Authenticities in Podcasting:
Practices and Challenges of Irish Podcasters

Study submitted in part fulfilment of the requirement for the award of
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original and have conformed to the regulations on the use and declaration of Generative AI, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: Waqar Ahmed

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Reporting of Generative AI Tool Use in Research Thesis

Tools:	Google NotebookLM. Used between 27/07/2023 and 03/03/2024	Google NotebookLM. Used on 13/06/2024	Google Gemini 2.0 Flash. Used between 24/04/2025 and 11/07/2025
Outputs:	NotebookLM was used to provide concise summaries of recent podcast episodes, helping to identify the interviewee's recurring guests, key topics, and updates shared by the interviewee. This was used only to build rapport at the start of the interview.	NotebookLM was used to increase background knowledge of the *Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes*. The outputs were answers to questions on institutional conduct and history within the Report.	I used Google Gemini to gather a preliminary understanding for future directions of the role of AI in audio production. This helped identify areas of future research.
Prompts:	I asked NotebookLM to "Analyse the last five episodes' transcripts from each specific interviewee. Identify any common themes discussed with recent guests and summarise any public, personal announcements made by the host".	I asked NotebookLM to "Summarise the Commission's findings regarding the role of the State versus religious orders. Also list the primary recommendations". The prompts focused on information retrieval of complex sections of the source.	I asked Gemini to "Find academic papers that analyse the use of generative AI for content creation, editing, and voice synthesis in audio podcasting".
Iterations:	One session per interviewee on NotebookLM generated key themes and personal or recent content updates to build rapport. Another session on NotebookLM focused on producing high-level summaries, followed by second session that involved specific queries to cross-reference themes raised tangentially by the interviewee with the content of the *Mother and Baby Homes Report*. Separate dedicated sessions using Gemini conducted targeted searches and produced summaries of academic papers related to the technological, production, and ethical dimensions of AI in podcasting. Examples of prompts and outputs appear in Appendix F.		
Critical Reflection:	Generative AI tools were used minimally in this research. A brief critical reflection is provided in Chapter 4 Research Methodology (Section 4.8).		

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AI	Artificial intelligence
ANT	Actor-Network Theory
ASMR	Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BIA	Basic Income for the Arts
DCU	Dublin City University
DIY	Do-it-yourself
DJ(s)	Disc jockey(s)
DMA	Digital Markets Act
DSA	Digital Services Act
EU	European Union
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IAB	Interactive Advertising Bureau
ISS	Information Systems Services
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, or asexual
LLM	Large Language Model
MP3	MPEG-1 Audio Layer 3
PEM	Political Economy of Media Theory
PLS	Plain Language Statement
PPI	Phonographic Performance Ireland
PRI	Public Radio International
Pro-Ams	Professional Amateurs
REC	Research Ethics Committee
RSS	Really Simple Syndication
RTÉ	Raidió Teilifís Éireann
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
USP	Unique Selling Proposition

Authenticities in Podcasting: Practices and Challenges of Irish Podcasters

Waqar Ahmed

Abstract

Podcasting is a form of cultural production and creative labour practice that involves producing, distributing, and consuming on-demand spoken and narrative audio via the internet. Media scholars, podcasters, and listeners credit authenticity as a source of trust and a driver of popularity for podcasts. Authenticity is a central organising principle in podcasting, shaping creative work, audience trust, and cultural value while also exposing creators to structural and affective vulnerabilities. Thus, this project uses authenticity as an explanatory lens to analyse podcasting practices. This study critically examines the extent to which podcasters' practices are informed by notions of authenticities, how these claims of authenticities are shaped by broader contextual factors, including genre, production modes, and degrees of autonomy, and the effects and limitations for podcasters when their practices are perceived as inauthentic. Podcasting has grown in Ireland, yet attention to podcasters' production practices remains underexplored. The Irish context is relevant for studying audio podcasting because it has among the highest levels of podcast consumption, so examining its podcasters can help clarify what makes podcasting successful. The study employs an interpretive qualitative methodology and collects empirical data through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 30 podcasters from a diverse range of genres (e.g., narrative non-fiction, conversational, and fiction) and working models (i.e., independent, commercial, and public service) in the Republic of Ireland. The empirical findings demonstrate that authenticities are contextual, performative, and shared practices shaped by personal, relational, cultural, genre, production, industrial, structural, professional, and working model contexts. This research makes theoretical contributions to podcast studies, cultural production, media authenticity, field theory, Irish media studies, parasocial theory, cultural labour, platformisation of culture, performance theory, and the political economy of media. Moreover, this project has practical significance for scholars, podcasters, industry stakeholders, and cultural policymakers. The present work supports future research in podcasting through broader comparative work and multi-method approaches.

Keywords: authenticities, autonomy, competence, genre, Ireland, parasocial relationship, platformisation, podcasting, political economy of media, production, working model

PART 1 RESEARCH FOUNDATIONS

Chapter 1. Introduction

> Podcasting, in particular, routinely gets referred to as a new 'medium' and championed as a disruptive technology that is especially 'intimate' and 'authentic' and so on. These discourses typically divorce the contemporary media from the past, treating them as though they are purely a product of new technologies and recently developed modern sentiments.
>
> Andrew Bottomley (2020, p. 2.)

> We are witnessing a more profound shift through a qualitative transformation in which machine-generated content becomes not just indistinguishable from human production but begins to reshape the very grounds upon which we understand authenticity and experience. [...] Traditional markers of authenticity, such as institutional affiliation, professional credentials, or social reputation, might become unreliable as AI systems are able to convincingly simulate these markers.
>
> David Berry (2025, pp. 1, 8)

1.1 Research Context and Problem

On 11 January 2005, Michael Ryan published one of the first independent podcasts in the Republic of Ireland, *EirPod: A View from Ireland*. It covered the host's personal rants, Anglo-Irish relations, technology products, and cultural observations. Ryan (2005) described podcasting as "a free-for-all while mass media is in free fall. Whether it has legs, only time will tell". Two decades later, Ireland ranks among the leading countries in podcast consumption[1] and maintains one of the highest levels of daily radio listening in the world[2]. This strong auditory culture plays a role in how Irish podcasters understand their practices, which often draw from a broader sense of authentic storytelling. Some of Ireland's leading podcasters, such as Alan Bennett, the founder of HeadStuff, the country's leading podcast

[1] Over 46% of Irish people listen to podcasts every month, making it one of the highest consumption rates in the world (Reuters Institute, 2022).
[2] Almost four out of five adults in Ireland (79.3%) listen to radio every day (Ipsos, 2025).

network, have occasionally invoked the traditional storytelling concept of *Seanchaí* (shan-a-kee) to situate podcasting as an evolution of oral storytelling heritage in Ireland (O'Connor, 2019). While such comparisons are more metaphorical than based on historical accuracy, they highlight the value placed on intimacy and perceived authenticity in oral communication, qualities that would shape how podcasting developed in Ireland.

Early Irish podcast adopters framed podcasting as a medium that afforded a greater sense of authenticity, a quality that later became a defining feature of podcasts and was often credited by podcasters as a source of trust and a driver of popularity. Claims around authenticity shape how podcasting is produced and understood, whose voices are heard, which messages are sent, and the producers who craft them. In practice, claims of authenticity configure podcasts' capacity to create intimacy, spark imagination, stimulate engagement, and build trust through voice and content. This perceived openness encourages creators and audiences to form communities based on shared interests and stories, influencing expectations of how podcasters should present themselves. As a result, notions about authenticity inform production decisions, presentation styles, engagement practices, and the pursuit of being true to oneself. These concepts of authenticity reflect not only how people engage with podcasts, but also how they understand themselves within a wider media landscape, one which is undergoing deep structural changes regarding trust and authenticity in mediated communication. The broader cultural resonance of these concerns is evidenced by the selection of authenticity as Merriam-Webster's Word of the Year for 2023, a choice that, according to editor Peter Sokolowski, signals a growing public preoccupation with what can be trusted. Seen in this context, authenticity functions as both a narrative ideal and a practical resource within an increasingly competitive media landscape.

