

Podcasting in Cuba: Building a Sense of Community through Transmedia Storytelling and Co-creation Practices

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ABSTRACT

Podcasting in Cuba: Building a sense of community through storytelling and co-creation practices

Leysi Rubio Arevich

This research examines podcasting in Cuba during the period 2018-2024, offering an empirical study into the development and evolution of the medium within the context of the Caribbean nation. It explores how podcasting fosters the experience of community through transmedia storytelling and co-creation practices in Cuba. Podcasting has emerged as an unregulated medium within a media landscape shaped by the narrative of the Revolution since 1959, functioning 'as an element of the political system, legitimised by the normative discourse' (Sosa Valcárcel, 2021, p. 25). The study traces the evolution of the Cuban podcasting landscape over six years, during which the country's sociopolitical conditions influenced the emergence, consolidation, and subsequent dispersal of the podcasting movement. Drawing on analytical listening of 85 podcast episodes, 27 semi-structured interviews with 32 podcasting media practitioners, and two focus groups involving ten podcast listeners, the research examines how communicative practices in Cuban podcasting contribute to community-building. Grounded in a conceptual framework centred on community, transmedia storytelling, and co-creation, the study identifies podcasting communities as multidirectional networks of interactions, comprising podcaster-to-listener (top-down), listener-to-podcaster (bottom-up), and listener-to-listener (horizontal) exchanges. These communities are formed and sustained through a series of interconnected interactions and communicative practices that generate meaning and contribute to the reconfiguration of the country's communicative system. Furthermore, this research proposes a framework for recognising participatory and co-creative practices within podcasting, thereby offering a significant contribution to the field of podcast studies, particularly in the underexplored area of podcast communities. Finally, the research shifts the analytical lens away from dominant Western perspectives in podcast scholarship and broadens the scope to include the Global South, with particular emphasis on Latin America and the Caribbean.

Keywords: Podcasting, Cuba, community, transmedia, co-creation

1. INTRODUCTION

Podcasting is a medium in constant reconfiguration, whose enduring core lies in its capacity to connect individuals through elective listening. It is a medium grounded in intention, both individual and collective, from the production of sound narratives to their distribution and consumption. It demands continuous choices by creators and listeners alike to create, listen, share, and contribute. Within this sequence of choices, the medium reveals its potential to interweave individual experiences and nurture collective meanings, which evolve and materialise through narrative extensions, multiple platforms, and new participatory spaces that enable and encourage the exchange and production of collective knowledge. Consequently, the medium demonstrates a capacity to cultivate communities around its narratives, based on interactions and attitudes towards others, and grounded in horizontal and, even sometimes, decentralised communication models. However, the practices that facilitate the formation, maintenance, and strengthening of these communities have been insufficiently explored, interrogated, or used by creators and podcast scholars alike. This research contributes to closing this gap by analysing podcast communities within the Cuban context during the period 2018-2024.

The study examines the material conditions, institutional structures, and symbolic systems that shape the emergence and development of podcast communities in Cuba. Drawing on the experiences of podcast creators and listeners, this empirical study explored the communicative practices and attitudes that foster a sense of community within the Cuban context.

The study employed conceptual frameworks related to community, transmedia storytelling and co-creation to examine the interactions between media practitioners and listeners throughout the podcasting experience. Moreover, the research unpacked the set of communicative practices that podcasting in Cuba employed to construct belonging, through transmedia extensions and co-creation practices. Communicative practices are understood as meaningful patterns and forms of engagement within a field of practices, following (Couldry, 2004) conceptualisation of communication. This framework shaped the understanding of communicative practices as meaningful patterns and forms of engagement with podcasting on the Caribbean island. The study also focused on how podcast communities construct meaning, articulate identities and negotiate power within this specific cultural and historical context.

This approach revealed the intricate web of communicative relationships that characterise podcast communities in Cuba, and enabled the identification of distinctive features specific

to the domestic podcasting landscape, which have remained largely unexplored to date. This study highlighted how communicative practices are central to the formation and transformation of social life, as well as the role of podcasting in both reproducing and contesting cultural norms and power relations.

This introductory chapter provides an overview of the context in which the research is situated and presents podcasting in Cuba as a case study. It then outlines the aims, objectives, and research questions guiding the study, alongside a reflection on the qualitative methodological approach adopted. In addition, the chapter addresses the study's limitations and concludes with an outline of the structure of the thesis.

1.1 A Medium in Continuous and Permanent Reconfiguration

Despite continued scholarly debate on the liminalities between radio and podcasting, the latter has increasingly been recognised as a medium in its own right, examined and theorised from a range of disciplinary perspectives (Berry, 2006, 2018; Llinares, Fox and Berry, 2018; Spinelli and Dann, 2019; García-Marín, 2022a).

The definition of podcasting has moved from the technical notion offered by Espada (2018) who describes it as a format supported by three main technologies: 'compressed audio information (e.g., MP3-files), a global point-to-point network (the 'internet') and a subscription system (a Really Simple Syndication [RSS] feed)' (2018, p. 3) to a medium expanded into a 'global cultural phenomenon' (Chadha, Avila and Gil de Zúñiga, 2012; Samuel-Azran, Laor and Tal, 2019).

Podcasts are often understood as 'complex multimodal texts' (Vasquez, 2013, p. 240). The liveness, narrative extensions, intimacy these narratives foster and expand through sound (Euritt, 2023) and the active listening capability of individuals offer podcasting the nuance of developing communities of listeners or communities of shared interests (Berry, 2016; Carlton, 2018).

Podcasting, for the purposes of this research, is considered a medium with transmedia capabilities, in continuous reconfiguration. Podcasting is an elective aural capsule in which intimacy is nourished among listeners simultaneously, though not necessarily in synchronicity. Podcasting fosters intimate bonds through individual listening, and these connections are developed simultaneously - but asynchronously - in relation to other listeners. This individual intimacy can evolve into a sense of connectedness with other listeners, based on shared interests, a feeling of proximity or a mutual sense of belonging to

the podcast's audience. Through intimacy, podcasting fosters personal and social bonds and a sense of community that is individually and collectively nurtured.

It is a medium ultimately governed by the individual determination to listen, interact, engage, and contribute. Podcasting, moreover, poses a challenge and a creative opportunity to surpass vertical communication models (García-Marín and Aparici Marino, 2020) to the appropriation of co-creation practices towards the development, expansion, and re-configuration of the podcasting experience.

This medium recreates interpretive communities that extend beyond the relationship between podcasters and producers, to a broader space also integrated by audiences and communities of listeners. These interpretive communities are linked to digital culture practices that impact the understanding of digital communication and how it influences the podcasting industry (Laughlin, 2023), challenging traditional notions of audiences, fans and communities, as well as production, distribution, and consumption practices (Berry, 2006).

A sense of community is formulated around its aural culture (Bohlmann and Ross, 2021) stressing the 'sense of belonging' and the construction of a strong social economy sustained, not on material rewards, but on 'positive interactions' between members of the community reinforced by communal traits of 'respect, goodwill and trust' (Guertin, Theveny and Barber, 2021, p. 3). Those niche spaces become 'an open source community' and a platform for participatory collective knowledge exchange (García-Marín, 2020d, p. 146). These communities of practices are defined by Wenger (2001) as interactive learning spaces, areas of knowledge production and expertise, instead of the creation of goods, and 'the delivery of products, services, or tasks' (Turner, Schaeffer and Lowe, 2021, p. 54).

The exploration of podcasting and community often highlights the 'voice' as a factor of empowerment, representation, and community-building vehicle (King and Sanquist, 2008). Podcasting encourages collective storytelling in the voices of the audience, a discursive avenue that goes beyond feedback to the construction of a collective narrative. Podcasting, therefore, continues to decipher its potential in 'relationship-building, storytelling, and knowledge dissemination' (Ferrer, Shaw and Lorenzetti, 2021, p. 92).

Academic literature has stressed the shift in the producer-consumer relationship as one of the main distinguishing features of the medium (Friedman, 2006). The horizontal approach of the 'prosumer' capabilities (Bruns, 2008) is also noted in the interpretive communities of podcasters, nurtured by supporting networks of knowledge exchange and collective learning spaces (Berry, 2006). These communities can be found in online and offline spaces,

‘shared by the producers of podcasting projects and the users and fans of such productions’ (García-Marín, 2020a, p. 117). Users’ interactions thrive and complement the narrative through different platforms (Wrather, 2016), which stresses the transmedia character of the medium beyond its ‘sonorous entity’ (García-Marín and Aparici Marino, 2020, p. 98) deployed across intertextual ecosystems (Barrios-O’Neill, 2018). Community, therefore, is shaped by ‘interactions, connections, conversations, debates and joint projects’ (García-Marín, 2020a, p. 117), and are those processes that connect community members like synapses in neural networks that intertwine the communal traits amongst all members.

Podcasting has become an instrumental medium that expands its reach beyond “communication, information, culture, identity or transformation” (García-Marín, 2020a, p. 117). The intersection of platforms and the transience of the podcast itself outlines a transmedia experience that grows and shifts across media technologies, ‘producers’ media literacy (Bruns, 2008), the platformisation of the medium (Sullivan, 2019; Berry, 2020; Bonini, 2022; Paisana and Crespo, 2022; Thompson and Weldon, 2022), and the openness of a new communication highway that continues to unravel its aural potentialities. Discussions on audiences, fandoms, and communities return to the ‘social economy’ paradigm, manifested in the development of individual ‘social contracts’ within the community (Hancock, 2018). Mañas-Pellejero and Paz (2022) describe a shift in the user role, envisioning an organic transition from audience to community given by interactions, shared interest, communal traits, learning experiences, and the development of commitment signs and sense of belonging.

These dynamics are particularly salient in contexts like Cuba where technological and political constraints shape media practices uniquely.

1.2 Cuban Podcasting as a Case Study: Singularities and Challenges in Focus

The phenomenon of podcasting in Latin America has remained largely understudied until recent years (Reyes García and Martínez, 2021; Lozano, 2022; Sellas and Gutiérrez, 2022; Febles, 2023; Pelúcio, 2023; Hack, 2024). The consolidation of the Spanish-speaking podcasting industry in countries like Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, Chile and México (Pérez-Alaejos, Terol-Bolinches and Barrios-Rubio, 2022) has influenced academics and advertisers’ interests in the region, especially after the arrival of distribution platforms like Spotify in 2013, and Podimo more recently (*Podimo Expands Its Footprint to Mexico and the UK*, 2023). Podcasting in Latin America also saw a spike during the pandemic years, as EncuestaPod 2021 (Vaccaro *et al.*, 2021) reveals, given by a considerable change in consumption habits. According to this survey, nearly 70% of respondents claimed to have increased podcast listening during the COVID-19 pandemic (Vaccaro *et al.*, 2021).

While *Radio Ambulante*, and *Las Raras Podcast* have emerged as notable references in the region (Vicente and Soares, 2021; Lozano, 2022), telling stories of Latin America through soundscapes and non-fiction narratives, there is a universe of podcasts being produced in this part of the Global South that invite further inspection. In this context, it is worth noting that the critical development of this field in the Spanish-speaking world, originated in Spain (Legorburu, Edo and García-González, 2021; Ruiz-Gómez and Legorburu-Hortelano, 2023) finds the industrialization of the digital ecosystem in Latin America based on three main elements (Leandro, 2024). Firstly, Spotify's dominance over other streaming platforms (Podcaster@s, 2022); secondly, the influence of the Spanish podcasting industry and its development in early years (García-Marín, 2022b); and thirdly, the emergence of local producers and content networks (Leandro, 2024). However, not all factors influencing podcasting are uniformly applicable across the region.

1.2.1 The Cuban Media State Controls

The media system in Cuba inherits elements from the country's colonial past, the influence of the Soviet Union, and institutionalised mechanisms of regulation over the press and its role within Cuban socialist society. It comprises more than 600 official outlets, including newspapers, radio stations, television channels, printed magazines, news agencies, and native digital platforms.

Most of these media outlets were established after 1959 and encompass various formats, including the printed press, television, radio, digital media, news agencies, and audio-visual production. There are three newspapers with national circulation, fifteen provincial newspapers, and over 400 printed publications of various types, although this figure represents almost half of what circulated before 1989 (Sosa-Valcarcel, De-Aguilera-Moyano and De-la-Noval-Bautista, 2019).

Radio broadcasting began in Cuba on 10 October 1922, and television followed on 24 October 1950 (Salazar Navarro, 2017). Currently, there are 100 radio stations distributed across the national territory, along with a dedicated drama production unit. Among these stations, six have national coverage, one is international, one broadcasts in historical cities, nineteen are provincial, and seventy-three are municipal. Prominent examples include *Radio Rebelde*, *Radio Progreso*, *Radio Reloj*, and *Radio Habana Cuba*.

Cuban television comprises ten national channels, five of which are available only via digital signal, one international channel, sixteen provincial telecentres, twenty-eight municipal

channels, one community television station, and seventy-one correspondent offices. All of these media outlets maintain an online presence, alongside digital platforms such as *Cubadebate*, *Cubasí*, and *Cubahora* (Salazar Navarro, 2017, pp. 43–44).

The internet has facilitated the coexistence of traditional and emerging media, including both state-run and independent outlets. Among the latter are *eltoque.com*, *revistaelestornudo.com*, *periodismodebarrio.org*, *cachivachemedia.com*, and *cibercuba.com*. These outlets represent a range of political perspectives, including “defenders and detractors of the revolution, reformists, and staunch critics” (Salazar Navarro, 2017, p.45).

1.2.1.1 Imprints of the Soviet Press Model

Following a process of nationalisation that extended to formerly private media outlets, a communication system was consolidated during the 1960s and 1970s, ideally oriented towards the objectives of the revolutionary project (Sosa-Valcarcel, De-Aguilera-Moyano and De-la-Noval-Bautista, 2019, p. 9). The Soviet Union, Cuba’s primary reference in political, economic, cultural, and media domains during the 1960s, strongly influenced the structure of the socialist media system.

The press was modelled “in the image and likeness of the nations of the Warsaw Pact” (Salazar Navarro, 2017, p.41), adhering to the so-called Leninist model of the press, which conceived the press as a “collective propagandist, collective agitator, and collective organiser” (Salazar Navarro, 2017, p. 41). As in the former USSR, each of the main newspapers is affiliated with a political or mass organisation. The three national newspapers are linked to key institutions: *Granma* is the official organ of the Communist Party of Cuba; *Juventud Rebelde* represents the Union of Young Communists; and *Trabajadores* is the weekly publication of the Cuban Workers’ Central Union. Similarly, provincial newspapers operate as the official publications of the respective Provincial Committees of the Communist Party.

The Cuban press functions under an Information Policy directed by the Communist Party at the national level. This policy is adapted at the provincial and municipal levels and implemented by the leadership and journalistic collectives of each media outlet (Zúñiga, 2018, p. 236).

1.2.1.2 Regulatory Frameworks

The Constitution approved in 2019 establishes that the State “determines the principles of organisation and operation for all social media outlets” (Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, 2019, p. 81), and asserts its sovereignty and jurisdiction over the radio spectrum.

The principal regulatory authority overseeing the media in Cuba is the Ideological Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC), previously known as the Department of Revolutionary Orientation (Salazar Navarro, 2017, p.38).

The regulatory framework is composed of various normative instruments, including the Constitution and its reform projects, laws, decree-laws, decrees, agreements, resolutions, codes of ethics, organisational policies, and national guidelines on economic and social policy (Sosa Valcárcel, Aguilera Hintelholher and Castro-Martínez, 2021). Approval of such regulations involves several actors, including legislative bodies such as the National Assembly of People's Power, the Councils of State and Ministers, and the Ministry of Communication. Political entities such as the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, and professional bodies like the Union of Cuban Journalists and the Cuban Association of Social Communicators, also influence the media landscape (Sosa Valcárcel, Aguilera Hintelholher and Castro-Martínez, 2021).

The regulation and self-regulation of the Cuban press are characterised by extensive external oversight and internal conditions, including “the training of directors, organisational cultures, and, in general, a weak presence of strategic projection approaches within the operation of media institutions” (Garcés Corra and Franco Senén, 2017, p. 82).

Among the core characteristics of the Cuban media system, Somohano (2013) highlights “the social nature of ownership and the principle that information should not be subject to private interests or commercialisation processes” (2013, p. 83). Muñiz and Castillo (2017) note that it displays a diffusionist rather than a communicative nature, given the inadequate feedback mechanisms and the restricted public involvement in managing its content.

The Penal Code also addresses media-related offences. Article 103.1 stipulates:

Anyone who uses mass media to incite against the social order, international solidarity, or the socialist State —through oral or written propaganda or in any other form— or to spread false news or malicious predictions aimed at causing alarm, discontent among the population, or public disorder, shall be punished with a prison sentence of ten to fifteen years (Law no. 62, 1987, p. 37).

The legal framework explicitly states that the media are State property and affirms that the radio and television broadcasting service is “state-run and not commercialised, essential for bringing information, education, and entertainment to the whole of society” (Resolution no. 175, 2013, p. 819).

These elements define the Cuban mediascape, shaping communicative practices in the country, as well as the production, distribution, and reach of media within the framework of the Cuban socialist project. Within this context, podcasting has emerged as an unregulated medium, opening up new and unconstrained possibilities for communication.

1.2.2 Contextualising Podcasting in Cuba

Podcasting in Cuba has experienced significant growth since 2018, notably distinctive in the years 2020 - 2022 during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown periods. A range of social actors, including state-related media, independent outlets, independent creators, fashion brands, entrepreneurs, and religious institutions, produced over 100 podcasts that emerged within this period. In parallel, these podcasts built up a sense of community around their narratives, establishing a diverse network of voices across different platforms.

Podcasting emerges in an unregulated manner within Cuba’s tightly regulated mediascape, which has been defined as ‘an element of the political system, legitimised by the normative discourse’ (Sosa Valcarcel, 2021, p. 25) since 1959. Article 55 of the Constitution of the Republic of Cuba (2019) establishes state control over “principles of organisation and operation for all mass media,” reinforcing the irrevocable socialist character of the national mediascape.

*“The fundamental means of social communication, in any of their manifestations and media, are the socialist property of the whole people or of political, social, and mass organisations; they cannot be the object of any other type of ownership.”
(Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, 2019)*

Podcasting unfolds in a context where communication is conceived as a public good and has been subject to regulation since 1959, in accordance with the socialist character of the media and the principles of the Revolution (Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba, 2021). This encompasses the official status and legitimacy of the institutional media, as well as the conceptualization of communication as a service to the people and to the principles of the socialist society. In this media landscape, the lack of a legal and juridical framework for independent media creators results in their coexistence on the margins of officialdom and non-recognition by the government or the constitution. Consequently, non-state or non-institutional content is produced independently and in an unregulated manner. Meanwhile, national broadcasters lack a media policy or strategy for podcasts (Costales Pérez *et al.*,

2018, p. 179), with content managers often replicating traditional radio formats instead of promoting original content creation.

In 2020, Carlos Lugones created CubaPod, a platform designed to bring together ‘podcasts made by Cubans inside or outside the country, and using a bot on Telegram to compress the audio files of those podcasts so that the national audience would use less internet to consume them’ (Despaigne Brito, 2022, p. 6). CubaPod featured more than 200 podcasts (Rodríguez, 2020b) produced by Cubans, inside or outside the country, regardless of whether they belonged to a media outlet, business or independent users (Rodríguez, 2020a). The context of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 proved fertile ground for podcasting in Cuba, marked by a notable increase in productions, participation and recognition at events, and audience growth, among other significant developments (Rodríguez Torres, 2021).

Cuban studies have focused on podcast production by radio stations, with an emphasis on journalistic output from official media outlets (Benito Martínez, 2021; Rojas Espinosa, 2021; Despaigne Brito, 2022), a study on ‘social vulnerabilities’ during the Covid-19 pandemic (Bravet Ramírez, 2021), as well as an analysis of production and distribution characteristics in narrative podcasts based on content analysis of narrative journalistic podcast channels in Latin America (Rodríguez Torres, 2021). However, to date, no research has explored the communities these podcasts foster, particularly through a sample that includes productions from a range of social actors beyond traditional radio.

The Cuban mediascape is also shaped by the island’s technological development, and its particular pace of adoption and access. Since 2000, Cuba has undergone a technological upgrade at a distinctive pace due to its economic limitations, reinforced by the economic embargo imposed by the United States.

The access to the Internet is constrained by several factors, including inadequate infrastructure, limited resources, restrictions on freedom of expression, and, notably, government censorship (Martínez-García *et al.*, 2023, p. 168). Nonetheless, the Cuban government has implemented measures to address the digital divide. Cuba’s National Information Policy promotes computer literacy among the population to achieve digital inclusion for all citizens (Quindemil Torrijo, 2008). The government outlined a strategy to stimulate the development and use of technologies in the island, summarised in the nation’s programme for the Computerisation of the Society in Cuba (Rubio, 2019). The policy advocates, ‘to achieve universal access to the productive use of information and communication technologies, based on developing investments in advanced technologies internationally, which allow for greater access to broadband’ (*Política Integral para el Perfeccionamiento de la Informatización de la Sociedad en Cuba*, 2017).

Measures include the introduction of Internet access via mobile devices in December 2018 (Blasco, 2021); the implementation of the National Digital Literacy Plan (PNAD), which seeks to train the Cuban population in digital skills and competencies (Martínez-García *et al.*, 2023, p. 168); and programmes aimed at integrating ICTs into the Cuban education system, including the training of teachers in the use of ICTs for pedagogical purposes (Capote, 2022).

Nevertheless, the digital divide on the island became increasingly apparent during the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly reflected in ‘inequality in people’s ability to work and study from home, access critical information about the pandemic, and stay connected to friends and family’ (Martínez-García *et al.*, 2023, p. 169).

Steyaert (2002) discusses the digital divide in Europe and North-America, which draws from very different variables when it comes to the digital divide in regions like Latin America. However, he stresses two key elements that are relevant to explore in each context, which are the technology-illiteracy and information-literacy. He also proposes three key variables to reduce the digital divide: accessibility to technology, universal access where creative ‘access can however no longer be confined to the commercial aspects of innovations, but equally needs to target the technology as such’ (2002, p. 9); and skills as a pathway towards the ‘democratic availability of new media’ (2002, p. 10).

Despite government efforts to promote digital inclusion across the Cuban population, some authors highlight ‘a high rate of digital illiteracy (despite being a highly educated country) and difficulties in accessing online information and services’ (Martínez-García *et al.*, 2023, p. 169), which also affect education and employment opportunities. Capote (2022) contends that this digital access divide is directly reflected in varying levels of competence, resulting in a cognitive divide concerning knowledge and use of ICT tools. Opportunities for e-commerce among businesses and entrepreneurs are similarly constrained by the country’s technological development and degree of informatization.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, messaging applications such as WhatsApp gained popularity for educational purposes (Cala Calviño, Bosch Nuñez and Díaz del Mazo, 2022), primarily due to their low data consumption and group chat functionalities. Compared to platforms like Moodle, WhatsApp was more readily accessible. Cala Calviño *et al.* (2022) identify several advantages of using WhatsApp for distance learning: it encourages students’ active participation in knowledge construction; facilitates real-time communication with educational agents; and supports cooperative work, reflection, and group collaboration. However, they also acknowledge the limitations of WhatsApp, noting that educators found universal internet access to be a crucial factor in the successful implementation of such

initiatives (Steyaert, 2002; Polson, 2019). The Covid-19 pandemic posed additional challenges to the Caribbean nation, exposing the extent of the digital divide within the country (Delís and Ortiz, 2021). Nonetheless, Martínez-García *et al.* (2023) highlight Cuba's resilience in adapting to the situation and implementing ICT-based initiatives despite limited resources. Finally, these authors also signal how the digital divide impacts not only a nation's digital culture but also leaves a lasting imprint on the country's social fabric and its population (Martínez-García *et al.*, 2023, p. 169).

The co-dependent relationship between media and society in the Cuban context (Sosa Valcarcel, 2021) states where media practices 'coexist and dialogue with a public model of communication where the logic of social-cultural profitability prevails, oriented to creating educational, scientific, cultural, and public good content, free of advertising, which differentiates it from other communication systems' (Sosa Valcarcel, 2021, p. 25). The massive access to the Internet from mobile phones, starting in 2018, and existing Wi-Fi hotspots opened up limitless opportunities for content creation, as well as the appearance of a new landscape of audio narratives, including podcasting.

Therefore, the selection of Cuba as the research field for this study opens a path to the examination and analysis of the Cuban podcastsphere, as previous studies have not been undertaken in this regard to date.

Cuba currently experiences a complex socio-historical period in which political and socio-economic factors are placing significant pressure on the country's development and, by extension, its communicative production. The storytelling of the Revolution, which is the normative narrative of Cuba as a country, continues to be constructed from the singular and narrow gaze of officialdom. In this scenario, podcasting proposes a harmony of voices that, although dispersed in the diversity of platforms and formats, manifest echoes of identity synchronised in their eagerness to communicate and connect with their peers. Podcasting's recreation of the 'national imagined community can work as traditional media do: it can imagine a nation as moving forward through space and time in a developing storyline' (Euritt, 2023, pp. 137–138). Therefore, podcasting in Cuba emerged as part of the medium's organic global evolution, shaped by the specific technological and communicative conditions of the Cuban context.

Podcast listeners, distinguished from radio listeners by their deliberate selection of both listening time and content (Berry, 2006), face unique challenges in this context. This distinction is particularly evident in the Cuban setting, where producing and consuming podcasts involves not merely a matter of preference, but a conscious investment of personal time and financial resources.

Cuban podcasters are likewise subject to technological and political barriers, lacking the organic opportunity to monetise their content or fully exploit the potential of streaming platforms due to the USA embargo. The motivations behind podcasting in Cuba, therefore, prompt an examination of the communicative nature of these narratives, as well as the rewards and gratifications derived from this medium on the island.

1.3 Research Aims, Objectives and Questions

Researching podcasting in Cuba offers a retrospective perspective on the medium's development on the island, alongside a contextual examination of the evolution of podcast communities within a distinctive setting, contrasting with global podcast studies. This research aims to deepen the understanding of the relationship between podcasting and its communities, while exploring the role of transmedia storytelling and co-creation in the building and maintenance of these communities. The objectives of this study are:

1. To analyse the evolution of Cuban podcast communities over the period 2018-2024.
2. To examine forms of community engagement within podcast communities.
3. To investigate participatory practices that foster and enhance a sense of community in podcasting.
4. To characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba.

The evolution of the podcast movement provides insight into how the isolated island of Cuba resonates within the context of social, political, and economic changes, mediated by technological opportunities and challenges. This approach to podcasting in Cuba also illuminates the relationship between podcasters and listeners and facilitates the examination of horizontal communication models based on collaboration and co-creation practices.

Podcasting scholars have explored communities of podcasting creators and listeners (Hancock, 2018; García-Marín, 2022b), especially during the early consolidation of the medium. Audience engagement, listening patterns, uses and gratifications, fandom, and communities continue to attract the attention of researchers (Spinelli and Dann, 2019; Horrocks and Mahoney, 2021; Euritt, 2023). Podcasting communities have found in these narratives a sense of identity and self-expression, a recognition of the self in the stories shared and enhanced through transmedia spaces and storytelling avenues toward community engagement.

The shift from audiences to ‘communities’ presents both a challenge and an opportunity to reconsider the relationship between podcasters and listeners, questioning the traditional roles of producers and consumers. Acknowledging this relationship invites a reimagining of the podcasting medium itself, emphasising co-creation avenues rooted in horizontal, collaborative practices.

Nonetheless, the relationship between podcasts and their communities has yet to be examined in depth from a collaborative and participatory perspective. This research seeks to address the gap in existing scholarly literature by exploring the role of narratives and co-creation practices in the creation, maintenance, and expansion of podcast communities.

This study also broadens the scope of podcasting research, contributing valuable perspectives from the Global South to the ongoing discussion.

1.4 A Qualitative Approach: Participants as the Lens

The study employed a qualitative design including three main methods: semi-structured interviews with Cuban podcasting media practitioners, focus groups with Cuban listeners, and analytical listening of podcast episodes.

This research followed a social constructivist interpretative framework. The study relies on participants’ experiences to thread and portray a social process attached to a specific social, political, cultural, and historical framework (Creswell and Poth, 2016). Participants act as a lens through which the research depicts the Cuban podcasting scene, the complexity of narratives, and their interconnections with the social reality and the media landscape of the country. These constructed meanings, framed in social and historical contexts, ‘are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others (hence social construction) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals’ lives’ (Creswell, 2007, p. 21). Participants’ voices, intertwined with their individual and collective contexts, offer insight into a communication format that goes beyond the content itself, capable of building communities of shared interests, while simultaneously co-creating new meanings and communities.

The research contributions have a significant impact on Cuban studies and the contemporary mediascape of the island. Moreover, the study provides knowledge into the podcast potential for creating and shaping communities through participative, collaborative and horizontal modes of communication. The research provides an empirical framework for the exploration of podcast communities through a multidirectional network of interactions.

Furthermore, the study shifted the lens of podcast studies away from Eurocentric and Western approaches, while also broadening the scope to the Global South and Latin America in particular.

1.5 Limitations

The limitations of this project are firstly related to the time frame covered by the research (2018-2024), and secondly to the methodology outlined in Chapter 3, which discusses the selected methods: analytical listening, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups.

The qualitative and empirical nature of this study placed the experiences of creators and listeners at its core, triangulated with analytical listening to episodes of Cuban podcasts.

The research did not aim to represent the experiences of the entire Cuban population; rather, it captured a particular moment in Cuban history from a communicative perspective that enabled an understanding of social and structural transformations within the national context.

The primary objective, however, was to obtain qualitative, in-depth insights that contributed to a broader understanding of podcasting as a medium on the island, its role in the reconfiguration of the media landscape, and the restoring of the social fabric through the communities it fosters.

1.6 Outline of the Chapters

Chapter 2 provides a literature review that identifies and discusses key concepts related to community, transmedia storytelling, and co-creation. These concepts form the foundation for the analytical units and coding processes applied in the later stages of the research.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approach, situating the study within contemporary podcast research practices. It examines the use of analytical listening, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups as tools for obtaining appropriate data.

Chapters 4-7 present the empirical findings of the research:

- **Chapter 4** explores the emergence and evolution of Cuban podcast communities between 2018 and 2024 and situates podcasting within the broader Cuban media landscape. The findings present in Chapter 4 illustrate the emergence and evolution of podcast communities in Cuba, highlighting the elements that influence the

development of the medium on the island, as well as its role within the broader mediascape.

- **Chapter 5** examines community-building practices in Cuban podcasting, focusing on participatory avenues implemented by both media practitioners and listeners.
- **Chapter 6** investigates community-building practices through participatory approaches.
- **Chapters 7** provides a characterisation of the Cuban podcasting scene. It offers a characterisation of podcasting in Cuba, addressing the specificities of the medium through an exploration of podcasters' motivations, avenues for sustaining these sound narratives, attitudes towards monetisation, and the rewards and gratifications derived from the podcasting experience.

Chapter 8 discusses the findings in dialogue with the literature, drawing on theoretical frameworks of community, transmedia, and participation. It also proposes a novel theoretical framework for examining the sense of community within podcasting.

Chapter 9 presents the research's conclusions, followed by a comprehensive list of academic references cited throughout the study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review leads to an exploration of three concepts: community, transmedia, and co-creation.

These concepts, although previously explored individually in academic literature about podcasting, have not been used within a unified conceptual framework for interpreting a given podcasting scenario, as this research proposes.

The chapter first defines the concept of community as a structure of symbolic character and social nature, sustained through communicative and discursive interactions, and which facilitates the creation of meaning both individually and collectively through chosen associations.

Technological and social developments have impacted the definition of community, which evolves and expands through new communicative dynamics. The resilient nature of community allows it to adapt to new scenarios, something that transmedia narratives intuitively replicate. Hence, the premise of understanding how the podcasting experience, and the communities it fosters, are reconfigured through different points of entry, converging meanings and narratives, as well as the collective creation of knowledge in and around the medium.

This new podcasting experience is constructed from the interactions that take place within these communities. These interactions are based on participatory practices, among which co-creation acts as the pinnacle expression of the democratisation of creative control within these social and communicative structures. While co-creation has been studied as a marketing tool to strengthen emotional ties for commercial purposes between brands and users, this research proposes to redirect the research focus towards non-profit co-creative practices within podcast communities in Cuba.

Therefore, the following chapter introduces concepts of community, transmedia, and co-creation, and proposes a conceptual framework for interpreting the communicative practices that enable and expand the community experience in podcasting in Cuba.

2.1 Podcasting: A Medium in Its Own Right

Podcasting has grown into a medium in its own right, examined and theorised from a range of disciplinary perspectives (Berry, 2006, 2018; Wrather, 2016; Llinares, Fox and Berry, 2018; Spinelli and Dann, 2019; García-Marín, 2022b). Winer (2019), a pioneer in the

development of syndication (RSS), has updated its technical explanation for podcasting, describing it as ‘a series of digital media files made available over the open web through an RSS feed with enclosures’ (2019) heavily influenced by technology (Bonini, 2022; Paisana and Crespo, 2022; Thompson and Weldon, 2022).

Bonini (2015) coined the ‘second age of podcasting’ in 2015, after the success of *Serial*, produced by *This American Life*. Bonini (2015) argues that this consolidation was due to the influence of technological conditions, like the widespread accessibility to portable devices like smartphones; the emergence of hosting platforms and native listening applications; as well as sustainability avenues for supporting the production of podcasts like ‘micro-collective funding schemes’, in a market scenario where the subscription based model was widely accepted and implemented across other media.

Following Berry’s (2021) systematic inquiry into the definition of podcasting, three main dimensions emerge from scholarly literature, focusing on the technical, sociocultural and sonic elements. Several studies have been conducted focussed on the potential of podcasting as an educational tool (Andrade and Paredes, 2021), and the impact it had on learning processes, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, podcasting has been explored as a research method (Jorgensen, 2021; Lundström and Lundström, 2021; Jorgensen and Lindgren, 2022), with a greater call to practice-based approaches in this regard.

Moreover, much literature has been produced exploring the role of podcasting in influencing public discourse, public trust, as well as its role in journalism and media studies (Lindgren, 2023; Lindgren and Bird, 2024; Bird, 2025). Podcasts have uncovered an untapped influence over election processes across the world, shaping public opinion through narratives based on intimacy, storytelling and narratives techniques (Dowling and Miller, 2019). With the potential of influencing public opinion, also comes the ‘potential to disrupt, complement, or even undermine the existing media landscape in contexts beyond established democracies’ (Žikić and Markov, 2025, p. 2).

The producer-listener relationship has been significantly studied from the media practitioner’s perspective (Markman, 2012; Laughlin, 2023), listeners’ point of view (Morris, 2012; Chan-Olmsted and Wang, 2022), and listener-to-listener engagement (Perks and Turner, 2019). Podcast studies have identified the medium's potential for community-building, and how it constructs a culture of participation based on a curated multi-platform interactive experience. The intimacy these narratives foster and expand through sound (Euritt, 2023) and the active listening capability of individuals offer podcasting the nuance

of developing communities of listeners or communities of shared interests (Berry, 2016; Carlton, 2018).

Podcasts facilitate social connection and can serve as a sonic archive for personal narratives from underrepresented voices (Vrikki and Malik, 2019). The medium provides a space that fosters ‘compassion, support, and recognition of voices that have previously been unheard’ (Gaynor, 2024, p. 2). Its flexibility, low production costs, and asynchronous distribution make podcasting viable even in rural contexts, where internet connectivity may be limited or intermittent (Ruíz Menéndez *et al.*, 2025).

However, an element that has faded within the sociocultural dimension of podcast studies—most of which are concentrated in Western contexts—is the consideration of the contextual and cultural nuances of the production site in which podcasting unfolds. This is—at the risk of redundancy—a fundamental component in understanding not only podcast media producers and listeners, but also the positionalities of scholars in relation to their interpretation of the medium as a ‘major cultural and media form in the early twenty-first century’ (Sullivan, 2024, p. 42). This contextual layer reveals subtle yet significant insights into the motivations of podcasters and listeners, brings to the fore inherent but often overlooked cultural values, and contributes to a richer and more inclusive understanding of the medium on a global scale. Elements such as ‘listening’, ‘sociability’, and ‘purpose’ may carry entirely different meanings across distinct cultures. This research, therefore, emphasises the importance of incorporating contextual factors into the analysis of podcast production, viewing them as a cultural imprint that informs, shapes, and deepens our understanding of the medium as a meaning-making cultural artefact.

Berry (2021) highlights the sonic element present in podcast studies, the grammar structure of these sound narratives, the continued scholarly debate on the liminalities between radio and podcasting (Berry, 2022), and the potential of podcasting (and its raw materials) as oral archives for future historians and scholars.

Despite the sustained interest in the field, podcasting stands at ‘a historic crossroads: formalisation, specialisation, and monetisation’ (Sullivan, 2024, p. 17), developments that challenge the medium’s core ‘democratic ethos’. This process of ‘industrialisation’ may have originated with the conceptualisation of the listener as the ‘basis of the fragile economic ecosystem surrounding podcasting’ (Sullivan, 2024, p. 28). This shift introduced a transactional dynamic between producer and listener, one that, while largely dormant during the early years of the medium when experimentation and shared passions predominated, was later strategically targeted by hosting platforms and advertisers as a profitable and scalable opportunity.

The DIY (Do-It-Yourself) nature of podcasting, as a democratic, gatekeeper-free, and regulation-free space for sound and storytelling creation and innovation (Spinelli and Dann, 2019), is now being reshaped by the industry and the platforms driving its consolidation (Paisana and Crespo, 2022). The platformisation of podcasting (Sullivan, 2019; Berry, 2020; Bonini, 2022; Paisana and Crespo, 2022; Thompson and Weldon, 2022) also affects financial models for media practitioners, which have shifted from grassroots crowdfunding efforts (Bonini, 2015) to monetisation agreements mediated by platforms and advertisers.

Sullivan (2024) also warns that standardisation of techniques is a risk which can impact, not only the innovative nature of audio storytelling, but the establishment of storytelling best-selling arcs, or successful production formulas, narrowing the scope of originality, artistry and craftsmanship of the medium.

Since 2015, Noronha e Sousa, Zagalo, and Martins have highlighted the challenges faced by the sound medium due to its lack of an audiovisual component. The very definition of podcasting is once again under contestation, shaped by platform functionalities and the privileged position afforded to Spotify, alongside the growing prominence of podcast consumption on YouTube. Spotify introduced video functionality in 2020, initially restricted to a limited number of English-language podcasts, with its expansion to other countries, such as Spain, occurring only in 2022 (López-Villafranca, 2024). Meanwhile, YouTube has gained substantial traction among audio-native listeners, becoming ‘the most widely used podcast listening platform, doubling its percentage of weekly consumers for this reason; users who watch and listen to podcasts’ (López-Villafranca, 2024, p. 236). However, the platform’s definition of podcasting remains ambiguous, encompassing repackaged content, audiobooks, video podcasts, and podcast episodes accompanied by a fixed image, among other formats.

Some Spanish video podcasts include their audiences in recordings, in an effort to ‘show the relationship they have with the hosts of these spaces’ (López-Villafranca, 2024, p. 244). However, the extent to which audiences adopt more active roles during these episodes remains an area requiring further research and analysis. These ‘video podcasts’ may be replicating a fourth wall more characteristic of television or live-show formats, albeit with distinct aesthetics. López-Villafranca (2024) also cautions that video podcasts entail specific demands, ‘a different narrative, aesthetics and appeal for the audience compared to the television format or even YouTube videos’ (2024, p. 247). For new listeners discovering the medium, this may represent a significant shift towards visual aesthetics and video-based consumption, thereby introducing an additional barrier to entry for sound-exclusive productions. This shift also influences the motivations of podcasters, placing them in a

continual race for metrics and rankings, while ‘amateur, independent productions’ increasingly appear as relics of a different era. Although independent podcasters continue to derive gratification from production as a form of creative autonomy, as well as for its networking potential and capacity for community building, many now view the long-term sustainability of their podcasts as a central objective.

While some podcasters are still primarily driven by the pursuit of cultural and social capital rather than economic gain (Markman and Sawyer, 2014) there is an increasing trend towards monetisation among more formalised producers (Ortiz-Díaz and Moreno-Moreno, 2024). Contrary to some recent findings, many podcasters continue to perceive their practice as a leisure activity rather than as employment (Berg, 2021; Taylor, 2024). Additionally, the accessibility of podcasting, both in terms of technology and creativity, remains a central motivating factor (Markman, 2012; Berg, 2021; Taylor, 2024).

Platformisation, nonetheless, poses a threat to the rich and diverse nature of podcasting, as hosting platforms function as ‘high-density agglomeration structures’ (Paisana and Crespo, 2022, p. 7), capable of standardising content production practices based on successful case studies, listener behaviour within the apps (as inferred from listening metrics), and the expectations and consumption habits of both producers and audiences. For instance, the introduction of a comments feature on Spotify, in 2024, created a new avenue for listener engagement that had not previously existed on the platform.

This change also impacts the ‘decentralised production, distribution and consumption environment’ (Paisana and Crespo, 2022, p. 7) that prevailed in the early podcasting movement. Although more social actors have joined the podcasting production, including independent producers, artists and non-professional actors (Bonini, 2015), these platforms are challenging the open nature of podcasts and its ‘inherent collaborative structure’ (Paisana and Crespo, 2022, p. 9). The premium and subscription-based scheme, the hosting behind paywall platforms, limits the accessibility of the content and disrupts the ‘open architecture of podcasting and lack of institutional gatekeepers’ (Sullivan, 2024, p. 25).

Nonetheless, podcasting continues to be a medium of production and distribution of audio narratives, creating and spreading rich audio content across the globe, and fulfilling individual and collective needs and desires. The pandemic, for example, was a turning point for the medium, which ‘survived the profound disruption of COVID-19’, and ‘rebounded and displayed impressive growth’ (Sullivan, 2024, p. 40). During this period, podcasting became more flexible (Newman and Gallo, 2020), enabling aspiring creators from around the world to temporarily become ‘podcasters’ from the comfort and isolation of their own homes, or even from a rooftop overlooking the Caribbean Sea.

2.2 Unravelling the Concept of Community

Podcast communities emerge within a tapestry of narratives, platforms, and cultural practices. The concept of community invites an exploration of its symbolically constructed nature, underlying values, and the distinctions between place-based and network-based communities. This study specifically examines the mechanisms of community-building and maintenance, with particular emphasis on virtual and podcast communities.

Community remains a concept in continuous reconfiguration. It is better understood as a 'symbolically constructed reality' (Delanty, 2009, p. 33) rather than merely a social practice (Cohen, 1985). Community is deeply embedded in a group's collective consciousness and in the degree of awareness of 'mutual connections' (König, 1968, p. 133) among individuals. Cohen's (1985, 2013) framework corresponds with the foundational principles of the political community, where the delineation of boundaries defines the symbolic space for identity formation and collective awareness. This perspective resonates strongly with the political ethos of the Cuban Revolution post-1959, which regarded 'unlimited personal concessions in favour of a larger notion of community' as 'a structural requirement in revolutionary Cuba' (De Ferrari, 2014, p. 15).

This symbolic character of community is challenged by Turner (1969) who stressed that community has the capability of creating and enhancing powerful bonds between members of society or social groups, a theory that Delanty (2009) later presents as the 'binding nature of *communitas*' (2009, p. 32).

Significant debates have taken place in the demarcation, or liminalities, between community and society (Tönnies, 1887, 2012; Turner, 1969; Caum Moffitt, 1999). Tönnies (1887, 2012) differentiates community from society, acknowledging both as separate entities and irreconcilable products of human wills. Community resembles traditional cultural values, a closely bound form of social bonds, in opposition to rational, more formal relationships influenced by industrialisation and transactional relationships between citizens (Tönnies, 2012).

Culture emerged as a key variable in understanding the social relationships defined by community and society. Caum Moffitt (1999) argues that culture, society, and community form an indissoluble trinity for navigating continuous change, offering a novel approach grounded in a flexible and global framework that can be shaped and adapted to suit each society and historical period.

Whereas Tönnies' (2012) perspective regards the division between community and society as irreconcilable, other scholars such as Cohen (1985, 2013) argue that individuals can simultaneously participate in both community and society, developing a plurality of (reconcilable) meanings and aspirations of belonging within each social environment (Cohen, 2013). Cohen (2013) conceptualises community as a 'cluster of symbolic and ideological map references with which the individual is socially oriented' (2013, p. 58). He recognises community beyond uniformity, endorsing diverse behaviours and meanings for each individual (Cohen, 2013). Individual participation in both community and society facilitates and encourages the coexistence of multiple meanings (Cohen, 2013), thereby allowing for singular yet simultaneous expressions of communal aspirations. Consequently, the notion of community embraces a range of 'life experiences' encompassing several, equally valid aspirations (Bauman, 2013). Bauman (2001, 2013) critiques Tönnies' (2012) understanding of community as a unity based on 'sameness', emphasising instead the reassuring nature of community as an integrated unity whose members' capacity for belonging transcends distinctions of class, gender, age, and so forth. Community thus presents itself as a lasting unity, whose persuasive power of belonging embodies the most social character of society.

Community, when symbolically structured, is cultivated and sustained through social practices. Its discursive capacities render it an expression of 'human potential' (Habermas, 1984). Habermas (1984) contends that communication is an open-ended process and constitutes 'the basis of all social action', situated at the core of social expression and becoming the epicentre of society, surpassing institutions such as political organisations, social classes, and roles. He further underscores the negotiation of norms and rules of communicative action in response to 'changes in the domain of instrumental and strategic action' (Habermas, 1979, pp. 147–148) and the manner in which communicative practices reconfigure their own logic through such confrontations.

The communicative nature of communities, expressed through their discursive character (Herring, 2004) is shaped by and enacted through language and, increasingly, 'other semiotic resources, textual forms and patterns, still and moving images, sounds and cultural discourses' (Leppänen *et al.*, 2014, p. 113). The discursive practices shared within communities facilitate the exchange and construction of multiple meanings, reinforcing the communicative essence of community through an ongoing collective learning process.

Community is experienced through communicative narratives that are closely linked to identity formation, as well as through the manifestation of this communal identity via social action. In summary, 'the power of community - therefore - is the power of communication' (Delanty, 2009, p. 125).

2.2.1 Community Values

Previous studies have highlighted important values that allow for a better understanding of the underlying processes that take place within a community. Community is *resilient* and continues to be a viable unit of change, a bridge to hold the core of culture and society while facing changes and ‘conveying continuity’ (Caum Moffitt, 1999, p. 238).

Philip Selznick’s (1994) view on community, although limited to a ‘variable aspect of group experience’ (1994, p. 358), makes a substantial contribution while framing community within key variables such as participation but also loyalty, solidarity and commitment.

Community enables individual and collective creativity for personal and associational identity (Caum Moffitt, 1999) enabling multiple but equally valid aspirations (Bauman, 2013). Key propositions advanced by McMillan and Chavis (1986) include membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs, and shared emotional connections. Other scholars argue that a sense of belonging is a common characteristic among community members, and that these members will eventually interact through established routines, rituals, and communications that the community enables (Chalmers Thomas, Price and Schau, 2013; Guertin, Theveny and Barber, 2021).

Community can be either ‘place-based and/or network-based’ (Caum Moffitt, 1999, p. 235), leaving the intensity of functions and emotions as well as the capacity of changing over time as third and fourth dimensions, respectively. The network-based dimension works on a functional level within the cultural and informational exchange for technological survival/progress, while its emotional (symbolic) character relies on religion, and the role of creativity for identity building and personal association (Caum Moffitt, 1999).

The local community, for instance, underscores variables such as trust, shared symbols, traditions, and communal narratives (McMillan, 2011) as well as the importance of shared historical experiences. One of the tensions identified in community studies is its heterogeneous or homogeneous character. *Affinity communities*, which bring together actors with shared interests, or on the other hand, the idea of the neighbourhood, which brings together all sorts of people influenced by the territorial, cultural, and socio-economic conditions of the area in which it is rooted (McMillan, 2011). However, territorial influence leaves a mark on the community only to the extent that individuals interact within their urban spaces and consolidate forms of sociability anchored in the local context. Without those interactions, territoriality implies merely a sense of coexistence, not of conviviality.

Network-based communities (Caum Moffitt, 1999) on the other hand, can be explored from a cultural perspective or the informational exchange that define and shape their definition. No longer attached to traditional notions of territorial proximity, community withholds its subjective character (Urban, 1996), which can only be experienced, and cannot be institutionalised or spatially structured. Anderson (1983) foresaw the development of the cognitive capacity of communities to imagine themselves, not only due to the changes that modernity enables but a broader understanding of community as a concept beyond conventional face-to-face structures.

Whether approached from a normative, post-traditional, or global perspective, community is technologically mediated —both symbolically and discursively— and is inherently interwoven with technology. Androutsopoulos (2006) identifies common variables in definitions of online or virtual communities, describing them as groups of users characterised by ‘regular interaction around a shared interest or purpose; the development of social roles, hierarchies and shared norms; a sense of common history; and an awareness of difference from other groups’ (2006, p. 422). Within this framework, the transnational community emerges, capable of producing ‘new streams of consciousness that awaken an aspiration for the cause of the diaspora’ (Delanty, 2009, p. 129).

Virtual communities are also intertwined with a combination of instrumental, structural and strategic skills (Steyaert, Zee and Zaat-Jones, 2000; Steyaert, 2002) relevant to the information society. Beyond accessibility, there are instrumental skills like ‘the ability to use technology’ (Steyaert, 2002, p. 7); structural skills that include literacy about new formats ‘in which information is communicated’ (2002, p. 7) ; and lastly, strategic skills are based on a new digital culture where information enacts ‘the basis for decision making’ (2002, p. 7) and a permanent reliance on communication and information as an important foundation for a ‘very information-intensive’ society (2002, p. 7).

2.2.2 The Virtual Community

The virtual community emerges as ‘a form of elective affinity’ (Monaghan, 2014, p. 246). Rheingold (1993, 2000) highlights the emotional dimension of the interaction on the Internet and its capacity to build ‘webs of personal relationships in cyberspace’ (2000, p. xx). These virtual communities have been catalogued as *thin communities* when approaching fragile communities of strangers. George Simmel’s¹ foresees the fragility of these interactions, although he stresses the individual response to a conscious participation act. Castells (2002) also warns about the ephemeral character of what he denotes ‘networks

¹ Georg, S., 1950. The metropolis and mental life. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, pp.409-424.

of socialisation' (2002, p. 556). He highlights the multiplicity of forms and participants that these networks embody, and the further progression from networks to spatial communities.

Calhoun's (1998) notion of the Internet recalls its complementary character of 'face-to-face community organisation and movement activity' (1998, p. 382) rather than as a substitute for it. Nonetheless, it should be noticed that the Internet allows the existence of purely virtual communities, which do not transcend other social scenarios (Delanty, 2009), but which are fully entitled to perform social actions within the digital scope.

Virtual learning communities are based on multidirectional communication combining synchronous and asynchronous textual and/or audiovisual tools (Cabero Almenara, 2006). In such communities, value is generated through the development of collective practices, which are subsequently negotiated and routinised to form a set of shared norms, 'implicit ways of understanding, saying and doing things' (Rodríguez-López, 2021, p. 1). Moreover, online communities 'rely heavily on voluntary input from their users' (Fu, 2024, p. 78) and facilitate the emergence of new roles adopted by users according to 'their skills, responsibilities, motivations, and levels of engagement' (Fu, 2024, p. 78).

Virtual environments 'foster community resilience' (Kurt, 2025, p. 2) enabling communities to withstand adversity (Aldrich and Meyer, 2015). However, current studies that focus solely on face-to-face communities overlook the ways in which virtual social interactions contribute to building community resilience through new spaces for exchange and socialisation. Offline interactions, or 'sociovirtualisation' as Kurt (2025) describes them, contribute to resilience and enable virtual spaces for social interaction where members exchange practical and emotional support (Kurt, 2023). This involvement strengthens the sense of belonging and identity within the community (Kurt, 2025), which is reinforced through 'online discussion boards, social media groups, and virtual events where they may exchange experiences and work together on projects' (2025, p. 2). Virtual communities also allow user involvement 'in activities such as exploring webpages, commenting, sharing a photo or experience' (Chen and Keng, 2024, p. 932). Similarly, limiting the study to virtual spaces is exclusionary, as offline interaction nodes can influence, reconfigure and even disintegrate dynamics within the virtual community.

Other approaches to virtual communities have focused on social media interactions (Nieto and Lucena, 2024). Seargeant and Tagg (2014) explore the term *communities of shared values* referring to the use of social media to communicate and bond with others, using language to enact communal bonds. Nevertheless, it should be critically analysed to what extent a community can be identified in groups of users who share values about a specific topic aligned in meaning units like hashtags or trends. This 'coupling disposition' proposed

by Zappavigna (2014) refers to *ambient communities* of values that reflect ‘particular orientations toward a particular ideation’ (2014, p. 151), where interactions between members are displaced in importance by the ‘emergent bonding around searchable topics’ (2014, p. 156). While this might be conceived as a novel gaze on community, and an answer to defining what a virtual community is, it shifts the weight of the discussion into ‘common ideations’ and patterns of alignments without weaving the influence of the intervention of algorithms and individual consumption patterns; but most importantly, leaves interaction out of the spotlight.

An important proposition related to community engagement in virtual communities, social listening as 'legitimate participation' in online communities. Podcast scholars expand this understanding to the actual action of listening to podcasts. Chen and Keng (2024) highlight how ‘the cognitive and conscious participation of the audience in podcasts can improve identification with the group’ (2024, p. 932). For these authors, the podcaster's programme community has a utilitarian and instrumental function, providing ‘feedback and suggestions’ (Chen and Keng, 2024, p. 932), and through this contribution encourages other listeners to participate in a conversation.

Although they highlight the ‘high intimacy and sense of companionship’ of podcasting (Chen and Keng, 2024, p. 935), they limit their argument by stating that podcasts have ‘low sociality’ (2024, p. 935), and therefore the degree of interaction that these podcast communities can generate.

2.2.3 The Podcast Community

Podcasting is a user-centred medium (Llinares, 2018), where community building and community maintenance is performed through interactive communicative practices (online and offline), enhanced by the participants’ shared interactional history (Seargeant and Tagg, 2014). Seargeant and Tagg (2014) recall the construction of links between members of the network as an ‘important element in constructing or maintaining the community’ (2014, p. 180), achieved through ‘shared cultural and linguistic practices’ (2014, p. 180).

Podcasting’s aural culture (Bohlmann and Ross, 2021) fosters a sense of togetherness and the construction of a strong social economy sustained, not on material rewards, but on ‘positive interactions’ between members of the community. These belonging, in turn, are expressed through solidarity, loyalty and commitment practices and the reinforcement of solidarity is ‘achieved through virtual contact via other semiotic modes’ (Monaghan, 2014, p. 246) of every community in general.

The podcasting community encourages the formation and sharing of meanings and belongings through interaction and engagement, which ‘turns an isolated and fragmented activity’ (García-Marín, 2020d, p. 146) into a transformative experience where the role of passive consumers shifts into producers and collaborators ‘united through collective creative interests’ (2020d, p. 146). Collective storytelling is also encouraged in the voices of the audience, a discursive avenue that goes beyond feedback to the construction of a collective narrative, independent, and sometimes counter-mainstream (Rodgers, 2022).

The podcast community layout recreates a multi-platform experience through interactive links between the podcast show (the core content) and its social media profiles (Wrather, 2016). These strategies impact listeners’ experience and ‘improve their relationship, participation and engagement within the shows’ (García-Marín, 2020d, p. 143). The content is situated at the heart of podcasting communities, while the communicative practices that unfold within, and around it, constitute the foundation of communal action.

Passing beyond the ‘phatic communion’ notion, these communities establish and consolidate ties of ‘companionship’ and deliver ideas. Interactions between members through communicative processes reinforce these supporting networks, encouraging solidarity practices, as well as peer support.

The online podcast community can reproduce a ‘unique ecosystem capable of bringing the audience alongside’ as a ‘collaborator instead of a passive receiver’ (Witmer and Dowling, 2024, p. 1703). True crime podcasters, specifically, have been recognised for nurturing a space beyond storytelling, while ‘building an active community and allowing the audience to be a part of the conversation’ (Boling, 2019, p. 175). These sound narratives can create social media pages, build the community through collaborative practices like ‘sharing information’ or ‘crowdsourcing’ (Gray and Benning, 2019; Witmer and Dowling, 2024).

Membership poses an interesting variable within podcast communities, closely related to ‘active participation’ (Witmer and Dowling, 2024, p. 1708). Interactions, and collaborative labour toward a common goal can be variables that significantly influence community membership. Other actions such as ‘sharing, liking, and commenting’ demonstrate engagement and personal investment, but might be considered passive or sporadic participation. Retweeting, for example, may indicate a higher level of participation or engagement with content when compared to liking, which is often associated with a more automatic or passive audience response (Sekimoto *et al.*, 2020).

Connectedness, according to Soto-Vásquez, Vilceanu and Johnson (2022), appears at ‘the intersection of learning as discovery and learning as familiarity’ (2022, p. 332). These

collective creation processes are fundamental for community building and community maintenance.

While community building dynamics continue to be explored, some scholars propose ‘listening’ as a form of active participation. A sense of relatedness (Tobin and Guadagno, 2022) can emerge through regular and loyal listening to podcast episodes. Listeners may cultivate a sense of belonging to the imagined community that forms around these sound narratives and develop parasocial relationships with the hosts (Schlütz and Hedder, 2022; Soto-Vásquez, Vilceanu and Johnson, 2022; Tobin and Guadagno, 2022; Heiselberg and Have, 2023). ‘Listening’ also reinforces a shared identity and intragroup diversity among members (Donison, 2023). Its communitary aspect can be grounded on sustained interactions between producers and listeners in the comments sections of hosting platforms or social media channels (Perks and Turner, 2019; Nieto and Lucena, 2024).

Nonetheless, legitimising ‘listening’ as a form of community participation may risk scholars and media practitioners overlooking the embodied communal bonds nurtured through meaningful interactions and collective exchange. According to Wang and Lin (2024), continuous podcast listening ‘brings individuals together and shapes specific community identities imagined by users based on their social and cultural values’ (2024, p. 33). While these authors acknowledge spaces for exchange, such as discussions among multiple participants on a domestic podcasting platform in China, they emphasise a predominant ‘one-way communication’ from host to audience, with limited opportunities for participant interaction. Although this communication style aims to prioritise spaces for ‘reducing conflicts and cultivating a culture of attentive listening’ (Wang and Lin, 2024, p. 27), it may impose a notion of homogeneity within the imagined community and create an exclusionary environment, where the exchange and respectful confrontation of ideas, key to enriching collective knowledge production, are diminished.

While the ritual of frequent listening fosters communal trust, it cannot be sustained through one-way communication alone. This narrow approach to community-building, centred primarily on the podcaster’s skill in speaking and listening, may be culturally shaped by domestic communicative practices and societal norms, which are often reproduced within these spaces that ‘exist at the ambiguous intersections of the public and private domains’ (Wang and Lin, 2024, p. 28). In contrast, Soto-Vásquez, Vilceanu and Johnson (2022) contend that ‘the private nature of podcast listening’ can be insufficient to stimulate broader communal activities such as ‘intergenerational conversations or communal viewing’ (2022, p. 334).

Chen and Keng (2024), however, make a valuable contribution by emphasising the role of ‘links between audiences and other audiences’ within the podcast community. Regrettably, they confine the impact of these audience-to-audience connections to a primarily cognitive dimension, centred on the potential to encounter ‘other like-minded people’ (Chen and Keng, 2024, p. 941) within spaces for opinion exchange created by the podcaster and the audience.

Conclusion

In the context of profound transformations in information and communication, community continues to serve as a viable unit of change, a bridge that sustains the core of culture and society amid such shifts, while simultaneously ‘conveying continuity’ (Caum Moffitt, 1999, p. 238). Community remains a dynamic and living system, existing ‘as long as it is being experienced’ (Bauman, 2013, p. 65), a definition especially pertinent to understanding podcast communities formed within contemporary storytelling frameworks.

To date, very few studies have examined community-building practices in podcasting, and none have specifically addressed the Cuban context. Exploring this area allows for a deeper understanding of how podcasting facilitates the formation of communities through sound-based narratives. This research seeks to fill this gap by investigating emerging forms of community engagement within Cuban podcast networks.

Podcast communities build upon a participatory culture grounded in convergence, resilient reconfiguration, and collective intelligence, key principles of transmedia storytelling. The following chapter therefore revisits the concept of transmedia storytelling and examines each of its principles in relation to podcasting and its communities of listeners. Given the liminal space between community-building and transmedia narratives, the chapter will explore the concept of transmedia storytelling alongside recent studies positioning podcasting as a transmedia experience.

2.3 Transmedia Storytelling: “A Term and a Practice”

Transmedia storytelling (TS) is a narrative world-building practice constructed through the expansion of stories and meanings across different media and semiotic resources. TS is both ‘a term and a practice’ (Hancox, 2021, p. 2), encompassing a multi-branching narrative structure that unfolds across diverse platforms, formats, and storytelling avenues. Notable transmedia storytelling studies have focused on narrative worlds such as *Star Wars* (George Lucas), *The Matrix* (Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski), *The Lord of the Rings* (J. R. R.

Tolkien), and *A Song of Ice and Fire* (George R. R. Martin), among others. Early studies on transmedia primarily concentrated on commercial narratives, though research has also extended to TS within 'journalism, documentaries and advertising' (Scolari, 2014, p. 73).

Transmedia storytelling articulates a multiplicity of experiences linked to a single story, which is unfolded and distributed across various media, including literature, audiovisual formats, games, and others (Jenkins, 2006a; Scolari, 2009; Rodríguez, 2014). In TS, new meanings and narrative values are generated and enriched through each interpretation or expansion of the core text. Transmedia franchises typically exhibit three key features: 'text-audience interactivity, producer-audience participatory storytelling, and audience-audience collaboration and antagonism' (Graves, 2011, p. iii) across digital platforms and offline environments (García-Marín and Aparici, 2018).

In transmedia productions, 'each part of the story is developed mainly by employing the specific medium that is most suitable for that part of the narrative or storyboard' (Serrano Tellería, 2023, p. 200). These story components are 'completely connected by multiple means of communication and interaction, through the most diverse media, which complement each other, communicate, explain, self-reference' (Gabrich and Costa, 2020, p. 46). The construction of narrative universes relies on distinct nodes, each contributing unique elements to the overarching narrative (or mothership), where the collective construction of knowledge is shaped by and with the user.

Narrative nodes in TS must be self-sufficient in their expansion of the story across different platforms or languages. Jenkins (2003) asserts that 'each franchise entry needs to be self-contained enough to enable autonomous consumption' (2003). His definition has facilitated new understandings of the concept by describing 'a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience' (Jenkins, 2011).

While seminal studies by Kinder (1991) and Jenkins (2006a) refer to major fictional franchises that found new cultural channels through which to expand their narratives -with the active participation of fans- each new narrative element introduced a distinct language of interpretation and interaction. Therefore, if the narrative experience is contextualised on a single platform, it must be expanded not only in terms of language, but also through the creation of meaning via diverse codes, languages, and cultural practices. As Serrano Tellería (2023) notes, transmedia production 'requires in-depth reflection on the ecologies and semiotics of each medium, as well as their interconnections' (2023, p. 201).

Contemporary narratives are inherently cross-media, multi-platform, adaptive, and resilient. Jenkins (2006a) defined cross-media storytelling as the ‘media dump’ characteristic of the early Web 2.0 period, in which content was simply transferred from one medium to another without expanding the narrative universe (Montoya, Vásquez Arias and Salinas Arboleda, 2013). A key distinction between transmedia and the mere repetition of content across platforms lies in one of TS’s foundational principles: the addition of knowledge and the generation of new meanings within the narrative world through multiple perspectives and platforms. The reproduction of identical content across platforms may be perceived as offering different paratextual elements; however, genuine transmedia practice demands creativity and innovation in adapting content to the language codes of each platform. This inherently involves an interpretation of the original material, thereby constructing new meaning from the new point of entry.

Transmedia storytelling remains unfinished, as it is continuously open to expansion through emerging technologies and the cultural appropriation of such technologies in the production of meaning. Innocenti and Pescatore (2017) highlight the ‘capacity to overflow across the media landscape’ (p. 165), describing a process of mutation that results in ‘objects that are no longer self-conclusive and finished texts, but instead have become long-lasting transmedia phenomena’ (p. 165). These authors propose the concept of a ‘narrative ecosystem’ as a novel interpretative framework, ‘a dynamic model that represents vast narratives, accounting for the interactions of agents, changes, and evolutions’ (Innocenti and Pescatore, 2017, pp. 165–166). These narrative ecosystems are ‘open systems, inhabited by stories and characters that change through time and space’ (Innocenti and Pescatore, 2017, p. 170), and are composed of ‘an abiotic component (the media context) and a biotic component (the narrative structure)’ (2017, p. 170). With the emergence of new platforms and formats, and the influence of social networks on the creation and dissemination of content with potentially unlimited reach, the media industry is undergoing a process of organic democratisation, stemming from the creative opportunities embedded within these platforms themselves.

While some scholars approach TS through intertextual models (Kinder, 1991; Montoya, Vásquez Arias and Salinas Arboleda, 2013), languages and media (Scolari, 2013; Porto, 2024), or by focusing on the planning and design of the experience (Scolari, Jiménez and Guerrero, 2012), other academics identify two fundamental conditions for TS: narrative and its dissemination, and user interaction, including the creation of communities of followers or fandom (Tarragó Mussons, 2023). Within this type of narrative, the audience ‘becomes a prosumer and an indispensable part of the creation and development of the stories’ (Díaz Duarte and Arciniegas Martínez, 2021, p. 3).

TS has been examined through dual models that often stand in contrast to one another. For instance, Scolari, Jiménez and Guerrero (2012) propose two primary modes through which transmedia storytelling develops: the strategic model, where narrative extension and dispersion are deliberately designed and planned; and the tactical model, where the transmedia experience emerges organically, either from the success of the core node, from audience-generated content, or as a result of external influences (Pedrero-Esteban, Terol-Bolinches and Arense-Gómez, 2023, p. 191). Transmedia extension models proposed by Porto (2014), the multi-geographic (or multiplatform) model is based on the dispersion of the narrative across various platforms. By contrast, the multi-language model focuses on the variety of languages presented on one or more platforms, and such projects must be considered to qualify as transmedia examples (García-Marín and Aparici, 2018).

Montoya, Vásquez Arias and Salinas Arboleda (2013) propose two models - horizontal and vertical - based on Kinder's (1991) studies on intertextuality. These models do not consider paratexts such as news, comments, trailers, and reviews as part of the diegetic category (i.e., content that expands the narrative). Conversely, Koistinen, Koskimaa and Välisalo (2021) argue that these non-diegetic elements can 'provide a way for users to engage with the transmedia universe, and may provide information that affects the way they understand the broader transmedia universe' (2021, p. 17), thereby contributing new meanings to the storyworld.

2.3.1 Defining the Term 'Narrative'

In this research, the term narrative is employed with reference to three interrelated elements. First, sound narratives refers to podcasts and the overarching narrative structures they build over time (Lindgren, 2016), where individual episodes contribute value, but it is through a series of episodes that a meta-narrative emerges. To clarify the concept, this study distinguishes between story, a sequence of events or content, and narrative, which refers to the structured and mediated arrangement of those events through elements such as editorial choices, voice, pacing, and sound design. Furthermore, narrative is understood as a discursive and meaning-making practice that enables individuals and communities to interpret and organise their lived experiences. As Bruner (1991) argues, narrative constitutes a fundamental mode of human thought, allowing people to construct and communicate meaning, identity, and social reality. Within the context of podcasting, narratives serve not only as storytelling mechanisms but also as frameworks through which podcasters and listeners make sense of the world and negotiate cultural identities, histories, and perspectives.

For example, *Radio Ambulante* tells stories from Latin America, with each episode focusing on a specific story set in a particular country within the region. Each episode contributes accents, sounds, and soundscapes that enrich the Latin American tapestry. In a similar vein, *Lo Llevamos Rizo*, although it recounts the stories of Cuban artists and their personal relationships with their hair, constructs a narrative of Afro-hair empowerment that, in turn, reclaims Afro-Cuban identity.

These narratives emerge through the serialised production of podcasts. Topics such as cinema, music, and Cuban literature are presented as narratives developed by Cuban podcasts like Flash Musical, Voces de Marzo Literario, and Cinemafilia.

This is also evident in podcasts addressing themes of empowerment, whether centred on Afro-Cuban identity, as in *En Estéreo Podcast* and *Lo Llevamos Rizo*, or on female empowerment, as in *Empoderadas*. These podcasts put forward narratives of empowerment through personal stories that, over time, and through serialised listening and community-building spaces, develop narratives around gender and identity empowerment.

The term narrative is also used to refer to individual podcast episodes, particularly in the case of collectively produced podcasts such as *Cositos Radiales* and *Buzón de Voz*. While the latter gathers reflections on the pandemic in Cuba, both podcasts lack a central thematic focus. Consequently, narrative construction becomes secondary, giving way to a chorus of voices, woven together through editing and the use of sound elements such as music and radio-style interludes.

Narratives is likewise used when describing podcast episodes that emulate everyday conversations, episodes characterised by an intimate, familiar, and informal tone.

Finally, the term narrative is also employed as a synonym for the stories captured within podcast episodes.

Drawing on various traditions, narrative inquiry explores how personal stories provide meaning and individual interpretations of life experiences (Ferrer, Shaw and Lorenzetti, 2021, p. 91).

Podcasting scholarship places significant emphasis on narrative construction, particularly through the narrative voice (Jorgensen, 2021), and on narrative podcasting within the non-fiction genre, especially journalism. Additionally, the use of personal narratives (Bottomley, 2020) reenacts radio sociability, highlighting podcasting's capacity to foster intimate and affective relationships with listeners.

Although this study does not delve into the conventions of narrative structure, such as “strong plot, fully- fledged characters, narrative twists, inviting language, flowing episodic format” (McHugh, 2022, p. 248), it does address the construction of meta-stories through the serial production of episodes.

In line with McHugh (2021), a narrative podcast can be understood as “an episodic, nonfiction, audio storytelling format that interweaves voice, music, and ambient sound recordings to create a layered audio experience with a narrative arc” (2021, p. 105). These narrative arcs may exist within individual episodes, but they also contribute to the podcast’s overarching meta-narrative, which is the primary focus of this research.

2.3.2 Commercial vs Non-Commercial TS: Motivations and Opportunities

Davis (2025) defines transmedia storytelling (TS) as ‘the practice of narrating or creating meaning or experiences across media platforms, formats and devices’ (Davis, 2025). He emphasises the benefits of TS for media makers and managers, noting that these are linked to increased audience engagement, the creative opportunities it offers, and the monetisation of artistic content. Transmedia producers have rapidly decoded and embraced the efficiency of using the specific language and semiotic resources of each platform to explore ‘a specific field of the story using initial planning’ (Agirreazkuenaga and Ayllon, 2023, p. 5).

World-building around fictional stories appears both logical and appealing to creators, producers, and profit-driven mainstream organisations (Jenkins, 2006). Public broadcasters in Europe have adopted transmedia strategies to expand their content and attract more followers than their commercial competitors (Lucas Zaragoza, Moreno Cano and Angulo Rincón, 2025, p. 14). These public service media outlets are investing in transmedia initiatives to diversify narratives and ‘connect with younger audiences seeking creative dialogue with content’ (Lucas Zaragoza, Moreno Cano and Angulo Rincón, 2025, p. 15). TS can thus be understood as a ‘strategy to reach out to new audiences through several entry points or platforms’ (Agirreazkuenaga and Ayllon, 2023, p. 5).

Independent transmedia productions ‘operate with less complexity and, generally, on a more limited time frame’ (Selvadurai, Vistisen and Binns, 2022, p. 100). These productions may not conceptualise the podcast as a transmedia product from the outset, as they are often entirely self-contained (Selvadurai, Vistisen and Binns, 2022, p. 98). Notably, countries such as Colombia have placed emphasis on independent transmedia experiences. The NODOS-transmedia platform brings together 136 Colombian transmedia projects developed between 2009 and 2020, not only to promote the work of local creators, but also

to preserve a historical archive of these projects, which are often discontinued due to lack of funding. However, Diaz Duarte and Arciniegas Martínez (2021) observe that in most of these Colombian transmedia experiences, experimentation and the personal interests of the creators - rather than narrative planning - have driven expansion. They further note that these projects have largely failed to involve users in a meaningful way in the creative processes (2021, p. 6).

Podcasting has been identified by industry professionals as an accessible format, ‘more direct and efficient in testing new fiction series than traditional pilot episodes’ (Pedrero-Esteban, Terol-Bolinches and Arense-Gómez, 2023, p. 191). Owing to its relatively low production costs compared to television, podcasting is increasingly used by TV networks as a testing ground to gauge audience interest, using listener ratings and reproduction numbers to inform decisions about expanding certain stories to the screen. This strategy of narrative expansion not only engages users intellectually and emotionally, but also presents ‘opportunities to generate business’ in specific contexts (Pedrero-Esteban, Terol-Bolinches and Arense-Gómez, 2023, p. 200). These narratives are attractive to media producers not only because they can be developed in various formats and target diverse audiences across platforms, but also because a series of coordinated communicative actions that promote a compelling narrative may go viral and evolve into a financially sustainable cultural phenomenon-especially if audiences assume agency and creative control over parts of the transmedia experience.

Podcast productions frequently implement marketing strategies tailored to meet listeners' expectations (Rime, Pike and Collins, 2022). Content is thus ‘created to maximise the reach of each podcast and increase its audience, but also to increase its profitability’ (Rime, Pike and Collins, 2022, p. 1271). According to these authors, the early stages of podcasting were marked by innovation in content creation. In Spain, amateur and independent podcasters also experimented with complementary narrative resources (García-Marín, 2023). However, the current trend appears to focus on ‘exploiting the creative opportunities offered by the auditory nature of the medium’ (Rime, Pike and Collins, 2022, p. 1271). While transmedia creators increasingly leverage the emotional connection listeners develop with shows, few have fully tapped the participatory potential of audiences as content creators, whether for commercial or non-commercial purposes.

Martens (2011) views participatory strategies as methods of harnessing user-generated feedback as a content source, enabling publishers to create new transmedia products that can then be marketed back to fans (Graves, 2011). Podcasters, whether independent or institutionally backed, seem to capitalise on listener engagement in various ways. Listeners

become a financially viable resource, drawn in by compelling narratives they are eager to ‘follow’ and ‘share’ (Noronha e Sousa, Zagalo and Martins, 2015, p. 197).

2.3.3 Engagement and Participation in TS

Transmedia narratives are non-linear and have fostered the emergence of a new ‘participatory user’ who ‘selects preferred content but is also intent on consuming it across multiple channels (websites, platforms, social networks, etc.) and engaging directly in the narrative process’ (Lucas Zaragoza, Moreno Cano and Angulo Rincón, 2025, p. 14). However, this study primarily examines the strategies of various public service media focusing on new technological and digital capabilities, anchored in a series of multiplatform services. Although it acknowledges the presence of social networks such as Facebook and Twitter and the interactive potential they offer, it does not explore in depth the audience’s capacity to co-create with media labs or contribute beyond reacting to the narratives or feedback mechanisms made available by the platforms.

Yee (2025) revisits the notion of ‘participatory culture’ as articulated by Jenkins *et al.* (2009), referring to these convergent spaces where idea-sharing is encouraged and knowledge circulates through a set of rituals and norms. In such cultures, ‘contributions are seen to matter, social relationships are meaningful’ (Yee, 2025, p. 94), and the barriers to participation are deliberately kept low. Scolari (2009) underscores the active role of audiences and the collaborative dynamics that underpin the collective construction of knowledge, as Jenkins (2003) originally emphasised in his theory of convergence. People should be able to engage in the storytelling process and be provided with at least an interactive medium through which to do so (Miller, 2014).

Transmedia storytelling operates at the intersection of creative forces, balancing a top-down approach (from creators and producers) with a bottom-up approach (from audiences and communities). Jenkins (2004) elaborates on this, asserting that if convergence is ‘both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process’ (2004, p. 37), then research must not ignore the co-creation of content by audiences. Within transmedia storytelling, the audience is not merely the endpoint, it is also part of the medium.

