomley, 2016).

Lionel Felix and Damien Stolarz broaden the research scope by examining podcasts in video format and draw comparisons to video blogging. They have even authored a *Hands-On Guide to Video Blogging and Podcasting: Emerging Media Tools for Business Communication* (Felix, Stolarz, 2016).

David Nieborg and Thomas Poell conducted a study on studied podcasts and published their results in the article “The platformization of cultural production: theorizing the contingent cultural commodity”; the authors talk not only about platformization concerning the use of online platforms for the distribution of podcasts, but also about their role in the development of the cultural industry “the penetration of economic, governmental, and infrastructural extensions of digital platforms into the web and app ecosystems, fundamentally affecting the operations of the cultural industries” (Nieborg, Poell, 2018: 4275-4292).

In the context of culture, digitalization, and audio content, Dario Llinares, Neil Fox, and Richard Berry analyze podcasting, evaluating it as part of the “New Aural Cultures and Digital Media” (Llinares, Fox, Berry, 2018).

John L. Sullivan delves into the various facets of podcasting, focusing on its technological, software, and business dimensions. He investigates the role of digital platforms in podcasting and explains their influence on its structure, content, and management within the context of business and industry. Sullivan explores the transformative impact of platforms on podcasting, analyzing how the three primary functions of media-related platform services - storage, discovery, and consumption - not only affect producers but also shape the audience’s experience. Through his research, the author draws conclusions regarding audience consumption patterns, clarifying some of the structural characteristics of platforms that contribute to industry consolidation (Sullivan, 2019: 1-7).

In the realm of technology and law, Linn Johnson and S. Grayden conducted research on podcasts and concluded that they are “distinguished from other forms of digital audio-video content”, and must seek answers to important questions related to “intellectual property and copyright, podcast preservation, podcast location, and podcast standards” (Johnson, Grayden, 2006: 205).

Jonathan Sterne, Jeremy Morris, Michael Brendan Baker, and Ariana Moscote Freire analyze the intricacies of podcasts, categorizing them into three groups: A. Podcast creation and uploading process, B. Ensuring the podcast's discoverability online (which is typically automated), C. Downloading and listening to the podcast. They also delve into explaining the distinctions between Podcasting and Broadcasting, examining the shifts in radio operations, and draw the following conclusions: „Podcasting is not an alternative to broadcasting, but a realization of broadcasting that ought to exist alongside and compete with other models. If broadcasting were a more generally available term, then perhaps we could begin to speak of our own broadcasts without sounding grandiose or pretentious.“; „The point is not endless celebrations of individuality in computer culture.“ and „At its best, it has certainly already contributed to the weird diversity of audio out there in the world.” (Sterne et al., 2008).

The review reveals that podcasts are analyzed from various perspectives, including their creation, integration into the media ecosystem, software and platforms used, their role in business and industry, changes in audio content, and

their impact on culture, particularly media culture. Rather than being categorically viewed as a mere extension of radio shows or segments, podcasts are recognized as a distinct form of digital audio content creation and distribution. This has expanded to include video and even multimodal content. While traditional radio maintains its place within the media ecosystem, podcasts created by non-journalists contribute to shifting attitudes, perceptions, and expectations among virtual audiences who engage with this content.

There have been analyses of celebrity podcasts spanning from 2003 to 2023, employing various study methods. Jasmyn Connell and Christopher Moore present findings from their examination of the online persona associated with the Australian satirical comedy podcast *Ja'miezing*, created, directed, performed, and produced by comedian Chris Lilly. Their study explores the five dimensions of the persona - public, mediated, performative, collective, and value - integrating insights from podcast research to gain deeper insights into the distinctive characteristics and practices of digitally and virtually represented personas within podcasts (Connell, Moore, 2003: 1-21).

Kaliym A. Islam conducted research on podcasts in the context of employee training in business and discovered that organizations can utilize podcasting to enhance workplace performance (Islam, 2007).

Lewis Edward Mackenzi analyzes a selection of 952 scholarly podcasts spanning from 2004 to 2018 within the context of global production. He compares them with other types of podcasts and draws conclusions that scholarly podcasts are predominantly audio-based, with less video content. Mackenzi's findings suggest that podcasts contribute significantly to academic communication in virtual environments and to university education, fostering the advancement of open science by providing accessible resources for education and self-learning (Mackenzi, 2019: 1-19).

Maria Rae examines podcasts from a distinct perspective by selecting some of the most popular ones and seeking intersections between them: "Podcasts and political listening and more specifically what is the role of sound, voice and intimacy in the Joe Rogan Experience"; the author also explores the role of sound, voice and intimacy: podcasting's potential to challenge mainstream media (Rae, 2023: 180-189).