The thesis focuses on authenticity in podcasting because it operates as a foundational myth and guiding principle for podcasters. Mythology and technology have a long history, and Mosco's (2004) analysis of technology and power relies on the notion of myth as a "captivating fiction, a promise unfulfilled and perhaps unfulfillable" and as a form of hope (p. 22). In Mosco's (2004) words, "Myths are important both for what they reveal (including a genuine desire for community and democracy) and for what they conceal (including the growing concentration of communication power in a handful of transnational media businesses)" (p. 19). Drawing from Mosco's (2004) use of myth, the present work also uses the concept to analyse and describe a shared mythological narrative that shapes how authenticity is claimed and influences cultural

production. In doing so, the mythical lens allows a complex and nuanced view that embraces social, cultural, and political-economic structures.

The argument developed in the present work questions the celebratory claims about authenticity in podcasting, arguing that an idealised myth of authenticity can obfuscate a more complex reality as well as the interests of powerful stakeholders. For example, after Spotify acquired the free podcast creation tool Anchor, it changed its terms so that podcasts produced with its tools no longer generated an RSS feed[3]. The change effectively locked creators into the platform and reduced their control over ownership and distribution. The notion of "just a podcaster being authentic" masquerades as authentic practice and functions as a cover for power and influence. During the 2024 US presidential election, podcasts were framed as authentic alternative media against legacy outlets. Analysing such claims clarifies how notions of authenticity are mobilised, when they become tools of influence, and where they fail to match the lived realities of podcasters.

The present study develops a contextual model of authenticit*ies* to analyse how podcasters understand the establishment, maintenance, and withdrawal of trust in podcasting. Authenticity is unpacked and analysed as a set of contextual authenticities, each taking different forms across personal, relational, structural, genre, and production contexts. Conceptually, the term authenticity functions as an explanatory lens for analysing how its constituent dimensions are performed and negotiated in production practices. The growth of podcasting from an amateur niche medium into a commercial mass medium problematises many of the egalitarian ideals associated with authenticity. The project uses authenticity as an explanatory lens to examine how podcasters interpret audience desires for comfort, trust, and connection in contemporary digital media. The present study draws on podcasters' accounts of their work to challenge uncritical celebratory discourses of authenticity by analysing authenticity both as a valued ideal and as a driver of pressure, risk, and inequality. Interviews with podcasters highlight how their perceptions of authenticity shape self-presentation, mediated relations, cultural labour, and production decisions, and how these perceptions position the work within that wider development.

[3] The development of Really Simple Syndication (RSS) bypassed the need for central platforms and opened distribution channels to independent producers.

A meso-level approach is suitable to analyse podcasters' everyday practices in a relatively small-nation context such as the Republic of Ireland, where storytelling traditions intersect with global podcasting formats. The project focuses on Irish podcasters' understandings and practices of authenticities because podcasting in Ireland has grown rapidly. Despite high rates of podcast listenership, the podcasting field in the Republic of Ireland has received little scholarly attention. Ireland also has some of the highest levels of radio consumption, reflecting the cultural significance of audio as a trustworthy community-based medium[4]. These factors make Ireland a relevant and timely case study to investigate podcasting and authenticity. The Irish case provides an empirical setting to trace how contextual authenticities are constructed within a relatively small, platform-dependent media system. By analysing how podcasters understand authenticities as shaping trust with listeners, this thesis develops a framework for authenticity that informs wider debates in podcast studies and cultural production scholarship.

Until recently, authenticity was widely understood as a predominantly human characteristic, grounded in embodied voice, intention, and lived experience. The rise of generative AI and automation, with tools such as Google NotebookLM that can generate podcasts directly from scripts and prompts, is rebalancing agency within cultural production. These tools further complicate notions of authenticity in podcasting by raising questions about whether claims to authenticity can or should be assessed in content created through varying degrees of human and machine agency. To understand these consequences clearly, the thesis examines the human aspects involved in podcasting practices that are framed as authentic and how authenticity is constructed, performed, and challenged. Podcasting offers a particularly relevant context because it centres the human voice in non-musical audio while remaining deeply entwined with digital platforms. By placing emphasis on human producers and the human aspects of authenticity in podcasting, the project lays the groundwork for future debates about how claims to authenticity by non-human or AI-driven systems can be assessed against a benchmark of human-produced podcasts.

This introductory chapter sets out the research focus and positions authenticity as a central concern within the study of podcasting in the Republic of Ireland. It outlines the research aim and questions, establishing the need for a study that interrogates how podcasters conceptualise,

[4] About 12% of Irish audiences listen to podcasts as a trusted source of news, higher than in the UK (7%) and the European average of 9% (Reuters Institute, 2025).

negotiate, and perform authenticities in their work. The introduction situates podcasting within a rapidly evolving cultural and media environment and establishes the broader academic and practical relevance of the study. Section 1.2 presents the research aim and questions. Section 1.3 defines key terms used in the thesis. Section 1.4 discusses the scope of the study and its (de)limitations. Section 1.5 sets out the study's rationale and highlights how it addresses research gaps and under-examined areas. Section 1.6 explains the significance of the study, and Section 1.7 outlines the structure and organisation of the thesis.

1.2 Research Aim and Questions

The study aims to critically examine to what extent podcasters' practices are informed by notions of authenticity, how these notions of authenticity are shaped by broader contextual aspects, including genre, production modes, and degrees of autonomy exerted by podcasters, and the effects and limitations for podcasters when they believe their practices may be perceived as non-authentic. It investigates the cultural, relational, and organisational conditions through which podcasters claim, negotiate, and perform authenticity, and analyses how genre conventions and production processes influence podcasters' approaches to authenticity. Through an interpretive qualitative lens, the study analyses the motivations, relational dynamics, structural influences, and production practices that shape multifaceted and context-dependent authenticities, ultimately contributing original insights into how podcasters deal with tensions and constraints to create meaningful connections via mediated communication.

The research aims to address the following primary research question:

> How and why do podcasters in the Republic of Ireland negotiate and perform authenticity, and what challenges arise in that pursuit?

Considering the thesis position that authenticity is a multifaceted and context-based phenomenon, I have resolved the primary question into four research questions as noted below.

RQ1. In what ways do podcasters in the Republic of Ireland pursue authenticity in relation to their self-presentation, motivations, values, and creative practices?

RQ2. How do podcasters negotiate and construct authenticity through their mediated, interpersonal, and cultural relationships with audiences, guests, collaborators, and communities in the Republic of Ireland?

RQ3. How do genre conventions and podcasters' creative and editorial choices across production stages shape their approaches to authenticity in the Republic of Ireland?

RQ4. In what ways do autonomy, platformisation, commercialisation, institutionalisation, and professionalisation influence podcasters' ability to negotiate authenticity in creative and editorial decision-making in the Republic of Ireland?

1.3 Key Terms

To ground the analysis, the following section defines key terms used in the thesis.