Engagement in transmedia narratives can foster community building, but it is grounded in a culture of transmedia literacy (Alonso-López and Terol-Bolinches, 2020, p. 145). The techno-social skills required to navigate such narrative worlds demand varying levels of literacy from both creators and users, who must engage with diverse semiotic resources, interactive possibilities, and a complex, interwoven path through the overarching story.

Media practitioners working in the transmedia field must develop a range of competencies that enable them to design and implement applications or products in multiple languages and formats, with a strong emphasis on user experience (Husted Ramos, Rodríguez Garay and Álvarez Chávez, 2023). These competencies also contribute to the enhancement of digital media skills, directly influencing the creative potential of producers, particularly independent creators.

2.3.4 A Community-Building Practice

Transmedia narratives resonate within communities that form around their textual universes, where participation and engagement gain significance across all processes involved in podcasting, from content production to the conception and re-conceptualisation of the final communicative product (Wilson, 2018).

Such narratives ‘can help to address complex and multidimensional themes that are increasingly present in our societies’ (Agirreazkuenaga and Ayllon, 2023, p. 7), particularly when grounded in Pierre Lévy’s (1994, 1997) and Jenkins’s (2006) concept of ‘collective intelligence’. Minority perspectives, however, are often marginalised in favour of more conservative narratives (Kustritz, 2022; Agirreazkuenaga and Ayllon, 2023). Yet, transmedia storytelling-beyond definitional debates-can, as Lina Srivastava argues, serve as a tool to map ‘new ways of exploring how communities were already working together and using culture to effect social change’ (Jenkins, 2016).

Montoya, Vásquez Arias and Salinas Arboleda (2013) contend that the features of Web 2.0 promote ‘collaboration and the formation of conversational and interest-based communities’. These communities emerge through interaction between users who are also active co-producers and regulators of content. As such, they occupy a central role in the ‘social production of both value and meaning’ (Montoya, Vásquez Arias and Salinas Arboleda, 2013, p. 156).

The term ‘transmedia community’ can be understood as comprising both media producers and pro-active or co-creative users, alongside the intended relationship established between these groups, one grounded in shared values such as authenticity, credibility, and transparency (Serrano Tellería, 2023). While authenticity and credibility can be cultivated through meaningful social interactions, transparency presents a greater challenge, particularly for narratives produced by media houses or commercial entities. These actors often operate within frameworks driven by financial imperatives and performance metrics, which may not align with the sociocultural impact or collective benefit that transmedia storytelling can promote.

2.3.5 Between Creative Control and Decentralised Authorship

Tensions and struggles surrounding creative control and authorship can arise within transmedia storytelling (TS). Such narratives may challenge decentralised authorship models, which reject privileging certain voices, segments of the story, or platforms over others, as proposed by Hancox (2021). Hancox's (2021) socially oriented perspective highlights the potential of TS to contribute meaningfully to social change initiatives, 'particularly those that use personal or community narratives' (Hancox, 2021, p. 3). Research on collective intelligence emphasises the role of community in the collaborative exchange of information (Jenkins, 2006b; Bruns, 2008; McGonigal, 2008).

At the heart of transmedia storytelling lies the potential for creative pathways fostered by collaborative exchanges between creators and audiences. This perspective evaluates the impact of collaborative authorship and challenges industry conceptions of media as primarily profit-driven mechanisms. The notion of prosumption, as articulated by Axel Bruns (2008), supports the formation of knowledge communities across narrative worlds, which gather and process information that expands and influences the development of paratexts related to the core text. These communities facilitate collaborative processes of knowledge evaluation and synthesis (Euritt, 2023), thereby enhancing what Jenkins describes as collective knowledge.

However, Baelo-Allué (2019) reflects on the risks associated with 'collective intelligence', including the potential loss of creative control and the emergence of niches of misinformation. The author also argues that content creators, such as podcasters, may adopt a protective authority that limits the expansion of the core text beyond its predetermined storyline, reflecting a conservative stance towards the collaborative potential of audiences and communities. Furthermore, Baelo-Allué (2019) discusses how the expansion and engagement of stories facilitate 'community-based input easy to access and provide' (2019, p. 125).

2.3.6 Podcasting: A Transmedia Experience?

Podcasting is described as 'a highly libertarian medium' for both creators and listeners (Gabrich and Costa, 2020, p. 47). It can bring together 'educational content that one wants to transmit through the most diverse media' (Gabrich and Costa, 2020, p. 47) by means of storytelling and emotion. The podcast, as a transmedia scientific dissemination tool (Horisberger, 2024) holds considerable potential as an instrument for cultural, educational, and social inclusion (Husted Ramos, Rodríguez Garay and Álvarez Chávez, 2023). Podcasting, within a transmedia experience, promotes 'critical and reflective thinking,

through connections between theory, practice' (Gabrich and Costa, 2020, p. 47), and the lived experiences of its users.

2.3.6.1 Podcasts as 'Binding Elements' in Transmedia Storytelling

Podcasts can function as nodes within transmedia narratives (Koistinen, Koskimaa and Välisalo, 2021; Pedrero-Esteban, Terol-Bolinches and Arense-Gómez, 2023). These sound-based narratives may serve as 'a vehicle for narrative continuity' and 'a formula used by producers to connect with the fans' (Pedrero-Esteban, Terol-Bolinches and Arense-Gómez, 2023, p. 191). They can constitute an expansive element of the narrative universe, 'creating and binding the story together on various platforms' (Agirreazkuenaga and Ayllon, 2023, p. 9). When podcasting operates as a transmedia storytelling node or narrative extension, it may be linked by other binding elements within the transmedia environment that contribute cohesion and coherence to the supra-story. Distinctive features may act as the connecting thread across the narrative realm, and at times creative resources -such as music, a character, or the topic itself- provide 'continuity' and unity to the story. For instance, sound can function as 'a binding element for the transmedia universe' (Agirreazkuenaga and Ayllon, 2023, p. 5).

Nonetheless, podcasts can enact transmedia experiences independently. Podcasting is highly intermedial (Euritt, 2023) and operates within a transmedia environment. This medium weaves together a network of 'technical, cultural, and material elements that work in sync with each other' (Euritt, 2023, p. 8) in the construction of a supra-narrative expanded across multiple platforms. Transmedia storytelling enables innovative and interactive patterns of consumption and participation in podcasting, while also challenging traditional production models by embracing active and collaborative users (García-Marín and Aparici, 2018) who are engaged in the re-creation and expansion of these narratives.

García-Marín (2020) coined the term transpodcast to describe the fusion between podcasting and transmedia features. Podcasting possesses an 'important transmedia component in narrative terms' (Celaya, Naval and Arbués, 2020, p. 27). Dann (2014) contends that the podcast facilitates the creation of larger narratives and their expansion across transmedia worlds, as the medium invites listeners to contribute their experiences to the original text through emails, online forums, social media, voice notes, attendance at live shows, among other means. Podcasts can become transmedia experiences, functioning 'as either core or auxiliary texts' (Baelo-Allué, 2019, p. 117). The intertextualities of podcasts can be explored and enhanced across different platforms, 'making their content more accessible to the audience who, through collective intelligence and social media, can

contribute to and build on the story, thereby enhancing both body and mind beyond the limitations of the human condition' (Baelo-Allué, 2019, p. 117).

Welcome to Night Vale, created in 2012, exemplifies a podcast that has expanded the narrative experience by world-building a town populated with well-developed characters, supported by online fan communities, live events, and more. This fictional podcast blends 'supernatural elements with dark humour, creating an otherworldly and captivating storytelling experience' (Kanwal, 2024, p. 81).

2.3.6.2 Podcast - Transmedia Storytelling - Communities

Podcasting can reproduce a 'classic horizontal mediaform' (Berry, 2006, p. 146), wherein consumers and producers merge roles 'in conversations with each other' (Berry, 2006, p. 146). However, this does not occur organically but rather intentionally. Given that listening remains a selective, elective action (Waldmann, 2020), horizontality in podcasting is therefore constructed deliberately and purposefully. Listening (to others) plays a central role in the creative process of the podcast, as 'aural nonfiction narratives are based on storytelling as much as on storylistening' (Waldmann, 2020, p. 34).

Transmedia participation spaces within podcasting influence not only the narrative structure of the show but also its virtual community (Celaya, Naval and Arbués, 2020). These spaces include 'public instant messaging groups'- Telegram being the most popular platform-audio questions that listeners send as files for podcasters to play and respond to during subsequent episodes, live chat or feedback during special streaming broadcasts akin to radio, where producers observe text comments in real time and can interact with them, as well as listener reviews and ratings on podcast aggregator apps or podcatchers (Celaya, Naval and Arbués, 2020). Barrios-Rubio (2021) highlights that audiences increasingly migrate across multiple platforms in search of new entertainment experiences, although accessibility remains a key variable in what he terms 'the social contract between the media and its listeners-users' (2021, p. 42). Nonetheless, face-to-face meetups continue to complement the actions of virtual communities, acting as catalysts for community cohesion by 'converting interest-based and online-only ties among strangers to close connections that traverse online and offline boundaries' (Shen and Cage, 2015, p. 410).

Podcast creators may facilitate interaction spaces with listeners through 'public chat groups in instant messaging, social networks or microblogging' (Celaya, Arbués and Naval, 2021, p. 593). Such spaces are conducive to the exchange, debate, and co-construction of new knowledge (Celaya, Arbués and Naval, 2021), fostering what Cabero and Llorente (2010) define as a learning community.

2.3.6.3 Podcasting and the Boundaries of Transmedia Storytelling

While most authors delineate what constitutes a transmedia narrative, Pedrero-Esteban, Terol-Bolinches and Arense-Gómez (2023) emphasise what it is not. These authors argue that transmedia storytelling ‘is not an adaptation, transposition or intersemiotic translation’ (2023, p. 190). In this regard, García-Marín (2023) also stresses the importance of distinguishing between a *transpodcast*, as he denominates transmedia podcasting, and other forms. He contends that when a podcast is not ‘the core content from which the narrative extensions originate, but rather functions as one of those extensions’ (2023, p. 4), it should not be classified as a transpodcast. Furthermore, he adds that even if the podcast occupies a degree of centrality within the narrative universe, it should not be considered a transpodcast if other platforms, such as YouTube, offer the same content merely in a different format. Finally, García-Marín (2023) argues that ‘the conversion of certain podcasts to the television format in the form of a series’ (2023, p. 5) also falls outside his definition.

While García-Marín (2023) recognises the potential of podcasts to serve as the central axis and ‘mothership’ of transmedia storytelling narratives, his view may overlook significant creative and participatory dynamics that podcasts-even when not occupying the core position-can generate, as well as the meanings constructed within this aural space.

Podcasting has evolved into an instrumental medium that extends its reach beyond mere ‘communication, information, culture, identity or transformation’ (García-Marín, 2020a, p. 117). The intersection of platforms and the transient nature of the podcast itself shape a transmedia experience that grows and shifts across media technologies, the ‘producers’ media literacy (Bruns, 2008), the platformisation of the medium, and the openness of a new communication highway that continues to unfold its aural potentialities. Discussions regarding audiences, fandoms, and communities return to the paradigm of the ‘social economy’, manifested in the formation of individual ‘social contracts’ within the community (Hancock, 2018). Mañas-Pellejero and Paz (2022) describe a shift in the user role, envisioning an organic transition from audience to community, driven by interactions, shared interests, communal traits, learning experiences, and the development of signs of commitment and a sense of belonging.

These dynamics are especially salient in contexts such as Cuba, where technological and political constraints shape media practices in distinctive ways.

Conclusion

Transmedia storytelling continues to evolve through new reconfigurations, both as a conceptual framework and a world-making narrative, as fresh avenues for participation and collaboration emerge. Jenkins (2014) asserts that participation ‘is a property of the surrounding culture and is often something communities assert through their shared engagement with technologies, content and producers’ (2014, p. 283). The collective construction of knowledge, grounded in the principle of collaborative participation, remains the highest expression of transmedia storytelling.

Podcast studies have largely overlooked the role of listeners in the construction of transmedia experiences within podcasting (Celaya, Naval and Arbués, 2020), as well as how these transmedia practices influence the consolidation and sustenance of podcast communities. Furthermore, there exists a research gap concerning transmedia experiences that are not primarily driven by commercial motives. Husted Ramos *et al.* (2023) emphasise the necessity of investigating transmedia narratives beyond those that generate commercial success or are situated within the entertainment industry.

This research examines the transmedia storytelling practices that foster and strengthen communal bonds in Cuban podcasting, exploring the perspectives of both podcasters and listeners. Through its intimate and narrative appeal, podcasting facilitates the asynchronous formation of affections, both individual and communal, alongside memories and emotions, which manifest across multiple scenarios of interaction, participation and co-creation, as discussed in the following section.

2.4 Co-creation: From Participation to Collective Creation

The podcast community rises within ‘a space of non-hierarchical communication’ that reassesses the ‘identity of the medium and its narrative possibilities from a horizontal perspective’ (García-Marín, 2020, p. 146). The produsage model of Bruns (2008) contributes to a wider understanding in this shift within communication practices, that strengthen communal bonds through interaction and engagement. The podcasting community can rethink the relationship between ‘producers and users’, relying on ‘social networks and open spaces’ to facilitate and enhance the interaction among members of the community, towards the potential ‘content co-creation’ (García-Marín, 2020c). Content co-creation foresees one of the highest manifestations of communal bonds within a podcasting community.

Academic literature has emphasised the transformation of the producer-consumer relationship as one of the medium’s most distinctive features (Friedman, 2006). The horizontal nature of ‘prosumer’ capabilities (Bruns, 2008) is likewise evident in the

interpretive communities of podcasters, which are sustained by supportive networks of knowledge exchange and spaces of collective learning (Berry, 2006). These communities exist both online and offline and are ‘shared by the producers of podcasting projects and the users and fans of such productions’ (García-Marín, 2020, p. 117). Podcast communities, therefore, are constituted through ‘interactions, connections, conversations, debates and joint projects’ (García-Marín, 2020a, p. 117). These processes function as synapses within neural networks, binding community members together and reinforcing their shared characteristics.

Audiences possess the potential to act as co-creators by moving beyond a passive role as recipients. Rather, ‘as followers, they manipulate it, interact with it, or create paratexts inspired by the original text’ (Costa Sánchez, 2013, p. 565).

2.4.1 Participatory Culture: Negotiating Creative Authority

Jenkins (2009) definition of participatory culture encompasses artistic expression and civic engagement; the creation and sharing of content with others; the transfer of knowledge through informal mentorships; the making of meaningful contributions; and the formation of valued social connections (Wendland, 2024). Participation may emerge from personal interests and passions rather than from institutional or commercial imperatives (Ito, 2013). Content plays a key role in influencing users’ engagement with media (Shahbaznezhad, Dolan and Rashidirad, 2021; Rohden, Tassinari and Netto, 2023).

Wendland (2024) contends that participation is grounded in two principal dimensions: media production and ‘structural participation’, wherein users are involved in co-decision-making processes with producers (Carpentier, 2007). User participation and the redefinition of their roles towards positions more closely aligned with that of prosumers create opportunities for innovation among creators, audiovisual communication institutions, and users alike (Montoya, Vásquez Arias, and Salinas Arboleda, 2013).

Nico Carpentier’s (2011, 2015) Access, Interaction, Participation (AIP) model conceptualises interaction as rooted in socio-communicative relationships that entail co-decision-making. Carpentier (2015) delineates three interrelated yet distinct notions. Access refers to the capacity to be present in relation to technology, content, or institutions, and is considered a prerequisite. Interaction denotes the development of socio-communicative relationships that facilitate engagement, albeit without conferring decision-making power. Participation, by contrast, is defined as a political process involving power-sharing and collective decision-making.

Carpentier (2015) recognises participation where users hold a degree of power and where all actors involved have a stake in the outcomes (Jenkins, 2006). While participatory culture is enabled and shaped by technology, its realisation is driven by both individual and collective motivations (Jenkins, 2009). Nonetheless, elective participation and opportunities for meaningful engagement across transmedia platforms are essential practices for fostering and sustaining a sense of community. According to Wendland (2024), participation intensity and transmediality serve as enhancers of the sense of community (McMillan and Chavis, 1986).

2.4.2 Produsage: Towards a Participatory Model of Content Creation

The evolution of customer-brand relationships has reinforced the user-centric paradigm, enabling Bruns (2008) concept of produsage to illuminate points of convergence with the co-creation approach. Bruns (2008) challenges Alvin Toffler's earlier definition of the prosumer, which describes the process as 'thoroughly integrated, on-demand industrial production'. In contrast, Bruns' framework emphasises the customer's contribution across multiple stages of production, not limited to the exchange of information or knowledge, but also encompassing the often-unconscious collection of consumer behaviours and consumption patterns. A prosumer is understood as 'an active user who not only accesses and consumes content but also produces and disseminates it' (Videla-Rodríguez and Piñeiro-Otero, 2013, p. 85).

Toffler (1980) anticipated the rise of product customisation, whereby companies would allow customers to remotely trigger production. While customisation has become a feature available to consumers, it does not equate to unregulated, autonomous production. Rather, the scope of customisation is constrained by the logistical and technological capabilities specific to each company. Customers' creative agency is thus shaped by the platforms made available by brands, or by their individual capacity to generate branded content within fan communities. Bruns and Schmidt (2011) acknowledge the risks inherent in this 'cooperative setup', which may 'have its parallels in the most exploitative forms of crowdsourcing, where user labour and knowledge are similarly harnessed for the improvement of commercial products without acknowledgement or remuneration' (2011, p. 4).

Bruns and Schmidt (2011) identify key features of produsage and user-led collaborative processes. Users' motivations to take on producer roles within a community are closely linked to communal decision-making practices. The overarching aim of such open participation is to foster a collaborative environment accessible to the majority of participants. Furthermore, they argue that 'the status of participants within the community of producers derives from the quality of their contributions to the shared project' (Bruns

and Schmidt, 2011, p. 4). This perspective rejects fixed hierarchies, instead proposing a dynamic model in which roles and responsibilities are fluidly allocated according to each member's level of contribution and active engagement.

In this context, produsage is characterised as a continuous and infinite flow of multiple modifications (Bruns and Schmidt, 2011). This ongoing process may result in the development of a 'new product', but only if a timely revision occurs within a specific timeframe. The authors also highlight the user's potential contribution to enhancing product quality, although this notion is not always directly applicable to the field of communication. In communicative co-creative practices, collective synergy, elective participation, and communal value often hold greater significance than any measurable improvement in 'quality'. Moreover, communication artefacts-such as podcasts-typically undergo a finite number of modifications during the production process, culminating in the publication of episodes on audio distribution platforms.

Bruns and Schmidt (2011) further identify a key characteristic of produsage communities: the difficulty, if not the impossibility, 'for participants to directly extract royalties from the content they have contributed – therefore, the chief currency in produsage projects is personal status, not financial rewards' (Bruns and Schmidt, 2011, p. 5). This raises a pertinent challenge for both creators and scholars in identifying the intrinsic rewards experienced by participants within these produsage communities.

2.4.3 From Business to Media Studies

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) argue that 'co-creation puts the spotlight squarely on consumer-company interaction as the locus of value creation' (2004, p.10), where the active role of consumers in co-creation of product development becomes 'part of value creation for businesses' (Rathore, Ilavarasan and Dwivedi, 2016, p. 10). The main outcome of this paradigm points to the development of novel artefacts as a result of a collective exercise of mutual and horizontal input. The exchange of multiple ideas and approaches is furthermore registered in a new development, which could lead to the addition of new assets to the company's product portfolio. Co-creation is therefore grounded on noteworthy principles: innovation, collaboration and multiple contributions towards the development of new artefacts.

Value creation constitutes a key variable in the co-creation scheme. Beyond the original notion of co-creation as an innovative marketing strategy to strengthen brand loyalty and gain new potential customers, it nowadays aims to outline a system where every subject involved generates and exchanges value co-creation. Gambetti, Graffigna and Biraghi

(2012) argue that brands can be appropriated and shaped by individuals, personally and collectively, ‘acting as a ‘passe-partout’ and the enabler of needs and desires’ (2012, p. 682). This is exemplified in the communication field when media and content creators challenge their narratives by transforming their individual creative processes into a platform for collective creativity. The co-creation of value, therefore, is kneaded in collectivity, and the value creation manifests itself in its shared character.

Piller, Vossen and Ihl (2012) define co-creation as ‘a voluntary form of firm-customer-customer interaction’ (2012, p. 7), although individual and corporate incentives often coexist in parallel. Customers’ motives for engaging in co-creation practices are frequently linked to the perceived economic benefits offered by the company, such as monetary rewards or direct payment for brand-related contributions. Füller (2010) distinguishes between extrinsic motivations, such as financial compensation, social recognition, and reputation, and intrinsic motivations, including task fulfilment, altruism, and the desire to enhance one’s social status (Füller, 2010; Piller, Vossen and Ihl, 2012). On the one hand, customers may adopt an active role in the creation process to strengthen their position within the firm and, in doing so, be rewarded through an improved customer-firm relationship. On the other hand, participation in co-creation may be driven by socially oriented motives, including, but not limited to, social recognition, community identification, solidarity practices, and a sense of belonging.

Social media challenges traditional business approaches to product development by shifting the focus towards user-driven designs, shaped by various forms of social interaction (Chan-Olmsted, Cho and Lee, 2013). The authors identify key dimensions of social media as: ‘participation, openness, conversation, community, and connectedness’ (Chan-Olmsted, Cho and Lee, 2013, p. 154). These processes, however, are not presented in a chronological sequence, as they converge and intertwine in a non-linear and unpredictable manner. Moreover, social media continues to serve as a catalyst for emerging scenarios of customer–producer interaction, disrupting conventional, top-down approaches to product testing and delivery.

Co-creation practices within social media environments are understood to ‘improve the efficiency of knowledge sharing but can also help users to obtain a broader perspective of knowledge by participation’ (Rathore, Ilavarasan and Dwivedi, 2016, p. 11). Simultaneously, social media platforms function as ‘highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content’ (Din *et al.*, 2015, p. 856).

2.4.4 Co-creation in Podcasting

In the culture of convergence, ‘content, audiences and platform(s) constitute a trinomial that is difficult to separate’ (Costa Sánchez, 2013, p. 566). Users assume active roles and appropriate narratives ‘creating and disseminating their own content, without geographical or media limitations’ (Costa Sánchez, 2013, p. 562). Within this framework, ‘everyone has the option to participate as co-creators. Everyone counts and everyone is heard’ (Costa Sánchez, 2013, p. 562).

Co-creation practices in podcasting enable the preservation of ‘intonation, rhythm, pauses, silences and nuances of the oral tradition-elements that are often lost in written transcription’ (Ruíz Menéndez *et al.*, 2025, p. 9). This contributes not only to linguistic preservation, but also to the ‘affective memory of communities’ (2025, p. 9). Co-creation in podcasting introduces new creative models while facilitating the collection and ‘recovery of oral knowledge’, in which the spoken word is regarded as ‘living heritage’ (Ruíz Menéndez *et al.*, 2025, p. 12).

In such processes, media producers are no longer merely transmitters of content, but rather act as ‘facilitators of cultural co-creation processes’ (Ruíz Menéndez *et al.*, 2025, p. 9), particularly within collaborative frameworks that involve the listening community. Barbarino, Herlo and Bergmann (2022) underscore the importance of the curatorial role as a mechanism to ensure respect and meaningful participation among all stakeholders in the co-creation process. They further emphasise the value of ‘shared responsibility and decision-making’ throughout the production of the podcast.

2.4.4.1 From Participation to Co-Creation

Relevant participation serves as a catalyst for engagement (García-Marín, 2020b, p. 59). Nevertheless, such participation must be ‘stimulated from the design of interactive user experiences’ (García-Marín, 2020c, p. 61) (García-Marín, 2020, p. 61). Podcasts integrate user-generated content into their narrative structure, as contributions from audiences and fans, such as comments, questions, and interventions, are frequently embedded directly within the episodes themselves (Mañas-Pellejero and Paz, 2022, p. 3).

Interactions in podcasting facilitate dialogue and mutual influence; rather than reinforcing polarised relationships, they ‘enable a dialogical process between the interactants, where through the negotiation of meanings each participant has an impact on the other’s behaviour’ (Primo, 2024, p. 117). Interactivity fosters intimacy (Xu *et al.*, 2025) and recreates a sense of ‘liveness’ within the podcasting experience (Euritt, 2019). Common interactive elements include ‘listener feedback segments, social media engagement, and live

events or discussions' (Xu *et al.*, 2025, p. 3). Although stakeholders may pursue particular agendas, participatory culture is often guided by shared interests rather than institutional or commercial imperatives (Ito, 2013).

Listeners can respond to hosts' calls to action through social media platforms by posting comments or contributing user-generated content (Witmer and Dowling, 2024). These engagement techniques have been adopted by podcasts such as *Death in Ice Valley* (BBC World Service), which utilises its Facebook page to interact with listeners. Certain podcast distribution platforms, such as the Chinese app Xiaoyuzhou, influence both the listening experience and available modes of engagement by implementing a 'one-way flow' model of information consumption (Wang and Lin, 2024, p. 26). In contrast, social media platforms like Instagram 'provide a place for listeners/fans to engage with the podcast' (Gaynor, 2024, p. 5) in a multimedia, interactive format. Furthermore, such platforms offer a virtual space in which a community of podcast fans can develop in response to episode content (Gaynor, 2024, p. 5).

Podcast comment sections can enhance 'social connectivity among users' (Wang and Lin, 2024, p. 29). Listeners often 'share their personal, real-life situations after listening to podcasts' in the comments section, thereby fostering a sense of closeness with others on the platform (Wang and Lin, 2024). These interactions help to establish 'a consistent collective identity for podcast users and generate a participatory structure with cultural boundaries' (Wang and Lin, 2024, p. 33).

Within journalism studies, the incorporation of crowdsourced information into a professional journalist's investigation is identified as 'participatory journalism', a form of news co-creation involving an active audience (Witmer and Dowling, 2025, p. 48). According to Witmer and Dowling (2025, p. 53), 'listeners' leads popped up throughout the rest of the podcast series, often used as serious input that changed the direction of the storyline'. In such instances, user participation 'aims to have some impact or influence on the podcast's narrative', the podcaster's position, or the discourse within the community (García-Marín, 2020, p. 59). This interaction exemplifies Jenkins' (2009) notion of meaningful contribution and the pursuit of social validation from both the podcaster and the listeners. This mode of collective participation is emblematic of grassroots communities that exhibit both intellectual and emotional investment (Wendland, 2024).

2.4.4.2 Levels of Participation in Transmedia Podcasts

García-Marín and Aparici (2020) define five levels of participation within transmedia podcasts, all situated within what they describe as 'hierarchical models' (2020, p. 99). These

participation models progress gradually from radio-like, ‘vertical, broadcast-style’ formats to incorporating listeners’ comments gathered via social media or other platforms, to including users’ voices sent via audio messages, and finally to episodes produced entirely from listeners’ audio messages, comments, or a combination of both. At this highest level, there is no apparent dialogue between listener and podcaster, as listeners lack the ‘possibility of replying to the comments of the hosts’ within the episode, thus eliminating fully bidirectional communication.

García-Marín and Aparici (2020) make a significant contribution by emphasising that participation in digital media, including podcasting, is not ‘performed in a homogenous way’ (2020, p. 100). Listeners’ engagement is shaped by the narrative features of the podcast, the topics covered, their relationship with the host, and their interactions with other listeners. Consequently, participation is not an intrinsic characteristic of podcasting but rather ‘an element connected to the specific ecosystem created by each project’ (García-Marín and Aparici, 2020, p. 100).

Users’ participation in podcasts may follow a ‘unidirectional and hierarchical logic’ (García-Marín and Aparici, 2020, p. 100) when podcasters adhere to the norms and participatory practices inherited from analogue media. However, the participatory potential of podcasting remains one of its most powerful yet often unexplored features.

García-Marín and Aparici (2020) suggest that genuine participation can include a host inviting a listener to co-present an episode (p. 100), although there are many other ways to grant listeners a ‘protagonist role’ in the podcast experience. Achieving a ‘more horizontal and less hierarchical’ (García-Marín and Aparici, 2020, p. 100) model in podcasting can be realised by expanding the programme’s experience through transmedia storytelling practices.

The Social Podcasting model proposed by Wendland (2025) builds upon the work of García-Marín and Aparici (2020). Wendland (2025) identifies five levels of audience participation, ranging from no interaction to collective ownership, the latter characterised by meaningful ‘listener contributions playing a significant role in shaping the episode’ and influencing the future direction of the podcast. Certain genres, such as True Crime, facilitate listeners coming together within social media spaces to enact this collective intelligence, aiming to solve cases or exert real influence on social justice issues. In contrast, conversational podcasts must intentionally incorporate listeners through deliberately designed participatory practices.

Wendland (2024) concludes that a sense of community can be enhanced by a participatory culture that ‘embraces liveness; works in small enough communities; includes parasocial relationships; provides opportunities for meaningful participatory acts on transmedia platforms; does not try to force everyone to participate; and builds on shared intimacy and trust’ (2024, p. 1). This comprehensive combination of factors enables a broader understanding of the podcast community as a dynamic structure that supports multiple formations and draws on diverse modes of participation, which individually would be insufficient to foster a sense of community.

2.4.4.3 Barriers and Challenges

The complexity of narrative and technology may also hinder participation, particularly when engagement requires listeners to possess the technical skills necessary to navigate the logics and grammars of diverse formats or media (García-Marín, 2020). Media literacy can affect listeners’ access to the holistic experience of the podcast narrative, their journey of discovery through new narrative extensions, and may even lead to frustration and disappointment if they are unable to interact with the content with ease.

While technological advancements continue to shape participatory cultures, asynchronicity remains a barrier to community-building processes, as listeners ‘are not simultaneously present’ (Wendland, 2024, p. 3). However, this limitation may be mitigated through the incorporation of participatory and co-creation spaces within the podcast experience, drawing on the sense of liveness that such sound narratives are capable of evoking (Euritt, 2019).

Another important consideration is the role of podcasters and media practitioners as gatekeepers of the podcast experience, and the centralisation of power that this entails. This role can become exclusionary and alienating if listeners’ perspectives are disregarded or selectively filtered (McNamara and Bassett-Gunter, 2024). Smaller communities may offer more opportunities for close relationships between podcasters and listeners, whereas, in other cases, the scale of the podcastsphere and the number of active participants within the community may negatively affect engagement (García-Marín, 2020b). García-Marín (2020b) observes a decline in listener contributions such as ‘audio emails’ and highlights the ‘absence of this type of audio message in order to favour other less significant modes of connection and with less capacity for co-creation, textual contributions on social networks’ (García-Marín, 2020c, p. 61). Nonetheless, textual contributions on social media may retain considerable significance if user-generated content meaningfully shapes the podcast’s content and participatory culture.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter examined three concepts that, when considered together, constitute a conceptual framework for interpreting the findings of this study.

Community, understood as a symbolic structure characterised by its experiential and discursive nature, is constructed and sustained through communicative practices. It fosters a sense of belonging and identification through shared interests, themes, or socio-cultural markers. Communities constitute fundamental social structures, comprising an amalgamation of social ties that unfold within specific social, cultural, economic, and political contexts. In contemporary settings, new media practices have challenged and reconfigured the possibilities of community by interweaving digital and face-to-face interactions. Podcast communities, for instance, emerge through narratives, shared stories, and communicative exchanges between media practitioners and listeners across multiple platforms. These interactions cultivate a sense of belonging grounded not only in orality but also in the exchange of knowledge and the collective creation of meaning through sustained engagement.

The concept of transmedia storytelling intersects with the communicative practices that generate and sustain community. Its narrative extensions contribute independently to a broader supra-narrative in a self-contained yet interconnected manner. Transmedia storytelling involves the expansion of a narrative across multiple platforms, as well as through diverse semiotic and discursive resources. Situated within a participatory culture, transmedia storytelling in podcasting extends beyond passive engagement by facilitating and encouraging user-generated content that actively shapes the narrative, the communities, and the media practitioners involved. In this context, transmedia storytelling enables podcasting to transcend vertical, hierarchical, and one-way communication models, transforming it into a dynamic and participatory transmedia experience.

A key principle of transmedia storytelling is the reconfiguration of the user's role as a creative agent, or 'prosumer'. This 'co-deciding' user introduces opportunities for co-creation as an intensified form of participation, where users share creative power with content creators in pursuit of commercial or social rewards. When embraced by podcasting communities, co-creation converges with transmedia principles, reinforcing practices of collective intelligence. This convergence facilitates the emergence and negotiation of roles between creators and listeners, and it generates new opportunities for shared authorship within creative processes. This, in turn, enables the construction of new meanings and social fabrics, thereby strengthening the sense of community within podcasting.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research analysed how podcasts foster and enhance the experience of community through communicative practices in the Cuban context. This chapter begins by outlining the research aims and questions, providing a contextualisation of the study and defining its scope. It also addresses the limitations of the research, considering the economic, political, and sociological circumstances that shape the period under investigation.

The chapter then discusses qualitative and quantitative methods, evaluating their respective strengths and weaknesses, and presents the rationale for selecting analytical listening, semi-structured interviews and focus groups as the primary methodological approaches. This is followed by a description and discussion of the purposive sample and the criteria used for selecting podcasts within the Cuban podcasting landscape.

The chapter further explores the operationalisation phase and provides an overview of the research tools, including two pilot interviews conducted to test and refine the interview guide. It also considers ethical considerations, participant contributions, and data management. Subsequently, the chapter details the data collection procedures, outlining each stage, its characteristics, and the challenges encountered. It then examines the thematic analysis phase, the coding process, and the identification of themes and patterns within the data. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the methodological design, reinforcing the rigour and replicability of the research procedures.

3.1 Research Aims

The study collected and examined in-depth descriptions of the evolution and dynamics of Cuban podcasting communities between 2018 and 2024, with a particular focus on how podcasters engage their audiences while fostering a sense of community through communicative practices. The study also aimed to uncover the cultural, social and technological factors that shape this medium in the Cuban context by analysing the characteristics of the podcasting ecosystem.

This was achieved through analytical listening to Cuban podcasts and an examination of the experiences, motivations, and interactions of Cuban podcast media practitioners and listeners. While the emergence and development of podcasting worldwide has unfolded over the past two decades, there remains a limited body of research focused on understanding podcast communities and the ways in which the experience of community is constructed through a multiplicity of interactions between creators and listeners. In this regard, the research captured both ends of the spectrum to understand mutual

representations as well as the communicative practices that foster a sense of community around these aural narratives. The study, therefore, poses the following questions:

RQ1: How have Cuban podcast communities evolved over the period 2018-2024?

a) What is the role of podcasting within the Cuban media ecosystem?

RQ2: What forms of community engagement emerge within Cuban podcast communities?

RQ3: What co-creation practices foster and enhance communal bonds in podcasting in Cuba?

RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba?

3.2 Contextualising the Research

This study is situated in a complex socio-historical period for Cuba (2018-2024) from an economic, political, sociological and communication perspective.

Since 2020, Cuba has been facing a deepening crisis. Following the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with the United States during the Barack Obama administration, Cuba underwent a significant economic transformation. This period of economic opening stimulated domestic growth and contributed to the expansion of the private sector. However, in 2020 the country entered a recession, exacerbated by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and the introduction of new national economic measures. Together, these factors led to a reconfiguration of Cuban society, as the internal economic crisis unfolded within a broader global context of instability.

The Covid-19 pandemic also had a profound impact on the island, leaving lasting effects on the healthcare system. On 11 July 2021, unprecedented protests erupted across several regions of the country, the first large-scale demonstrations of their kind since the 'Triumph of the Revolution' in 1959. In response, hundreds of individuals were arrested, some for acts classified as vandalism, and others for participating in what the government labelled as 'oppositional' activity.

The convergence of this health crisis, rising economic inflation, and persistent political tensions has contributed to a significant wave of migration between 2021 and 2025. During this period, an estimated 1.5 million Cubans have migrated to the United States and Europe, reshaping the country's demographic and social structures.

Within this evolving landscape, podcasting has emerged as both a product of and a challenge to established media practices. The first record of a Cuban podcast dates to 2016, with a programme called *El Trastero*, produced by the independent magazine *Cachivache Media*. A year later, the state-run radio station *Radio Rebelde* launched the programme *De Cuba y de los Cubanos*. It was not until 2018, that the massive access to internet data from mobile phones forced a drastic reconfiguration on the Cuban media (Sosa Valcarcel, 2021), giving rise to new formats and content creation strategies with broader scopes. Positioned within a highly centralised and state-regulated media environment, podcasts navigate complex regulatory frameworks while simultaneously creating new spaces for discourse and engagement. The particularities of the Cuban context also pose challenges to the organic monetisation of podcasts within the island, due to both the technical limitations imposed by the US embargo and the cultural conception of communication, enshrined in the constitution, as a service to the state and the people.

The study contributes to understanding the evolution of the podcasting sphere in Cuba from January 2018 to December 2024. While podcast studies have focussed on practitioners and the evolution of a podcast scene in a given location (Markman, 2012; Spinelli and Dann, 2019; García-Marín, 2022a), not enough attention has been paid to understanding the relationships between podcasters and listeners, and how their interactions foster and strengthen a sense of belonging. This study addresses that gap by, firstly, offering insights into the case of Cuba, an area that has not previously been examined at this scale. In addition, the research captures a snapshot of social history marked by significant socio-political and economic changes on the island. Finally, it contributes to the emerging academic literature on podcasting studies in the Latin American and Caribbean region (Espada, 2023; Febles, 2023; Hack, 2024; Ortiz-Díaz and Moreno-Moreno, 2024).

3.3 Scope of Research

This research examined the communicative dynamics that foster and strengthen a sense of community within Cuban podcasting. The scope is limited to podcasts produced between 2018 and 2024, a period that enabled an analysis of the emergence and development of the podcasting movement on the island. For the purposes of this study, Cuban podcasts are defined as those produced either in Cuba or by Cuban podcasters living abroad who identify as such, and whose content is aimed at Cuban audiences both on the island and in the diaspora.

This research included podcasts that exhibit collaborative practices, whether through active listener contributions or the involvement of multiple creators in the production process. The study narrowed its sample to podcasts that maintain at least one social group connected to their sound narratives on platforms such as Telegram or WhatsApp, enabling an analysis

of the transmedia extensions of the podcast and the social spaces in which these participatory exchanges occur.

This research does not encompass the entirety of Cuban podcast production, as it does not aim to be representative. Rather, it narrows its focus to examine the phenomenon of community through the lens - and ears - of selected sound narratives, in keeping with the study's qualitative approach.

This study employed community, transmedia, and participatory frameworks to guide the analysis and discussion in Chapter 8. The study deliberately excluded alternative approaches, such as political communication, oral history, and feminist theories, which, while offering valuable insights into the Cuban podcasting phenomenon, were less suited to uncovering findings related to the experience of community-building and its underlying interactions. Given the contested nature of the term *community* in academic discourse, the research acknowledged its subjective dimensions. At the same time, it drew on the symbolic character and resilience of community as a concept to approach the Cuban context with flexibility and openness, allowing space for new forms of podcast communities to emerge.

The research involved forty-two participants, comprising Cuban podcasting media practitioners and podcast listeners. The data was collected through three primary methods:

- Analytical listening of podcast episodes (n = 85);
- Semi-structured interviews conducted with Cuban podcasting media practitioners (n= 27);
- And focus groups with podcast listeners (n=8) and individual interviews (n=2).

While the analytical listening of podcast episodes offered an understanding of the Cuban podcasting landscape through a critical listening exercise (Jorgensen, 2023), the principal sources of primary data were the semi-structured interviews with Cuban podcasting media practitioners and the focus groups with Cuban podcast listeners. All data were organised, coded, and thematically grouped to facilitate in-depth analysis, as well as the triangulation and validation of findings.

3.4 Cuban Podcast Population: Sampling the Initial Data

Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) recall the intent in qualitative research to not generalise the information but to set the focus on elucidating the particular and the specific. Following that premise, several non-probability samples were assessed in the following section to determine the technique most relevant for this research project.

Non-probability sampling is relevant for ‘qualitative approaches such as ethnography, case studies or action research’ (Somekh and Lewin, 2005, p. 219), when ‘researchers target a particular group and are not always seeking to generalise findings to the population overall’ (2005, p. 219). Non-probability includes *convenience sampling*, *purposive sampling*, *quota sampling*, *snowball sampling*, etc. (Acharya *et al.*, 2013).

Convenience sampling refers to ‘easy access’ as the driving criteria for the selection process (Somekh and Lewin, 2005). Convenience sampling assembles individuals of the ‘target population that meet certain practical criteria’ (Etikan, 2016, p. 2), such accessibility, geographical proximity, high availability, or the willingness to participate in the study. On one hand, this sampling technique reduces the hazards of the recruitment process as participants are easily accessible to the researcher. On the other hand, the homogeneous characteristics of the sample directly impacts the findings, giving way to potential hidden biases (Somekh and Lewin, 2005; Etikan, 2016).

Quota sampling gathers individuals who are ‘selected to fill quotas to represent relative proportions of specific characteristics’ (Somekh and Lewin, 2005, p. 219), while *snowball sampling* refers to a small representation of a population with specific characteristics who ‘are subsequently used as informants to recommend similar individuals’ (Somekh and Lewin, 2005, p. 219).

Purposive sampling entitles the selection of individuals for a specific reason as a strategy to ensure ‘that specific kinds of cases of those that could possibly be included are part of the final sample in the research study’ (Campbell *et al.*, 2020, p. 654). Etikan (2016) also calls this technique *judgement sampling*, when the researcher chooses participants due to specific qualities, expertise or experience. Researchers stress the importance of taking into consideration other variables such as ‘availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner’ (Etikan, 2016, p. 2).

Purposive sampling methods include the *maximum variation sampling* that aims at examining a subject from multiple perspectives, to enhance the understanding of it. This technique involves ‘selecting candidates across a broad spectrum relating to the topic of study’ (Etikan, 2016, p. 3).

This study employed purposive sampling to gain an in-depth understanding of the formation and maintenance of podcast communities in Cuba, extending beyond a mere exploration of the medium itself. This approach enabled the inclusion of various transmedia extensions and co-creation instances identified within Cuban podcasting. The sample

encompassed different forms of listener engagement and participatory practices, with the aim of maximising understanding of podcasting in Cuba and the emergence of communities around these sound narratives.

A maximum variation sampling strategy was applied to the original sample database to maximise ‘differences at the beginning of the study’ and to capture diverse perspectives (Terry *et al.*, 2017). The purposive sample for this study was defined by the research scope, podcasts produced between 2018 and 2024 by Cuban practitioners.

The sample included a variety of podcasts about different topics, episode lengths, and types of social actors involved in their production. The purposive sample encompassed Cuban podcasts that published at least eight episodes in the period 2018-2024. These podcasts were produced by a wide range of social actors: state-run and independent media, entrepreneurs, tech enthusiasts, religious institutions, a sustainable fashion brand, publishers, higher education institutions, amongst others.

Due to the flexible and unregulated nature of podcasting, the length of episodes varied according to the podcast structure, and they could last between ten minutes and three hours approximately. The purposive sample included episodes with the average length of the podcast, to ensure an accurate representation of the show.

The final selection was further refined to include only those podcasts that maintained groups, channels, or other forms of listener engagement linked to their narratives. The selection of Cuban podcasts was narrowed down to podcasts that explicitly demonstrate the presence of listener groups with permanent and sustained interaction over time, or that explicitly targeted a community. The sample also included podcasts that actively involved listeners in the processes of podcast creation, to understand the extent to which these contributions enact indicators of community.

3.5 Overview and Discussion on Data Collection Methods

Podcast researchers have documented the development of the medium in different regions around the world: in the USA (Llinares, Fox and Berry, 2018; Spinelli and Dann, 2019); the UK (Berry, 2018, 2020); Australia (McHugh, 2016; Lindgren, 2020, 2021); Spain (García-Marín, 2020, 2022) by conducting interviews with practitioners and industry professionals, as well as examining the motivations of independent podcasters (Markman and Sawyer, 2014; Schlütz and Hedder, 2022).

Studies have also emphasised the significance of encompassing listeners’ perspectives in the analysis of podcasting, drawing special attention towards uses, motivations and

gratifications (McClung and Johnson, 2010; Chan-Olmsted and Wang, 2022; Tobin and Guadagno, 2022; Craig, Brooks and Bichard, 2023). Other scholars have explored communities of podcasting creators and listeners (García-Marín, 2022; Hancock, 2018), especially during the early consolidation of the medium. Audience engagement, listening patterns, uses and gratifications, fandom, and communities continue to attract the attention of researchers (Horrocks and Mahoney, 2021; Euritt, 2023). Podcast studies have also identified several gratifications including parasocial relationships with podcasters and media characters (Hartmann, 2008; Euritt, 2023); elective and controlled listening settings (Albarran *et al.*, 2007); multitasking (Perks and Turner, 2019) identity and self-representation (Horrocks and Mahoney, 2021); amongst others.

Over the past two decades, podcast studies have employed a range of data collection methods. Among these, podcast content analysis has emerged as a significant area of research, particularly in efforts to understand listener preferences and content distribution strategies. Content analysis is defined by Krippendorff (1980, 2018) as a research technique that enables valid inferences to be drawn from data in relation to the context in which they are produced. It advances the understanding of texts through the development of codes, categories, and themes. This method provides ‘a systematic and objective means to make valid inferences from verbal, visual, or written data’ (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p. 314), allowing researchers to explore and describe specific phenomena. Textual data may take the form of ‘verbal, print, or electronic’ sources and can be derived from ‘narrative responses, open-ended survey questions, interviews, focus groups, observations, or print media such as articles, books, or manuals’ (Kondracki, Wellman and Amundson, 2002). However, some limitations of content analysis include the substantial time required to code the data and the constraints it places on the types of statistical procedures that can be applied, regardless of whether the data are verbal, visual, or written (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992).

Discourse analysis, by contrast, concentrates on the linguistic distinctions between discourse and other forms of text, aiming to describe the logic underpinning constructed words and phrases, and the influence of context on linguistic appropriation (Tyler, 2013; Renkema and Schubert, 2018). While this method offers a detailed examination of the relationship between discourse, culture, and ideology, particularly through the study of power relations that, among other things, determine different actors access to different discourses’ (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002), it overlooks the lived experiences of podcasters, their creative visions, and the interactions they maintain with listeners beyond the fragments contained in podcast episodes.

Moreover, both discourse and content analysis would fail to capture the specificities of production and distribution, as well as other contextual dimensions of the Cuban

podcasting scene. These aspects are accessible only through the direct experiences of creators and listeners.

Surveys have proven particularly useful in assessing attitudes toward podcast use and listener demographics (Jowitt, 2008; Chadha, Avila and Gil de Zúñiga, 2012; Galily, Laor and Samuel-Azran, 2022), in comparing the effectiveness of podcasts with other learning resources (Saeed, Yang and Sinnappan, 2009; Letón *et al.*, 2018), and in examining the motivations that drive independent podcasters (Markman, 2012; Markman and Sawyer, 2014). However, given the qualitative nature of this study, the research seeks to explore in depth the roots of podcasting in Cuba from the perspective of various social actors. While a representative sample of the Cuban podcasting population, with a similar distribution of characteristics or attributes, could allow for the generalisation of findings (Somekh and Lewin, 2005), this was not the aim of the research.

The objective was not to generalise these attitudes, but to understand podcasters' and listeners' perceptions of the impact of these audio narratives in creating and nurturing a sense of community around them. There is also a technological element to conducting online surveys in Cuba, as people may be more reluctant to participate due to technological limitations, data allowance, or fear of providing personal information to an international research study without proper authorisation.

Instead, the study aimed to provide a rich, descriptive understanding rather than a generalisable one. Consequently, the use of survey instruments was not aligned with the research questions.

3.6 Methods Selection

Having reviewed selected methodological approaches used in podcast studies, this research adopts three primary methods: analytical listening of podcast episodes, semi-structured interviews with Cuban podcasting media practitioners, and focus groups with Cuban podcast listeners. These methods were chosen to align with the study's qualitative orientation and its focus on understanding the experience of community within the Cuban podcasting context.

3.6.1 Analytical Listening of Cuban Podcasts

The study performs the analysis listening of eighty-five podcast episodes published in the period January 2018 - August 2024 (See Appendix 13). Close analytical listening encourages the attentive examination of all sound elements entwined in the production of an audio piece. It is an examination of the audio media form, its language features (formal/informal settings, number of speakers, narratives structures), the audio craft elements (Bernstein,

1998; Lundström and Lundström, 2021; Jorgensen and Lindgren, 2022), and how sonic elements like music and sound “are being deployed to invite ways of listening and subsequent meanings” (Spinelli and Dann, 2019, p. 31).

Close listening is considered a methodological approach that performs “a human sensorial listening, manual registering, and hermeneutic interpretation of audio material” (Have and Enevoldsen, 2021, p. 2), and requires an exhaustive analysis of data. This thorough examination constitutes a strength as it allowed a hermeneutic analysis stressing “the contribution of sound to meaning” (Bernstein, 1998, p. 4). Spinelli and Dann (2019), informed by Bernstein (1998) argue that close analytical listening ‘is facilitated by two of the most distinctive features of podcasting: the ease of back-scanning and repeat listening’ (2019, 31). This multi-layer dissection of the podcast works at different levels of language practices, narrative arcs, storytelling layouts, the listener’s reactions, and the combination of music and sound to encourage new listening avenues and ‘subsequent meanings’ (Spinelli and Dann, 2019). Lindgren (2021) argues that this method involves frequent note-taking about the content, “noting sonic elements, storytelling techniques, and how the researcher responded to listening” (2021, p. 7).

The critical analysis of podcasts and the deconstruction of these sound narratives shed light on the creative strategies implemented by journalists to compel listeners into their shows (Lindgren, 2021).

Moreover, the inclusion of the researcher/listener’s perceptions within the method, expands and reinforces the notion of podcasting as a narrative in continuum, a media loop that grows and expands through communicative practices, peer to peer, irretrievably bound by sound. Lundström and Lundström (2021) proposed podcast ethnography based on participant observation, close analytical listening and a reflexivity process as a critical exercise from a listener-researcher perspective. In this regard, Vandenberg (2018) highlights that “close listening of good podcasts reveals the importance of logical and coherent thinking processes of structuring an argument” (2018, p. 54). Moreover, close listening also enables the mapping of cultural markers and sonic signifiers that contribute to identity formation within a specific podcast scene.

Nevertheless, the main limitation of close analytical listening points at the size of the sample, as a narrow selection of cases could bring partial observations of the phenomena under study. For the purposes of this research, this method offered an approach to the narrative structure and storytelling techniques deployed across the sampled Cuban podcasts, which is latter contrasted with the insights provided by participants during the

focus groups and semi-structured interviews, as a triangulation method to compare, corroborate and contrast collected data.

3.6.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

The research employed semi-structured interviews with Cuban podcasting media practitioners, a method ‘designed to ascertain subjective responses from persons regarding a particular situation or phenomenon they have experienced’ (McIntosh and Morse, 2015, p. 1). In this way, the study captured the experiences and insights of podcast content creators to understand how the Cuban podcasting landscape evolved between 2018 and 2024, as well as the practices that foster listener engagement and communal values.

Interviews are amongst the “most direct, research focused interaction between researcher and participant” (Kazmer and Xie, 2008, p. 258). Creswell and Poth (2016) address Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) seven stages of an interview inquiry as a logical sequence of phases that encompass all processes from formulating the inquiry, data collection and analysis, validation of findings, to reporting the study. Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) proposed the design and use of an ‘interview protocol’, giving space to open-ended questions while maintaining a responsive attitude toward the interviewees’ comments.

Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to follow a guide of prepared questions or topics, while also offering the flexibility to introduce new or follow-up questions, one of their key advantages. Communication is “optimised because both verbal and non-verbal communication is possible” (McIntosh and Morse, 2015, p. 7). During semi-structured interviews, the researcher can access both verbal and non-verbal information, including cues that prompt clarification, the reformulation of questions when necessary, and the sensitive management of any discomfort experienced by participants. In this study, for example, non-verbal cues observed during the interviews, such as bodily expressions made by podcasters, offered additional insights that extended beyond what could be conveyed through voice alone.

On the other hand, as McIntosh and Morse (2015) caution, some disadvantages of the technique may include participants feeling inhibited to respond, or an excessive influence exerted by the researcher, which can result in homogeneous answers. Other variables, such as the interview setting, the length of the session, and the pace of the dialogue, may also affect the quality of the data collected. For this project, interviewees were offered a range of settings for the interview, including the locations where the podcast is recorded or edited (which could provide enriched contextual annotations for further data analysis), as well as neutral venues to ensure participants’ comfort.

The interview is a conversation guided by research questions that preserves the interaction and mutual influence exerted by both the researcher and the interviewee during the exchange. Kvale and Brinkman (2015) discuss the power asymmetry in which ‘the research interview should not be regarded as a completely open dialogue between egalitarian partners’ (2015, p. 13), with these authors stressing the ‘unequal power dynamic between the interviewer and the interviewee’ (2015, p. 13). Somekh and Lewin (2005) raise concerns about the ‘symbolic violence’ that the researcher may impose upon the interviewee, and warn about the ‘agenda of concerns that the interviewer may impose upon the interview which may prevent the interviewees raising the concerns of their own lives’ (2005, p. 43). That power differential must be acknowledged and contested during the interview through what Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) denote as collaborative interviewing, ‘where the researcher and subject approach equality in questioning, interpreting, and reporting’ (2009, p. 34). While audio enables both parties to engage in conversation in a relaxed and less self-conscious manner, being indeed “hugely liberating” (Siobhán McHugh, 2022, p. 71), it remains the case that the connection established between interviewer and interviewee typically leads to revealing insights not from the interviewer, but from the interviewee. This approach highlights the semi-structured interview as a generative space for unforeseen questions to emerge from the interviewee’s responses, and as an opportunity for intimacy and rapport to develop between both parties.

On the other hand, the interviewee is an individual who can offer a single threaded narrative mediated by personal experiences and their social surroundings. Kvale (2007) describes the qualitative interview as “key venue for exploring the ways in which subjects experience and understand their world”(2007, p.9). In this regard, Somekh and Lewin (2005) argue that people who are willing to get involved in discussions ‘may very well have their own agenda, which may or may not reflect the concerns of others in similar circumstances’ (2005, p. 44). Therefore, the interview protocol guides the interview, and when needed, the researcher can bring back the conversation towards the research questions, if the conversation drifts towards other topics of interest outside the study focus. In summary, participants’ responses, therefore, reflect individual circumstances, values, political affiliations, etc., which makes every contribution singular, unique. That singularity also entitles a leap of faith attached to the “reliability of personal testimony” (McHugh, 2022, p. 91) that will be contested and contrasted through the combination of data collection methods and triangulation of findings.

Kvale (2007) also reflects on the bias and subjectivity of the researcher during the interviews, an ethical consideration to avoid influencing interviewees’ responses and their further interpretations during the data analysis process. The researcher undergoes an

ethical quest during the data collection processes, trying to achieve “a delicate balance between the interviewer's concern of pursuing interesting knowledge and ethical respect for the integrity of the interview subject” (Kvale, 2012, p. 16). The use of a plain language statement to communicate the researcher’s intentions serves as a valuable tool, not only for conveying the aims of the project and the interests of the supporting institution, but also as an effective ‘ice-breaker’ to initiate the conversation. The interview, therefore, constitutes an ethical agreement between the researcher and the interviewees, guided by the interview protocol, the aim to answer the research questions, and the aspirations to significantly contribute to the body of knowledge in the academic field.

McHugh (2022) argues that interviews ‘create an accelerated form of intimacy’, based on the practice of ‘active listening’ as a crucial element. Following this podcasting distinctive feature, interviews aimed to build rapport with the participants, as well as to develop an intimate and meaningful relationship with the interviewees. Cuban podcasters and producers offered valuable insights into podcasting production processes, storytelling strategies, transmedia settings, audience participation, and communal articulations. Another favourable element lied on their communication skills and their insider perspective, which elucidated - from a holistic approach - how the podcasting mediascape in Cuba creates the experience of community, from their individual experiences.

In podcasting, semi-structured interviews have been used to study independent women podcasters challenging norms (Adler Berg, 2022) and to investigate podcast production workflows (Rime, Francombe and Collins, 2022). These studies reveal how podcasting and its unrestricted nature enable in-depth discussions of personal issues (Adler Berg, 2022). While face-to-face interviews offer access to visual cues, online semi-structured interviews present challenges in capturing non-verbal communication (Al Balushi, 2018). These challenges can be mitigated to some extent by paying close attention to facial expressions when video recording is included. Nonetheless, audio-only virtual interviews proved to be rich in content, capturing emotional nuances and offering interviewees greater freedom by focusing solely on the voice rather than physical appearance. Despite these limitations, semi-structured interviews remain an effective method for eliciting rich, often unanticipated information across various research contexts (Adams, 2015; Al Balushi, 2018).

3.6.3 Focus Groups

Focus groups can be acknowledged as ‘an informal discussion among selected individuals about specific topics’ (Beck, Trombetta and Share, 1986, p. 73), where the researcher gains an understanding of the topic enquiry by encouraging participants to ‘question each other’s

responses, elicit clarification and explore caveats to their statements' (Freeman, 2006, p. 492) within a safe environment for knowledge exchange and communication.

Focus groups and questionnaires are complementary methods for gathering user views in research and evaluation (Conning, Fellowes and Sheldon, 1997). Focus groups can be valuable for developing questionnaires, helping to elaborate study aims and ensure validity (McLeod *et al.*, 2000). When combined with other methods like think-aloud, focus groups can enhance overall research quality (Bischoping and Dykema, 1999). While focus groups allow for group discussions, other methods like surveys and questionnaires can reach larger participant numbers more efficiently (Adams and Cox, 2008). Considering advantages and limitations, while questionnaires require extensive data analysis, focus groups provide rich data but less individual depth than one-on-one interviews (Adams and Cox, 2008). Furthermore, social psychological factors such as group composition, size, and moderator training warrant further investigation in focus group research (Bischoping and Dykema, 1999).

The aim to depict Cuban communities of podcast listeners transcends an audience's inquiry approach towards a holistic depiction of the podcasting mediascape in Cuba. Focus groups are an appropriate data collection method when: 'A phenomenon under investigation is socially constructed; The researcher wants to know how individuals think and act in social settings; Little is known about the topic of interest' (Cyr, 2019, p. 19, Table 2.1). Focus groups are social essays, woven by the personalities, backgrounds, and interests of the participants displayed through 'emic processes', 'true members' perspectives' (Adler and Adler, 1987).

Although there are many possible settings, a focus group generally refers to 'one or more group discussions, in which participants focus collectively upon a topic selected by the researcher, and presented to them (most commonly) as a set of questions' (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 330). Morgan (2012) recalled this method as an analysis of participants' interactions within the group and their reactions to the topic proposed by the researcher.

Focus groups also entitle an exercise of reflexivity about the role of the researcher as moderator, engaging in the conversation to offer prompts and new topics to enrich the debate between participants. Participants assume unconscious roles within the group that can be spotted as active or passive participation, antagonists, non-contributors, reserve participants with punctual strong contributions, amongst others. Rabiee (2004) states the singular interactive character of the focus group, compared to other methods, which highlights the moderator role of the researcher to preserve a balance and fluid exchange. Creswell and Poth (2016) emphasise that in group setting and interviews, all participants

must be encouraged to take part in the conversation and the researcher or interviewer should monitor individuals 'who may dominate the conversation' (2016, p. 133).

In contrast to the interview, where the researcher leads the conversation according to topics and questions envisioned beforehand, focus groups are unpredictable. Participants' contributions might lead from one topic to the other without the interference of the researcher, in a flexible and organic dynamic. Wilkinson (1998) reflects on how the researcher is provided with an 'insight into the commonly held assumptions, concepts and meanings that constitute and inform participants' talk about their experiences' (1998, p. 189). The focus groups also allow the researcher to highlight topics in need of further discussion and encourage the exchange of opinions between participants as a way to corroborate validation, contrast and opposed perspectives within the same group.

An observation built from my previous work experience as research assistant in charge of organising and conducting focus groups, is how the dynamics of a group conversation is mediated by the responses of each of its participants. Cyr (2019) stresses how 'the social setting of the focus group cannot be set aside' and how 'individual responses are likely shaped by the group environment' (2019, p. 18). Wilkinson (1998) argues about the relevance of focus groups when the purpose of the research is 'to elicit people's understandings, opinions and views, or to explore how these are advanced, elaborated and negotiated in a social context' (1998, p. 187). Focus groups dynamics might shift depending on the geographical location where the participants are based, mix of age groups, educational levels, professional roles, among others. Therefore, the context surrounding should be acknowledged while conducting the focus groups and must be stated in all data analysis.

In the context of the present study, focus groups with listeners from podcasting communities were conducted using open-ended questions to explore various aspects of their engagement with podcasts. This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of the demographic composition of the Cuban podcasting audience, providing insights into age, gender, educational background, and other relevant socio-cultural factors. Additionally, the discussions examined listeners' motivations and preferences, shedding light on the motivations for podcast consumption and the specific genres or formats these listeners favour. The study also considered uses and gratifications derived from podcasting, analysing how audiences integrate podcasts into their daily lives and the needs these media fulfil.

Beyond individual consumption preferences, the focus groups explored the manifestation of community traits within podcasting audiences, identifying participation and engagement

attitudes, shared values, cultural references, and social dynamics that contribute to a sense of belonging. Participants' perceptions of the Cuban podcasting movement were also assessed, offering perspectives on its development, challenges, and impact within the broader media landscape.

One key variable that can negatively impact focus group dynamics is the researcher's perception of the group, influenced by their own cultural background. It is therefore essential for the researcher to develop the appropriate tools and cultural awareness needed to interpret cultural expressions, understand domestic dynamics, and identify implicit meanings conveyed through bodily or verbal cues. In this context, my position as a Cuban citizen, having lived on the island for over 25 years, offers a distinct advantage, enabling accurate translation of cultural expressions and a fair representation of the cultural meanings captured during the data collection processes.

Finally, a key limitation of conducting focus groups lies in the limited generalisability of the findings, which cannot be extended to all Cuban podcast listeners. As Cyr (2019) notes, 'when it comes to population validity, it is very difficult to randomly select individuals across enough focus groups to be broadly representative of a population as a whole' (2019, p. 33). The absence of such representative data renders this study empirically exploratory, offering insight into an audience that has, until now, remained unexamined and underexplored.

The rationale for conducting focus groups with members of podcasting communities in Cuba lay in the importance of understanding listeners' interactions with podcasters and fellow listeners, the influence they exert on one another, and their listening habits, data that can be more deeply explored and corroborated through group discussion than through other data collection methods, such as surveys. Conducting focus groups with Cuban podcast listeners provided a bottom-up perspective on the podcasting scene and offered insights into listeners' attitudes towards the medium, complementing the semi-structured interviews with podcasting media practitioners.

3.7 Operationalisation

Following the chosen methodology, this research comprised several stages, which are detailed in this section. Firstly, an exploration of the Cuban podcastsphere was undertaken to facilitate the selection of the study's sample. This involved mapping domestic podcast production from 2018 onwards to ensure maximum variation sampling.

Furthermore, research instruments tailored to each method were delineated, as discussed in Section 3.7.2. This process led to the creation of a form for the analytical listening of Cuban podcast episodes, based on the RadioDoc Review guidelines (Section 3.7.2.1),

followed by the preparation of the interview guide for the semi-structured interviews (Section 3.7.2.2) and the questionnaire for the focus groups (Section 3.7.2.3).

The research design also incorporated key ethical considerations (Section 3.7.3), including confidentiality, anonymity, and data protection (Section 3.7.4.1), as well as the management of data during and after the research. To this end, I prepared plain language statements and consent forms to safeguard the rights of interviewees and to ensure ethical conduct throughout the study.

3.7.1 Mapping the Cuban Podcastsphere

First, I explored the Cuban podcastsphere, an undertaking that proved particularly challenging, as Cubapod was discontinued in October 2021, just as I was beginning my doctoral research. Locating Cuban podcasts is inherently difficult, given that country categories are not included in the core metadata of podcast RSS feeds. As a result, unless a podcast includes specific keywords, such as the names of Cuban provinces, domestic cultural references, or the word ‘Cuba’ itself, the search becomes akin to navigating blindly through a vast sea of audio narratives dispersed across multiple hosting platforms. In these circumstances, I contacted Carlos Lugones, one of the founders of Cubapod, who kindly granted me access to the Cuban Podcast Directory database. This resource contained information on 164 podcasts, most of which were Cuban, though it also included a small number of foreign productions.

Cubapod’s original database contained 164 registered podcasts, and included fields such as podcast name, RSS feed, and category (e.g., news, technology, sports, society and culture, leisure, etc.).

This dataset was a starting point that allowed me to identify podcasts created during the research period (2018-2024) and consequently map the Cuban podcasting landscape. This process required an extensive and detailed search, as no single platform aggregates all Cuban podcasts. The search was expanded to include platforms such as Telegram and Ivoox, as well as social media platforms like Instagram. The database has since been updated to include 195 podcasts (see Fig. 3.1). Furthermore, I created a qualitative matrix (see [Appendix A.1](#)) to identify and explore aspects like:

Name / Running since / Number of episodes / Seasons / Category / Average length of episodes / Frequency of publication / Bio / Distribution platforms / Funding / Community platform / Number of members / Social media / Notes / Co-creation

#	Name	Running since...	Number of episodes	Seasons	Category	Average length of episodes	Frequency of publication	Bio	Distribution platforms	Community platform
1	Buzón de Voz de Clandestina	21 Apr 2020 - 14 Feb 2021	8 (until 3/12/21)		Sociedad y cultura	6 - 20min	(5 episodes in May 2020)	Ve al baño y descárgate. Mándanos lo que te saiga. Una queja, una solución, un chiste, un mensaje de apoyo, un escándalo, una canción. En este buzón entran todas las voces.	https://anchor.fm/s/20a05800/podcasts/rss	Analizar Telegram luego de la publicación del buzón? O los comentarios de Instagram?
2	Team Serendipia	31 May 2020 - 30 Jun 2020	5 on telegram (until 11/01/22)		Comedia	3 - 4 min	2 on May 31st	Descarga en Cuarentena de un grupo de gente aburrida y creativa!!! por mayoría periodistas y psicólogos, por minoría programadores, arquitectos, diseñadores, filólogos, comunicadores y otras dores más...	https://us.ivoox.com/es/epodcasts-team-serendipia-fq_f1918623_filtro_1_x.html	https://t.me/teamSerendipia
3	El Pitch	16 Jul 2020 - 8/12/21	21 episodes (until 9/12/21)		Negocios	20 - 45 min	Weekly at the beginning, but not a fixed schedule overall	Un podcast para pensar la comunicación desde el emprendimiento. Si estás emprendiendo o piensas emprender, sabes que la comunicación ha cambiado el mundo de los negocios. A través de ella, generas más visibilidad, más crecimiento, mayor reputación. Con El Pitch podrás desarrollar al máximo tus habilidades en diferentes áreas de la comunicación. Todo lo que necesitas para comunicar en grande tu marca. Un podcast de La Penúltima Casa, con Katia Sánchez y Adriana Sigüenza.	https://anchor.fm/s/24dc0124/podcasts/rss	Telegram, La Penúltima Casa chat
4	Para Darle a la Lengua	27/04/2020 - 14/09/2020	22 (until 28/10/21)	2	Language	17 - 43 min	Weekly	#Podcast cubano sobre #lingüística, la ciencia del #lenguaje humano. @ernestowg	Podtail / Amazon Music/ Spotify / Anchor / Apple Podcast / Ivoox / Google Podcast / Breaker / Overcast / Pocket Casts / RadioPublic	Telegram channel "Para Darle a la Lengua" (308 subscribers) and in the group chat there are 65 members, whose level of interaction is higher
#	Name	Running since...	Number of episodes	Seasons	Category	Average length of episodes	Frequency of publication	Bio	Distribution platforms	Community platform
5	Lecturas al oído	20/02/2020 - 17 Sept 2020	59 (until 8/12/21)		Arte	3 - 11min	Twice a week	Desde nuestro canal queremos regalarte #LecturasAlOído, un programa semanal que protagoniza el profesor Julio Fernández Estrada. Si eres de los que amas los libros y la literatura, no dejes pasar la oportunidad de prestarnos tus oídos y escuchar por unos minutos. Vale la pena.	https://www.ivoox.com/podcast-lecturas-al-oido-fq_f1860058_filtro_1_x.html	
6	Marzo Literario	03/03/2021 - 25/03/2021	13 (until 20/01/22)		Arte y literatura	4 - 10 min	All published on March, 2021	Conozca las interioridades del festival de promoción del libro y la lectura Marzo Literario, en voz de sus organizadores y protagonistas.	https://www.ivoox.com/podcast-vozes-de-marzo-literario_sq_f11196253_1_h.html	Chat de Marzo Literario 257 members (https://t.me/chatmarzoliterario). Chat del festival de promoción del libro y la lectura online. @marzoliterario 📖 Revisa nuestro repositorio de libros 📖 en @repositoriomarzoliterario 📖
7	Costlos radiales	11 Jul 2020 - 23 Jan 2021	30 (until 9/12/21)		Sociedad y cultura	2 - 7min	The podcast started on a daily basis, then it spaced without fixed frequency.	¡Hola a tod@s! 📻 Bienvenidos a nuestro canal "Costlos radiales", un espacio colaborativo, participativo e innovador para crear y compartir magia sonora. Este experimento en construcción juega con sonidos, voces, historias, silencios... Su metodología singular une historias independientes en nuevos elementos sonoros que intentan, por sobre todo, alimentar el alma.	https://www.speaker.com/show/4502395/episodes/tead	https://t.me/cosilrosradiales / https://t.me/+VEJAwcyRwYhTvt42

Figure 3.1 – Cuban Podcasts Matrix

Once the initial mapping stage was completed (December 2021 - April 2022), I narrowed the focus to a purposive sample intended to purposefully inform the “understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell and Poth, 2016, p. 326). This initial sampling responded to the broader exploration of the Cuban podcastsphere and led to the selection of podcasts that could potentially offer ‘different and important views about the ideas and issues at question and therefore need to be included in the sample’ (Campbell et al., 2020, p. 654). The core criterion for inclusion in the purposive sample was the presence of at least one form of listener group or community engagement associated with the podcast experience. The purposive sample was subsequently updated to include podcasts such as *Emprende Verde* (Go Green Entrepreneurship), added in December 2022, and *La Escuelita* (The Little School) in 2023.

Fourteen of the twenty-four podcasts exhibit forms of participatory and co-creative practices, particularly during the pandemic period (2020-2021). One podcast, *Píldoras Buen Idioma* (Good Language Pills), extended its reach through transmedia practices across multiple platforms, including a blog, a Telegram community, a television segment, and in-person meet-ups.

The purposive sample also included podcasts across a variety of categories such as News, Society and Culture, Education, Art, and Religion, which counteracts sample homogeneity (see [Appendix A.2](#)).

3.7.2 Development of Research Tools

For the purposes of this study, three primary research tools were designed and developed to collect the necessary data for an in-depth analysis of podcasting in Cuba and its role in fostering and maintaining a sense of community through communicative practices.

Firstly, I created an analytical listening form, guided by the evaluation criteria proposed by *RadioDoc Review* and expanded to incorporate additional elements for the critical analysis of podcast episodes.

Secondly, I developed an interview guide to facilitate semi-structured interviews with Cuban podcasting practitioners, enabling a deeper understanding of their experiences, motivations, and perspectives.

Thirdly, I designed a questionnaire for conducting focus groups with Cuban podcast listeners, both in person and online, to maximise participation and capture a diverse range of listener experiences and demographics.

The subsequent section provides a comprehensive overview of each of these research instruments, accompanied by a thorough justification for their incorporation within the present study.

3.7.2.1 Analytical Listening of Cuban Podcasts

RadioDoc Review (RDR) was established in 2013 and continues to be to this date 'the only journal dedicated to the rich culture of audio documentaries, narrative podcasts, audio features and other examples of the crafted factual form (sometimes called 'built speech') around the world' (*RadioDoc Review*, 2024). In their podcast evaluation criteria, the forum invites reviewers to engage in in-depth discussion, usually allowing the inclusion of personal experiences and emotional responses enacted by the listening experience (Jorgensen, 2023, p. 152).

This approach is further elaborated by scholars such as Jorgensen (2019) and Euritt (2022), who have acknowledged the value of self-reflexive exercises in individual listening while researching podcasts. These scholars emphasise the importance of incorporating individual perspectives and emotional responses to podcast episodes into academic research.

Radio Doc Review proposes a set of criteria to analyse the podcast, looking at elements such as:

Criteria	Aspects
Storytelling strength/ Narrative structure	Micro and macro story arcs, episodic structure, use of scenes, episode endings, resolution, techniques of storytelling.
Originality and innovation	What if anything is new, and why this is appealing.
Audience engagement/ Hosting narration	What techniques are used to pull audience in and connect with audience, how is it hosted, narrated or presented, if at all.
Research and reporting	Depth, breadth, and accuracy of knowledge accessed.
Complexity of information and portrayals	Interplay between content/research and form/audio medium and portrayal of place/people, challenges for the listener.
Emotiveness and empathy	Identification with talent/characters, affect, techniques that may evoke visceral response – whether positive or negative, eg humour, affection, or anxiety, shock.
Craft and artistry	Use of sound and music, mix of sound, scripting, pacing, aesthetic considerations.
Ethical practice	Fair, honest and considerate treatment of topics and talent, journalistic/editorial issues such as impartiality.
Public benefit and Impact	Contribution to store of knowledge and evidence of merit, e.g. awards or other forms of formal recognition, evidence of changes in public attitudes, policy; audience feedback; professional feedback.

Table 3.1 – Radio Doc Review Analytical listening criteria

(Source: RadioDoc Review)

Following the assessment criteria outlined by Radio Doc, I developed a Google Form to support the analytical listening of podcasts. The criteria were measured using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (low) to 5 (high). In addition, I incorporated several sections to adapt the framework to the specific aims of this study, thereby facilitating the systematic collection of the following data.

Criteria	Aspects
Date and description of the episode	Episode descriptions sourced from podcast hosting and distribution platforms. Episode data spanning the entire research period.
Length of the episode	Data on episode length and podcast categories, along with their correlation.
Gender of the host(s)	Gender balance of podcast hosts.
Streaming platform	Links to episodes to enable further review and potential use by other researchers.

Community mentions	Terms of reference for listeners, with a focus on language used to describe the audience, such as "listener," "subscriber," "audience," or "community."
Co-creation practices	Identified co-creation practices implemented within episodes.
Impressions/Notes	Researcher's impressions and notes, attached to the document for validation and ensuring data reliability.
Significant oral cues (Emotional expressions/ silences/ intimate phrasing)	Significant oral cues, including emotional expressions, silences, and intimate phrasing, along with the researcher's reflections and notable phrases from the episodes. These cues highlight elements often overlooked in textual content analyses of aural materials.

Table 3.2 – Extended criteria for analytical listening of Cuban podcasts.

Through the analytical listening of eighty-five Cuban podcast episodes (see [Appendix A.3](#)), I mapped the date and length of episodes, and other aspects such as storytelling strength, originality, and innovation. I included the gender of the host, as well as the number of hosts, to gain insight into gender balance within the sample. The identification of streaming platforms served a dual purpose: enabling episode verification and future use by other researchers and contributing to the mapping of the platforms used by Cuban podcasters to disseminate their content.

I also annotated references to the audience within episodes to examine how podcasters position themselves in relation to their listeners, focusing on terms such as “listener,” “subscriber,” “audience,” or “community” (see Fig. 3.2). I observed community references made by Cuban podcasting practitioners, along with impressions and notes on listener feedback (see Fig. 3.3), which contribute to a reflective dimension within the listening exercise. This allowed me to gain insight into audience engagement in the production of Cuban podcasts, ranging from social media comments and voice notes included in episodes. Additionally, I recorded instances of co-creation practices to map participatory dynamics within Cuban podcasting. Furthermore, I noted significant aural cues in the episodes (see Fig. 3.4) that helped construct a more authentic picture of the podcast narratives, as well as their relationship with the audience.