After observation, a conclusion can be drawn that podcasts represent a significant phenomenon within the media ecosystem. They are actively reshaping it and exerting influence on society while becoming integral to popular culture. Podcasts offer continual opportunities for cultivating digital literacy, fostering creativity and entrepreneurship. Moreover, they contribute to elevating the visibility of individuals who value communication as a means of self-positioning, empathy expression, and facilitating the exchange of experiences and knowledge, as well as giving and receiving advice.

In the current article, the author provides descriptive definitions without claiming exhaustiveness. These definitions are crafted for the purpose of this publication.

**A podcast** is defined as a versatile media genre and communication channel, continuously evolving and updating, and exhibiting diverse formats, some of which are non-homogeneous:

- Audio or video content presented as a product and stored in a file published on platforms.
- An audio or video file featuring dialogue, interviews, conversations, performances, or a blend of informational elements with reports and surveys.
- An audio or video file showcasing monologues, sharing opinions, dispensing expert advice or recommendations within specific fields.
- Audio or video content aimed at sharing professional and personal experiences, presenting diverse perspectives or opinions, and representing various community positions.
- Audio and video content designed to be available online, intriguing and influencing audiences' attitudes in a non-intrusive manner and attracting them to subscribe or follow based on interest.
- An audio or video file containing important or useful information presented in an engaging and accessible manner, often blending technical terminology with colloquial language.
- An audio or video file produced using digital tools, software, and applications, published on relevant platforms, and accessible for online listening or viewing, or downloaded to personal devices like computers, mobile phones, tablets, etc.
- An audio or video file meant to be listened to or watched once or repeatedly by virtual audiences.

**Podcasters**, whether journalists, media outlets, individuals, businesses, institutions, or NGOs, create audio or video content published as a file or product (generated by software in a compressed format) on platforms enabling web distribution. A podcaster may work alone or as part of a team comprising professionals, experts, or volunteers engaged in the entire podcast creation process, from conception to distribution. In this context, creativity and entrepreneurship are key components of the podcaster's professional profile.

From a practical standpoint, **podcasting** is a complex activity involving knowledge and experience from various domains: media literacy, scriptwriting, technology, content processing, digital marketing, business management, and more. It's important to differentiate between podcasting and other forms of online content creation like blogging, vlogging, or social media platforms such as YouTube and TikTok, which may serve as distribution channels for finished podcast products.

The review of publications also derives the concept of a **media ecosystem**.

Richard Holliman analyzes the development of a dynamic digital media ecosystem, shifting from traditional communication to a landscape characterized by conversation and confrontation. “Developments in digital technologies relate closely to emerging social practices. In turn, these are influencing, and are influenced by, the political economy of professional media and user-generated content, and the introduction of political and institutional governance and policies” (Holliman, 2011: 1).

Ethan Zuckerman examines the media ecosystem and summarizes: “The complex relationships between user-generated social media and professionally created news media are best understood as a complex media ecosystem with its own

emergent behaviours that only become visible when studied from a perspective broader than considering a single medium in isolation” (Zuckerman, 2021: 1495).

Kate Starbird investigates the alternative media ecosystem through the lens of Twitter and the results of the analysis conclude that “...the emerging alternative media ecosystem and provide insights into how websites that promote conspiracy theories and pseudo-science may function to conduct underlying political agendas” (Starbird, 2017: 230).

Schäfer and James Painter, use the concept of climate journalism and analyze its role in a changing media ecosystem. Their study assesses the production of news related to climate change worldwide and demonstrates that the roles available to climate journalists have diversified, transitioning from “gatekeeping” to “curating” roles (Schäfer & Painter, 2021).

Antonio Lopez in his book “The Media Ecosystem. What Ecology Can Teach Us about Responsible. Media Practice” (2012) provides an interpretation of the state of media in the present and outlines potential opportunities for its development in the future; he combines options for combining achievements from two different fields: media studies and ecology; the author introduces the concept of “organic media practitioners” and concludes that it is important to be aware of the impact of the media on the environment, as well as to be aware of the interdependence of the media and the economy on a global scale, and the interconnection between the media and culture (Lopez, 2012).

The term **media ecosystem** has a distinct manifestation in theory and practice. Over time, there has been a persistent effort in researching and validating the media ecosystem at a scientific level, achieved through conceptualization and the enrichment of research methods. Recognizing the valuable contributions of scholars and aligning with their perspectives, it can be assumed that the media ecosystem possesses a complex nature. It is not static in terms of quantity but evolves in response to various phenomena and processes within the media, including digitalization, technological advancements, software development, changes in the media market, enhancement of professional skills, legal regulations, codes of ethics, and more. Technological advancements play a significant role in reshaping the media ecosystem and its management, thereby fostering new forms of creativity. Consequently, media ecosystems are dynamic and necessitate analysis not only within geographical dimensions but also across the vast landscape of the internet, encompassing online media, blogs, social networks, podcasts, virtual forums, and echo chambers.