Podcasting is a form of cultural production and creative labour practice that involves producing, distributing, and consuming on-demand spoken and narrative audio through the internet. The definition aligns with Morris and Patterson (2015), who defined podcasting as a specific set of practices and cultural meanings that centre human agents and communicative labour. Regarding content, the defining feature of podcasting is audio that includes conversation, interview, narration, vocal performance, and narrative features (i.e., voice-overs, sound effects, music, and silence). ASMR, music-only content, or DJ sets without substantive vocal or narrative elements fall outside this definition. The study focuses on audio podcasts and does not include video podcasts or live streams. It also distinguishes podcasts from catch-up radio streams that repackage broadcast output for time-shifted listening and do not follow podcast-first production or open RSS[5] syndication. Podcasts draw characteristics from traditional and internet radio, blogging, documentaries, literary and genre fiction, storytelling, narrative journalism, performing arts, music, streaming, and internet cultures. However, they have distinctive aesthetics, forms, styles, performative techniques, and 'dispersed, hybrid, serial, and experimental' attributes that set them apart from other audio media (Edmond, 2015). The study situates podcasting within the Republic of Ireland's platformised audio sector that

[5] RSS is a web feed format that links audio files to be automatically downloaded onto users' devices.

connects independent producers, commercial networks, and public service broadcasting within a relatively small-nation market.

Podcaster(s) are the producers, hosts, and other personnel whose activities are fundamental to the production, presentation, and distribution of podcasts. I recognise that industry reports define those who create podcasts as "podcast creators" (Edison Research & Sounds Profitable, 2022). However, the term 'creator' is grounded in the tech sector and has limitations in critical analysis of podcasting. The term podcast creator can commodify podcasting by prioritising monetisation, algorithmic commodification, and platform dependency over cultural expression and artistic integrity (Gill & Dorsen, 2024; Rei-Anderson, 2023). Companies such as Spotify and Apple have increasingly adopted the term podcast creator[6] to reflect wider trends in the creator economy, where cultural producers are expected to create beyond audio, including video episodes, interactive elements, and multimedia formats (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2024). I use podcaster as an occupational self-description that aligns with grassroots visions of podcast as primarily an audio medium grounded in an RSS ethos of openness. The term also suits the inclusion of all personnel behind podcast production, including writers, hosts, producers, editors, marketers, trainers, and researchers who conduct background research and fact-checking for podcasts.

Authenticity in podcasting is a contextual and multifaceted construct shaped by personal, relational, structural, conventional, and production factors. Authenticity functions as an explanatory force that helps to analyse podcasting practices. This research uses the term authenticit*ies* to describe the plurality of meanings and practices attached to the construct. By addressing authenticities in podcasting, it analyses how podcasting has evolved as a cultural and labour practice. When addressing authenticity, the study focuses on podcasters' perceptions of authenticity and does not aim to examine how audiences perceive authentic practices. This project draws on work that treats authenticity as socially and culturally constructed beyond artist identity, place, and source, and as negotiated through historicised interpretations within listening cultures (Moore, 2002; Peterson, 2013).

[6] For example, Spotify rebranded its podcasting platform from "Spotify for Podcasters" to "Spotify for Creators" in November 2024 (Spotify, 2024).

The grammatical shift from authenticity to authenticities avoids treating authenticity as a single essence, a stable moral value, or a fixed property of podcasting. It treats authenticity as a socially and culturally constructed concept that podcasters interpret, perform, and negotiate within particular working contexts. This grammatical shift gives the study analytical purchase because it shows how the same term can carry different meanings. It also allows the analysis to compare how different claims to authenticity are shaped by self-presentation, trust, autonomy, commercial pressure, genre conventions, and production choices. The project draws on podcasters' accounts of their work to challenge celebratory discourses of authenticity by analysing authenticity both as a valued ideal and as a source of pressure, risk, and inequality. The fuller theoretical discussion appears in Chapter 3 to help frame this plural approach.

Genres are conventions and expectations shared by producers, audiences, platforms, and publishers (Brackett, 2016; Toynbee, 2000). Genres serve as guides for thematic focus, narrative style, and delivery format. The concept of genre works as an analytical tool and as an explanatory framework that helps understand the nuances identified in analysis. Drawing on Berry (2020) and McHugh's (2022) typology, the thesis focuses on three podcast genres, namely narrative non-fiction[7], conversations (or chatcasts) [8], and fiction[9]. It examines how each genre shapes performances and practices of authenticity across planning, recording, editing, and publishing. Authenticities vary according to genre conventions, and this genre typology allows a nuanced view of similarities and variables in podcasting. The distinction between genre and format is complex because many podcasts draw on elements of multiple genres. This study uses the term format to refer to podcasting as a long-form audio medium that allows a greater sense of intimacy and authenticity. This definition differs from Sterne (2012), who, in his book *MP3: The Meaning of a Format*, discusses format as a way of codifying audio information. This study frames longer format as a key feature of podcasting that distinguishes podcasts from broadcasts and allows for the sense of authenticity that the research examines (see Section 2.4 for detail).

Motivation leads podcasters to engage in podcasting in a sustained manner. Podcasting requires considerable resources, effort, and dedication that are more frequently associated with

[7] Narrative non-fiction podcasts include news, documentary, true crime, personal narrative, and activist podcasts.
[8] Conversation podcasts include panel discussions, interviews, comedy, and monologues.
[9] Fiction podcasts include audio dramas, horror, and sci-fi.

professional work and other activities that require serious commitment. To fully appreciate podcasters' motivations in the context of authenticity, the project draws from self-determination theory (SDT), which frames self-determined, enjoyable, and satisfying behaviour as authentic (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Moreover, in SDT, motivations are classified as intrinsic and extrinsic. In SDT, relatedness, autonomy, and competence are conditions associated with self-determined experience. This study uses these concepts to analyse how podcasters connect motivation, autonomy, competence, and relationships with authenticity.

Working Framework(s) are models of production that distinguish podcasters as independent or operating within commercial or public service institutions. The term working model is also used interchangeably with working framework. Identifying a podcaster within a single framework is challenging because many podcasters work across multiple frameworks at the same time. For example, some produce independently, make podcasts for brands, work under commercial media organisations, and seek commissions from the public service broadcaster RTÉ (see Appendix K). Working frameworks provide a useful lens for analysing authenticities because they place distinct expectations, influence, and limitations on podcasters. Podcasters in each working framework aim to maintain authenticity through a degree of autonomy while managing distinct structural pressures. I draw on a three-sector approach that distinguishes independent, commercial, and public service settings.

1.4 Research Scope and (De)limitations

The study scopes the inquiry to focus on podcasters' perspectives and to explain how authenticity is constructed in practice. It examines how and why podcasters in the Republic of Ireland construct, negotiate, and perform authenticities, and what challenges arise in that pursuit. The project draws on 30 in-depth interviews with podcasters across independent, commercial, and public service working frameworks. Among the 30 participants, 18 identified as male, 9 identified as female, and 3 identified as non-binary. Sampling follows purposive logic to enable cross-model and cross-genre comparison. The study explores motivations, relational dynamics, external influences, production practices, and genre conventions in narrative non-fiction, conversational, and fiction podcasts. This range provides sufficient variety of experiences and allows for a detailed understanding of multiple authenticities shaped by different contexts. Interviews serve as the primary dataset because they reveal decision-

making, reflexivity, and performance choices. Podcast episodes and audience metrics fall beyond the scope because the project prioritises production processes over reception and analytics. Claims about audience expectations and trust are analysed as podcasters' interpretations rather than as audience evidence. The study focuses on contemporary practice within the fieldwork timeline, acknowledging that later industry shifts may bring new constraints and opportunities. The context of generative artificial intelligence in cultural production is recognised as shaping ideas of authenticity, although fieldwork predated its mainstream adoption. The study highlights tensions in digital cultural production and offers analytic transferability, particularly to small nations with comparable media infrastructures and cultural policy.