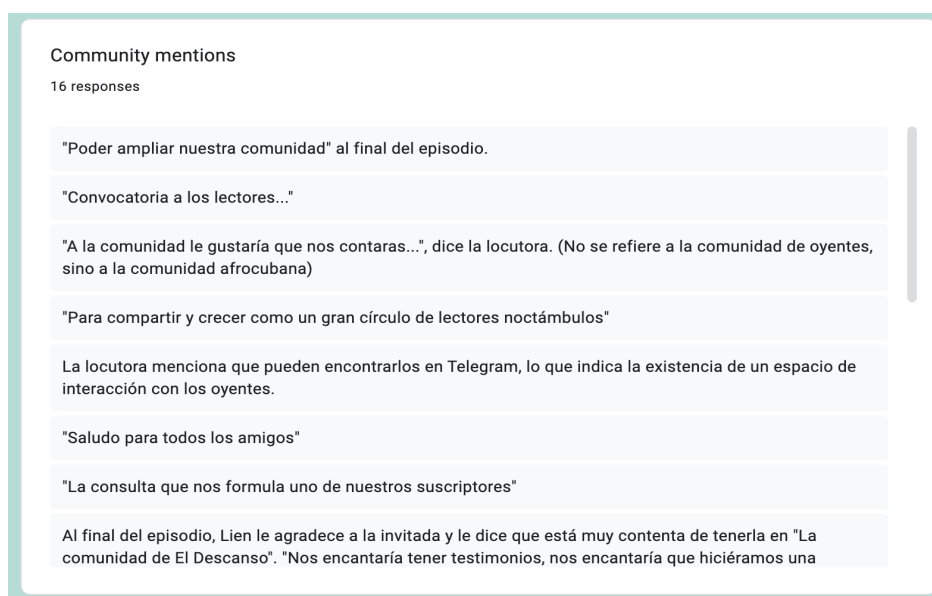


Figure 3.2 – Community mentions annotated during the analytical listening

Two further fields were added to support my reflexive process as both listener and researcher: one for noting significant oral cues and my interpretation of them, and another for recording impressions and notes that inform subsequent coding and analysis.

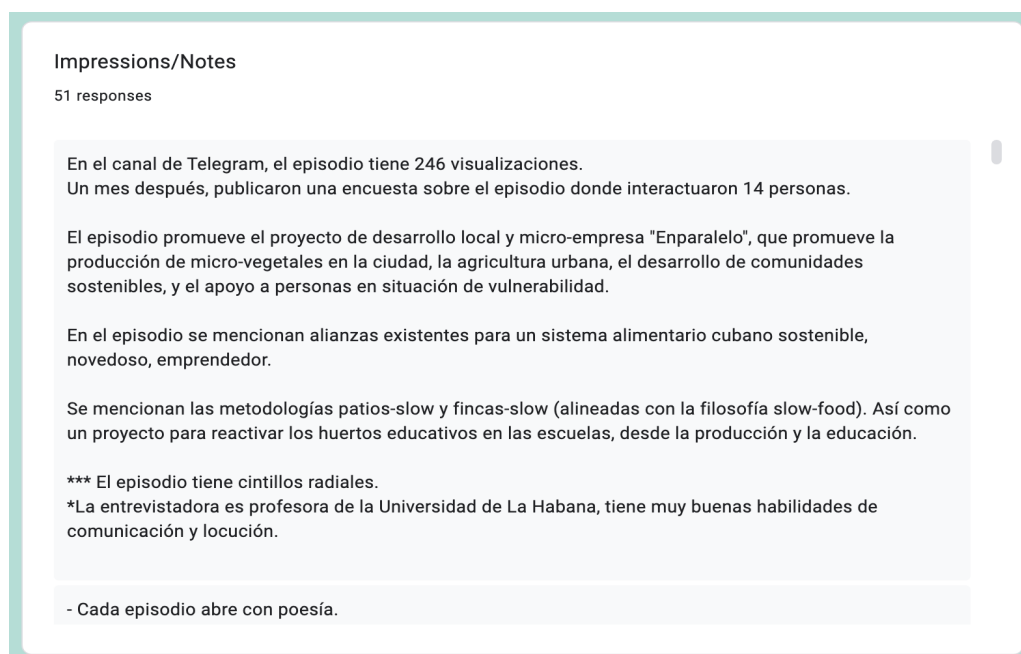


Figure 3.3 – Impressions and notes captured during the analytical listening

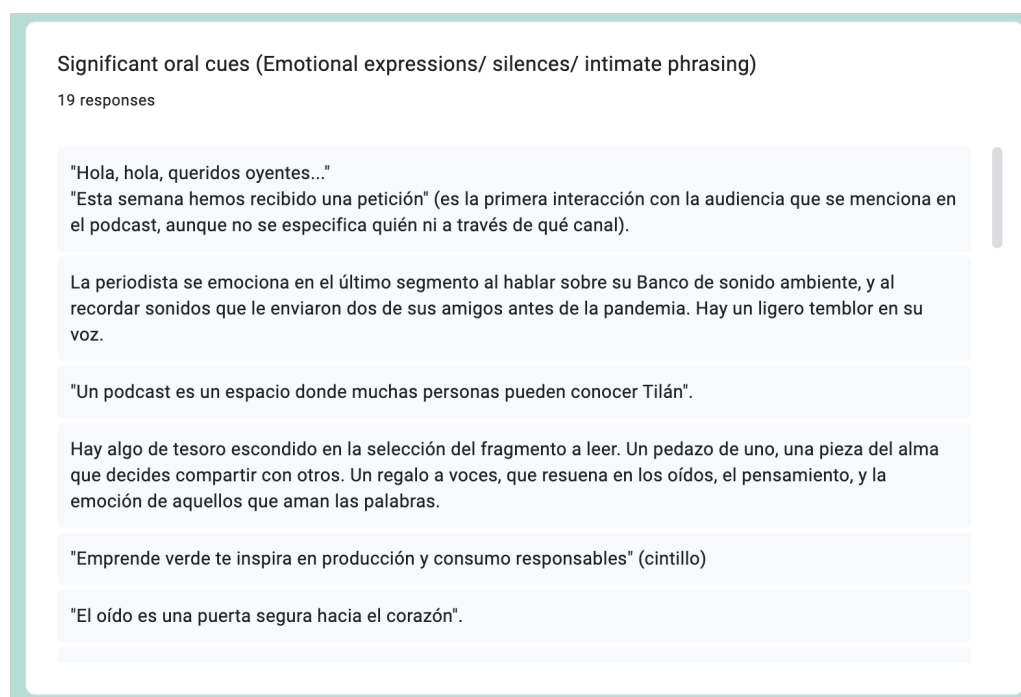


Figure 3.4 – Significant oral cues annotated during the analytical listening

The integration of these elements expanded the scope of the study, offering a comparative and analytical lens through which to examine the emerging field of aural podcast analysis. This comprehensive research tool therefore enabled a nuanced exploration of audio-based communication, while maintaining methodological rigour and ensuring the reliability of the collected data.

The analytical listening of podcast episodes offered an intimate process of familiarisation with the Cuban podcasting landscape. Most of the listening took place at my desk in the C144 research office, located in the old-brick Henry Grattan building in the DCU Glasnevin campus, using headphones to avoid disturbing fellow PhD colleagues. I listened to episodes live through podcast apps and systematically recorded their durations. Additional listening sessions occurred at home in both Dublin and Havana during the data collection phase, further enriching my contextual understanding of the material.

Listening with the Google form in view enabled a focused attention not only to oral cues, but also to the identification and recognition of cultural nuances embedded within the narrative elements - sometimes even oblivious to their own creators -. The use of Cuban music, the distinct accent, the reproduction of traditional radio narrative structures, and the evocation of ancestral knowledge — such as the recipes inherited from the *abuela* (grandmother) in *En Estéreo*'s first episode, *Negra* (Black Woman) — all contributed to this process.

“This time I didn't go to cookbooks or history books, but I looked into the living memory of my grandmother, and she passed on to me the recipe for coconut jam that her mother and aunts passed on to her”. (In Stereo Podcast, Episodio_1_Negra, 01/10/2020)

These episodes evoke a deep sense of *cubanía* - a feeling of Cuba - that often diminishes amid the distance of the Irish shores where most of this research took place.

The analytical listening of Cuban podcasts enabled me to map domestic podcast production, identify its narrative structures, and observe the influence of radio traditions embedded in some of the shows. Moreover, it provided insight into listeners' contributions and the ways in which podcasters refer to and engage with their audiences. These observations were subsequently contrasted with the data collected through interviews with podcasters.

In my role as an international researcher, the notion of home has become increasingly abstract, dispersed across people and places all over the world. Yet through the act of listening, a powerful sense of *home-fullness* is reawakened. Listening, in this context, brings home to me.

3.7.2.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

To facilitate data collection, I developed a questionnaire prior to conducting semi-structured interviews with Cuban podcasting practitioners (see [Appendix B.1](#)). The initial interview guide contained 29 questions, which were subsequently refined and modified. In collaboration with my supervisor, the interview guide was mapped against the research questions to ensure alignment with the study objectives. This process also provided clarity on the type of data each question was designed to elicit. Refining the questionnaire prior to the data collection phase resulted in a more accurate and effective research instrument. Particular attention was paid to ensuring that the questions were open-ended, encouraging participants to provide detailed and nuanced responses.

The questions were carefully structured in a logical sequence to ensure an organic progression of topics. The first question served as an introductory exercise or 'warm-up' question: *Q1: What is your definition of the word 'podcast'?* This question positioned the interviewee within the research context and invited them to articulate their understanding of the term. Additionally, it provided the researcher with an opportunity to map the participant's individual perspective on radio and their conceptualisation of the podcast as a format, medium, or communicative tool. The subsequent question explored the rationale for engaging in podcasting, allowing the participant to express their motivations and elucidate the gratifications derived from this activity.

The third and fourth questions focus on the Cuban context, examining both the advantages and challenges of podcast production in Cuba. The interviewee was encouraged to reflect on the positioning of the podcast within the Cuban communication system, as well as its constraints and limitations. Additionally, they were invited to discuss key contextual factors such as technological conditions and accessibility.

During the semi-structured interviews, participants were asked questions such as 'Do you consider your podcast to be a purely audio experience?'. This was followed by a request for further elaboration to elicit an answer from the participants, to explore the concept of podcasting and their conception of their own podcast, and to understand how they conceive of the construction of the podcasting experience. This question was of particular importance, as it facilitates the elucidation not only of the concepts of podcasting in the Cuban context, but also of the intentions and aspirations of podcasters regarding the creative experience they conceive and implement for their audience.

Core questions addressed various aspects of podcasting, including creative processes, methods of audience engagement, feedback channels, and the role of listeners in the production process. They also explored the distinction between 'audience' and 'community' (if the participant employs these terms), the resources used to sustain this community, and the social function attributed to the podcast. Furthermore, the discussion extended to issues of financing, remuneration, and monetisation channels, as well as transmedia experiences and sound representations of contemporary Cuba. The interview guide (see Appendix B.1) concluded with one reflective question: '*What are the main strengths and limitations of podcasting in Cuba?*'. Finally, the podcasting practitioners were also invited to reflect on the future of podcasting in Cuba and its role as a global media platform.

A significant aspect of this research is that the Cuban podcasting media practitioners interviewed provided informed consent for their real names and professional titles to be included in the study.

Question	RQs	Data it might reveal
Why start podcasting?	Q1: How have Cuban podcast communities evolved over the period 2018-2023? RQ4: What elements characterise the Cuban podcasting scene?	Data from individuals and most likely what their impression of the podcasting scene at the time.
What are the main strengths and limitations of podcasting in Cuba?	RQ4: What elements characterise the Cuban podcasting scene?	Contextualising the findings. Listener experience in context.
How do you engage with your listeners?	Q2: How do Cuban podcasters engage listeners? RQ3: How does community manifest itself in podcasting in Cuba? How does it resonate with the people? In what way? What values? RQ4: What elements characterise the Cuban podcasting scene?	Listeners' attitudes towards podcasters. Modes of interaction. Looking at participation, contribution and co-creation. Also the motivations behind these interactions.

Table 3.3 – Semi-structured interviews questionnaire sample.

3.7.2.2.1 From Pilot Interviews to the Final Questionnaire

Pilot studies are crucial for improving the quality and efficiency of research, serving as small-scale versions of full studies or as pre-tests of research instruments (Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2010). They help to identify potential recruitment problems, refine key themes and allow researchers to reflect on the research process (Day *et al.*, 2017).

Pilot studies are essential for assessing safety, recruitment potential, and providing estimates for sample size calculations in larger studies (In, 2017). A rigorous five-step process is recommended for qualitative research using semi-structured interviews: identifying prerequisites, drawing on prior knowledge, formulating a preliminary guide, pilot testing, and presenting the final guide (Kallio *et al.*, 2016). This systematic approach contributes to the objectivity and trustworthiness of studies. Although pilot studies do not guarantee the success of the main study, they significantly increase its likelihood and provide valuable insights for other researchers (Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2010).

I conducted two pilot interviews prior to the data collection phase. Both interviews were conducted via Zoom, as both podcasters were based outside of Cuba at the time of the interview.

The first pilot interview was conducted with Carlos Lugones of the podcast *La Mente Creativa* (The Creative Mind) (5/07/2023). Lugones was one of the founders of the Cuban podcasting platform Cubapod, which attributed added value to the interview, as it provided

unique insights into the creation and dissolution of Cubapod in late 2021, as well as the motivations behind the Cuban podcast mediascape. This interview helped to situate the Cuban podcasting context with its particularities and limitations, especially during the years 2020-2021.

The second interview was conducted with Sixela Ametller (23/10/23), a Cuban podcaster based in San Francisco, California, who hosts the show *Empoderadas* (Empowered Women) since 2020. This interview allowed me to test the questions and begin to explore the notions of community associated with podcasting. Sixela produces and distributes her podcast from the United States, and most of her interviewees to the date of the interview have been Cuban women. This interview prompted a question about the 'identity' of the podcast, shedding light on the conceptualisation of the 'Cuban podcast' for media producers inside and abroad the island.

These pilot interviews lasted about an hour, while Sixela's interview lasted almost two hours, split into two sessions due to the podcaster's availability.

These first two interviews were crucial for testing the questionnaire and aligning it with the research questions. Moreover, they allowed me to reflect on my role as knowledge facilitator, instead of journalist or commentator during these interviews, which proved to be challenging as most of the interviews felt like easy-going conversations.

Additional Questions

Semi-structured interviews allow for additional questions to emerge from active listening to participants' responses (McHugh, 2022). One interviewee, Arletis Arango, creator of *Palabras con Sentido* (Words with Purpose), reflected on the influence of the editorial agenda on podcast dynamics, an element that I furthered included in the questionnaire for those podcasters whose shows are produced by state-owned or independent media.

This contribution became relevant as it elucidated the influence of the media's editorial agenda on the topics of the podcast, as well as on the production, distribution and dissemination of the show.

3.7.2.3 Focus Groups

Focus groups facilitate interaction, knowledge exchange and in-depth discussion between participants (Prates *et al.*, 2015). To facilitate discussion among Cuban podcast listeners, I developed a questionnaire that explored listener engagement in podcasting in Cuba (see [Appendix B.2](#)). These focus groups also explored the sense of community perceived and experienced by listeners, as well as the motivations and underlying values behind these

interactions.

The questionnaire included twenty-nine questions grouped in ten consecutive blocks, exploring elements such as: *Podcast production practices; podcast consumption practices; consumption platforms; experiences of interaction, participation, and co-creation; relationship with podcasts and podcasters; relationships between podcasters and listeners; networks of podcast listeners; uses and gratifications; podcasting and other media; and perceptions of the podcasting scene in Cuba* (See Table 3.5).

Q	Interview schedule question	Elements to explore
1	Could you define the word podcast?	Perceptions of podcasting scene in Cuba
2	Why start podcasting?	Podcast production practices. Relationship with podcasts and podcasters.
3	What advantages and disadvantages does podcasting offer you? In comparison with other media and broadcasting, especially in Cuba?	Podcast production practices. Perceptions of podcasting scene in Cuba.
4	What distinguishes your podcast within the universe of Cuban podcasts?	Podcast production practices
5	How is the creative process behind your podcast? (Production and communication practices)	Podcast production practices
6	What role does social media play in the dynamics of production and dissemination of your podcast?	Podcast production practices. Experiences of interaction, participation, and co-creation
7	Do you consider your podcast to be a purely audio experience? Why?	Podcast production practices. Experiences of interaction, participation, and co-creation
8	How has the narrative structure changed since the podcast began?	Podcast production practices
9	How do you think the narrative structures of your podcast have influenced the growth and loyalty of your audience?	Relationships between podcasters and listeners
10	How would you describe your listeners?	Relationships between podcasters and listeners
11	How do you connect with them?	Podcast consumption practices; consumption platforms. Experiences of interaction, participation, and co-creation
12	What are the main avenues of feedback?	Podcast consumption practices; consumption platforms.

Table 3.4 – Sample of Interview questions and elements to explore

When developing questions for focus groups, researchers should consider guiding principles, question sequencing, and the use of various question types, including projective questions and group activities (Krueger, 2014). To address this objective, the following questions hereby presented were included:

Focus group schedule questions	RQ	Targeted data
<p>What is a podcast for you?</p> <p>When did you start listening to podcasts?</p> <p>Why did you start listening to podcasts?</p>	RQ1: How have Cuban podcast communities evolved over the period 2018-2024?	General information on podcast consumption habits, probably giving insights into Cuban podcasting audiences.
<p>Do you interact with the podcast or podcaster in any way (social media comments, voice notes, emails, etc.)?</p> <p>Is it important for you to offer feedback after listening to an episode, and how do you provide that feedback?</p> <p>Have you participated in the making of an episode, and how important was it for you to be part of that experience? If so, what motivated you to participate?</p>	<p>RQ2: What forms of community engagement emerge within Cuban podcast networks? How do these reflect or challenge broader dynamics of media and sociopolitical expression?</p> <p>RQ3: What participatory practices foster and enhance communal bonds in podcasting in Cuba? Which practices, attitudes, and affective or symbolic resonances foster collective identification, participation, and belonging in podcasting?</p>	Experiences of interaction, participation, and co-creation.
<p>What role does podcasting play in your daily media consumption?</p> <p>Why listen to podcasts instead of other media?</p> <p>How do podcasts distinguish themselves within the Cuban media context?</p>	RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba? What is the role of podcasting within the Cuban media ecosystem?	Podcasting in relation to other media (the media landscape on the island).

Table 3.5 – Focus groups questionnaire sample.

3.7.3 Ethical Considerations

The study received the approval from the Research Ethics Committee in Dublin City University (see [Appendix B.3](#)) on 19 April 2023 (DCUREC/2023/058). The proposal was considered low risk and approved on the basis that the interviews would be conducted with Cuban podcasting media practitioners who ‘can be considered public figures, professionals or others in their professional capacity in relation to their professional activities’ (Appendix B.3). In addition, the focus groups and two individual interviews were conducted with ten members of the public, all participants over the age of 18, whose data was anonymised by removing direct and indirect identifiers, as well as data providing context or identifying characteristics of the participants. Plain language statements and consent forms were also approved and further translated to Spanish to facilitate the understanding of the research’s participants (see Appendices D1, D2, D3 and D4).

The research did not involve any risks beyond those encountered in everyday life (as experienced by podcasters in Cuba and podcast listeners), such as being asked about their opinions on podcasting, storytelling, podcast consumption habits and motivations, co-creation practices, and podcasting strategies. Nonetheless, participants made use of the ‘*off the record*’ option to share details they did not wish to include in the transcripts but felt comfortable disclosing during the interview, reinforcing participants’ comfort in Cuba’s politically sensitive context. Political opinions were also expressed during the interviews, while consent for their collection was included in the interview consent form, along with the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

3.7.4 Voluntary Participation and Informed Consent

Participants read and signed consent forms (see [Appendices D.1, D.3](#)), either in person or via Google Forms, , as well as plain language statements (see [Appendices D.2, D.4](#)), which also included demographic information.

At the beginning of each interview, I guided participants through the consent form, outlining the purpose of the study, the type of data to be collected, the management of their personal information, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

I also provided an opportunity for participants to ask questions to clarify any concerns they might have regarding the interview, the processing of their data, or its potential future use. For media practitioners, I emphasised their right to anonymity; however, none of the podcasters interviewed opted to remain anonymous.

3.7.5 Confidentiality, Anonymity and Data Protection

For focus groups participants, the study applied anonymisation techniques with the aim of guaranteeing the right of participants and their protection “in relation to the processing of personal data”, as stated in the Article 8(1) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (the ‘Charter’) and Article 16(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

‘Personal data’ is considered as any sort of ‘information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person (‘data subject’); an identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person’, as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

“Pseudonymisation” was applied to focus groups participants data, with the goal of processing personal data in a way that it can no longer be attributed to a specific data subject without the use of additional information. Such additional information was kept separately and subjected to technical and organisational measures to ensure that the personal data were not attributed to an identified or identifiable individual (Guidance on Anonymisation and Pseudonymisation, 2019). However, pseudonymised data is still considered personal data because the ‘pseudonymisation’ process can be reversed if ‘means and available datasets might be used to re-identify a data subject’ (Guidance on Anonymisation and Pseudonymisation, 2019).

Personal data was coded in a master sheet. Identifiers were replaced with a unique pseudonym in a master sheet containing names and/or contact details of participants and linking them to their unique code/pseudonym used in the data set. The master sheet was stored in a Google Drive folder linked to my DCU account (supported by Google Suite for Education). The access to this folder is password protected, and a Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) security measure remains in place. The master sheet will be destroyed once the research has been completed, which will minimise the re-identification of participants.

3.8 Gathering the Data

The following section offers a comprehensive overview of each stage of data collection, accompanied by a detailed justification for their inclusion in the present study.

The research employed three primary methodological approaches. First, it included the analytical listening of 85 episodes of Cuban podcasts (see Fig. 3.5), published and distributed between 2018 and 2024. Second, it incorporated twenty-seven semi-structured interviews with Cuban podcasting media practitioners, including hosts, producers, and experts in the field, providing in-depth insights into their experiences, motivations, and perspectives. Third, the study conducted two focus groups and two individual interviews with Cuban podcast listeners. This method facilitated the exploration of individual understandings of the Cuban podcasting landscape and allowed for an examination of listeners’ motivations, interactions, and perceptions of the podcasting mediascape.

3.8.1 Editorial Content of the Selected Podcasts

This section presents the editorial content of the 24 Cuban podcasts selected for this research. The sample does not contain any investigative or narrative podcasts.

Podcast	Name	Produced by	Description	Editorial content
<i>El Descanso</i>	The Rest	Periodismo de Barrio (Independent media)	It addresses the undervaluation of care work in Cuba, especially for women, in the context of systemic crisis and social inequalities. The podcast gives voice to caregivers, shares experiences, and aims to provide a supportive space.	Interview-Based
<i>Palabras con Sentido</i>	Words with purpose	Periódico Girón (State-owned media)	Life stories of well-known and popular figures from Matanzas, produced by Periódico Girón.	Personal Narrative / Memoir
<i>Team Serendipia</i>	Serendipity Team	Independent creators	A creative quarantine project by mostly journalists and psychologists, with contributions from various other professionals.	Co-creation / Participatory
<i>En Plural</i>	In Plural	Proyecto Cuba Emprende (PCE), a project of the Catholic Church of Cuba	Conversations with entrepreneurs and their communities, focusing on stories behind socially responsible businesses.	Interview-Based
<i>Píldoras Buen Idioma</i>	Good Language Pills	Independent creator	Linguistic advice and clears up doubts about contemporary Spanish usage.	Explainer / Educational
<i>Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio</i>	We wear it curly Radio	Sociocultural project <i>Lo Llevamos Rizo</i>	Interview podcast that uses afro and curly hair as an entry point to address issues relevant to Cuba's Black and Afro-descendant communities.	Interview-Based
<i>Buzón de Voz</i>	Voicemail	Fashion brand Clandestina	Invites listeners to send in anything (complaints, jokes, songs) highlighting the value of all voices.	Co-creation / Participatory
<i>Voces Ecuménicas Cubanas</i>	Cuban Ecumenical Voices	Centro Memorial Martin Luther King Jr.	An ecumenical and diverse view of Christianity centred on love, humility, justice, and human dignity in Cuba.	Co-creation / Participatory
<i>El Pitch</i>	The pitch	Independent creator	An exploration of the Cuban entrepreneurial ecosystem, its challenges and opportunities, with practical insights from the field.	Interview-Based
<i>Emprende Verde</i>	Go green Entrepreneurship	Sociocultural projects Ecorizos, Tercer Paraíso Cuba y La Mina	Discussions about entrepreneurship and good practices in Cuba, created by grassroots and environmental initiatives.	Interview-Based
<i>La Mente Creativa</i>	The creative mind	Independent creator	Personal experiences in launching startups, including both successes and failures, with a focus on creativity and technology.	Personal Narrative
<i>La Potajera</i>	The Stewpot	Initially funded by the independent magazine Tremenda Nota.	Cuba's first LGBTIQ+ podcast.	Chat-Based
<i>La Escuelita</i>	The little school	Independent creators	Educational podcast on topics like gender identity, sexual health, and diversity, using simple, accessible language.	Chat-Based
<i>Empoderadas</i>	Empowered women	Independent creator	Interviews women on various topics, aiming to affirm empowerment and	Interview-Based

			encourage self-awareness and responsibility.	
<i>Cositos Radiales</i>	Radio Thingies	Independent creators	A participatory and creative audio space for sharing sonic experiences.	Co-creation / Participatory
<i>Oye Te Cuento</i>	Hey, let me tell you	El Toque and Periodismo de Barrio (Independent media)	Personal quarantine stories from listeners to document everyday life during the pandemic.	Co-creation / Participatory
<i>En Estéreo Podcast</i>	In Stereo Podcast	Independent creator	Weekly episodes exploring African roots through art, culture, history, and entrepreneurship.	Interview-Based
<i>Lecturas al Oído</i>	Readings to the ear	El Toque (Independent media)	A weekly literary programme with readings by a university professor for book lovers.	Co-creation / Participatory
<i>Voces de Marzo Literario</i>	Voices of Literary March	Independent creators	An online festival promoting reading and literature.	Chat-Based
<i>Zona o Clichés</i>	Cliché-Free Zone	Independent creator	A psychologist's reflections on life, aiming to provoke thought and be useful, with a mix of realism, affection, and humour.	Personal Narrative
<i>Flash Musical</i>	Music Flash	Independent creators	Introduces the careers of musicians and producers, intended for a general audience.	Chat-Based
<i>Cinemaflia</i>	Cinefilia	Periódico Girón (State-owned media)	A film-themed podcast by two young people from a city with no cinemas.	Chat-Based
<i>Tecno Code Live (CalvOS 360)</i>	CalvOS 360	Independent creator	Provides tips, tutorials, and app reviews for Apple users, based on the hosts' personal experience.	Personal Narrative
<i>Los podcasts de Cubadebate</i>	Cubadebate's podcasts	State-owned media	Covers debates, news, and stories related to life in Cuba.	News Recap / Commentary

Table 3.6 – Editorial Content of the Selected Podcasts

3.8.2 Analytical Listening

The rise of podcasting as a cultural phenomenon has led to new studies exploring its impact on media, society and storytelling (Spinelli and Dann, 2019). The concept of analytical listening extends beyond mere listening to include a search for meaning and multiple perspectives, as explored in psychoanalytic contexts (Meissner, 2000). This study conducted the analytical listening of eighty-five Cuban podcast episodes.

Podcast

85 responses

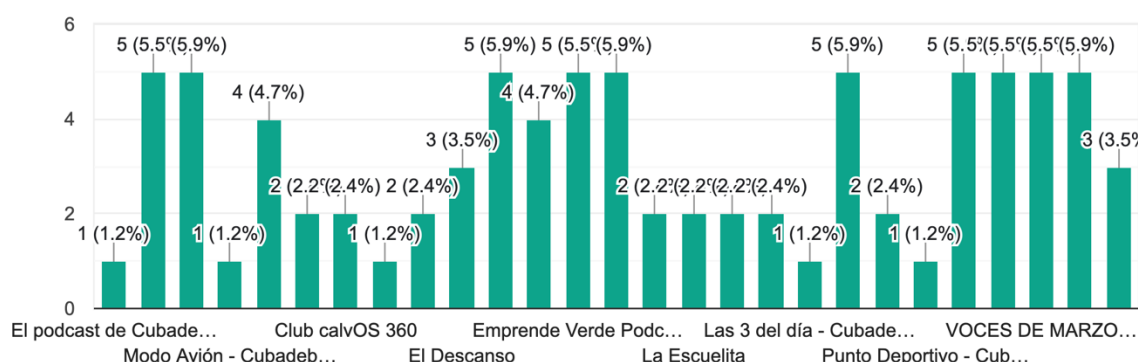


Figure 3.5 – Analytical listening of 85 Cuban podcast episodes

The in-depth exploration of selected Cuban podcasts through analytical listening, focused on specific elements such as mentions of community, significant oral cues, and my reflections on both the listening experience and my role as a researcher. This analytical listening not only facilitated an examination of the Cuban podcasting landscape from an auditory perspective but also allowed for critical reflection on the narrative structures reproduced within this medium in the Cuban context. It also provided valuable insights into specific podcasts, some of which were later included in the sample for interviews. This informative method allowed me to gather prior knowledge about areas of the phenomenon prior to the interview (Turner, 2011).

The analytical listening phase was conducted in 2023-2024, prior to the data collection phase. It included the analysis of episodes of 24 Cuban podcasts, including at least two episodes of each of the podcasts included in the purposive sample. I accessed the episodes from a variety of platforms, including Ivoox, Spotify, Google Podcasts (which ceased to function in April 2024), websites, Telegram channels, etc. The data was collected through a combination of regular podcast listening and adding annotations to the Google Form.

The episodes were assessed following the extended Radio Doc Review criteria, using a scale of 1 to 5 in elements like *Originality and innovation*, *Craft and artistry*, and *Public benefit and Impact*, informed by the researcher's experience in media production and podcasting (Jorgensen, 2023).

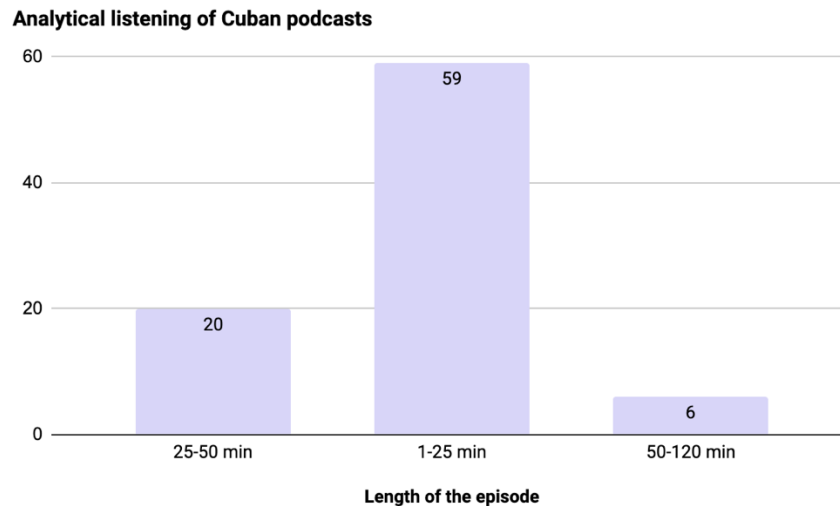


Figure 3.6 – Length of podcast episodes analysed

More detailed observations were recorded in the *Impressions/Notes* section to highlight distinctive elements for further analysis. Additionally, I documented my own listening location and included comments about my listening experience, for example:

*‘There is something of a hidden treasure in the selection of the fragment to read. A piece of you, a piece of your soul that you decide to share with others. An open gift, resonating in the ears, the thought, and the emotion of those who love words.’
(Personal notes about the podcast Lecturas al Oído - Readings to the Ear)*

This reflective practice proved particularly beneficial during the later stages of my PhD, especially during the processes of data coding and analysis.

3.8.2.1 Granular ‘Close Listeners’ of Podcast Episodes

Empoderadas

Episode #7: The Production of Musical Shows in Cuba from the Perspective of Being a Woman. Interview with Amalia Rojas

Date: 08/09/2020

Length of the episode: 39min 8 sec

This episode of the *Empoderadas* podcast features an in-depth interview with Amalia Rojas, a prominent Cuban producer of musical and artistic events, based in Havana. The conversation centres on Rojas’s professional trajectory, the challenges she has faced as a woman in the male-dominated music industry, and her reflections on creativity, labour, and gender dynamics.

Rojas began her artistic journey in childhood with the theatre company *La Colmenita*, where she balanced school and performance from an early age. Her transition into audiovisual and music production started during her bachelors studies at the University of Arts (Instituto Superior de Arte), later complemented by heritage management studies at

San Gerónimo University College. Early work included producing for groups such as Vocal Sampling, and musicians like Tony Ávila and Ivette Cepeda.

Her professional consolidation occurred in 2015 when she joined La Rueda Producciones under the mentorship of Josué García, focusing on the production of major concerts and festivals such as Havana World Music. She has since collaborated with influential artists including Pablo Milanés and X Alfonso.

She describes the years 2015–2016 as “the golden years”, “Obama’s boom time”, she says.

“I became totally convinced that what excites and drives me is anything to do with the stage, and with a musician up there.”

The interview explores the gendered aspects of production work in Cuba. Rojas reflects on the persistent patriarchal structures within Cuban society, despite the growing presence of women in leadership roles. She critiques the objectification and instrumentalisation of women’s appearances in professional settings and the subtle gendered expectations placed upon female producers.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, Rojas used the downtime for reflection, strategic planning, and further engagement with theoretical approaches to her practice. She also explored collaborations in fashion and visual arts, notably with the brand Clandestina. Rojas advocates for an ethos of action and resilience, encouraging women to pursue production careers through direct engagement and passion-driven work.

Amalia acknowledges the formative role of her parents in guiding her professional path and concludes the interview by reflecting on the emergence of a new generation of women in production roles in Cuba, as well as the broader landscape of female entrepreneurship.

“If you don’t appreciate, value, and love what you’re creating, managing... and you don’t do it with the passion it demands —especially in a country like Cuba— then you won’t be able to build anything.”

This episode underscores Rojas’s influential role in Cuban cultural production and highlights her commitment to fostering a more inclusive and equitable creative industry.

Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio

Episode 3 – Interview with Daymé Arocena

Date: 31/10/2020

Duration: 1:01:25

This episode of *Lo Llevamos Rizo* features an in-depth interview with Cuban jazz singer Daymé Arocena, who reflects on her personal journey toward self-acceptance through her hair and cultural identity. She recounts her early desire to straighten her hair, shaped by

societal norms and beauty standards that marginalised Afro hair. At fifteen, she underwent painful straightening treatments as part of traditional celebrations, which she retrospectively critiques. Her turning point came with her initiation into the Yoruba religion, during which she chose to shave her head. This moment marked the beginning of a new relationship with her natural hair and identity.

Daymé details her transition from braids to dreadlocks, initially resisted due to the lack of female references. Influenced by jazz artists and her husband's example, she embraced dreadlocks as both a practical and empowering choice. She challenges myths surrounding dreadlocks, addressing issues of hygiene, societal stigma, and cultural ignorance, particularly in Cuba. She and her husband developed haircare routines that maintain cleanliness and style versatility.

Throughout the conversation, Daymé emphasises the liberating experience of embracing her natural hair, referring to her former relationship with straightening as a “bad marriage” and to her dreadlocks as her “soulmate.” She critiques the term “dreadlock” for the lingering negative connotation associated with the word “dread,” and advocates for the use of “locks” instead. She situates her identity within the spiritual and aesthetic traditions of the African diaspora, particularly through her devotion to Yoruba deities like Oshun, often depicted with long locks.

The episode also touches on the impact of online access in diversifying hair references and supporting unlearning processes around internalised colonial beauty standards. Daymé's active presence on social media aims to serve as a reference point for others navigating similar paths. She shares how the COVID-19 pandemic allowed space for creative exploration with her husband, blending audiovisual media, music, and Afro-descendant narratives.

Concluding with a powerful message to the *Lo Llevamos Rizo* community, Daymé Arocena advocates for self-acceptance as the foundation for happiness. Quoting Beyoncé's *Black is King*: “We were beautiful before they knew what beauty was”, she reinforced the notion that beauty existed within Black identity long before mainstream recognition.

The episode closes with her song *La rumba me llamo yo*, affirming music as a central mode of self-expression and Afrocuban affirmation.

3.8.3 Conducting Semi-Structure Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are a valuable research method in podcasting and qualitative research.

While the first phase of data collection, the analytical listening of Cuban podcast episodes, facilitated access to narratives and storytelling techniques and mentions of the audience, it left out meaningful interactions that can only be accessed by exploring the creator's motivations, their relationship with their audiences, and their understanding of the podcasting experience in the Cuban context. This study conducted twenty-seven semi-structured interviews that document the experiences of podcast creators in Cuba between 2018 and 2024.

The research examined the evolution of the podcasting movement in Cuba, focusing on the various ways in which podcasters engage with their audiences and with one another. Additionally, it explored how creators perceive their listeners and their most dedicated groups, as well as their definitions of 'audience' and 'community.' The study further investigated the communicative and discursive strategies employed to cultivate and sustain these communities.

By analysing narratives, communicative practices, and the construction of sound experiences beyond the podcast itself, the research identified the factors that facilitate the transition of listeners from passive consumers to active community members. Furthermore, it explored how these processes of meaning-making resonate with audiences and contribute to the formation of podcasting communities in the Cuban context.

The data collection period commenced in January 2024 and concluded in March 2024. During this time, seventeen face-to-face interviews were conducted, in addition to eight virtual interviews conducted via Zoom (5), Telegram (3) and questionnaires (2). It is noteworthy that eight out of eleven participants that took part in virtual interviews do not reside on the island permanently. This is a salient aspect that illuminates the Cuban context and the migratory element that intersects Cuban podcasting.

The face-to-face interviews were conducted in various locations, predominantly in Havana (15), Matanzas (1), and Paris (1), due to the residence of one interviewee in Havana-Paris. The decision to travel for these interviews was made in recognition of the significance attributed to in-person interviews and the potential for richer non-verbal communication clues (McIntosh and Morse, 2015) during live interactions.

The participants in this study are podcasting media practitioners, including Cuban podcast hosts, producers, and editors (see Fig. 3.7). This selection aligns with the aim of understanding the creative dynamics of podcast production on the island through the experiences of these creators. The sample includes podcasters who began their work in different years, with some starting in 2019 and 2020, while others began in 2022 and 2023. This variation enables an examination of motivations and perspectives across different

stages of the Cuban podcasting movement, providing insights into how the medium has evolved over time in the Cuban context.

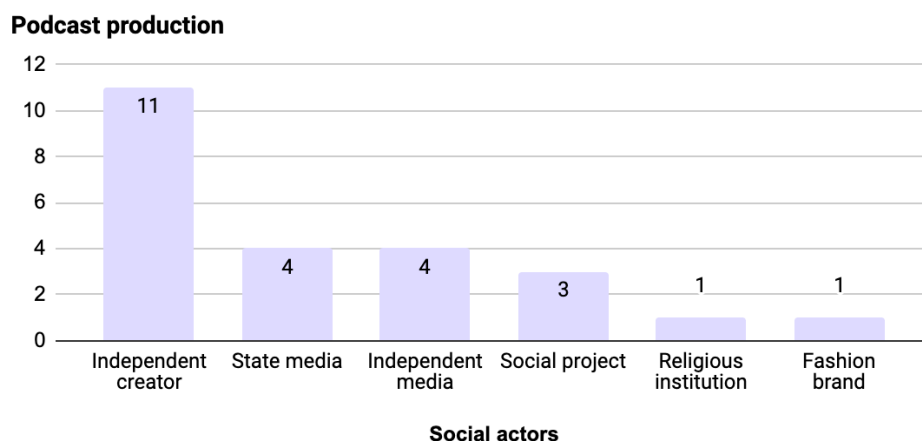


Figure 3.7 – Social actors behind podcast production

Participants were contacted by email or direct message on social media (see [Appendix C.1](#)). In addition, a snowballing process was used to gain access to other podcasters, with participants acting as conduits. For example, Dachelys facilitated access to *La Escuelita* (The Little School) and *El Descanso* (The Rest), as well as Raúl Soublett from *En Estéreo Podcast* (In Stereo Podcast).

In the case of Edilberto Carmona, Deputy Director of *Ideas Multimedios*, the access was facilitated through a journalist colleague who works in the media and served as a communication bridge. A similar scenario was observed in the case of Julio A. Fernández Estrada, whose participation was limited to answering a questionnaire. The communication with this podcaster was facilitated by a mutual acquaintance. Finally, it is important to note that interviews with podcasters associated with state or independent media did not require any special permission.

3.8.3.1 Interviewees Profiles

Twenty-seven interviews were conducted with a total of 32 participants, as some interviews had two or more participants (see Table 3.6). Of the 32 participants, seventeen identified as female, thirteen as male and two as non-binary (see Fig. 3.8). In terms of gender composition, Cuba had a ratio of 102.7 females to 100 males, as reported by the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO)². Consequently, the gender ratio of the sample is skewed towards a higher proportion of women than the average (13.35 women x 10 men).

² Perfil de País - Cuba: [https://hia.paho.org/es/perfiles-de-pais/cuba#:~:text=Asimismo%2C%20en%20el%202024%20se,del%20pa%C3%ADs%20\(figura%201\)](https://hia.paho.org/es/perfiles-de-pais/cuba#:~:text=Asimismo%2C%20en%20el%202024%20se,del%20pa%C3%ADs%20(figura%201))

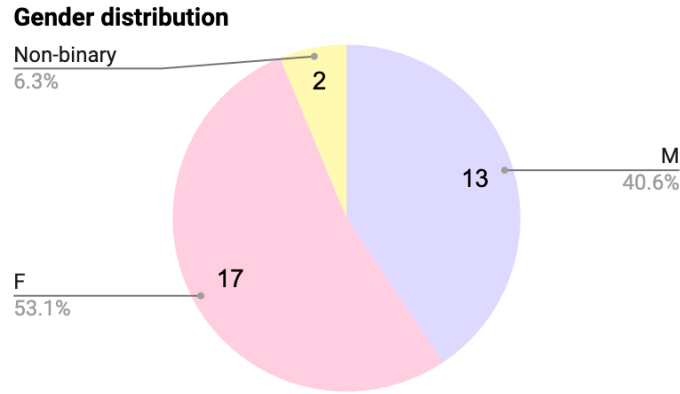


Figure 3.8 – Interviews gender representation

In terms of age groups, the 30-39 age group (19) was the largest in the sample, outnumbering the 20-29 (6) and 40-49 (6) groups, as well as one participant in the 50-59 age group (see Fig. 3.9). Previous studies have shown that most English-speakers podcasters are aged 35 or older, with the highest concentration in the 35–44 age range, and relatively few over the age of 65 (Markman, 2012). In Brazil³, for instance, recent data for 2024–2025 indicates a similar trend, with 37.36% of podcasters falling within the 35–44 age group, followed by 25.86% in the 25–34 age range. According to the Spanish-language podcast and radio platform iVoox in the first “Annual Report on the State of Podcast Creation in Spanish” (2023), the profile of Spanish-speaking podcast creators is consolidated among men, with 58% of male podcasters, who are also between 35 and 54 years old.

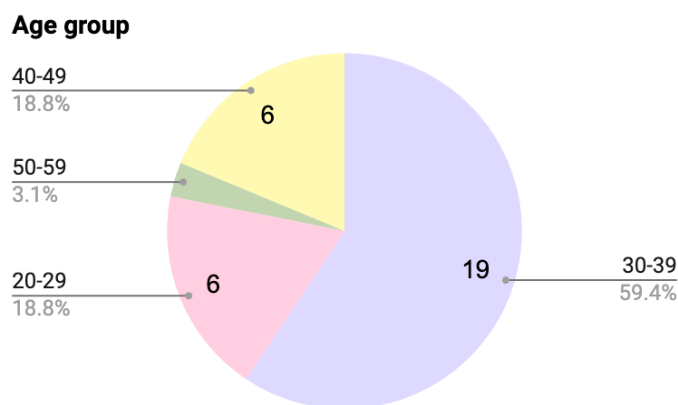


Figure 3.9 – Interviewees’ age groups

The face-to-face interviews were audio-recorded using a Zoom portable recorder. Interview locations were carefully chosen to avoid settings such as hotels or other environments that might cause interviewees to feel intimidated or uncomfortable. Consequently, the interviews were conducted in public places, including cafes (n = 9), workplaces (n = 6), and

³ ABPOD. (2024/2025). Podpesquisa 2024-2025 produtores (Pesquisa N o 1; p. 7). ABPOD. <https://abpod.org/podpesquisa/>

the podcaster's home (n = 2), with the latter options being selected to accommodate interviewees with limited availability.

Name	Podcast	Date	Location	Duration
Carlos Lugones	<i>La Mente Creativa</i>	05/07/2023	Online (Zoom)	01:00:00
Sixela Ametller	<i>Empoderadas</i>	20/10/2023	Online (Zoom)	01:18:00
Arletis Arango	<i>Palabras con sentido</i>	13/01/2025	Online (Zoom)	01:03:00
Julio A. Fernández Estrada	<i>Lecturas al oído</i>	25/01/2024	Questionnaire	-
Albert Cabrera	<i>Tecno Code Live (Club calvOS 360)</i>	06/02/2024	Online (Telegram)	02:02:48
Dachelys Valdés Moreno	<i>Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio</i>	18/02/2024	Online (Telegram)	01:36:00
Edilberto Carmona	<i>Cubadebate</i>	20/02/2024	In person (Havana)	01:00:00
Claudia Yilén	<i>Cositos Radiales</i>	20/02/2024	In person (Havana)	01:22:00
Liliam Marrero				
Yerisleydys Menéndez	<i>Oye te cuento</i>	21/02/2024	Online (Zoom)	00:45:00
Boris Leiva	<i>Flash Musical</i>	23/02/2024	In person (Havana)	02:12:00
Laura Salas	<i>Emprende Verde</i>	01/02/2024	In person (Paris)	00:52:33
Maria Carla Figuerola	<i>Emprende Verde</i>	23/02/2024	In person (Havana)	00:55:43
Raul Soublett Lopez	<i>En Estéreo Podcast</i>	25/02/2024	Online (Telegram)	00:50:05
William Bello	<i>En Plural</i>	26/02/2024	In person (Havana)	00:45:00
Yuliet Villares	<i>Voces Ecuménicas</i>	26/02/2024	In person (Havana)	00:56:00
Lilian Sarmiento	<i>Marzo Literario</i>	16/01/2024	Online (Microsoft Teams)	00:45:00
Erick Méndez	<i>Marzo Literario</i>	27/02/2024	In person (Havana)	00:44:00
Cristian Martínez	<i>Píldoras Buen Idioma</i>	27/02/2024	In person (Havana)	01:10:00
Allison Norch	<i>ZonaoClichés con Allison</i>	01/03/2024	In person (Havana)	01:09:00
Lisy Romero				
Yeye Hernández	<i>La Escuelita</i>	01/03/2024	In person (Havana)	00:45:00
Alejandro Gómez	<i>Cinemapilia</i>	08/03/2024	In person (Matanzas)	00:46:13
Katia Sánchez	<i>El Pitch</i>	11/03/2024	In person (Havana)	01:02:00
Yadira Álvarez				
Lien Real				
Rafa Escalona	<i>El Descanso</i>	12/03/2024	In person (Havana)	01:16:00
Daniel Triana	<i>La Potajera</i>	14/03/2024	In person (Havana)	00:58:39
Giselle Ordoñez	<i>Team Serendipia</i>	14/03/2024	In person (Havana)	00:33:10
Leire Fernández				
Alejandro Arango	<i>Buzón de Voz de Clandestina</i>	21/03/2024	In person (Havana)	00:42:17
Yohan A. Rodríguez	<i>Podcast producer</i>	07/11/2023	Questionnaire	-

Table 3.7 – Interviews details

In the context of public spaces, a major challenge was to isolate the city's ambient noise from the recorded interviews. Havana is a very noisy city and noise is an integral part of the auditory environment. However, as far as the researcher could tell, this did not have a detrimental effect on the pace of the interview or the interviewees. Before beginning each

interview, I carried out a meticulous sound check to ensure the quality of the recording and the clarity of the interviewee's voice. I also took handwritten notes, but these were secondary as my focus was on attentive listening. These handwritten notes also included post-interview reflections, which guided the familiarisation process in the coding phase of the thematic analysis.

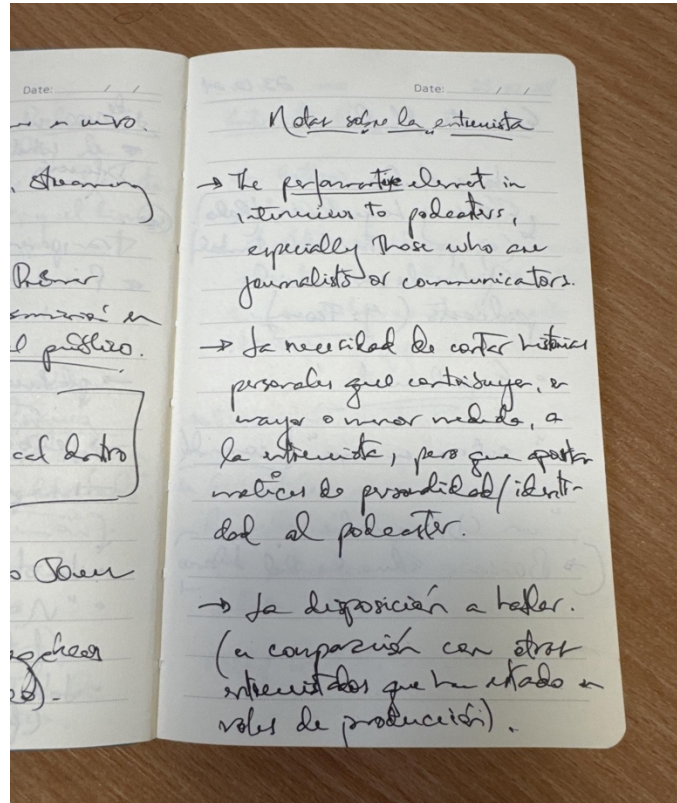


Figure 3.10 – Research notes after the interviews

Notes on the interview:

- *The performative element in interviews with podcasters, especially those who are journalists or communicators.*
- *The need to tell personal stories that contribute more or less to the interview but bring nuances of personality/identity to the podcaster.*
- *The willingness to talk (compared to other interviewees who have been in production roles).*

For instance, following the interview with Allison Norch, creator of *ZonaoClichés* (Cliché-Free Zone), I recorded the following observation:

‘Sus brazos abiertos y alzados. La forma en que sacudía el pelo de sus hombros’ en referencia a su personalidad histriónica (‘Her arms open and raised. The way she shook her hair off her shoulders’ when speaking about her ‘histrionic’ personality). (Researcher’s notes).

At the conclusion of each interview, I transferred the recording to the Drive folder designated for data collection, and a copy to a hard drive reserved exclusively for housing this information. This practice was primarily driven by connectivity issues, which

occasionally rendered the uploading of a 1GB file to the cloud from Havana challenging. Moreover, the existence of this copy on the hard drive served as a crucial backup, ensuring the security of the information against potential loss.

Following the completion of each interview, the recorder USB memory was erased to ensure that no information was lost. This procedure was implemented to prevent any potential issues with the loss of data.

3.8.3.2 Data Consistency and Validation

In addition to the recording, I used a printed question guide to ensure all participants were asked the same questions. I listened attentively to avoid repeating questions that participants had already answered. However, when participants provided partial responses, I asked the question again to clarify their answers and to maximise the comparability of the data across interviewees.

The validation of the data was carried out through a thorough review of the annotations and the aggregated information extracted from the analytical listening form. This process facilitated a comparative analysis between the podcast content and the information provided by the participants. A key aspect to highlight is the inherently performative nature of podcasters, as their level of comfort within the interview setting played a crucial role in analysing their participation.

To address any potential bias, I established neutrality through the adoption of a non-judgemental tone and body language. I was very conscious of avoiding affirming or dismissing participants' responses but instead keeping a neutral attitude towards their responses.

I also sought to avoid imposing preconceived notions of community or co-creation on the interviewees. Therefore, the term 'community' was only introduced if the interviewee themselves used it. If the term was not mentioned by the interviewee, I refrained from introducing it and made a conscious effort to use the same terminology that the podcasters used when referring to their listeners, whether it was 'audience', 'listeners', 'community' or other terms. This approach ensured that the language used in the interviews remained consistent with the podcasters' own conceptualisations of their relationship with their listeners, and reinforced my research ethical practice. Nevertheless, I did offer commentary on their responses during the initial interviews, a practice that I subsequently reduced and limited as the interviews progressed. I refrained from leading questions and terms, opting instead for an open-ended, exploratory approach to questioning. Furthermore,

unanticipated responses were permitted, and participants were encouraged to reflect on the questions, with silence serving as a valuable resource for elaborating answers. It was notable that some participants incorporated personal anecdotes that might have appeared to be unrelated to the main topic, but which ultimately proved to be valuable in illustrating motivations, values and meanings that were inextricably linked to the podcast's central themes.

3.8.4 Focus Groups

Conducting focus groups includes conceptualisation, facilitation skills, recruitment of participants, and analysis and reporting of results (Krueger, 1989). These guidelines set out the procedure for conducting two focus groups with podcast listeners in Cuba: one in Matanzas (five participants) and one virtual session on Telegram (three participants). In addition, two individual interviews were conducted with listeners in Havana. It is worth noting that both individual participants also had experience as podcasters, which provided a valuable opportunity to explore their perspectives from the dual roles of creator and listener.

While the study does not claim to be statistically representative, it is important to emphasise that the research did not focus exclusively on the Havana experience. Havana, with an estimated population of 1.8 million, offers a significant diversity of experiences within a single territory. As highlighted by Prates *et al.* (2015), the effective use of focus groups requires researchers to possess qualities such as creativity, sensitivity and cultural awareness, as well as thorough preparation and knowledge of the technique. Therefore, in order to avoid an overly Havana-centric approach, one focus group was held in the province of Matanzas. The decision to hold this focus group in Matanzas was also motivated by the fact that three of the podcasters interviewed in this research are from this province.

Participants were recruited through emails to Cuban podcasters, word of mouth, and the social media accounts of the researcher and podcasters. Participants read, discussed when necessary, and signed plain language statements and consent forms, in person or through Google Forms, which allowed the collection of demographic data such as age group and gender. Participants were asked to share their opinions on the definition of podcasting, the point at which they started listening to podcasts, and the motivations behind it. In addition, participants were encouraged to share their preferences and consumption habits regarding both Cuban and international podcasts. No material or financial benefits were offered to participants for their contributions.

One primary concern was the potential impact of the social context on focus groups' participation. Cuba's contemporary context presents several challenges to the recruitment of participants, with focus group attendance affected by power shortages and transportation issues. Reflecting on how the social environment variables could either enhance or constrain the dynamics of the groups, in the case of the focus groups conducted in Cuba, the contextual and technological variables appeared to exert a greater influence than the geographical location, age groups, levels of education, and professional roles of the participants.

As Wilkinson (1998) observes, focus groups represent an efficacious methodology for eliciting individual understandings and examining the manner in which these are negotiated within a social context. Conversely, virtual focus groups present certain advantages, including a reduced burden on participants, increased accessibility and the ability to attract more diverse samples (Turney and Pocknee, 2005; Johnson and Odhner, 2021). The decision to conduct the study through a virtual discussion group on Telegram was made in recognition of the socio-economic conditions that prevail in Cuba. This approach also served as a strategy to maximise the participation of Cuban podcast listeners, both inside and outside the island. For this study, the use of virtual focus groups offered a solution to the logistical challenges associated with in-person sessions, providing an efficient tool for data collection (Johnson and Odhner, 2021).

In summary, the focus groups allowed for a recollection of Cuban listeners' reflections on their relationship with podcasts, specifically Cuban shows, and their relationship with the podcast experience and other listeners. These focus groups also enabled the collection of preliminary demographic data and consumption patterns of Cuban podcast listeners, areas that have not yet been studied in Cuba.

3.8.4.1 Participants Profiles

The focus groups were designed for listeners of Cuban podcasts, with the aim of understanding their motivations, preferred Cuban podcasts, modes of interaction with these narratives, as well as their assessments of the podcasting movement on the island.

I implemented several participant recruitment strategies, including my personal social networks where a poster (See Fig. 3.11) created specifically for each focus group was posted (see [Appendix C.2](#)).



Figure 3.11 – Recruitment poster for Havana's focus groups

Additionally, a Microsoft sign-up form was created ([Appendix C.3](#)) to allow interested individuals to confirm their participation. In the case of Havana, due to the difficulties in transportation, it was deemed essential to offer two locations for the focus groups, with the objective of maximising accessibility for the participants. Consequently, two locations were selected: one in the city centre, in El Vedado, within the municipality of Plaza de la Revolución. This meeting was scheduled for 4:00pm, a time considered convenient for those returning from work. The second location was provided by podcaster Yuliet Villares, who kindly agreed to provide a classroom at the Dr. Martin Luther King Memorial Centre, located in the Marianao municipality west of Havana. The registration form recorded 23 interested parties, 17 from Havana, 5 from Matanzas and one from Miami.



Figure 3.12 – Registration form for Havana's focus groups

Some podcasters, who had previously participated in the initial data collection stage through semi-structured interviews, agreed to share the poster on their podcasts' social networks as well as their personal profiles. This sponsorship process played a significant role in disseminating the focus groups across various podcast channels and audiences.

Of the total participants in the focus groups, five were from Matanzas, two were from Havana, and three participated virtually. Among the latter, one was from Havana, one from Ciego de Ávila, and one was residing outside Cuba at the time of the focus group. This sample does not align with the overall population distribution of the country, which is particularly noteworthy as it offers an alternative, non-Havana-centred perspective. At the same time, it highlights the study's limitations in terms of the relatively lower level of participation from Havana. The significant representation of Matanzas, accounting for 50% of the sample, allows for a more in-depth exploration of this specific context. Additionally, all participants were from urban areas. It is important to acknowledge the disparities between urban centres across the country, particularly in comparison to Havana. As noted in the literature, Havana benefits from greater technological and socio-cultural access than other provinces, a factor that inevitably shapes the podcasting landscape in Cuba.

Participant preferred pseudonym	Gender	Age group	Locality	Educational background
María	F	18-19	Matanzas	High school degree or equivalent
Isis	F	20-29	Matanzas	High school degree or equivalent
Pedro	M	20-29	Matanzas	Bachelor's degree
Javier	M	20-29	Matanzas	Bachelor's degree
Futon	M	20-29	La Habana	High school degree or equivalent
Sonia	F	20-29	Online	Bachelor's degree
Sandra	F	30-39	Matanzas	Bachelor's degree
Zea	F	30-39	La Habana	Bachelor's degree
MsDup	F	40-49	Online	High school degree or equivalent
MilaG	F	50-59	Online	Bachelor's degree

Table 3.8 – Focus Group participants demographic data

The face-to-face interviews were recorded using a Zoom device recorder. In selecting the interview locations, it was essential to ensure that the spaces were comfortable to foster

interaction between participants. In Matanzas, the focus group was held at the Cuban Association of Artisans and Craftsmen (ACAA), while in Havana, the interviews took place at the Dr Martin Luther King Memorial Centre and at the literary café *Cuba Libro* (Calle 24 and 19, Vedado).

Challenges

The biggest challenge encountered during the data collection was conducting the focus groups in Havana. For instance, on the day scheduled for the discussion group at the literary café *Cuba Libro*, a city-wide power cut occurred from 8 am to 3 pm. Although fifteen individuals had registered, only one person attended. This situation posed a significant challenge for the research, but it can be attributed to several factors that characterise the current Cuban context. The ongoing transport issues in Havana, which have worsened in recent months, coupled with power outages, directly impact people's ability to attend and engage in participatory activities, particularly those that are non-profit in nature.

On a positive note, both participants present had been involved in the creation of a podcast, one at an early stage of the process. Their participation in the research stemmed from a curiosity to learn more about podcasting in Cuba and to gather best practices from the conversation, highlighting the existing interest in the subject. In response to this situation, I opted to organise a virtual discussion group, which saw participation from three individuals.

3.8.4.2 Data Consistency and Validation

In addition to the recording, I had a questionnaire printed to ensure that the core questions were the same for each group. At the beginning of the focus group, I invited each participant to contribute to break the ice of the conversation. Although most participants responded individually, the group conversation dynamic was achieved when they responded to each other and the researcher became an observer of this group conversation dynamic.

Drawing on both experiences, I reflect on focus groups as a qualitative method that is complex to coordinate and anticipate. However, it is a method that not only allows for the collection of participants' experiences and impressions on a specific topic but also reveals the interactions between them, transforming this communicative exchange into a moment of individual and collective learning for both participants and the researcher. Consequently, the impact of this method extends beyond the mere collection of information, facilitating an exchange of knowledge, good practices, and experiences.

To ensure the validity of the data, I refrained from commenting on participants' responses and maintained a neutral tone and body language throughout the discussions and individual

interviews. To balance the interactions and prevent disproportionate weighting of contributions, I actively facilitated the conversation, occasionally encouraging less vocal participants to engage more, thereby ensuring a more equitable distribution of responses.

I also allowed space for follow-up questions and reflected on expected responses, encouraging participants to elaborate and engage with each other's contributions. Whilst remaining alert to off-topic conversations, I carefully redirected the discussion when necessary, ensuring that valuable tangential insights were not dismissed, but included in the analysis of the data.

3.8.5 Locating the Researcher within the Research

Sound is important. Sound memories and soundscapes are key elements of memory-building in my personal life.

I am a Cuban woman: heterosexual, journalist, researcher. An islander. I come from a developing country located in the Caribbean Sea, a socialist nation that has been navigating a capitalist world since 1959. I have undertaken my doctoral studies in a foreign nation, in a different language, on another island 7,000 km away from my homeland. I am now also a migrant (there is pain in this sentence, a connotation of loss, an expectation of found-ness).

My interactions with participants were not influenced by gender or sexual orientation, neither theirs nor mine. I respected their chosen pronouns and sought to represent their identities as faithfully as possible. In the analysis and discussion of findings (Chapter 8), I reflect on how their identities may have shaped the topics they chose to explore in their podcasts, and how their gender might have influenced their approaches to community-building.

I am *mulata*, although I do not feel racialised, not in my institution, nor in this country. However, I am sympathetic to others who have been hurt because of this, who have struggled because of this, who have left because of this.

I am atheist.

I have never considered myself a podcaster, although I had a podcast called *Cositos Radiales* (Radio Thingies). This project inspired my doctoral proposal, prompted by the possibilities it unlocked through its collaborative approach. *Cositos* brought stories together, brought people together. It became a creative exercise, a social experiment, a listening/storytelling community. This experience, which is included in the research sample, allows me to contribute to critical research from multiple perspectives: creator, listener, and researcher.

I bring to this study my belief in the power of communication to promote community growth and societal development, a belief shared by most of my participants. As one of the podcasters stated, they are helping to repair Cuba's "social fabric" by providing a platform for shared experiences and struggles, and a way to forge emotional connections with others.

I believe in the power of storytelling, and in the importance of stories, sounds, and voices in building community and identity, as well as in preserving and transmitting the nation's cultural memory. Three of my participants also viewed podcasting as an instrument of oral history, a means of capturing the memory of the nation during specific events, or of creating archives to be consulted in the future.

I still believe in José Martí's dream for Cuba: the aspiration of being an independent, dignified nation for all Cubans. For the good of all. With all of us.

My research captures a temporary soundscape of podcasting in this Caribbean island, localised and entangled in the voices and experiences of my participants, as well as the theories and concepts that inform my understanding of the phenomena. I believe my research may find commonalities with community theories, identity theories, and/or development communication paradigms, particularly participatory theories.

My understanding of communication as a social service aligns with the socialist principles of communication at the service of the people. I inherited this positionality from Cuba's historical background, my family principles, and my belief that the media's prime responsibility is to the truth, which, always, must be to the people.

Recruiting participants (podcasters) was not a difficult task, largely due to the use of snowball sampling techniques and the participants' willingness to contribute to the study. Reflecting on this process, four of the participants were already part of my personal network, one being the co-creator of *Cositos Radiales*, and the others friends from work or university. I had no prior contact with the remaining interviewees. With the exception of two interviews, in which participants had limited availability or offered brief responses, most were in-depth, extended, and conducted in a mutually comfortable atmosphere. Only one prospective participant declined to take part after initially agreeing to do so.

I position myself as an insider/outsider researcher. I am an insider by virtue of being Cuban and a native Spanish speaker. I possess the cultural access and linguistic competence to interpret the nuances and subtleties in the language and discourses used by my participants, particularly expressions that may be difficult to translate without the accompanying cultural

insight. These native expressions act as markers of identity, fostering a sense of shared belonging and positioning us as equals in terms of citizenship and national identity.

At the same time, I am also an outsider researcher because my project is based in a foreign university, and I do not currently live in Cuba. Considering how participants —particularly those still living on the island— might perceive me, some may view me as privileged due to conducting my doctoral research abroad on a full-time scholarship, and researching a topic such as podcasting, which is not currently among the immediate priorities for the average Cuban (such as securing food, electricity, or internet access). Transparency proved crucial in mitigating any potential power differentials arising from these circumstances.

I treasure people's stories. They are constructed truths, confided in transient intimacies, grounded in an unspoken trust between interviewer and interviewee. While the interviewees are the subjects of inquiry, they also perceive the potential social impact the research might have for them and other podcasters.

“This very work you're doing. Do you know how many Cuban podcasters are going to come your way now? Plenty. Wouldn't it be great if, at some point, all of us, maybe not meeting face to face, but meeting on Telegram, on WhatsApp, saying, ‘Hey, what are we going to do? Why are we going to let this die?’” (Interview, Albert Cabrera, 2024)

My participants have not been heavily interviewed before; therefore, there was a genuine interest in discussing the work they have been doing. I reflected on how this study became a form of validation for them, entangled (and accomplished) through the interviews, and also through their inclusion in a doctoral thesis.

I did not introduce myself as a podcaster at the beginning of the interviews, but rather as a researcher. My intention was to encourage participants to articulate their own notions of podcasting and to avoid assumptions based on a perceived mutual understanding between peers. I wanted them to map the medium through their own experiences and trajectories. However, I did share that I had a podcast with some participants during the interview, or at the end of the conversation, when the opportunity naturally arose.

I chose to prioritise my role as a researcher, focusing on establishing trust with participants by showing a genuine interest in their work, rather than merely “extracting” information. My background as a Cuban journalist facilitated the conduct of semi-structured interviews and focus groups, as I have gained expertise in interviewing and radio production through my work at various local media outlets. However, the distinctions between interviews for journalism and those for research involve different positionalities, which I have learned to

navigate and reconcile within myself throughout the study: do not let them drift too far from the research questions, but let them talk. Listen, attentively. I also understood that, despite the absence of material benefit, there was an unspoken transaction: they provided the data, and I gave them my time, attention (which some had not previously received), and validation.

“And that’s how I see Cuban podcasting, not necessarily working in Cuba. I mean, you’re doing a thesis far away from Cuba, about Cuba. And that’s the whole point, isn’t it? That there are people talking about Cuba —or not— but Cuban people making podcasts from anywhere in the world.” (Interview, Katia Sánchez, 2024)

Resilience was essential when recruiting participants for focus groups, as it is rarely a straightforward process. Challenges and less-than-ideal circumstances frequently arise. Making the most of such situations can enhance the quality and depth of the data collected, without compromising its integrity. Like when a seven-hour blackout hinders people’s ability to attend a focus group on a warm afternoon in Havana, and I had to create a poster for social media and organise a virtual focus group to include more listeners in the study.

As a journalist, I have a strong appreciation for people’s quotes. I believe that incorporating my participants’ voices and words was not only significant, but vital, a token of gratitude aligned with collective knowledge principles. Their words evoke places and emotions, contribute to the authenticity of the study, and offer a distinctive imprint of *Cubanía*.

I admire —and sometimes envy— my participants. They have built sound narratives in a distinctive context, with limited resources and endless challenges (technological, financial, political, etc.). They have kept producing podcasts despite all, and through all.

This doctoral research is not political *per se*, but then, what isn’t? The greatest challenge lay in navigating the political dimensions of the study while keeping podcasting communities at its core, remaining faithful to participants’ accounts, and honouring my own research sensibilities. I hope to have captured, with both rigour and sensitivity, a portrait of Cuban podcasting communities, and to proudly present the richness of Cuban sound and storytelling potential.

I conducted my research in full accordance with the principles of research conduct and ethics established by DCU. Participants were offered the right to anonymity to protect them from any potential harm, physical or emotional. However, all chose to use their real names. I introduced myself as a Cuban journalist and researcher, using both surnames in line with Latin American custom (father’s surname followed by mother’s surname).

Participants retained the right to withdraw from the research at any point, during or after the interview, or prior to the submission of the final draft.

The research captures a plurality of views on podcasting in Cuba, and includes a range of political perspectives. It features direct quotes from participants who openly criticise the government and the State, and who call for accountability on issues such as caregiving, LGBTQ+ rights, and human rights.

The study includes podcasts produced by a variety of social actors, from state-run media to independent outlets such as *El Toque* and *Periodismo de Barrio*. These independent media platforms have been openly criticised on national television and in Cuban digital media, and their journalists are subject to political harassment by State security forces, as documented in the research.

The study deliberately includes and reflects the diversity and plurality of contemporary Cuba, staying faithful to participants and their individual experiences. While it is true that some members of my family hold active roles in the Cuban government, a factor I considered throughout the research process - particularly during interviews - this study demonstrates, based on the points outlined above, that there was no external influence on either data collection or data analysis.

As a Cuban-woman-journalist-researcher-islander, I borrow from my participants a pool of knowledge, shaped by their own experiences and beliefs, as well as the content they have produced. Aligned with Lévy (1997) and Jenkins' (2006) ideas of collective knowledge, we assemble a piece of a puzzle, specifically situated in time and space, made possible only through the contribution of each of their voices.

3.9 Thematic Analysis

Recent research explores the use of thematic analysis in podcast studies across various domains. In medical education, creating psychiatric podcasts enhanced students' learning experiences and highlighted the need for clearer production guidelines (Brew-Girard *et al.*, 2023). Analysis of the "Serial" podcast demonstrated its use of radio language elements and narrative techniques to engage listeners, positioning it as a poligeneric format (Vásquez and Castro, 2021). Podcasts are also examined as socio-cultural and political phenomena, with research emphasising their role in public communication, expert opinion dissemination, and audience engagement through targeted content selection (Li and Ensafjoo, 2025). These studies collectively underscore the versatility of podcasts as both educational tools

and platforms for diverse discourse, while also highlighting the potential for further research in this rapidly evolving medium.

This research followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework to identify themes, patterns within the data collected in the interviews to summarise and interpret the information and translate it into research findings.

The study conducted a semantic thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) focusing on the 'meanings of the data' and the interviewee's experience through what has been said. The research adhered to the thematic analysis approach outlined by Maguire and Delahunt (2017), which consists of several key steps. First, a comprehensive review of the data was undertaken, including the transcripts of semi-structured interviews and focus groups, as well as my notes from the analytical listening form. Second, semantic codes were generated through a systematic and purposeful organisation of the data, with codes being constructed and refined iteratively throughout the coding process. Finally, themes were identified by outlining patterns and connections emerging across the codes.

The thematic analysis was carried out using a combination of inductive (themes constructed from the interviews) and deductive (themes emerging from the literature review) methods. It included the transcripts of twenty-seven interviews, the transcripts of two focus groups and the transcripts of two individual interviews with Cuban listeners.

The following section outlines the various steps taken to complete the thematic analysis. First, the data were sorted, followed by the construction of initial codes. A second round of coding was then undertaken, after which the themes were refined. Finally, patterns and connections were identified and drawn to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the data.

3.9.1 Coding

Coding is a crucial process in qualitative data analysis that involves the systematic categorisation and thematic organisation of collected information (Stuckey, 2015; Adu, 2019). The process typically involves reading through the data, creating a narrative, categorising the data into codes, and using notes for clarification (Stuckey, 2015). Researchers may use predetermined codes or emergent codes, often using a combination of both (Stuckey, 2015; Williams and Moser, 2019). Various tools and software such as Microsoft Word, NVivo and QDA Miner Lite can be used to assist in the coding process (Adu, 2019). The iterative nature of coding allows for the development of themes and categories, allowing the researcher to construct meaning from the data (Williams and Moser, 2019). Interestingly, qualitative coding techniques can also be applied to

quantitative and mixed data, a process known as ‘qualitising’, which can lead to richer meta-inferences in mixed methods research (Saldaña, 2021).

After reviewing the transcripts, I imported them into the qualitative analysis software NVivo. I imported twenty-five transcribed interviews and two questionnaires from Julio A. Fernández Estrada and Yohan Ahmed, who is also a Cuban podcast producer and researcher.

The first step involved preparing the data. I transcribed twenty-five semi-structured interviews, two focus groups, and two individual interviews with Cuban listeners. Initially, transcription was done manually, and later supported by Turbo Scribe software for automatic transcription. Once transcribed, I carefully reviewed and edited each transcript. This process not only ensured accuracy but also offered a first opportunity to engage closely with the recordings, facilitating an initial familiarisation with the data. The transcripts included key oral cues, such as intonation, pauses, and silences, that contributed to the interpretive depth of the analysis by signalling the meaning or emphasis behind certain expressions. These annotations were crucial for subsequent thematic development during the coding phase.

Arletis:

¿Por el podcast? No, querida. [se ríe] Para nada, para nada. De hecho, como fue prácticamente mi obligación, en vez de escribir comentarios, reportajes, informaciones para el periódico, eso [el podcast] era lo que hacía. Me dedicaba completamente a eso, incluso después le hicimos como versiones impresas a los episodios, y salían en la última página del periódico. Pero no, no, yo no recibía ningún tipo de remuneración por eso. Simplemente era mi salario, mi salario en el periódico se justificaba con los cuatro episodios que tenía que entregar mensualmente.

Figure 3.13 – Extract from the interview with Arletis Arango.

Brackets [] are used to indicate commentary or actions performed by the interviewee during speech - for example, [she laughs] - or to provide clarification of references, such as [the podcast].

Dachelys:

25:09 Yo creo que lo que nos distinguía era que estábamos tratando un tema que yo no sé si alguien lo estaba haciendo a la par que nosotras, pero al menos yo en la búsqueda que hice no encontré - que estábamos hablando sobre racismo, y sobre racismo desde ese punto de vista vinculado con la belleza, vinculado con la autoestima, y vinculado con el cabello. Quizás la gente no había encontrado otro espacio donde escuchar una historia de gente o de personas que tuvieran experiencias muy parecidas o iguales a las tuyas, y creo que no, también desde el punto de vista de los famosos. Porque yo me puedo sentar quizás con una amiga mía, y podemos recordar cómo nos hacían laciarnos el pelo, y cómo no nos gustaba, o si nos gustaba, y el derris me hizo una postilla o no me la hizo, y me dolía y me ardía, lo que sea... Pero, yo creo que la fuerza que tenía el testimonio de gente como Daymé, de gente como Yessica Borroto, del mismo Cimafunk, de Yissy, era como una cosa bien emocional, que conectaba mucho con la gente y decir: "A todas nos ha pasado". Y un poco el análisis de ahí venía como para mí también que la gente podía percibir, aunque no fuera como explícito, venir desde: **"Esto es un problema nacional, esto no solo me pasó a mí, no es que mi familia lo veía así. Todo un país entero estaba diciendo que tú no eres linda, que tú no eres bella, que tú tienes que cambiar, transformar tu cuerpo para que te podamos querer y para que te podamos aceptar."** Y yo creo que eso fue un punto distintivo. 26:58

Nosotros también intentamos con varios de los artistas que entrevistamos que estuvieran, hicimos audiochats [en Telegram] y los invitamos, para que la comunidad les pudiera hacer preguntas. Y a lo mejor hay gente que no tenía chance de conversar con Saray Vargas por la calle porque no la conocen, o porque les da pena, pero ella estaba ahí en el audio chat y la gente le hacía preguntas y ella respondía. Y conversó con ellos, y la gente lo mismo hacía preguntas en audio, que las hacía escrita, y ella iba leyendo el chat, o yo se lo iba leyendo la pregunta para que ella pudiera seguir conversando y no perdiera el hilo. Pero ese momento de conexión para la gente fue súper importante porque yo creo que les acercaba - también a los artistas a veces los vemos y a veces es verdad que son un poco inalcanzables - y yo creo que traerlos a dialogar con la gente fue una cosa que nos distinguió.