## **Materials and Methods**

The analysis focuses on podcasts in Bulgaria from January 2021 to December 2023, created and implemented by various entities such as media outlets, journalists, business organizations, cultural and educational institutions, etc. However, the study does not delve into the podcast audiences and their funding. Instead, it primarily relies on data regarding online listenership and viewership, as well as any available feedback or evaluations.

Fifty podcasts, established before or during this period, were carefully selected. This selection process involved a combination of researcher observations and secondary analysis of information obtained from websites disclosing podcast details or related charts.

The hypothesis posits that podcasts function not only as a medium but also as a business and a communication channel, serving as a model that combines information dissemination with the sharing of experiences, knowledge, and news. This multifaceted role is seen as a product of media, digital, and communication literacy.

Methodologically, an interdisciplinary approach is employed, encompassing media, genre, and discourse analysis. *The media analysis* aims to understand the podcasting ecosystem, including its emergence, development, funding, distribution, platforms, software, creativity, and business elements. *The genre analysis* seeks to categorize podcasts based on various criteria, such as audio or video format, monologue or dialogue, new formats, performances, and hybrid variants. *The discourse analysis* involves examining podcast names, messages, logos, slogans, rhetorical techniques, presentation styles, promotional expressions, web writing peculiarities, linguistic features, and positioning strategies for personal branding or knowledge promotion.

This section of the article provides a concise overview of the three types of analysis employed in an interdisciplinary study of podcasts in Bulgaria. To ensure clarity and transparency, each type of analysis is introduced in the section preceding the main study.

The website <https://podcastalot.com/> provides a platform for checking podcasts, fostering transparency, credibility, and virtual community creation. As of March 2024, the database contains 653 podcasts and 35,217 episodes. The number of active podcasts was 370 in 2021, 324 in 2022, and 248 in 2023, with a corresponding episode counts of 8,970, 8,465, and 6,037, respectively.

Various attempts have been made to rank podcasts, including models based on viewership or listenership, as seen on websites like <https://topcast.bg/?p=693> and <https://kakvonauchih.com/spisak-s-balgarski-podkasti/>. Personal ratings for podcasts can also be found on websites like <https://thriftsheep.com/2020/11/13/liubimi-podkasti/>.

The selection of 50 podcasts, presented in Table 1 (see Appendix), is based on predefined research objectives, covering criteria such as name, subject matter, podcasters, hosts, production, audio or video content, and funding sources (e.g., projects, outsourcing, crowdfunding).

## Results

### *Results of Media Analysis*

Media analysis is inherently complex, as it seeks to identify the creators and distributors of podcasts as a media product, along with their thematic orientation, production methods, and funding mechanisms. The analysis also examines emerging

phenomena such as crowdfunding, outsourcing, promotion, digital marketing, and advertising, as well as the processes of brand building and reputation management. From a media perspective, these elements are explored in relation to the specificity of the podcast format, the media market, and the broader media ecosystem.

There are limited analyses of podcasts in Bulgaria, with notable contributions from scholars such as Genika Grigorova on podcasts and music in Bulgaria (Grigorova, 2019: 290-318), Stella Angova on theoretical aspects of podcasts (Angova, 2020), Desislava Antova on media podcasts (Antova, 2021: 178-198), Ilia Valkov and his team's analysis of academic podcasts in Bulgaria and across Europe (Vakov, Minev, Lozanova, 2021: 52-79), Ivanka Mavrodieva's examination of podcast features in Bulgaria (Mavrodieva, 2021: 7-18), and Justine Toms' publication of a book on podcasts (Toms, 2022).

Media analyses primarily focus on studying the emergence and development chronology of podcasts in Bulgaria, exploring aspects such as funding, distribution, platforms, software, post-production, creativity, business elements, and their contributions to media evolution, identifying phenomena and trends.

Podcasting in Bulgaria commenced in the second decade of the 21st century, with a surge observed between 2014 and 2017. Despite some podcasts ceasing operations, new ones continue to emerge, resulting in approximately 250 active podcasts as of 2024. Several factors influence podcasting, including growing interest among journalists and professionals from various fields, advancements in technology accessibility and digital literacy, and the evolution of platforms and social networks. Moreover, increasing audience interest, particularly among virtual audiences, contributes to the sharing of expertise, narratives, and personal stories.

Podcasting integrates seamlessly into Bulgaria's media ecosystem, with a flexible approach allowing podcasts to coexist with public and private media or function independently as individual, corporate, institutional, or organizational media channels.