The study acknowledges that podcasters are subject to gendered and racial inequities (Brekke, 2020) and has taken steps to account for potential problems resulting from these structural inequalities in representation. These challenges are persistent because "media culture and institutions have historically favoured people who are some or all of the following, White, middle class, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied male" (McHugh, 2022, p. 120). Considering these challenges, underrepresented communities are included in the sample, for example, Black and Irish producers and people living with HIV. The study also addresses gender by incorporating a broad range of voices to ensure a wide view of the worlds of podcasting, rather than framing the project as research on women in podcasting. Sinéad O'Moore's *Stretch Marks Podcast*[10] offers a clear example of why such breadth matters. The title signals the connection the podcaster seeks with her audience and challenges commonplace assumptions about "bro-casting" in male-centred media narratives. The inclusion strategy widens the scope of the phenomenon while keeping the analytical focus on production practices.

The study is delimited to podcasters working and living within the Republic of Ireland to focus on culturally specific authenticity practices. The focus on Irish podcasters enables analysis within a small platform-dependent system with strong audio traditions. This research positions Ireland's podcasting field as a "subfield of small-scale production" (Hesmondhalgh, 2006, p. 215). Benson and Neveu (2005) argue that the various forces shaping media fields are most influential at the "mesolevel of the interorganizational 'field', which tends to be national" (p. 11). Guided by this insight, this study focuses on the podcasting field in the Republic of Ireland.

[10] *Stretch Marks Podcast* discusses challenging aspects of parental, personal, and professional lives.

The Irish podcasting field is subject to internal and external forces that subvert its existing structures, including the flows of cultural, social, and symbolic capital. The research shows multifaceted, contested, and sometimes contradictory ways in which notions of national identity and Irishness are performed, challenged, and rearticulated through podcasting. The study departs from Benedict Anderson's (2020) concept of "imagined communities" by focusing on lived experiences and relational patterns that shape contested expressions of Irishness in podcasts. National identity operates as a complex issue in the Republic of Ireland due to variations in local cultures, political environment, and linguistic styles (Cronin, 1999). Northern Ireland and diasporic podcasters fall outside the project's scope for feasibility and analytic focus.

The study's scope reflects deliberate choices to address the research questions and to manage feasibility while centring producers' perspectives. The data consisted of participants' reflections, opinions, and self-assessments, since self-reported interviews best captured how podcasters understand and perform authenticities. Self-reported interview data introduce potential subjectivity and recall bias, which were mitigated through reflexive memos, transparent coding notes, and member checking with participants. The researcher's positionality as a non-Irish researcher with prior industry knowledge shaped interpretive choices; reflexive practice guided analysis to make those choices explicit. Despite references to the intimacy and immersion of podcasts, the analysis does not extend to reception studies or to spatial audio, because the study prioritised production processes. The current study analyses authenticity in audio podcasts while recognising that the rise of video podcasts presents an area for future research. Despite efforts to recruit rural-based podcasters, participants were mainly interviewed in cities due to the concentration of media in urban centres, which may restrict analysis of how local and subcultural contexts shape authenticities. Future comparative research across national contexts can clarify changing platform dynamics and cultural expectations.

1.5 Research Gaps and Un(der)explored Areas

The scholarly understanding of authenticity in podcasting is evolving despite creators and listeners valuing the medium's unfiltered style (Milovan et al., 2025). Earlier research has emphasised the technological, cultural, and social potentials of podcast consumption. However,

there is a limited focus on the lived experiences of human agents (podcasters) who create and communicate with podcasts. Podcasters working in different frameworks experience distinct challenges. Authenticity is treated here as a negotiated practice that involves trade-offs between intrinsic values and external rewards, amateur production and professionalism, creative autonomy, and platform constraints. By providing a deeper inquiry into the motivations, practices, and conditions in podcasting, the present work addresses the gaps in podcast scholarship. These gaps highlight the need for an interpretive qualitative study focusing on motivations, relationships, organisational conditions, genre conventions, and production processes. In the following sub-sections, I provide the rationale for this study by identifying un(der)explored areas in research.

Motivations, Relationships, and Cultural Context

The present study addresses calls within podcast studies for deeper exploration of podcasters' intrinsic motivations. Scholars describe podcasting as a participatory medium that is "particularly conducive to the pursuit of a more authentic sense of selfhood" for creators (Meserko, 2015a, p. 796). Even independent podcasters face practical and social constraints that complicate the pursuit of authenticity. Prior research on podcaster motivations, mostly focused on Anglo-American creators, has not fully explored such nuances, especially in varied cultural settings. Scholars have therefore called for studies on a broader range of voices and contexts to understand how different backgrounds and value systems affect creators' notions of practices framed as authentic (Tennant, 2023). Podcast research often prioritises audience motivations, partly because authenticity is commonly associated with reception, fandom, and listener validation. This focus leaves podcasters' motivations underexamined, including how they construct authentic voice, identity, and expression in practice (Berg, 2021b). The study examines how podcasters understand authenticity and navigate constraints by analysing intrinsic motivations and lived experiences. It also highlights the need to analyse excessive or exploitative appeals to authenticity in podcasting.

By examining how podcasters perceive their relationships with audiences, guests, and production teams as shaping authenticities, this research contributes to contemporary parasocial and media engagement scholarship. Traditionally, parasocial relationship research examined the audience's perspectives of one-sided relationships (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

However, podcasters often incorporate direct audience interaction through social media, which they may perceive as shifting relationships from one-sided to more engaging forms. Therefore, attention has been given to authenticity as a co-constructed process shaped by in-person interaction with guests, co-host(s), and production teams. The analysis of how host and guest interactions shape authenticity can reveal how rapport, trust, power asymmetries, gatekeeping, and editorial framing can influence perceived authenticity. This study also addresses how interpersonal relationships between co-hosts, producers, editors, and other production members contribute to or constrain practices that podcasters frame as authentic.

A focused analysis of podcasting in Ireland provides original insights into how local podcasting practices deal with global influences. Cultural and national contexts shape the performance and perception of authenticity, yet podcast research beyond the dominant US industry has received little attention. Podcast research requires a wider geographical lens to examine the effects of platformisation beyond US-centric models (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). Analysis of relatively small European markets can show how scale, power, and ownership shape production cultures (McElroy et al., 2018). Irish media operate within distinctive broadcasting policy and governance constraints that shape production incentives for audio producers (Durrer & Magan, 2017; Higgins & Donnellan, 2023). This aligns with recent calls (e.g., Rae & Diprose, 2024; Ramsey, 2024) for studies on cultural production, platform challenges, and authenticity in regional contexts. While industry reports (e.g., Edison, IAB Ireland, Reuters) have highlighted the growth of the podcast sector in Ireland, little academic attention has been given to how Irish podcasters understand and perform authenticity. Studies of Irish media have largely focused on legacy broadcast media, journalism, and music, overlooking podcasting as a cultural form with its own practices, audiences, and communities. This study attempts to fill the research gap by analysing podcasting practices.

Autonomy, Platformisation, Political Economy, Professionalisation, and Ethical Challenges

This study responds to recent calls (e.g., Sharon, 2023) for further research on the political economy of podcasting to examine how power, ownership, and money shape podcasting. It highlights recent developments, challenges, structural constraints, and consolidation in the industry. Digital media scholars have described this process of consolidation as platformisation (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). Platformisation has serious implications regarding the autonomy and

sustainability of cultural productions, including podcasts. In the case of podcasting, discovery algorithms and platforms can influence which voices get heard, corporate deals can impose content guidelines or exclusivity, and revenue models (advertising or subscriptions) may pressure independent podcasters to adjust their content for financial sustainability. While scholarship on media production has addressed autonomy in relation to journalism, broadcasting, and cultural work, there is limited research examining how autonomy (as a constituent of authenticity) is negotiated within podcasting. This study deals with questions of media economics and regulation to fully appreciate the context in which authenticity is pursued. The study of podcasters across working frameworks explores how podcasters experience and respond to platform pressures. It explores whether they feel constrained in their editorial decisions. Do they alter their persona or content to appease algorithms or advertisers? Are independent podcasters able to resist these forces, or do they internalise new forms of self-censorship? By exploring these questions, the project argues that podcasters' authenticity work is mediated by structural contexts, from the global platform economy down to national media ecosystems.