Leysi Rubio Arevich
13 May 2024

Las narrativas nacionales, cimentadas en estereotipos culturales y estéticos, reproducidos de forma lingüística y práctica. Y como este podcast, mediante los testimonios de personalidades destacadas, proponen narrativas ausentes dentro del panorama mediático cubano, y desde la oralidad y el intercambio, proponen un diálogo sobre el racismo, y sobre la identidad afrocubana.

Figure 3.14 – Extract from the interview with Dachelys Valdés Moreno.

This comment was added to the transcript, which subsequently informed the development of the *counter-narratives* code.

Following this review, the transcripts were imported into the qualitative analysis software NVivo for systematic coding and analysis.

To mitigate risks, instruments were combined, documenting code rationale and analysis processes, triangulation, referential adequacy, among others (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Following these recommendations, I developed a coding book, to describe and identify each code and its meanings in the data.

I also kept a research journal during the thematic analysis phase, where notes, ideas, and quotes from the interviews were recorded. This journal provided a space to revisit the interviews and offered an opportunity to reflect on the coding and analysis process, ensuring a more nuanced understanding of the data.

Nvivo

NVivo is a powerful software tool for qualitative data analysis that has gained widespread acceptance in educational and social science research (Hilal and Alabri, 2013). It provides a workspace for researchers to store, manage, query and analyse different types of unstructured data, including text, images, audio and video (Phillips and Lu, 2018).

After importing the data, I used Nvivo's *autocoding* by speaker feature to create *case classifications* and identify each participant, which was particularly useful for interviews with two or more participants. This feature also allowed for the identification and

assignment of attributes to each participant, allowing for more detailed analysis of the podcasters and those involved in the creation of these podcasts. These classifications facilitated the creation of demographic attributes for the participants, including age, gender, and place of residence. These demographic details are valuable in contextualising the subjects of my research and unpacking the concept of the Cuban podcaster, both on and off the island.

3.9.1.1 Type of Codes

Thematic analysis uses different types of codes to identify and interpret patterns in qualitative data. Descriptive codes provide a basic overview of the data, capturing simple facts or actions without going into in-depth interpretation. They are often used at the beginning of the analysis to classify simple content. In contrast, interpretative codes go beyond mere description and allow researchers to delve deeper into underlying meanings or themes. These codes help to interpret the data in relation to the research questions and provide a deeper insight into participants' experiences and perceptions (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

In addition to descriptive and interpretive codes, *in vivo* codes capture the exact words or phrases used by participants, ensuring that their voices are authentically preserved (Saldaña, 2021). This type of coding is particularly useful in qualitative research, as it is crucial to preserve the integrity of participants' language.

Process codes describe actions or changes over time, reflecting the dynamic nature of social phenomena, while axial codes link different categories together, providing a more structured understanding of how elements of the data are related. Meanwhile, contextual codes highlight the influence of external factors or the environment in which the data were collected, thus placing the findings in a wider context (Younas *et al.*, 2022). These codes are essential for understanding how contextual elements shape the meaning of the data.

The coding process in thematic analysis is iterative and the codes evolve as the researcher refines his or her understanding of the data, ultimately enabling the researcher to identify significant themes that inform the research findings (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Braun and Clarke, 2017).

3.9.1.2 Stages of Coding

The first stage of the coding cycle, as previously mentioned, was familiarisation with the data, achieved through listening of interviews and focus groups, notes-taking during the process, as well as a first reading of transcripts. During that first reading of transcripts, annotations were taken to highlight important elements to consider during the coding stage.

The coding stage involved the construction of meaning from the data (Saldaña, 2021), which was informed by the theoretical frameworks of community, transmedia storytelling and co-creation that inform the research, alongside the semantics elements that elucidate meaning related to the research questions (see [Appendix E.1](#)).

During this phase, I added new codes and recoded existing ones as I progressed through the data, attaching descriptions to each code as outlined in the codebook. This iterative process was a crucial aspect of the coding stage. The initial phase was considered complete once all transcripts had been fully coded.

To illustrate, in the first stage of the coding cycle, I employed different types of codes:

Type of codes	Examples
Descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2021, p. 94):	Condiciones tecnológicas (Technological conditions)
	Compañía (Company)
	Censura institucional (Institutionalised censorship)
In vivo coding (Saldaña, 2021, p. 137)	“Una forma de no estar solo” (A way of not being alone)
	“Ser parte de algo más grande que tú” (Being part of something bigger than yourself)
	“Una conexión ahí súper femenina” (A deeply feminine connection)
Process codes (Saldaña, 2021, p. 97)	Voicing discontent
	Escuchar al oyente (Listening to the listener)
	Abrir la mente (Foster understanding)

Table 3.9 – Type of codes constructed during the first coding cycle

Subsequently, a second round of coding was conducted to refine and redefine codes. During this round I merged codes, allocated sub-codes and group some related codes. This stage was instrumental in identifying patterns and constructing themes that will be presented and analysed in the subsequent chapters.

The Spanglish *Dilemma*

An important aspect of the coding process is the interchangeable use of Spanish and English simultaneously and in a non-exclusive manner. The coding process can be enhanced through contextual coding, which is particularly useful when working with participants from diverse sociocultural backgrounds. This approach involves preliminary coding in the native language and creating a sociocultural query list to better understand the data's meaning (Younas *et al.*, 2022).

Given that the interviews were conducted in Spanish, that this research takes place in both cultural contexts, and that the researcher is bilingual, it is not unusual for the analysis processes to take place in both languages (Younas *et al.*, 2022), with the aim of identifying the code that best represents the meaning contained in the data. However, the thematic blocks that emerge in the second stage are written in English to facilitate the analysis and subsequent review of this stage. Thus, the transcription and coding process prioritises meaning over words, a method described as “especially suitable for working in two languages with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds” (Mesquita, 2022, p. 74).

Rather than abandoning Spanish early in the coding process, which posed an ethical dilemma given that the research is situated in Cuba and grapples with capturing meaning deeply rooted in the cultural and discursive context, I chose to work bilingually. Embracing my bilingual and bicultural position, I became a bridge between both languages, allowing their semantic meanings to converge, interact, and co-construct understanding.

This is also why I retained podcast names in both Spanish and English. Preserving their original identities was important, as English translations risked overshadowing their original names, and erasing the cultural significance and representation that this research aims to uphold.

3.9.1.3 Identifying themes and patterns in the data

Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as a flexible and systematic approach to identifying, analysing and reporting patterns and themes within data. This process involves coding segments of data based on relevance, grouping similar codes, and refining themes to ensure that they accurately capture the underlying narratives. Themes are not merely descriptive but interpretative, reflecting the researcher's analytical engagement with the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The iterative nature of this approach ensures that themes remain coherent, distinctive and substantively meaningful within the research context.

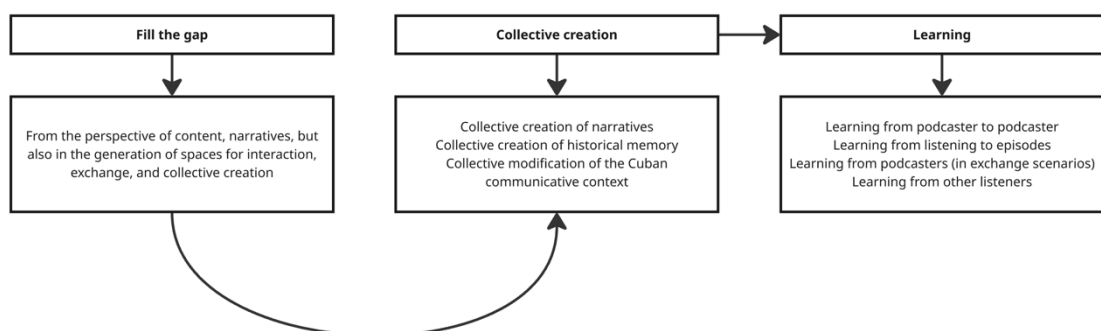


Figure 3.15 – Connecting themes within the data

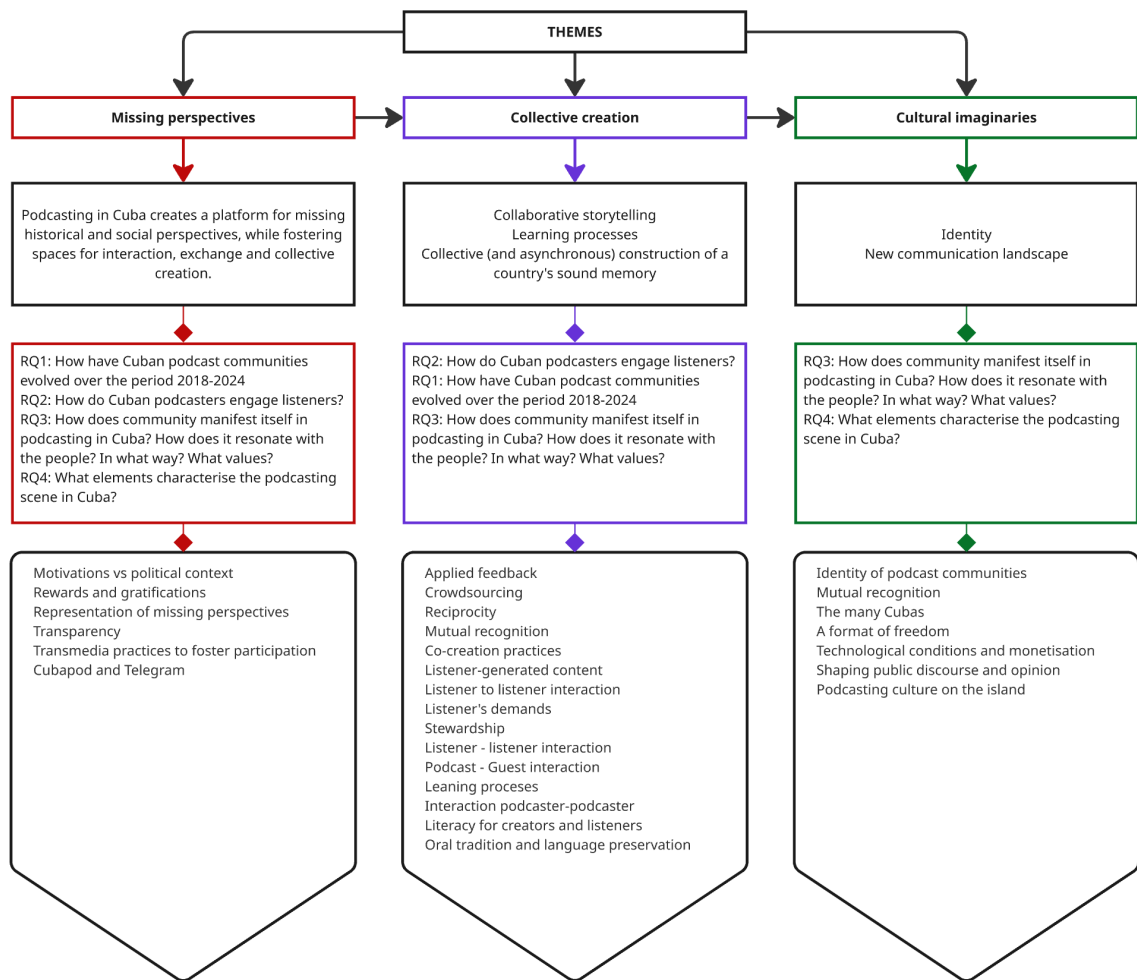


Figure 3.16 – Constructing themes from the data

3.9.2 Conclusion

The selection of methods employed in this study facilitated an in-depth examination of the Cuban podcasting landscape between 2018 and 2024 and its role in fostering and enhancing a sense of community among podcasting media practitioners and listeners. By incorporating listener perspectives, the study provides a comprehensive exploration of both ends of the communication process, enabling an investigation into mutual representation and the impact of interaction in shaping communal aspirations.

The initial phase of analytical listening allowed for a detailed examination of selected Cuban podcasts, focusing on specific elements such as mentions of community, significant oral cues, and reflections on both the listening experience and my role in the research process.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews with Cuban podcasting media practitioners, including hosts, producers, and experts in the field, offered deeper insights into their experiences, motivations, and perspectives. In addition, the study conducted two focus groups and two individual interviews with podcast listeners to explore their motivations, interactions, and perceptions of the Cuban podcasting mediascape.

In summary, a rigorous and systematic methodological approach was employed to uphold the qualitative nature of the research, ensuring the validity of the findings and their contribution to the understanding of podcasting as a space for community-building in Cuba.

4. EMERGENCE AND EVOLUTION OF CUBAN PODCASTING COMMUNITIES OVER THE PERIOD 2018-2024

This chapter is the first of four presenting the findings of the study, organised around the research questions and themes developed through the thematic analysis of the data. The subsequent chapters examine the evolution of podcasting in Cuba from 2018 to 2024 (Chapter 4), the forms of community engagement within podcasting communities (Chapter 5), the participatory practices that foster and strengthen a sense of community in podcasting (Chapter 6), and a comprehensive description of the podcasting scene in Cuba (Chapter 7).

This chapter examines the political, structural and social elements that are cross-cutting to podcasting in Cuba. It also provides an insight into the technological conditions that shape the podcasting landscape in Cuba. This section also addresses the complexities of podcast production and distribution on the island, as well as the role of communication platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram and Instagram.

Finally, the chapter reviews the platforms and spaces that are central to community interaction and growth, including the Cuban podcasting platform, Cubapod, and social media platforms such as Telegram.

4.1 Podcasting Development in Cuba

Prior to 2020, Cuban podcasts were predominantly produced by state and independent media entities. In the case of state media, Cuban radio had already begun to repurpose some of its programmes to the podcast format, and digital media such as *Cubadebate* (Cuba debates) began publishing radio and television programmes in podcast format from Spreaker⁴.

The first record of a Cuban podcast was in 2016, with a programme called *El Trastero* (The Junk Room), produced by the independent magazine Cachivache Media. Subsequent to this, in 2017, the state radio station Radio Rebelde launched *De Cuba y de los Cubanos* (From Cuba and Cubans).

In the case of independent media, podcasts such as *Cafecito informativo sobre Cuba* (Cuban news over coffee) have been running since 2019, with more than 1.5K episodes. *Cafecito informativo* was originally called *Ventana 14* (Window 14) and is part of the blog by Cuban journalist Yoani Sánchez, who comments on major national news and current

⁴Spreaker is a multi-faceted podcast platform that provides both independent content creators and established publishers with the tools and support to launch, grow, and monetize their podcasts easily and fast. Source: The Podcast Show. London, 2025. (<https://www.thepodcastshowlondon.com/partners-profiles/spreaker>).

domestic affairs. Sánchez is a blogger catalogued as “dissident” by the Cuban government, who has received international awards for her critical portrayal of life in the island.

In that same year, the independent media *El Toque* started producing *El Enjambre* (The Swarm), one of the most renowned Cuban podcasts. *El Enjambre* describes itself as ‘Cuba's number one radio disinformation programme’ and it discusses the reality of Cuba, and debates and analyses “the issues and events that shape the contemporary reality” of Cuba. Furthermore, independent podcasting pioneers such as Carlos Richard López and Ernesto Acosta were producing their shows before 2020. Ernesto Acosta is the host of *Como pienso, digo* (As I think, I speak), and founder of the TuPodcast platform, “an amateur podcasting network” where he groups the podcasts he produces or in which he participates. TuPodcast was created in 2018 and currently has 11 podcasts, including *Inmigrantes* (Immigrants), *PodcastInside*, *El Relato* (The Tale), among others. This platform also has an extension called “TuPodcast Community”, where Acosta interacts with his listeners in a forum where users can leave their comments and the podcaster responds on the same platform, as well as other users.

Amid this emergent production, two key factors have significantly contributed to the expansion of podcasting in Cuba: The Covid-19 pandemic and the creation of the Cuban podcasting platform, Cubapod. During the pandemic, Cuba experienced a surge in podcast creation, reflecting a global trend. In 2020 alone, more than 150 podcasts emerged across a range of themes and categories.

This stage was influenced and shaped by the appearance and consolidation of the Cuban podcasting platform Cubapod, a directory of Cuban podcasts that was created in 2020 with the aim of collecting, organising and distributing Cuban podcasts on the web, and also through a bot⁵ on Telegram. This platform served to organise the nascent Cuban podcast movement, by gathering and promoting new podcast creators and domestic shows.

4.1.1 Positioning Podcasting within the Cuban Media Ecosystem

The emergence of Cuban podcasts has generated both opportunities and challenges for the island’s media ecosystem. Some podcasts have identified communication gaps, addressing the specific needs of population segments that remain underserved or overlooked by state media. In this context, podcasting plays four roles within the Cuban communication system: it responds to the communication needs of specific groups, offers new sources of information, disseminates content, and contributes to the construction of new discourses.

⁵ Bots are small applications that run entirely within the Telegram app. Users interact with bots through flexible interfaces that can support any kind of task or service. (<https://core.telegram.org/bots>)

Cuban podcasts are addressing communication gaps on topics such as caregiving, mental health, gender, and identity. *El Descanso* (The Rest) podcast, for example, is a show dedicated to discussing issues related to caregiving and its implications within Cuba's current socio-political context, produced by the independent media outlet *Periodismo de Barrio* (Neighbourhood Journalism).

“The issue of care here in Cuba is key because of the processes of population ageing and migration. And so, when these two issues intersect, and there are no spaces - as there aren't - to talk about these issues continuously, a podcast like this one and the spaces it generates are a tremendous opportunity to connect with people who have similar dilemmas, to find solutions, to let off steam, to talk”. (Interview, Rafa Escalona, 2024)

Another example is the podcast *Historias al Oído* (Stories in the Ear), produced by the independent media outlet *El Toque*. Aimed at blind and visually impaired communities in Cuba, this podcast aspires to “enable them to enjoy news content in another way and not have to listen to it through a bot or a reader that is so robotic and depersonalised” (interview, Yerisleydys Menéndez, 2024).

Other podcasters emphasise the need for communication centred on mental health and the support of empowerment and resilience processes, particularly amidst the socio-political changes the country is experiencing. Shows like *ZonaO* *Clichés* (Cliché-Free Zone) or *Empoderadas* (Empowered Women) stand as a means to transform the collective mentality and facilitate the achievement of the proposed objectives.

4.1.1.1 Source of Information

Podcasts have become sources of information independently of the institutional or journalistic affiliations of their producers. In the case of the state-owned digital media *Cubadebate*, the podcast is conceived as another information format that is offered to the user from the multimedia nature of this media outlet. For independent creators such as Erick Méndez, the podcast offers the added value of information on specific events as an informative and promotional platform.

Listeners, on the other hand, recognise podcasts as a source of specialised information. Some participants in the focus groups conducted for this study highlighted the expertise of certain podcasters on specific topics, in contrast to others who vary their content across episodes. Others noted that podcasts offer more in-depth information than other media, particularly because of their ability to transcend the temporality and instant consumption modes of social media platforms. For some listeners, such as Sonia, podcasts serve as a

substitute for reading lengthy reports or books, providing analytical depth through listening. Meanwhile, Sandra emphasised that the credibility of a podcast is tied to the perceived ‘seriousness’ of its delivery, which in turn influences audience loyalty.

Other listeners like Pedro recognise the value of finding another version of current events and say it is one of the main reasons why he became "hooked" to *El Enjambre* (The Swarm) in 2021. Following the popular protests that took place on 11 July 2021 in several Cuban cities, Pedro found original and unpublished testimonies in *El Enjambre* that conveyed authority and credibility to the podcast.

“And for me, it was after 11 July. El Enjambre has... I mean, Junior García Aguilera also did episodes in El Enjambre and they did an episode after what happened and, I mean, by WhatsApp my friends told me: "Hey, you have to listen to this in El Enjambre", which, I mean, was completely outside the official discourse. It was someone who had been there, and what had happened to him. And that's when I got hooked on El Enjambre, and now, it's something I carry to this day.” (Focus group, Pedro, 2024)

Other listeners emphasise the value of podcast hosts who are not “subject to any institution that can manipulate, or filter, or narrow the range of things he can talk about, say or comment on” (interview, Futon, 2024). This view is further reinforced through direct comparisons with Cuban state media, which is often perceived as being restricted “to a specific set of topics”.

4.1.1.2 Dissemination Means

The podcast also functions as an alternative channel for disseminating experiences and specific events that receive no coverage in mainstream media. For example, the podcast *Voces de Marzo Literario* (Voices of Literary March) was created to publicise an event focused on Cuban literature. In an interview conducted for this study, its creator, Erick Méndez, explained that they decided to launch the podcast due to the absence of “a fixed space on radio and television, or in print, not having the possibility of reaching other audiences” (Interview, Erick Méndez, 2024). This initiative went beyond a merely informative function, becoming a platform for promoting young writers who lack visibility in other media, and enabling their work and voices to reach the audiences of *Voces de Marzo Literario*.

An interesting element identified points at some listeners’ apathy towards political podcasts or shows that discuss Cuban politics, noting the impact this can have on their overall listening experience, even when they find other content valuable. For example, María discovered recommendations for queer films and series through *La Potajera* (The Stewpot), content that aligned with her interests, yet she felt she would not enjoy the podcast “because

it's political, all the fuss.” This political apathy in listening practices is noteworthy, as is the way listeners navigate and decide whether to engage with these more prominent public debates.

4.1.1.3 A Format of Freedom

These sound narratives, politically explicit or not, emerged as a format of freedom within the Cuban mediascape. Freedom entails a broadest sense, ranging from opportunities for personal expression and experimentation to the ability to question power structures.

Rafa Escalona, podcaster and producer of *El Descanso* (The Rest), describes podcasting as "another possible world that radio doesn't usually allow" (interview, 2024). He points out that, unlike radio, podcasting is not tied to a fixed structure; it thrives on the freedom of not being limited by a specific purpose or audience, but instead depends on the creators. Podcasting "breaks a lot of moulds that radio wouldn't allow" in terms of duration, style, language and subject matter. Escalona also points out that radio stations can't address every single topic due to their reliance on schedules, specific audiences and advertisers, which is one fundamental difference between both mediums.

Meanwhile, other podcasters see the medium as “another path”, a tool, and an opportunity to express oneself “completely, without fear, and as a way to say what one wants to say” (interview, Raúl Soublett, 2024). Some participants highlight the format’s flexibility, particularly in terms of episode length, while others reflect on the creative freedom for both creators and contributors involved in the production processes. Nonetheless, other creators reflect on how that freedom must be negotiated within the island’s context, considering factors such as accessibility, autonomy, and the communicative and financial impact these narratives can achieve.

4.2 Political and Social Context

Within this communicative framework, podcasting emerges both inside and outside institutional structures, with sound narratives linked to state-owned and independent media, independent creators, socio-cultural projects and other social actors involved in podcast production on the island.

Communication in Cuba is regulated by the constitution as well as the 'socialist character' of the nation, declared in April 1961. As a result, only the state-affiliated podcasts are required to comply with Cuba's communication regulations. The rest operate independently, unregulated and without legal backing, presenting both opportunities and

risks for independent creators, especially those who question, challenge or criticise the country's power structures.

Some creators are aware of the political dimension of their podcasts in questioning the state and established power structures, particularly on behalf of groups in vulnerable situations or marginalised communities. This awareness adds a strong social character to the political dimension of their work, which is evident in podcasts such as *El Descanso* (The Rest), *La Potajera* (The Stewpot), *En Estéreo Podcast* (In Stereo Podcast), *La Escuelita* (The Little School), etc.

Podcasters like Yadira Álvarez, co-host of *El Descanso* (The Rest), acknowledge that although the show focuses exclusively on the issue of carers in Cuba, it is a 'deeply political' topic, shaped by economic and organisational factors. She explains that caregiver support networks, some of whose members engage with *El Descanso*, are often informal and non-institutional, which makes their existence and practices inherently political.

"You always have this fear that, at any moment, someone will speak up, say something, and suddenly all eyes will be on us. And well, it's complicated. Because we are not backed by a state-run media outlet. And that, well, makes it difficult." (Interview, Yadira Alvarez, 2024)

Similarly, *La Potajera* (The Stewpot) host, Daniel Triana, argues that discussing "gender issues, feminism, and the LGBTQ+ community inevitably involves talking about the state and power structures".

"These conversations are shaped by power. The themes, the struggles - everything is defined by power. Without power, without the state, without a power structure, it would be impossible to talk about feminism." (Interview, Daniel Triana, 2024)

Some participants have resorted to self-censorship because of the potential "complications" that the podcast could bring to their personal lives or to the people involved in the podcast, whether as guests or as part of the production team.

"And while you try to push the boundaries and navigate the limits, you know there are things you simply cannot do. That is a major obstacle because you can never fully relax and say, 'OK, let's have an open and fearless discussion about this.' Or consider the kind of guest you're bringing in - because a guest could suddenly cause you trouble." (Interview, Katia Sánchez, 2024)

Cuban podcasters navigate these uncertainties but are not safe from political harassment. Five participants in the study recounted how they had been subjected to questions by state security agents about their work. Although others tried, to a greater or lesser extent, to show "subtlety" when discussing certain issues and "to avoid any kind of trouble", some

podcasters have been under surveillance and scrutiny by the State Security, the generic name given to all of Cuba's intelligence and counterintelligence bodies since 1959.

While Raúl Soublett describes podcasting as “a word of freedom,” a tool that “allows you to express yourself completely without fear, without anything, and as a way of being able to say things that you want to say,” this freedom comes without guarantees. Soublett, now a political refugee in Panama, argues in an interview for this study that any form of independent communication that questions or criticises the state and its institutions of power provokes acts of persecution and political violence.

Nevertheless, anonymity is not widely practised within the Cuban podcasting landscape. All participants interviewed for this study use their real names in their podcasts, with the exception of four podcasts (*Cositos Radiales*, *Oye te cuento*, *Team Serendipia*, and *Buzón de Voz de Clandestina*) which feature multiple contributions from different listeners and therefore either omit names entirely or use only first names, as in the case of *Team Serendipia* (Serendipity Team). In podcasts such as *Buzón de Voz de Clandestina* (Clandestina's Voicemail), anonymity encouraged users to speak more freely about topics of their choice, while still being included in the episode. The podcast producer, Alejandro Arango, noted that despite the prevailing context, it is noticeable that podcasters do not hide their identities through anonymity. He acknowledges, however, that state intelligence services could still identify creators through other means, such as informants within their neighbourhoods.

Nevertheless, he considers podcasting to be a safer form of expression than more direct platforms, such as Twitter.

“Because the podcast is perfect for doing things anonymously, and with the current censorship, you can create whatever content you want. The State Security can still reach you because they heard the sound of a truck passing by [sarcasm], but in general, it's safer than tweeting what many people tweet.” (Interview, Alejandro Arango, 2024)

Other narratives, however, showcase a political perspective that is more in line with the official discourse. Podcasts such as *Voces Ecuménicas Cubanas* (Cuban Ecumenical Voices), while promoting an inclusive vision of Christianity based on popular education and ecumenism, remain aligned with the 'revolutionary project' and aim to 'accompany the Cuban people in all its diversity'. While this podcast does not reproduce official narratives,

it constructs stories within the fundamental political framework of the Cuban Revolution, described by Cuba's national hero, José Martí, as: 'With all and for the good of all'⁶.

At the same time, some independent podcasters deliberately avoid engaging with politics. Maria Carla Figuerola, host of *Emprende Verde* (Go Green Entrepreneurship), argues that they chose to stay away from "the political-ideological noise of the official discourse and its alternative," choosing not to take a stance "for or against the official narrative or its alternative." Interestingly, Sixela Ametller, a Cuban podcaster based in California, also sets a clear boundary regarding politics in her podcast. Sixela says that she doesn't want to bring politics into her podcast: "I don't want to pollute it with that" (interview, 2023).

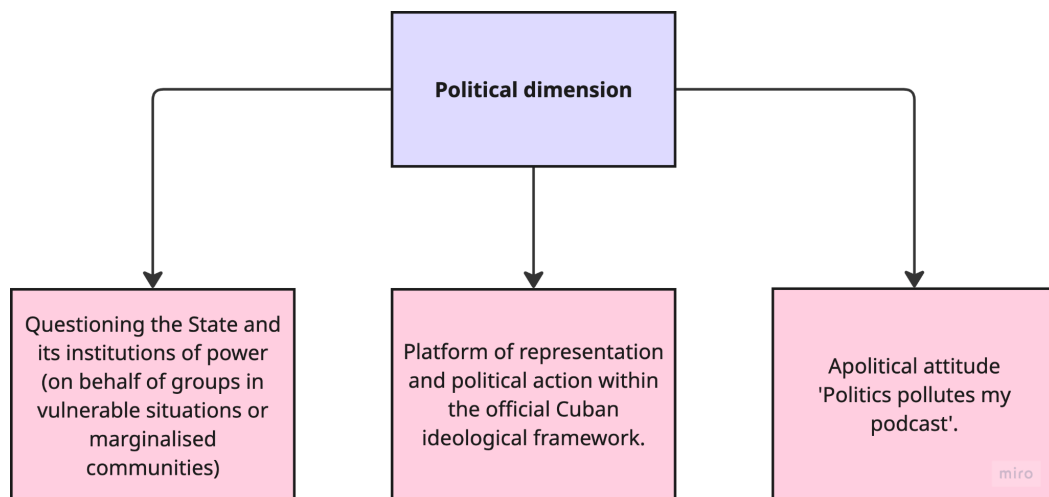


Figure 4.1 – Political dimension of podcasting in Cuba

In summary, this section captured the political dimension of Cuban podcasting through three main attitudes, as shown in Figure 4.1. These include: questioning the state and its institutions on behalf of marginalised groups and communities; serving as a platform for representation and political discourse within the normative ideology; and an apolitical stance observed among both podcasters and listeners. Nonetheless, podcasters navigate this political landscape according to their own beliefs, while other factors, such as technological conditions, impact their work and remain beyond their control.

4.3 Technological Conditions

The Cuban podcasting landscape is also shaped by two primary technological challenges: limited internet connectivity and restricted access to podcast recording equipment.

⁶ Speech delivered by José Martí on 26 November 1891, at the Cuban Lyceum in Tampa, Florida, USA.

4.3.1 Connectivity

Despite the evolution of internet connectivity in Cuba since 2018, when mass mobile internet access was introduced, various limitations have been observed in the years that followed.

Between 2018 and 2020, the affordability of data packages was primarily constrained by service costs, which proved expensive for the majority of users. Concurrently, there was a gradual deployment of technological infrastructure across the country, resulting in unequal internet access for all users. While cities such as Havana and provincial capital cities such as Santiago de Cuba and Villa Clara were prioritised during this period, the rest of the Cuban territory experienced this technological shift at a more gradual pace.

In the period between 2020 and 2021, the Cuban government initiated a currency unification process that has been denoted "Monetary Ordering". This process introduced major currency and price reforms in the country by devaluing the Cuban peso in an attempt to align Cuban prices with international markets. However, the strategy was significantly affected by the global impact of the pandemic, the absence of tourism in Cuba, and administrative decisions, leading to inflation in the country that would exponentially increase in the following years. In this context, the prices of mobile internet data packages remained unchanged, and, due to the inflationary process, they became relatively more affordable for the majority of users.

Despite the increase in internet access, the expansion of telecommunications infrastructure has not been in proportion to the growth in users and network traffic, which has affected the quality of connectivity. As a result, between 2022 and 2024, users experience a significant deterioration in the quality of internet access and navigation. This problem is exacerbated by the energy crisis affecting the country since 2021, which has led to regular scheduled power cuts. The disruption of telecommunications services, particularly the failure of radio base stations due to power cuts, has further exacerbated the challenges faced by users. In this context, podcast production has not been immune to the impact of these factors.

4.3.2 Access to Recording Equipment

One technological challenge flagged by many participants is the access to professional recording equipment. While having professional recording equipment is not a prerequisite for producing these audio narratives, many Cuban podcasters interviewed for this research expressed dissatisfaction in this regard and acknowledged this as a limitation in their podcast production.

“Everything is very precarious, so you record with whatever you can, edit with whatever you can, and do post-production with whatever you can.” (Interview, Rafa Escalona, 2024)

Access to audio recording equipment in Cuba is highly restricted, as there are no stores where such equipment can be purchased, making it even less accessible. Yohan Rodríguez, podcaster producer, argues that since this equipment is not produced locally, “buying microphones, recorders, consoles, or editing PCs to record with high quality is expensive” (questionnaire, Yohan Amed Rodríguez, 2024).

Some Cuban podcasters rely on third parties abroad - friends or informal parcel services that ship to Cuba - to purchase these devices. In these cases, podcasters must pay in a different currency (US dollars) than the one they earn in Cuba. They also have to cover shipping costs, which are higher than the direct prices listed on shopping platforms such as Amazon. For example, Albert Cabrera, host of *Club caluOS 360*, recalls how he bought a microphone during a Black Friday sale, relying on others to assist him with purchasing and transporting it to Cuba, while also taking advantage of the discount to reduce costs.

“People say: ‘You saved yourself 18 dollars’, yes, but they are 18 dollars that in Cuba are dollars, and you don't know everything I had to do to get those \$52, which is what people who live in other countries, who are not Cuban, don't understand. They can't explain it to themselves. Only Cubans know.” (Interview, Albert Cabrera, 2024)

An alternative for obtaining recording equipment is the black market, where the scarcity of stock in state-owned stores significantly increases prices, often far beyond the original value of the product.

Meanwhile, access to professional studios, whether state-owned or private, offers a potential solution to the lack of personal recording equipment. However, this option is not viable for all creators unless they have affiliations with state media institutions, such as local or national radio stations, partnerships with independent music producers, or the financial means to rent studio space.

During the pandemic, *En Plural* (In Plural) recorded its first episodes at an independent studio called Manana Records, owned by two Cuban singers. William Bello recalls the studio as a space of intimate interaction that fostered connections and more immersive communicative experiences, although they eventually ceased recording there “because there was no money”. *Emprende Verde* (Go Green Entrepreneurship), meanwhile, records in a small independent studio owned by the radio director of the podcast host, Maria Carla

Figuerola, who explains that they are allowed to use the studio free of charge until they can determine how the podcast “could be monetised in some way” (Interview, 2024).

In the case of *Cubadebate*, the digital media outlet benefits from alliances with the Faculty of Communication at the University of Havana, which grants access to the university’s recording and editing facilities. However, during the pandemic, access to these institutional spaces became restricted, forcing journalists to record voice-overs for the podcast using their mobile phones.

Independent podcasts such as *El Pitch* (The Pitch), *El Descanso* (The Rest), and *La Potajera* (The Stewpot) also relied on independent recording studios. However, they frequently encountered financial constraints that made it difficult to afford studio space, or, in some cases, were subject to threats from State security forces.

"We have been questioned by State security agents, by that entity. (...) And like I said, well, 'the big explosion'. I call it that because it was an event, a moment in which at least five podcasts lost the studio we had for recording due to pressure from State security." (Interview, Daniel Triana, 2024)

In summary, technological and political constraints in Cuba restrict access to recording studios and hinder the development of podcasting, particularly in relation to production values and sound quality.

4.3.3 Hosting Platforms

Participants identified the access to podcast hosting platforms from the island as another technological challenge. When discussing platform usage, some participants highlighted the inaccessibility of Spotify from within Cuba due to restrictions associated with the United States blockade imposed on the country since 1962. As a result, both listeners and podcasters often rely on VPN services to access the platform. This limitation also affects podcast distribution, with some creators opting to upload entire seasons in a single day to navigate connectivity challenges and restricted access.

Despite these barriers, Cuban podcasters continue to use conventional hosting services such as Spreaker, Anchor, iVoox, and Buzzsprout, distributing their content across streaming platforms including Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts (which was discontinued in 2024), and even Spotify. According to Erick Méndez, Ivoox “is the platform where most podcasts are consumed in Cuba, because Spotify is blocked” (Interview, 2024). Other platforms mentioned include Clubhouse, which gained public interest during the pandemic, and Mumbler, referenced exclusively by Albert Cabrera.

Some podcasters have chosen alternative strategies by hosting their shows solely on websites. For instance, *En Plural* (In Plural) is hosted on the website of the social project that produced the show. *Cuba Emprende* (Cuba Entrepreneurs) is a project of the Catholic Church of Cuba, whose mission is ‘to provide training and advice to Cuban entrepreneurs who wish to create or improve a small business, in order to contribute to the development of an entrepreneurial culture, social progress and the improvement of their quality of life’⁷. They decided to upload the episodes to the website rather than on streaming platforms, enabling their listeners access not only podcast episodes but also additional content such as books of interviews published by the project.

Others combine web-based and platform distribution. While some, like *Pildoras Buen Idioma* (Good Language Pills), report consistent listenership through their website, averaging around 100 listens per episode, others, such as *El Pitch* (The Pitch), found that “the Internet audience wasn’t relevant”. Meanwhile, podcasting projects like *Emprende Verde* (Go Green Entrepreneurship) initially hosted their episodes in a Google Drive folder named Educopedia, where listeners could access all seasons of the podcast. They later expanded their distribution by creating a Telegram channel to reach and engage with their audience more directly.

4.4 Production and Distribution Practices

Considering these technological conditions, Cuban podcasters have adopted alternative creation and distribution strategies that are accessible to listeners and creators, and require lower mobile data consumption, both in the production and promotion of their podcasts.

4.4.1 First Recordings

When speaking with several Cuban self-taught independent podcasters interviewed for this study, many recalled similar experiences of recording at home. Commonly cited examples from their early sessions include making mistakes and having to start over repeatedly, enduring long recording sessions due to imperfections in the process, and the unavoidable intrusion of urban soundscapes in the background.

“There was a time when I had to record at 2:00 a.m. It was the only way I could do it, up on a rooftop. (...) When the train passes by, you can hear it from my house, when it blows its horn, ‘whoosh.’ But that was the only time I had to record, after one in the morning, when the shouting in the neighbourhood died down, when everything calmed, when the cars stopped passing.” (Interview, Albert Cabrera, 2024)

⁷ <https://www.cubaemprendefoundation.org/>

Several recall recording and editing directly from platforms like Anchor, Buzzsprout or software like Adobe Audition. The recording settings could go from rooftops, bathrooms, wardrobes to rooms in the house. For example, Julio Estrada, host of *Lecturas al Oído* (Readings to the Ear), shares how the podcast was recorded "with great difficulty, never in a recording studio, looking for quiet moments, in all sorts of places in the house, including the bathroom, running away from birdsong and jackhammers".

Another common practice among participants was reading from a script, although they admitted that, over time, they allowed themselves greater flexibility and creative freedom during the recording process. Some moved to simply following prompts, embracing spontaneity, and even turning intrusive noises into valuable elements of the episode. By commenting on these sounds and incorporating them playfully, they added a sense of liveness and relatability to the recording.

Participants also described alternative recording methods. For instance, WhatsApp was used to conduct interviews in the first season of *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* (We Wear It Curly Radio) and by Allison Norch in *ZonaoClichés* (Cliché-Free Zone). In contrast, Sixela conducts interviews via Zoom for her podcast *Empoderadas* (Empowered Women).

Six participants mentioned asynchronous recording methods, both during and after the pandemic. This is the case for *Flash Musical* (Music Flash), *Voces de Marzo Literario* (Voices of Literary March), and several podcasts produced by *Cubadebate*. Since the pandemic, *Cubadebate* has prioritised asynchronous recording for certain productions, wherein journalists send pre-recorded questions to interviewees, who then respond with audio clips that are subsequently edited into full episodes.

While the recording conditions for podcasters in Cuba mirror those of early independent creators in other countries - recording from home, sometimes hidden in closets - they still differ significantly in terms of access to equipment and internet connectivity and affordability.

4.4.2 Distribution Channels

Distribution avenues also reflect the impact of contextual limitations, as well as the consumption patterns and attitudes embedded in the cultural practices of Cuban audiences.

Raúl Soublett, host of *En Estéreo Podcast* (In Stereo Podcast), argues that social media became the only viable means of promoting the show, as securing promotional space in

state-own media or even alternative distribution channels such as the ‘*Paquete Semanal*’ (The Weekly Package)⁸ was ‘unthinkable’:

“Because even thinking about a podcast being broadcast on the radio in Cuba is unthinkable. Or that it would be distributed through the ‘paquete de la semana’ (the weekly package) in Cuba, that’s even more than unthinkable.” (Interview, Raúl Soublett, 2024)

In contrast, two podcasters mentioned how they have also distributed their episodes via USB sticks at face-to-face events and meetings, responding to the offline circulation practices that remain central to Cuban media consumption.

Sometimes distribution practices were also influenced by listeners' geographical locations. For example, *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* (We Wear It Curly Radio), adopted a unique distribution strategy to reach both on-island and diaspora audiences through consecutive platform releases:

“I mean, we used to publish on Friday nights on Anchor, which is now Spotify for Podcasters, or something like that, they changed the name. But we published it there on Friday nights because we had a large audience in Europe. With the six-hour time difference, we’d release it on Friday night so that by Saturday morning, it would already be circulating. And for Cuba, we uploaded it to Telegram at nine in the morning.” (Interview, Dachelys Valdés, 2024)

While some podcasts rely on traditional hosting platforms to circulate their narratives, others emphasise the role of social media, and messaging apps like WhatsApp and Telegram as distribution methods.

4.4.2.1 WhatsApp

Whatsapp groups became distribution channels for podcast episodes, as in the case of Clandestina's *Buzón de Voz* (Clandestina's Voicemail). Clandestina is Cuba's first sustainable fashion brand, founded in 2015, with a community of over 76,000 followers on Instagram. During the pandemic, Clandestina created the podcast *Buzón de Voz* to stay connected with its community of followers, and also to give them a space to vent, for 'catharsis'. As Leire Fernández, Clandestina's cofounder, describes, the podcast was closely linked to the specific moment of the pandemic to meet "that very specific need", following the marketing strategy aimed at meeting the needs of the community.

“And there was a very clear awareness that people were having a hard time, and we needed to create things that would help—whether by bringing a bit of good

⁸ El Paquete Semanal or ‘The Weekly Package’ is a “one terabyte (TB) collection of digital content that is distributed across Cuba on external hard drives, USBs, and CDs. This collection includes a variety of television, music, movies, apps, educational programs, YouTube videos, magazines, and news” (Dye et al. 2018, p. 1).

humour, making them laugh, or encouraging participation. That was it. What we did was very purposeful.” (Interview, Leire Fernández, 2024)

The distribution process of *Buzón de Voz de Clandestina* (Clandestina’s Voicemail) episodes, in addition to the traditional way of streaming platforms, took place in the brand's Whatsapp groups, where they shared the episodes as well as the graphic covers that accompanied them, created by the brand's designers.

4.4.2.2 Instagram

Participants in the study emphasised the role of Instagram as a key platform for promoting their content. Cuban podcaster Allison Norch has prioritised Instagram in her outreach strategy, reporting higher levels of audience engagement through Stories (short, ephemeral posts that disappear after 24 hours) than through audiograms. Her use of popular language and cultural references strongly resonates with her followers. Owing to the platform’s high level of interaction, she has paused podcast production to focus exclusively on Instagram, and more recently, on TikTok content as well. This shift raises questions about the sustainability of the podcasting medium in ongoing competition with other visual platforms.

Other participants also identify Instagram as their principal social network for content dissemination. *El Pitch* (The Pitch), for instance, uses Instagram primarily because it aligns with contemporary user behaviours and the predominance of visual culture. Secondly, it is a strategic choice, as the podcast's target audience - the entrepreneur community - is concentrated on the platform.

“And it has been super challenging because Instagram is very visual, and we had a sound format.” (Interview, Katia Sánchez, 2024)

Emprende Verde (Go Green Entrepreneurship) also relies on the platform, citing the presence of “a solid community”, not in terms of follower count but in terms of interaction. Laura Salas describes it as the place “where the people are, and it is vibrant, moreover” (interview, Laura Salas, 2024).

Cuban listeners also recognise Instagram as the platform where they have discovered new shows, largely due to the influence of the algorithm or through friends tagging them in posts. Futon, for instance, began exploring podcasting through the consumption of reels on this social network. Some listeners like MsDup also interact with the podcasts she listens to, through question boxes on Instagram. She recalls the ‘Thank You’ challenge organised by *Empoderadas* (Empowered Women) in 2023 in which she participated by sending responses through the platform. The 'Thank You' challenge was a monthly initiative by the

podcaster, in which daily gratitude exercises were sent via direct messages to those followers who joined the challenge. During November 2023, Sixela Ametller, host of *Empoderadas*, encouraged her followers to engage in specific actions designed to cultivate a practice and attitude of gratitude.

In contrast, other creators question the effectiveness of Instagram for podcast promotion, given its prioritisation of visual over aural content. This also highlights creators' concerns regarding the suitability of podcasts as a 'long-form' medium within such a platform.

4.4.2.3 Telegram

Telegram also emerges as a key platform for podcast hosting and distribution, particularly during the years 2020–2021. The pandemic and the technological and economic conditions in the country have made the social network Telegram one of the most important niches for Cuban podcasts, not only as a hosting platform, but also as one of the main hubs of the podcasting experience in Cuba.

According to Erick Méndez, during the pandemic - “and still today in Cuba” - “the largest podcasting movement is on Telegram”. Similarly, Katia Sánchez notes that during this period, most of the Cuban audience listened to *El Pitch* (The Pitch) on Telegram, describing it as “their favourite place”.

“And now what we do is upload the episode promo with the cover and links to Telegram. But yes, we still publish them on Telegram because it’s a channel similar to email. You don’t depend on an algorithm for people to receive it. If they’re in the channel and haven’t muted it, they’ll get the notification.” (Interview, Katia Sánchez, 2024)

Sonia, a podcast listener who participated in this research, affirms that a significant number of podcasts are currently available on Telegram. She notes that both state and independent media in Cuba use the platform to upload audio clips which are, in effect, “podcasts uploaded as compressed files, so that people can download them and listen to them later.”

Telegram has also demonstrated potential for community building. Albert Cabrera describes the platform as a space where creators can offer content to their listeners for free and, at a later stage, transition to a paid model by providing exclusive material.

He also highlights the presence of bots that facilitate podcast listening, making audio content more accessible to users. However, this feature limits opportunities for feedback and restricts the availability of listener statistics. The feedback process is hindered because users must leave the platform and open a different application to submit a comment, an

action that demands additional data usage in an already challenging connectivity environment.

The interactivity and possibilities for direct listener engagement remain distinctive features of Telegram when compared to other podcast platforms. Nevertheless, Rafa Escalona observes that access to the platform “has not proven to be as viable” in the Cuban context, as users are often required to download files as large as 40 megabytes, an issue that, even in 2024, continues to pose a significant challenge.

4.5 Cubapod: Cuban Podcasting Platform

Production and distribution practices give shape to the Cuban podcasting landscape. However, the emergence of the Cuban podcasting community dates back to the creation of Cubapod, recognised for most participants in the study as a central platform for the consolidation and growth of the podcasting movement in the island.



Figure 4.2 – Cubapod: Cuban Podcasting Platform

Cubapod was launched in March 2020, designed to organise and promote Cuban podcasts, and it played a key role in the integration and visibility of podcasting in Cuba⁹.

“For the first time in the more than 20 years that podcasting has existed, there was a movement, a clearer way to identify the Cuban podcasting community. On the other hand, it also served to train new podcasters who were just starting out through the blog, recommendations, online talks, and various events that were organised. Cubapod was able to bring together a community of producers.”
(Interview questionnaire, Yohan Amed Rodríguez, 2024)

Cubapod had more than 160 podcasts registered on the platform, mostly Cuban and some foreign. It also had a bot on Telegram that allowed users to subscribe to specific shows and receive notifications about new episodes. The bot also enabled users to download the episode using different compression options, thereby facilitating the download process

⁹Article published in the New York Times by the journalist Ernesto Londoño.

whilst minimising the consumption of mobile data. The platform also offered weekly rankings based on the number of show downloads, allowing users to keep track of new podcasts, and for podcast creators it offered visibility and insight into other shows being produced and user preferences.

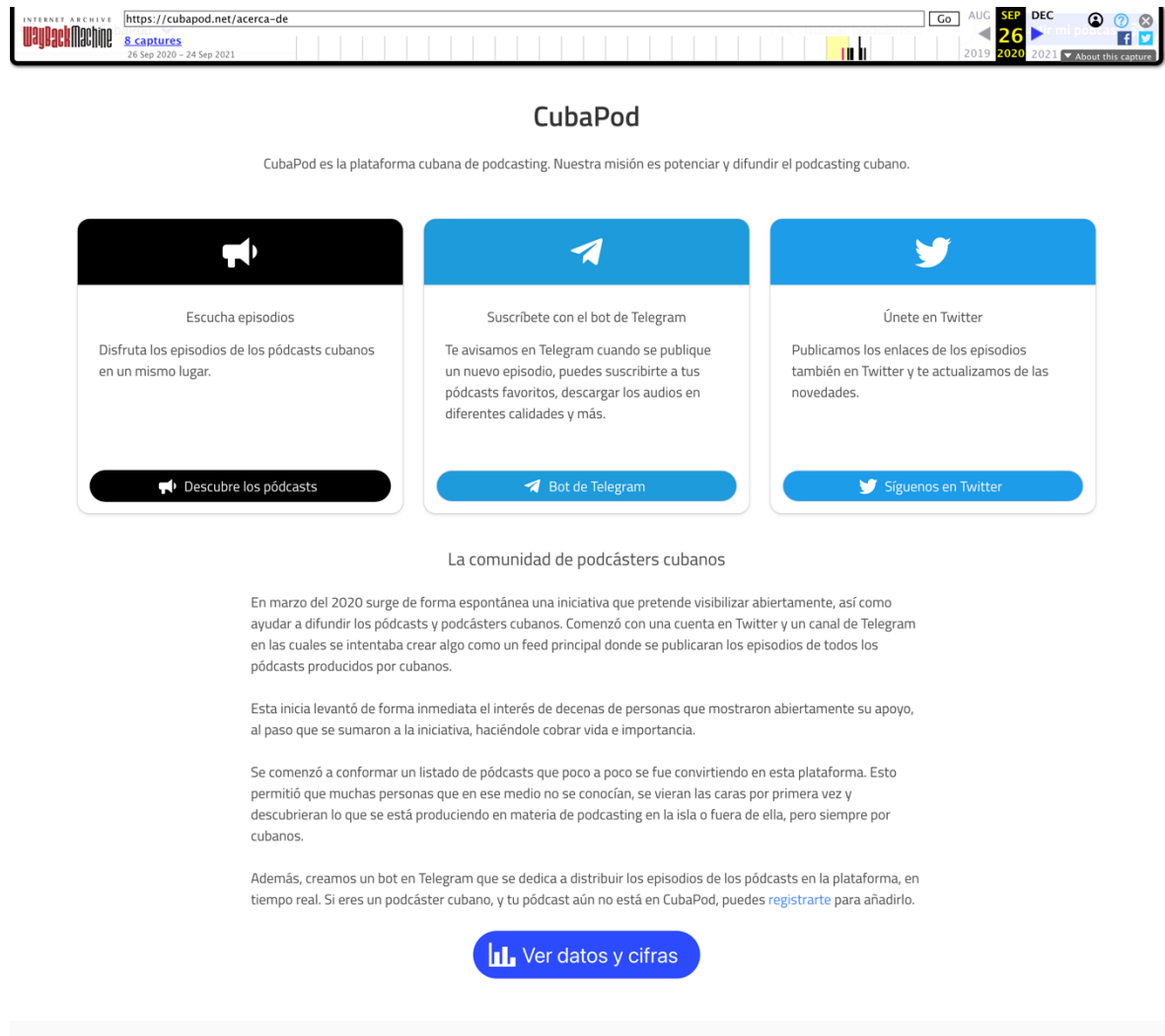


Figure 4.3 – Cubapod ceased its services in October 2021

(Source: Wayback Machine)

One of its founders, Carlos Lugones, interviewed for this study, recalls how the initial idea that gave rise to Cubapod began as a personal concern to create a list that would bring together the Cuban podcasts he was listening to at the time. In an episode of *Drop The Mic News* in August 2020, Carlos tells how he first created a bot that published each episode of the podcasts on this list on Twitter, and when the idea took off, it was extended to Telegram, where they also published the episodes in a channel called *Podcasts Cubanos* (*Cuban Podcasts*). The list became a website and from there a platform that, in less than four months, had "almost 100 podcasts, more than 1,500 episodes, more than 4,600 compressed audios, around 1,000 users on the Telegram bot and more than 3,500 unique downloads". Lugones describes the platform as a "podcatcher", even if it was through the Telegram bot,

because the user could subscribe to the podcast of their choice and download the audio in different compressions, facilitating lower mobile data consumption for Cuban listeners.

“We can compress episode audio files, allowing users to save up to 80% of data consumption. We have episodes that were originally 50 megabytes and have been compressed to just 8 megabytes, which is something users greatly appreciate.”
(Carlos Lugones in *Drop the Mic News: Los podcasts en Cuba*, Aug 27, 2020)

In 2018, the cost of a 1GB data package amounted to 32.2% of the average salary, and although prices have significantly decreased since then, mobile data remains a costly asset for the average Cuban user.

Year	Data package	Price	Average salary	Price of data as % of average salary
2018	1GB (3G)	250 CUP	777 CUP	32.2%
2020	1GB (4G)	250 CUP	1194 CUP	20.9%
2024	1GB (LTE)	100 CUP	5839 CUP	1.7%

Table 4.1 – Mobile data packages prices over the period 2018-2024

For some interviewees, however, Cubapod represented merely an alternative distribution platform without significant impact. Others, though aware of the platform, never registered their podcasts in it or engaged with other podcasters.

Unfortunately, the platform ceased operations in October 2021 due to financial constraints and internal disagreements among its creators. The main points of contention emerged during the evolution of Cubapod and the renegotiation of its purpose and focus. At one stage, the founders proposed a payment model linked to listening to foreign podcasts within Cubapod, despite the platform having originally been “conceived and structured as a free platform for Cubans” (Interview, Albert Cabrera, 2024).

Carlos Lugones, during an interview for this study, referred to divisions among Cubapod members arising from “political reasons”, which he attributed to both his own decisions and those of other members. He further assigned responsibility to the political system, arguing that it demonstrates “how easily the regime can separate people and create division” by polarising everything and reinforcing the prevailing mantra: “either you think like me or you are against me” (Interview, Carlos Lugones, 2023).

Among the reasons mentioned by Carlos and Albert Cabrera, both members of Cubapod's founding group, the split arose from differing views on Cubapod's development, reluctance to adopt a payment model, a lack of technological and financial resources to maintain the server and compensate people for their work, as well as divergent political opinions.

Nonetheless, Cubapod emerged as a significant platform for Cuban podcasting, providing a unified digital space for the aggregation of domestic podcasts. It also played a key role in articulating and strengthening the nascent Cuban podcasting community, fostering alliances and collaboration among podcasters. Despite its closure, Cubapod retains a legacy of “bringing together a community of producers”, as Yohan A. Rodríguez affirms.

4.6 Podcaster-Podcaster Collaborative Interactions

With the consolidation of the Cuban podcast movement, interactions between podcasters begin to take place, strengthening the sense of belonging and community. Podcasting fosters experiences of logistical support, mutual exchange of resources and good practices, peer-to-peer mentorship, strategic partnerships, and cross-pollination amongst podcasts.

Through peer-to-peer mentorship, some podcasters share insights on production techniques and audience engagement strategies with other emerging creators, strengthening the overall podcasting ecosystem. Meanwhile, cross-pollination practices allow podcasters to expand their reach by featuring each other as guests, blending different styles, personal brands, and perspectives.

In addition, logistical support plays a crucial role in sustaining podcasting communities, whether through sharing recording equipment or troubleshooting technical challenges. Strategic partnerships with other podcasters or media organisations also alleviate limited human resources teams and broaden the audience.

Cuban podcasters offer not only guidance, but sometimes logistical support to new creators. An example of this is the Cuban podcaster, Carlos Richard, who donated a microphone to Albert Cabrera. The donation of technical resources is extremely valuable in a context where accessibility to recording equipment is very limited. Cabrera also recalls receiving another microphone from a listener, an unexpected donation from a foreign supporter.

These collaborative interactions podcaster-podcaster contribute to the community growth and sustainability by fostering a culture of solidarity and collective learning.

4.6.1 Skill-Sharing and Mentorships

Many self-taught independent podcasters say they had to familiarise with the medium by learning recording and editing practices, as well as promotion and distribution of contents strategies. During the podcasting boom in Cuba in 2020, informal transfer skills processes

took place among some podcasters, consisting mainly of the exchange of best practices related to the use of software and distribution platforms.

An example of this is the virtual support offered to Dachelys Valdés by Ernesto Wong, creator of the podcast *Para darle a la lengua* (Let's talk), who taught her how to use Anchor as a way of "professionalising" the podcast beyond hosting it on Telegram, as she recalls. Dachelys, in turn, teaches Raúl Soublett how to upload audio to the platforms, how to edit in Adobe Audition and other good practices. In the case of Laura Salas of *Emprende Verde* (Go Green Entrepreneurship), she has received advice from Italian podcaster Carla Vitantonio, who lives in Cuba, as well as Sixela Ametller, host of *Empoderadas* (Empowered Women), and Lisy Romero of *La Escuelita* (The Little School), who has recommended platforms such as Ivoox to host the podcast.

"The beauty of these spaces is that you connect with people, that things happen. In the end, we are creating connections. Carla, Sixela, and Lisy from La Escuelita, who joined us in this last stage, have been supporting us: 'Hey, go this way, try that,' and that has been really wonderful too." (Interview, Laura Salas, 2024)

These connections accompany the development of *Emprende Verde* (Go Green Entrepreneurship), and hint at a "whole super-feminine connection" (interview, Laura Salas, 2024) woven from these exchanges. The mentorship processes encourage the impact, accessibility and visibility of the podcast, as well as advice on how to improve the narrative structure of the episodes.

4.6.2 Partnerships

Partnerships between creators are also mentioned in the study to consolidate alliances that allow for the creation of projects that cannot be done on individual efforts. Edilberto Carmona, deputy director of *Ideas Multimedios* (Multimedia Ideas), reflects on how the state-owned digital media outlet *Cubadebate* established a collaboration with the journalist and podcaster Liset Prego as part of its media strategy to seek partnerships with journalists and producers from other parts of the country. This collaboration resulted in the 2019 podcast series *Manual para padres impacientes* (Manual for Impatient Parents), about motherhood and childhood.

However, one participant pointed out that partnerships bear fruit when there is compatibility and mutual understanding between podcasters.

"And we understood that it wasn't due to a lack of alliances, but rather because people didn't care much, other platforms didn't care much about the topic we were addressing. - 'Where did these crazy little Christians come from?' - So, you also become aware of real and concrete limitations." (Interview, Yuliet Villares, 2024)

Reflecting on how the *Voces Ecuménicas Cubanas* (Cuban Ecumenical Voices) podcast would not necessarily have fit on other platforms because of the topics of religion, identity and popular education they discussed, they decided to focus more on building alliances with the audience than with other creators.

4.6.3 Cross-Pollination

Processes of cross-pollination can also be identified in the episodes of Cuban podcasts. For example, in 'Episode 12 - How to start a business in 2021 Cuba' of *El Pitch* (The Pitch), Katia interviews the leaders of the *Cuba Emprende* (Cuban Entrepreneurs) project and mentions and promotes their podcast *En Plural* (In Plural). Likewise, Katia recounts how *El Enjambre* (The Swarm) made a short publicity ad for *El Pitch*, when the podcast just started in 2020, and that brought them a lot of listeners. She also mentions how they have collaborated with young podcasters of *Del Pi al Pa* (From start to end), another Cuban podcast.

Further evidence of cross-pollination is found in the 'Episode_1_Negra' (Black Woman) of the *En Estéreo Podcast* (In Stereo Podcast), which features a segment from *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* (We Wear It Curly Radio) discussing best practices for caring for Afro hair.

4.7 Dispersion and Fragmentation of the Podcasting Movement in Cuba

Interactions between podcasters initiated a period of increased podcast production and positively contributed to the consolidation of the podcast movement and its identity. However, between 2022 and 2024, the study maps the dispersion and fragmentation of the Cuban podcasting movement. This period is also characterised by the return to normalcy following the COVID-19 pandemic, the reopening of social spaces, and a consecutive global decline in podcast listening compared to the heightened consumption during the pandemic years.

Furthermore, with the disappearance of Cubapod in October 2021, the Cuban podcast movement was left without a platform or organisation to bring together these narratives on the island, thus complicating the process of finding Cuban podcasts. These sound narratives are now spread across an unlimited number of hosting platforms like Ivoox, Spotify, Spreaker, Buzzsprout, Apple Podcasts, and social networks such as Telegram.

A notable distinction is a shift in audience consumption patterns, marked by the rise of video podcasts on YouTube. In 2024, the fourth most popular Google search term on the island was 'videos', followed by 'de' (from), 'Cuba' and 'traductor' (translator), while

'Youtube' ranked 17th. Cuban shows like El podcast de Ale (Ale's podcast), for example, have been hosted on this video platform since 2023, and in 2025 reports more than eleven thousand subscribers.

The wave of migration since 2021 also influenced the dispersion of the podcasting movement. Between that year and 2024, more than 900,000 Cubans arrived in the United States, without including those who emigrated to other Latin American and European countries. Cuba experiences a demographic decline as result of this migration flow, as well as the low birth rate, reflecting the socio-economic conditions in the country, aggravated by the shortage of basic goods, the continuing energy crisis and the increased political repression following the protests of 11 July 2021.

This reality intertwines with the podcasting landscape, as creators and listeners are also dispersed around the world. For example, two of the podcasters involved in this study currently live outside of Cuba, but at the time of the first seasons of their podcasts they were residents of the island. One of them migrated for personal reasons, while the other, Raúl Soublett, left the country because of political persecution linked to his role as a human rights activist.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter addressed the emergence and evolution of Cuban podcast communities during the period 2018-2024. It mapped the motivations of Cuban podcast creators in this period and areas that shed light on how these narratives respond to the social context in which they develop.

This section of the study outlined three key stages in the development of the Cuban community of podcasting media practitioners, analysing the socio-economic and political factors that shape each stage.

The first stage, spanning the years 2018-2020, included the production of podcasts mainly by state and independent media institutions, with a few independent creators also involved in podcast creation. The second phase, from 2020 to 2021, showed a significant proliferation of podcasts produced by a wider range of different social actors. This period was also marked by the emergence of a national podcasting platform, Cubapod, which played a key role in the consolidation of the Cuban podcasting movement. The final phase, from 2022 to 2024, experienced the influence of YouTube as a new podcast consumption platform, characterised by a progressive dispersion of the Cuban podcasting community.

The different periods are distinguished by unique socioeconomic and political scenarios, also influenced by international trends in podcasting. The impact of these phases on the production of Cuban podcasts has been significant, shaping the narratives as well as the communication and participatory strategies used to engage with listeners.

During 2018-2021, an emerging production associated mainly with the media was identified.

An interesting element of this chapter is that interactions between podcasters foster processes of mentoring, accompaniment, skill-transfer and mutual contributions, which strengthens the consolidation of the Cuban podcasting community. From peer mentoring to logistical support, these bonds of solidarity contribute to the dissemination of practical knowledge about the medium.

The role of the Cuban podcasting platform Cubapod in the construction and consolidation of the Cuban podcasting movement was also highlighted. Unfortunately, this platform closed in October 2021, causing a dispersion in the Cuban podcasting community, also influenced by socio-political elements.

Although Cuban podcasters use conventional podcast hosting platforms, they have adapted the podcasting experience to the Cuban context, prioritising listeners' accessibility to content and frequently using spaces such as Telegram as the centre of the distribution and interaction movement with audiences.

This particularity of the Cuban context invites an analysis of how podcast communities in Cuba interact and what kinds of narratives foster this interaction. To this end, the following chapter maps community engagement in podcast production in Cuba through narratives and transmedia practices.

5. MAPPING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN CUBAN PODCASTING

This chapter explores community engagement in Cuba through narratives, participation and transmedia practices.

In this chapter, I explore how these podcasts fulfil a communication need by making visible specific communities or groups that lack spaces for expression or whose representation in the media is limited and framed by socio-cultural stigmas.

I then examine the role of narratives in creating engagement between podcasters and listeners, as well as the influence of this engagement on the preference for narratives that reaffirm shared identity and values, thus fostering strong community ties and a high degree of personal involvement in the medium. These new forms of communication are examined in depth, including the interaction and authenticity of the creator, as well as the use of narrative structures like the island's radio tradition.

The chapter also presents the counter-narratives that these podcasts propose, as well as the reconfiguration of cultural imaginaries based on these new proposals. The chapter gathers collective creation strategies, the contribution of the listener, as well as the implementation of co-creative actions and their impact on the construction of the collective discourse are presented.

The last section of this chapter discusses the collective construction of the transmedia experience in the field of Cuban podcasting, with an emphasis on virtual encounters through voice chats on Telegram, the role of social networks in the dissemination of podcasts and the processes of feedback with listeners. It also examines the impact of face-to-face encounters in consolidating mutual recognition between podcasters and listeners. It also presents examples of transmedia experiences that include the reuse of content on various platforms and the creation of a festival as a season finale. While these strategies elucidate the forms of engagement that podcasters use with their audiences, they facilitate a better understanding of the motivations of these podcast creators and why they construct the podcasting experience beyond the creation of content and the act of individual listening.

5.1 Narratives and Themes

This section explores what narratives appeal to the formation of community in podcasting in Cuba.

5.1.1 Origins and Themes

Among the themes proposed by Cuban podcasts included in this study, specific interests in technology (*Club calvOS 360*), cinema (*Cinemafileia*), music (*Flash Musical*) or literature (*Voces de Marzo Literario*; *Lecturas al Oído*) can be identified. Also, as in the case of *Píldoras Buen Idioma* (Good Language Pills), the podcast becomes a tool for promoting the correct use of the Spanish language or a space for cultural promotion. Another niche topic is Afro-Cuban culture and its history, discussed by *En Estéreo Podcast*, as described by its creator, Raúl Soublett.

While some podcasts such as *El Descanso* (The Rest), *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* (We Wear It Curly Radio), *Buzón de Voz de Clandestina* (Clandestina's Voicemail), *Voces Ecuménicas Cubanas* (Cuban Ecumenical Voices) were born based on the premise of connecting with specific communities of projects or associations, others, such as *El Pitch* (The Pitch), *En Plural* (In Plural), *Emprende Verde* (Go Green Entrepreneurship), *La Mente Creativa* (The Creative Mind), are focused on giving visibility and support to the niche of entrepreneurship in Cuba.

In this context, narratives of activism also emerge, such as *La Potajera* (The Stewpot) and *La Escuelita* (The Little School), both podcasts whose themes relate to the LGBTQ+ community on the island. Similarly, *Empoderadas* (Empowered Women) offers a compilation of female empowerment stories based on interviews with Cuban women and from other regions of the world.

Albert Cabrera, for example, is a skydiving instructor who decided to start his own podcast in 2018, based on the 'tertulias' (discussions) that his friends, all fans of Apple products, held every night on Whatsapp. A year later, in November 2019, he launched his first podcast called *El show de los Betas testers* (The Betas testers' show), hosted on Spreaker, with a daily format, from Monday to Friday.

"Imagine, I had no knowledge at all - not about handling an audio track, not about recording techniques, and of course, I didn't have the right equipment to record. I had nothing. The only thing I had was an iPhone and a YouTube video by a Peruvian guy showing how to upload a podcast to Spreaker - nothing more than that." (Interview, Albert Cabrera, 2024)

Podcasting also emerged in the journalism classroom, as in the case of Cristian Martínez, host of *Píldoras Buen Idioma* (Good Language Pills) and graduate from the University of Havana, and Mario César Fiayo Díaz, co-founder of *Cinemafileia* (Cinephilia) with Alejandro Gómez, also a journalism graduate from the University of Matanzas. In Cristian's case, he started *Buen Idioma* (Good Language), a project that began as a weekly column on the

Faculty of Communications' website, then became a radio space - as its creator describes it in its beginnings - and then a podcast. In the episode 'Word of the year 2020 for Buen Idioma', according to my analytical listening annotations, the presentation changes from 'Radio space in defence of the language' to 'Welcome to the last episode of the *Good Language Pills* podcast in 2020'. This podcast has received more than 400 questions about the (correct) use of the Spanish language, through the podcast and other platforms related to this project.

Other podcasts are born out of collective contributions, such as *Cositos Radiales* (Radio Thingies), *Oye Te Cuento* (Hey, Let Me Tell You), *Team Serendipia* (Serendipity Team), *Lecturas al Oído* (Readings to the Ear), *Buzón de Voz de Clandestina* (Clandestina's Voicemail) and *Voces de Marzo Literario* (Voices of Literary March). *Team Serendipia* (Serendipity Team) was also produced by a group of friends who met in a Facebook group about memes called "Me Hackearon la Cuenta" (My account has been hacked). Around thirty members later joined a Whatsapp group, and decided to create a podcast to showcase "little micro-stories and narrate things just for fun, out of sheer boredom" (interview, Giselle Ordoñez, 2024).

These sound narratives were constructed in a collective and participatory way, mostly around listener contributions, curated and edited by the podcasters.

5.1.2 Enhancing Representation and Identity

Podcasts emerge as communicative spaces that meet the needs of creators and audiences, often on the fringes of the mainstream media's communicative spectrum. These sound narratives give visibility to marginalised communities and contribute to counteracting discourses rooted in colonial structures, reproduced in the media and social ecosystem of the Cuban nation.

For podcasts such as *En Estéreo Podcast* (In Stereo Podcast) and *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* (We Wear It Curly Radio), both have as their main objective to make experiences and success stories of the Afro-Cuban community visible. Raúl Soublett, in an interview conducted for this study, affirms that *En Estéreo* highlights the history of black people in Cuba in all scenarios "in art, in politics, in social issues". To this end, they also aim to "make visible the achievements of black people in Cuba, to make visible artists who work in totally limited spaces, who have not had the opportunity or the luck to reach another type of stage", without victimising the Afro-Cuban community. The podcast also mentions initiatives that are not widely publicised about the Afro-descendant community on the island, such as the project *Historia Negra de Cuba* (Black History of Cuba).

Similarly, *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* (We Wear It Curly Radio) podcast brings together shared experiences of the Afro-Cuban community in Cuba through interviews with celebrities and renown artists, which are not predominant in the media landscape. In the episodes, the host reflects on the need to access information, to seek new references, to expand the horizon of experiences that reinforce and reinterpret Afro-Cuban identity.

“And that it's not just reinforced by your family, it's reinforced by society as a whole, and how your skin colour is made invisible by the media as a whole, or relegated to roles where there's a very big stereotype, or changing your hair in the media to appear and pass the filters of what beauty is”. (Interview, Dachelys Valdés, 2024)

In interview for this research, the podcaster reflects on how “perhaps people had not found another space where they could listen to the stories of people who had experiences very similar or the same as yours”, the impact of these experiences on individual and collective identity and self-esteem, and how these narratives are reproduced at the family and social level.

5.1.3 Building the Spotlight for Others

Several podcasts propose narratives that pursue the social validation of certain social actors and the recognition of groups in conditions of vulnerability.

Some podcasts such as *El Pitch* (El Pitch), *En Plural* (In Plural) and *Emprende Verde* (Go Green Entrepreneurship) propose a vision of entrepreneurship in Cuba that is situated in the middle of a polarised media space, where the figure of the entrepreneur has been criticised both by the state media and by independent media, especially those international media that oppose the Cuban government.

“I think that, from its raison d'être, from the fact of supporting entrepreneurship in Cuba, which had also been, from many stages, both criminalised and vilified, that above all - even today if you see the official press many times, not only the official press, but also the press outside Cuba that supports, more intransigent that supports for example the sanctions against Cuba and so on, you can find that many times the entrepreneurship that is emerging in Cuba is bad-mouthed” (Interview, Katia Sanchez, 2024).

In the same way, William Bello highlights the value of *En Plural* (In Plural) in exposing “all the potential that these ventures had to support the country in the midst of an extremely difficult situation”, and reconfiguring the narrative on entrepreneurship in Cuba and its role in the country's socio-economic and political dynamics.

Emprende Verde (Go Green Entrepreneurship) podcast highlights existing alliances for a sustainable, innovative and entrepreneurial Cuban landscape. The aim of the podcast is to make the issue of corporate social responsibility visible from a plural and inclusive perspective, starting from entrepreneurship but also including “people from civil society who are making and pushing for a policy of sustainability in many areas” (interview, Laura Salas, 2024). Salas reflects on how this way of communicating, which is not only limited to podcasting, but conceives *Emprende Verde* as part of a narrative of socio-environmental responsibility that contributes to the content and also to the credibility of social projects such as Tercer Paraíso and Eco Rizos, while at the same time exhibiting a modernity and “a contemporaneity in this way of communicating that is also interesting” (interview, Laura Salas, 2024). In the same way, Maria Carla - host of *Emprende Verde* - adds that the podcast has always been conceived as “a kind of auxiliary platform for communication and visibility”.

“There are people who are, for starters, wanting to live in Cuba. Qué locura! So I think that's legitimate. They are people who not only want to live in Cuba, but who also want to live in Cuba in a socio-environmentally responsible way, from where they can do it, from where they have managed to do it, and against all odds.”
(Interview, Maria Carla Figuerola, 2024)

Other podcasts build their narratives with a focus on niche interests. For example, *Voces de Marzo Literario* (Voices of Literary March) creates a space that did not exist in the media for young writers and which generated a way “for their voice to reach at least the public that was waiting for Marzo”, thus facilitating “a greater possibility of interacting and being heard, of being known” (interview, Erick Méndez, 2024).

Podcasts also influence the discovery and dissemination of the work of young authors, many of whom come from “very humble places in the province”, which limits access to exchange with publishers and poses another challenge in the promotion of their work. Lilian Sarmiento, a Cuban journalist interviewed for this research, highlights the case of the writer Reynaldo Zaldívar and his book *Carne Roja*, who was ‘discovered’ on the podcasts of La Luz, which allowed his literature to reach the province of Holguín and the whole country.

In the case of *Voces de Marzo Literario* and the podcasts of *Ediciones La Luz*, both have become platforms for the promotion of literature, publishing imprints and young Cuban writers, and have consolidated themselves as channels of exchange between authors, reader-listeners and publishers.

Other podcasts have focused on discussing faith and religious views, while diversifying the narrative of Havana-centrism to include stories from other parts of the country. *Voces*

Ecuménicas Cubanas (Cuban Ecumenical Voices) podcast amplifies and echoes the local efforts of the territories where the Martin Luther King Centre works, the institution that produces the podcast. The team aimed to map “the people who were doing things, the invisible life stories, the revolution of the nobodies” (interview, Yuliet Villares, 2024).

"Especially the churches, from Guantánamo, in a tiny community in El Salvador, where there is still very little electricity, water comes every I don't know how many days, and the food is even worse than in Havana and other provinces; even a story in El Vedado. So, compiling these stories always shows that there are a lot of people. That there are many of us, we are not so few". (Interview, Yuliet Villares, 2024)

On the other hand, the study identifies narratives from activism and the representation of communities in conditions of vulnerability. *El Descanso* (The Rest) addresses social issues based on personal experiences and the socialisation of good practices. As one of its hosts Lien Real describes, is "the first podcast that makes visible the precariousness with which caregivers live in Cuba". Its aim, according to co-host Yadira Alvarez, is "to make caregiving visible as a process and a phenomenon that crosses all elements of human society".

Meanwhile, *La Potajera* (The Stewpot) is the first LGBT podcast produced in Cuba, born "as an extension of Tremenda Nota magazine" (interview, Daniel Triana, 2024). The podcast discusses issues of "feminisms and LGBT community, gender issues, also Cuban current affairs, politics, but basically that, around feminisms and gender issues" (interview, Triana, 2024). Triana recognises that while these narratives exist on an individual or journalistic basis, more focused on the 'scriptural', *La Potajera* offers a distinctive format or communication product to address issues of gender and feminisms in Cuba.