Podcasters can be categorized based on their backgrounds and roles. The first group comprises journalists employed in mainstream media outlets such as Bulgarian National Radio (BNR), and Bulgarian National Television (BNT), and private media like Darik Radio, bTV, Bloomberg TV Bulgaria, Investor.bg, Capital newspaper, and Manager magazine. These podcasts cover diverse topics and formats, characterized by high professional standards.

The second group includes former journalists who now engage in part-time roles or freelance work, hosting podcasts such as Freedom of Speech, Boulevard Bulgaria, No Filter, MindCast, and Limitless.

The third group consists of individuals from the arts sector, including singers, actors, writers, and poets, hosting podcasts like PodcI (ПодкА3) and The Career Show Podcast.

The fourth group is comprised of business professionals and executives, offering expert insights on podcasts like The Superman, Cold Shower for Managers, Women Speak Leadership, and content from educational institutions like Klet Publishing House and Znam.be – a Private Education Center.

The fifth group encompasses individuals with innovative and creative thinking, contributing to podcasts like Quiet, the Film Begins.



The sixth group consists of NGOs focused on science, sustainability, and success, such as Science.bg.

The seventh group includes psychologists hosting podcasts like Antonina Kardasheva and Madeleine Algafari.

There is an interesting example of publishing a book based on podcasts - “Cold Shower for Managers” by Plamen Pavlov.

*Podcast topics span a wide range*, including politics, economics, finance, business management, arts, sports, education, and science. Businesses have shown increasing interest in podcasting, particularly in areas like economics, IT, digitalization, finance, and crisis management.

While cultural and artistic aspects are primarily presented by celebrities sharing personal stories, sports podcasts feature experienced sports journalists discussing current developments in sports. Educational institutions, albeit less proactive, are also producing podcasts, with notable contributions from private universities, NGOs, and educational centers like Science.bg.

Information regarding the funding and production of podcasts in Bulgaria was gathered through various sites, platforms, and social networks. The analysis of available funding information for podcasts revealed the following trends: only a few podcast creators disclose funding details, typically when they receive funding from programs or projects. For instance, the National Culture Fund supports the podcast “The Internet Speaks”, particularly its sub-branded series “The Artist Speaks” hosted by Margarita Dorovska (<https://www.govoriatist.at/>). Similarly, the book podcast episode 207, featuring Justine Toms, is supported by the National Forum of the Global Libraries Foundation - Bulgaria.

Additional funding methods such as crowdfunding, are emerging but are not yet widely adopted in Bulgaria. One such avenue is Patreon, where some podcasts offer opportunities for listener support. For example, “The Artist Speaks” podcast allows listeners to make monthly donations of BGN 5 (<https://bit.ly/hristopatreon>). Some podcasts, like Polifem Podcast and Katerina Vassileva, utilize digital marketing and advertising techniques, including microtargeting (<https://thecreators.bg/polifem-podkast-katerina-vasileva/>).

Moreover, “The Artist Speaks” podcast employs additional funding and attention-grabbing tactics, such as selling or purchasing unique collectible cards and offering membership to Discord Women Speak Leadership servers. These strategies serve as innovative forms of digital marketing, fostering a sense of belonging and engagement among listeners. Collaboration and teamwork are also evident in these endeavors.

Crowdfunding in Bulgaria is still in its nascent stages, with Patreon being the preferred model for podcasts like “The Artist Speaks”, “Limitless”, “Karbovsky”, and others. Hristo Georgiev, for instance, utilizes Patreon for his Creative Life podcast (<https://bit.ly/hristopatreon>) with successful donation-raising attempts. Another podcast, 2x200, also utilizes Patreon for donations (<https://bit.ly/hristopatreon>).

Furthermore, sponsors play a role in funding established podcasts, often acknowledged during the podcast itself. Payment methods for donations typically include bank transfers, platform payments, PayPal, and Revolut. The production

aspect of podcasting emphasizes clarity and transparency, with media outlets and companies indicating their involvement even when co-funding or supporting projects.

Comedy Club podcast stands out as an example of a comedy show developed spontaneously by its participants. Moreover, podcasts can be created by professionals from various fields, contributing to their heterogeneity across multiple levels including host and participant numbers, funding sources, production methods, and format variations such as audio, video, or duration and performance.

The podcasts analyzed exhibit heterogeneity in both content and topics, ranging from narratives of personal and business successes, challenges, and achievements, to discussions of awards and recognition, negative developments in Bulgarian political life, and skepticism towards European integration. This heterogeneity is also evident in the diverse assessments and opinions expressed, resulting in a polyphonic media discourse across the podcasts. This is a noteworthy phenomenon, as it highlights the lack of uniformity in messaging, positioning podcasts as distinct, and at times, alternative communication channels.