The study addresses ethical questions in contemporary podcasting. For example, how can podcasters balance being open and unfiltered with being responsible media practitioners? The study also examines how podcasters practise accuracy, transparency, and accountability in producing content across various conventions that guide claims to authenticity. The present work emphasises that as podcasting evolves from a hobbyist practice to a mainstream industry, it is undergoing marked professionalisation. Rising production values and formal routines have raised questions about the medium's authenticity, distinct identity, originality, spontaneity, and intimacy (Martín-Morán & Martín Nieto, 2022). The central issue is how production practices and ethics are being (re)negotiated amid this shift (Spinelli & Dann, 2019; Sullivan, 2018). Podcasts have become an important outlet for journalism (e.g., daily news podcasts, investigative series), which introduces potential conflicts between the norms of journalism (e.g., objectivity, verification, accountability) and the subjective, immersive storytelling. Enli (2025) warns that perceived mediated authenticity can be weaponised to legitimise misinformation and extremist discourse, since audiences may trust a charismatic speaker over institutional sources. Joe Rogan's case exemplifies this risk. He is not a journalist and does not fact-check, yet his high production values amplify a sense of authenticity usually associated with professional media.

Genre Conventions and Production Processes

The study offers new insight into how genre shapes production practices that podcasters in Ireland may perceive as authentic. Podcasts are produced in a wide array of genres and formats, including narrative non-fiction, conversations, and fiction. Each genre carries its own conventions that influence how authenticity is constructed. These conventions and professional norms shape production choices and podcasters' assumptions about listener expectations in recognisable ways (Hardey & James, 2022; Maares & Perreault, 2025). This research addresses the gap by analysing how the notions of authenticity are shaped by distinct genre conventions. For instance, a comedy podcast's approach to authenticity might differ from that of a news podcast or a scripted fiction series. By doing so, the study presents authenticities as genre-driven practices.

The study examines a range of podcast genres in the Republic of Ireland to examine how narrative and stylistic choices across production stages shape the podcasters' approach to authenticity. Studies of podcasting often treat authenticity as a rhetorical claim about self-presentation or discursive performance rather than as a process embedded in the practical decisions of podcasters. This leaves a gap in understanding how authenticity is continuously shaped by creative choices, technical practices, and genre expectations. Much of the existing podcast scholarship has often focused on audience perceptions without examining the creative and technical decisions made by podcasters themselves. McHugh (2016) found gaps in audio storytelling and performative documentary, calling for process-based studies. This study responds to gaps in podcast production perspectives (e.g., Llinares et al., 2018; Perdomo et al., 2025), offering an analysis of practice, production cultures, and industry contexts.

The study offers original contributions by providing an integrated, context-rich understanding of authenticities in podcasting.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This work holds theoretical, cultural, methodological, and practical significance. Theoretically, this study advances media scholarship by deepening understandings of authenticity as a

multifaceted, performative, relational, and contextual construct in digital cultural production – authenticit*ies*. The plural term authenticities strengthens this contribution by allowing the thesis to compare how authenticity operates differently across personal expression, relational trust, field position, genre conventions, and production practice. It challenges simplified notions of authenticity (i.e., inherent quality, personal trait, moral value) and emphasises its intersections with power dynamics, platform algorithms, genre conventions, and cultural identities, with a focus on the Republic of Ireland as a small-nation context. The theoretical contribution to self-determination theory is useful for examining extrinsic and intrinsic motivations for creating content in new media formats. By exploring podcasters' accounts of parasocial relations, this research helps explain how they understand contemporary relations with listeners amid perceived reciprocity on social media. The findings enrich theoretical debates in media and cultural studies by extending the authenticity concept beyond individualised expression to encompass relational, organisational, and cultural dimensions, particularly in relation to autonomy and mediated self-presentation. Analysing the political economy of podcasters in the Republic of Ireland helps identify key social, economic, and platform-related challenges. The study advances scholarly critique of the celebratory notions of podcasting, which describe it as an alternative democratic medium for passive listeners (Friedman, 2005) and "disappointed fans of radio" (Millette, 2011).

From a cultural perspective, the study foregrounds Irish podcasters' voices and contributes to debates on digital media's role in preserving local narratives amid global influences. This research highlights the underlying assumptions about social relationships and historical patterns that link Irish art and cultural production as diverse fields of inquiry (Negra, 2006). Examining practices of producers in different podcast genres and sub-genres provides rich insights into how podcasting differs across distinct conventions. This Irish case study contrasts with US-centric research, highlighting cultural specificity in platform-mediated production. As one of the first empirical explorations in the Republic of Ireland, this study provides baseline data on podcast production practices for comparative studies. By emphasising the practices of Irish podcasters, the thesis positions podcasting as a significant element of Ireland's evolving media and cultural landscape. It sheds light on how podcasters negotiate authenticity in response to local, national, and global pressures, including cultural identity, audience expectations, and institutional constraints. By situating podcasting within cultural contexts and addressing external pressures of platformisation and professionalisation (Sullivan, 2024), the

research shows how authenticities operate within and across specific media ecologies. The research offers analysis for media scholars, audio and podcast producers, journalists, and podcast enthusiasts on how podcasters describe their relationships with the medium, the content, and listeners. The research emphasises the need for a podcasters' community of practice, training, and formal educational provision. Courses and programmes on podcasting and digital media literacy can support sincere discussion about how podcasters believe authenticity shapes trust in podcasting, including how trust may be constructed or manipulated through podcasters' production choices that audiences do not always see.

Beyond academia, the study carries practical significance for podcasters, media practitioners, media organisations, production companies, funding bodies, media regulatory bodies, and policymakers. For practitioners, the findings highlight strategies for sustaining claims to authenticity by balancing audience engagement, autonomy, and institutional expectations. It offers insights into strategies that podcasters use to support perceived audience trust, relevance, connections, and cultural positioning. For industry stakeholders, the research provides insights into how podcasting models shape creative practices, offering implications for supporting sustainable podcast production. In the Irish context, the study deepens knowledge of how podcasters navigate authenticity within local traditions and globalised podcast markets, contributing to a richer understanding of podcasting as a site of cultural production. For policymakers, the study situates podcasting within the Republic of Ireland's broader media ecology, contributing to debates on diversity, independence, and the future of cultural production. This research informs policies on funding for independent media, promoting diversity in Ireland's cultural sector. The research has significance for regulatory institutions as well. It contributes to EU debates on digital cultural production and platform regulation (European Commission, 2022). Section 10.2.2, *Practical and Policy Implications* provides a comprehensive account of significance for policymakers and practitioners.

1.7 Outline and Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into three parts: from foundations to findings and synthesis. Part I, Research Foundations, comprises Chapters 1–4 and establishes context, rationale, objectives, and the theoretical and methodological frameworks. Part II, Findings and Analysis, covers

Chapters 5–8 and presents the evidence. Part III, Discussion and Conclusion, includes Chapters 9–10 and synthesises findings and contributions.

Following this introduction, the second chapter, Key Perspectives in Podcasting, provides an overview of the various ways podcasting has been theorised. In the first half, it sets the foundation for understanding podcasting as a media form by reviewing three interconnected perspectives (i.e., podcasting as a new medium and technology, podcasting as a remediation of broadcasting and radio, and podcasting as a cultural practice). The second half of the chapter outlines the political economy of media, situates platformisation within that tradition and its relevance to podcasting, and introduces cultural labour and production studies to address micro processes linked to authenticity. The closing develops a framework for understanding authenticity as a contextual construct that differs across genres.