"It is a niche, a place that was not occupied in some way, and that we came, perhaps, to fill, or to start a path, or simply to begin to speak from a place from which many people were not speaking" (Interview, Daniel Triana, 2024).

Meanwhile, *La Escuelita* (The Little School) is conceived as an activist project, which aims to educate people on LGBT issues, rights and identity.

Therefore, the podcasting phenomenon in Cuba serves as a catalyst for communicative spaces that highlight narratives traditionally marginalised within the Cuban media ecosystem.

5.1.4 Deconstructing Stereotypes

This medium allows narratives of identity to emerge, promoting alternative and countercurrent discursive spaces. An example of this is the podcast *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio*

(We Wear It Curly Radio). The show, interview-based, socialises stories of personalities, artists of Cuban culture, and the relationship of each one of them with their hair.

The podcast proposes an alternative discourse on Afro-Cuban identity and uses hair as a pretext to engage in dialogue based on individual experiences heard and discussed in collective spaces. This counter-narrative challenges the discourses rooted and reproduced in family and social contexts, as well as in the media, which are reinforced by stereotypes and the lack of information, debate and representation of black and mixed-race people in the media.

“This is a national problem, this didn't just happen to me, it's not that my family saw it that way. A whole country was saying that you are not pretty, that you are not beautiful, that you have to change, transform your body so that we can love you and accept you”. And I think that was a distinctive point.” (Interview, Dachelys Valdés, 2024)

The episode 3 of *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* (Interview with Daymé Arocena) reflects on the de-stigmatisation of dreadlocks, the use and role of language in the reinterpretation and appropriation of African styles. "It's hard work to unlearn...", says the podcaster. Another Cuban interviewee and artist, CimaFunk (Episode 5), reflects in the podcast on the cultural reproduction of racism that is organically embedded in the language of black families and communities, telling a child from an early age that his hair is "bad" and that he should "peel it short" because of it:

“Because you don't see it, you're not adapted to the fact that it's part of normality, that 'eso también está rico' (it's 'cool' as well).” (CimaFunk in Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio, Episode 5, 14 Nov 2020)

Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio (We Wear It Curly Radio) proposes the deconstruction of stereotypes based on the analysis of personal stories and beauty standards inherited from colonial times, enhanced by a cultural and racist gaze, which persists in contemporary Cuban society. Therefore, podcasting can supply this communicative need, creating a space for the construction of identity and collective self-esteem by making visible individual pains, experiences and conflicts that resonate with other listeners who have suffered similar experiences of racism.

5.1.5 A Gender-Conscious Lens

Narratives that are guided by gender-conscious lenses demonstrate potential to create a sense of community around them. Stories and discussions about female empowerment, feminisms, and gender representation not only deliver powerful storytelling, but are also able to articulate strong networks based on sisterhood and collective identity.

Empoderadas (Empowered Women) stands out as a podcast aimed at disseminating narratives of success, exemplary practices and inspiring perspectives by and for women. The podcast emerges as a communication space that shares success stories by women both inside and outside Cuba, as a strategy of validation and empowerment. It also identifies positive references that encourage inspiration in listeners who begin a process of exploration and definition of new horizons in their professional careers.

Other shows like *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* (We Wear It Curly Radio) encourage black female representations in the media, raising questions about stereotypes and racism related to physical appearance. In this sense, Dachelys Valdés, the podcast host, underlines the relevance of making these stereotypes visible and dismantling them, accompanying the audience in the process of unlearning the normative discourses and rebuilding self-esteem and identity through communication, dialogue and collective learning.

Sometimes the gender lens becomes the compass of the show, like in season 3 of the podcast *Emprende Verde* (Go Green Entrepreneurship). Laura Salas explains how the topic of gender became a common thread, connecting both cultural projects producing the podcast: Tercer Paraíso and Eco Rizos.

Feminisms are also discussed in podcasts like *La Potajera* (The Stewpot) and *La Escuelita* (The Little School), podcasts that generate space for debate and reflection on domestic topics related to LGBT issues in the island, as well as gender and political matters.

5.1.6 Enacting Conversations: Like Having ‘Cafecito’ With a Friend...

Narratives that emulate everyday conversations hold strong appeal for podcast listeners and have the potential to foster a sense of intimacy and familiarity. Several podcasters refer to the podcast format as akin to “sitting with your friend, chatting, having a coffee”, an experience marked by informality and comfort. These conversational narratives often function as audio postcards of daily life, capturing interactions during moments of leisure, such as blackouts in the city, or even reflecting elements of national idiosyncrasy, including the enjoyment of entertainment, casual ‘gossip’, “that little ring of: “Vecina (neighbour), look what happened today in the neighbourhood with the lockdown” (Interview, Yerisleidy Menéndez, 2024), and the cultural value placed on storytelling and sharing lived experiences.

During the analytical listening of Cuban podcasts, I observed a notable difference in language use between *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* (We Wear It Curly Radio) and *En Estéreo*

Podcast (In Stereo Podcast), despite both being focused on the Afro-Cuban community. In *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* (We Wear It Curly Radio), the host successfully creates a conversational tone, marked by colloquial language and a sense of reciprocal connection with her interviewees. By contrast, the first season of *En Estéreo Podcast* (In Stereo Podcast) includes “segments of the episode that are read by the host, in a complex and stilted language that is more akin to written language” (researcher's notes). This language use evolves significantly in later seasons, as improvements in recording conditions and a shift in the podcaster’s style result in a tone that is more accessible and conversational. Some podcasters also reflect on the performative nature of podcast speech, which, while aspiring to convey professionalism and authority, often presents itself as “casual conversation”.

Daniel Triana, referring to *La Potajera* (The Stewpot), states that the podcast “offers a kind of familiarity,” simulating conversations, using a Havana accent and colloquial, informal language, without the constraints of journalistic or linguistic purism. In this regard, Triana said that this mode of communication establishes a strong connection with the listener, as it draws on “a primary activity for human beings: that of conversing.”

5.1.7 Radio Textures

Another distinctive type of narrative with strong community appeal is found in podcasts that seek to revive the tradition of ‘radio’ for contemporary audiences. Radio-like textures, sometimes unconsciously embedded in the structure of episodes, reflect an oral tradition that has largely faded among younger Cuban listeners, but which podcasting is attempting to revitalise.

For Laura Salas, the aim behind the *Emprende Verde* (Go Green Entrepreneurship) podcast is “to recover radio, to recover a different kind of communication,” while Giselle Ordoñez describes podcasting as “a way of making radio, one could say almost in situ, live.” This liminal perspective between radio and podcasting reinforces a set of shared, and often overlapping, elements such as “intonation, intention, music, [and] the soundscape that accompanies a story” (interview, Dachelys Valdés, 2024), all of which contribute to the emotional resonance of the listening experience.

The radio nature of some Cuban podcasts is also visible in auto-imposed ‘fixed form’ of content production, and how some podcasters restrict themselves to a certain length and conventional narrative structures. This is evident in the case of *Voces of Marzo Literario* (Voices of Literary March), where Erick Méndez argues that they aimed to “maintain 10 minutes of programming”.

“Voces de Marzo Literario is indeed strongly influenced by radio because its creators come from radio, and it closely resembles cultural radio programmes that we can hear on our station”. (Interview, Lilian Sarmiento, 2024)

An example of radio practices embedded in Cuban podcasting can be found in Season 2 of *En Estéreo Podcast* (In Stereo Podcast), where the host includes the cue “Every Monday at 11:00 am” in the episode introduction. This temporal anchoring of the listening experience echoes traditional radio scheduling and contrasts with the inherently on-demand, timeless nature of podcasting.

In terms of audio production, many Cuban podcasts segment episodes into distinct sections, often using bumpers to signal transitions or employing sound effects to highlight specific actions, such as the sound of a phone preceding audience voice clips.

One of Cinemafilia’s (Cinephilia) narrative strategies is the historical section with which to appeal to “that nostalgic value and in a way encourage curiosity about what film life was like in Matanzas” (interview, Alejandro Gómez, 2024). Other podcasts such as *Píldoras Buen Idioma* (Good Language Pills) have sections such as “Claves Buen Idioma” or “Sección Numeral Duda”, where the podcaster includes queries from listeners or subscribers to the Telegram channel.

El Pitch (The Pitch) included a section of tips for entrepreneurs in the middle of the interview during its first season, as a useful break so that the user could “rest” from the main content while receiving valuable information. Meanwhile, *La Escuelita* (The Little School) podcast includes sections such as “El receso”, a name that describes a morning session in which students have a 15–20-minute break, like this “session in the middle of the episode that was more playful so to speak” (interview, Yeye Hernández, 2024). They also have another section “A las 4:20”, which is a popular reference to fights after school, ‘la fajazón a las Cuatro y veinte’ (the brawl at four-twenty), that this co-host describes as “exclusive YouTube content, which are rather controversial topics”.

Despite incorporating conventional radio-style formats, some podcasters criticise the resemblance to radio shows, viewing it as a limitation on narrative experimentation. This is the case with *Voces de Marzo Literario* (Voices of Literary March) and the first season of *Emprende Verde* (Go Green Entrepreneurship); in both instances, the hosts came from a radio background and reproduced the same narration style. In contrast, others highlight podcasting’s unique affordances as a creative medium, “as a language”, that allows for the construction of “another possible world that radio does not usually allow” (Interview, Rafa Escalona, 2024).

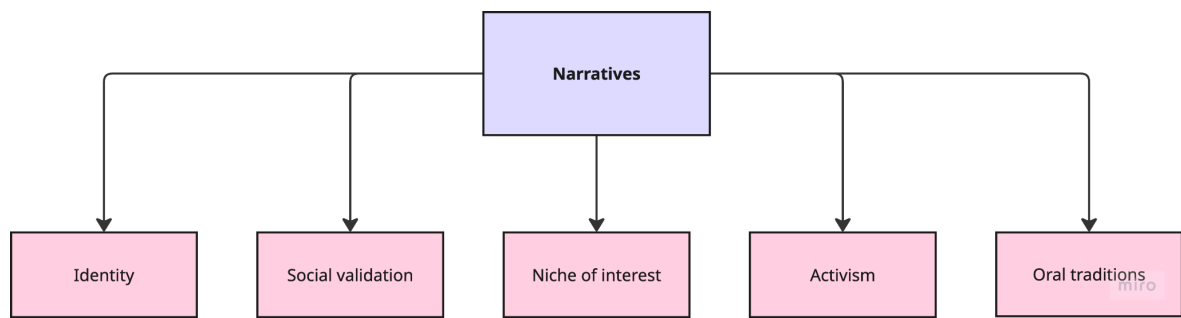


Figure 5.1 – Narratives that foster community in podcasting in Cuba

As discussed in this section, narratives contribute to fostering a sense of togetherness and communal bonds when they centre on niche interests or promote identity empowerment (see Fig. 5.1). Other narratives that nourish community are rooted in activism and the advocacy of social and human rights. Additionally, narratives that offer social validation impact collective belonging by enhancing opportunities for further interaction among members. Moreover, narratives that preserve and reproduce oral traditions can attract radio listeners to podcasting, revealing a correlation between the love/hate relationship with radio and its transposition into the podcasting space.

5.2 Fostering Participation Through Transmedia Practices

While narratives foster a sense of collective ideals and identification through identity affirmation and social validation, contemporary storytelling, however, extends beyond the auditory realm, offering the potential to create interactive and engaging user experiences across multiple platforms and formats. By building unique sensory experiences around a central theme, these narratives open various entry points that function independently, allowing audiences to engage with the story from diverse perspectives. This raises the question: which additional platforms contribute to the transmedia experience of Cuban podcasting communities?

5.2.1 Real Time Engagement: Voice Chats on Telegram

For Cuban podcasters, Telegram continues to serve as a key platform for engaging with listeners and distributing content. It enables the creation of dedicated channels where voice chats can be hosted and live discussions facilitated, all while requiring relatively low data consumption, an important consideration within the Cuban connectivity context.

Dachelys Valdés recalls how, during the pandemic, “discussion groups were set up on Telegram and people would leave their opinions”, a practice that extended beyond her own podcast to include other Cuban shows to which she subscribed. In the specific case of *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* (We Wear It Curly Radio), these voice chats on Telegram became a follow-up activity after the release of each episode. Listeners first accessed the episode, and

then, depending on the availability of the interviewees, a voice chat would be scheduled as a space for exchange and dialogue. As the host explains, this allowed “the community to ask them questions”, thereby deepening engagement and reinforcing the participatory dimension of the podcast.

In the experience of *Voces de Marzo Literario* (Voices of Literary March), for example, Lilian Sarmiento comments on how the audience took the floor in these audio chats and had the possibility to interact not only with the podcasters, but also with Cuban authors and other literary enthusiasts.

*"So we also gave them the possibility to interact, to comment on what they thought, to ask an author a question, or to read their own texts, all of that happened there".
(Interview, Lilian Sarmiento, 2024)*

The podcast *Voces Ecuménicas Cubanas* (Cuban Ecumenical Voices) occasionally had between seventy to one hundred people connected to the voice chats on Telegram. These voice chats later became episodes of the podcast.

These voice chats on Telegram offer the advantage of immediacy by allowing real-time connection with listeners; however, they also present distinct challenges for podcasters. William Bello underscores the difficulties associated with content management and moderating live conversations. He also reflects on how communicative codes shift within these interactive environments, where urgency dominates, post-production editing is absent, and participants enjoy “the freedom to ask”. In the case of *En Plural* (In Plural), up to 50 listeners participated in live sessions on Telegram, although attendance was often impacted by inconsistent connectivity. These audio chats were subsequently published as standalone episodes on the platform, where they reached broader audiences, some accumulating as many as 300 listens per episode.

A comparable experience is offered by Albert Cabrera, host of *CalvOS*, who used Twitter Spaces as a platform for interaction with his audience. These live sessions served as spaces for dialogue, where Cabrera responded to questions and comments from listeners, with some discussions extending up to two hours. He emphasises the importance of “giving the audience a voice” by opening the microphone and fostering direct participation. Unlike other podcasters, however, he chose not to repurpose these conversations as podcast episodes.

5.2.2 Expanding the Podcast Experience

Transmedia experiences are evident in repurposing content for podcasting on the web. For instance, the digital media outlet *Cubadebate* has a history of publishing both radio and television programmes as podcasts on Spreaker since 2018, in addition to producing its own original podcast content.

Another example of content repurposing is the podcast *Palabras con sentido* (Words with Purpose), of the Periódico Girón de Matanzas, which even had versions of the episodes in the printed editions of the newspaper, an example of processes in reverse where these sound contents become part of the production of traditional media in written language. Arletis Arango recalls how the newspaper's former editor Ayose S. Naranjo recommended her to implement a change in strategy to increase the number of listeners and diversify the podcast's audiences.

"We're going to change the strategy a bit, we're going to put a QR in the printed newspaper too, and we're going to put a QR on it so that people can scan it - look, a QR on the newspaper - because the people who read the Matanzas newspaper in print - because since it was digital, people didn't buy it any more - were the old people. (Interview, Arletis Arango, 2024)

Similarly, independent podcasters reuse the content of the episodes in different formats and platforms. For example, *El Pitch* (The Pitch) keeps a "written record of each of the interviews, of each of the episodes", and they have published versions of the episodes as articles on their website. Katia explains how these articles provide an overview of the episode, including quotes from the interviewees, as well as a link to the episode on the hosting platform to give the user the option to listen to the full interview.

Cristian Martínez is also committed to offering a variety of formats and platforms where content can be consumed, according to the user's preference. *Buen Idioma* emerged as a project in April 2020, amid the pandemic, as a linguistic dissemination project, whose main objective is to "promote the good use of Spanish in the media in Cuba", according to its creator and host Cristian Martínez. The project has a YouTube channel, a website, a magazine, and the podcast, aimed at users who "prefer to listen to linguistic recommendations through audio or are adapted to consuming information in this format" (interview, Cristian Martínez, 2024).

This transmedia example can be seen in how *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* (We Wear It Curly Radio) podcast expanded the experience on Telegram using various interactive strategies with their audience. According to the host, they didn't want "it to be like a dry audio, we wanted there to be all this construction around it". Therefore, they created posters, polls,

riddles, "collages with the photos of the artists, and in one of those photos was the one we were going to interview for people to guess" (Interview, Dachelys Valdés, 2024). On the Telegram channel they shared books related to the topics they addressed in the episode, and even shared the visual and musical work of the Cuban artists interviewed in the podcast, if they gave their consent. This experimentation and construction around the podcast also included an experience of "live music, as if it were real radio", according to Dachelys.

"People would go online on Sundays to listen to music, and people would tell me: 'Hey, I've got it on, your music, while I'm doing other stuff, or 'no sé que cosa'". (Interview, Dachelys Valdés, 2024)

The extension of the podcast fosters a form of collective listening, bringing together listeners and the podcaster in real time. It constitutes a variation of the traditional podcast experience, which is typically characterised by individual control and autonomy over listening. However, this "streaming of audio via Telegram" enables a shared, collective connection without undermining the individuality or spatial autonomy of each participant.

5.2.3 Meetups and Events

In the context of the transmedia construction of podcasting in Cuba, face-to-face meetings emerge as a prominent component. Although they are not an exclusive element of the Cuban podcast landscape, it is pertinent to examine the underlying purpose of these encounters. Far from being live recordings in the presence of the audience, these events contribute to enriching the podcast experience through discussions with podcast creators, exchanges with listeners, audiovisual screenings, debates and other moments aimed at strengthening communities.

Some podcasters have organised events and invited other peers to join, such as the face-to-face meeting organised by *ZonaO*Clichés (Cliché-Free Zone), whose guest was also Cuban podcaster Sixela Ametller.

Other podcasts organise in-person meetups to "put a face to the conversation" taking place on digital platforms. This reflects a need to complement virtual interactions with physical encounters, creating opportunities for mutual recognition and presence. Such transitions in the podcasting experience highlight the value of embodied communication, through gestures, behaviours, and shared physical space, which in turn fosters new collective constructions of meaning, memory, and affiliation with both the listener and the podcaster.

In the case of *El Descanso* (The Rest), the hosts and producers recall face-to-face meetups with their audience as spaces of mutual recognition and connection. One such encounter

resulted in the creation of an episode entitled “Families and Schools”. These events are often enriched by cultural activities such as audiovisual screenings and musical performances, which serve to expand and deepen the podcast experience beyond the digital realm.

"This has also allowed us to put a face to the people who listen. I have two friends who started out as listeners, and they are my friends who are mothers. (Interview, Lien Real, 2024)

For Maria Carla Figuerola, the event organised by *Emprende Verde* (Go Green Entrepreneurship) in Havana, in August 2023, put the podcast “in the hands of the community it was intended for in a way”. Although the organisers state that they did not aim to have a proper exchange with the audience during the event, it ended up being a space for questions. Laura Salas described it as an opportunity for getting closer to “people who had been part of it with their interviews, but also with a kind of people we dreamed of interviewing in the future, a community” (interview, Laura Salas, 2024).

5.2.4 From Podcast to Festival

The Pitch Festival is a good illustration of transmedia extension of podcasting in Cuba. *El Pitch Festival*, whose second edition took place in 2024, was conceived with two primary objectives: to mark the end of the podcast season through a collective event, and to convene the invisible “community of podcasters that can never be found, that is never anywhere, that nobody recognises” (Interview, Katia Sánchez, 2024). The festival serves as a space for sharing experiences and best practices, fostering both visibility and cohesion within the Cuban podcasting scene. Both editions of the festival were held in Havana, incorporating in-person and online participation.

“We brought together a series of podcasts and we started to talk about what we do, to inspire, to also talk about the problems that exist, the obstacles - which are many - but in spite of everything, to know how this community of podcasters in the country continues to work, which I think is very important”. (Interview, Katia Sánchez, 2024)

The first edition of the Pitch Festival took place online in 2021, with 400 attendees and speakers from four countries. The 2024 edition featured speakers such as Mariana Vaccaro, director of Podcaster@s, the largest community of Spanish-speaking podcasters. In this edition, podcasters from *El Descanso* (The Rest), *La Escuelita* (The Little School), *La Potajera* (The Stewpot), and *El Enjambre* (The Swarm) were invited to participate in a panel discussion on podcasting in Cuba.

The festival has received sponsorship from several businesses, including some of the entrepreneurs interviewed in the podcast. These funds were sufficient to produce the

festival, and also to guarantee the production of the second season, as well as the salaries of the podcast production team.

These complementary experiences to the podcast, not only enrich the listener's experience, but also build a sound window to the domestic production of podcasts (see [Appendix E.2](#)), and facilitate the articulation of a Cuban podcaster community that continues to exist in the popular unknown.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the evolving narratives and themes emerging from the Cuban podcasting landscape during 2018-2024.

Cuban podcasts articulate stories that resonate deeply with listeners, fostering togetherness and identification through identity affirmation, social validation, niche interests, activism, and the preservation of oral traditions.

These narratives are often enhanced through transmedia extensions that facilitate real-time engagement and diversify the audience experience. Platforms such as Telegram and Twitter offer interactive opportunities, while in-person meetups, live events, and festivals serve to publicly showcase the work of Cuban podcasters. These extensions function as complementary entry points, some conventional, others more experimental, that deepen listener involvement.

Through the interplay of narrative and transmedia practice, Cuban podcasts cultivate spaces of exchange that enable mutual recognition between producers and audiences. In doing so, they open new possibilities for identification, belonging, and community-building in the contemporary Cuban media ecosystem. Therefore, if the processes underpinning these narratives are examined, which communicative practices emerge? How is a sense of community constructed through these podcasts? And what roles do listeners play in shaping this communicative dynamic?

6. BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH COLLABORATIVE PRACTICES

This chapter begins by examining how Cuban media practitioners interviewed for this study define the concept of community. It then offers a comprehensive analysis of the values, shared attitudes, and symbolic practices that contribute to the construction of a sense of community within the Cuban podcasting landscape.

Firstly, it enquires into the communicative practices adopted by podcasters in order to shape the podcasting experience collectively and foster community engagement.

Secondly, it explores how listeners develop a sense of belonging through their relationship with the podcast and its creators.

Thirdly, although less prominently, the chapter examines interactions among listeners themselves that, while often peripheral, contribute to the broader fabric of community and support its consolidation.

Finally, it reflects on the significance of guest participation in podcast episodes as a form of creative collaboration and symbolic entry into the podcasting community.

6.1. What is the Meaning of Community?

Cuban podcasters describe community as a space of gathering or communion grounded in shared values, a meeting point for individuals with common or complementary interests. While participants may not always share the same perspectives, they nonetheless contribute to what many describe as a convergence space for mutual exchange.

“Which is, ultimately, what El Descanso is all about: a meeting point, a network of people with shared concerns.” (Interview, Rafa Escalona, 2024)

Community is also described as a “beautiful connection”, a space where people link and can be present. Sixela Ametller, host of *Empoderadas* (Empowered Women) describes it as a place to meet others, but above all, to be heard around a particular topic. She perceives her podcast community as those with whom she has a closer relationship, people who have engaged in an exchange, whether at an in-person event or through private communication.

While some understand the concept as a space to share one’s story, receive feedback, and find identification and collaborative work, others highlight how loyalty is deeply intertwined with community building processes. Katia Sánchez, creator of *El Pitch* (The Pitch) podcast, argues that the community consists of loyal listeners that remain despite inconsistencies,

obstacles, changes in concept, migration, and other circumstances. To her, the community sustains and encourages the podcaster, staying “close to”, even at times when “the episode wasn’t the one that resonated the most, but they are still there regardless”.

Podcast communities can also become a space for democratising information, communication, and even the ways members interconnect. Yuliet Villares explains that the idea behind *Voces Ecuménicas Cubanas* (Cuban Ecumenical Voices) was to “create a choir”, to unite voices, to achieve “the realisation of that collectivity”.

“There are people who have been trampled on all their lives. And God is there. For me, that was the essential part of Voces. To unite, to form the choir. Because there were people singing out there, but we tried to form the choir. That’s why I said at the beginning that, for me, the podcast was this symphony of voices. Because alone, one gets exhausted. But if you come together...” (Interview, Yuliet Villares, 2024)

This social perspective contrasts with views that frame community primarily as a means of sustainability. In an interview for this study in 2024, Albert Cabrera explained that the community could also serve as a financial support mechanism for a podcast. From the standpoint of an independent media outlet in Cuba, it constitutes a form of backup, one that could potentially sustain production in a financially fragile context, where independent outlets often rely on international grants and subsidies.

“But small, independent media have had to realise the importance of community building, just as podcasts do. Because that’s where it all begins, first and foremost, there’s the economic aspect. These are the people who can eventually pay you.” (Interview, Yerisleydys Menéndez, 2024)

Listeners, therefore, play a crucial role in building and sustaining these communities, demonstrating loyalty and commitment to the podcast through various actions, such as sharing content, participating in events, or creating listening clubs. Listeners also offer notable forms of support by “interacting among themselves through the podcast, joining membership programmes, contributing financially, etc.” (Questionnaire, Yohan Amed, 2024).

6.2 Collaborative Storytelling

Having identified the values and attitudes that define community for Cuban podcasting media practitioners, this chapter now turns to the communicative practices employed by podcasters to cultivate a sense of community through the collective construction of the podcasting experience.

6.2.1 Integrated Feedback

An important element stressed by Cuban creators in the podcasting experience is the feedback from the listeners. This feedback not only informs the podcaster about the listeners' opinions but also represents a reciprocal conduit that facilitates the articulation of listeners' perspectives on the episodes, enables communication with the podcast creator, and facilitates a response platform for podcasters. However, the extent to which feedback shapes the content and performance of the podcast host is an interesting variable in understanding the significance of the podcast-listener interaction, and therefore, how this influences a sense of community for listener and podcaster alike.

Raúl Soublett, host of *En Estéreo Podcast* (In Stereo Podcast), believes that engaging with the audience requires a negotiation of mutual interests, as “you have to listen to them, to what they want”. *En Estéreo* regularly conducts post-episode surveys and polls precisely to assess “how well the work is coming along”. These surveys include questions such as:

“What did you like? What didn’t you like? What would you like us to improve? Or what would you like us to include?” (Interview, Raúl Soublett, 2024)

Similarly, Arletis Arango, founder of *Palabras con Sentido* (Words with Purpose), recalls receiving comments from listeners both on social media and via the Ivoox platform. She notes that although not every episode prompted active engagement, there were notable instances where listeners suggested potential interviewees through social media interactions.

In some cases, listener suggestions have had a significant impact on the identity of a podcast. For example, Albert Cabrera credits a listener’s recommendation within a Telegram community for prompting him to rename his podcast. Originally titled *TecnoCode*, the podcast was rebranded as *Club calvOS 360* (a play on words because the podcaster is *calvo* (bald), the podcast discusses topics related to the iOS operating system, and 360 because it's all-encompassing). Cabrera recalls a suggestion from a listener, whom also describes as a friend, who told him:

“You need to create something that’s truly yours, because there are thousands of projects that start with the word ‘Tecno.’ That ‘Tecno’ thing is everywhere.” (Interview, Albert Cabrera, 2024)

Some podcasters incorporate listener feedback directly into their episodes as a way to acknowledge audience engagement, while others have even used this feedback as the central focus of entire episodes.

For example, the podcast *En Plural* (In Plural) actively integrated listener participation by incorporating their questions into the interview process. A few days before recording, the team would invite their audience to submit questions for upcoming guests. These contributions were then included alongside the pre-established questionnaire designed by the *En Plural* team. William Bello highlights that this approach was aimed to balance editorial direction with audience input, fostering a more pluralistic and inclusive dialogue.

Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio (We Wear It Curly Radio) podcast gradually integrated audience feedback into its content, drawing on listener suggestions, particularly from social media and its Telegram channel, to shape future episodes around topics that had not yet been addressed but were of clear interest to the community. Listeners also participated in collective decision-making, such as choosing the timing of Telegram voice chats through polls on the platform, aligning this interactive exchange with their availability.

However, feedback can also be a challenging path to navigate through. Lisy Romero, co-host of *La Escuelita* (The Little School) podcast, shares her experience of navigating aggressive comments on social media:

“So, in a way, we’ve also been making use of people’s hate. (...) Yeah, it’s amazing, especially because they do half the work for you! They drop something, and I’m like: ‘Hey, that’s actually a great idea!’ And then you create an episode out of it. But, for the most part, we’ve used these comments to deconstruct harmful narratives.” (Interview, Lisy Romero, 2024)

The podcaster explains that they have transformed audience feedback into a point of discussion, specifically aiming to “demystify certain ideas,” as many of these comments are based on misconceptions rooted in sexism, homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, and lesbophobia.

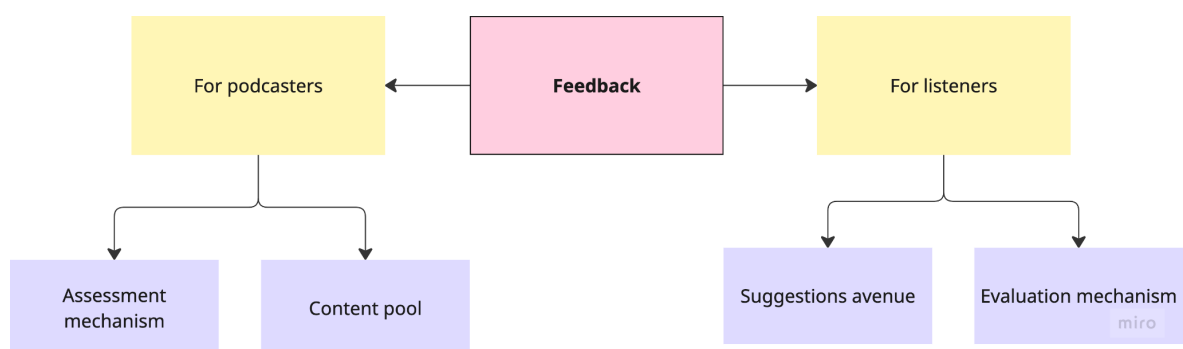


Figure 6.1 – Feedback’s dual mechanism

Feedback is a dual mechanism for podcasters and listeners, providing opportunities for mutual exchange. For podcasters, feedback serves as both an assessment tool and a source of content to incorporate into their shows, while listeners gain a channel to offer

suggestions. Moreover, feedback functions as an evaluative mechanism through which listeners affirm, criticise, and act as a social compass for the podcaster.

6.2.2 Crowdsourcing

The communicative exchange between podcasters and listeners not only facilitates feedback but can also serve as a form of crowdsourcing for podcast episodes.

Albert Cabrera, for example, explains that while his podcast *Club calvOS 360* is based on his personal experiences, he also wants to base it on his community. For this reason, Albert invites his listeners to suggest topics or problems so that he can try to help and offer a solution from his perspective. This idea of providing a space for listeners to suggest topics through comments on various platforms such as Telegram, Twitter, Trek, even a form in Notion, is, according to Albert, an important element of the community experience, as it gives the listeners a direct "opportunity to interact" with him.

"I also base the community part on this, that is, giving them the opportunity to interact with me. Because it's not just about putting on your headphones, listening, 'well yes, very nice, he speaks very well, very beautifully, with nice background music, the audio sounds really good'." (Interview, Albert Cabrera, 2024)

In the case of *El Descanso* (The Rest), its producer, Rafa Escalona, reflects on how the interactions they receive on social media become spaces of suggested topics and testimonies that they later include in the podcast. They have also created a WhatsApp group for the podcast's listeners, where participants have proposed sources of information and even potential interviewees. Yadira Alvarez, co-host of the podcast (The Rest), also argues how some of the topics "also come from what the community itself has suggested or openly requested" in that group.

"And sometimes, we pick up on those, because there are certain topics that might raise concern, that the caregiver community might be worried about, something they may not make public but, well, they let it slip, they needed to vent and explained everything they were going through, and one thinks: 'Look, this is a topic that others might be experiencing, and they might need to talk about it or hear about it.'" (Interview, Yadira Alvarez, 2024)

The host of *Píldoras Buen Idioma* (Good Language Pills) podcast receives questions through various channels, including email, social media and especially Telegram, where the podcast has the largest community. Cristian Martínez receives these messages and from there he selects content for one of the sections of the podcast, in addition to receiving a lot of feedback through this channel.

"I think that when people see themselves represented in the podcast, they say, 'Oh, well, they're paying attention to me,' or 'they're giving me a say in the product that's being created'." (Interview, Cristian Martínez, 2024)

In summary, listener contributions can exert significant influence on the podcast content. Social media comments can be transformed into episode topics, thereby acknowledging the listener's contributions to the podcast's creative process. This element points to the bi-directional potential of podcaster-listener interaction, where both actors are rewarded: the podcaster by receiving new topic suggestions and recommendations, and the listener by being recognised as an actor who adds value to the podcast.

6.2.3 Reciprocity: The Podcast as a Space for Listening

This web of relationships between podcasters and listeners is further strengthened by the attitudes of many Cuban creators who view the podcast as a space for 'listening to the listener'.

Some Cuban podcasters advocate for a bidirectional perspective on podcast communicative dynamics, positioning the medium as "a space to be heard". This perspective extends beyond the podcast itself, encompassing other communication spaces such as personal and private conversations between the podcaster and listeners, or even group settings like WhatsApp groups.

"What we do is accompany more, and listen. But we can then redirect them to seek information or look for information together." (Interview, Yadira Alvarez, 2024)

These private conversation spaces, especially when sustained over time, foster relationships that go beyond traditional teaching or guidance roles. Some Cuban podcasters embrace a more pastoral or mentoring role, offering support to listeners as they seek information or personal growth.

"Do you need therapy? Here's these numbers". "Do you need this? Here, take this." Or, if I see it's something small, not a big deal, it's more like: "Hey, calm down, you need to focus on this. This goes here, that goes there, lower your anxiety, etc." (Interview, Allison Norch, 2024)

Therefore, these communicative practices within podcasting foster relationships based on support and reciprocity. Podcasters 'listen' to their audience by also giving prominence to their stories and respecting the identity of those who contribute.

Reciprocity also emerges as a strategic media engagement tool within the Cuban podcasting landscape. For instance, the independent media outlet *Periodismo de Barrio*

(Neighbourhood Journalism) adopts a proactive listening approach by directly asking audiences what they want covered, framing this responsiveness as a foundational part of their editorial process. Rather than treating audiences as passive recipients or formal sources, they are engaged as collaborators in a process of triangulating data and validating stories. As Yerisleydys Menéndez notes, this shifts the function of the listener from that of expert informant to participant verifier. This practice becomes especially valuable in Cuba's restricted information ecosystem, where official data is scarce or inaccessible to independent media.

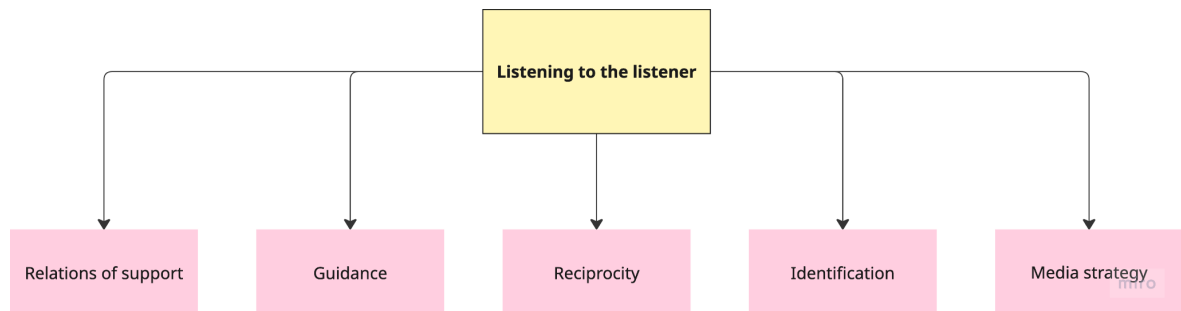


Figure 6.2 – *Listening to the listener*

Participants, while emphasising that the podcast is a space for listening (see Fig. 22), propose a different approach to the medium based on mutual understanding and a bidirectional model of communication. Seeking these relationships with listeners can foster support and guidance, enhance trust and reciprocity, and cultivate a sense of identification. Nonetheless, it can also be employed as a media strategy to bring users closer to the outlet and strengthen citizen journalism by positioning them as sources within data triangulation strategies.

6.2.4 Mutual Recognition

Participants highlighted podcasting's potential to foster a sense of belonging to something 'bigger than yourself'. For some podcasters, the idea of community has been a compass from the very beginning of show production. Dachelys Valdés shares the example of *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* (We Wear It Curly Radio), and how the team aimed at creating something that the listeners "felt a part of and recognised themselves as part of" (Interview, 2024). Other podcasting media practitioners, such as Laura Salas, emphasise the spiritual satisfaction of creating a sound narrative in which she and others can take part.

This sense of belonging articulated by the podcast can transcend geographical boundaries, as this belonging is symbolic, constructed and reinforced through communicative practices. In this context, Yadira Álvarez highlights the potential of the *El Descanso* (The Rest) community to foster networks of solidarity. She aims to form alliances with a group of

foreign Spanish caregivers who have reached out to the podcast via social media, with the intention of supporting Cuban caregivers in Spain or integrating Cuban caregiving families already residing there into their support network. This act of mediation on behalf of other caregivers, even those outside of Cuba, reflects a deeper understanding of what it means to belong to the Cuban caregiving community and illustrates how solidarity networks are weaved through communicative actions.

In this line of mutual recognition, Lien Real also argues that the research process for the production of the podcast allowed them to identify many caregivers in Cuba "who feel the same as you and face caregiving difficulties very similar to yours". These processes of mutual identification enable listener participation in the podcast as guests or experts. This, furthermore, renegotiates the power dynamic between podcaster and listener that the podcast format might create.

For podcasts listeners, the medium can also foster a meaningful sense of connection, especially with those narratives where similar lived experiences are shared. MsDup, a listener of Cuban podcasts based in Canada, expresses her satisfaction in hearing the voices of "women and men and people who have lived the experience of living in Cuba, being Cuban, and emigrating to other countries" (focus group, MsDup, 2024).

Therefore, sound narratives that resonate collectively, bringing individuals together around shared values, facilitates a form of mutual recognition between podcasters and listeners. This, in turn, fosters a dialogical and reciprocal exchange between both parties and promotes a shared sense of recognition centred on the podcast.

6.3 Listeners' Attitudes and Contributions

The chapter has examined the communicative practices employed by podcasters to construct the podcast experience as a collective endeavour, incorporating listeners into the creative process to a certain extent. The discussion now turns to explore listeners' attitudes towards the podcasts and the voluntary roles they assume in managing the spaces surrounding these aural narratives.

6.3.1 Co-creation Practices

More than half of the participants recalled including listeners' social media comments, testimonies or voice notes in their episodes. Podcast listeners may contribute passively to the creative process by sharing stories and testimonials, which podcasters subsequently incorporate into episodes while respecting the listeners' identity and anonymity.

Testimonials offered via social media platforms such as Instagram inform podcasters of unique experiences, which are subsequently shared within podcast episodes. Some podcasters emphasise the importance of preserving anonymity when including these contributions, viewing this practice as a form of reciprocity that acknowledges and validates their attentive engagement with the audience.

Podcasts like *Voces Ecuménicas Cubanas* (Cuban Ecumenical Voices) are closely linked to the testimonies of the people, to those "very simple and straightforward life stories", and that in the act of including these testimonies there is also a process of recognition where, far from accentuating the identity of the contributor, emphasis is placed on those "testimonies of justice, equity and dignity" (interview, Yuliet Villares, 2024).

Lecturas al Oído (Readings to the Ear) podcast, on the other hand, invites active participation when the host says: "You too can be a protagonist of *Lecturas al Oído*" and become part of the "big family of readers". The production team then turned listeners' contributions into individual episodes of the podcast, allowing the listeners to be a fundamental part of the creative process.

Shows such as *Cositos Radiales* (Radio Thingies), *Píldoras Buen Idioma* (Good Language Pills), *Modo Avión*, from *Cubadebate*, among others, promote the active contribution of their listeners, inviting the public to send audio clips related to the podcast's theme. In the case of *Cositos Radiales*, listeners send clips with stories (real or fictional) that are then edited by the podcaster, with the support of sound resources.

6.3.2 Listener-Generated Content

A significant element focuses on actions initiated by listeners, voluntarily and intentionally towards the podcast creator. This active user contribution constitutes a dynamic and interactive resource that reinforces notions of identification in the audiences, as they listen to themselves and see themselves explicitly represented in the creation of the sound product.

Cositos Radiales (Radio Thingies) offers a notable example of collaborative podcasting. Launched in 2020 as a participatory initiative, it promoted collective storytelling based on creative prompts or points of inspiration. Although the podcasters provided a basic set of guidelines for contributions (see Fig. 6.3), listeners determined the narrative arcs and assumed responsibility for the creative and editorial processes, selecting their own soundtracks and sound effects.

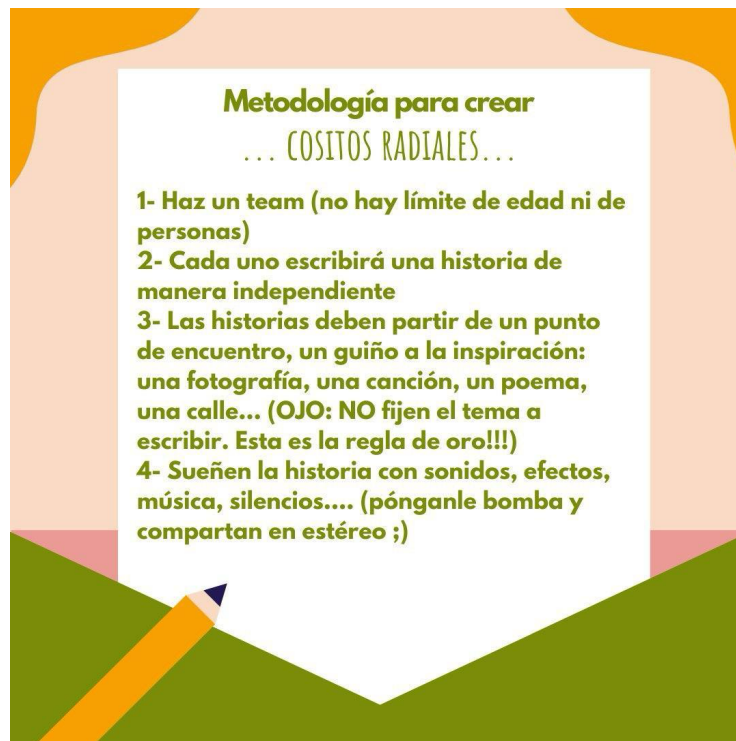


Figure 6.3 – Cositos Radiales set of guidelines for listeners' contributions.

Source: Telegram

Claudia Yilén, in an interview for this study, highlights the collective creation experience of the podcast *Cositos Radiales* (Radio Thingies), and the transition of some listeners from observers to contributors and producers of the podcast. Yilén argues that this collaborative experience constructed a "supportive sound community," a space "where people went and just 'were', without much makeup, without many filters like social media" (interview, 2024)

"We had prosumers. And I think that's typical of a community, something where everyone participates in different ways. As a listener, as a producer of something, as a creator of something." (Interview, Claudia Yilén, 2024)

Claudia also reflects on the creative process and how *Cositos Radiales* became a space for individual and collective experimentation during the pandemic.

"I think that the isolation we were living through was a way of sharing with someone. It was almost a blind date because you didn't know who was [the person you were creating the episode with]. (...) Another thing, thinking about it this way... We never told anyone: 'I need you to create a joint story.' There were never any rules. People would approach and say, 'I'd like to create a story with this girl or this guy who does that episode'." (Interview, Claudia Yilén, 2024)

Another similar experimental experience, based on collective creation, was the podcast *Buzón de Voz de Clandestina* (Clandestina's Voicemail) by the Cuban fashion brand Clandestina. While its producer and co-founder, Leire Fernández, describes the podcast as

a communicative "response to a very specific situation" in the middle of the pandemic, *Buzón* became an invitation to their community of followers to bring together different voices across its episodes. However, its editor and producer Alejandro Arango, states that the podcast became more of a catharsis space rather than a collective conversation. Arango argues that despite the pandemic being "the perfect moment" for a conversation to bloom, *Buzón* didn't go beyond "groupies making jokes in the bathroom, bored, with a couple of exceptions of listeners who shared hobbies and stories" (Interview, 2024).

"For better or worse, because that's it, that's why it stayed mostly as catharsis. It never reached a phase of people there talking about other things. It was all catharsis. People making catharsis. And then after seven episodes, that kind of wears you out." (Interview, Alejandro Arango, 2024)

Other listeners' voluntary contributions can be found in *Voces de Marzo Literario* (Voices of Literary March), Erick Méndez recounts how some listeners sent poems to the podcast to be included in the episodes, and how these contributors even became close friends. Dachelys Valdés, for her part, highlights how the *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* (We Wear It Curly Radio) podcast channel had a wide following in the Telegram group, including a young girl with her mother. Dachelys recounts how this young girl would make songs for the group and send them into the chat, highlighting how these sound narratives can encourage listeners to engage through creative exchange.

The *Lecturas al Oído* (Readings to the Ear) podcast, on the other hand, offers a mixed experience. Its main host, Julio A. Fernández, was not involved in the process of adding other participants to the podcast, as the show was produced by the independent media outlet *El Toque*. Nevertheless, *Lecturas* is a podcast that brings together a variety of voices and literary fragments narrated by different contributors. While it is true that the call for contributions came from the podcast - following the editorial stance of the independent media - the listener exercises greater creative freedom by choosing to contribute, given the autonomy to choose what to read and how to read it. The medium does not set parameters for these contributions; therefore, each narrative is different, each contributor brings a unique cadence, intonation and oral expression to the podcast. There is no music to interrupt the reading, only the voice and the narrative ability of the listener as protagonist (and producer).

In the case of *Voces Ecuménicas Cubanas* (Cuban Ecumenical Voices), the podcast was based on individual stories sent in by listeners. The podcast includes the representation of several provinces of the country, people who had no podcasting culture but intended to contribute and participate in this collective construction of Voices. The production team guides the contributors, and some of them were so creative that they even played

"musiquita" in the background of the recording. The creative team then matches the stories and builds the macro narrative of the episode.

"But if you put the stories of the people, the collective stories of the people, into a product and from that you reflect, that is also part of popular education. From the practice, you theorise about that practice and there is an enriched practice. So it is under this dynamic of popular education that we are going to do the podcasts". (Interview, Yuliet Villares, 2024)

Moreover, the podcast *Oye, te cuento* (Hey, let me tell you) was the result of the experimentation of two Cuban independent media in the context of the pandemic. This creative exercise is part of a strategy for the audiences of *El Toque* and *Periodismo de Barrio* (Neighbourhood Journalism), with the aim of accompanying their users amid this circumstance and offering readers the possibility of being part of a sound archive of the coronavirus in Cuba.

"But I think that what distinguished it was that, from its conception, from the moment we thought of it, it was designed to be created by the people, not by journalists. In other words, the journalists from El Toque and Periodismo de Barrio were going to do the back end, behind camera, behind audio, to help make sense of it, to give it a narrative. But the voices were the people's voices and we thought of it that way from the beginning." (Interview, Yerisleydys Menéndez, 2024)

However, listeners can also refrain from any form of engagement due to several factors, including shyness. This is something acknowledged by both podcasters and audiences, and can hinder participation and contribution. This is exemplified by Zea, a Cuban podcast listener, who expresses concern that interacting with podcasters might 'bother' them after a long, tiring day. Similarly, Dachelys Valdés recalls a moment when they considered incorporating listeners' voices and issued a call in a chat group; however, the response was hesitant: 'Oh, I'm too shy and I don't know,' ultimately preventing the initiative from moving forward.

6.3.3 Audience Requests

A key finding of the study concerns listeners' demands, which are primarily centred on the reliable availability of podcast episodes, as well as expressions of collective concern for the podcast and its creators. Notably, when this topic was raised, it was most often associated with the notion of community.

Cuban podcasters observe that listeners actively call for the release of new episodes when delays occur, underscoring the audience's engagement and investment in the continuity of the podcast.

"The community is made up of those who are really interested in what the podcast is, who will even tell you: 'Hey, where's this week's episode, you haven't published it?' They write to me. There are some ladies who write to me and say, 'Cristian, where is the podcast, it's not available?'" (Interview, Cristian Martínez, 2024)

Claudia Yilén, co-creator of *Cositos Radiales* (Radio Thingies), recalls the responsibility they felt about publishing due to the listeners' demand. In the case of *Team Serendipia* (Serendipity Team) podcast, Giselle Ordoñez shares how some people would worry about the episode, and if it wasn't published at the time they had announced, they would get private messages saying: "Hey, what happened?". "That was every day," Ordoñez adds. Among the listener demands was also the request for music, and other multimedia resources.

"People started asking us for the music we put on the podcasts, they started asking us for memes related to the podcasts, and a whole community formed around that." (Interview, Giselle Ordoñez, 2024)

Another request from the audience relates to the accessibility of the podcast for future consultation, especially for discussion spaces like Telegram audio chats, which can be more ephemeral and not necessarily evolve into a podcast episode. Yuliet Villares gives an example of how some listeners requested *Voices* to share the recording after the virtual meeting, and how that shows a "pedagogical, educational commitment behind it" (Interview, Yuliet Villares, 2024).

The expectations and demands expressed by the audience, as highlighted in several interviews, are particularly revealing, as they point to a specific demand driven by a process of audience loyalty. These requests reflect the development of a distinctive cultural form of consumption and underscore the close bonds between listeners and podcasters, bonds nurtured by trust and a shared sense of proximity.

6.3.4 Trust and Confidentiality

The podcast experience nurtures trust through intimacy and encourages listeners to reach out to podcasters through private communication avenues or social media. Listeners use private communication channels to share personal burdens with podcasters, to seek support, or simply to find a space to be heard. As the Cuban scholar Julio A. Fernández argues, "podcasting has the advantage of the intimacy of using the voice to connect with people" (Questionnaire, 2024).

Some podcasters might have the professional tools to deal with these requests, but as Daniel Triana argues, "it's a huge responsibility".

“And he wrote to us on Telegram to say, 'Look, I have a friend who thinks she's trans, and doesn't know how to handle it with her family, I don't know what else. What do you recommend?' And I thought, 'Wow, what a responsibility. Because this person is trusting us.' Because he assumed, of course, since he heard us and said: 'Well, I can have confidence in the recommendations of these people.'” (Interview, Daniel Triana, 2024)

Lisy Romero, co-host of *La Escuelita* (The Little School), a podcast about LGBTQ+ activism and community, shares that listeners tend to write to her private social media profile rather than the podcast, although they also receive emails, albeit to a lesser extent because “there isn't much email culture in Cuba.”

“People open up a little to ask you without shame, 'What's happening? What am I? Who am I? How am I?' And those identity and orientation crises are sometimes resolved with us.” (Interview, Lisy Romero, 2024)

Listeners of *El Descanso* (The Rest) contact its hosts through social media and messaging apps such as Messenger or WhatsApp, to “ask questions, share concerns or just vent”. These private communications are kept private, even from the other co-host, because “sometimes if they come directly to one of us, we assume it's something more confidential” (interview, Yadira Alvarez, 2024). These private exchanges, in turn, have allowed them to better identify the needs of their community.

This direct exchange between listener and podcaster facilitates a safe space for advice, recommendation and guidance, based on the listener's trust in the podcaster and the podcaster's reciprocal responsibility to people's stories and struggles.

6.3.5 Stewardship: Personal Investment

A prominent find that emerged is the active engagement of listeners in the podcasting experience, as they assume stewardship roles without any financial incentive. Listeners support the podcast or its creator by sharing their knowledge and expertise or taking on content moderation and gatekeeping roles. This involvement is further strengthened through personal interactions with the podcaster and face-to-face encounters.

Cristian Martínez, the host of *Píldoras Buen Idioma* (Good Language Pills), describes how he relies on an 'advisory board' made up of loyal listeners who help him manage and edit comments in the Telegram group. This advisory board also participates in discussions about the topics and concepts presented on the podcast, and occasionally makes suggestions.

“I mean, they're already on Telegram helping me manage the group chat. If they see a message that somebody sends that is out of place, they have the permission

in the group, which is Dudas Buen Idioma, to delete that message". (Interview, Cristian Martínez, 2024)

The advisory board also publishes content that the podcaster has already created, such as questionnaires. Cristian adds that this group not only gives him ideas, but also helps him "plan face-to-face activities". However, when it comes to managing the podcast, Cristian is more reserved about the creation and editing of the show. He exercises unique control over this stage of the creative process, delegating only support roles in the management without relinquishing control over the creation of the podcast or the management of its conversational spaces.

The podcast *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* (We Wear It Curly Radio), on the other hand, takes a different approach. Dachelys Valdés appreciates that listeners are involved in moderating content on the podcast's Telegram channel, without the need to formalise these processes or create a group of more loyal listeners in an advisory role. Dachelys explains that sometimes listeners would ask questions about hair or other topics that the podcast team couldn't answer right away, and other listeners would respond to others requests. Dachelys says their listeners "collaborate and cooperate a lot".

Listeners also assume gatekeeping roles when they detect issues with the podcast, including correcting content inaccuracies or the podcaster's pronunciation of specific names or terms. Listeners also assume production roles by voluntarily assisting in the search for stories and content for podcast episodes.

"For example, if there's an issue with the link or the embed doesn't work, they comment: 'Hey, the embed isn't there, or it's not working, or it won't let me download the podcast,' or they write directly to [the Chapeando podcast host] Arleen." (Interview, Edilberto Carmona, 2024)

Podcasters express appreciation for these contributions, recognising that such forms of audience involvement enhance the overall podcasting experience and reinforce a shared sense of belonging among individuals united by common interests.

6.4 Sustaining Community Beyond the Podcast

Having mapped the various forms of listener engagement with the podcaster, the chapter now turns to examine the connections identified among listeners themselves. Although such relationships appear less pronounced in the Cuban context, they nonetheless illuminate the broader network of interactions surrounding podcasting, interactions that contribute to fostering a sense of community among all those involved.

In the focus groups conducted for this study, Cuban podcast listeners reported sharing their favourite podcasts with others, either through social media or in face-to-face conversations. Pedro, for instance, relates this exchange to trading “Yu-Gi-Oh cards”. Other participants describe sharing episodes with friends and family “if there is an interesting topic.” Sonia, meanwhile, explains that she often discovers new podcast recommendations when friends tag her in social media posts related to podcasting.

6.4.1 Personal Connections

Listeners cultivate one-to-one interactions in communicative spaces created around the podcast experience. WhatsApp groups, for example, enable listener-to-listener exchanges, based on equal opportunities for contribution and participation, as well as information sharing.

One of the hosts of *El Descanso* (The Rest) podcast shares how their listeners share interesting material related to caregiving in the WhatsApp group, "and a conversation is generated around it". She also notes how listeners have formed alliances independently of the podcast and stresses the beauty in providing “the space for that to happen” (interview, Yadira Alvarez, 2024).

The listeners of *El Descanso* (The Rest) have also expanded these alliances, offering each other professional resources, and as a result, "therapies have been coordinated, pedagogical support has been coordinated", as described by the podcast hosts Lien and Yadira.

6.4.2 External Alliances and Collaborations

Voces de Marzo Literario (Voices of Literary March) podcast offers a compelling example of how listeners forge alliances and collaborations beyond the podcast itself. As the podcast emerged as a platform for increasing the visibility of young Cuban literary authors, it also featured representatives from foreign publishing houses in its episodes. This, in turn, facilitated connections between these two literary spheres outside the podcast, ultimately contributing to the publication of new titles within the Cuban literary landscape.

"So I think that, when you have thousands of writers or thousands of young people who do poetry, or write, or are lovers of literature, in a virtual space; when you have another space - which would be the podcast - that you place them, you give them visibility, you take them to another level, yes, you create a greater possibility for them to interact and be heard, to be known." (Interview, Erick Méndez, 2024)

Meetups and events also play a significant role in facilitating listener-to-listener interactions. Sixela Ametller, host of *Empoderadas* (Empowered Women), shared her experience of organising two in-person meetups, one in Havana and another in Madrid. She

explains that these events created a “space of sisterhood” and mutual recognition among listeners, as they “share their stories and realise that your story wasn’t so different, it wasn’t so far off” (Interview, 2024). A notable element in these events is that Sixela deliberately chooses not to transform these meetups into podcast episodes, motivated by a conscious desire to avoid inhibiting participants from sharing personal and intimate experiences. Instead, only short video snippets are recorded for *Empoderadas*’ social media channels. Her intention, as she explains, “is for it to be something intimate, something that if you want to be in the experience, you have to go”.

These interactions among listeners shed light on the complex network of exchanges that underpin the podcasting experience, illustrating how each instance of engagement contributes to the ongoing process of community building.

6.4.3 Guest Participation: Creating Networks from Inside the Episode

Some podcasters propose another meaningful interaction between the podcast and its interviewees, describing them as members of the podcast community. This membership is evident in those interviewees who share values or interest promoted by the podcast.

“There are loyal followers, especially those who have been interviewed on En Plural, that continue to follow the podcast. Not because they were interviewed, but because they are people strongly linked to social and corporate responsibility, and they are loyal, not to the podcast, but to the message. (Interview, William Bello, 2024)

Sixela Ametller states that her community, in addition to including her listeners with whom she interacts at live events and through private messages, “also includes the people” she has interviewed. In this aspect, it is interesting that Sixela includes interviewees who hadn’t listened to the podcast before, but once they are on, they begin to consume the content, either to prepare for the interview, “or out of curiosity”.

“Then something interesting happened that I never thought would happen, it was never in my mind, but obviously it’s one of the nicest things, which is the community that starts to form around the podcast. And then one person recommends another, and so the network is woven, and I start reaching out to those people.” (Interview, Sixela Ametller, 2023)

For Laura Salas, community starts with listening, with staying engaged, and extends to those who have made collaboration possible, from actively contributing to the project to being willing to consume more information like that produced by *Emprende Verde* (Go Green Entrepreneurship). The podcast poses as an opportunity to highlight those collective individuals whose identities blur when working under similar principles or goals, and “also

a way to give voice to those people who are sometimes anonymous" (Interview, Laura Salas, 2024).

Laura also recalls the live event *Emprende Verde* (Go Green Entrepreneurship) organised at the end of its first season, emphasising how the gathering enabled “a face-to-face moment with the people who had been part of it through their interviews”. She adds that the event also welcomed people they “dreamed of interviewing in the future, a community”.

Alliances between podcasters and their guests also emerge as a means of accessing new communities. These synergies can serve as strategic tools for audience diversification, as Katia Sánchez explains: “because they allow us to enter other spaces and reach other people” (interview, 2024).

In summary, podcasters recognise those who contribute to the creative process of their podcasts as integral members of their community, provided that guests and interviewees align with the values and principles the podcast seeks to embody.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted how podcast communities emerge as interwoven networks of interaction, nurtured and sustained through ongoing communicative practices.

The section identified four distinct types of interaction within the Cuban podcasting landscape where a sense of community takes shape. These interactions occur between the following actors: podcaster and listener, listener and podcaster, listener and listener, and podcast and guest.

Podcasts, particularly those that develop transmedia experiences and attract significant audiences, often cultivate specific groups of listeners who become increasingly involved in podcast management. These loyal listeners provide crucial support to podcasters and facilitate a renegotiation of roles within the podcast’s communicative space. They actively participate as contributors, producers, gatekeepers, and integral members of the broader podcasting experience.

Participants consistently emphasised that community can foster closer, more human connections and enable the inclusion of diverse voices and stories beyond their own. For these creators, community is conceived as a space of shared interests and a genuine desire to participate in dialogue. These listeners remain engaged over time and interact with podcasters across multiple platforms. In doing so, podcast communities not only facilitate

collective meaning-making and dialogue but also serve as support systems, offering encouragement, solidarity, and sustained engagement.

7. CHARACTERISING THE PODCASTING SCENE IN CUBA

As earlier chapters have explored various aspects of Cuba's podcasting landscape, the present chapter moves forward to outline the unique characteristics that define the podcasting scene in this Caribbean nation. The chapter discusses the attitudes of Cuban podcasters towards the possibility of monetising their programmes. In addition, it focuses on the US blockade of Cuba and its impact on the consumption of podcasts through distribution platforms such as Spotify, and how this embargo affects the potential monetisation of these audio narratives from the island.

Funding opportunities for Cuban podcasts from within the island are also discussed, as well as experiences with advertising and strategic partnerships. A key element highlighted in this section is the total reliance on volunteer efforts for the production of some of these podcasts. It also considers the long-term sustainability of these audio narratives and the factors that may influence their continued existence over time.

In summary, this chapter presents several elements that characterise the Cuban podcasting landscape and provides a comprehensive reference framework to facilitate future research on podcasting in the Cuban context.

7.1 An Exploration of Podcasters Motivations

The exploration of motives for podcasting in Cuba facilitates a more profound comprehension of the origins of the emergent podcasting landscape. The semi-structured interviews with Cuban podcasting media practitioners have identified six main categories: Personal Expression and Emotional Release, Creative Control, Social and Cultural Impact, Professional and Entrepreneurial Goals, Educational and Informational Purposes, and Historical and Memory Preservation. When questioned about the reasons for starting their podcast, Cuban creators stated that they were primarily interested in personal, professional and socio-cultural motivations.

7.1.1 Personal Motivations

For Cuban podcasting media practitioners, the medium serves as a platform through which they articulate personal perspectives and convey both their own experiences and those of others. Some podcasters say the format serves as a channel for venting feelings and emotional expressions, providing a therapeutic outlet. Moreover, participants also mention how the process of creating podcasts is often driven by the joy of storytelling and creative

expression, although some state that it became a way to "kill" boredom during the pandemic, as the podcaster Giselle Ordoñez described it.

Other personal motivations included the creative control over the podcasting experience, especially those with radio and media experience, and the autonomy of podcasting in comparison to media outlets.

"And we wanted to keep that idea of doing something similar to radio, but where we were the ones in charge of the production". (Interview, Boris Leiva, 2024)

Some mention how podcasting offers an unregulated platform for personal expression, which allows them to explore topics they are passionate about without external constraints. Most of the participants also stressed the convenience of the audio format, its simplicity and accessibility, especially in the Cuban context in comparison to other media formats.

One fifth of participants admitted that they are drawn to the medium by their passion for specific interests, such as technology, cinema, or music. This passion fuels their desire to share knowledge and insights with a broader audience, as is the case with *Flash Musical* (Music Flash), a podcast that aims to connect with young audiences, approximately 15–16 years old.

7.1.2 Professional Motivations

In terms of professional motivations, five participants highlighted the importance of supporting and making entrepreneurs visible, especially during the pandemic. There is also an important focus on the socio-environmental responsibility of these businesses, and the role they play in the Cuban economy, while offering positive references and good practices for entrepreneurship in Cuba.

"So, I do think that as a goal, it remains the same, to be a space for voices, for listening, and for connection within the community that identifies with socially and environmentally responsible entrepreneurship." (Interview, Maria Carla Figuerola, 2024)

Similarly, due to the impossibility of meeting during the Covid lockdown periods, the project *Cuba Emprende* (Cuba Entrepreneurs) turned its *En Plural* (In Plural) face-to-face discussion space into a podcast. *Cuba Emprende* held three face-to-face debates at the Padre Félix Varela Cultural Centre in Old Havana before creating the podcast as an alternative means of communication and a way to maintain the conversation going between Cuban entrepreneurs, their employees and the general public.

For five participants of the study - who work with either independent and state-owned media - podcasting is an extension of journalistic work and a part of media innovation strategies. The state-owned digital media *Cubadebate* includes podcasts as part of their multimedia strategy of keeping up with international trends, as Edilberto Carmona argues. Moreover, media professionals acknowledge the recognition and validation they receive from peers and audiences through these sound narratives.

Furthermore, the format can be a bridge between the outlet and the audiences and a tool for community building, especially during isolating times like the lockdown periods of the Covid-19. Participants also recognised the format as an informative avenue to satisfy the need for information of audiences, which became a crucial motivation during this period.

7.1.3 Social and Cultural Motivations

On the socio-cultural level, there is a strong interest in topics such as Cuban literature, cinema, local stories, as well as the correct use of the Spanish language and linguistic education for media practitioners. Motivations such as literary promotion or offering the Cuban public an accessible alternative to Cuban literature due to the scarcity of printed books or distribution problems in publishing houses, is also present among the podcasts included in this study.

Socio-cultural projects turned to podcasts as a format and communicative solution to the mobility restrictions in the country. During the pandemic, *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* (We Wear It Curly Radio), a socio-cultural project based in Cuba aimed at valuing Afro hair, was unable to continue developing the face-to-face workshops organised in Havana's vulnerable neighbourhoods. Therefore, they decided to create the podcast as a way of accompanying its community of followers during this period of isolation and global pandemic.

Participants also recalled how podcasting became a platform for activism and advocacy, by making women's stories visible, discussing feminism, LGBT issues, gender topics. Furthermore, they emphasised their role in contributing to national debates, as exemplified by the podcast *Voces Ecuménicas Cubanas* (Cuban Ecumenical Voices) during the 2019 constitutional referendum, or through engagement with discussions on the recognition of equal marriage in the new Family Code, approved in 2022, as in the case of *La Escuelita* (The Little School). Interestingly, podcasts with socio-cultural motivations also share aspirations of community building, and the aim to bring audiences closer. For Yadira Alvarez, these narratives also allow them to weave social networks of support and turn it into "something a bit more solid, more communicative, more interconnected", while

“rebuilding that broken social fabric we hear so much about” (interview, Yadira Alvarez, 2024).

Furthermore, there is a significant element mentioned by several participants, which points to podcasting as a historical and memory preservation tool. Some podcasters mentioned how these sound narratives serve as a sound archive, documenting conversations and events, particularly during the pandemic. Moreover, they highlight the potential of recording and preserving Cuban cultural and historical narratives as a significant motivation. For Laura Salas, producer of the podcast *Emprende Verde* (Go Green Entrepreneurship), the format is “a kind of logbook”, or as Yeri Menéndez, producer of *Oye, te cuento* (Hey, Let Me Tell You) also describes: “it’s a record for the future of how the lockdown, the pandemic experience in Cuba, was lived”.

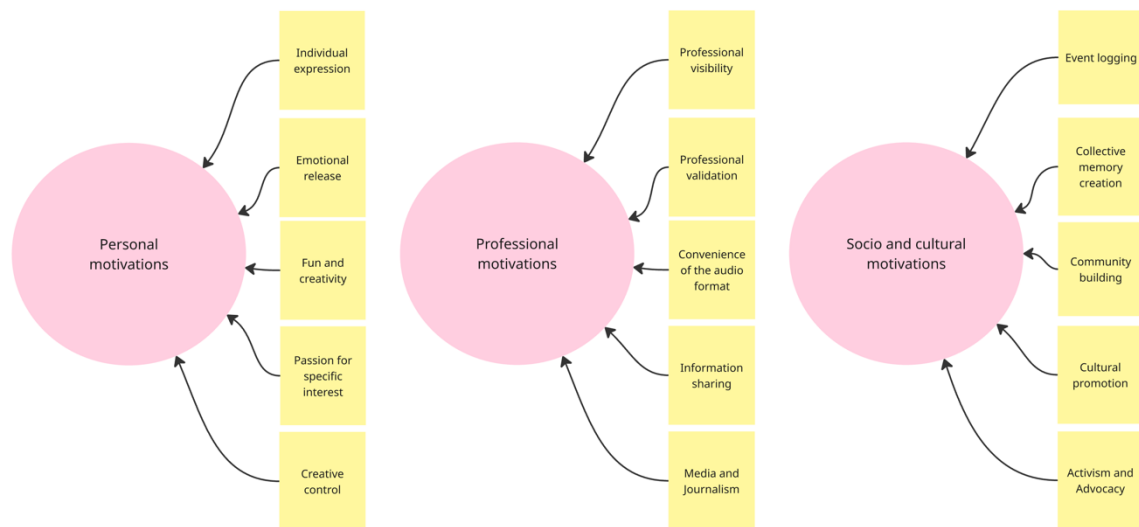


Figure 7.1 – Motivations of Cuban podcasting practitioners

In summary, participants identified three main clusters of motivations for podcasting (see Fig. 7.1), primarily related to personal, professional, and socio-cultural factors. This data offers a clearer understanding of the reasons behind podcasting, particularly within a context of very limited monetisation opportunities, as explored in the following section.

7.2 Podcast Sustainability: To Monetise or Not to Monetise?

Podcasters' motivations are also influenced by the production models that support the podcast production. These elements serve to highlight particularities of the Cuban podcasting scene, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the country's communicative landscape.

Of the twenty-four podcasts included in this study, eleven are produced by independent creators, four by state media outlets, four by independent media organisations, three by

socio-cultural projects, one by a religious institution, and one by a sustainable fashion brand.

In the case of media outlets, both state-run and independent, podcasts are produced and funded by the organisation, which ensures – to a certain extent – sufficient funds to access equipment and recording studios, as well as payment for the creators.

In the context of state media, podcasters receive a "journalistic collaboration fee". Conversely, independent media outlets remunerate podcast production with a salary. Both payment methods are based on a fixed rate and are not directly linked to the number of downloads or podcast listening statistics.

"In fact, podcasts in Cuba are being "monetised" today, especially when you work for a press outlet; they pay you through the media as a journalistic collaboration. However, I don't think this really influences the quality of the podcast content." (Interview, Erick Méndez, 2024)

In the context of socio-cultural projects, the production of podcasts is predominantly financed through the project's own funds, which are often constrained by financial limitations and limited time and human resources. For instance, the podcast *Emprende Verde* (Go Green Entrepreneurship) has been produced with some collaboration funds received by the social project Tercer Paraíso. These funds are allocated for podcast production, though no monetary remuneration has been provided to the creators. A similar scenario can be seen in the case of *En Plural* (In Plural) podcast, part of the *Cuba Emprende* (Cuba Entrepreneurs) project, which was able to cover the costs of the recording studio with funds from another international grant. However, once these funds were exhausted, they decided to transfer to Telegram to continue the podcast production.

In the case of *Voces Ecuménicas Cubanas* (Cuban Ecumenical Voices), it was produced by the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Center (CMMLK) in Havana, a Christian-inspired macroecumenical organisation. Meanwhile, the podcast *Buzón de Voz de Clandestina* (Clandestina's Voicemail) was produced by the fashion brand of the same name, which used its own resources to create these audio narratives.

The rest of the podcasts included in this study are independently produced and self-funded.

7.2.1 Monetisation and Financing Opportunities in the Cuban Context

A widespread issue affecting podcast monetisation opportunities in Cuba is the inability to generate income through platforms such as Spotify or Spreaker, due to restrictions imposed by the U.S. blockade. This results in two main limitations: the (im)possibility of organic

monetisation from podcasting hosting platforms and the access to the monetisation funds by Cuban podcasters from inside the island.

7.2.2 Is Organic Monetisation Possible?

Organic monetisation presents a significant challenge for Cuban podcasters. For instance, receiving payments from platforms such as Spotify or Spreaker requires an international bank account, something that cannot be opened from within Cuba due to the constraints of the U.S. blockade. As a result, podcasters must rely on third parties (friends, family members, or trusted individuals) to manage financial transactions on their behalf and transfer earnings through alternative channels. While new payment methods from abroad have been introduced in Cuba, these models remained limited during the period of this research (2018–2024).

In the case of the Spreaker platform, for example, Edilberto Carmona explains how it allows them to monetise the *Cubadebate* podcasts through advertising. However, they have not been able to "solve the problem of receiving this payment". The inability to access these funds means that the media outlet is dependent on the "solidarity" of users to pay for the hosting platform, even though they could, in principle, use the funds from their monetisation to pay Spreaker's hosting fees.

Edilberto recounts how, on one occasion, they were unable to upload episodes because they could not pay for Spreaker hosting. It is important to note that *Cubadebate* is the most visited Cuban state-related news site in the country, with a total of 40,851,211 million visits in 2024 and more than 230,000 comments published on the site.

For independent creators like Lisy Romero, co-host of *La Escuelita* (The Little School), learning about distribution platforms was a self-taught experience as they had to "educate themselves", and how they "took a lot of hits" during their learning process. They decided to use Buzzsprout, but unfortunately their card was stolen and they had to move to another platform, resulting in a significant loss of listeners.

"That's why we lost a lot of listeners, because before we had 2,000 listeners. Now, I don't know, maybe, adding up all the platforms, we have 700, 800, somewhere around there. We're reaching those numbers, more or less. Even less sometimes."
(Interview, Lisy Romero, 2024)

Yeye Hernández, co-host of this LGBTQ+ activism podcast, comments: "In order for the new episodes to appear and be downloaded, you have to use a VPN". Yeye explains that, in order to monetise, they have decided to "slowly move to YouTube", offering exclusive

content such as the “*La fajazón a las Cuatro y Veinte*” (The Brawl at Four-Twenty) segment on the platform.

For Allison Norch, her experience on Anchor generated enough audience for the platform to start paying her for advertisements inserted into episodes. She recorded a personalised ad promoting the platform, which aired at the beginning of each episode. However, she was never able to access that monetisation as she had to rely on the help of a friend living in the USA to access that payment.

7.2.3 Membership: A Challenging Task in the Cuban Context

Another special element in the Cuban context is the inability to manage membership payments automatically through bank accounts. This means that the podcast audience would have to manually send in their subscription quota each month, which would represent a significant commitment on the part of the listener.

"In Cuba, you can't do that. How do you connect? You know? To set up a membership, you have to ask people for money every month again. So, that business model doesn't work, because it's based on people not having to make a purchase decision every time." (Interview, Katia Sánchez, 2024)

Albert Cabrera, who has hosted his podcast on paid-for platforms such as Mumbler, reflects on the experience and its impact on his autonomy as a creator.

"I joined Mumbler, signed up on Mumbler, and then I thought, 'Well, here comes the problem - how are they going to pay me?' They allowed me to receive payments via PayPal, and since I had a PayPal account, I linked it. I remember I started charging three dollars a month for the subscription." (Interview, Albert Cabrera, 2024)

Albert describes his experience with Mumbler as positive, as he gained more than ten paying subscribers with monthly memberships of \$3 and \$5. However, after seven months, he says he became “a slave to it” because he was committed to these subscribers and didn't want to let them down. Eventually, Albert stopped using the platform and instead tried other funding alternatives, such as a sponsorship contract with a Cuban skydiving agency.

7.2.4 Advertising?

While advertising has played a key role in consolidating the podcast industry in many parts of the world, the Cuban context remains notably distinct. The Social Communication Law, approved in 2023, marks a significant shift by officially recognising advertising and sponsorship as legitimate components of the country's social communication system, for the first time since 1959. Prior to this legislative change, as Arletis Arango, host of *Palabras*

con sentido (Words with Purpose), recalls, newspapers were prohibited from including advertising in any of its media outputs, including podcasts.

However, there are some examples of advertising in the Cuban podcast scene, especially those produced by independent creators. In the case of *El Pitch* (The Pitch), a podcast about entrepreneurship in Cuba, Katia Sánchez mentions that they have had both paid and free advertising slots over the three seasons of the podcast. Sánchez highlights that they make room for some free advertising because of the social interest these brands represent for the podcast. This Cuban podcaster also reflects on how, for her, monetisation is not about making a profit, but rather about raising the funds to fairly compensate the production team and to achieve a high-quality production and subsequent distribution of the podcast.

Some podcasters have had positive sponsorship experiences, collaborating with local businesses and even state-owned workplaces. However, not all advertising experiences have been without issue. Carlos Lugones, host of *La Mente Creativa* (The Creative Mind), recounts how he made the mistake of advertising a business that "scammed several people," including himself.

"The episodes had already been recorded and distributed, and my solution was to remove them. I also publicly denounced the person, etc. Of course, he also scammed me. I didn't know anything. So that's a risk you take. (Interview, Carlos Lugones, 2023)

Cuba's long-standing culture of prohibiting commercial publicity and sponsorship on radio and national television has significantly shaped Cuban attitudes towards advertising. In this context, the perspective of Dachelys Valdés, host of *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* (We Wear It Curly Radio), is particularly interesting, especially when considered four years after the podcast's first season. Although Dachelys no longer resides in Cuba, she reflects on the possibility of incorporating advertising into the podcast only for projects with a social vision similar to that of *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio*. Her view highlights the shifting dynamics of sponsorship and advertising in Cuba's evolving media landscape.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are also present in the use of advertising in podcasting in Cuba. In the case of in-platform advertising, for example, Edilberto Cabrera explains that the media organisation *Cubadebate* can insert "pre-roll, in-roll and post-roll advertising within the Spreaker platform". However, they decide what type of advertising they do not want to include in their content, like political ads or sexual topics.