However, there is insufficient evidence from the analysis to conclusively determine that podcasters are actively engaged in digital citizenship. Participants in these podcasts often present different, and occasionally alternative, perspectives. The production, recording, and distribution of podcasts occur within a competitive media environment, necessitating a combination of digital, media, communication, technological, business, and financial competencies. Podcasts integrate, in a heterogeneous manner, elements of the creative industry with entrepreneurial skills, corporate responsibility, charity, volunteering, and outsourcing.

### *Results of Genre Analysis*

Christopher Drew presents the results of genre analysis in an article focused on educational podcasts (Drew, 2017: 201-211). Building on the methods presented, a comprehensive methodology was developed to identify the genre features of podcasts. These features include the introduction of episode topics, the announcement of issues, the presentation of participants, the inclusion of advertising content, and the structuring of episode conclusions. Additionally, the methodology examines key themes, scripted segments, the use of stories—particularly personal narratives—arguments, narrative flow, transitions, musical elements, visuals, promotional texts on platforms, and the use of slogans and appeals on social networks.

The duration of podcasts typically ranges from 15 to 60 minutes, with some episodes extending to 90 or 120 minutes, and exceptionally, as seen in Comedy Club, reaching up to 3 hours. Kitodar Todorov's live stream broadcasts also stretch to 2 hours. Broadcast frequency varies, occurring weekly, bi-monthly, or monthly. There is a drive for consistency in publishing schedules to meet user expectations and adapt to the nuances of the media ecosystem, particularly within the complex realm of podcasting, encompassing creation, distribution, and advertising.

Regarding the number of presenters and participants, certain trends emerge. The majority of podcasts are hosted by a single individual, such as Superman (Georgi Nenov), with rare exceptions featuring two presenters, such as The Internet Speaks (Vlado and Elenko), 2x200 (Tsvetomir Tsanov and Orlin Milchev),

Boulevard Bulgaria (Asen and Sabina Grigorovi), or even three or more, as seen in Comedy Podcast (Vasil Nojarov, Nikola Todoroski, Ivan Kirkov). Similarly, the number of participants is typically limited to one, occasionally two. This pattern likely stems from the organizational structure of recordings, topic preparation processes, script development, storyboarding, and other factors.

In terms of format, podcasts are categorized into dialogue or monologue, predominantly featuring interview-style dialogues. Ratio, for instance, incorporates presentations and lectures on scientific topics, while others adopt performance or skit formats, exemplified by Kitodar Todorov's *PodcI. Comedy Club* stands out with its inclusion of stand-up comedians and artists. Notably, Violeta Ashikova's podcast, *Euronet – The Z Generation (Gen Z)*, adopts a professional approach, integrating interviews, reports, and commentaries.

Observations on audio or video file content reveal nearly equal distribution between the two formats. Technological advancements and platform versatility enable the publication and dissemination of both audio and video content. Popular platforms for podcast distribution include Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, and Pocket Casts, while YouTube remains the preferred video-sharing platform. Despite the potential, social networks such as TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn are underutilized for podcast circulation, although Facebook is gradually gaining traction. Distribution via mobile apps like Castbox, Overcast, and iTunes is also on the rise.

Many podcasts maintain their own websites, particularly those produced by media outlets. Thumbnails are prevalent among podcasts, enhancing recognition and attracting online engagement. Visuals are synchronized with content, often featuring the participants' faces, reflecting creativity and professionalism in digital content creation and management.

External organizations evaluate podcasts as parallel media products, recognizing their diverse roles. For example, in 2021, the Bulgarian Society for Public Relations lauded Katya Vassileva's podcast from the Bulgarian National Radio for its utility during the pandemic and beyond. Chart websites further signify the establishment of podcasts as a parallel form within Bulgaria's media ecosystem.

The results of the genre analysis reveal several key features of podcast introductions and content presentation. Introductions are typically concise, focusing directly on the topic, with a preference for straightforward disclosure. Participant introductions are handled in one of three ways: first, the podcaster may present important facts from the participant's biography; second, the presenter may allow the participant to introduce themselves; and third, a combination of both approaches, where the podcaster provides an introduction followed by the participant's additions.

Closing remarks in podcasts vary in style, often resembling aphorisms or concise statements, and sometimes taking the form of messages or appeals, particularly when discussing current topics such as art, career, psychology, or personal development. Transitions between topics within the dialogue are casual and swift, with minimal return to previous topics unless for the purpose of clarification or addition.

A defining feature of the podcast genre is the integration and validation of personal stories, which are often presented as successes or failures, experiences, or

testimonials. Another characteristic is the combination of personal stories with arguments drawn from professional experience, frequently accompanied by advice and recommendations. A third feature is the use of narrative; however, there are still limited successes in developing complex plots, particularly when presenting historical or current events in fields such as art, public relations, or business.