Chapter 3, Authenticities in Podcasting, develops the conceptual and theoretical foundation for analysing authenticities in podcasting. It begins by outlining authenticity as a contested concept. The chapter reviews how authenticity is understood in media, cultural production, and podcasting. The chapter then presents theoretical frameworks that shape the research design. Bourdieu's theory of cultural and economic capital helps reveal significant variations in how authenticity is constructed across different production contexts. Self-determination theory is used to explore authenticity through motivations such as autonomy, competence, and connections. Parasocial relationship theory helps explain how hosts seek to create bonds with listeners that they believe reinforce authenticity. Finally, claims about authenticity are reviewed from a cultural context, showing how local bonds and postcolonial experiences shape podcasting practices within specific socio-cultural contexts. The chapter concludes by framing authenticity in podcasting as a performative, relational, and cultural construct that could be analysed by genre conventions, performance, and production choices.

Chapter 4 explains the methodological design of the thesis. It outlines the epistemological positioning of the research within qualitative inquiry. The interpretivist paradigm offers ontological advantages to the analysis of authenticities in podcasting, in large part because it allows the analysis of multiple realities coexisting and being shaped by individual, social, historical, professional, and cultural contexts. The chapter provides the rationale for adopting semi-structured interviews with podcasters working across independent, commercial, and

public service contexts. Thirty podcasters were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling to participate in semi-structured and in-depth face-to-face interviews. The chapter details the participant recruitment and data collection before describing the process of thematic analysis. Ethical considerations and issues of trustworthiness, reflexivity, and researcher positionality are addressed, ensuring transparency in the research process. Limitations of the study are acknowledged. The chapter establishes the methodological rigour that underpins the empirical analysis.

Moving to Part II, the empirical segment, four chapters analyse the findings and present authenticity in podcasting as a contextual and relational phenomenon shaped by personal motivations, relational work, creative autonomy, institutional models, genre conventions, and production decisions. Chapter 5 begins with personal motivations and self-presentation, where podcasters have the greatest influence over authenticity. Chapter 6 turns to contextual and relational dimensions, including audiences, guests, collaborators, communities, and cultural identities. Chapter 7 focuses on genre to show the varied and often contradictory manifestations of authenticities across genres and production choices. Chapter 8 examines creative autonomy, external challenges, and business and working models that shape practices and reduce individual influence.

Chapter 5 analyses how podcasters frame personal authenticity through self-expression, motivation, and the performance of multiple selves. It examines how podcasters explain authenticity as both a guiding principle and a performed practice shaped by audience expectations and industry pressures. Chapter 5 shows how podcasters perceive authenticity as an ongoing negotiation of personal ideals and professional constraints. The chapter highlights the contradictions involved in presenting the “true selves” while also curating a persona for listeners. It analyses the strategies podcasters use to balance authenticity, vulnerability, and professionalism. The chapter demystifies the notion that money-making is always an external and inherently negative motivation for authenticity in podcasting. The risks of oversharing and ethical concerns surrounding vulnerability are also considered. The final section of the chapter shows “excessive authenticity” as an interpretive concept developed from recurring concerns in podcasters’ accounts, which point to how notions of authenticity can be overvalued or misapplied.

Extending the focus from the personal level of authenticity, Chapter 6 analyses a relational model of authenticities. It provides a broader and more detailed analysis of authenticities and is correspondingly longer. It shows that podcasters understand authenticity as shaped through interactions with audiences, guests, collaborators, and cultural settings. It examines podcasters' accounts of contemporary parasocial relationships and perceived reciprocity between hosts and audiences. Then it moves on to consider how host and guest relations contribute to perceptions of authenticity, particularly through openness, trust, and vulnerability. The chapter also explores how team collaborations, shared values, and production processes contribute to or constrain claims around authenticities. The analysis is extended to cultural connections, with Irishness, cultural identity, community affiliation, and local belonging operating as contested markers of authenticity.

Having analysed mediated, personal, and cultural contexts, Chapter 7 examines how authenticity in podcasting is shaped by the genre conventions and creative decisions. The chapter shows that podcasters understand authenticity as context-dependent, guided by audience expectations, genre norms, and production constraints. The first half focuses on genre and the construction of authenticities in narrative non-fiction, chatcasts, and fiction podcasts. Within narrative non-fiction, participants associated authenticity with factual accuracy and emotional resonance. Podcasters working in conversational formats describe spontaneity, relatability, and informality as central to authenticity. In fiction podcasts, authenticity is linked to the immersive sound design and suspension of disbelief. The second half of the chapter analyses how podcasters' perceptions of authenticity shape editing, sound design, and recording practices. The section concludes that authenticities are negotiated at all levels of production.

The final empirical chapter, Chapter 8, explores how podcasters negotiate authenticity through their creative autonomy, the challenges they face in sustaining their work, and the processes of professionalisation that shape podcasting as a formalised industry. The chapter shows that authenticity is a negotiation with wider social, economic, and institutional conditions that influence podcasting practices framed as authentic. It first sets out the key dimensions of autonomy – namely creative agency, creative control, originality, creative freedom, and flexibility – that shape podcasting practices. The second part of the chapter explores external pressures on autonomy, including platformisation, commercialisation, and institutionalisation.

The final part of the chapter shows how podcasters respond to external challenges through professionalisation and competence building. In doing so, the analysis returns to the claim that simplistic views of authenticity are insufficient. The chapter concludes by analysing challenges of burnout, well-being, and precarity in podcasting.

Building on the empirical analysis, Part III of the thesis offers discussion and conclusions. Chapter 9 synthesises the empirical analysis in relation to the theoretical frameworks. It evaluates how podcasters' performances of authenticity intersect with debates on autonomy, relational labour, cultural identity, and the political economy of media. The chapter synthesises personal, relational, mediated, institutional, genre, and production contexts of authenticity, showing how these layers interact to shape podcasting practice. The discussion highlights that authenticity is both individually motivated and institutionally conditioned, drawing connections between the findings and broader scholarly debates. The discussion also extends to broader industry developments, including platformisation, commercialisation, and policy, highlighting how these factors shape authenticity work in podcasting.

The concluding chapter, Chapter 10, draws together the contributions of the thesis. The chapter outlines the theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions to podcast studies, the political economy of digital media, cultural production, relational labour, performance theory, cultural capital, parasocial theory, ethics in audio, production studies, genre analysis, and Irish media research. The chapter identifies practical implications for podcasters, audiences, industry stakeholders, and policymakers. Finally, it acknowledges limitations of the study and proposes directions for future research, including cross-national comparative studies, audience research, podcast analysis, and the role of audio visualisation and artificial intelligence in podcasting.

Chapter 2. Key Perspectives in Podcasting

2.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a review of key scholarly debates that underpin this study. It evaluates the foundational assumptions and perspectives that have emerged within podcast studies, specifically concerning podcasting's emergence, evolution, and the contemporary phenomenon of platformisation. It discusses key perspectives used to define podcasting, namely as a new medium and technology, as a remediation of broadcasting and radio, and as a cultural practice. In doing so, the chapter provides an overview of the strengths and inconsistencies of various perspectives from podcast scholarship. Chapter 2 provides the map of the field of podcasting and its key debates, while Chapter 3 provides the conceptual tools used for analysing authenticities. By mapping frameworks, the chapter situates podcast studies within broader debates in media and cultural research and prepares the ground for a more critical examination of authenticity in later chapters.