Other podcasts, like *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* (We Wear It Curly Radio), have opted not to use platform advertising due to the uncertainty surrounding the type of ads that might be inserted and how these ads could impact the listener's experience. The host expressed concerns about the potential for an ad "in English that they [the listeners] don't even understand," interrupting the flow of the podcast. Additionally, she raised questions about the social responsibility of the brands being advertised, highlighting the ethical conflict this posed for them.

7.2.5 Other Funding Avenues

Other funding options mentioned by Cuban podcasters include applying for international grants, solidarity payments, international cooperation, alliances with media companies, and the creation and sale of digital products. *El Pitch* (The Pitch), for example, has explored alternative funding strategies, including launching digital products and applying for international grants.

Laura Salas explained how the podcast *Emprende Verde* (Go Green Entrepreneurship) received support from the Netherlands Embassy, "which has a very strong agenda to promote gender diversity", in line with the show's third season. This support was mainly in terms of "communication and also with some funds to cover the production costs" (Interview, Laura Salas, 2024). Maria Carla Figuerola, the host of this podcast, argues that the mechanisms for obtaining foreign currency funding in Cuba are complicated and highlights how this affects podcast production.

"So the mechanism of the foreign currency account linked to the Banco Financiero Internacional (International Finance Bank) exists. The difficulty lies in the withdrawal, but it can be done. Once you get over the first hurdle, it can take three or four months to get a deposit. If it took me two years, what are four months? (Interview, Maria Carla Figuerola, 2024)

Producer Yuliet Villares highlighted the concept of "solidarity payments," which involves differentiated rates for services such as editing. They also received funds, although modest, from churches and international agencies through the Martin Luther King Center. With these payments, they were able to produce the podcast, create video capsules, and occasionally top up the team's mobile data packages.

Funding avenues also include partnerships with media organisations as is the case of *Pildoras Buen Idioma* (Good Language Pills). The podcast established a partnership with the Cuban News Agency, and now the host receives a monthly payment for his collaboration. However, this does not put any additional pressure on the podcaster in terms of production

because, as Cristian Martínez explains, “the podcast is practically the same” as the one he did from the start.

7.2.6 Long-Term Sustainability

A salient challenge confronting the Cuban context is the sustainability of podcasts amidst the ongoing crisis. The inability to monetise or secure sustainable funding schemes has directly influenced the continuity of some podcasts. Many creators acknowledge that while the primary goal is not necessarily to generate profit, the passion for creating content often competes with more pressing daily concerns.

“It’s that simple, if you have to dilute yourself among everything else, life and so on, Emprende Verde, Eco Rizos, Tercer Paraíso, all these socio-environmental responsibility projects at some point start to compete for time with food. It’s that simple.” (Interview, Maria Carla Figuerola, 2024)

One fifth of participants emphasised the critical importance of securing funding to compensate the team involved in the show’s production. This funding is necessary not only to acknowledge the time and effort put in by the team but also to cover their basic needs. Without a reliable revenue stream, the risk of burnout increases, and the continuity of the podcast becomes uncertain.

Carlos Lugones, a Cuban podcaster, reflects on how few creators reach a point where they can sustain their podcasts, recognising this as a significant gap in the Cuban context. Lugones suggests that Cuba would greatly benefit from a formative space, such as “a podcasting academy”, that could educate and guide podcast creators on sustainable and profitable ways to produce audio narratives on the island.

7.3 Attitudes of Podcasters Towards Monetisation

Given these circumstances, how do podcasters perceive the concept of monetisation, and what impact does this have on the sustainability of audio narratives within the Cuban context?

7.3.1 “It Was Positive Not Being Able to Monetise”

Three participants reflected positively on the inability to monetise, as it fosters greater flexibility in the creative process, freeing them from the necessity to adhere to production quality standards or the demands of a more discerning audience. This is illustrated by the case of Arletis Arango, creator of the podcast *Palabras con Sentido* (Words with Purpose), who stated that it was beneficial “not being able to monetise at that time.” The absence of a

monetisation strategy allowed them to create without the pressure of meeting audience expectations.

Meanwhile, a third of participants emphasised that monetisation, or generating profit from the podcast, was never the objective. *Voces de Marzo Literario* (Voices of Literary March) aimed to “disseminate knowledge, culture, and provide others with the opportunity to make themselves known”. Similarly, *Emprende Verde* (Go Green Entrepreneurship) seeks not to “make money from it, but to create a solid space, one where we could have quality content, fundamentally”. Likewise, William Bello affirms that monetising the podcast *En Plural* (In Plural) “was never the intention, nor the idea, nor the desire”.

7.3.2 “I Don’t Live Off This, I Live for This”

Monetisation is not a priority for some Cuban podcasters, who find satisfaction in this medium by fulfilling their individual needs. In this regard, podcasters such as Allison Norch and Albert Cabrera view podcasting as a 'hobby' rather than a profession.

*“I want it to remain something I do because I enjoy it, something that brings me many benefits as it has, because it has brought many benefits, but not money.”
(Interview, Allison Norch, 2024)*

Allison feels that she does not want to ‘live off this’, and prefers to preserve spontaneous, non-obligatory creation. On the other hand, Albert Cabrera, despite having experimented with various forms of monetisation and sponsorships since 2019, still sees the podcast as an elective space for individual fulfilment.

*“I don't care if I have a thousand, two thousand or three thousand followers, because this is really my hobby, this isn't my job, I don't live off this, I live for this.”
(Interview, Albert Cabrera, 2024)*

Sixela Ametller rejects the notion of podcasting as a hobby, recognising the responsibility it entails beyond personal motivation. However, she also resists framing it as a job, despite acknowledging the financial resources required to cover the editor, interview production, and other expenses. Sixela argues that the “idea of working for free is very Cuban” and admits she has resisted monetising the podcast, despite living in the USA and having organic opportunities to do so.

Some participants also reject the idea of monetisation due to the constraints and demands associated with shifting to a paid model. Allison Norch states that she doesn't want to “lock herself up” at home creating content, while Albert Cabrera highlights the psychological pressure of having to release episodes systematically for his subscribers.

One participant in the study highlights the disruptive potential of monetisation, particularly for larger production teams. This was the case with the *Team Serendipia* (Serendipity Team) podcast, where the prospect of monetising the project not only paralysed the group but also, to some extent, 'divided' them.

The *Team Serendipia* (Serendipity Team) podcast emerged as a collaborative initiative involving approximately thirty participants, coordinated via a WhatsApp chat during the pandemic. Giselle Ordoñez describes how monetisation was perceived as 'an opportunity to make some extra money' amid the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic's duration. However, she acknowledges that any potential income would have been minimal due to the large number of contributors. Those who opposed monetisation argued that it would "take away the fun aspect" that had characterised the podcast from its inception. Ultimately, disagreements over this issue, coupled with the emigration of several members, led to the decision to discontinue the project.

7.3.3 “De Akokán” (From the Heart)

In contrast, most Cuban media podcasters acknowledge creating these sound narratives from “pure volunteering”, or as Erick Méndez and Raúl Soublett describe it, “de akokán (from the heart)”.

Laura Salas points out that the work behind the *Emprende Verde* (Go Green Entrepreneurship) podcast has been done through “pure volunteer work and the greatest effort that exists, individually and collectively” (interview, 2024). The same is true for Rafa Escalona from his position as a “veteran podcaster by Cuban standards”, creator of the podcast *Los Casetes de AM:PM* (AM:PM Cassettes). Escalona says he has always done it “without a penny”, despite having started his podcast in April 2020, during the pandemic.

7.4 Rewards and Gratifications

The Cuban scenario is characterised by specific factors that hinder the financial viability and sustainability of podcasts over time. In this context, particularly given the absence of assured compensation and financial incentives, what are the gratifications derived from podcast production, and what impact does these gratifications have on the creation of these narratives?

7.4.1 Sense of Purpose

Cuban podcasters cite emotional and sentimental gratifications, primarily associated with the possibility of undertaking a meaningful task, finding purpose, and impacting others

through podcasting and its narratives. For instance, Dachelys Valdés and Yadira Álvarez have identified the representation of “many stories” within the podcast, and the impact these narratives have both individually and collectively, as essential gratifications. Dachelys has expressed the appeal of feeling “that you are sharing a story that’s not just yours,” while Yadira emphasises that “doing something that’s not just for you, but for other people” is one of the greatest rewards they derive from the podcast.

Similarly, Daniel Triana and Lisy Romero highlight as a major reward the opportunity and responsibility of talking about topics that can be transformative, and empowering for the LGBTQ community, and also the general public.

“But you know, we also have that responsibility to talk about delicate topics, topics that touch sensitivities, and at the same time can be transformative in that sense. To start talking about topics that can give much more empowerment to people, confidence, self-assurance, self-knowledge... Liberation.” (Interview, Daniel Triana, 2024)

Lisy Romero, for her part, talks about how she has sometimes been recognised in the street, especially by young listeners who have told her how the podcast helps them navigate their gender identities and how useful the podcast is in highlighting this multiplicity of references and representations.

7.4.2 Personal Fulfilment

Furthermore, podcasts enable content creators to achieve personal fulfilment. Another element highlighted by Cuban podcasters is how their individual performance as hosts and narrators improved significantly over time. The improvement in their individual projection and overall podcast production was particularly meaningful for self-taught podcasters. Albert Cabrera makes a solid argument in this regard when he talks about how the podcast has had a positive impact on his oral expression as an individual, but also how he has moved from reading a script to enjoying more freedom to express himself in the podcast, without the restrictions of the written page. In the case of Allison Norch, the podcaster comments that she started by imitating forms of communication learned and reproduced from the state media, which were much more formal and comprehensive, until she found her personal style in a more popular form of communication that felt more like herself. Other podcasters, such as Dachelys Valdés, say that they can trace the development of their own fluidity and change over time.

Carlos Lugones highlights “the expressive nature of the Cuban” person, and how the podcast provides a platform to satisfy the need for free and unregulated expression.

“Cubans talk a lot, they talk loudly. They express themselves... they extrapolate gestures. (...) Cubans are Latino, that’s in our nature. And we’ve been repressed for many years in expressing ourselves in many ways, for fear of repression, for fear of censorship.” (Interview, Carlos Lugones, 2023)

In the same line of self-expression, Boris Leiva, co-host of the podcast *Flash Musical* (Music Flash) argues that the greatest reward for them has been “the opportunity to say what we want to say, what we think”, something they hadn't found before in other communicative settings.

The experience of collective learning that arises from the exchange with the community of listeners is also regarded by podcasters. Dachelys Valdés highlights the value of hearing how others navigate situations, and the lessons embedded in these attitudes and experiences. She underscores how the podcast brings together various lessons that others can share and apply to their personal lives, either because they find them useful or because they "give them strength". From this collective perspective, Lisy Romero also views it as a positive reward when her listeners, particularly those beyond the Cuban LGBTQ+ community, express that they have “learned something”.

7.4.3 Connecting with Others

A reward mentioned by several podcasters is the opportunity to meet new people, connect with other podcasters and listeners, and become part of podcasting networks.

They highlight the interview format, which allows them to forge new synergies and relationships with their interviewees, which is a common experience among some Cuban podcasters. Raúl Soublett describes the experience of creating the podcast as "incomparable," noting that the reward they received was precisely the knowledge gained from "meeting people" through the interviews conducted for *En Estéreo Podcast* (In Stereo Podcast).

In-person events also provide other gratifications linked to the new connections they foster. For Sixela Ametller, the events organised by her podcast *Empoderadas* (Empowered Women) are "definitely a gift, an impressive reward" (Interview, 2023).

In the case of collaborative podcasts, these narratives can bring together different people in the collective creation of episodes. For her part, Giselle Ordoñez highlights the ability of the *Team Serendipia* (Serendipity Team) podcast to bring together people from different professions and how they managed to overcome the boredom of the pandemic through entertainment. In the same vein, Claudia Yilén acknowledges that although there was no financial reward, the opportunity to meet people, receive recommendations, feedback or

even the collection of stories made possible by *Cositos Radiales* (Radio Thingies) was a great reward in itself.

7.4.4 Social Recognition

Podcasting in Cuba also fulfils intrinsic needs for both individual and professional recognition. For podcasts produced by journalists affiliated with state media, the podcast serves as a mechanism for recognition within the profession. In this regard, Edilberto Carmona agrees with the praise they receive from other media professionals when *Cubadebate* produces this type of content.

Podcasts also serve as platforms for recognising the work of other social actors. Lilian Sarmiento argues that these audio narratives enhance the social recognition of the Cuban publisher *Ediciones La Luz*. Podcasts, audiobooks, and social media have enabled them to reach new audiences, even beyond Cuba. People have listened to and consumed this audio content, which has increased the publisher's visibility to the point where it has received invitations to participate in international events.

7.4.5 Validation

Cuban podcasters also feel validated by this medium. This is the case of *Palabras con Sentido* (Words with Purpose), produced by the state-owned newspaper Girón, the first podcast linked to a state media outlet and produced in the province of Matanzas. Arletis Arango, its first host, talks about how *Palabras con Sentido* paved the way for other local creators and became a point of reference in this Cuban place.

"And for us to be the first, and for people to start making their own after us, for other podcasts to be born in the newspaper, in the radio, in the local News Agency as well. For them to consider us as the first and as the reference to then make their own, I think that is what distinguishes us." (Interview, Arletis Arango, 2024)

Other podcasters acknowledge that the greatest reward they receive is the inspiration their podcast generates. For Sixela Ametller, for example, it is the messages from listeners expressing how "useful this podcast is to me, how it inspires me." Similarly, Sixela shares how another Cuban creator living in the United States, Carlos Sotolongo, was inspired by her podcast *Empoderadas* (Empowered Women) to start his own show, *La Casa Azul* (The Blue House).

Listeners also offer validation to independent podcasters, especially those without a communications background. Pedro, a participant in a discussion group for this research, argues that podcasters may be better prepared than communications professionals because

"a journalist is like a vessel that collects knowledge, but this person may have dedicated their whole life to this subject, and that's why they have a better reach with what they can do with it" (Focus Group, 2024).

7.5 Podcasting Culture on the Island?

In this context of financial restrictions, non-economic and emotional rewards, podcasting in Cuba continues to thrive, although its consolidation as an industry remains uncertain. Therefore, discussing podcasting culture on the island (or its absence) remains a challenge, as many of the participants in the study affirm.

The term 'podcasting culture' is used to describe the processes of literacy for both creators and audiences. This concept includes the knowledge and understanding of the podcast format, its potential as a medium for communication, and the means and platforms for consumption. According to both listeners and podcasters, podcasting culture in Cuba is also influenced by the lack of a technological platform that brings together all Cuban podcasts, therefore hindering a more efficient integrated search and identification process.

7.5.1 Literacy for Creators and Listeners

Participants engage in ongoing informal education about the nature of podcasts and the manner in which they are consumed. More than half of the participants mentioned that they educate audiences in their daily lives, particularly when explaining their role as podcasters and the implications of this role. Albert Cabrera describes this as "giving a class," in which he explains what a podcast is, how to access it, and even provides live demonstrations on his phone to help people understand how to find and listen to podcasts in Cuba.

Listeners in this study argue that "Cuban audiences are not used to consuming podcasts from a platform" (Sonia, Focus Group, 2024), and are more inclined to discover podcasts through social networks such as Instagram rather than via native audio platforms. Meanwhile, Claudia Yilén highlights that Cuban audiences remain attached to traditional media and often struggle to navigate the vastness of the internet.

Listener literacy is also shaped by the frequency and consistency with which creators produce and distribute podcasts. This, in turn, directly affects audience loyalty and enhances the podcasting culture of both creators and listeners. While some participants claimed that there is no podcast consumption culture in Cuba, María Carla Figuerola argues that "there are podcast consumption niches". She notes that the format is fraught with uncertainty, as listeners "have to 'eat' their mobile data" to access the content, which competes with other forms of consumption, such as "watching memes, at best".

In this regard, some participants insist on the need of better preparation, not in academic terms, but on creative training, in order to reach Latin American standards or to approach reference podcasts in the region such as *Radio Ambulante* (Wanderer Radio) and *Las Raras* (The Weird Ones).

7.5.2 Current Challenges

Another significant challenge for podcast consumption in Cuba is the lack of awareness regarding how to access and engage with these sound narratives. This is reflected in social media interactions, where users frequently ask whether podcasts are available on Instagram, question why the audio file has not been uploaded to Facebook, or, as Cuban podcaster Sixela Ametller observes, request that she send MP3 files directly to listeners.

Another obstacle is the lack of a central platform that aggregates all Cuban podcasts. This fragmentation complicates the process of discovery, making it difficult for listeners to find and engage with new domestic narratives. Without a unified distribution space, Cuban podcasters must rely on multiple, often inconsistent channels to reach their audiences, further limiting the visibility and accessibility of their content.

In this regard, Erick Méndez drew attention to the risk of the Cuban audience becoming alienated during the process of learning about podcasting, particularly if the first shows they consume are of foreign origin. He expressed concern about the risk of neglecting listeners and failing to meet their cultural consumption needs. He also highlighted the danger of listeners' continued exposure to foreign programmes, which may not only fulfil but also shape their communicative preferences. Furthermore, Méndez drew attention to the risk that creators face in attempting to emulate shows from other regions that do not resonate organically with Cuban listeners, which could result in a compromise of their cultural identity in the process of imitation.

7.5.2.1 Migration and Identity Struggles

Migration has impacted podcasting, as it has many other aspects of life on the island. Cuban podcasters such as Dachelys Valdés and Raúl Soublett began their shows while living in Cuba and now reside abroad. Dachelys reflects on the concerns experienced by Cubans who migrate, whether temporarily or permanently, and questions how Cuban identity extends into the diaspora and is shaped by its diverse influences.

“But I feel that for many of us, when we migrate, whether permanently, temporarily, or in stages, we grapple with the question of where Cuban identity ends and where the other influences begin. How much do I still know about the

island if I left two, three, or even just one year ago, and everything has changed so much? Will I still feel connected?” (Interview, Dachelys Valdés, 2024)

Raúl Soublet, creator of *En Estéreo Podcast* (In Stereo Podcast), recounts a very different migration experience than Dachelys, as he is a “political refugee in Panama”, officially recognised by the Panamanian government. He recounts how his creative process “collapsed” after emigrating, particularly as he grappled with the reality that he would be unable to return to Cuba or see his family in the foreseeable future.

“I put out the first three episodes, just barely, pushing through. But the mental exhaustion was overwhelming, everything I was going through was just too much. I couldn’t do it. So I decided to stop. I said: ‘I’ll take a break for at least a month.’ And look, it’s been a year now.” (Interview, Raúl Soublet, 2024)

Among the challenges of producing Cuban podcasts from abroad, one significant difficulty lies in how distance and new surroundings affect language, slang, and narrative style. As podcasters adapt to different cultural and linguistic environments, their expressions, references, and ways of storytelling may evolve, potentially altering the authenticity or relatability of their content for audiences in Cuba.

7.5.3 “Now It’s a Different Story”

Cuba is undergoing a “very big and violent” sociological transformation, as described by Dachelys Valdés, and these changes inevitably intersect with the trajectory of Cuban podcasting. While 2020 offered an opportunity for the medium, partly due to the country’s specific circumstances and the impact of the pandemic, she reflects that “now it’s a different story.” In this context, William Bello underscores a key challenge: as many Cubans are primarily focused on survival, content centred on “social responsibility” may risk being perceived as overwhelming or even counterproductive.

Despite the difficult technological and economic conditions, some participants like Liliam Marrero recognise that “interesting things are happening with content creation”. She notes that while the focus has often been on more familiar topics such as Cuban identity, language and political issues, the potential of podcasting has yet to be fully explored.

Other podcasters also highlight the technological “delay” that the island always experiences in terms of access to technology and communication trends, which presents both challenges and creative opportunities, as Rafa Escalona notes. Meanwhile, others agree on the “poverty” of the current Cuban podcast landscape and the need to strengthen the movement.

There's also a more pessimistic view from other podcasters, shaped by a political lens. Raúl Soublett, who is based outside the island, describes podcasting in Cuba as being on an "uncertain path" because in the future legislation could classify podcasting as a "crime" and declare that "from now on, podcasting will be illegal" (interview, Raúl Soublett, 2024).

Lisy Romero offers a more optimistic perspective, expressing confidence that podcasting in Cuba will continue to grow because "many people are interested in speaking, because in a podcast no one censors you". However, she acknowledges that censorship is not solely a political concern, but also encompasses self-censorship by podcasters, impacting the ways in which they present their content and themselves within their podcasts.

"I think podcasting, and speaking without anyone stopping you, is very important, and everyone needs it. Especially for us, who have spent our whole lives being quiet." (Interview, Lisy Romero, 2024)

Other podcasters raise concerns about a decline of interest and rigour in producing these narratives, not just in Cuba, but globally.

Lastly, Alejandro Gómez highlights the unique strength of Cuban podcasts, emphasising the curiosity they evoke as content emerging from a country marked by significant limitations. For him, Cuban podcasts are compelling, not only because of their content, but also because they are resilient artefacts born amid numerous technological and socio-political challenges.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter explored the motivations of Cuban podcasters: personal, professional and socio-cultural.

The chapter discussed the possibilities for the long-term sustainability of Cuban podcasts, examining monetisation opportunities, memberships schemes, and other available funding mechanisms. It then gathered podcasters' attitudes towards monetisation, with most participants emphasising the perceived benefits of not being unable to monetise and underscoring the non-profit nature of most of these podcasts.

Moreover, it expanded on the rewards and gratifications received by podcasting media practitioners, which are mostly emotional and sentimental. Among the rewards mentioned are finding a sense of purpose, personal fulfilment, connecting with others, social recognition and professional validation.

Finally, the chapter described the podcasting culture on the island (or the lack thereof) and the current challenges faced by podcasting in Cuba due to the socio-economic crisis, as well as competition from other platforms such as YouTube.

After reviewing the four chapters of findings, the next chapter engages with the conceptual framework of community, transmedia storytelling, and co-creation to discuss the study's results.

8. PODCAST COMMUNITIES IN CUBA: A MULTIDIRECTIONAL NETWORK OF INTERACTIONS

This chapter opens with a discussion of the macro-level conditions underpinning the development and evolution of podcast communities in Cuba from 2018 to 2024. It explores the technological mediations shaping both production practices and modes of consumption, and considers how these dynamics inform podcasters' motivations. This technological dimension underscores the enduring digital divide that characterises the Cuban podcasting landscape. Collectively, these elements support a characterisation of the Cuban podcasting context which, isolated in both geographical space and historical time, constitutes a distinct case study.

The chapter further examines how podcast communities in Cuba have co-constructed transmedia experiences through multidirectional interactions and collective narratives. It subsequently shifts focus to micro-level interactions among the various actors involved in the production and reception of podcasts in Cuba. Through the analysis of podcaster-listener, listener-podcaster, and listener-listener relationships, the chapter outlines a network of exchanges that sustains and reinforces a sense of community through participatory engagement. These interactions not only reshape power structures within podcasting but also contribute to the broader reconfiguration of the island's communicative landscape.

In addition, the chapter addresses further interactions that characterise podcast communities and serve as entry points into the collective experience these sound narratives generate. Among these are podcaster-podcaster alliances and the communal act of co-hosting an episode, both of which can act as catalysts for communal bonds within podcast communities, particularly those grounded in shared interests or identity-based narratives. The section also examines the transition from listener to podcaster, focusing on individuals who moved from participating in a podcast to becoming podcasters themselves, as well as devoted listeners who, motivated by admiration and personal aspiration, chose to create their own podcasts.

Finally, this chapter proposes a framework for identifying a sense of community within podcasting, offering a more complex and nuanced understanding of cultural convergence and the creation of social value in the context of the transmedia podcasting experience.

8.1 Technological Mediations

Podcast communities in Cuba evolved during the period 2018-2024 shaped by technological access, the socio-political context and the diverse motivations of their creators. This research analyses the technological and material elements that influence the Cuban podcasting scenario, while it also highlights the socio-cultural and political dimensions, as key elements defining the production, distribution and consumption of these sound narratives in the island.

Technological conditions can shape the evolution of podcasting (Bonini, 2015). In the Cuban context, however, rather than steering the medium towards professionalisation, podcasting undergoes a series of reclassifications closely tied to the island's socioeconomic conditions and technological limitations. Nonetheless, podcasting demonstrates resilience, as Cuban media creators discover and adapt the medium to platforms accessible to local audiences. This dynamic also supports Habermas's theory (1979), which posits that communication and its norms respond to instrumental and strategic changes, which in turn, reconfigure the communicative logic and practices of the medium itself.

The Cuban podcasting movement, along with its community of podcasters, emerges, consolidates, and disperses in response to the country's sociopolitical landscape. The movement initially consolidated when Cuba achieved the technological conditions necessary for the mass production and consumption of the medium (Bonini, 2015), marked by the general population gaining access to the internet via mobile phones in December 2018 (Blasco, 2021). In the absence of such technological conditions, as illustrated in Nico Carpentier's (2011) Access, Interaction, Participation (AIP) model, it would not have been possible to access not only the means of production (mobile phones), but also those of distribution and consumption from within the island. Technological infrastructure is thus the first essential element in enabling the widespread consumption of podcasts in Cuba

A further technological challenge concerns the affordability of internet data packages, which continues to influence media consumption on the island. In 2025, Cuba recorded 7.05 million active mobile cellular connections, representing 64.4 per cent of the total population. Although the cost of a 1GB data package in 2024 was nearly nineteen times lower than in 2018, when adjusted relative to the average salary over this period, the ongoing economic crisis ensures that this expense remains considerable for the average Cuban user.

The delayed arrival of widespread internet access in Cuba has influenced digital content production and consumption from the island. It has also limited exposure to technologies, resulting in what some Cuban podcasters describe as an ongoing 'delay' of creative trends and technologies. Nevertheless, some Cuban podcasters view this delay as an opportunity for creative freedom, providing a space for experimentation and innovation, free from the

financial aspirations and pre-established constraints of the broadcast media industry (Berry, 2016, 2018; Spinelli and Dann, 2019), such as advertising obligations and creative restrictions.

Digital literacy also plays a crucial role in podcast consumption, encompassing not only physical access to technology but also the user's proficiency in its utilisation Jenkins (2006) contends that 'new media literacies should be seen as social skills' (2006, p. 32), extending beyond individual expression to include interactions on a wider social scale. Within the podcasting community, these social skills are developed through the collaborative negotiation of practices related to the consumption, distribution, and creation of the medium. For Cuban podcast listeners, basic skills (Steyaert, 2002) are shaped not only by access to technology but also by socio-cultural practices such as data-saving practices and download-based navigation. These practices reflect adaptive responses to the country's delayed internet access and the high cost of data usage.

When focusing on podcast creators, and in contrast to Steyaert's (2002) emphasis on Western digital divides, instrumental capabilities in Cuba are shaped more by limited access to hardware than by deficiencies in software literacy. Cuban podcasters require varying levels of expertise and, consequently, different instrumental skills to produce their content depending on their available economic resources, professional background and media experience, as well as personal and professional networks that may facilitate recording conditions. While the digital divide in the island 'became increasingly apparent during the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic' (Martínez-García *et al.*, 2023, p. 169), this period marked a flourishing moment for podcasting in Cuba, despite the prevailing limitations as discussed in Section 8.2.

The technological literacy of Cuban listeners is another salient aspect, often highlighted by Cuban creators when discussing the perceived 'poor podcasting culture' on the island. This issue of technological literacy reflects a broader digital divide (Steyaert, 2002), the disparity between individuals who have access to the internet and information and communication technologies, and those who either lack access entirely or possess only limited access (Ruíz Menéndez *et al.*, 2025).

Cuban podcasters in this study also underscored the general public's limited understanding of podcasting as both the format and a medium itself. They stressed the necessity of educating audiences about what a podcast is, as well as how and where to access it. This development of media literacy constitutes an intrinsic responsibility of the podcaster, representing an ongoing educational role directed towards existing listeners and potential new audiences. Listening to podcasts becomes a 'highly formative process' (Celaya *et al.*,

2019)), which also extends the formative experience to other podcasters, guests, and listeners.

Another key aspect of digital literacy pertains to the creator's understanding of the affordances and limitations of podcasting practices and their potential. Cuban creators reimagined and adapted the medium according to their technological and cultural literacies, as well as the audience convenience, in an emerging context, free from advertising pressures and the constraints of a formally established podcasting industry. Their podcasting-related instrumental skills partly explain their appropriation of non-native platforms, such as Telegram, for the syndication and dissemination of audio content. This echoes early stages of podcasting, characterised by a 'decentralised production, distribution and consumption environment' (Paisana and Crespo, 2022, p. 7). The appropriation of new scenarios enabled participants to discover the medium, not from a structural perspective, but from a communication one. In summary, these technological constraints influence the distribution practices of Cuban podcasters to secure an accessible listening experience, by prioritising spaces and platforms accessible to Cuban listeners over conventional podcast hosting platforms.

8.1.1 Production and Distribution Practices

The Cuban scenario presents podcast production and distribution methods that blend conventional approaches and alternative propositions.

For instance, the Cuban podcasting platform Cubapod exerted a notable influence on content distribution and consumption via alternative platforms such as Telegram, a key space for transmedia participation (Celaya, Naval and Arbués, 2020). Cubapod established the foundation for the initial hosting of these narratives on conventional platforms, including Spreaker, Google Podcasts, and Ivoox, among others. Cubapod enabled audiences to access Cuban podcast episodes via a Telegram bot offering various audio compression options, thereby accommodating different levels of Internet data consumption. This represents a significant aspect of the Cuban podcasting landscape, as it interprets and adapts the audio syndication element at the core of the technical definition of podcasting (Espada, 2018). By leveraging the functionalities of Telegram, such as channels and bots, Cuban podcasters employ the subscription features of Telegram channels, enabling users to subscribe to a source and receive updates in a unidirectional manner, akin to the functionality of an RSS feed (Winer, 2019).

Telegram became the epicentre of podcasting in Cuba, especially during the pandemic years, and serves as a central platform in the development of Cuban podcast communities. While Telegram also played a pivotal role in facilitating dialogues between the nascent Spanish

podcast community ‘for joint decision-making or the horizontal co-creation of scripts’ (García-Marín, 2020b), while in Cuba Telegram functions as a participatory space for listeners, and can also act as the main platform for hosting these sound narratives. For example, *Emprende Verde* (Go green Entrepreneurship) initially hosted the podcast on Telegram and Google Drive, and it was not until 2024 that they began distributing their episodes on conventional hosting platforms.

Telegram’s capabilities enable podcasters to host multimedia files, including music and audio, while also offering features that facilitate interaction and participation, opportunities that traditional hosting platforms often lack. The podcast *Píldoras Buen Idioma* (Good Language Pills) exemplifies this interactive experience, with over ten thousand users on its Telegram channel, @BuenIdioma. Listeners can react to posts, engage in discussions about the content, participate in polls and quizzes, and submit grammar or language-related questions directly to the podcaster via the platform. However, Telegram restricts the understanding of user engagement to metrics such as the number of views, rather than more nuanced variables like ‘listening time, number of pauses, and abandonment’ (Jones *et al.*, 2021, p. 1557). This limitation hinders podcasters’ insight into the listener’s consumption experience, while demographic information cannot be collected from these Telegram channels either. Conversely, Telegram offers the advantage of supporting group chats linked to the channels, facilitating the exchange of messages, responses to content, sharing of multimedia files among users, audio and videochats, polls, etc.

In 2020, Telegram emerged as a participatory space for Cuban podcast communities. Celaya, Naval and Arbués (2020) emphasise the role of this platform alongside other transmedia participatory practices, such as ‘chat or live feedback when special radio-like streaming shows are produced, where producers can see live text comments and interact with them’ (2020, p. 27). Live audio chats were hosted by *En Plural* (In Plural), *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* (We Wear It Curly Radio), and *Voces Ecuménicas Cubanas* (Cuban Ecumenical Voices) to engage with their listeners during the isolation periods of the pandemic.

Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio (We Wear It Curly Radio) featured “live music streams” on Telegram, emulating a live radio show. The podcaster would play a playlist from her PC and share it in an audio chat, allowing listeners and followers of the channel to join and listen as if tuning into a radio station. This adaptation of radio practices to podcasting integrates ‘synchronous and asynchronous textual and/or audiovisual’ elements within the podcasting community (Cabero Almenara, 2006).

Telegram’s popularity is also a direct result of obstacles in accessing mainstream podcast hosting and listening platforms such as Spotify, due to the economic embargo imposed by the United States on Cuba. This limitation prevented podcasts such as *Voces Ecuménicas*

Cubanas (Cuban Ecumenical Voices) from being available on Spotify until the producer was able to travel outside the country for work. The embargo also hinders the dissemination and reception of content from the island, unless users employ a Virtual Private Network (VPN), which represents another significant technological barrier. Additionally, the embargo complicates the organic potential for monetisation through podcast distribution on Spotify, Spreaker, and others, further limiting podcasters' access to any earnings generated through these platforms. Other participants highlighted the difficulty of having to explain to listeners that they need to use a VPN, describing it as both complicated and discouraging.

Therefore, the distribution process of Cuban podcasts through Telegram is customised and adapted to optimise the listening experience, responding to the country's technological conditions and the limitations imposed by high mobile data costs, as well as the variability in connectivity stability and quality. These constraints also encourage the use of other platforms, such as WhatsApp and Instagram, which play significant roles in the distribution and dissemination of podcast content in the island.

The messaging platform WhatsApp, which gained significant popularity in Cuba during the COVID-19 pandemic (Cala Calviño *et al.*, 2022), served as a rapid distribution channel for some Cuban podcasters, particularly within groups connected to the social actors producing the podcasts. For instance, the sustainable fashion brand *Clandestina* shared episodes of *Buzón de Voz de Clandestina* (Clandestina's Voicemail) within WhatsApp groups comprising their customers and followers. WhatsApp also functioned as a community-building platform for podcasts such as *El Descanso* (The Rest), and served as an informal distribution method for *Cositos Radiales* (Radio Thingies) until the podcasters established a Telegram channel.

Instagram, however, emerged as a central platform within the Cuban podcasting landscape, acting as a platform to disseminate content to other audiences. The intertwined nature of podcasting and social media (Spinelli and Dann, 2019) challenges podcast creators to develop new discursive avenues for identity building through aural and visual representations. The diversity of content on Instagram encourages the construction of podcast identity through visual means, while also providing a platform for the reception and discussion of podcast content. Interactions between listeners and creators in Instagram take place through comments, story mentions, direct messages and participation in interactive experiences on Instagram, such as challenges or live broadcasts, similar to Din *et al.* (2015) studies.

Participants use Instagram for self-promotion (Gaynor, 2024) and distribution of audio narratives, which aligns with the platform's widespread popularity among domestic users. This is particularly relevant for podcasts such as *Emprende Verde* (Go Green

Entrepreneurship) and *El Pitch* (The Pitch) whose target audience - the Cuban entrepreneurial community - is more active on this platform. Conversely, other Cuban podcasters do not consider Instagram to be an effective promotional platform, unless it is aimed at a specific niche, as mentioned above.

Podcasters and listeners in the study also highlighted Instagram as a primary source of podcast discovery. As Carlsson (2024) argues, this podcast discovery is endorsed by ‘trusted social media contacts’, and it can also be attributed to the influence of the platform’s algorithm, which promotes content based on user consumption patterns or through mentions by other users. These dynamics of podcast discovery shape listeners’ access to content and, consequently, domestic patterns of cultural consumption related to podcasting. These new distribution and discovery practices require a different set of technological skills and knowledge, extending beyond the aural realm and highlighting the transmedia nature of the podcasting medium.

Podcast	Distribution Platforms Mentioned
<i>La Mente Creativa</i>	Cubapod; Telegram
<i>Empoderadas</i>	Spreaker; Cubapod
<i>Palabras con sentido</i>	Easypodcast; Ivoox
<i>Lecturas al Oído</i>	Ivoox
<i>Tecno Code Live (Club calvOS 360)</i>	Spreaker; Mumbler; Cubapod; Telegram
<i>Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio</i>	Anchor; Telegram; Cubapod
<i>Cubadebate</i>	Spreaker
<i>Cositos Radiales</i>	Telegram; Spreaker; Cubapod
<i>Oye te cuento</i>	Ivoox
<i>Flash Musical</i>	Telegram
<i>Emprende Verde</i>	Telegram
<i>En Estéreo Podcast</i>	Anchor
<i>En Plural</i>	Website; Telegram
<i>Voces Ecuménicas</i>	Telegram; Spreaker; Cubapod
<i>Marzo Literario</i>	Telegram
<i>Píldoras Buen Idioma</i>	Telegram; Cubapod; Anchor; Ivoox
<i>ZonaoClichés con Allison</i>	Spreaker
<i>La Escuelita</i>	Buzzsprout
<i>Cinemafilia</i>	Ivoox; Google Podcasts
<i>El Pitch</i>	Cubapod
<i>El Descanso</i>	Ivoox; Spotify; Apple Podcasts
<i>La Potajera</i>	Telegram; Ivoox; Spotify

<i>Team Serendipia</i>	Telegram
<i>Buzón de Voz de Clandestina</i>	Telegram; Apple Podcasts

Table 8.1 – Distribution platforms mentioned by Cuban podcasters

This raises a pertinent question regarding the definition of podcasting as a format, which remains in flux within academic research and contemporary audio productions due to the influence of platforms, industry dynamics, and the expansion of advertising. Emerging audience listening trends, identified by both podcast creators and listeners in this study, underscore the growing significance of YouTube as a distribution platform and its consequent effects on audio consumption practices. The pervasive use of video is markedly reshaping conceptions of what constitutes a podcast, a shift anticipated by Noronha *et al.* (2015). This evolution is further reinforced by platforms such as Spotify, which have incorporated video features to offer listeners both audio and visual options (López-Villafranca, 2024). In this study, only a small number of podcasts, most notably *Píldoras Buen Idioma* (Good Language Pills), have YouTube channels, with the video component of the transmedia experience acknowledged primarily as an extension of the podcast.

Although video consumption continues to rise among younger audiences, some podcast distribution platforms maintain a ‘one-way flow’ model of consumption (Wang and Lin, 2024). By contrast, other platforms, such as Telegram, which were not originally designed for podcasting, facilitate two-way communication by providing enhanced opportunities for interaction. Podcasting is redefined as user-centred, mediated, shaped, and conditioned by technology (Thompson and Weldon, 2022; Paisana and Crespo, 2022; Bonini, 2022), yet not defined by it.

8.2 Socio-Political and Communicative Context

While technological access enables podcast production, the socio-political context and the communicative ecosystem shape the way these narratives consolidate and evolve.

Prior to the pandemic, the majority of podcasts identified in this study were linked either to independent or state media, with a focus on national news and current affairs. However, there were already some independent creators producing podcasts on specific interests, such as technology (Markman and Sawyer, 2014). It was not until 2020, with the advent of the pandemic, that Cuba witnessed a surge in the production of these audio narratives, which can be attributed to several factors.

Firstly, the restrictions on personal mobility imposed as a preventive measure against the spread of the Covid-19. Secondly, the significant increase in free time and leisure, which created a receptive audience (Soto-Vásquez, Vilceanu and Johnson, 2022). Finally, the

global influence of the podcasting boom, which served to standardise the format and disseminate the medium more widely.

By 2020, reference podcasts from Latin America, such as *Radio Ambulante* (Wander Radio) and *Las Raras* (The Weird Ones), had gained a significant listener base in Cuba, according to participants in this study. These shows were among the most frequently cited during interviews and focus groups, alongside other Spanish-language podcasts from Spain and Latin America. In parallel, a wave of domestic podcast productions emerged, focusing on themes such as personal development (*Empoderadas*, *ZonaoClichés con Ally*), the promotion of reading and Cuban literature (*Lecturas al Oído*, *Voces de Marzo Literario*), and niche narratives centred on technology, music, or the correct use of the Spanish language (*Píldoras Buen Idioma*). Other podcasts explored issues such as women's empowerment and the life stories of notable Cuban cultural figures (*Palabras con Sentido*, *En Estéreo Podcast*, *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio*), reflecting a growing diversification in content and purpose within the Cuban podcasting landscape.

Similarly, during the pandemic, some podcasts like *Buzón de Voz de Clandestina* (Clandestina's Voicemail), *Cositos Radiales* (Radio Thingies), and *Team Serendipia* (Serendipity Team) created spaces for collective creativity, without adhering to a specific theme, but rather seeking to encourage collaborative creation. This offers a new dimension to Jenkins' (2006) concept of collective intelligence, which goes beyond the notion of knowledge convergence and postulates 'creativity' as a variable to identify and analyse both the individual contribution and the collective creation of the final artifact.

Furthermore, narratives centred on activism, particularly concerning race and identity, emerged, often through the stories of artists, celebrities and Cuban figures, cultural references within the Afro-Cuban community. These Cuban podcasts took on emotional and social functions by providing emotional relief, catharsis, and companionship, satisfying society's communicative and spiritual needs (Gambetti, Graffigna and Biraghi, 2012) in a time of uncertainty, fear, and boredom.

In the 2021, especially after the 11 July protests, more defiant attitudes began to emerge in newly emerging podcasts. Podcasters began to address certain social issues from more questioning or confrontational attitudes (Tan, 2025) towards the government and its institutions. Public dissatisfaction, as stated by Tan (2025), often finds expression through alternative channels, from 'private conversations, online forums, and social media platforms' (2025, p. 10) to emergent media. Podcasts such as *El Descanso* (The Rest), *La Potajera* (The Stew Pot), *El Pitch* (The Pitch) and *En Estéreo Podcast* (In Stereo Podcast) took on an activist role, whether consciously or not, questioning power structures through different lenses such as gender, entrepreneurship, racism and even care work in Cuba.

Podcasting, functioning as an alternative public sphere within the official mediascape, grows ‘in the cracks in the complex Internet governance of the state,’ as Wang and Lin (2024, p. 33) observe. This study exemplifies how podcasting communities in Cuba allow civic engagement initiatives (Jenkins, 2025) to reclaim a communicative space in the media ecosystem in an unregulated and unconstrained way.

8.2.1 Communicative Ecosystem

The influence of the socio-political context on Cuba’s communicative landscape is both constitutionally enshrined and reaffirmed through the 2023 Social Communication Law. Podcasting operates within this communication environment, which remains closely linked to the socialist character of the nation and the institutional structures that sustain it. For more than six decades, Cuba has conceptualised communication as ‘a service of and for the people’, a foundational principle that provides critical context for understanding the evolving role of podcasting in the country’s media landscape.

Podcasting in Cuba emerged as an unregulated and decentralised medium, devoid of a formalised set of rules governing creation and distribution, which reflects what Sullivan (2024) terms the ‘open architecture of podcasting’ (2024, p.25). This highlights both the freedom and the apparent ‘lack of institutional gatekeepers’ (Sullivan, 2024, p. 25), but also the limited support available to podcasters. Given that the media ecosystem in Cuba remains predominantly controlled and restricted by state interests and their affiliated institutions, podcasting provides a crucial opportunity to bridge the enduring communicative gap that has left certain sectors of society unheard and underserved. Furthermore, such narratives have shaped journalistic practices by contributing to the validation and professional recognition of podcasting as a legitimate form of media and journalistic production (Lindgren, 2020; Jorgensen, 2021; Bird, 2025).

Podcasts such as *La Escuelita* (The Little School), *En Estéreo Podcast* (In Stereo Podcast), and *La Potajera* (The Stewpot) influence public opinion while addressing ‘complex and multidimensional themes that are increasingly present in our societies’ (Agirreazkuenaga and Ayllon, 2023, p. 7). These podcasts create platforms of visibility that enable specific groups to reframe narratives, deconstruct stereotypes, and normalise debates surrounding gender and identity. Such debates employ communicative codes that are more accessible and relatable to the Cuban public than those of the state media. Through their advocacy for human and social rights and calls for accountability directed at the state and its institutions, these podcasts possess the potential, as Žikić and Marvok (2025) argue, to ‘disrupt, complement or undermine the official media’ (2025, p. 2). Other shows like *El Descanso* (The Rest), for example, highlights the societal role (Dowling and Miller, 2019) of Cuban caregivers by employing intimacy and personal narratives. It seeks to shape perceptions of

caregiving as a fundamental component of family management. The podcast also advances a narrative that recognises carers as key figures in the country's socio-economic stability, particularly in a context where an ageing population renders their contribution increasingly vital.

While podcasters affiliated with Cuban media outlets - whether state-run or independent - adhere to the editorial agendas of their respective media organisations, only those associated with state institutions possess 'official authorisation' for the production and distribution of their podcasts. Other actors, including independent media and individual creators, contribute to the broader media ecosystem without institutional protections, rendering them vulnerable to governmental censorship (Martínez-García *et al.*, 2023) if their content openly challenges or even questions existing power structures. Within the Cuban communicative ecosystem, podcasts establish self-directed networks of horizontal and reticular communication that bypass institutional controls (Castells, 2004). Nonetheless, such podcasts remain subject to attempts at regulation through the exertion of political pressure on their creators.

Podcast production has persisted, even as some creators acknowledge the limitations and risks associated with certain types of content, guests, topics, or approaches, factors that may attract the attention of state authorities and result in political harassment. Even podcasters operating within state-sanctioned frameworks recognise the constraints imposed on the realities they can represent, shaped both by the editorial policies of their institutions and by the ideological and political restrictions enforced by Cuba's communication regulatory bodies.

Other podcasters choose to stay out of politics, as a self-censorship or self-regulation mechanism designed to preserve creative freedom while avoiding unnecessary scrutiny by government regulators. Their narratives, however, navigate the context and lay down the path towards community building through transmedia experiences.

8.2.2 Shaping the Narrative: An Overview of Influential Factors

Podcast communities in Cuba, from a contextual and socio-cultural perspective, brings back Caum Moffitt's (1999) proposal of the triad of 'culture, society and community' as an inseparable and resilient system for coping with permanent change.

Podcasts generate their own systems of cultural production, distribution, and consumption. As narrative ecosystems, they operate as open systems, composed of stories and characters that evolve across time and space, shaped by production practices and the influence of interactions between creators and listeners. Innocenti and Pescatore's (2017) concepts and

practices about the narrative ecosystem enhance the understanding of the Cuban podcasting context, especially while intersected with transmedia approaches.

While Innocenti and Pescatore's (2017) work focuses on television narratives and emphasises convergence design as a means of defining the economic value of narratives, in the Cuban context, resilience assumes a broader significance. It encompasses gratifications that are not tied to commercial or economic value as Sullivan (2024) warns in other contexts, but rather to the communicative and socio-cultural impact these narratives generate and extend.

Notably, commercial advertising was not legally permitted in Cuba until 2023, raising broader questions regarding how this institutional shift may influence public perceptions of advertising, and whether it will be re-signified as a "positive" instrument for visibility or sustainability, potentially detached from its earlier associations with capitalist models of communication. In this particular context, the majority of the podcasts examined in this study only began to receive some form of compensation or to explore pathways towards financial sustainability from 2023 onwards. While podcasts affiliated with state or independent media outlets may receive economic remuneration, either as a salary or on a per-collaboration basis, neither type of media provides incentives linked to audience size, podcast rankings, or the pursuit of advertising and sponsorships. Since 2023, however, following the formal approval of advertising in state media and increased exposure to international trends, a growing number of podcasters have begun to explore mechanisms for securing stable funding to support the continuity of their narratives.

As noted by Jenkins (2006) and Scolari (2019), convergence studies have long examined the tensions between commercial and collaborative cultures, two seemingly opposing forces that are, in fact, interdependent. However, what happens when this collaborative culture emerges in the absence of a commercial industry to challenge, expanding instead without profit, as is the case in Cuba? In the absence of financial incentives, what motivates the production of these narratives, and what forms of reward justify their creation?

Davis (2025) underscores the rewards of transmedia storytelling for media creators and managers, particularly how these rewards are linked to enhanced audience engagement (and the creative opportunities this affords), as well as the monetisation of artistic content. However, this study shifts the focus to the diverse rewards derived from constructing transmedia experiences, not only for media practitioners but also for listeners. Furthermore, it highlights the non-economic rewards within the Cuban context, given the significant limitations on monetisation, alongside a cultural perspective that views communication as a service.

The majority of transmedia podcasting experiences in the Cuban context have evolved from a tactical model (Scolari, Jiménez and Guerrero, 2012). This applies to both *Píldoras Buen Idioma* (Good Language Pills) and *El Pitch* (The Pitch), which distribute podcast versions via their respective blogs. Additionally, *Palabras con Sentido* (Words with Purpose) has been published as a section in the print media outlet Periódico Girón of Matanzas. In these extensions, only the podcast content is curated; no additional resources or narrative developments are introduced. This approach aligns with the paratextual concept outlined by Kinder (1991) and further elaborated by Montoya, Vásquez, and Salinas (2013). Nonetheless, the podcast format offers narrative and sonic resources that are absent from the written word. A transcribed interview is insufficient to convey the emotions expressed by Arletis Arango, the podcaster behind *Palabras con Sentido* (Words with Purpose), as revealed in her interview for this study. The podcast episodes, therefore, provide an alternative set of discursive tools capable of generating a deeper sense of identification in the listener than reading alone.

In the cases of *Palabras con Sentido* (Words with Purpose) and *El Pitch* (The Pitch), neither publishes auto-generated transcripts. Rather, the content is curated for the web, often in the form of an interview summary, as seen in *Palabras con Sentido*. These extensions work as means of communication expanded through diverse media, complementing and self-referencing each other (Gabrich and Costa, 2020). Although these extensions do not expand the narrative itself, they increase accessibility, diversify audiences by attracting prospective listeners to the audio content, and ‘provide a way for users to engage with the transmedia universe’ (Koistinen, Koskimaa and Välisalo, 2021). This strategy, which seeks to ‘reach new audiences through several entry points or platforms’ (Agirreazkuenaga and Ayllon, 2023, p. 5), does not pursue direct commercial gain.

In contrast to the approach adopted by *Píldoras Buen Idioma* (Good Language Pills) and *Palabras con Sentido* (Words with Purpose), in *El Pitch* (The Pitch) for instance, there is an emphasis on the utilisation of marketing strategies (Rime, Pike and Collins, 2022) and the occasional sale of specific communication products associated with the brand. However, this is not the financial avenue that supports the production of the podcast. Instead, it is a communicative practice that has been handed down from the professional training of podcaster Katia Sánchez, who holds a degree in Social Communication. Therefore, the individual skill sets of the practitioners (Steyaert, 2002) and the culture of transmedia literacy (Alonso-López and Terol-Bolinches, 2020) also define the capacities for narrative innovation and the range of competencies that podcasting media practitioners may have.

Within the context of this research, the only podcast to have expanded into a national television space is *Píldoras Buen Idioma* (Good Language Pills), which focuses on the

correct use of the Spanish language. The TV segment is produced by Cristian Martínez in his capacity as a journalist and employee of the Cuban Television Information System. However, this expansion onto a national platform has not resulted in any changes to the podcast's production practices. Indeed, the multimedia content accompanying the podcast episodes, as well as the broader interactive experience developed by Cristian for the podcast's Telegram channel, existed prior to this expansion, as well as the communication channels with listeners, who now can also engage with the televised content.

While *Píldoras Buen Idioma* (Good Language Pills) stands out as an exception in the Cuban podcasting landscape, the motivation behind the podcast creation was not financially oriented, at least not initially. Podcasters' attitudes towards monetising their narratives, whether through hosting platforms or alternative models such as sponsorship or advertising, are cause for consideration. Participants in this study highlight the voluntary nature of many of these sound narratives as a distinctive feature of the Cuban landscape. This voluntary basis, on the one hand, aligns with podcasting being a 'hobby activity that does not generate revenue' (Markman and Sawyer, 2014, p. 30), but also reflects a legacy of understanding communication as a non-for-profit public service geared towards the collective.

Monetisation and funding opportunities remain limited, though some podcasters have discovered alternative and creative methods to finance their podcasts, with some initiatives dating back to 2019. For instance, *El Pitch* (The Pitch) has organised events such as El Pitch Festival, while others like *Emprende Verde* (Go Green Entrepreneurship) have received funding from embassies to cover some production costs. These examples demonstrate a deliberate effort to secure financial support, achieved through creativity and resilience.

An analysis of Cuban podcasters' attitudes towards monetisation reveals notable insights, with many framing podcasting as both a passion and a self-imposed responsibility, while rejecting the idea of turning it into a paid profession. As one interviewee argued: "I don't live off this, I live for this" (interview, Albert Cabrera). This perspective reflects Taylor's (2023) argument that podcasters often continue to view their practice as a form of leisure rather than a form of employment.

Additionally, the issue of sustainability remains unresolved, particularly in the context of the economic crisis the country has faced since 2020. While there is widespread agreement among participants on the importance of identifying funding sources to ensure adequate human resources and fair compensation, it is notable that for the majority, non-financial rewards are sufficient to justify the time and effort devoted to podcast production on a voluntary basis. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of the motivations behind

podcast production on the island, which are predominantly personal, professional, and socio-cultural, rather than commercially driven.

The findings of this study expand Markman's (2012) argument that podcasters are often motivated by the pursuit of cultural and social capital rather than economic gain.

Participants acknowledged personal motivations linked to podcasting as a space for expression, emotional release, and enjoyment, where the podcaster exercises creative control over the topic and autonomy over the production process. These personal motivations mirror the early movements of podcasting globally, when creators were primarily interested in exploring their own interests, having fun, and enjoying an unrestricted level of creative control (Markman, 2012).

Podcasters that mentioned professional motivations referred mostly to the socialisation of knowledge and information, as well as the recognition of social actors and their roles in Cuba's economic and social development. These narratives seek to counterbalance the negative media coverage that various social actors receive in the country, for instance, entrepreneurs, who are often criticised by both state and opposition media, each with their own political bias aimed at discrediting the opposing ideological stance. Podcasts, in this case, facilitate processes of social recognition, particularly of entrepreneurial initiatives that demonstrate a socio-environmental responsibility.

Within the professional dimension, Cuban podcasters related to careers in communication and journalism expressed their desire for recognition by journalistic outlets, or the opportunity to practise professional skills acquired during academic years. Although this finding is influenced by the particular sample of podcasts examined in this study, it also reflects broader international trends, especially during the early stages of podcast development (Markman, 2012; García-Marín, 2020), when many of the initial creators came from backgrounds in journalism or communication and were among the first to experiment with this audio format.

Participants also exhibit strong socio-cultural aspirations, often driven by activism and advocacy for marginalised communities and voices that have been silenced or underrepresented (Vrikki and Malik, 2019; Gaynor, 2024). These narratives are fuelled by a desire to deconstruct stereotypes inherited from colonial times and perpetuated by the media of revolutionary Cuba, particularly through the underrepresentation of certain social groups or their predetermined association with specific roles and portrayals.

Similarly, these narratives are often motivated by the desire to create a sonic archive of specific events and to preserve the historical memory of organisations and socio-cultural processes within the country. As Ruíz Menéndez *et al.* (2025) argue, podcasts contribute to

the ‘affective memory of communities’ (2025, p. 9) and emphasise the role of oral knowledge as ‘living heritage’ (2025, p. 12). It is important to note that, for many Cuban podcasters motivated by this objective, an additional aim was to foster communities around their sound-based narratives.

These participants recognise podcasting as a means of ‘filling the niche’, but, contrary to Markman’s (2012) findings, their goal is not to reach an ‘untapped or underserved audience’ (2012, p. 555). Instead, their aim is to address the socio-communicative needs of particular Cuban groups.

This research offers a different perspective on Markman’s (2012) motivations of independent podcasters. In contrast to Markman’s findings, motivations of independent podcasters can emerge from external concerns and not necessarily from a listening disposition. In this study, one fifth of podcasting media practitioners admitted to not being avid podcast listeners, while half stated that they are not regular listeners of Cuban podcasts. This challenges the produsage nature of the medium (Diaz Duarte and Arciniegas Martínez, 2021) which is not solely shaped by the creators’ experiences as listeners, but also emerges from their interactions with others, the rewards derived from these interactions, and the sense of community fostered around the podcasting experience. This view challenges conception of transmedia storytelling, which is typically linked to strong economic motivations (Pedrero-Esteban, Terol-Bolinches and Arense-Gómez, 2023). Instead, it presents an alternative perspective, suggesting that podcasting in Cuba is primarily driven by communicative and community-oriented purposes.

The impact of the Cuban socio-political and communicative context also significantly influences podcasters’ expectations regarding the rewards they seek. Among the primary gratifications mentioned by the podcasters in this study are a sense of purpose, personal satisfaction, the opportunity to connect with others, public recognition and validation, as well as individual and collective learning. These non-monetary rewards underscore how podcasting serves as a pathway for personal growth, a platform for networking, and a means of public recognition. This has a positive effect on podcasters’ status within both their personal and professional circles, reinforcing processes of validation, trust, and authority. At the same time, the new connections fostered through podcasting facilitate social recognition and create opportunities for collaboration with social actors who share similar interests. These interactions, in turn, contribute to the personal development of the creators, within an ongoing cycle driven by interaction, knowledge exchange, and reciprocal social validation.

The following section shifts the focus to a more in-depth examination of the micro-interactions that facilitate participatory and co-creation practices, exploring how socio-

communicative relationships promote and expand the sense of community within podcasting in Cuba.

8.3 “*Community Comes From Communication*”: Mapping Interactions and Participation in Cuban Podcasting

In discussing podcast communities as networks of interaction, this research highlights the elective nature of the medium, characterised by asynchronous and consecutive actions between creators and users. This study expands Vrikki and Malik (2019) idea of ‘podcasting as a community building exercise’ (2019, p. 278), as a chord that connects podcasters creators to their peers, that poses a ‘community sensibility’ between the hosts themselves, and between ‘the hosts and their listeners’ (2019, p. 278).

This research draws on Ferdinand Tönnies’ (1887) conceptualisation of community and the intimate communal bonds it enacts, based on mutual recognition, close interactions and communal identity. While Tönnies (1887) criticised the United States stating that it ‘lacked national character, ushering in the notion that the degree of community depended on nationhood’ (Bond, 2024, p. 375), this research shifts the focus to a socialist model, where the principle of community is positioned as a foundational political ideal (Cohen, 1985, 2013). Cohen’s notion of ‘communal reciprocity’ rejects transactional forms of reciprocity rooted in market-driven logic. Instead, it offers a framework through which this study can examine the social interactions within Cuban podcasting communities, based on a ‘non-instrumental’ logic approach, ‘one in which I give to you because you need or want, and in which I expect a comparable generosity from you’ (Cohen, 2008, p. 43). These interactions are sustained by shared interests, purposes, and values, as well as collective knowledge produced and exchanged across multiple narrative contexts (Celaya, Naval, and Arbués, 2020).

Language plays a crucial role in fostering communal bonds, particularly within parasocial relationships with the host or in relation to the imagined community described by Anderson (1983). Language enacts these bonds by conveying cultural meanings and identity signifiers. Listening recalls a similarity with ‘searchable content’ and the ‘ambient affiliations’ (Zappavigna, 2014) it conveys. However, isolated listening does not transition into stronger communal ties, as individual actions are insufficient to generate meaningful community bonds.

Listeners’ nurture a sense of relatedness (Tobin and Guadagno, 2022) through regular and loyal listening to podcast episodes. Parasocial relationships can emerge between hosts and listeners, for example, when a listener texted Sixela and referred to her as ‘Sixe’, an abbreviation of her name - a very intimate approach - just because they felt they knew her.

These parasocial relationships with the hosts are built from listening to the podcast (Soto-Vásquez, Vilceanu and Johnson, 2022; Tobin and Guadagno, 2022) and often by passively following the podcast's social media presence and observing the ongoing conversation. However, this study challenges the notion of 'listening' - whether as social media listening or audio consumption - as constituting 'legitimate participation' in online communities, as suggested by Crawford (2011). Listening enables a 'coupling disposition' (Zappavigna, 2014) in podcasting, and while there is an active choice and intention in consuming the episodes or reading others' messages in the comments section or more participatory spaces, limited interaction gives way to 'ambient' communities. These, in turn, are overtaken by sustained interactions between podcasters and listeners, moving towards a horizontal model of 'knowledge communities' (Bruns, 2008).

Listening does not entail co-deciding (Carpentier, 2015), mutual influence, or deliberate interaction with other members of the community. Furthermore, the imagined community (Anderson, 1983) only shifts into an experiential one (Bauman, 2013) when the listener consciously initiates interaction - either with another engaged listener or with the podcaster - thereby facilitating the emergence of collaborative and participatory processes. Podcasting in Cuba, as Wrather (2016) argues, provides examples of media convergence through 'the interactions, relationships and bonding' between all actors involved in the podcasting experience, from podcast producers and audiences to communities, beyond the episodes and across multiple platforms. These interactions are the result of the individual actions of podcasters and listeners towards each other converging based on shared interests, purposes and values suggested by the podcast experience.

This study demonstrates that such interactions have the potential to catalyse further exchanges, giving rise to a sequential and interrelated construction of meanings. This dynamic, in turn, contributes to the gradual formation of a sense of community among both podcasters and listeners. Building on this premise, a central question emerges: what types of interactions within the Cuban podcasting landscape foster socio-communicative relationships that influence and reinforce the sense of community?

8.3.1 Podcaster-Listener Interaction

This research builds upon and contributes to the participatory podcasting frameworks proposed by García-Marín and Aparici (2020) and Wendland (2025). Even at the highest level of Wendland's (2025) 'Social Podcasting model', creative control remains firmly in the hands of the podcaster, without extending to co-design practices. This position stands in contrast to Carpentier's (2015) conception of full participation, which demands shared decision-making power and a more egalitarian structure of content creation.

In the Cuban podcasting scenario, interactions between podcasters and listeners propose new ways of understanding community-building practices. The interactions identified below are drawn from interviews with podcasters, focus groups with listeners and analytical listening to a sample of podcast episodes conducted for this study.

Podcasting encourages a primary podcaster-listener interaction that often begins with the unidirectional content dissemination followed by asynchronous feedback. In this configuration, the podcaster releases an episode, which is then consumed individually by the listener. This act of listening may elicit a response from the audience, typically in the form of comments posted on hosting platforms or shared via the podcast's associated social media channels. The podcaster may subsequently respond to this feedback, often by publicly acknowledging or replying to the comment, as shown in Fig. 8.1 *Unidirectional podcaster–listener interaction model*. However, this exchange generally does not evolve into sustained or direct dialogue, thereby maintaining the asymmetrical nature of the interaction and constraining opportunities for real-time engagement or co-creative processes.

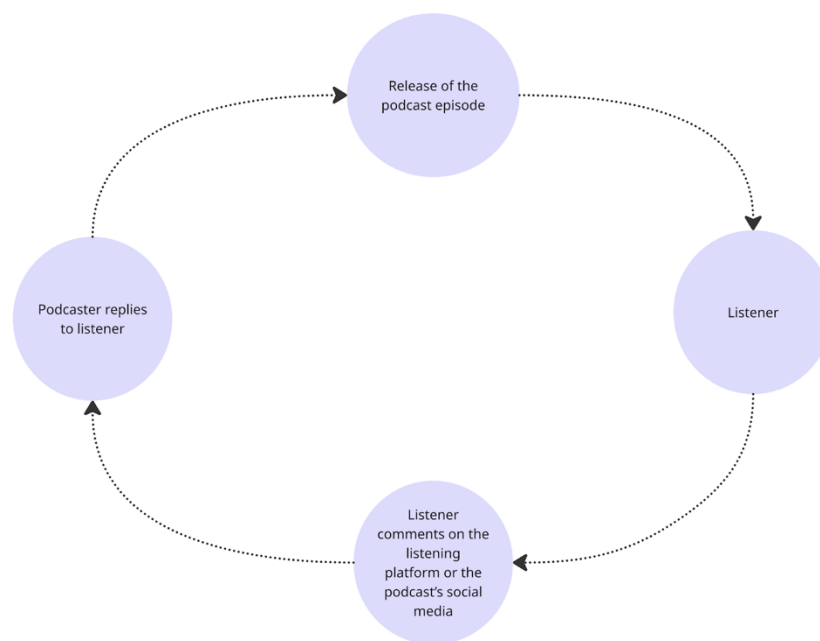


Figure 8.1 – Unidirectional podcaster–listener interaction model

Some of the Cuban podcasts analysed in this study exhibit limited degrees of audience participation (García-Marín and Aparici, 2020; Wendland, 2025), often restricting listeners' contributions to comments read aloud during episodes or the inclusion of listener voices in select segments (e.g., *Cinemafilia*, *La Mente Creativa*, *Emprende Verde*, *Flash Musical*, *Empoderadas*). However, these contributions rarely influence the content or creative direction of the podcast in any impactful way. In contrast, other podcasts demonstrate a more participatory approach, actively encouraging and integrating listener

input into the construction of specific episode segments or topic selection (e.g., *Píldoras Buen Idioma*, *Oye te cuento*, *Cositos Radiales*, *Buzón de Voz de Clandestina*). Through mechanisms such as polls, comment sections, direct messages, and emails, listeners are invited to participate in shaping episode content, from suggesting topics to contributing questions for interviews (Mañas-Pellejero and Paz, 2022).

Participants embrace the medium not merely as an individual broadcasting platform, but also as a space for reception and co-creation (Witmer and Dowling, 2025). The podcast creative process moves from an individual, closed exercise to a more collaborative one, where the listener can influence the creative process, whether through feedback or suggestions for topics (García-Marín and Aparici, 2020).

This shift also signifies a form of validation of the listener by the podcaster, as it redefines the balance of creative power and the mutual influence exerted by both actors at various points in the process. Interactions between podcasters and their listeners are shaped by podcasters' perceptions of these narratives as collaborative spaces, such as when Dachelys Valdés says that they didn't want to tell their own stories only, but the stories of others who have experienced the same struggles as them as well, allowing modes of both individual and collective creative expression. This research offers a new approach to podcasting and the "workflows leading its creative production" (Sharon, 2023, p. 334) and contributes to the understanding of transmedia storytelling as a community-building exercise.

The following discussion explores the diverse actions that mediate podcaster-listener interactions within the Cuban context.

1. Integrated Feedback

Podcasters actively integrate feedback from their audiences to improve and shape their content. By inviting users to contribute and thereby participate in the construction and expansion of transmedia narratives (Dann, 2014), this research also underscores that users' initiative to contribute to these narratives can be both voluntary and unsolicited.

Dann (2014) argues that podcasting facilitates the creation of broader narratives and their expansion across transmedia worlds, as the medium invites listeners to contribute their experiences to the original text through emails, online forums, social media, voice notes, attendance at live programmes, among other means. While Dann (2014) predicted that the way to expand podcasting narratives across transmedia worlds was to engage the listener to contribute through different channels, it is important to emphasise that it is not just a matter of providing an invitation, but that there must be horizontal communication and a sharing of power in the construction of the podcasting experience. This is one of the most

notable findings about podcasting in Cuba: the idea of understanding the podcast as a space for listening to others, and not just for individual broadcasting. This adds another perspective to Waldmann's (2020) notion that all 'auditory non-fiction narratives are based on both storytelling and storylistening' (2020, p. 34).

Listeners' suggestions have a utilitarian and instrumental role (Chen and Keng, 2024) as they can influence the topics of the podcast, the style or performance of the host, or even the design of interview questions. This interaction is facilitated through mechanisms such as surveys, social media comments, direct messages, and emails (Florini, 2015; Chen and Keng, 2024). While the use of feedback in podcasting can be instrumental in creating new products tailored to users and marketed back to them commercially (Martens, 2011; Graves, 2011), in the Cuban context this user-generated feedback is incorporated into the podcast as a narrative element and returned to the community as a strategy for individual and collective validation, a narrative that others are experiencing similar situations and that they are not alone.

2. Crowdsourcing

Listeners also contribute to content development through crowdsourcing practices. They may suggest topics or share personal testimonies that become part of the podcast narrative (Gray and Benning 2019; Witmer and Dowling, 2024). These contributions are typically collected through social media platforms (e.g., Telegram, Twitter, Instagram) and messaging apps such as WhatsApp, fostering a sense of shared authorship and relevance. This research expands on the idea of crowdsourcing in podcasting, not as in the true crime genre (Boling, 2019; Witmer and Dowling, 2024) where listeners aspire to solve real cases or participate in a collective social justice exercise, but rather from those spontaneous individual contributions that feed directly into the podcast content and contribute to the building of a narrative that embodies more than an individual creator.

The podcast community acts as the 'enabler of needs and desires' (Gambetti, Graffigna and Biraghi, 2012) through participatory practices that allow for mutual influence, knowledge creation and the modification of the podcast experience.

Here, an important tension arises as podcasters and media practitioners can act as gatekeepers of the podcast experience, and of the centralisation of power that this entails. This role can become exclusionary and alienating if listeners' perspectives are disregarded or selectively filtered (McNamara and Bassett-Gunter, 2024). These filtering processes take place, for example, when the podcaster is selecting listeners' comments to construct an interview questionnaire, like in *En Plural* (In Plural), or when they decide to produce

episodes exclusively responding to listeners' comments, as Albert and Allison mention in their interviews for this study.

In the episode 'Reacting to your reactions to the last episode about pornography' of the podcast *ZonaoClichés*, the podcaster gathers comments from her Instagram profile and creates an episode based on them. Allison does not mention the names of her followers, maintaining the anonymity of the comments.

"Today's episode is an unusual one, a kind of bonus episode, which I wanted to do to react to your reactions to the last episode about pornography. (...) So I also have things I gathered from people who approached me, or who let me know their opinion through some chat, but in a very indirect way. And I've brought them together here to share with you, because I think it's super interesting and necessary. It's not gossip, it's sharing." (ZonaoClichés con Ally, "Reacting to your reactions to the last episode about pornography," 23/03/2022)

The podcaster includes a comment with which she disagrees, where a listener states they will not share the episode due to concerns about others' reactions. The podcaster responds emotionally and reflects on the influence of external opinions on individual actions. This purposive inclusion of a variety of opinions contributes to the credibility of the feedback selection process and suggests, at the very least, a move towards greater transparency, one that accommodates a plurality of perspectives.

Although the interactions between listeners and podcasters demonstrate innovative behaviours (Piller, Vossen and Ihl, 2012), they also raise important questions regarding listeners' 'expected outcomes'. These may range from a genuine desire to contribute to the podcast, to leveraging the intimacy and sense of closeness established with the podcast and its community, or even aspiring to assume roles in the podcast's management. The listener has the capabilities to become a prosumer, in their capacity to access, consume, produce and disseminate content (Videla-Rodríguez and Piñeiro-Otero, 2013). While Bruns' (2008) concept of prosumer has been mostly explored within commercial contexts where consumers are positioned as co-creators of content alongside brands. This framing has led to considerable emphasis on the exploitative nature of crowdsourcing, in which user labour and expertise are mobilised to enhance commercial products without proper recognition or remuneration (Bruns and Schmidt, 2011, p. 4).

In contrast, this research situates the notion of the prosumer outside of commercial frameworks, specifically within contexts where profit-making is not a primary objective. This may be due to structural economic conditions or a deliberate decision to use the podcasting medium for purposes of social impact. In these cases, the notion of transaction is supplanted by a different form of reciprocity, one based not on financial reward but on

other forms of mutual recognition, such as personal fulfilment, collective belonging, or the advancement of shared values (Bruns and Schmidt, 2011, p. 5).

Crowdsourcing establishes a bidirectional channel of communication, enriching podcast content with a plurality of experiences and transforming the individual creative space into a more collective conversation. It also offers reassurance and validation to podcasters, enabling them to begin testing and exploring their audiences' attitudes and interests, as well as listeners' concerns and expectations regarding both the show and the podcaster.

3. Reciprocity

Participants in this study conceive the podcast as a 'place to listen', in line with Costa Sánchez's perception of the medium as a space where 'everyone counts and everyone is heard' (Costa Sánchez, 2013, p. 562). The relationship between certain Cuban podcasters and their listeners is characterised by this aspiration of reciprocity, notably the ones that discuss social issues, like *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* (We Wear It Curly Radio) or *El Descanso* (The Rest).

Other podcasters take on a more guiding or supportive role, responding to direct messages or engaging in informal dialogue with their audience. Podcasters may invite listeners to actively contribute to episode creation or participate as knowledgeable voices. As Florini (2015) outlines, podcasts nurture a sense of community and reproduce social, intimate, spaces that foster engagement through interactions across informal virtual networks between podcasters and listeners.

El Descanso (The Rest) has designated spaces to reciprocate its listeners. Although not all guests are invited because they are part of the community, some may be experts of interest to the podcasters, for example, in the episode "*Gestionar los duelos*," (Dealing with grief) the podcasters speak with expert Yuleivis Valdés Ayala, a licensed psychologist and Master in Sexology. At the beginning of the episode, one of the podcasters acknowledges that she would not feel confident discussing "this topic alone, without someone who knows" (Lien Real, 2023). On the other hand, they have a WhatsApp group where they create spaces for conversation with their listeners and other caregivers who are part of the *El Descanso* community. In this particular episode, Yadira invites listeners to continue the conversation in this space and to share their experiences in a 'safe space':

"Please, those who feel comfortable and feel that this is a safe space to share their experiences, it would be great if you could share how you've lived it, how you've managed it, what tools you've used. Remember we have a chat. Grief is a complex process, and we completely understand if someone doesn't feel secure or comfortable talking about it." (El Descanso, Gestionar los duelos, 27/06/2023)

However, other podcasts adopt a more collaborative approach, such as *Cositos Radiales* (Radio Thingies) or *Buzón de Voz de Clandestina* (Clandestina's Voicemail), which receive and include all sorts of contributions from their listeners, regardless of the quality of the messages. *Buzón de Voz de Clandestina*, for example, in its episode "La Habana no aguanta más con esta cuarentena..." ('Havana can't take this quarantine anymore...') incorporates audio clips sent by followers of the brand. The episode includes quarantine stories, children's voices among them, as well as tales of frustration and boredom during lockdown. In addition, it features a fictional story about a cholera outbreak in the city, all woven together with sounds from Cuban animated series and fragments of Cuban music.

In this production approach, there is not hierarchy amongst contributors, as the purpose of the podcast is to provide a catharsis-based space where all voices and stories are accommodated. Therefore, the status of these participants is homogeneous as they are not defined by 'the quality of their contributions to the shared project' (Bruns and Schmidt, 2011, p. 4).

However, in the case of *Píldoras Buen Idioma* (Good Language Pills), listeners can achieve different status within the podcast community. A selection of loyal listeners has become part of the podcast 'Advisory Board' - as the podcaster calls it - which is a management support group, not solely based on the 'quality' of these listeners' contributions in the community, but also on loyalty, rigour and a sense of collective responsibility towards the podcast and the community.

As Bruns and Schmidt (2011) suggest, some listeners with more valuable experience than others will be more likely to be invited to host an episode than those whose contributions may be less consistent. In the case of *El Descanso* (*The Rest*), some listeners have been invited to appear as guests on the podcast, based on the value of their personal and professional experiences as carers. This strongly evokes a form of genuine participation (García-Marín and Aparici, 2020), in which the podcaster invites a listener to co-present an episode.

Reciprocity in podcasting is, therefore, nurtured through interactions and trust. For example, episode 'X of Tu Taller' from *En Plural* (In Plural) podcast results from a live video call conducted via Telegram. Unlike previous studio-recorded episodes, this one extends over 50 minutes and is marked by notably lower audio quality, echo from speakers and background wind noise are perceptible. Several guests from the Cuban business Tu Taller are featured, and the episode is distinctly more dynamic due to the increased number of participants. Conversations unfold spontaneously, with participants responding directly to each other, at times bypassing the podcaster altogether.

At one point, the moderator gives the floor to a listener participating through the live chat, asking them about their connection to the featured business, temporarily shifting attention away from the official guests. Later, another listener's question is read aloud and acknowledged by name. These gestures signal a reconfiguration of traditional podcasting dynamics: the listener assumes a role of equal visibility within the episode, and the boundaries between audience and guest are blurred.

This episode illustrates a notable decentralisation of narrative control. The podcaster relinquishes the authoritative position typical in more structured formats, thus disrupting hierarchical and unidirectional patterns often found in transmedia podcasting. Such live, participatory environments, especially when microphones are open, pose curatorial and gatekeeping challenges, as they diminish the predictability of audience input. They demand a heightened level of trust in listeners and open a negotiation of power between podcaster and audience.