Musical elements are appropriately employed at the beginning and end of episodes, and occasionally between segments, with transitions handled elegantly. Advertising slogans are notably brief and encourage audiences to watch or listen to podcasts on various platforms or social networks. Another confirmed specific element is the use of text on platforms to present and promote podcasts. These texts are often paired with timelines or podcast logos and typically include a summary of the podcast's content, along with an introduction of the participant or key questions addressed during the episode.

The voice of the podcaster or host in audio and video podcasts, particularly when they have a background in journalism or public speaking, plays a crucial role in establishing a favorable and relaxed atmosphere during the dialogue. The analysis indicates that podcasters typically avoid creating genre-level hybrids by mixing natural voices in recordings with artificial voices or voice-overs. In Bulgaria, the podcast genre, whether in its dialogic or monologue formats, is characterised at the non-verbal and paralinguistic levels by a moderate tempo, clear articulation, frequent pauses, melodious phrasing, and radiophonic quality.

A distinctive feature of podcasts is their functionality as cross-media formats, demonstrating considerable flexibility and adaptability in their content updates to align with the preferences of listeners and viewers. Maintaining and enhancing audience engagement necessitates dynamic adjustments at the genre level, particularly in the style of dialogue within podcasts. This dialogue is increasingly characterized by a more elegant, casual, and positive tone, while simultaneously embracing polyphony.

### *Results of Discourse Analysis*

The methodology employed in this study utilizes an adapted version of the critical discourse analysis (CDA) model developed by Teun A. van Dijk (Dijk, 2015: 466-485). This analysis primarily focuses on the key propositions articulated by van Dijk, specifically the relationship between discourse, domination/power, and dissent, and how these elements are manifested through text and speech (Dijk, 2015: 467). Additionally, the study adopts van Dijk's conceptualization of CDA as a multidisciplinary approach that seeks to connect discourse and action with knowledge and society (Dijk, 2015: 467). The methodology also considers the work of Rafli Akram Kurniansyah and Rachmi Kurnia Siregar, specifically their publication "Critical Discourse Analysis on the Podcast 'Putusan MK: Palu Hakim Patah Berkeping'", which, although it operates within a different political and social context, offers relevant insights (Kurniansyah, Siregar, 2023: 316-322).

The critical discourse analysis in this article is conducted along two main strands. The first strand aims to elucidate the communication strategies employed in discussions related to contemporary events across national, regional, and global

contexts. This includes the sharing of personal and professional experiences, business achievements, and advice on prosperity, well-being, personal growth, and spiritual development. The second strand focuses on examining the methods used to promote personal experience and establish authority in media discourse, particularly through narratives, personal stories, and examples that combine personal experience with argumentative language, especially within the context of podcasts. The table presents the distribution of podcast types and topics. Discourse analysis indicates that in podcasts focused on political topics in Bulgaria, the region, and globally, experts and politicians (Freedom of Speech, Politically Incorrect, Translation on air, Boulevard Bulgaria, Darik Café) often present viewpoints that diverge from those found in traditional media. A critical tone is evident at the linguistic level, with participants combining technical terminology with ideological language, semi-formal expressions, and the use of idiomatic expressions, phrases, and metaphors rich in expressive content. In podcasts centered on science and education (Sceince.bg, Practical Ecology, You and Science, For Teachers), participants demonstrate respect for both scientific traditions and innovations, while simultaneously presenting knowledge in accessible language that avoids communication barriers. Cultural and artistic podcasts (The Artist Speaks, Pop Culture, Quiet, the Film Begins) tend to feature casual dialogue, with a prevalence of personal stories, examples, and informal language. Podcasts on personal development, success, public relations, and psychology (How to Grow up?, Emotional Intelligence. Recipe for Development, Authenticity, MindCast, Limitless, Success without Limits) frequently incorporate personal narratives and deliver recommendations in an articulate and refined manner. In sports podcasts, the discourse is characterized by concise speech, short sentences, and a focus on facts such as dates, names, achievements, and competitions. Polythematic podcasts (The Internet Speaks, Comedy Club Sofia, 257, The Superman), on the other hand, display heterogeneity in language, subtopics, transitions between topics, and the inclusion of examples and arguments drawn from various fields. Podcasts serve various purposes, including sharing personal experiences, disseminating business knowledge, cultivating personal branding, offering self-help guidance, raising awareness of political, cultural, and artistic events, and supporting education or self-education (Cold Shower for Managers, One Thing in Mind, The My Wallet).