Additionally, the chapter explores the current state of the political economy of podcasting, examining how institutional and independent production models influence podcasting practices. The analysis examines how these frameworks shape professional norms and genre conventions, providing essential context for later discussions on authenticity. By highlighting legacy issues alongside recent developments, this chapter shows how podcasting has matured as a cultural practice, especially when compared with its earlier, more experimental forms. The chapter also shows that authenticity is a genre-dependent construct shaped by audience, production, cultural, and industrial conventions. The chapter's critical engagement with scholarly debates and historical contexts provides a foundation for understanding how authenticity is performed, perceived, and negotiated within podcast production, setting the stage for further exploration of authenticities in Chapter 3.

2.2 Emergence and Evolution of Podcasting and Podcast Studies

This section reviews three major theoretical frameworks that have shaped scholarship on podcasting, namely podcasting as a new medium and technology, podcasting as a remediation of broadcasting and radio, and podcasting as a cultural practice. The aim is to illustrate the

strengths and limitations of how each framework has conceptualised podcasting. For example, technological approaches have celebrated podcasting as innovative and democratic, yet they have often overlooked its wider sociocultural dimensions. Remediation frameworks have highlighted inherited conventions of radio but have offered only a partial account of podcasting's digital affordances. Cultural practice perspectives have foregrounded participation and relationality, providing a stronger basis for examining authenticity in podcasting.

2.2.1 Podcasting as a New Medium and Technology

Early in its history, podcasting was celebrated as a new technology that brought advantages to audio listeners and producers. Technology-focused approaches offered working definitions during podcasting's formative years and helped scholars describe a rapidly developing phenomenon. Their scope, however, remained limited for analysing practice, culture, and creative labour. The present subsection reviews these frameworks, acknowledges their early contribution, and explains their limits for analysing contemporary podcasting. Early discourses on podcasting in the mid-2000s reveal considerable optimism.

Early accounts frequently connected podcasting with democratisation, openness, innovation, and autonomy, ideals that later shaped claims about authenticity (Sullivan et al., 2020). Mosco's (2004) concept of the digital sublime helps frame early podcasting optimism as technological myth. Podcasting promised openness, community, and democratic access, yet such promises also concealed the material conditions of digital communication, including ownership, market power, platform control, and uneven visibility across producers, audiences, and national contexts. Early web culture, participatory media, and the open-source ethos of podcasting were contemporaneous and shared a common history and foundational technological infrastructure (Deuze, 2007; Heeremans, 2018; Leadbeater & Miller, 2004). These early ideals were later associated with authenticity because podcasting was linked with user-generated content, amateur production, and the rejection of corporate gatekeeping (Berry, 2018; Bonini, 2015a; Florini, 2015; Spinelli & Dann, 2019). A more detailed examination of authenticities in podcasting, including how they are understood and constructed, is provided in Chapter 3.

Podcasting's early technological identity rested on RSS distribution, MP3 audio files, and portable listening devices. RSS (Really Simple Syndication) allowed audio files to circulate outside centralised broadcast schedules and enabled listeners to subscribe to automatically updated programmes (Morris & Patterson, 2015). MP3 files made recorded audio easier to store, circulate, and download. Portable devices helped listeners integrate podcasts into everyday routines. These conditions supported audio production that seemed more open than broadcast radio. However, infrastructure alone does not explain how podcasting acquired cultural meanings of autonomy, intimacy, or authenticity.

Early scholarship on podcasting also used labels to describe podcasting's novelty and its challenge to radio. Berry (2006) described podcasting as a "disruptive technology", while Dearman and Galloway (2005) framed it as a "bypass technology" that could shift power away from broadcast institutions. These terms connect podcasting's technical form to wider claims about autonomy, democratisation, and control. Other scholarship described podcasting through portability, flexibility, time-shifting, self-scheduling, and on-demand audio distribution (Bonini, 2015b; Madsen, 2009; Morris & Patterson, 2015; Murray, 2009).

Despite its early usefulness, a technology-focused approach to studying podcasting is limited in its scope. It prioritises distribution and technical infrastructure while overlooking social, cultural, political, and experiential dimensions of production and consumption. Raymond Williams (1990) states that "new technology is itself a product of a particular social system" (p. 135) and stems from existing cultural needs. Technological approaches give limited attention to podcasting's relationship with radio, production cultures, genre conventions, political economy, and the lived experiences of podcasters. A sole emphasis on technology also cannot account for the authenticity and credibility that podcasters negotiate within the medium.

The following subsection focuses on how podcasting remediates radio, revealing further complexities in its relationship to broadcast forms.

2.2.2 Podcasting as a Remediation of Broadcasting and Radio

Podcasting inherits radio conventions while adding new affordances. Radio studies scholars describe podcasting as a remediation of existing media, technologies, and social and economic relations (Bottomley, 2015; Sullivan et al., 2020). Bolter and Grusin's (2000) theory of remediation suggests that new media gain cultural meaning by refashioning earlier media.

Applied to podcasting, the concept helps explain why the medium has often been discussed through its relationship with radio, broadcasting, and earlier audio practices. Podcasting scholars have used remediation to identify the semiotic similarities, shared conventions, and production expectations that connect podcasting with radio and broadcasting. Kerrigan et al.'s (2021) study of podcast production practices shows that podcasting is shaped by existing rules, media knowledge, resources, social norms, and practices drawn from radio, music, and media production. Menduni (2007) describes podcasting as a stage in the digitalisation of radio, while Sterne et al. (2008) characterise podcasting as a continuation of broadcasting. Podcasting and radio share several qualities, including flexible listening, voice-to-ear intimacy, sociality, topical content, and audience participation (Berry, 2016a; Bonini, 2015a; Edmond, 2015; Tobin & Guadagno, 2022). These parallels show that podcasting draws on established audio traditions while adapting them to digital infrastructures.

However, the analysis of podcasting as a remediated form of radio offers only a limited perspective. Unlike broadcast radio, podcasts are shaped by affordances such as on-demand listening, niche circulation, personalised address, flexible production models, and platform-based distribution. McHugh (2022) describes the radio presenter as a professional communicator, while the podcast host often invites listeners into a more personal mode of address. These differences affect how producers imagine listeners and how listeners might engage with audio content. Sharon and John (2019) argue that radio producers often address a broad and neutral audience, while podcasting allows hosts to address listeners through narrower cultural interests and community attachments. Berry (2022) advances the view that podcasting should be understood as a medium in its own right rather than only as a remediated form of radio. For this thesis, remediation provides useful background but does not serve as the main analytical framework. It helps explain inherited radio conventions, but it cannot fully account for how authenticities in podcasting are shaped by personal expression, professional standards, audience relationships, cultural connections, autonomy, platformisation, genre conventions, and production practices. The following section turns to the social and cultural framework of podcasting.

2.2.3 Podcasting as a Cultural Practice

Podcasting extends beyond technological and mediated frameworks to encompass sociocultural processes and participatory culture that shape its authenticity. Framing

podcasting as a cultural practice highlights sociocultural aspects such as informality, amateurism, lack of institutional regulations, and participatory cultures. Morris and Patterson (2015) define podcasting as "a specific set of practices and cultural meanings" (p. 221). Such analyses provide a sociocultural perspective that focuses on the human agents, the people who create, consume, and communicate through podcasts, thereby defining what podcasting is (Sharon, 2021). Participatory cultures are important because they emphasise openness, reciprocity, and collaboration. These practices make authenticity feel less like an individual claim and more like a shared and negotiated quality between podcasters and audiences, particularly within niche or community-driven contexts. The framework for studying podcasting as a cultural practice reveals that authenticity is shaped by social aspirations, informal production, and evolving media labour. While some scholars praise the podcast's affordances as markers of authenticity, others critique the ways in which corporate and commercial influences have reshaped the medium (Sullivan, 2019). These competing visions illustrate how personal expression and informal production practices coexist with market pressures, prompting critical questions about the nature of authenticity in podcasting. Podcast studies acknowledge cultural practices, yet many accounts give limited attention to podcasters and their production work.