4. Mutual Recognition

Mutual recognition represents another aspiration for podcasters, who intentionally create spaces for individuals or groups “who feel the same as you,” as described by Lien Real. Building on previous studies (Piller, Vossen and Ihl, 2012; Florini, 2015), this research argues that such connections, whether identity-centred, value-centred, or content-centred, often extend beyond the aural dimension of the podcast into new interactive and collaborative scenarios, both online and offline.

Listeners' identification is enhanced through narratives of shared experiences and common struggles, as highlighted by one Cuban podcast listener interviewed in this study. This identification is further reinforced through transmedia extensions such as social media or messaging groups on WhatsApp or Telegram.

Through the sharing of stories and experiences, social media has become a space for identification and solidarity, reflecting broader notions of social creation and its relational dimension. For example, Sixela Ametller, host of *Empoderadas* (Empowered women), invites her community to participate in collective experiences in Instagram, enabling listeners to engage with the podcast through alternative discursive resources. These interactions not only deepen their connection to the podcast but also offer a sense of enjoyment and validation in the experiences of others (Piller, Vossen and Ihl, 2012).

Nevertheless, the existing literature has largely overlooked the successive layers of interaction that arise from the evolving podcaster-listener relationship. The following section, therefore, examines the subsequent listener-to-podcaster interactions that emerge

from this initial exchange, with particular attention to how these dynamics unfold within the Cuban podcasting landscape.

8.3.2 Listener-Podcaster Interaction

The listener-podcaster interaction is characterised by the listener's spontaneous and intentional engagement in the communicative process. Unlike more passive forms of listener engagement and opportunities for feedback (McGregor, 2019), this interaction is initiated by the listener and extends beyond evaluative commentary on the content or the podcaster's performance. Instead, it encompasses unprompted actions through which listeners articulate demands and assume a form of responsibility towards the podcast. These practices signal a deeper level of involvement, underpinned by a strong sense of loyalty and belonging, suggesting that listeners perceive themselves as integral participants in the podcast's continuity and community. Morris (2012) argues that examining the impact of podcasts on listeners' lives beyond the individual act of listening reveals the medium's role as a 'cultural object', as Wrather (2016) coins it.

The following section highlights several listener-podcaster interactions and discusses how the power balance between the podcaster and its audience is renegotiated, because of the listeners' involvement and participation.

1. Listener-Generated Content

Listener contributions to Cuban podcasts play a pivotal role in deepening the transmedia dimension of the medium. These contributions often take the form of voice recordings, submitted either in response to podcasters' invitations or spontaneously, typically through platforms such as Instagram and Telegram. Such practices exemplify a shift from passive consumption to active co-creation (García-Marín and Aparici, 2020; Wendland, 2025). While Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) argue that 'co-creation acts as the locus of value creation in the consumer-enterprise interaction' (2004, p. 10) from a commercial perspective, this allows for an understanding of the listener-podcaster interaction as a locus of value creation.

In the case of *Voces de Marzo Literario* (Voices of Literary March), what initially began as a podcaster-led strategy, inviting listeners to contribute content, gradually evolved into an autonomous participatory practice. Listener contributions became so prominent that individuals began submitting poems and other materials without solicitation, reflecting a strong sense of identification with the podcast and a desire to influence its narrative direction. This development also illustrates how community can enable both individual and collective creativity, contributing to personal and associational identity (Caum Moffitt,

1999), as well as the convergence of multiple, yet equally legitimate, aspirations (Bauman, 2013).

While barriers to participation in transmedia storytelling are generally considered low (Yee, 2025), the Cuban context presents both external and internal limitations. Externally, restricted internet access and poor connectivity across the island continue to hinder widespread engagement. Internally, participation is shaped by the extent of creative control exercised by podcasters, who may position themselves as gatekeepers, curators, or facilitators within their respective communities.

The elective nature of listeners' contributions recalls Monaghan (2014) approach to virtual communities as 'a form of elective affinity' (2014, p. 246). Listeners demonstrate not only their awareness and capacity to participate but also the value attributed to their input (Bruns and Schmidt, 2011). However, not all members of a podcast community must engage in every form of interaction to be regarded as active participants or to meaningfully experience the community (García-Marín, 2020). Several podcasts examined in this study illustrate how user-generated content can significantly shape the structure of an episode. In *Buzón de Voz de Clandestina* (Clandestina's Voicemail), for instance, episodes are composed entirely of voice messages submitted by the audience in response to a call for contributions—messages that are “seen to matter” (Yee, 2025, p. 94), thereby strengthening meaningful social relationships. In such cases, the role of the podcaster is reconfigured: rather than acting as the sole content creator, they assume the position of curator, primarily responsible for integrating sonic elements, music, and sound design. This aligns with Barbarino, Herlo and Bergmann (2022), who emphasise the significance of the curatorial role as a mechanism for fostering respect and meaningful participation among all stakeholders in the co-creation process. They also underscore the value of shared responsibility and decision-making throughout the podcast production process.

Similarly, *Cositos Radiales* (Radio Thingies) offers another example of collaborative podcasting. The open nature of this content production fosters a novel sense of shared authorship, reshaping the creative control of the podcast through collaborative means.

Nevertheless, these elective interactions, facilitated through social media, direct communication, and participation in face-to-face or virtual gatherings, create multiple entry points into the podcast experience and its co-creative spaces.

2. Audience Requests

Listeners often demonstrate a high level of engagement and assertiveness in their expectations towards the podcaster, based on expertise, communicative skills, and the host's personality and performance (Heiselberg and Have, 2023). This research, by

contrast, moves beyond the parasocial framework and foregrounds listeners' expectations as requests for new episodes or access to supplementary content. Such requests are typically expressed through social media interactions, comments or direct messages, and function both as expressions of loyalty and as indicators of emotional proximity between the audience and the podcaster. This form of listener engagement reflects a deep investment in the podcast's narratives and a desire to sustain an ongoing communicative relationship with its creator.

Such dynamics are more readily observed in smaller-scale podcasts, where the reduced audience size enables more personalised and responsive interaction. In these settings, podcasters are better positioned to acknowledge and accommodate listener input, thereby reinforcing a sense of intimacy.

However, even within larger, more widely followed podcasts, this level of engagement can persist. The case of *Píldoras Buen Idioma* (Good Language Pills) illustrates this phenomenon. Despite the podcast's popularity with more than ten thousand followers on Telegram, its creator, Cristian Martínez, consistently responds to listeners' demands. This responsiveness not only affirms the bond between podcaster and audience but also signals a sense of professional responsibility and commitment to sustaining content production for a dedicated community.

3. Confidentiality and Intimacy

Some listeners develop profound emotional bonds with podcasters, often marked by a level of trust that compels them to disclose personal challenges or seek emotional support. This extends Kurt's (2025) argument that virtual spaces for social interaction enable members to exchange both practical and emotional support. However, these intimate exchanges reach a deeper level, as they typically take place in private settings, most commonly through direct messaging on social media.

When addressing the personal and communal identification motives of listeners, Chan-Olmsted and Wang (2022) underscore the 'significant marketing communication implications' of podcasting, given its potential to foster loyal and trustworthy relationships. This research, while also focusing on personal identification emerging from listener-podcaster interactions, emphasises the distinctiveness of listeners' motives as they extend beyond the individual listening sphere toward more intimate and confidential exchanges with the podcaster.

While these interactions may begin as confidential communications, they frequently evolve into expressions of genuine emotional attachment, with listeners perceiving themselves as personally connected to the host. This sense of closeness is particularly nurtured through

the affordances of one-on-one communication, which enables a perception of direct, unmediated engagement. The resulting intimacy not only enhances listener loyalty but also positions the podcaster as a trusted confidant, thereby deepening the relational dimension of the podcasting experience.

This intimacy is also reciprocal: podcasters often maintain ongoing exchanges with their listeners, even as their communities expand, though audience numbers may remain modest by global standards, they are nonetheless significant within the Cuban context. These sustained interactions occur despite the limited human resources typically available for podcast management. As noted by three podcasters interviewed in this study, such relationships are not incidental but rather intentionally cultivated; they require consistent effort, time, and a sense of responsibility toward the audience. Cristian Martínez offers a compelling example of this commitment: when a listener sends him a lengthy email, he replies with a response of equal depth, reflecting a genuine investment in sustaining meaningful dialogue with his community.

4. Stewardship

Listeners often take on an active role in sustaining the podcast and its associated community, marking a significant shift from passive audience members to active participants in the management of the podcast's communicative spaces. This transition is especially notable in terms of perceived ownership and loyalty, as listeners take on responsibilities typically reserved for the podcaster or production team. Such an 'upgrade' in participation status highlights a deep emotional and symbolic investment in the podcast experience, particularly given the absence of monetary compensation for their involvement.

For example, listeners can manage Telegram groups and moderate group discussions, all in the service of maintaining and enhancing the podcast's communicative spaces and community cohesion. These roles are not merely supportive, as they demonstrate a sense of collective responsibility, reinforced by the podcasters' recognition of listeners' contributions as integral to the overall podcast experience. In doing so, listeners assert their presence as meaningful producers (Bruns, 2008) and co-facilitators of the podcast experience, blurring the boundaries between creator and audience. Some actions performed by listeners are listed below:

- Content moderation: Listeners help manage discussions or interactions within the community.
- Community management: Taking on organisational or leadership roles in online spaces (such as Telegram). Answering questions from other participants or newcomers, effectively becoming an informal community guide or facilitator.

- Gatekeeping: Informally monitoring the accuracy of podcast content, as well as the conversation and exchange in groups or podcast channels. These roles are most carried out through social media groups (Telegram, WhatsApp) and direct messaging.

Through these actions, listeners demonstrate a high level of emotional, social, and even operational investment in the podcast, thereby bringing a sense of collective participation (Wendland, 2024). The contribution of listeners to the content creation process, the maintenance of community spaces, and the fostering of strong relational bonds with podcasters signifies their holding a certain amount of power (Carpentier, 2015) in the podcasting community.

Podcasting communities emerge as convergence spaces where the individual authorship of the podcaster intersects with listener contributions, engaging in an ongoing negotiation of creative control and collaborative practices. While Bruns (2008) cautions against the potential for user exploitation in co-creation settings, the Cuban podcasting communities examined in this research operate without commercial outcomes. As such, the focus shifts from concerns about exploitation to an emphasis on user participation.

Yet, this ephemerality contrasts with the enduring social and emotional resonance of these communities. Their longevity does not necessarily derive from ongoing interaction among members, but rather from the social bonds initially formed and the symbolic and emotional significance they continue to hold. As Rheingold (2000) argues, these relationships often persist in an imagined form, echoing Anderson's (1983) "imagined communities." This is evident, for example, in the experiences of podcasters such as Erick Méndez, who notes that occasional messages are still posted in the *Voces de Marzo Literario* Telegram group when someone shares an interesting link. Similarly, in the case of *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* (We Wear It Curly Radio), valuable information continues to be exchanged in their Telegram channel (*Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* Chat), even though the podcasters officially announced its closure in November 2024. While Bauman (2013) contends that a community 'exists only as long as it is being experienced,' (2013, p. 65) its symbolic and affective imprint can indeed transcend time.

This chapter has examined two fundamental forms of interaction in the creation and consolidation of Cuban podcast communities: podcaster-listener and listener-podcaster. This research identifies a third, equally significant interaction, listener-listener, which underscores podcasting's capacity to transcend its aural origins and adopt a transmedia character. These interactions are not limited to exchanges facilitated by the podcast itself, such as online discussion groups or comment sections; rather, they extend beyond the

podcast's formal structures (Wrather, 2016), giving rise to autonomous alliances and independent networks among listeners.

8.3.3 Listener-Listener Interaction

One of the most frequently overlooked dimensions of podcast communities is the emergence of horizontal, peer-to-peer relationships among listeners. These relationships extend the podcast's influence beyond the podcaster-listener dynamic, embedding it within more dynamic and participatory networks. This research builds upon Perks and Turner's (2019) exploration of listener-to-listener engagement, as well as Chen and Keng (2024) identification of the importance of 'links between audiences and other audiences' within podcast communities (2024, p. 941). While Perks and Turner (2019) observed that podcast users frequently multitask by engaging with platforms like Twitter, monitoring real-time listener reactions and interacting with hosts, this study concentrates on the specific affordances identified by Cuban podcast practitioners. It highlights both the opportunities for listener-to-listener interaction and the transmedia extensions that facilitate and sustain such exchanges within the Cuban podcasting ecosystem.

Although fan and audience studies have examined audience engagement and interaction both among themselves and with media texts (Gray and Benning, 2019), this dimension remains largely underexplored within podcast studies. While this research provides only preliminary insights into such listener-to-listener interactions, their significance as a fundamental manifestation of community is clearly evident.

García-Marín (2020) highlights how podcast communities frequently operate across both online and offline spaces, fostering the development of sound projects that bring listeners together through dialogue, learning, and collaborative creation, an observation that also holds true in the Cuban context. Such interactions often take place within communicative environments associated with the podcast itself, including live chats, WhatsApp or Telegram groups, and in-person gatherings (Shen and Cage, 2015). Within these spaces, listeners identify shared interests, establish connections, and begin to generate new synergies. These interactions can evolve into more substantive forms of collaboration, ranging from the informal exchange of resources and advice seeking to more structured models of mutual support, consultancy, and even professional partnerships.

Listener-to-listener interactions facilitate mutual recognition and the co-construction of knowledge, emerging as a critical mechanism for sustaining the podcast community beyond the audio medium itself. At the same time, these interactions reinforce the social capital (Chadha, Avila and Gil de Zúñiga, 2012) of personal connections and a sense of community

belonging, while also enabling the accumulation of resources and good practices through mutual exchange and participation.

The following examples illustrate the potential of listener-to-listener interactions for building and sustaining podcasting communities.

1. Personal connections

Through this study, listeners reported forming personal bonds with podcasters and fellow listeners through direct communication. These bonds are strengthened by a shared sense of identity or experience, often leading to mutual recognition. Interactions take place primarily through WhatsApp groups and Telegram channels and are reinforced through in-person meetups and community events, nurturing a sense of belonging and continuity beyond the digital sphere.

Meetups act as catalysts for community cohesion, ‘converting interest-based and online-only ties among strangers to close connections that traverse online and offline boundaries’ (Shen and Cage, 2015, p. 410). This research also argues that meetups enable spaces for mutual recognition between podcaster and listeners, as well as between listeners themselves. These events in Cuba have included episodes recordings, presentations and other cultural experiences, such as audiovisual screenings or musical performances, which enrich the podcast experience and reinforce its transmediality.

2. Knowledge and resources exchange

Listeners actively engage in the exchange of information, tools, opportunities, and practical advice, fostering a culture of mutual support that contributes to both community development and individual empowerment. These exchanges are facilitated through hybrid mechanisms, primarily WhatsApp groups and in-person gatherings, which blend digital and physical spaces to enable sustained collective learning. These sites encourage connectedness between listeners, as they enable knowledge exchange and collective learning ‘as discovery and learning as familiarity’ (Soto-Vásquez, Vilceanu and Johnson, 2022, p. 332).

This research argues how listener-to-listener interactions can provide practical guidance and resources to help individuals navigate personal and professional challenges, not necessarily from someone more experienced, but from those possessing the relevant skills or knowledge to support others within the community.

For example, in her interview, Dachelys Valdés recalls the invaluable support provided by the *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* (We Wear It Curly Radio) community and the mutual assistance among its members. She recounts occasions when the team was not present in

the Telegram chat and a listener posed a question about hair; another participant would promptly respond with advice, illustrating the open, collaborative, and cooperative nature of the space.

This informal learning environment aligns with Gee's (2005) concept of 'affinity spaces', in which participants engage in peer-to-peer teaching and each individual is entitled to assume an expert role in sharing knowledge. Such communities foster collaborative approaches to processing and evaluating knowledge (Euritt, 2023), thereby enhancing what Levy (2001, p.12) describes as collective intelligence.

3. *External Alliances and Collaborations*

Podcast communities in Cuba demonstrate that each element of the transmedia podcasting experience holds distinct value for listeners. Relationships among listeners can evolve beyond the podcasting context, giving rise to personal and professional collaborations that originate within podcast-affiliated spaces but are maintained through external interactions.

- WhatsApp groups: providing continuity and frequent informal contact.
- Face-to-face meetings and events: offering opportunities for deeper engagement and coordinated actions.

In the WhatsApp group of *El Descanso* (The Rest), caregivers exchange resources and good practices relevant to the Cuban context, grounded in discussions of podcast episodes and the interests of members within the caregiver network who converge in this communicative space. Yadira and Lien, hosts of *El Descanso*, act as "facilitators of cultural co-creation processes" (Ruíz Menéndez *et al.*, 2025, p. 9) in the podcast WhatsApp group.

Similarly, some listeners who participated in *Voces de Marzo Literario* (Voices of Literary March) have established professional partnerships with foreign publishers who discovered them through the podcast's episodes.

This section shifts the analytical lens from media creators and managers (Davis, 2025) to listeners and the value they derive from the various dimensions of the transmedia experience. For example, *Empoderadas* (Empowered Women) offers its audience a multifaceted engagement through three core components: podcast episodes, social media challenges, and face-to-face events. Together, these elements foster new forms of interaction and meaning-making. This case expands upon the work of Witmer and Dowling (2025), who examine how listeners respond to hosts' calls to action via social media by posting comments or contributing user-generated content, illustrating how audiences are not merely consumers but active participants in shaping the narrative and community.

Each of these components contributes significantly to the podcast community experience: from the learning processes stimulated by active listening to episodes, to participatory engagement and mutual recognition via Instagram challenges, and to peer-to-peer connection and collective knowledge construction during in-person events. While complementary to the podcast, these events are not centred on the audio format but rather on the experiential dimension of community interaction.

Face-to-face events serve as spaces for value creation for both podcasters and listeners. Interactions among listeners illustrate how podcasts can function as catalysts for broader social and communicative practices (Couldry, 2004), enabling the formation of communities that are shaped not only by shared media consumption, but also sustained through independent, multidirectional relational interactions. Podcast communities in Cuba not only exemplify the convergence of narratives across multiple platforms, but also provide insight into how the podcasting experience can unfold across diverse media environments, as Fig. 8.2 *Podcast community participation ecosystem* represents. It underscores the importance of each transmedia element contributing meaningful value to both producers and listeners, highlighting Hancox (2021) argument of TS as ‘a term and a practice’ (2021, p. 2). By promoting engagement and collaboration, the podcast experience can evolve into a social and participatory ecosystem (see Fig. 8.2).

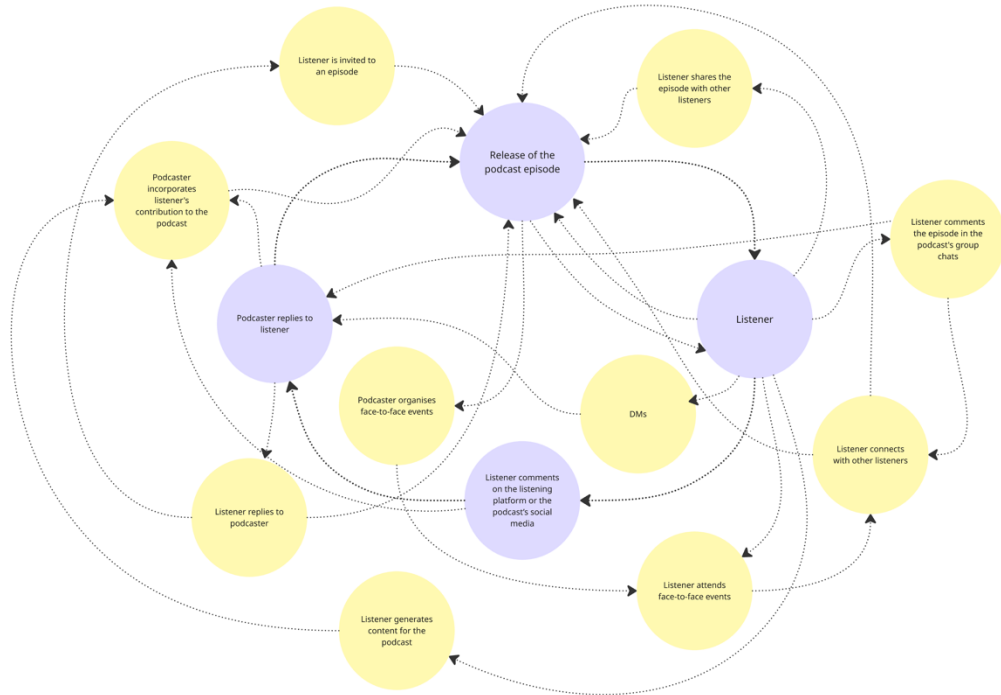


Figure 8.2 – Podcast community participation ecosystem

These three forms of interaction: podcaster-to-listener (top-down), listener-to-podcaster (bottom-up), and listener-to-listener (horizontal), introduce a more complex and layered understanding of cultural convergence within the podcasting experience. The inclusion of

the horizontal, listener-listener dimension complements existing vertical models of communication and underscores the participatory potential of podcasting as a multidirectional network of interactions. This research contends that these interactions do not occur in isolation but rather unfold in a dynamic sequence, with one form of interaction catalysing the next. It is this chaining of interactions, together with the socio-communicative relationships and practices that emerge from them, that fosters and reinforces a strong sense of community.

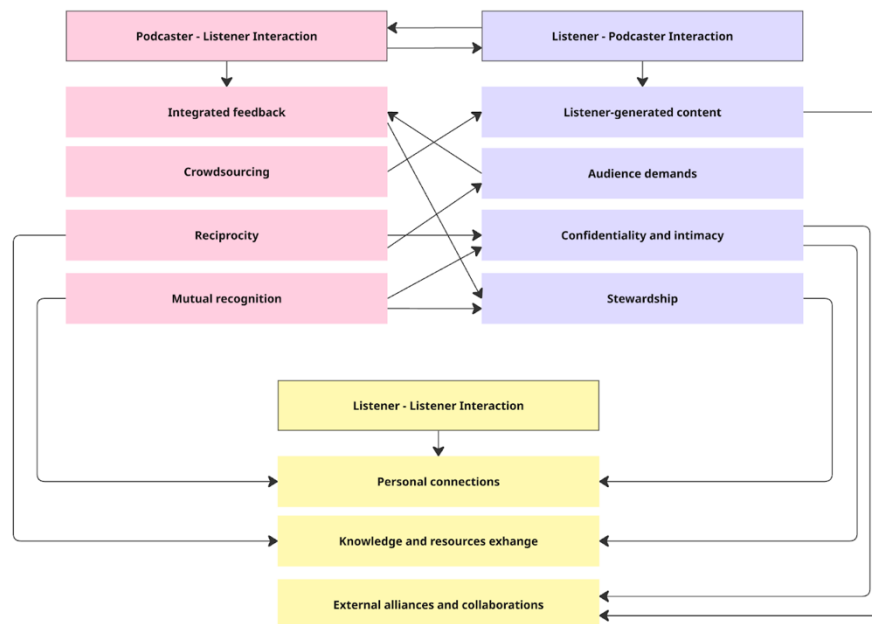


Figure 8.3 – Forms of Interactions in Podcasting Communities

As illustrated in Fig. 8.3, various forms of interaction within podcasting communities reveal that podcaster-to-listener engagement often fosters reciprocal listener-to-podcaster interaction. Mutual recognition within these communities enables members to assume distinct roles, ranging from gatekeepers to content moderators, thereby strengthening interpersonal bonds and reinforcing a shared sense of belonging.

Reciprocity is a core dynamic of these communities, exemplified by the conceptualisation of the podcast as a space for attentive listening. Podcasters' repeated calls for listeners to share personal experiences and seek emotional or professional guidance cultivate an atmosphere of trust. This trust not only strengthens personal relationships but also supports the exchange of resources, informational, emotional, and even practical, between podcasters and their audiences. Such reciprocal relationships can also generate audience expectations and demands. As listeners grow more comfortable and familiar with the podcaster, they may feel entitled to offer feedback or request content, reinforcing their sense of co-ownership and loyalty. These evolving dynamics deepen community ties and increase the likelihood of listeners taking on participatory roles within the podcast ecosystem.

Cuban podcasting communities exemplify what García-Marín and Aparici (2020, p. 100) describe as ‘more horizontal and less hierarchical’ models of participation within transmedia storytelling, while also offering a contrast to the standardised levels of participation proposed in their framework. This study reinforces García-Marín and Aparici’s (2020) assertion that participation in digital media is not enacted in a uniform manner. It further contributes to this discussion by emphasising that modes of participation are deeply shaped by contextual factors, particularly the socioeconomic conditions and cultural heritage of the individuals involved.

This research identifies three main types of interactions within podcasting communities, summarised in the framework entitled Multidirectional Network of Interactions in Podcasting Communities (See Table 8.2). This framework outlines categories, subcategories, and units of analysis that contribute to a deeper understanding of how podcast communities operate. The categories and subcategories emerged from the findings and discussion of this study, while the units of analysis were drawn from interviews, focus groups, and the analytical listening and field notes. As these units of analysis are context-dependent, the framework should be seen as an adaptable tool, an open invitation for scholars and media practitioners to explore the potential of podcasting as a vehicle for community-building through transmedia storytelling practices.

Podcast Community: A Multidirectional Network of Interactions			
Interactions	Categories	Sub-categories	Units of analysis
Podcaster Listener	Incorporated feedback	Listeners’ feedback shapes the content of the podcast	Surveys and polls
			Social media comments
			Comments-based episodes
		Co-creation of interview questionnaire for up-coming episodes	Social media (Facebook, Telegram)
		Listener’s feedback influences the performance of the podcast host	Direct messages
			Social media comments
			Emails
	Crowdsourcing	Suggested topics	Social media comments (Telegram, Twitter)
			WhatsApp groups
		Listeners’ testimonies	Social media comments
	Reciprocity	Credited contributions for listeners’ stories	In-episodes
		Guiding or pastoral role of the podcaster	Direct messages
		Unofficial source of information for data triangulation	In-episodes
	Mutual recognition	Invitations to speak as experts in the podcast	Active role in the production process of the episode
		Identification through (similar) stories	Social media

		Solidarity networks	Out-of-the-podcast
Listener Podcaster	- Listener-generated content	Requested and unrequested voice clips	Social media (Instagram, Telegram)
		Demand the release of episodes and related contents	Social media Direct messages
	Confidentiality	Share personal burdens with podcasters	Social media DM Direct messages - WhatsApp
		Seek support	Direct messages
	Intimacy	Closeness	Direct messages
	Stewardship	Content moderation	Social media groups Whatsapp groups
		Community management	Social media (Telegram)
		Gatekeeping	Direct messages Social media comments
Listener Listener	- Personal interactions	Mutual recognition	WhatsApp groups Face to face meeting and events
	External alliances	Personal and professional collaborations out-of-the-podcast	WhatsApp groups Face to face meeting and events Face to face meetings and events
	Knowledge and resources exchange	Information sharing	WhatsApp groups Face to face meeting and events

Table 8.2 – Empirical framework for examining Podcast Community through a Multidirectional Network of Interactions

8.4 What Other Forms of Interaction Contribute to the Sense of Community in Cuban Podcasting?

This research identifies further meaningful interactions within the context of Cuban podcasting, each exerting a significant influence on the processes of community building. These interactions contribute not only to the strengthening of podcast-based communities but also to a broader and more nuanced understanding of the transmedia potential of the medium. The subsequent section will analyse other complementary interactions that transpire between podcasters, as well as the social relationships forged between podcasters and their guests.

8.4.1 Podcaster-Podcaster Interaction

The podcaster-podcaster interaction has been a key focus in early studies of podcasting communities globally (Markman and Sawyer, 2014; García-Marín, 2022a; Laughlin, 2023), serving as a lens through which to examine the motivations, expectations, and interconnections that define emerging podcasting networks. Analysing these dynamics provides critical insight into the structure of a country's podcasting ecosystem, shedding

light on production practices, patterns of solidarity, and evolving notions of collective identity. Literacy and mentoring processes among podcasters take place in the Cuban context, ranging from the use of hosting platforms, editing skills, to best practices in content distribution. These processes encompass a range of activities, including the use of hosting platforms and the demonstration of editing skills, as well as the application of optimal practices in content distribution. Dachelys Valdés, for example, received training in editing and distribution practices from a member of the Cuban podcast directory *Cubapod*, Ernesto Wong, and subsequently shared these acquired skills with Raúl Soublett, creator of *En Estéreo Podcast* (In Stereo Podcast).

In the Cuban context, this interaction is also understood as a defining element of a podcasting movement shaped by a shared sense of identity and mutual recognition (Markman and Sawyer, 2014). Podcasters such as Lisy Romero (*The Little School*) and Sixela Ametller (Empowered Women) have provided guidance and mentorship to *Emprende Verde* (Go Green Entrepreneurship), a connection strengthened by shared gender identity and a sense of sorority among these podcasters. This interaction plays a central role in fostering the exchange of knowledge and experiences, facilitating informal mentorship (Jenkins, 2006), collaborative projects, and the voluntary provision of technical and creative support.

Collaborations among podcasters cultivate a sense of mutual responsibility among creators, frequently expressed through voluntary actions undertaken without financial remuneration. For example, Albert Cabrera and Lisy Romero both emphasise their willingness to offer their microphones to emerging podcasters, provided that such support contributes to the development of new programmes and the advancement of the podcasting movement. This ethos of mutual support significantly contributes to the identity of the Cuban podcasting community and echoes what Paisana and Crespo (2022) have described as podcasting's 'inherent collaborative structure'.

Podcaster-podcaster interactions are mediated, yet uniquely shaped by shared technological challenges. In Cuba, limited access to equipment and recording studios restricts creators' ability to achieve optimal audio quality, production efficiency, and flexibility in their recording environments. These common constraints foster a sense of shared struggle and mutual experience, reinforcing a collective identity among podcasters. Within this scenario, acts of solidarity and the exchange of knowledge have emerged as key strategies for overcoming material limitations and sustaining podcasting practices collectively over time.

Interactions among podcasters can serve as marketing and promotional strategies, thereby expanding audiences and consolidating brands (García-Marín, 2022). However, within the

Cuban context, non-profit initiatives predominate, with the objective of supporting new podcasters as they learn about the format and the medium.

Podcaster-podcaster interaction also facilitates cross-pollination, as creators can appear as guests on each other's shows. This practice enriches the podcast content and creates a meeting point for their existing podcast communities to converge. Finally, it leads to a further interaction examined in this chapter: the podcaster-guest relationship, through which further dimensions of community building are explored.

8.4.2 Podcast-Guest Interaction

While the podcast-guest interaction has often been examined as a mechanism for enhancing intimacy through listening and strengthening the listener's connection with the host (Tobin and Guadagno, 2022; Adler Berg, 2023), this research shifts the focus to the podcaster's perception of the guest as an integral member of the podcast community, provided they remain "faithful to the message" conveyed through the podcast's narratives.

In the case of *En Plural* (In Plural) and other podcasts such as *Empoderadas* (Empowered Women), for instance, Sixela Ametller considers all her guests to be part of the podcast's community, even if many were not regular listeners prior to their participation in the episodes. This underscores the social value the podcast offers, which may at times surpass the significance of the content itself. Guests come to be regarded as members of a select group bound by shared interests or values, aligning them with other contributors and reinforcing the podcast's sense of community.

However, it is important to note that this perspective is articulated by the podcasters themselves, as part of the organic community they believe the podcast fosters. This study does not incorporate the voices of the interviewees, which presents a potential avenue for future research. Moreover, it is also assumed by the podcasters that guests share common traits, particularly in relation to themes such as female empowerment, identity, racism, and family caregiving.

The narratives that emerge from these episodes serve to articulate meanings that foster a sense of connection among interviewees over time, thereby contributing to the symbolic construction of the podcast's core community. This community is grounded in a participatory coherence, shaped by the shared experiences and ideas of its members. In contrast, podcasts that adopt a confrontational, debate-driven, or thematically diverse approach tend to lack this narrative cohesion among interviewees, which significantly limits the formation of a unified community.

8.4.3 From Listener to Podcaster

The final aspect identified within podcast communities is the transition from listener to podcaster. This trajectory has been integral to the formation of early podcasting communities, where individuals were drawn to the creative potential of sound production and the opportunity to explore niche interests, particularly in areas such as technology. In the Cuban context, similar transitions continue to emerge, underscoring podcasting's capacity to foster participatory and creative engagement.

For instance, Allison Norch emerged from *Team Serendipia* (Serendipity Team), a participatory podcast launched in 2020 that originated from a Facebook group titled *My account has been hacked*. Allison produced the episode *Diablos que sienten* (22/06/2020), and by December of the same year, she had launched her own podcast, *ZonaoClichés con Ally*. A similar case is that of *La Casa Azul*, a podcast created by Carlos Sotolongo in September 2023, inspired by the work of Sixela Ametller and her podcast *Empoderadas* (Empowered Women) as she recalls in the interview for this study.

These invisible synergies reveal the tangible influence of the medium and how creators often find in the work of others the impetus to begin their own narrative journeys, motivated not by commercial success, but by communicative resonance and a desire to contribute to the ecosystem of shared storytelling.

Furthermore, podcasting communities are shaped by both internal and external elements, as illustrated in Fig. 8.4. Internally, three primary modes of interaction, listener-to-podcaster, podcaster-to-listener, and listener-to-listener, serve as the foundation of these communities. These are further enriched by the emergence of relational dynamics among podcasters (Vrikki and Malik, 2019), the sense of community formed around podcast guests who share a common identity or cause, and the transition from listener to podcaster, often prompted by the inspirational effect of other creators' work.

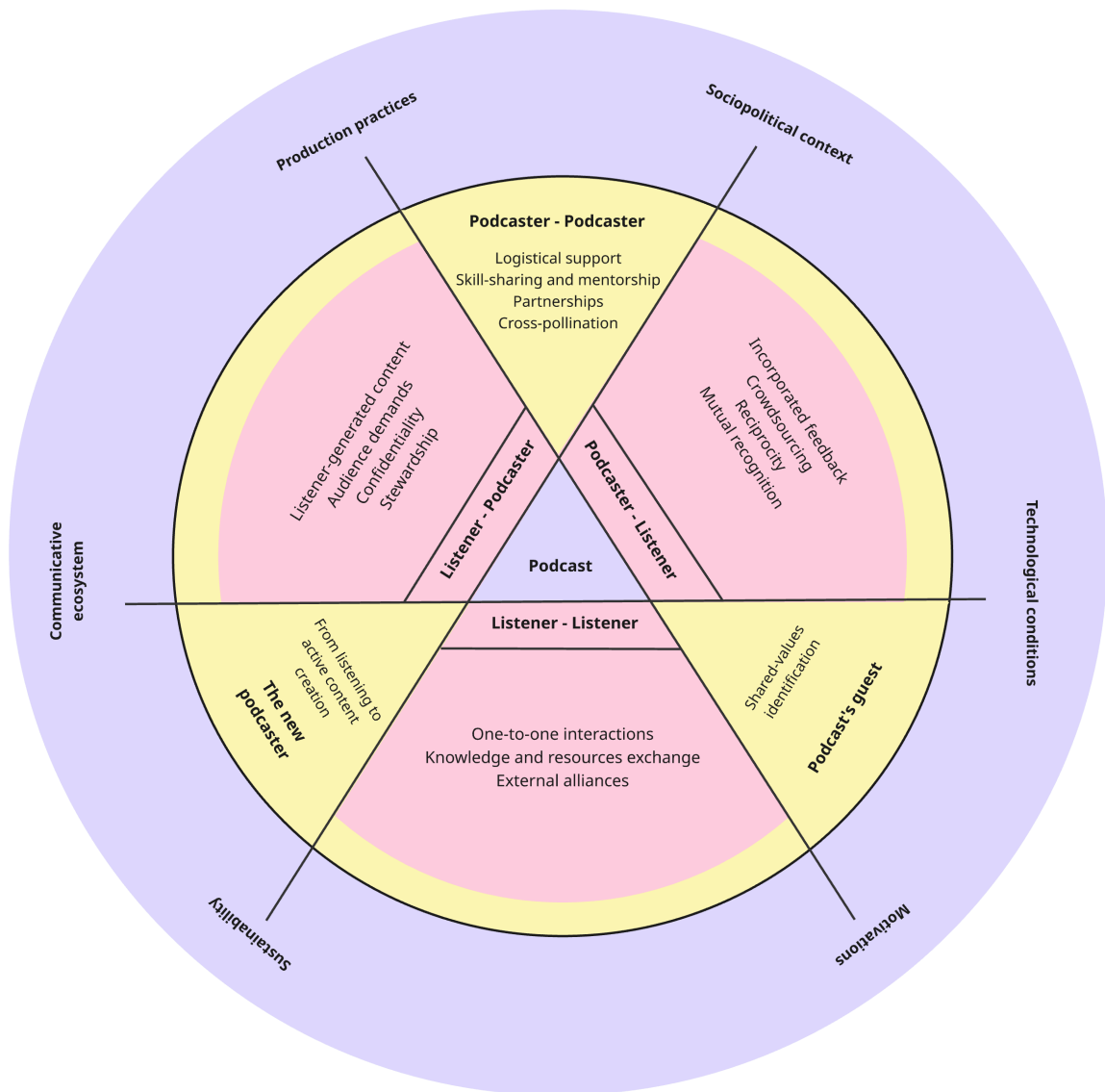


Figure 8.4 – Podcast communities: A multidirectional network of interactions

Externally, podcast communities are influenced by a range of contextual factors, including production practices, the socio-political environment, technological infrastructure, the broader communication ecosystem, creators' motivations, and the sustainability of the podcast over time. Together, these elements help define the scope and longevity of podcasting communities in the Cuban context and beyond.

8.5 Conclusion

Podcasting engages with transmedia storytelling by weaving together sounds, voices, and narratives across multiple platforms and communicative practices. In doing so, it fosters the creation of communities and the co-construction of knowledge and meaning through social interaction.

Podcasting can be defined as a set of communicative practices, with the ability to build community through a multidirectional network of interactions between the different actors

that shape and participate in the podcast experience. While podcasting is a user-centred medium (Llinares, 2018), podcast communities are interaction-based constructs sustained by storytelling, transmedia expansions and collective creation. Podcast communities within the Cuban context are being created and sustained through a series of interconnected interactions and communicative practices, that generate meaning and contribute to the reconfiguration of the country's communicative system.

These podcasting communities emerge as a concatenation of interactions rooted in elective and intentional actions by both podcasters and listeners. The power dynamics between these actors are continuously negotiated, adapted, and reconfigured within unconventional communicative spaces that diverge from dominant international norms of podcasting. This prompts a critical reflection on how the medium is defined and conceptualised, cautioning against limiting podcasting to platform-bound, commercially driven models. Such a reductive view risks obscuring its potential to evolve into new creative and participatory frontiers enabled by collective practices. This research responds to the call by Husted Ramos *et al.* (2023) to investigate transmedia narratives beyond those that generate commercial success or are situated within the entertainment industry.

This study also reorients Habermas's (1984) theory of communicative action toward a different social and political system - one distinct from the capitalist model - yet identifies parallels in the interplay between 'lifeworld' and 'system', as well as in the emergence of social pathologies resulting from the colonisation of the lifeworld by systemic mechanisms. In a socialist context, the 'lifeworld', conceived as the unregulated sphere of society, continues to reproduce the symbolic and cultural dimensions of social life, albeit within the boundaries of the prevailing political framework. The other component in this triad, the means of material reproduction, such as the economy and the state, also formally aligns with the political order. However, in the pursuit of consensus, expressions that diverge from or challenge the dominant political discourse are often marginalised or excluded, resulting in forms of social segregation, political apathy, and other pathologies identified by Habermas (1984). While consensus may have originally been fostered through participation and communicative action during the early stages of the revolutionary process, it has since been instrumentalised by power structures and imposed upon the fabric of society.

Podcasting communities in Cuba not only reproduce a 'classic horizontal mediaform' (Berry, 2006, p. 146), but are reversing the 'structural requirement' of the Revolution (De Ferrari, 2014) of 'unlimited personal concessions' (2014, p.15) over individual needs. They bring back a bottom-up community, grounded in peoples' individual identities, weaved together by shared interests and mutual struggles.

One may ask whether podcast communities can enact new forms of collective affirmation (Castells, 2002) and contribute to alleviating the social pathologies identified by podcasters in this study. Might this renewed sense of belonging, shared knowledge, and collective consciousness constitute an attempt to repair the 'lifeworld' and, if not transform the system, at least offer a critical response to the instrumental rationality perpetuated by institutional and media apparatuses? By fostering spaces for dialogue oriented toward collective knowledge rather than imposed consensus, these communities actively resist alienation and build communicative bridges capable of countering social fragmentation.

In conclusion, this study identifies the outcomes of socio-communicative relationships within podcasting and explores how their interconnections enhance the medium's potential as a platform for community building and collaborative creation. By moving beyond the commercialised notion of the listener, podcasting can be reimagined as a space for innovation, social connection, and collective creativity.

9. CONCLUSION

This research examined the communicative practices that foster and enhance a sense of community within Cuban podcasting. Through a study of the podcasting landscape from 2018 to 2024, the research revealed the intrinsic influence of the socio-political context in shaping the medium on the island. The exploration of podcast communities provided valuable insights into the interconnectedness of communicative practices that cultivate and sustain a sense of community through these narratives.

This chapter outlines the research findings pertaining to: 1) the evolution of Cuban podcast communities between 2018 and 2024; 2) community engagement through storytelling and transmedia strategies; 3) collaborative practices within podcast communities; and 4) a characterisation of the Cuban podcasting scene. To address these objectives, the study explored four key areas, which are summarised below:

- 1) The chapter first discusses the evolution of Cuban podcast communities shaped and mediated by technological, socio-cultural and political dimensions, influencing production and distribution practices. Podcasting, therefore, emerges as an unregulated medium in a constitutional regulated media environment.
- 2) Community engagement practices allow for podcasts to enhance collective representation and identity, preserve oral traditions and language, as well as fostering participation through transmedia practices
- 3) Participatory practices maintain podcast communities through socio-communicative interactions.
- 4) The Cuban podcasting scene remains unstructured, characterised by the absence of a podcast industry and advertising flows. This, in turn, shapes the podcasters attitudes towards monetisation and commercial outcomes, as well as expected rewards and gratifications.

Following this, the chapter discusses the findings of this study by framing podcast communities as a multidirectional network of interactions. This expands on prior discussions about *community*, *transmedia* and *participation*. The discussion incorporates theoretical as well as practical examples of the multiple interactions that foster and enhance a sense of community in podcasting in Cuba. The study also proposes an empirical theoretical framework for the analysis of multidirectional networks of interactions in podcasting communities.

Finally, the chapter highlights the contributions of the study to podcasting and community studies and concludes with a discussion of limitations of the research, as well as future research directions.

9.1 Collective Meaning-Making: Transmedia Narratives and Co-creation in Cuban Podcast Communities

Podcast communities are interaction-based constructs sustained by narratives, participation and collective creation. By researching the communicative practices that foster and enhance the sense of community in podcasting in Cuba, this study enables a more complex understanding of the medium as a transmedia cultural experience.

Building on Piller, Vossen and Ihl (2012) and Florini (2015), this research argues that these connections built on mutual recognition (identity-centred, value-centred, content-centred), often extend beyond the aural scope of the podcast into new transmedia collaborative scenarios (online and real-life interactions) and foster the development of support networks and stronger community ties.

The research begins by exploring the evolution of the Cuban podcasting landscape over a six-year period, during which the country's sociopolitical conditions influenced the emergence, consolidation, and subsequent dispersion of the podcasting movement.

Evolution of Podcast Communities from 2018-2024

RQ1: How have Cuban podcast communities evolved over the period 2018-2024?

Cuban podcast communities arose and evolved intrinsically linked to the country's socio-political and economic context. The island's technological development, as well as the technical and economic challenges faced by both Cuban podcasters and listeners, configured the emergence and evolution of these narratives on the island.

Although Cuban podcasters make use of conventional podcast hosting platforms, they have significantly adapted the podcasting experience to the specificities of the Cuban context. In particular, they prioritise listener access by leveraging platforms such as Telegram, which frequently serves as the central hub for both content distribution and audience interaction, as discussed in Section (4.4.2.3). These alternative spaces and platforms facilitate and strengthen the interaction and growth of these communities. Therefore, the use of unconventional spaces to host, distribute and engage with the community challenges the understanding of podcasting as a hosting-based medium, and highlights its communicative nature and value beyond industry models.

The Cuban context also shapes the relationships among podcasters, as mentoring, accompaniment, skill transfer, and mutual contribution processes take place, as outlined in section (4.6). These dynamics facilitate learning, promote non-profit peer mentoring, and highlight the voluntary and non-commercial nature of the podcasting movement in Cuba.

Moreover, such interactions help to overcome technical limitations and shortcomings, while reinforcing the collective identity of the Cuban podcasting community of media practitioners and creators, which was particularly strengthened during the existence of the Cuban podcasting directory, Cubapod, as discussed in section (4.5).

In the years 2018-2024, Cuban podcasts emerged from journalism, activism, social and community projects, and casual conversations between friends and family.

Furthermore, the narratives that sustain these communities are shaped by the sociopolitical context and the communicative environment in which they emerge. In a media ecosystem largely controlled and restricted by the interests of the State and its representative institutions, these sound narratives create opportunities to bridge a longstanding communicative gap that has left certain sectors of society unheard and underserved. In doing so, they contribute to the reconfiguration of the Cuban communicative system by fostering processes of democratisation of information and communication within the country.

This reconfiguration of the communicative horizon unfolds through practices that promote exchange between podcasters and listeners, facilitated by storytelling, transmedia approaches, and participatory methods. Building on this evolution, RQ2 examines how these communities engage through specific narrative and transmedia practices.

Mapping Community Engagement in Cuban Podcast Communities

RQ2: What forms of community engagement emerge within Cuban podcast communities?

Cuban podcasting communities engage through narratives and transmedia practices, fostering interaction, collaboration, and a shared sense of identity among podcasters and listeners.

Cuban podcasts articulate narratives that resonate deeply with listeners, fostering togetherness and identification through identity affirmation, social validation, niche interests, activism, and the preservation of oral traditions, as described in the section (5.1). These narratives reaffirm shared identity and values, thus fostering strong community ties and a high degree of personal involvement in the medium. Some narratives build the spotlight for marginalised communities or vulnerable groups by deconstructing stereotypes and challenging normative discourses. The study also exemplifies how podcasting communities in Cuba allow civic engagement initiatives (Scolari in Jenkins blog, 2025) to reclaim a communicative space in the media ecosystem in an unregulated and unconstrained way.

For example, *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* (We Wear It Curly Radio) advances an alternative discourse on Afro-Cuban identity, as discussed in Section 5.1.4. Although it initially appears to celebrate Afro hair and beauty, it addresses ‘a national problem’, as podcaster Dachelys Valdés describes it. These narratives constitute a ‘healing process’ for the *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* community, a collective exercise in identity empowerment, reconciliation with the past, and the restoration of self-esteem. This shared understanding and collective acceptance offer listeners both emotional and practical support. As Dachelys expressed, they sought to remove ‘all that suffering; we wanted to help remove it, to alleviate it.’ This podcast contributes to erasing the externally, historically, imposed narrative of ‘a whole country saying that you are not pretty, that you are not beautiful’ (Interview with Dachelys Valdés, 2024). Like other Cuban podcasts, *Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio* reclaims the Afro-Cuban narrative within the media landscape, not solely from the standpoint of historical justice, but also with a self-ascribed responsibility to pave the way for future generations. The podcast threads the Afro Cuban identity through the stories featured in its episodes, audio chats with podcast guests on the Telegram channel, the sharing of good practices on the channel, and enhanced personal bonds nurtured during meet-ups in Havana. These narratives, therefore, generate social value and contribute to the reconstruction of a shared Afro-Cuban identity within the national collective imagination through mutual recognition, storytelling and collective knowledge.

Podcasts communities, if fostered by storytelling, are maintained through transmedia interaction spaces (Celaya, Naval and Arbués, 2020), as the section (5.2) describes. Voice chats in Telegram, community polls, social media interactions converge with meetup, events and festivals, which add uniquely to the podcast experience, by facilitating participatory accessible entry-points (Jenkins, 2006) to the Cuban listeners.

These transmedia spaces hint at an existing network of interactions threaded and sustained by participatory practices. Therefore, the following research question unfolds what underlying interactions take place in podcast communities in Cuba, and how they enhance communal bonds.

Power Sharing: Building Community Through Co-creation Practices

RQ3: What participatory practices foster and enhance communal bonds in podcasting in Cuba?

This research builds upon the work of García-Marín and Aparici (2020) and Wendland (2025) in deciphering participatory practices in podcasting. From the perspective of media podcasting practitioners, collaborative storytelling plays an important role in achieving more horizontal modes of podcast production. The study highlights practices such as integrated feedback and crowdsourcing (Section 6.2) as mechanisms that enable listener

contributions, while simultaneously nurturing the notion of the podcast as a reciprocal space, or a 'place to listen'. These practices foster deeper affective resonances of reciprocity and mutual recognition between podcasting media practitioners and their listeners.

Other interactions between listeners and podcasters encourage more participatory models based on co-creation practices and shared authorship behaviours. Co-creation practices include voluntarily and intentionally actions performed by the listener, as well as collective creation experiences, described in section (6.3.1). These practices encourage dynamic and interactive exchanges that reinforce notions of identification in the listeners and validates their contributions as a meaningful part of the podcast creative process. This, in turn, fosters trust and confidence in the podcaster, enabling the initiation of private communication exchanges. The direct interaction between listener and podcaster creates a safe space for advice, recommendations, and guidance, grounded in the listener's trust in the podcaster and the podcaster's reciprocal responsibility towards them.

Listeners' attitudes demonstrate a strong sense of loyalty and closeness to the podcaster, often expressed through emphatic requests to Cuban practitioners for the timely release of episodes and related multimedia resources. These expectations reflect the formation of close bonds between listeners and podcasters, blurring the traditional boundaries between creator and audience and fostering the emergence of new, more personal connections. This reaches a significant level where listeners take on stewardship roles as a result of their personal investment, as described in section (6.3.5). Loyal listeners provide crucial support for the podcaster and enable a renegotiation of roles within the podcast communicative space, as they actively partake as contributors, producers, gatekeepers, and integral members of the podcasting experience.

If podcaster and listener interactions, and vice versa, nurture and enhance communal bonds, interactions between listeners themselves offer a novel layer of understanding of the podcast community dynamics. Listeners cultivate one-to-one interactions in communicative spaces created around the podcast experience, making use of transmedia spaces, as described in section (6.4). These interactions expand and sustain the podcast community through personal connections, knowledge and resources exchange, as well as external alliances and collaborations.

All interactions within podcasting communities, particularly those occurring in online environments, recall Simmel's (1950) insights into the fragility of social forms and Delanty's (2009) notion of the transience that characterises virtual communities. In the Cuban context, this fragility is further compounded by irregular patterns of engagement and the broader socioeconomic limitations that shape digital participation. Podcasting communities in Cuba are often closely bound to the lifecycle of the podcasts themselves,

rendering them particularly vulnerable to dissolution in the absence of sustainable models. This dynamic not only underscores the apparent fragility of these communities but also invites deeper reflection on the durability of the internal interactions they sustain. For example, although *Voces de Marzo Literario* (Voices of Literary March) ceased podcast production in 2021, its associated Telegram channel and chat group remained active until 2023, with frequent posts related to Cuban literature and occasional contributions from related channels, extending into 2024. These residual practices of sharing and engagement challenge Delanty's (2009) assertion of the transience nature of virtual associations by demonstrating how collective intelligence and shared cultural affinities can prolong community engagement and preserve symbolic meaning in the affective memory of its members. While Bauman (2013) contends that a community 'exists only as long as it is being experienced', (2013, p. 65) its symbolic and affective imprint can indeed transcend time.

This study also advances the notion of podcast guests as integral members of the community, particularly evident among participants who uphold the values and principles the podcast seeks to embody.

After mapping this interwoven network of interactions, podcast communities emerge as complex communicative experiences, nurtured and sustained through ongoing communicative practices. This, in turn, reveals characteristics of the podcast scene within a given context, posing questions about the motivations, rewards and gratifications experienced by both podcasters and listeners. Consequently, it allows for the identification of elements that characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba, including the podcasting culture of creators and audiences. The fourth and last question addresses distinctive elements of the Cuban podcasting scenario by inquiring:

RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba?

A Characterisation of the Cuban Podcasting Scene

The podcasting scene in Cuba develops in the absence of a formal podcast industry and without the influence of commercial advertising. As a result, the motivations and attitudes of podcasters towards the creation and sustainability of these sound narratives are crucial to map, as they contribute valuable insights to a holistic understanding of the podcasting landscape.

The Cuban podcasters in this study highlight personal, professional, and socio-cultural motivations. While some motivations align with those identified in academic literature, such as the convenience of the medium, its close relationship with radio (Markman and Sawyer, 2014), and its role in entertainment and recreation, new motivations also emerge.

Notably, these include the preservation of collective memory and the recording of historical events for future analysis.

A cross-cutting element of the Cuban podcasting scene concerns the sustainability of these narratives. Podcast media practitioners are unable to monetise through platforms such as Spotify or Spreaker due to the US blockade. This results in three primary limitations: an added barrier to the user experience; the impossibility of organic monetisation via podcast hosting platforms; and restricted access to funding for Cuban podcasters based on the island.

Another unique element in the Cuban context is the inability to manage membership payments automatically through bank accounts. In addition to this, Cuba's long-standing culture of no commercial publicity or sponsorship on radio and national television has significantly shaped Cuban attitudes towards advertising. It was only in 2023, with the approval of the Social Communication Law, that the State began to recognise advertising and sponsorship as part of the country's social communication system for the first time since 1959. Other funding options mentioned by Cuban podcasters include applying for international grants, receiving solidarity payments, engaging in international cooperation, forming alliances with media companies, and creating and selling digital products.

In light of these circumstances, podcasters' attitudes towards the idea of monetisation add nuances to the podcasting scene. For many Cuban creators, the absence of a monetisation strategy fosters greater flexibility in the creative process, freeing them from the necessity to adhere to production quality standards or the demands of a more discerning audience, as described in section (7.3). This, in turn, directly influences the rewards and gratifications derived from podcast production, which are non-commercial and socially oriented. Participants cited emotional and sentimental gratifications, primarily associated with the opportunity to undertake a meaningful task, find purpose, and impact others through podcasting and its narratives. Another gratification mentioned by several podcasters is the chance to meet new people, connect with other podcasters and listeners, and become part of podcasting networks. Podcasting in Cuba also fulfils intrinsic needs for individual and professional recognition, with Cuban podcasters feeling validated by this medium.

In summary, these elements characterise the Cuban podcasting scene and the broader podcasting culture on the island, both of which are shaped by technological challenges, the digital literacy of creators and listeners, and the absence of a unified platform to consolidate all Cuban podcasts. Podcasting fosters the construction of new narratives and modes of communication, challenging traditional models by prioritising a more accessible form of expression that mirrors everyday conversation. By employing participatory and collective

approaches, these podcast communities, and their voices, contribute meaningfully to the democratisation of communication in Cuba.

9.2 Contribution to the Field

The present study proposes three significant contributions to the existing body of knowledge concerning podcast communities and their intricate network of interactions. These contributions fall under the following categories: contextual, analytical and theoretical.

Contextual:

As far as can be determined, this is the first study of its scale to be conducted on the Cuban podcasting landscape, and the first to focus specifically on podcast communities and their communicative practices.

This research offers a snapshot of Cuba's social and cultural history. Owing to the socioeconomic and political particularities of the period it encompasses (2018-2024), the study centres on three significant moments in Cuban history, one of which, the Covid-19 pandemic, also resonates with the broader history of humanity. Understanding the communicative processes that emerge in times of crisis enable scholars to comprehend how communication functions both as a connective thread and as a support network for emotional resilience. In such moments, togetherness is found in the primal instinct of listening to others and, in doing so, to ourselves, through the intimacy of the spoken word and the (reassuring, comforting, saving) presence of the other.

Furthermore, it contributes to the growing body of academic literature on podcasting in the Global South, with particular relevance to Latin America and the Caribbean region.

Analytical:

The study highlights technological, sociocultural, and political dimensions as key variables in the analysis of podcasting, particularly in underexplored podcasting contexts. These dimensions exert significant influence on both production and consumption practices, which, in turn, define the characteristics of the podcasting landscape and the identity of the podcasting movement.

This research contributes to the field of podcast studies by introducing podcasting communities as a multidirectional network of interactions, primarily comprising podcaster-to-listener (top-down), listener-to-podcaster (bottom-up), and listener-to-listener (horizontal) exchanges. These dynamics offer a more nuanced and layered understanding of cultural convergence within the podcasting experience. The inclusion of the horizontal,

listener-to-listener dimension complements traditional vertical models of communication and underscores the participatory potential of podcasting as a multidirectional network of interactions. This study argues that these interactions do not occur in isolation but unfold in a dynamic sequence, with each form of interaction catalysing the next. It is this chaining of interactions, along with the socio-communicative relationships and practices they generate, that fosters and sustains strong communal ties.

Theoretical:

This study offers a framework for analysing podcast communities as a multidirectional network of interactions. Building on the work of García-Marín and Aparici (2020) and Wendland (2025), the empirical framework facilitates the examination of participation in podcasting through this networked model and can be applied to future research through the proposed categories and units of analysis. This approach reinforces a transmedia understanding of the medium and underscores the significance of underexplored forms of interaction, such as listener-to-listener and podcast-to-guest dynamics.

9.3 Limitations and future research

This research conducted a qualitative exploration of Cuban podcasting communities; however, several limitations should be acknowledged. The sample consisted of twenty-four podcasts, twenty-seven interviews with podcasting media practitioners, and ten Cuban podcast listeners from multiple provinces, supplemented by the analytical listening of over eighty-five podcast episodes. The sample, although not statistically representative of the entire Cuban podcasting ecosystem, allowed for rich, in-depth insights.

A further limitation of this study lies in the limited geographic representation of media practitioners interviewed. While the research includes participants from several provinces, such as Holguín, Matanzas, and La Habana, as well as Cuban podcasters residing abroad, other regions within Cuba remain underexplored. Addressing this regional gap could enrich the analysis of localised podcast production and distribution practices, as well as illuminate potential variations in community engagement influenced by the island's diverse socio-economic and infrastructural conditions. To address this limitation, future research should expand the sample size and geographic scope to include a wider range of local and regional perspectives, particularly from underrepresented provinces and rural areas, thereby facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of the Cuban podcasting landscape.

In contrast to most podcasting studies, this sample includes a greater number of female than male podcast media practitioners. While this cannot be generalised to the broader Cuban podcasting movement, it is a noteworthy finding, particularly considering the

correlation observed between female creators and motivations related to activism, counternarratives, and community building. This suggests the need for further research into how female podcasters in Cuba are reclaiming social and communicative spaces through sound and storytelling.

Another limitation of the study was the low participation of Cuban podcast listeners in the face-to-face focus groups. Attendance was adversely affected by the country's energy crisis, which limited in-person engagement. To address this, virtual focus groups were organised to enhance accessibility, ultimately increasing the number of participants. Nonetheless, the inclusion of more regular podcast listeners in future research could offer deeper insights into both podcaster-listener and listener-listener interactions.

The study is also limited in its temporal scope, particularly regarding the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which marked a peak period for podcasting in Cuba and contributed to the emergence and consolidation of the podcasting movement. Nonetheless, the study reveals that podcast production experienced dispersion and fragmentation beyond this period. The study, therefore, identifies the distinct features that characterise each phase of its development over the period 2018-2024.

A personal dissatisfaction was not being able to secure an interview with *El Enjambre* (The Swarm), one of the most popular Cuban podcasts. Since 8 April 2024, I had been contacting the podcasters, initially via Instagram, and later through the personal email of one of the hosts, Camilo Condis. We exchanged 17 emails and arranged an interview date for June 6, 2024, which had to be postponed due to the podcasters' personal circumstances, and later exile to other countries in November 2024. In January 2025, I attempted to continue the process by sending them the interview questionnaire, which they agreed to answer, but ultimately never returned, even after a final follow-up email in March 2025. While their participation would have been particularly relevant for capturing the experience of a well-known Cuban podcast both inside and outside the country, its absence does not negatively affect the outcome of the research. The sample used in this study adequately serves its purpose and provides sufficient empirical data.

Finally, the study is shaped by its specific analytical lens, namely, a focus on podcast communities. A longitudinal study employing content analysis could examine podcast production on a national scale, with greater emphasis on the narratives constructed by each podcast. Furthermore, alternative theoretical frameworks, such as oral history, could support this thesis's proposition of podcasts as archives and sonic memory of the nation.

9.3.1 Future Research

Further studies could explore in depth patterns of podcast consumption on the island by applying large scale surveys in the Cuban scenario. This data coupled with this research can offer further validation to the findings of this study, while offering a more nuanced understanding of the podcasting landscape from the listeners perspective.

One potential avenue for research is the interaction between podcast hosts and their guests, particularly through the inclusion of guest perspectives. This line of inquiry could enable a comparative analysis between podcasts that feature like-minded guests, those who share the host's values, and those that adopt a more open or confrontational format. Such a study could examine how these different approaches influence listeners' sense of identification and how guests themselves relate to the podcast after their appearance. This could shed light on how guest participation fosters affective ties with the podcast and its community.

Another promising direction for future research involves examining Cuban podcasts produced within the diaspora. Such a study could explore how these sound narratives contribute to the construction of the Cuban 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983). Given the migration wave the country has been experiencing since 2021, this research would not only advance the field of podcast studies but also enrich the literature on diasporic communication, offering valuable insights into migration dynamics and contemporary Cuban history.

9.4 Closing Summary

This research examined podcasting in Cuba from 2018 to 2024, providing an empirical approach to the development and evolution of the medium within the context of the Caribbean nation. It explored how podcasting fosters and enhances the experience of community through communicative practices in the Cuban context.

The study highlighted how Cuban podcasts have established a diverse, unregulated network of voices across various platforms within a highly regulated media landscape.

This research offered a comprehensive characterisation of the Cuban podcasting landscape through an in-depth analysis of podcast episodes, semi-structured interviews with podcasting media practitioners, and focus groups with podcast listeners. It examined the motivations driving podcasters, their attitudes towards monetisation, and the forms of reward and gratification associated with the medium. The study also engaged in a broader analysis of the podcasting culture on the island, highlighting its distinctive features and contextual specificities.

This study developed a framework for identifying community experiences within transmedia and co-creative modes of communication in podcasting, offering a significant contribution to the scholarly literature on media communities and digital participation. Additionally, it broadens the scope of podcast studies by foregrounding perspectives from the Global South, with particular emphasis on Latin America and the Caribbean.

The research also served as a practical guide for media practitioners and researchers, offering pathways to explore and implement a range of interactions that support community-building through collaborative and transmedia approaches. These strategies can foster innovative forms of content creation in podcasting, contributing to its reconfiguration as a more horizontal and collectively shaped experience.

10. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APPENDIX A: OPERATIONALISATION

#	Name	Running since...	Number of episodes	Seasons	Category	Average length of episodes	Frequency of publication	Bio	Distribution platforms	Community platform	Telegram	Facebook
1	Buzón de Voz de Candelina	21 Apr 2020 - 14 Feb 2021	8 (until 3/12/21)		Sociedad y cultura	6 - 20min	(5 episodes in May 2020)	Ve al baño y descárgate. Mándanos lo que te salga. Una queja, una solución, un chiste, un mensaje de apoyo, un escándalo, una canción. En este buzón entran todas las voces.	https://anchor.fm/y20a05600/podcast/rss	Análizar Telegram luego de la publicación del buzón? O los comentarios de Instagram?		
2	Team Serendipia	31 May 2020 - 30 Jun 2020	5 on telegram (until 11/01/22)		Comedia	3 - 4 min	2 on May 31st	Descarga en Cuarentena de un grupo de gente aburrida y creatív!!! por mayoría periodistas y psicólogos, diseñadores, programadores, arquitectos, diseñadores, filósofos, comunicadores y otras dores más... Un podcast para pensar la comunicación desde el emprendimiento. Si estás emprendiendo o piensas emprender, sabes que la comunicación ha cambiado el mundo y es necesario tenerla clara y con palabras más visuales, más crecimiento, mayor reputación. Con El Pitch podrás desarrollar al máximo tus habilidades en diferentes áreas de la comunicación. Todo lo que necesitas para comunicar en grande tu marca. Un podcast de La Penúltima Casa, con Kalia Sánchez y Adriana Siguenza.	https://as.ivoox.com/lesapodcast-team-serendipia-a-fg-f1918623_filtro_1_x.mil	https://t.me/teamSerendipia	https://www.facebook.com/teamserendipia/	
3	El Pitch	16 Jul 2020 - 8/12/21	21 episodes (until 9/12/21)		Negocios	20 - 45 min	Weekly at the beginning, but not a fixed schedule overall	#Podcast cubano sobre lingüística, la ciencia del lenguaje humano. @larnestowg	https://anchor.fm/y2z4d50724/podcast/rss	Telegram, La Penúltima Casa chat	https://t.me/agenciafinanciera102405cbs	https://www.facebook.com/delichlo.gicbs
4	Para Darle a la Lengua	27/04/2020 - 14/09/2020	22 (until 28/10/21)		2 Language	17 - 43 min	Weekly	#Podcast cubano sobre lingüística, la ciencia del lenguaje humano. @larnestowg	Podail / Amazon Music/ Spotify / Anchor / Apple Podcasts / Ivoox / Google Podcasts / Pocket Casts / Overcast / RadioPublic	Telegram channel "Para Darle a la Lengua". 108 subscribers in the group chat there are 65 members, whose level of interaction is higher	http://t.me/darlelengua/	http://facebook.com/darlelengua
5	Lecturas al oído	20/02/2020 - 17 Sept 2020	58 (until 8/12/21)		Arte	3 - 11min	Twice a week	Desde nuestro canal queremos reseñar #LecturaAlOído, un programa semanal que protagoniza el profesor Julio Fernández Estrada. Si eres de los que amas los libros y la literatura, no debes pasar la oportunidad de prestarnos tus oídos y escuchar por unos minutos. Vale la pena.	https://www.ivoox.com/240480lecturas-al-oido-fg-f1860068_filtro_1.xml			
6	Marzo Literario	03/03/2021 - 25/03/2021	13 (until 20/01/22)		Arte y literatura	4 - 10 min	All published on March, 2021	Conoce las interioridades del festival de promoción del libro y la lectura Marzo Literario, uno de sus organizadores y protagonistas. ¡Hola a todos! Bienvenidos a nuestro canal "Costos radiales", un espacio colaborativo, participativo e innovador para crear y compartir magia sonora. Este experimento en construcción juega con sonidos, voces, historias, silencios... Su metodología singular une historias independientes en nuevos elementos ácidos que amanar, por sobre todo, almanar el alma.	https://www.ivoox.com/240480lecturas-al-oido-fg-f1860068_filtro_1.xml	Chat de Marzo Literario 257 members (https://t.me/chatmarzoliterario). Chat del festival de promoción del libro y la lectura online. @marzoliterario 📖 Revisa nuestro repositorio de libros 📚 en @posicionarmarzoliterrario 📖	https://www.facebook.com/marzoliterrario	
7	Costos radiales	11 Jul 2020 - 23 Jan 2021	30 (until 8/12/21)		Sociedad y cultura	2 - 7min	The podcast started on a daily basis, then it stopped without fixed frequency,		https://www.greatpod.com/podcast/503935episode/feed	https://t.me/costosradiales/ https://t.me/+VEIXw5RvXMTyIv2	-	
	En Estéreo (Podcast)	1 Oct 2020 - 27 Dec 2021	18 (until 10/01/22)	2	Sociedad y cultura	17- 41 min	Weekly (1st season) + 2 solo episodes + (Weekly) 2nd season	Traemos nuevos episodios cada lunes donde abordamos diversos temas conectados a nuestras raíces africanas como el arte, la cultura, la historia y el emprendimiento.	https://podcasts.apple.com/feeds/a-HrOC-HWELqHbmT0esShUzmDuoG8ZNYL3mVnQeKjYkCgA/MQSA-DanckEWKY1_Alt/gst/HUAHAQAHOJAAAGQAg		https://t.me/metranspodcast	https://www.facebook.com/estereopodcastclub/

Appendix A.2 Cuban Podcasts Represented in the Sample

Podcast	Name	Produced by	Description	Link
<i>El Descanso</i>	The Rest	Periodismo de Barrio (Independent media)	Los cuidados en Cuba constituyen una labor significativamente subvalorada bajo sesgos machistas, adultocentristas y capacitistas, que colocan a las personas que cuidan (en su gran mayoría mujeres) en una situación de desventaja social y desgaste físico que atenta contra su salud y la calidad misma de los cuidados que proveen. Este fenómeno se agrava aún más a partir de la crisis sistémica que está atravesando la sociedad cubana, donde impactan con mayor fuerza la escasez crónica de alimentos y recursos, así como el éxodo, que deja tras de sí a una gran cantidad de personas de la tercera edad con necesidad de ser atendidas. Con el objetivo de dar voz a las personas que ejercen en la Isla la función de cuidadoras, de analizar los procesos y desigualdades que les atraviesan, de compartir experiencias, aligerar cargas y, sobre todo, disminuir la sensación de soledad que les acompaña casi siempre, en lo que esperamos sea un espacio seguro, les presentamos El Descanso, un pódcast para personas que no descansan, producido por Periodismo de Barrio.	https://open.spotify.com/show/3bhWw0Llgis9M4XdR3chSN
<i>Palabras con Sentido</i>	Words with Purpose	Periódico Girón (State-owned media)	Un podcast del Periódico Girón que comparte las historias de vida de prestigiosos y populares matanceros.	https://go.ivoox.com/sq/1226828
<i>Team Serendipia</i>	Serendipity Team	Independent creators	Descarga en Cuarentena de un grupo de gente aburrida y creativa!!!! por mayoría periodistas y psicólogos, por minoría programadores, arquitectos, diseñadores, filólogos, comunicadores y otras dores más...	https://www.ivoox.com/en/podcast-team-serendipia_sq_f1918623_1.html
<i>En Plural</i>	In Plural	Proyecto Cuba Emprende (PCE), a project of the Catholic Church of Cuba	En Plural dialoga en cada edición con el emprendedor invitado, su equipo, clientes y comunidad para conocer de cerca anécdotas y experiencias, que marcan la construcción de un negocio exitoso y socialmente responsable.	https://proyectocubaemprende.org/blog/174
<i>Píldoras Buen Idioma</i>	Good Language Pills	Independent creator	En este pódcast ofrecemos recomendaciones lingüísticas y resolvemos dudas sobre el uso correcto del español actual.	https://go.ivoox.com/sq/1309959
<i>Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio</i>	We Wear It Curly Radio	Proyecto Sociocultural Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio	¿Qué es Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio? Es un programa de entrevistas pensadas esencialmente para inspirar a la comunidad negra y afrodescendiente cubana. Usaremos como pretexto central el cabello natural rizado y afro para abordar diferentes temáticas sociales. Se entrevistarán personas reconocidas o no dentro de la cultura y la sociedad cubana que tengan mensajes interesantes que aportar a nuestra comunidad. Los oyentes podrán escuchar historias, anécdotas, testimonios que le permitan naturalizar determinadas temáticas, identificar referentes cercanos, cambiar imaginarios y derrumbar estereotipos.	https://open.spotify.com/show/7wOR2AEhtUTwDilToQcYr?si=b78f50969b324b23

<i>Buzón de Voz de Clandestina</i>	Clandestina's Clandestina's Voicemail	Fashion brand Clandestina	Ve al baño y descárgate. Mándanos lo que te salga. Una queja, una solución, un chiste, un mensaje de apoyo, un escándalo, una canción. En este buzón entran todas las voces.	https://open.spotify.com/show/4fQBoogBXJSCwNhs8lquJa?si=7b49053cb7644dc1
<i>Voces Ecuménicas Cubanas</i>	Cuban Ecumenical Voices	Centro Memorial Martin Luther King Jr (Centro macroecuménico de inspiración cristiana)	Voces que desean mostrar a nuestro pueblo un cristianismo ecuménico e inclusivo, cuyo mensaje es el del Amor y la humildad de Jesús, así como su pasión por la justicia, por la dignidad del ser humano y por el bien de nuestra Cuba.	https://open.spotify.com/show/6mg2TXISxtUSstFqy4POFy?si=oda81cd189c84cb8
<i>El Pitch</i>	The pitch	Independent creator	Estás escuchando el podcast que necesitas para conocer todo sobre negocios en Cuba. ¿Quiénes son, qué hacen, cómo se comunican? Y también de qué maneras puedes colaborar y ser parte del ecosistema emprendedor cubano. Descubre aquí su diversidad, buenas y no tan buenas prácticas, sus límites, retos y oportunidades. Tercera temporada del podcast que comunica el emprendimiento cubano, y que te ayudará si quieres conocer el sector, emprender o triunfar en él. Esto se llama El Pitch. Un podcast de La Penúltima Casa, con Katia Sánchez.	https://open.spotify.com/show/1LYq4EWgmAj85ao3wQBujY?si=ed2b7f65fc9c4711
<i>Emprende Verde</i>	Go Green Entrepreneurship	Proyectos socioculturales Ecorizos, Tercer Paraíso Cuba y La Mina	Emprende Verde un podcast desde Cuba sobre emprendimiento y buenas prácticas. Creado por Ecorizos, Tercer Paraíso Cuba y La Mina	https://t.me/emprندهverdepodcast
<i>La Mente Creativa</i>	The Creative Mind	Independent creator	Te enseño lo que voy aprendiendo al crear empresas y proyectos. Los fracasos y los éxitos, la historia REAL detrás de mis startups. Hablemos de creatividad, emprendimiento, tecnología, y damos a conocer historias de vida de otros creadores.	https://www.podcasthaser.com/podcasts/la-mente-creativa-1182467
<i>La Potajera</i>	The Stewpot	Initially funded by the independent magazine Tremenda Nota.	El primer podcast LGBTIQ+ producido en Cuba. Conducido por Jessica Sabina, Nelson Álvarez y Mel Herrera.	https://open.spotify.com/show/1d6hpIAYdy2o71u7u4gdbC?si=df2d38d56aeb4dfc
<i>La Escuelita</i>	The little school	Independent creators	La Escuelita es un podcast para deconstruirse y aprender. Hablamos de temas como la orientación sexual, la identidad de género, la educación sexual, la salud sexual, los derechos sexuales y reproductivos, y la diversidad de género, entre otros muchos temas, brindándote nociones claves para comprenderlos. Acompáñanos desde Preescolar hasta ver si alcanzamos juntas grado de Máster.	https://open.spotify.com/show/1McqD8yW3Oend1aotDr3CQ?si=13f66ebc21e84359
<i>Empoderadas</i>	Empowered women	Independent creator	Este es un podcast que cuenta historias de mujeres. Aquí conversamos de éxitos profesionales y personales, crecimiento personal, autoconocimiento, emprendimiento, emigración, maternidad y cualquier otro tema que a mi entrevistada le interese. Creemos que todas las mujeres somos empoderadas, y nuestro objetivo es que las personas que nos escuchan empiecen a pensarse como tal, y asuman y se hagan responsables de el poder que tienen para	https://open.spotify.com/show/3MfKKNW08uYALp77Dm3e0N?si=243f07fc085448e

			alcanzar sus metas. Conviértete en un seguidor de este podcast: https://www.spreaker.com/podcast/empoderadas--4520328/support?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=rss	
<i>Cositos Radiales</i>	Radio Thingies	Independent creators	📻🌻...Cositos radiales...🌻📻 Un espacio colaborativo, participativo e innovador para compartir magia sonora.	https://open.spotify.com/show/2mOXEWzZtr25toPlTOezwC?si=62a27aa700104a2c
<i>Oye Te Cuento</i>	Hey, let me tell you	El Toque (Independent media) and Periodismo de Barrio (Independent media)	Ya está aquí #OyeTeCuento... Historias de cuarentena, un #podcast en el que nuestra audiencia le pone voz a estos días de aislamiento. En el futuro, ¿cómo recordaremos la pandemia? Aunque son tiempos duros y convulsos, queremos que sobrevivan estas historias personales que nos contarán cómo un virus global nos marcó la vida y modificó buena parte de nuestras rutinas personales y sociales. Gracias a todos los que colaboraron y nos enviaron sus testimonios, aquí está #OyeTeCuento, la memoria de la #pandemia en sonido 🇪🇸. 👉 Servicio de información con el medio digital El Toque. --- Send in a voice message: https://anchor.fm/periodismodebarrio/message	https://open.spotify.com/episode/7lXBjoh5eRRwCDmCraeu2?si=ds7ogloLQt6S4pd4UYo-Ig
<i>En Estéreo Podcast</i>	In Stereo Podcast	Independent creator	Traemos nuevos episodios cada lunes donde abordamos diversos temas conectados a nuestras raíces africanas como el arte, la cultura, la historia y el emprendimiento. Director: Raúl Soublett López	https://open.spotify.com/show/6h2nhRRgfirbT5arYXxQsX?si=b3bc8e8c6a7f4062
<i>Lecturas al oído</i>	Readings to the Ear	El Toque (Independent media)	Desde nuestro canal queremos regalarte #LecturasALOído, un programa semanal que protagoniza el profesor Julio Fernández Estrada. Si eres de los que amas los libros y la literatura, no dejes pasar la oportunidad de prestarnos tus oídos y escuchar por unos minutos. Vale la pena.	https://go.ivoox.com/sq/860058
<i>Voces de Marzo Literario</i>	Voices of Literary March	Independent creators	Festival de promoción del libro y la lectura online, del 19 al 25 de marzo. #marzoliterario #yoleoenmarzo ✉ marzoliterario@gmail.com 📖 Repositorio de libros @repositoriomarzoliterario 🌐 Somos @marzoliterario en Facebook, Telegram, Ivoox y Youtube	https://t.me/marzoliterario
<i>ZonaoClichés</i>	Cliché-Free Zone	Independent creator	Una psicóloga que tiene mucho que decir sobre el mundo en el que vive. Compartir mi visión y esperar que genere un cambio de actitud, o al menos haga un click, es la tarea que me he propuesto. Titánica o no, cada cual tiene que hacer algo con su vida y yo he decidido ser útil a los demás. Mucha diversión, enfoque, cariño y realidad pura. ¿Estás buscando eso? Pues quédate en mi ZonaoClichés, que es tu zona, la zona de todos.	https://open.spotify.com/show/6QTqAMPmOkUJAXljYQEIvk?si=af5d74ee60d94foe