The results of the discourse analysis indicate that dialogues or interviews in podcasts typically follow either pre-prepared questions and scripts or a semi-structured format, with complete improvisation being rare. In most cases, participants receive either scripts or at least conversational guidelines. A characteristic feature of podcast discourse is that the host not only asks brief questions but also expects detailed responses from the guest. The podcaster prepares thoroughly on the topics and engages in both prepared and spontaneous reflections without dominating the conversation or adopting a didactic tone. The communicative roles remain that of the leader and guest, yet there is no significant distancing between them. Occasionally, the dialogue is interrupted for calls to action directed at listeners and viewers, such as requests for support, subscriptions, or sign-ups, but these interruptions do not drastically disrupt the conversation. Such appeals and addresses to the audience typically occur at the end of the podcast.

A distinctive feature of podcast discourse in Bulgaria is the often semi-formal nature of the conversation, where polite forms of address (such as using “you” formally) and titles are rarely used. Instead, participants frequently use personal names, and sometimes surnames, particularly in podcasts involving cinema, literature, media, or sports professionals. This shift alters the media discourse from formal to semi-formal, and from strictly academic to emotionally enriched or connotative, as seen in discussions on business, finance, management, and women in business (Women Speak Leadership, Voice of Capital, Investor, Bloomberg). Figurative language, including comparisons and metaphors, is also a component of podcast discourse; however, complex symbols or allegories are avoided to prevent communicative barriers, especially for virtual audiences, as seen in podcasts about literature. Humor is present in the media discourse of podcasts but is free from vulgarities or low-register language, as exemplified by the podcast “Kitodar” and “To To.” Jokes and anecdotes are also part of the media discourse, with some being in dialect, but generally, the podcasts adhere to standard Bulgarian language norms.

Another aspect of the discourse analysis is that podcasters model behaviors and present social norms within society. Although indirectly, they influence the formation of public opinion to a certain extent, but not significantly. The critical stance of podcasters, as revealed in the analysis, represents various societal groups but does not necessarily establish lasting virtual communities. Indirectly, podcasts contribute to the development of media literacy and digital media culture within a dynamic media ecosystem, without dismissing other media forms but rather comparing them on professional criteria. Consequently, podcasts subtly influence and transform public discourse by introducing important topics presented by experts in an informal and unscripted manner, rather than through official or commissioned content. This process enriches societal discourse on various levels.

## Discussion

The podcast remains a prominent media genre, often created by journalists employed across various media platforms such as television, radio, online newspapers, and magazines. However, podcasts are also produced by journalists who operate independently of specific media outlets, establishing their own virtual platforms or media channels. Additionally, specialists and experts from diverse fields contribute to podcast production, aiming to inform, share news and knowledge, convey personal experiences, offer advice, and provide recommendations. This diverse range of contributors fosters a reevaluation of paradigms and an analysis of dynamics within both the media ecosystem and the business landscape, ushering in flexible organizational schemes within the labor market, human resource management, and the evaluation of human capital, particularly within the media sector.

Discussions surrounding podcasts often touch upon issues such as copyrights, journalistic standards, technological and technical norms, and methods of podcast dissemination. This underscores the need for interdisciplinary research spanning the realms of media, business, law, management, human resources, and marketing. Future research endeavors may delve into technical, ethical, and communicative

aspects of podcasting, analyzing various platforms for publishing, archiving, storing, and distributing podcast content in both audio and video formats. Moreover, podcasting has the potential to evolve into a creative industry, influencing social and cultural landscapes as an integral part of media culture.

## Conclusions

The hypothesis that podcasts function not only as a media platform but also as a business and a specific communication channel has been largely confirmed. In Bulgaria, podcasts contribute to establishing a model that combines information sharing and experience sharing, resulting in a product that reflects media, digital, and communication literacy. Furthermore, podcasts have been found to contribute to a paradigm shift in business, integrating crowdfunding, outsourcing, freelancing, volunteering, philanthropy, digital marketing, and micro-targeting of web visitors - listeners and viewers, among other strategies.

The analysis provides grounds to conclude the heterogeneity and diversity of podcasts in Bulgaria based on various criteria such as podcasters, topics, episode duration, script organization (dialogue or monologue), and publication format (audio or video files). It was observed that the total number of podcasts did not experience exponential growth from 2021 to 2023; by 2023, there were approximately 250 podcasts with about 6000 episodes.

From the analysis of information available on podcast websites, platforms, and social networks, it was noted that only a few podcasts disclose funding results, which typically come from project sponsorship, national and international institutions, donations, advertising, online crowdfunding (e.g., Patreon), and volunteering. Financial income specifics were not established as part of the survey. Additionally, podcasts are produced by both media entities and individuals across various fields. These two production methods are not seen as antagonistic; instead, they are reshaping the media ecosystem, outlining elements of a creative industry. Flexible organizational schemes for podcast production and the involvement of individuals in creation, processing, and distribution are being developed. Podcasters are predominantly freelancers and self-starters, with organizations less frequently involved in podcast creation and production. Few podcasts are created and produced by business organizations, academics, and cultural institutions.