<i>Flash Musical</i>	Music Flash	Independent creators	Flash Musical: para conocer la carrera de artistas y productores dedicados a la música. Este podcast es un regalo para todos los públicos #Musica #Artistas #Canciones #Listas #Playlist Grupo de charlas: @charlasfmcuba	https://t.me/flashmusicalcuba
<i>Cinematofilia</i>	Cinefilia	Periódico Girón (State-owned media)	Dos jóvenes, desde una ciudad sin cines, te invitan a explorar el séptimo arte y a recuperar la magia de la gran pantalla, a través de este podcast.	https://go.ivoox.com/sq/1881215
<i>Tecno Code Live (Club calvOS 360)</i>	Club calvOS 360	Independent creator	Buscamos y te contamos LOS MEJORES Trucos, Tutoriales, Aplicaciones y Accesorios para iPhone, iPad, Apple Watch, AirPods y MacBook. Cada video está fundamentado en nuestra EXPERIENCIA PERSONAL.	https://open.spotify.com/show/6qrxHLESPOzxIYe5NEqrEj?si=5df7edbe7ae046f2
<i>Los podcasts de Cubadebate</i>	Cubadebate's podcasts	State-owned media	Debates, noticias, e historias para escuchar sobre Cuba. Dale play.	https://www.speaker.com/user/podcasts-cubadebate-8902490

Appendix A.3 List of Podcast Episodes Analysed

Podcast	Episode	Date of episode
<i>Empoderadas</i>	Episodio # 1 _ El Mundo detrás de las Julianas: Conversando con Yael y Ronit Bircz.	28/07/2020
<i>Empoderadas</i>	Episode # 2. Moda ética y sustentable: conversando con Tamara Tenreiro y Maricet Cadalso, fundadoras de Ilé Slow Fashion	04/08/2020
<i>Empoderadas</i>	Episodio # 4_Qué esperar en los primeros meses de la maternidad: conversación con Estela Martínez	18/08/2020
<i>Empoderadas</i>	Episode #5 Cómo emprender siendo latina, emigrante y mujer en EE.UU? Conversación con Leydis Cordero	25/08/2020
<i>Coronavirus en Cuba (Servicio de Información)</i>	#OyeTeCuento: Historias de Cuarentena	09/07/2020
<i>Lecturas al oído</i>	Lectura #1: El hombre devorado por las hormigas	20/02/2020
<i>Lecturas al oído</i>	#LecturasAlOído: Defensa de la alegría (Yunier Riquenes)	02/03/2020
<i>Lecturas al oído</i>	#LecturasAlOído: Fragmentos de El libro de los abrazos (Camilo Noa) description	06/03/2020
<i>Lecturas al oído</i>	#LecturasAlOído: Poemas de Mirta Aguirre description	10/03/2020
<i>Lecturas al oído</i>	Lectura #11: Poemas de Rafael Alberti	16/03/2020
<i>Píldoras Buen Idioma</i>	¿Qué es Buen Idioma?	15/09/2020
<i>Píldoras Buen Idioma</i>	¿Es «el «alma mater»» o «la «alma mater»»?	22/09/2020
<i>Píldoras Buen Idioma</i>	«Fula», ¿de dónde proviene esta palabra?	27/10/2020
<i>Píldoras Buen Idioma</i>	Palabra del año 2020 para Buen Idioma	30/12/2020
<i>Píldoras Buen Idioma</i>	Resolviendo dudas lingüísticas	13/01/2021
<i>Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio</i>	Episodio 1 - Entrevista a Yissy García, directora de la agrupación musical Bandancha	17/10/2020
<i>Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio</i>	Episodio 2 - Entrevista a Adriana Heredia Sánchez, fundadora de Beyond Roots	24/10/2020
<i>Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio</i>	Episodio 2 - Entrevista a Adriana Heredia Sánchez, fundadora de Beyond Roots	24/10/2020
<i>Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio</i>	Episodio 3 -Entrevista a Daymé Arocena	31/10/2020
<i>Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio</i>	Episodio 5 - Entrevista a CimaFunk	14/11/2020
<i>En Estéreo (Podcast)</i>	Episodio_1_Negra	01/10/2020
<i>En Estéreo (Podcast)</i>	Episodio_4_Historias	23/10/2020
<i>En Estéreo (Podcast)</i>	Episodio 6_Hablando de Cine_II	06/11/2020
<i>En Estéreo (Podcast)</i>	Episodio 12_Final de Temporada	18/12/2020
<i>En Estéreo (Podcast)</i>	Ep.1 Café entre música y literatura	06/12/2021
<i>Palabras con Sentido</i>	José Hernández Hernández	06/04/2021
<i>Palabras con Sentido</i>	María del Carmen Domínguez	02/12/2021
<i>VOCES DE MARZO LITERARIO</i>	1x01	03/03/2021
<i>VOCES DE MARZO LITERARIO</i>	Voces de marzo literario 1x02	11/03/2021
<i>VOCES DE MARZO LITERARIO</i>	Voces de marzo literario 1x05	18/03/2021

VOCES DE MARZO LITERARIO	VOCES DE MARZO LITERARIO 1x08	21/02/2021
VOCES DE MARZO LITERARIO	VOCES DE MARZO LITERARIO 1x13	25/03/2021
Emprende Verde Podcast	Podcast Emprende Verde - Episodio 1 - Greta Tilán - Tilán	02/01/2023
Emprende Verde Podcast	Episodio 2 - Oliesky Fabre - En Paralelo	22/02/2023
Emprende Verde Podcast	Podcast Emprende Verde - Episodio 3 - Marnia Briones - Marnia Transformación y Reciclaje	21/03/2023
Emprende Verde Podcast	Podcast Emprende Verde - Episodio 8 - Laura Salas Redondo - Tercer Paraíso Cuba + La Mina	29/08/2023
Emprende Verde Podcast	Podcast Emprende Verde - Episodio 9 - Resumen temporadas I & II	21/09/2023
El Pitch	Episodio 01 - "Bajanda" o Cómo ser la marca líder de un sector	23/07/2020
El Pitch	Episodio 03 - "Mandao" o Cómo liderar equipos en tiempos de crisis	13/08/2020
El Pitch	Episodio 09 - Gestión de marca: raíces cubanas en el mundo digital Beyond Roots	22/10/2024
El Pitch	Episodio 12 - ¿Cómo emprender en la Cuba de 2021? Proyecto Cubaemprende	24/12/2020
Cubadebate	Las 3 del día (20 de julio)	20/07/2020
Cubadebate	¿Leemos en Cuba?	16/02/2024
Cubadebate	¿Qué pasará con el sexto juego de la final de la LEBC?	16/01/2024
Cubadebate	Episodio 1: La presentación no oficial	23/01/2021
Flash Musical	Flash Musical 1 BAD BUNNY	24/04/2020
Flash Musical	#FlashMusical 3 con #KelvisOchoa	07/05/2020
El Descanso	Episodio Piloto	06/04/2023
El Descanso	Autocuidarse sin culpa	18/04/2023
El Descanso	Gestionar los duelos	27/06/2023
El Pitch	A la gente no le gustan las MIPYMES	17/10/2023
Buzón de Voz de Clandestina	Buzón de Voz de Clandestina vol. 01	21/04/2020
Buzón de Voz de Clandestina	La Habana no aguanta más con esta cuarentena...	01/05/2020
Buzón de Voz de Clandestina	Buzón de Voz de Clandestina vol. 04	17/05/2020
Buzón de Voz de Clandestina	Buzón de Voz de Clandestina vol. 05	23/05/2020
Voces Ecuménicas Cubanas	Tiempo de cuaresma: Esperanzas y desafíos	17/02/2021
Voces Ecuménicas Cubanas	Podcast: Hasta que el amor sea Ley/Familias desde el texto bíblico	22/05/2021
Voces Ecuménicas Cubanas	Episodio 2: "Dios es una gran familia"	30/05/2021
Voces Ecuménicas Cubanas	Vivir en comunidad	06/06/2021
Voces Ecuménicas Cubanas	Es posible construir el Reino de Dios	13/06/2021
Team Serendipia	Consejos de Mother Massi	31/05/2020
Team Serendipia	Los miedos con alas	31/05/2021
Team Serendipia	Las Casualidades	06/06/2020
Team Serendipia	Diablos que sienten	22/06/2020

<i>Team Serendipia</i>	Reflexiones Intimas	11/06/2020
<i>En Plural</i>	En Plural - D'Brujas Jabones Artesanales	26/03/2021
<i>En Plural</i>	Edición V, en podcast, con Gim Charlotte	26/03/2021
<i>En Plural</i>	Edición VI, en podcast, con PROCLE	23/06/2021
<i>En Plural</i>	Edición VII, en podcast, con Muebles Atlantis	27/07/2021
<i>En Plural</i>	Edición X, en podcast, con Tu Taller	19/01/2022
<i>ZonaoClichés con Ally</i>	Las parafilias (Trastornos sexuales)	26/01/2021
<i>ZonaoClichés con Ally</i>	Reaccionando a sus reacciones sobre el último episodio acerca de la pornografía	23/03/2022
<i>ZonaoClichés con Ally</i>	Analizando tus respuestas de Instagram	25/08/2024
<i>La Escuelita</i>	Tú también vas a llegar a vieja: conversaciones de vejez queer	20/06/2023
<i>La Escuelita</i>	Aves Migratorias: Emigrar PORQUE eres LGBT	20/06/2023
<i>La Potajera</i>	Emprendimientos LGBTIQ+ en Cuba	18/01/2022
<i>La Potajera</i>	El Fotuto: ¿El feminismo cubano va camino a lo TERF?	11/03/2022
<i>Cositos Radiales</i>	La casa	25/07/2020
<i>Cositos Radiales</i>	Cosito radial num 30 - El sentimiento supremo	23/01/2021
<i>La Mente Creativa</i>	Lo que nadie te cuenta cuando vas a emprender	26/03/2020
<i>La Mente Creativa</i>	Desde el boom de los blogs, los pódcasts y Youtube: Ernesto Acosta, creativo y amigo.	19/02/2021
<i>Club calvOS 360</i>	¡Esto se salió de control, casi que VIRAL!	02/05/2022
<i>Club calvOS 360</i>	¡A que esto NO LO SABIAS... escúchalo!	20/04/2022
<i>Cinematofilia</i>	Oscar 2023: todo a la vez	24/03/2023
<i>Cinematofilia</i>	La nueva sirenita de Disney	29/05/2023

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Appendix B.1 Semi-Structure Interview Guide

Q	Interview schedule question	RQ	Data to collect
1	Could you define the word podcast?	Theoretical	Explore participants understand and frame the concept of a podcast, in their own terms and within their cultural or technological context.
2	Why start podcasting?	RQ1: How have Cuban podcast communities evolved over the period 2018-2024? RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba?	Data from individuals and most likely what their impression of the podcasting scene at the time.
3	What advantages and disadvantages does podcasting offer you? In comparison with other media and broadcasting, especially in Cuba?	RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba? a) What is the role of podcasting within the Cuban media ecosystem?	Participants' reflections on podcasting as a medium. How podcasting stands apart from or complements other media.
4	What distinguishes your podcast within the universe of Cuban podcasts?	RQ1: How have Cuban podcast communities evolved over the period 2018-2024?	Information on what makes their podcast stand out in terms of format, tone, sound design, language, or storytelling approach.
5	How is the creative process behind your podcast? (Production and communication practices)	RQ1: How have Cuban podcast communities evolved over the period 2018-2024? RQ2: What forms of community engagement emerge within Cuban podcast communities? RQ3: What participatory practices foster and enhance communal bonds in podcasting in Cuba?	Insight data into how the podcast is made: idea development, scriptwriting or improvisation, recording, editing, publishing, promotion, and audience interaction.
6	What role does social media play in the dynamics of production and dissemination of your podcast?	RQ2: What forms of community engagement emerge within Cuban podcast communities? RQ3: What participatory practices foster and enhance communal bonds in podcasting in Cuba? RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba? (Telegram)	Role of social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Telegram, X) in sharing episodes, behind-the-scenes content, or engaging with audiences.
7	Do you consider your podcast to be a purely audio experience? Why?	Conceptual	Whether podcasters see their work strictly as audio or if they integrate other media elements (video, images, text, social media interactions). Does the podcast extend beyond audio into broader communicative or participatory practices?
8	How has the narrative structure changed since the podcast began?	RQ1: How have Cuban podcast communities evolved over the period 2018-2024? RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba?	Insights into how the podcast's storytelling style, format, or episode structure has evolved over time. Changes in length, pacing, segment types, use of interviews, music, or sound design.
9	How do you think the narrative structures of your podcast have	RQ2: What forms of community engagement	How podcasters intentionally craft narratives to encourage listener loyalty,

	influenced the growth and loyalty of your audience?	emerge within Cuban podcast communities? RQ3: What participatory practices foster and enhance communal bonds in podcasting in Cuba?	for example, using personal stories, calls to action, or interactive elements.
10	How would you describe your listeners?	RQ2: What forms of community engagement emerge within Cuban podcast communities? RQ3: What participatory practices foster and enhance communal bonds in podcasting in Cuba? RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba?	Interests, values, or attitudes listeners are perceived to have. Podcasters-listeners relationships. The role listeners play in shaping the podcast.
11	How do you connect with them?	RQ2: What forms of community engagement emerge within Cuban podcast communities? RQ3: What participatory practices foster and enhance communal bonds in podcasting in Cuba? RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba?	Map strategies podcasters' use to foster loyalty, listener participation, or feedback loops.
12	What are the main avenues of feedback?	RQ2: What forms of community engagement emerge within Cuban podcast communities? RQ3: What participatory practices foster and enhance communal bonds in podcasting in Cuba? RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba?	Specific tools or platforms listeners use to give feedback. Types of feedback received. Evidence of listener input shaping the evolution of the podcast.
13	How do you visualise the people who engage with your podcast? (audience/listener/community) Is there a distinction between audience and community? (*only if they have mentioned the word community)	RQ2: What forms of community engagement emerge within Cuban podcast communities? RQ3: What participatory practices foster and enhance communal bonds in podcasting in Cuba? +Theoretical	Listeners' attitudes towards podcasters. Modes of interaction. Looking at participation, contribution and co-creation. Also, the motivations behind these interactions.
14	What is your definition of community? (*only if they have mentioned the word community)	RQ3: What participatory practices foster and enhance communal bonds in podcasting in Cuba? +Theoretical	How podcasters see the podcast as contributing to, building, or reflecting community. Whether community is linked to participatory media practices and co-creation.
15	What approaches have you used to build, expand, and sustain your listeners?	RQ2: What forms of community engagement emerge within Cuban podcast communities? RQ3: What participatory practices foster and enhance communal bonds in podcasting in Cuba? RQ4: What elements	Specific strategies to attract new listeners, including online and offline strategies.

		characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba?	
16	How would you describe the role of your listeners in relation to your podcast?	RQ2: What forms of community engagement emerge within Cuban podcast communities? RQ3: What participatory practices foster and enhance communal bonds in podcasting in Cuba?	How do podcasters perceive listeners: passive consumers, active participants, co-creators, collaborators, or community members?
17	When planning new episodes, where do you get ideas from? Have you included your listeners in the production of the podcast?	RQ2: What forms of community engagement emerge within Cuban podcast communities? RQ3: What participatory practices foster and enhance communal bonds in podcasting in Cuba?	Processes used to develop ideas for new episodes. Whether listeners contribute content directly or indirectly.
18	What social function do you attribute to your podcast?	RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba? RQ1: How have Cuban podcast communities evolved over the period 2018-2024?	Reflections on the role of podcasting in the Cuban context.
19	What kind of remuneration do you get from your podcast?	RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba?	Podcasts sustainability in the Cuban context.
20	What impact does the possibility or impossibility of monetising your podcast have on your production and your content?	RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba?	How remuneration (or lack of it) influences content choices, production quality, or podcast longevity. Data on other forms of remuneration (non-monetary).
21	Which international and Cuban podcasts do you admire?	RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba?	Names and styles of podcasts that inspire Cuban podcasters, revealing trends, formats, or storytelling techniques they admire. Differences or similarities between Cuban and international podcasts valued.
22	Do you interact with other Cuban podcasters? How?	RQ1: How have Cuban podcast communities evolved over the period 2018-2024? RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba?	Mapping the Cuban podcastsphere, types of collaboration and community building practices.
23	Is there any alliance, group, community of Cuban podcasters?	RQ1: How have Cuban podcast communities evolved over the period 2018-2024? RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba?	Exploration of formal or informal groups, alliances, or communities of Cuban podcasters. Cubapod?
24	What are the main strengths and limitations of podcasting in Cuba?	RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba?	Contextualising the findings. Listener experience in context.
25	*If your podcast was registered in Cubapod, why join the Cuban podcast directory?	RQ1: How have Cuban podcast communities evolved over the period 2018-2024? RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba?	Role of Cubapod during 2020-2021. (This may have already been covered in earlier answers)
26	What did it represent for your podcast to have a space in Cubapod?	RQ1: How have Cuban podcast communities evolved over the period 2018-2024? RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba?	Cubapod's role in the emerging Cuban podcasting movement of 2020

		RQ3: What participatory practices foster and enhance communal bonds in podcasting in Cuba?	
27	How does your podcast reflect the contemporary reality of the country?	RRQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba?	How the podcast addresses current social, political, economic, and cultural issues in Cuba.
28	What future do you see for podcasting in Cuba?	RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba? +Theoretical	Optimism or concerns about the growth, reach, and influence of podcasting in Cuba.
29	What future do you see for podcasting as a global media?	Theoretical	Podcasters' views on the medium's growth worldwide and how it impacts the Cuban context.
	<p>*If the podcast is produced outside Cuba:</p> <p>Who is your target audience and do you consider your podcast to be part of the Cuban podcast universe, even if it is produced outside Cuba?</p>	<p>RQ1: How have Cuban podcast communities evolved over the period 2018-2024?</p> <p>RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba?</p>	Whether the podcast targets Cubans inside the island, the diaspora, or broader international audiences interested in Cuba. Notions of identity, belonging and the imagined community (Anderson, 1983)

Appendix B.2 Focus Group Questionnaire - Mapped to RQ

Focus group schedule questions	RQ	Comment
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> What is a podcast for you? When did you start listening to podcasts? Why did you start listening to podcasts? 	RQ1: How have Cuban podcast communities evolved over the period 2018-2024?	Opening (warm-up) question
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> What podcast genres do you prefer to listen to? What kind of narratives do you prefer and why? What kind of narrative structure does your favourite podcast have? How would you describe yourself: casual listener, follower, fan, part of the podcast or a community of listeners? 	<p>RQ1: How have Cuban podcast communities evolved over the period 2018-2024?</p> <p>RQ2: How do Cuban podcasters engage listeners?</p> <p>RQ3: How does community manifest itself in podcasting in Cuba? How does it resonate with the people? In what way? What values?</p>	Listening Habits: Cuban podcasting audience
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Which Cuban podcasts do you listen to? When and where do you listen to podcasts? What do you do while listening to an episode? 	RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba?	General info about podcast consumption habits, that will probably offer insights into the Cuban podcasting audience
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> What platforms do you listen to your podcasts on, and why those platforms? 	<p>RQ1: How did podcast communities emerge around the Cuban podcast soundscape during the period 2018-2024?</p> <p>RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba?</p>	Consumption platforms (this might include technological drawbacks)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Do you interact with the podcast or podcaster in any way (social media comments, voice notes, emails, etc.)? Is it important for you to offer feedback after listening to an episode, and how do you provide that feedback? Have you participated in the making of an episode, and how important was it for you to be part of that experience? If so, what motivated you to participate? 	<p>RQ2: How do Cuban podcasters engage listeners?</p> <p>RQ3: How does community manifest itself in podcasting in Cuba? How does it resonate with the people? In what way? What values?</p>	Experiences of interaction, participation, and co-creation
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Have you interacted in person with the podcasters you follow? In what spaces? If so, what is the distinction between listening to an episode and participating in a live event? 	RQ3: How does community manifest itself in podcasting in Cuba? How does it resonate with the people? In what way? What values?	Relationship with podcasts and podcasters
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Do you know other podcast listeners and interact with them? <input type="checkbox"/> Do you belong to any listening groups? 	<p>RQ1: How did podcast communities emerge around the Cuban podcast soundscape during the period 2018-2024?</p> <p>RQ2: How do Cuban podcasters engage listeners?</p>	Networks of podcast listeners in Cuba

18. What motivates you to listen to podcasts? 19. What satisfactions do you get from listening to a podcast?	RQ2: How do Cuban podcasters engage listeners? RQ3: How does community manifest itself in podcasting in Cuba? How does it resonate with the people? In what way? What values?	Uses and gratifications
20. What role does podcasting play in your daily media consumption? 21. Why listen to podcasts instead of other media? 22. How do podcasts distinguish themselves within the Cuban media context?	RQ2: How did podcast communities emerge around the Cuban podcast soundscape during the period 2018-2024? RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba?	Podcasting vs other media (media landscape on the island)
23. Do you think there is a podcasting movement in Cuba? Why? 24. How do Cuban podcasts reflect the contemporary reality of the island? 25. What future do you see for podcasting in Cuba?	RQ4: What elements characterise the podcasting scene in Cuba?	Perception of the podcast movement in Cuba.

Appendix B.3 DCU Research Ethics Committee (REC) Approval

Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University



Dr Declan Tuite
School of Communications

19th April 2023

REC Reference: DCUREC/2023/058

Proposal Title: Podcasting in Cuba: Podcasting communities, storytelling and co-creation practices

Applicant(s): Dr Declan Tuite, Ms Leysi Rubio Arevich

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for your application to DCU Research Ethics Committee (REC). Further to notification review, DCU REC is pleased to issue approval for this research proposal.

DCU REC's consideration of all ethics applications is dependent upon the information supplied by the researcher. This information is expected to be truthful and accurate. Researchers are responsible for ensuring that their research is carried out in accordance with the information provided in their ethics application.

Materials used to recruit participants should note that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee. Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further amendment submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Dr. Melrona Kirrane'.

Dr. Melrona Kirrane
Chairperson
DCU Research Ethics Committee



Taighde & Nuálaíocht Tacaíocht
Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath,
Baile Átha Cliath, Éire

Research & Innovation Support
Dublin City University,
Dublin 9, Ireland

T +353 1 700 8000
F +353 1 700 8002
E research@dcu.ie
www.dcu.ie

Note: Please retain this approval letter for future publication purposes (for research students, this includes incorporating the letter within their thesis appendices).

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Appendix C.1 Interview Request Email Draft

Estimado [Nombre y Apellidos]:

Mi nombre es Leysi Rubio Arevich, soy investigadora cubana, doctorante en Comunicación en la Dublin City University (DCU), Irlanda. Mi proyecto estudia el fenómeno podcasting en Cuba, sus comunidades de oyentes, así como el rol de las narrativas sonoras y las prácticas co-creativas en la creación y mantenimiento de esas comunidades.

Como parte de mi investigación, propongo realizar entrevistas semi-estructuradas a podcasters cubanos que hayan producido un show en el periodo (2018-2024). La entrevista tendría una duración aproximada de 60 minutos, conducida de manera virtual o en persona.

Las preguntas versarán sobre su experiencia como podcaster en Cuba, la creación de [Nombre del Podcast], así como la relación entre el podcast, su audiencia, y su comunidad de oyentes. Los principales temas de la entrevista son:

Movimiento de Podcasting en Cuba: Consideraciones generales sobre el podcast en Cuba, evolución y proyecciones.

Motivaciones detrás del podcast.

Audiencias, fans y comunidades.

Canales de comunicación, retroalimentación y participación.

Procesos creativos, narrativas y prácticas de co-creación.

Fortalezas y limitaciones del podcasting en Cuba.

Podcasting y Cuba: ¿Escenarios sonoros de un país?

Me encantaría poder contar con su participación en mi proyecto.

Le agradezco de antemano y espero su pronta respuesta.

Saludos,

Leysi Rubio
PhD Researcher
Dublin City University
leysi.rubioarevich2@mail.dcu.ie

Annex. Interview request email (general format/structure)

Subject: Invitation to participate in a PhD project interview as a subject matter expert

Hello _____

My name is Leysi Rubio, I am a Cuban researcher, PhD student in Communication at Dublin City University. My project studies the Podcasting movement in Cuba, communities, storytelling and co-creative practices in the island's context.

As part of my research, I propose to conduct semi-structured interviews with Cuban podcasters who have produced a podcast in the period (2018-2024). You will be interviewed for approximately 60 minutes. The questions will relate to your own experience as a podcaster in Cuba, your content strategies, the relationship between the podcast and its community of listeners. The main interview topics will be:

Podcasting Movement in Cuba: general considerations about podcasting in Cuba, evolution and projections.

Motivations behind podcasting.

Audiences, fans and communities.

Communication channels, feedback and participation.

Creative processes, narratives and co-creation practices.

Strengths and limitations of podcasting in Cuba.

Podcasting and Cuba: Soundscapes of a country?

I would be delighted to include you in my PhD research.

Thank you very much for your kind consideration.

I look forward to your response.

Best regards,

*Leysi Rubio
PhD Researcher
Dublin City University
leysi.rubioarevich2@mail.dcu.ie*

Appendix C.2 Online Focus Groups Recruitment Poster



Posters shared in social media to recruit participants for the online focus group.

Appendix C.3 Sign-up Form for Focus Groups in Havana



¿Escuchas podcasts cubanos a menudo? ¡Únete a nuestro grupo de discusión!

Proyecto de investigación de doctorado

Podcasts en Cuba: comunidades, narrativas y prácticas de co-creación.

¿Escuchas podcasts cubanos a menudo? Ayúdanos a comprender que te motiva a escuchar, cuáles son tus podcasts preferidos y cómo ves el movimiento podcasting en Cuba.

Únete a un grupo de discusión por una hora en compañía de otros aficionados del podcast cubano (merienda incluida).

¡Agradecemos de antemano tu participación y esperamos verte pronto!

*Si tienes cualquier pregunta o inquietud, por favor contacta a la investigadora Leysi Rubio a través del correo leysi.rubioarevich2@mail.dcu.ie.

Dublin City University
2023

* Required

1. Nombre *

2. Provincia *

3. Grupo de discusión en el que desea participar: *

- ☐ 14/03/2024, 2:00PM - Centro Memorial Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (Calle 53, entre 96 y 98, Marianao)
- ☐ 15/03/2024, 4:00PM - Café Literario "Cuba Libro" (Calle 24, esquina 19, Vedado)

4. Contacto *

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Microsoft. The data you submit will be sent to the form owner.

Microsoft Forms

APPENDIX D: FIELD WORK

Appendix D.1 Informed Consent Form - Semi-Structured Interviews [EN/ES]

I am invited to participate in an interview as part of a PhD research project conducted by Leysi Rubio Arevich at the School of Communications in Dublin City University, under the supervision of Professor Declan Tuite, PhD, School of Communication, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, DCU, Glasnevin 9, Dublin.

DCU is the data controller of this research project.

Participation: My participation will consist essentially of one interview for approximately 60 minutes during which I will be asked questions by the researcher about how podcasting in Cuba creates, articulates and maintains communities through storytelling and co-creation. The interview will be audio-recorded for accuracy and attentive consideration.

Identification: I have received assurance from the researcher that my choice of how I want to be identified in the thesis will be honoured. I grant the researcher my permission to identify me in the thesis and further publications, conference presentations, book chapters, etc.

- a) By my job title only: _____.
- b) By my general area of professional or scholarly knowledge: _____.
- c) I want to remain unidentified (anonymous) in the thesis.
- d) Other (please specify): _____.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail providing personal information about my job or about my personal experiences and views on podcasting in Cuba. The thesis will employ a validation protocol that will give the interview participants the opportunity to review their contributions and quotes, and to correct them if necessary, before they can be included in the final thesis copy.

The interview transcripts will be sent by email in Word Document to interview participants for review and verification.

Confidentiality: I understand that the interview scripts will be used only for the creation of the PhD thesis at Dublin City University and that my confidentiality will be protected by the fact that only the researcher will have access to information linking my identity to the data.

Conservation of Data: I understand that my data will be stored and managed according to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The data will be conserved for a minimum period of five years following the completion of data collection.

Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

<i>I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)</i>	Yes/No
<i>I understand the information provided</i>	Yes/No
<i>I understand the information provided in relation to data protection</i>	Yes/No
<i>I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study</i>	Yes/No
<i>I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions</i>	Yes/No
<i>I am aware that my interview will be audio recorded</i>	Yes/No

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be deleted or destroyed.

I consent to the use of my data for future studies (papers, conference presentations, book chapters)
Yes/NO

Signature:

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

Participants Signature:

Name in Block Capitals:

Date:

Formulario de consentimiento (Entrevistas semiestructuradas)

Se me invita a participar en una entrevista como parte de un proyecto de investigación de doctorado dirigido por Leysi Rubio Arevich en la Escuela de Comunicación de la Universidad de la Ciudad de Dublín, bajo la supervisión del profesor Declan Tuite, PhD, Escuela de Comunicación, Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales, DCU, Glasnevin 9, Dublín.

DCU es el controlador de datos de este proyecto de investigación.

Participación: Mi participación consistirá esencialmente en una entrevista de aproximadamente 60 minutos durante la cual el investigador me hará preguntas sobre cómo el podcasting en Cuba crea, articula y mantiene comunidades a través de la narración y la co-creación. La entrevista será grabada en audio para su exactitud y atenta consideración.

Identificación: He recibido garantías del investigador de que se respetará mi elección de cómo quiero que se me identifique en la tesis. Autorizo al investigador a identificarme en la tesis y en futuras publicaciones, presentaciones en congresos, capítulos de libros, etc.

- Sólo con mi nombre profesional: _____.
- Por mi área general de conocimiento profesional o académico: _____.
- Deseo permanecer anónimo en la tesis.
- Otros (especifique): _____.

Riesgos: Mi participación en este estudio implicará proporcionar información personal sobre mi trabajo o sobre mis experiencias personales y puntos de vista sobre el podcasting en Cuba. La tesis empleará un protocolo de validación que dará a los participantes en la entrevista la oportunidad de revisar sus contribuciones y citas, y corregirlas si es necesario, antes de que puedan ser incluidas en la copia final de la tesis.

Las transcripciones de las entrevistas se enviarán por correo electrónico en documento Word a los participantes en las entrevistas para su revisión y verificación.

Confidencialidad: Entiendo que las transcripciones de las entrevistas sólo se utilizarán para la elaboración de la tesis doctoral en la Dublin City University y que mi confidencialidad estará protegida por el hecho de que sólo el investigador tendrá acceso a la información que relacione mi identidad con los datos.

Conservación de los datos: Entiendo que mis datos serán conservados y gestionados de acuerdo con el Reglamento General de Protección de Datos (RGPD). Los datos se conservarán durante un periodo mínimo de cinco años tras la finalización de la recogida de datos.

Participante, por favor complete lo siguiente:

- He leído la Declaración en lenguaje sencillo (o me la han leído)
- Comprendo la información facilitada
- Comprendo la información facilitada en relación con la protección de datos
- He tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas y debatir sobre este estudio
- He recibido respuestas satisfactorias a todas mis preguntas
- Soy consciente de que mi entrevista será grabada

Participación voluntaria: No tengo ninguna obligación de participar y, si decido participar, puedo retirarme del estudio en cualquier momento y/o negarme a responder a cualquier pregunta, sin sufrir ninguna consecuencia negativa. Si decido retirarme, todos los datos recogidos hasta el momento de la retirada serán borrados o destruidos.

Autorizo el uso de mis datos para futuros estudios (artículos, presentaciones en congresos, capítulos de libros)

- Sí
- No

He leído y comprendido la información contenida en este formulario. El investigador ha respondido a mis preguntas e inquietudes y tengo una copia de este formulario de consentimiento. Por lo tanto, doy mi consentimiento para participar en este proyecto de investigación.

Firma del participante: _____

Nombre y apellidos: _____

Fecha: _____

Appendix D.2 Plain Language Statement - Semi-Structured Interviews

Project title: “Podcasting in Cuba: Podcasting communities, storytelling and co-creation practices”

Researcher: Leysi Rubio, School of Communications, Dublin City University, Glasnevin, Dublin 9. Email: leysi.rubioarevich2@mail.dcu.ie. Project supervisor: Dr. Declan Tuite, School of Communications, DCU, Glasnevin, Dublin 9, email: declan.tuite@dcu.ie.

DCU is the Data Controller of the research project. A Data Processor may hold or process personal data but does not exercise responsibility for or control over the personal data, for example, a transcription service, or a software or cloud hosting company.

DCU Data Protection Officer – Mr. Martin Ward (data.protection@dcu.ie Ph.: 7005118 / 7008257)

This research explores the podcasting phenomena in Cuba, while taking a novel approach to the relationship between podcasts and their communities of listeners. The study also proposes to examine the influence of storytelling and co-creation practices within podcasting in the reconfiguration of the concept community.

This study is funded by the School of Communications in Dublin City University, as part of the doctoral studies of the researcher.

Involvement in the study: You will be interviewed for approximately 60 minutes. The questions will relate to your own experience as a podcaster in Cuba, your content strategies, the relationship between the podcast and its community of listeners.

During the interview, you might disclose sensitive special category data:

- ☐ I consent to the collection of my ethnicity/cultural background.
- ☐ I consent to the collection of my political opinions.
- ☐ I consent to the collection of my philosophical beliefs.
- ☐ I consent to the collection of my sexual orientation.

Data management:

Audio recordings will be processed as follows: the researcher will upload the recordings on the date of data collection into the DCU researcher Drive folder. The researcher will delete the files from the recorder after checking that the upload was successful. Transcriptions will be made by the researcher, once the data collection phase is finished.

Data’s retention period:

The recording will be stored on a secure Dublin City University Google Drive until 12 months after the project’s completion and final output is published (provisionally end-2025). The data will not be shared and only the interviewer will have access to the data. The investigators will then dispose of the files and transcripts in line with the DCU Data Retention and Deletion Policy. Handwritten notes if taken during the interview will be immediately transcribed in an electronic format and then the notes will be destroyed on the spot. The researcher will supervise the destruction of the data.

Involvement in the Research Study is Voluntary: You have the right to access your own personal data. Participation is voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason without consequence. You can initiate this process by contacting the primary investigator, Leysi Rubio (leysi.rubioarevich2@mail.dcu.ie) or alternatively contacting the Data Protection Unit.

Disguised extracts from your contributions during the focus group may be quoted in future conference presentations, published papers, book chapters, etc.

You have the right to lodge a complaint with the Irish Data Protection Commission.

Benefits to Participants Involved in the Research Study: As podcasting continues to unravel its potentiality as a medium, there is a creative opportunity for communities to articulate their members through storytelling and co-creative practices. This project shed light on the correlation between podcasting and community building through storytelling, working with content creators and communities of listeners in Cuba. The project will inform policymakers, stakeholders and civic society organisations about how the Cuba podcasting sphere reconfigures itself in the midst of a challenging economic and social context. Participants can benefit from the satisfaction they may have in making a significant contribution to this underserved research area.

Risks: The researcher will comply with your choice of identification. If you wish to remain unidentified (anonymous), you will not be directly named in any outputs, but your age/gender/nationality/ethnicity may be referred to. During the interview, you are under no obligation to answer each question, so it is not a problem to

move on if you are uncomfortable. Furthermore, you are free to leave and/or withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence.

Confidentiality: The interview will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes only, and then transcribed (ie, the recording will not be used for any other purpose). Confidentiality of information can only be protected within the limitations of the law- i.e., it is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions.

The study will be conducted in compliance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and if you have any concerns regarding how your data concerning this study has been handled, you can contact; DCU Data Protection Officer, Mr. Martin Ward – (data.protection@dcu.ie Tel: 01-7005118/01- 7008257) who will handle any concerns arising from this research. An individual also has the right to report a complaint concerning the use of personal data to the Irish Data Protection Commission.
DCU is the Data Controller for this project.

Communication of outputs: To obtain a full copy of your data or of the final dissertation, please contact Leysi Rubio at leysi.rubioarevich2@mail.dcu.ie after completion of the research project in September 2025.

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail rec@dcu.ie.

Declaración de entendimiento (Entrevistas semiestructuradas) [ES]

Título del proyecto: "Podcasting en Cuba: Comunidades, narrativas y prácticas de co-creación"

Investigadora: Leysi Rubio, Facultad de Comunicación, Dublin City University, Glasnevin, Dublín 9. Correo electrónico: leysi.rubioarevich2@mail.dcu.ie. Supervisor del proyecto: Dr. Declan Tuite, School of Communications, DCU, Glasnevin, Dublín 9, correo electrónico: declan.tuite@dcu.ie.

DCU es el Controlador de Datos del proyecto de investigación. Un procesador de datos puede poseer o procesar datos personales, pero no ejerce la responsabilidad o el control sobre los datos personales, por ejemplo, un servicio de transcripción, o una empresa de software o alojamiento en la nube.

Responsable de Protección de Datos de la DCU - Sr. Martin Ward (data.protection@dcu.ie Ph.: 7005118 / 7008257)

Esta investigación explora el fenómeno del podcasting en Cuba, a la vez que adopta un enfoque novedoso sobre la relación entre los podcasts y sus comunidades de oyentes. El estudio también propone examinar la influencia de las prácticas de narración y co-creación dentro del podcasting en la reconfiguración del concepto comunidad.

Financiación: Este estudio está financiado por la Escuela de Comunicaciones de la Dublin City University, como parte de los estudios de doctorado de la investigadora.

Participación en el estudio: Se le entrevistará durante aproximadamente 60 minutos. Las preguntas estarán relacionadas con su propia experiencia como podcaster en Cuba, sus estrategias de contenido, la relación entre el podcast y su comunidad de oyentes.

Durante el grupo de discusión, es posible que revele datos sensibles de categoría especial:

- Doy mi consentimiento para que se recopile mi origen étnico/cultural.
- Consiento que se recojan mis opiniones políticas.
- Consiento que se recojan mis creencias filosóficas.
- Consiento que se recoja mi orientación sexual.

Gestión de datos:

Las grabaciones de audio se procesarán del siguiente modo: el investigador cargará las grabaciones en la fecha de recogida de datos en la carpeta de DCU researcher Drive. El investigador borrará los archivos de la grabadora tras comprobar que la carga se ha realizado correctamente. El investigador realizará las transcripciones una vez finalizada la fase de recogida de datos.

Periodo de conservación de los datos:

La grabación se almacenará en una unidad segura de Google Drive de la Dublin City University hasta 12 meses después de la finalización del proyecto y la publicación del resultado final (provisionalmente a finales de 2025). Los datos no se compartirán y sólo el entrevistador tendrá acceso a ellos. A continuación, la investigadora eliminará los archivos y las transcripciones de acuerdo con la política de conservación y eliminación de datos de la DCU. Las notas manuscritas que se tomen durante la entrevista se transcribirán inmediatamente en formato electrónico y se destruirán en el acto. El investigador supervisará la destrucción de los datos.

La participación en el estudio de investigación es voluntaria: Tiene derecho a acceder a sus propios datos personales. La participación es voluntaria y puede retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento y por cualquier motivo sin consecuencias. Puede iniciar este proceso poniéndose en contacto con la investigadora principal, Leysi Rubio (leysi.rubioarevich2@mail.dcu.ie) o, alternativamente, con la Unidad de Protección de Datos.

Se podrán citar extractos disimulados de sus contribuciones durante el grupo de discusión en futuras presentaciones de conferencias, artículos publicados, capítulos de libros, etc.

Tiene derecho a presentar una reclamación ante la Comisión Irlandesa de Protección de Datos.

Beneficios para los participantes en el estudio de investigación: A medida que el podcasting sigue desplegando su potencial como medio, se abre una oportunidad creativa para que las comunidades articulen a sus miembros a través de la narración de historias y las prácticas co-creativas. Este proyecto arroja luz sobre la correlación entre el podcasting y la construcción de comunidades a través de la narración de historias, trabajando con creadores de contenidos y comunidades de oyentes en Cuba. El proyecto informará a los responsables políticos, las partes interesadas y las organizaciones de la sociedad civil sobre cómo se reconfigura la esfera del podcasting en Cuba en medio de un contexto económico y social difícil. Los participantes podrán beneficiarse de la satisfacción que les producirá realizar una contribución significativa a este ámbito de investigación tan poco atendido.

Riesgos: El investigador respetará su elección de identificación. Si desea permanecer sin identificar (anónimo), no se le nombrará directamente en ninguna salida, pero se podrá hacer referencia a su edad/género/nacionalidad/etnia. Durante la entrevista, no tiene obligación de

responder a cada pregunta, por lo que no hay problema en que siga adelante si se siente incómodo. Además, usted es libre de abandonar y/o retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento sin consecuencias.

Confidencialidad: La entrevista se grabará en audio únicamente con fines de transcripción y, a continuación, se transcribirá (es decir, la grabación no se utilizará para ningún otro fin). La confidencialidad de la información sólo puede protegerse dentro de los límites de la ley, es decir, es posible que los datos sean objeto de una citación, una reclamación de libertad de información o una notificación obligatoria por parte de algunas profesiones.

El estudio se llevará a cabo de conformidad con el Reglamento General de Protección de Datos (RGPD), y si tiene alguna duda sobre cómo se han tratado sus datos relativos a este estudio, puede ponerse en contacto con el responsable de protección de datos de la DCU, el Sr. Martin Ward - (data.protection@dcu.ie Tel: 01-7005118/01- 7008257) que se ocupará de cualquier duda que surja de esta investigación. Asimismo, toda persona tiene derecho a presentar una reclamación relativa al uso de datos personales ante la Comisión Irlandesa de Protección de Datos.

La DCU es la responsable de la gestión de datos de este proyecto.

Comunicación de resultados: Para obtener una copia completa de sus datos o de la tesis final, póngase en contacto con Leysi Rubio en leysi.rubioarevich2@mail.dcu.ie una vez finalizado el proyecto de investigación en septiembre de 2025.

Si los participantes tienen dudas sobre este estudio y desean ponerse en contacto con una persona independiente, pueden dirigirse a:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublín 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail rec@dcu.ie

He leído y acepto la declaración de entendimiento:

- Sí
- No

Nombre y apellidos: _____

Correo electrónico / Vía preferente de contacto: _____

Firma: _____

Appendix D.3 Informed Consent Form - Focus group [EN/ES]

Research title: “Podcasting in Cuba: Podcasting communities, storytelling and co-creation practices” conducted by Leysi Rubio Arevich at the School of Communications in Dublin City University, under the supervision of Professor Declan Tuite, PhD, School of Communication, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, DCU, Glasnevin 9, Dublin.

DCU is the data controller of this research project.

Purpose of the study: This purpose of the research project is to examine the podcasting phenomena in Cuba, while taking a novel approach to the relationship between podcasts and their communities of listeners. The study also proposes to explore the influence of storytelling and co-creation practices within podcasting in the reconfiguration of the concept community.

Confirmation of requirements as highlighted in the Plain Language Statement:

Participation in the focus group is entirely voluntary. You may decline to attend at any point or decline to answer any of the questions being asked. All information captured within the transcripts will be destroyed upon completion of the doctoral studies in the end-2025.

- I _____ voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me) and I understand the information provided.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data after the focus group has been conducted, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves taking part in a focus group about podcasting communities in Cuba, uses and gratifications, and the podcasting soundscape prospects for the future.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my contributions being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in dissertations, conference presentations, published papers, book chapters, etc.
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that research files such as consent forms will be stored in a lockable cabinet, managed and accessed exclusively by the data controller. Interview notes will be taken in a notebook dedicated to this stage of data collection, and will be stored in a lockable cabinet, managed and accessed exclusively by the data controller. For electronic records (audio recordings) all files will be stored in a Google Drive folder linked to the DCU account of the researcher (supported by Google Suite for Education). The access to this folder is password protected, after a two-step verification process.
- I understand that a transcript of the focus group in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for 12 months after the project’s completion and final output is published (provisionally end-2026).
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.
- I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this project.

Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

<i>I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>
<i>I understand the information provided</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>
<i>I understand the information provided in relation to data protection</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>
<i>I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>
<i>I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>
<i>I am aware that my interview will be audiotaped</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>

Your age will be used to contextualise your contributions in any outputs. You can just tick one of the following boxes, if preferred:

- 18-19
- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- 70-79
- Over 80
- Prefer not to say

Which gender do you identify with?

- _____

Preferred _____ pseudonym _____ for _____ research _____ report/outputs?
The researcher is not able to use your real name in any of the research outputs, and if any of your quotes are used will give you a pseudonym. The chosen pseudonym will facilitate further identification of your own contributions in the published work.

Signature:

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project

Participants Signature:

Name in Block Capitals:

Date:

Formulario de consentimiento (Grupo de discusión) [ES]

Título del proyecto: "Podcasting en Cuba: Comunidades, narrativas y prácticas de co-creación", realizado por Leysi Rubio Arevich en la Escuela de Comunicación de la Dublin City University, bajo la supervisión del profesor Declan Tuite, PhD, Escuela de Comunicación, Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales, DCU, Glasnevin 9, Dublín.

DCU es el controlador de datos de este proyecto de investigación.

Propósito del estudio: El propósito de este proyecto de investigación es examinar el fenómeno del podcasting en Cuba, al tiempo que se adopta un enfoque novedoso de la relación entre los podcasts y sus comunidades de oyentes. El estudio también propone explorar la influencia de las prácticas narrativas y de co-creación dentro del podcasting en la reconfiguración del concepto comunidad.

Confirmación de los requisitos particulares destacados en la Declaración de Lenguaje Sencillo:

La participación en el grupo de discusión es totalmente voluntaria. Puede negarse a asistir en cualquier momento o a responder a cualquiera de las preguntas que se le formulen. Toda la información recogida en las transcripciones se destruirá una vez finalizados los estudios de doctorado al final de 2025.

- Yo _____ acepto voluntariamente participar en este estudio de investigación.
- He leído la Declaración de Lenguaje Sencillo (o me la han leído) y comprendo la información proporcionada.
- Entiendo que, aunque acepte participar ahora, puedo retirarme en cualquier momento o negarme a responder a cualquier pregunta sin consecuencias de ningún tipo.
- Entiendo que puedo retirar el permiso para utilizar los datos una vez realizado el grupo de discusión, en cuyo caso se borrará el material.
- Me han explicado por escrito la finalidad y la naturaleza del estudio y he tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas sobre el mismo.
- Entiendo que la participación implica tomar parte en un grupo focal sobre las comunidades de podcasting en Cuba, usos y gratificaciones, y las perspectivas del paisaje sonoro del podcasting para el futuro.
- Entiendo que no me beneficiaré directamente de participar en esta investigación.
- Acepto que mis contribuciones sean grabadas en audio.
- Entiendo que toda la información que facilite para este estudio será tratada de forma confidencial.
- Entiendo que en cualquier informe sobre los resultados de esta investigación mi identidad permanecerá anónima. Esto se hará cambiando mi nombre y ocultando cualquier detalle de mi entrevista que pueda revelar mi identidad o la identidad de las personas de las que hablo.
- Entiendo que los extractos encubiertos de mi entrevista podrán citarse en disertaciones, presentaciones en congresos, artículos publicados, capítulos de libros, etc.
- Entiendo que si informo al investigador de que yo mismo u otra persona corre peligro de sufrir daños, es posible que tenga que informar de ello a las autoridades pertinentes; lo hablaré conmigo primero, pero puede que tenga que informar con o sin mi permiso.
- Entiendo que los archivos de la investigación, como los formularios de consentimiento, se guardarán en un armario con cerradura, gestionado y accesible exclusivamente por el responsable del tratamiento de datos. Las notas de las entrevistas se tomarán en un cuaderno dedicado a esta fase de la recogida de datos, y se almacenarán en un armario con cerradura, gestionado y accesible exclusivamente por el responsable del tratamiento. Para los registros electrónicos (grabaciones de audio), todos los archivos se almacenarán en una carpeta de Google Drive vinculada a la cuenta DCU del investigador (con el apoyo de Google Suite for Education). El acceso a esta carpeta está protegido por contraseña, tras un proceso de verificación en dos pasos.
- Entiendo que se conservará una transcripción del grupo de discusión en la que se haya eliminado toda la información identificativa durante 12 meses tras la finalización del proyecto y la publicación del resultado final (provisionalmente a finales de 2026).
- Entiendo que, en virtud de la legalización de la libertad de información, tengo derecho a acceder a la información que he facilitado en cualquier momento mientras esté almacenada, tal y como se especifica más arriba.
- Entiendo que soy libre de ponerme en contacto con cualquiera de las personas implicadas en la investigación para solicitar más aclaraciones e información.
- He leído y comprendido la información contenida en este formulario. El investigador ha respondido a mis preguntas e inquietudes y tengo una copia de este formulario de consentimiento. Por lo tanto, doy mi consentimiento para participar en este proyecto.

Participante: rellene lo siguiente:

- He leído la Declaración de Lenguaje Sencillo (o me la han leído)
- Comprendo la información facilitada
- Comprendo la información facilitada en relación con la protección de datos
- He tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas y debatir sobre este estudio
- He recibido respuestas satisfactorias a todas mis preguntas
- Soy consciente de que mi entrevista será grabada

Su edad se utilizará para contextualizar sus contribuciones en los resultados. Si lo prefiere, puede marcar una de las siguientes casillas:

- 18-19
- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- 70-79
- Más de 80 años
- Prefiero no decirlo

¿Cuál es su identidad de género?

¿Pseudónimo preferido para el informe/los resultados de la investigación?

El investigador no puede utilizar su nombre real en ninguno de los resultados de la investigación y, si se utiliza alguna de sus citas, le dará un seudónimo. El seudónimo elegido facilitará la posterior identificación de sus propias contribuciones en el trabajo publicado.

He leído y comprendido la información contenida en este formulario. Mis preguntas e inquietudes han sido respondidas por los investigadores, y tengo una copia de este formulario de consentimiento. Por lo tanto, doy mi consentimiento para participar en este proyecto de investigación.

Firma del participante: _____

Nombre y apellidos (mayúsculas): _____

Fecha: _____

Appendix D.4 Plain Language Statement - Focus Groups [EN/ES]

Project title: “Podcasting in Cuba: Podcasting communities, storytelling and co-creation practices”

Researcher: Leysi Rubio, School of Communications, Dublin City University, Glasnevin, Dublin 9. Email: leysi.rubioarevich2@mail.dcu.ie. Project supervisor: Dr. Declan Tuite, School of Communications, DCU, Glasnevin, Dublin 9, email: declan.tuite@dcu.ie.

DCU is the Data Controller of the research project. A Data Processor may hold or process personal data but does not exercise responsibility for or control over the personal data, for example, a transcription service, or a software or cloud hosting company.

DCU Data Protection Officer – Mr. Martin Ward (data.protection@dcu.ie Ph.: 7005118 / 7008257)

This research explores the podcasting phenomena in Cuba, while taking a novel approach to the relationship between podcasts and their communities of listeners. The study also proposes to examine the influence of storytelling and co-creation practices within podcasting in the reconfiguration of the concept community.

This study is funded by the School of Communications in Dublin City University, as part of the doctoral studies of the researcher.

You will be part of a focus group for approximately 60 minutes. Your contributions will advance understanding of listening motivations and preferences, uses and gratifications, manifestation of community traits, perceptions of the Cuban podcasting movement, as well as practices of participation, engagement and co-creation.

During the focus group, you might disclose sensitive special category data:

- ☐ I consent to the collection of my ethnicity/cultural background.
- ☐ I consent to the collection of my political opinions.
- ☐ I consent to the collection of my philosophical beliefs.
- ☐ I consent to the collection of my sexual orientation.

Data management:

Audio recordings will be processed as follows: the researcher will upload the recordings on the date of data collection into the DCU researcher Drive folder. The researcher will delete the files from the recorder after checking that the upload was successful. Transcriptions will be made by the researcher, once the data collection phase is finished.

Data’s retention period:

The recording will be stored on a secure Dublin City University Google Drive until 12 months after the project’s completion and final output is published (provisionally end-2025). The data will not be shared and only the interviewer will have access to the data. The investigators will then dispose of the files and transcripts in line with the DCU Data Retention and Deletion Policy. Handwritten notes if taken during the interview will be immediately transcribed in an electronic format and then the notes will be destroyed on the spot. The researcher will supervise the destruction of the data.

Involvement in the Research Study is Voluntary: You have the right to access your own personal data. Participation is voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason without consequence. You can initiate this process by contacting the primary investigator, Leysi Rubio (leysi.rubioarevich2@mail.dcu.ie) or alternatively contacting the Data Protection Unit.

Disguised extracts from your contributions during the focus group may be quoted in future conference presentations, published papers, book chapters, etc.

You have the right to lodge a complaint with the Irish Data Protection Commission.

Benefits to Participants Involved in the Research Study: As podcasting continues to unravel its potentiality as a medium, there is a creative opportunity for communities to articulate their members through storytelling and co-creative practices. This project shed light on the correlation between podcasting and community building through storytelling, working with content creators and communities of listeners in Cuba. The project will inform policymakers, stakeholders and civic society organisations about how the Cuba podcasting sphere reconfigures itself in the midst of a challenging economic and social context. Participants can benefit from the satisfaction they may have in making a significant contribution to this underserved research area.

Risks: You will not be directly named in any outputs but your age/gender/nationality/ethnicity may be referred to. During the focus group, you are under no obligation to answer each question, so it is not a problem to move on if you are uncomfortable. Furthermore, you are free to leave and/or withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence.

Confidentiality: The focus group discussion will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes only, and then transcribed (ie, the recording will not be used for any other purpose). **Confidentiality of Data:** Confidentiality of information can only be protected within the limitations of the law- i.e., it is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions.

The study will be conducted in compliance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and if you have any concerns regarding how your data concerning this study has been handled, you can contact; DCU Data Protection Officer, Mr. Martin Ward – (data.protection@dcu.ie Tel: 01-7005118/01- 7008257) who will handle any concerns arising from this research. An individual also has the right to report a complaint concerning the use of personal data to the Irish Data Protection Commission.
DCU is the Data Controller for this project.

Communication of outputs: To obtain a full copy of your data or of the final dissertation, please contact Leysi Rubio at leysi.rubioarevich2@mail.dcu.ie after completion of the research project in September 2025.

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail rec@dcu.ie

Declaración de entendimiento (Grupo de discusión) [ES]

Título del proyecto: "Podcasting en Cuba: Comunidades, narrativas y prácticas de co-creación"

Investigadora: Leysi Rubio, School of Communications, Dublin City University, Glasnevin, Dublín 9. Correo electrónico: leysi.rubioarevich2@mail.dcu.ie. Supervisor del proyecto: Dr. Declan Tuite, School of Communications, DCU, Glasnevin, Dublín 9, correo electrónico: declan.tuite@dcu.ie.

DCU es el Controlador de Datos del proyecto de investigación. Un procesador de datos puede poseer o procesar datos personales, pero no ejerce la responsabilidad o el control sobre los datos personales, por ejemplo, un servicio de transcripción, o una empresa de software o alojamiento en la nube.

Responsable de Protección de Datos de la DCU - Sr. Martin Ward (data.protection@dcu.ie Ph.: 7005118 / 7008257)

Esta investigación explora el fenómeno del podcasting en Cuba, al tiempo que adopta un enfoque novedoso de la relación entre los podcasts y sus comunidades de oyentes. El estudio también propone examinar la influencia de las prácticas de narrativas y co-creación dentro del podcasting en la reconfiguración del concepto comunidad.

Este estudio está financiado por la Escuela de Comunicación de la Universidad de la Ciudad de Dublín (DCU), como parte de los estudios de doctorado del investigador.

Usted formará parte de un grupo de discusión durante aproximadamente 60 minutos. Sus contribuciones permitirán avanzar en la comprensión de las motivaciones y preferencias de escucha, usos y gratificaciones, manifestación de rasgos comunitarios, percepciones del movimiento podcasting cubano, así como prácticas de participación, compromiso y co-creación.

Durante el grupo de discusión, es posible que revele datos sensibles de categoría especial:

- ☐ Doy mi consentimiento para que se recopile mi origen étnico/cultural.
- ☐ Consiento que se recojan mis opiniones políticas.
- ☐ Consiento que se recojan mis creencias filosóficas.
- ☐ Consiento que se recoja mi orientación sexual.

Gestión de datos:

Las grabaciones de audio se procesarán del siguiente modo: el investigador copiará las grabaciones en la fecha de recogida de datos en la carpeta de DCU researcher Drive. El investigador borrará los archivos de la grabadora tras comprobar que la subida se ha realizado correctamente. El investigador realizará las transcripciones una vez finalizada la fase de recogida de datos.

Periodo de conservación de los datos:

La grabación se almacenará en una unidad segura de Google Drive de la Dublin City University hasta 12 meses después de la finalización del proyecto y la publicación del resultado final (provisionalmente a finales de 2025). Los datos no se compartirán y sólo el entrevistador tendrá acceso a ellos. A continuación, los investigadores eliminarán los archivos y las transcripciones de acuerdo con la política de conservación y eliminación de datos de la DCU. Las notas manuscritas que se tomen durante la entrevista se transcribirán inmediatamente en formato electrónico y se destruirán en el acto. El investigador supervisará la destrucción de los datos.

La participación en el estudio de investigación es voluntaria: Tiene derecho a acceder a sus propios datos personales. La participación es voluntaria y puede retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento y por cualquier motivo sin consecuencias. Puede iniciar este proceso poniéndose en contacto con la investigadora principal, Leysi Rubio (leysi.rubioarevich2@mail.dcu.ie) o, alternativamente, con la Unidad de Protección de Datos.

Se podrán citar extractos disimulados de sus contribuciones durante el grupo de discusión en futuras presentaciones de conferencias, artículos publicados, capítulos de libros, etc.

Tiene derecho a presentar una reclamación ante la Comisión Irlandesa de Protección de Datos.

Beneficios para los participantes en el estudio de investigación: A medida que el podcasting sigue desplegando su potencialidad como medio, se abre una oportunidad creativa para que las comunidades articulen a sus miembros a través de la narración de historias y las prácticas co-creativas. Este proyecto arroja luz sobre la correlación entre el podcasting y la construcción de comunidades a través de la narración de historias, trabajando con creadores de contenidos y comunidades de oyentes en Cuba. El proyecto informará a los responsables políticos, las partes interesadas y las organizaciones de la sociedad civil sobre cómo se reconfigura la esfera del podcasting en Cuba en medio de un contexto económico y social difícil. Los participantes podrán beneficiarse de la satisfacción que les producirá realizar una contribución significativa a este ámbito de investigación tan poco atendido.

Riesgos: No se le nombrará directamente en ningún resultado, pero es posible que se haga referencia a su edad/género/nacionalidad/etnia. Durante el grupo de discusión, no tiene obligación de responder a todas las preguntas, por lo que no hay problema en que se vaya si se siente incómodo. Además, es libre de abandonar y/o retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento sin consecuencias.

Confidencialidad: El debate del grupo de discusión se grabará en audio únicamente con fines de transcripción y, a continuación, se transcribirá (es decir, la grabación no se utilizará para ningún otro fin).

Confidencialidad de los datos: La confidencialidad de la información sólo puede protegerse dentro de los límites de la ley, es decir, es posible que los datos sean objeto de una citación, una reclamación de libertad de información o una notificación obligatoria por parte de algunas profesiones.

El estudio se llevará a cabo de conformidad con el Reglamento General de Protección de Datos (RGPD), y si tiene alguna duda sobre cómo se han tratado sus datos relativos a este estudio, puede ponerse en contacto con el responsable de protección de datos de la DCU, el Sr. Martin Ward - (data.protection@dcu.ie Tel: 01-7005118/01- 7008257) que se ocupará de cualquier duda que surja de esta investigación. Asimismo, toda persona tiene derecho a presentar una reclamación relativa al uso de datos personales ante la Comisión Irlandesa de Protección de Datos.

La DCU es la responsable de la gestión de datos de este proyecto.

Comunicación de resultados: Para obtener una copia completa de sus datos o de la tesis final, póngase en contacto con Leysi Rubio en leysi.rubioarevich2@mail.dcu.ie una vez finalizado el proyecto de investigación en septiembre de 2025.

Si los participantes tienen dudas sobre este estudio y desean ponerse en contacto con una persona independiente, pueden dirigirse a:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublín 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail rec@dcu.ie

He leído y acepto la declaración de entendimiento:

- ☐ Sí
- ☐ No

Nombre y apellidos: _____

Correo electrónico / Vía preferente de contacto: _____

Firma: _____

APPENDIX E: DATA ANALYSIS

Appendix E.1 Documenting the Coding Process

Dachelys:

25:09 Yo creo que lo que nos distinguía era que estábamos tratando un tema que yo no sé si alguien lo estaba haciendo a la par que nosotras, pero al menos yo en la búsqueda que hice no encontré - que estábamos hablando sobre racismo, y sobre racismo desde ese punto de vista vinculado con la belleza, vinculado con la autoestima, y vinculado con el cabello. **Quizás la gente no había encontrado otro espacio donde escuchar una historia de gente o de personas que tuvieran experiencias muy parecidas o iguales a las tuyas, y creo que no, también desde el punto de vista de los famosos.** Porque yo me puedo sentir quizás con una amiga mía, y podemos recordar cómo nos hacían laciarnos el pelo, y cómo no nos gustaba, o si nos gustaba, y el derris me hizo una postilla o no me la hizo, y me dolía y me ardía, lo que sea... Pero, yo creo que la fuerza que tenía el testimonio de gente como Daymé, de gente como Yessica Borroto, del mismo CimaFunk, de Yissy, era como una cosa bien emocional, que conectaba mucho con la gente y decir: "A todas nos ha pasado". Y un poco el análisis de ahí venía como para mí también que la gente podía percibir, aunque no fuera como explícito, venir desde: **"Esto es un problema nacional, esto no solo me pasó a mí, no es que mi familia lo veía así. Todo un país entero estaba diciendo que tú no eres linda, que tú no eres bella, que tú tienes que cambiar, transformar tu cuerpo para que te podamos querer y para que te podamos aceptar."** Y yo creo que eso fue un punto distintivo.

26:58

Nosotros también intentamos con varios de los artistas que entrevistamos que estuvieran, hicimos audiocasts [en Telegram] y los invitamos, para que la comunidad les pudiera hacer preguntas. Y a lo mejor hay gente que no tenía chance de conversar con Saray Vargas por la calle porque no la conocen, o porque les da pena, pero ella estaba ahí en el audio chat y la gente le hacía preguntas y ella respondía. Y conversó con ellos, y la gente lo mismo hacía preguntas en audio, que las hacía escrita, y ella iba leyendo el chat, o yo se lo iba leyendo la pregunta para que ella pudiera seguir conversando y no perdiera el hilo. **Pero ese momento de conexión para la gente fue súper importante porque yo creo que les acercaba - también a los artistas, a veces los vemos y a veces es verdad que son un poco inalcanzables - y yo creo que traerlos a dialogar con la gente fue una cosa que nos distinguió.**

Interview with Dachelys Valdés from Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio

Lilian:

Sí, mira, ese chat de voz yo creo que donde primero lo hicimos fue en Ediciones La Luz, y luego a partir de ahí cuando Lisbet Moya me contactó para organizar Marzo Literario, pues tuvimos la idea de incluir los chats de voz, porque era una manera muy expedita y rica de interactuar directamente con el público, y con los invitados al evento. Entonces esos chats de voz creo que tenían la misma dinámica, o sea, tanto los que hacíamos en Ediciones La Luz, como los que teníamos en Marzo Literario. Básicamente tenían un moderador, que muchas veces fui yo, otras veces fue Lisbet, tenían un moderador que iba guiando toda la conversación, porque era una conversación. Era una conversación sobre nuevos títulos, sobre qué está haciendo tal autor, sobre qué dijo la crítica sobre un libro, vamos a leer un poema, "¿Fulanito, te atreves a improvisar aquí una décima?", qué sé yo, ese tipo de cosas eran las que surgían. Por supuesto, teníamos una especie de guioncito preestablecido, para poder organizar en todas las sesiones la información que queríamos dar, que queríamos meter, y también - si mal no recuerdo - **llegó un momento en que le dábamos la palabra al público, o sea, a los usuarios que estaban ahí mismo en el canal, que estaban oyendo el chat, y que no necesariamente tenían que ser autores, pero quizás eran aficionados a la literatura, quizás estaban en algún taller literario, y querían compartir con nosotros su quehacer.** Entonces también le dábamos la posibilidad a ellos de interactuar, de comentar qué les estaba pareciendo, de hacerle una pregunta a un autor, o de leer sus propios textos, todo eso sucedía ahí. Y yo creo que esos chats sí tenían mucho más de podcasts que de un simple encuentro en una red social, no era un foro más. Eso sí me parecía más cercano al podcast, de hecho se parece mucho a los podcasts que hoy yo veo, que hoy consumo, que hoy escucho, se parecía mucho más. Y ya te digo, a veces no tenía una articulación extremadamente pulcra, ni súper pensada, pero sí era muy espontáneo. Yo creo que el podcast tiene mucho de espontaneidad también, y al final dábamos la información que queríamos y estábamos hablando de literatura todo el tiempo, que era el objetivo del festival, y estábamos propiciando además un encuentro, una plataforma de interacción, de debate, y de retroalimentación entre los organizadores del evento, los autores, y los lectores.

R: ¿Estos chats de voz no se publicaban luego como episodios?

Lilian:

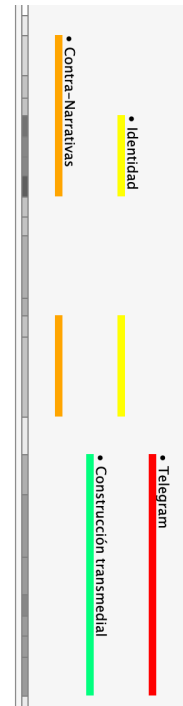
Como episodios de *Voces de Marzo Literario*, no. Pero sí recuerdo que se guardaban. De hecho, el otro día - cuando tuvimos el primer contacto - los estaba buscando en el canal que habíamos habilitado para el evento - pero no pude encontrarlos. Pero sí recuerdo que se guardaban, que se ponían a grabar.

R: ¿Pero no eran publicados luego como episodios?

Lilian:

No, no eran publicados como episodios.

Interview with Lilian Sarmiento from Voces de Marzo Literario



Rafa:
Han sido provechosos en todo, las dos veces que han ocurrido. ¿Son dos, no?

Lien:
Y el cierre, con La reina y la Real.

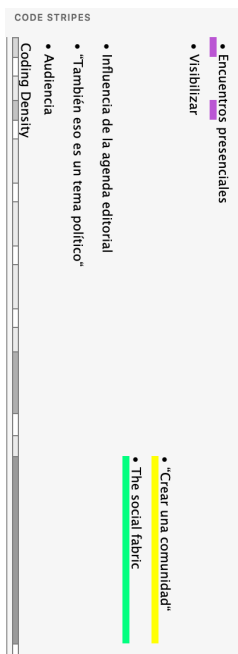
Rafa:
Sí, tienes razón.

Yadira:
Ay, qué lindo eso.

Rafa:
Sí, yo creo que han sido, en general, **pocos, pero han sido bien provechosos.**

Lien:
Y eso nos ha permitido, además, ponerle cara a las personas que escuchan. Acercarnos... Yo tengo dos amigas que empezaron de oyentes, y son mis amigas mamás.

Yadira:
También quizás la idea, y es que - no sé, bueno, creo que lo comparten conmigo Rafa y Lien - es de alguna manera que se construya esa red de cuidadores, que sea una cosa un poquito más sólida, más comunicativa, más interconectada, porque consideramos que dadas las situaciones que tenemos, y las que se vienen, una de las formas que necesita la población es precisamente tejer esas redes sociales, volver a tejer ese tejido social roto, del que tanto se habla. Y que las personas cuidadoras lo necesitan, precisamente para poder cuidar, y para garantizar de alguna manera su supervivencia y la supervivencia de las personas a su cuidado. Y que de alguna forma es urgente.



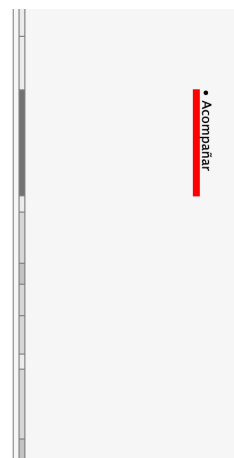
Interview with Rafa Escalona, Lien Real and Yadira Álvarez from El Descanso

Y también, entonces, eso fue un primer elemento interesante. Le pusimos podcast a eso, pero si nos vamos a ir a la literatura, ¿sabes?, podcast, no lo sé, no sé si encajaría, digamos, tú que nos preguntabas al inicio el concepto, ¿no?

Y luego, es esto que dice Yeri. **Nosotros lo que queríamos era mantener un diálogo activo con la gente, de que la gente estuviera con nosotros, escuchar a la gente, pero también darle un servicio a la gente de entretenimiento. O sea, de que la gente supiera que no estaba sola,** aunque llevaba dos, tres, cuatro, cinco meses sin poder salir de su casa, y solo oyendo noticias terribles y términos complejos, científicos, y que si verificaciones y que si ahora la variante tal, ¿no?

Entonces creo que es eso, la cuestión colaborativa y también tener desde el principio esa función de entretenimiento, de mantenimiento de la conversación y de registro de un momento que sabíamos que era extraordinario en la historia, no de Cuba, del mundo. El panorama del podcast en ese momento, si te fijas, no era tan amplio ni tan diverso, ahí estaba muy pionero *El Toque*, que estaba haciendo cosas muy interesantes ya, PB tenía sus pininos y había algún que otro podcast que había, pero le llamábamos podcast, pero era una historia, o sea, no hacíamos podcast seriado como El Descanso. Eso lo hemos aprendido ahora, cuatro años después.

Entonces creo que eso es lo que lo distinguió, que le pusimos podcast, pero que el nombre daba lo mismo. Lo que sí queríamos era que la gente participara de un proceso productivo y que hubiera un producto que dijéramos "Esto lo hicimos con la audiencia". Eso sí lo teníamos claro, que la audiencia estuviera presente en eso. Y por cierto, ahí está mi abuelo en ese post.

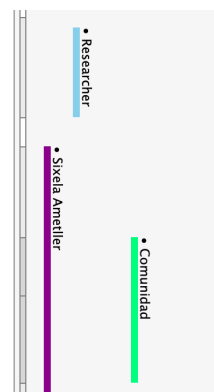


Interview with Liliam Marrero and Yerysleydis Mendéndez from Oye, te cuento

R:
Te llevo a la pregunta de cómo te has organizado, cómo has creado el proceso creativo detrás de Empoderadas.

Sixela:

La verdad es que ha sido un poco caótico. No te voy a mentir. Ya voy sistematizando cosas, pero la verdad es que al principio fue bastante caótico, en el sentido de que era como: "Bueno, necesito entrevistar a alguien y vamos a ver a quién entrevisto, y ya". Y, por supuesto, al principio fue mucho de la gente que yo conozco, porque, gracias al universo, conozco a muchas mujeres impresionantes y un poco empecé por ahí. **Después ha pasado una cosa interesante que yo nunca creí, en mi mente nunca estuvo, pero obviamente es una de las cosas más bonitas, que es la comunidad que se empieza a crear alrededor del podcast.** Y entonces una persona me recomienda a la otra, y por ahí entonces se va tejiendo esa red, entonces yo voy contactando a esas personas.



Interview with Sixela Ametller from Empoderadas

Appendix E.2 Transmedia Extensions within Cuban Podcasting

Podcasts	Transmedia Extensions (Based on Celaya <i>et. al</i> , 2020)						
Names	Public instant messaging groups	Interaction via microblogging (X, Facebook, Instagram)	Listeners' contributions in the episodes	Live chats or feedback	Events with the community	Website or blog	Other media platform
<i>La Mente Creativa</i>	Telegram (no longer exists)	X, Facebook	Yes	Yes		Blog in Medium	
<i>Empoderadas</i>		Instagram			Yes		
<i>Palabras con Sentido</i>							Print segment on local newspaper
<i>Lecturas al oído</i>			Yes			Media outlet website (<i>El Toque</i>)	
<i>Tecno Code Live (Club calvOS 360)</i>	Telegram	Twitter	Yes	Yes			YouTube
<i>Lo Llevamos Rizo Radio</i>	Telegram			Yes	Yes		
<i>Cubadebate</i>			Yes (Modo Avión)			Media outlet website (<i>Cubadebate</i>)	
<i>Cositos Radiales</i>	Telegram		Yes				
<i>Oye te cuento</i>	Ivoox		Yes			Media outlet website (<i>El Toque</i>)	
<i>Flash Musical</i>	Telegram	Instagram, Facebook		Yes			
<i>Emprende Verde</i>	Telegram	Instagram			Yes		
<i>En Estéreo Podcast</i>		Instagram	Yes		Yes		
<i>En Plural</i>	Telegram		Yes	Yes	Yes	Social project website (<i>Cuba Emprende</i>)	
<i>Voces Ecuménicas</i>	Telegram		Yes	Yes	Yes	Blog in Medium	
<i>Marzo Literario</i>	Telegram		Yes	Yes			
<i>Píldoras Buen Idioma</i>	Telegram	Instagram	Yes	Yes	Yes	Website	TV segment / YouTube
<i>ZonaoClichés con Allison</i>		Instagram	Yes		Yes		
<i>La Escuelita</i>		Instagram			Yes		
<i>Cinemafilea</i>						Media outlet website (<i>Periódico Girón</i>)	
<i>El Pitch</i>	Telegram	Instagram	Yes		Yes	Website page	El Pitch Festival

<i>El Descanso</i>		Whatsapp, Instagram			Yes	Media outlet website (<i>Periodismo de Barrio</i>)	
<i>La Potajera</i>	Telegram	Instagram	Yes				
<i>Team Serendipia</i>	Telegram	Facebook			Yes		
<i>Buzón de Voz de Clandestina</i>	Telegram	Whatsapp, Instagram, Facebook	Yes				