Consequently, podcasts play a crucial role in the media ecosystem, rapidly evolving in production and distribution. There is evident self-regulation and competition among podcasters as well as against traditional media outlets.

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## Appendix

Table 1. Podcasts in Bulgaria: Titles, Podcasters, Types, Funding

topics - spheres	title - name	podcasters creators producers editors	audio video content	funding donation support
policy	Karbovski, Freedom of Speech	Martin Karbovski	video	donations sponsors
	Politically Incorrect	Peter Volgin	audio	Bulgarian National Radio
	To To	ToTo musician artist	video	donations
	Translation on air	Poli Paunova	audio	Free Europe Radio
	Restart Europe	Bulgarian National Radio	audio	Bulgarian National Radio
	Boulevard Bulgaria	Asen and Sabina Grigorovi	audio	self-financing projects donation
	Darik Podcast – Darik Cafe	Journalists and media team	audio	Darik Radio
	Euronet – Generation Z	Violeta Ashikova	audio	Bulgarian National Radio – Euronet
economics finance business management	The Voice of Capital	Capital Newspaper	audio	Capital Newspaper
	Investor	Team and Asparuh Iliev	audio	Investor.bg
	Bloomberg	Ivaylo Lakov	audio	Bloomberg TV Bulgaria
	One Thing in Mind	Economic.bg	audio	Economic.bg
	Women Speak Leadership	Aneta Savova	audio	Impact Solutions
	My Wallet	Journalists Team	audio	Manager Magazine and Ludi Ars
	Cold Shower for Managers	Plamen Petrov	video	Equinox & Partners
culture and arts	Pop Culture	Bulgarian National Radio	audio	Bulgarian National Radio
	The Artist Speaks	Margarita Dorovska	audio	crowdfunding donations
	PodcI (ПодкаЗ)	Kitodar Todorov and Angelina Hadgidimitrova	video	self-financing donations company
	2&200 podcast	Tsvetomir Tsanov and Orlin Milchev	video	crowdfunding digital marketing
	Quiet, the Film Begins	Webcaffe Media	audio	Webcaffe Media
	Art Detective	Simona Krasteva	audio	Bulgarian National Radio
	No Filter with Patrashkova	Kristina Patrashkova	video	subscription donation
science	Sceince.bg (Hayka.бг)	Petar Teodosiev	video	donation projects

	You and Science (a podcast about objects)	Diana Uzunova	audio	donation projects
	Practical Ecology	Daniel Kostov	audio	donation projects
	The Orator of the 21st Century	Scientists, journalists, PR experts	audio	Institute of Rhetoric and Communications
	Ratio podcast	Team and scientists	video	Donations volunteers
education	About the Important Things	Klet and team	video	Publishing House
	Radio and TV Center	Students and Justin Toms	video	New Bulgarian University
	For Teachers	Team	video	Know.be (Znam.be, Знам.бе) SMS
psychology	Emotional Intelligence. Recipe for Development	Antonina Kardasheva and Diana Uzunova	audio	self-financing company
	How to Grow up?	Madlen Algafari	audio	self-financing company
	Authenticity	Georgi Yordanov	video	project crowdfunding
philosophy religion astrology esotericism	Truth.bg (Истината.бг)	Theodor Nikolov	video	self-financing
	Limitless	Eli Alexandrova and Zhivko Krastev	video	self-financing donation
image, PR, celebrities personal development experience sharing	MindCast (MindКаст)	Nely Hadjiyska	video	self-financing donation
	The Ultimate Podcast	Iva Ekimova	audio	self-financing
	The Career Show Podcast	Alexander Kadiev	video	self-financing
	Success without Limits	Chrissy Noeva	audio	self-financing
sport	Podcast about Sport	Sports journalists	video	bTV
	Darik Radio Sports Show	Sports journalists	audio	Darik Radio
	Kick Strike – Tennis Podcast	Lili Goleminova Lubomir Todorov	audio	Bulgarian National Radio
polythematic	The Internet Speaks	Vlado and Elenko	audio	projects crowdfunding
	The Superman	Georgi Nenov	video	sponsors
	Comedy Club Sofia	Vasil Nozarov, Nikola Todoroski, Niki Bankov and	video	Comedy Club Sofia and Club Sofia

	Ivan Kirkov, Nikolaos Tsitiridis, Hristo Radoev, Christian Terziev		
The Comedy Club Channel	Ivan Kirkov	video	project crowdfunding
Polifem – Creators	Katerina Vassileva	video	project crowdfunding
The Book Podcast	Milena Nikolova	video	Foundation Global Libraries
257 Podcast	Katya Vassileva	audio	Bulgarian National Radio
Clash Cast	Slavy Panayotov	video	The Clashers