Podcasting has relatively low entry barriers, particularly vis-à-vis other forms of media production such as audiovisual media in linear and interactive formats. Independent podcasters enjoy the convenience of publishing with relatively fewer institutional constraints due to their amateur character (Berry, 2020; McHugh, 2022). Llinares et al. (2018) similarly describe podcasting as a space "where traditional rules around language, content, duration and structural conventions are bent if not completely broken" (p. 5). The absence of institutional regulations and traditional gatekeepers prior to platformisation and institutionalisation has enabled podcasters to create content in a personalised and informal style. Spinelli and Dann (2019) observe that the informal characteristic of podcasting allowed the creation of new formats "cheaply, rapidly, and without specialist knowledge" (p. 208). Likewise, Berry (2016b) highlights listeners' experiences and sociocultural formations, such as participatory cultures and relational labour, as defining features of podcasting.

Authenticity in podcasting can be analysed through frameworks such as participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006), relational labour (Baym, 2015), and aspirational labour (Kuehn & Corrigan, 2013). Participatory culture refers to the ways audiences actively engage, create, and share

content within media communities (Jenkins, 2009). Relational labour refers to the ongoing communicative and emotional work creators invest in building and maintaining personas and social and emotional connections with audiences across different platforms (Baym, 2018). Podcasting enables listeners to become active producers (Friedman, 2005), aligning with the broader rise of *Pro-Ams*. According to Leadbeater and Miller (2004), Pro-Ams, or professional–amateur creators, are imaginative, committed, and well-connected amateurs who follow professional standards while creating user-generated content outside legacy media. The Pro-Am discussion predates podcasting and was coined in relation to other forms of cultural production, which aligns with Jenkins's (2006) account of participatory culture, which he defined as "relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement" (Jenkins, 2009, p. 5). The amateur production practices in podcasting are also linked to the concept of 'hope labour' or aspirational labour, where individuals create content on social media with the expectation of future opportunities (Kuehn & Corrigan, 2013). Markman and Sawyer (2014) studied the motivations of independent podcasters and found that producing podcasts for niche communities is a key motivation. This view aligns with theories of 'produsage', which emphasises the continual refinement of media content through audience feedback in participatory cultures (Bruns, 2008). These produsage communities offer podcasters opportunities to aim for unattended segments of the audience (Markman & Sawyer, 2014).

There has been increased attention by podcast scholars to the production practices of podcasting. Recent examples include *Podcast or Perish* (2024) and *Podcast Studies: Practice into Theory* (2025), which examine podcasting practices within communication scholarship. While worthy, recent attention concentrates on scholarly podcasting undertaken by podcast scholars and does not centre on podcasters or how they make, circulate, and promote their podcasts. The present study addresses this gap by examining podcast production culture and the work of producers creating for non-scholarly goals.

In summary, the cultural practice approach is relevant for this research because it highlights how podcasting's authenticity is shaped through sociocultural processes and relational practices rather than reducing it to purely technical or institutional dimensions. This perspective provides the necessary foundation to understand how authenticity in podcasting is performed and perceived before turning to the economic and institutional structures that shape it. The next section examines the political economy of podcasting, highlighting how platformisation,

commercialisation, professionalisation, and institutionalisation further complicate the technical, mediated, social, cultural, and sonic ideals associated with podcasting's authenticity.

2.3 Political Economy of Podcasting and the Platformisation of Cultural Production

The political economy of media (PEM) provides a framework for analysing how economic and political power shape production, distribution, and consumption. Murdock and Golding (1973) argue that mass media operate as industrial and commercial organisations that produce and distribute commodities. Mosco (1996) defines the political economy of communication as the study of social and power relations that shape the production, distribution, and consumption of communication resources. PEM is relevant to podcasting because podcasts are produced within material conditions that shape access, visibility, sustainability, and autonomy. Political economy has also been used to analyse audio media, including radio and podcasting (Boling, 2019; Hendy, 2000; Sperber, 2021). In podcasting, a political economy perspective helps explain how power imbalances among producers, platforms, advertisers, and institutions affect independent creators. This is directly relevant to authenticity because podcasters' claims to openness, independence, and creative control are shaped by the conditions under which they produce and circulate their work. While podcasting initially appeared to offer an open and accessible medium for audio production and distribution, the rise of dominant platforms has introduced new forms of influence, control, and gatekeeping. The political economy of digital platforms helps analyse power relations across production, distribution, and consumption. Platformisation provides the clearer lens for this study because it is suited to podcasting's platform infrastructures.

Platformisation refers to the growing dominance of major digital platforms in the production, circulation, and consumption of culture. Nieborg and Poell (2018) emphasise that platforms shape market structures, govern cultural production[11], and transform the infrastructure of cultural production through data-oriented practices. In podcasting, platformisation encompasses production companies, hosting services, distribution apps, advertising networks, and algorithms. As podcasting becomes more integrated with digital technologies and subject

[11] Rokhani (2024) described the key archetypes of the cultural production: (i) produced with a limited number of personnel; (ii) personnel with similar hobbies; (iii) activeness and consistency in production; (iv) simple talent, minimal and simple equipment; and (v) collaborative production.

to platform policies, the notion of authenticity is being reshaped by economic and political considerations. Gillespie's (2010) account of platform politics extends this framework by showing that platforms present themselves as open intermediaries while actively shaping participation. The term platform carries technical, economic, political, and cultural meanings. For podcasters, these meanings matter because hosting services, apps, algorithms, monetisation rules, and terms of service shape visibility, access, revenue, RSS portability, and creative autonomy.

The shift toward platform dominance is visible in the role of large technology firms and podcast-specific intermediaries, including Spotify, Apple, YouTube, Acast and Libsyn. Platformisation can expand podcasting's professional horizons while constraining the autonomy of smaller, independent, and grassroots creators. Martín-Morán and Martín Nieto (2022) argue that multimedia companies are interested in podcasts because they can attract sizeable audiences. The sense of authenticity once associated with amateur and low-cost production is now challenged by promotional strategies, audience targets, platform visibility, and professional production values. Wade Morris (2021) cautions that Apple and Spotify increasingly operate as primary distribution channels, making discoverability both a technological and cultural obstacle for podcasters. Institutional media players, including public broadcasters, commercial networks, and streaming services, have also adopted podcast formats, bringing professional resources while intensifying market logic (Bonini Baldini et al., 2021).

Small and peripheral media market scholarship clarifies how scale shapes podcasting's platform conditions in Ireland. Leotta (2014) shows that smaller screen industries can enter global production circuits while remaining marked by structural imbalance. Chalaby (2016) explains how global formats travel through adaptation to local markets. Lobato (2019) and Szczepanik et al. (2020) extend this argument to digital distribution, where territorial markets, platform visibility, national borders, centre-periphery relations, and differences in scale continue to matter.

The political economy's focus on macro issues, such as ownership, regulation, and capital flows, is useful to analyse systemic forces in podcasting. However, it can also overlook nuanced creative practices at the micro level (Banks et al., 2015). Researchers increasingly call for integrated approaches that unite PEM with production studies, cultural studies, and ethnographic methods. Paterson et al. (2016) argue that research on media production should

examine technologies, grassroots production, collaboration, social media, and production tools. The analysis of authenticities among podcasters addresses these concerns by examining micro-level aspects of cultural production. Political economy and cultural labour together support an analysis that moves between structural conditions and everyday production practices.

The current landscape of podcasting reflects a broader trend in cultural labour towards the entrepreneurial creator. Podcast hosts often manage production, promotion, audience engagement, and brand-building while trying to sustain an authentic impression. Cultural labour in podcasting has parallels with the music industry, where grassroots artists must manage public relations, distribution, and visibility while working within market constraints. Banks et al. (2015) suggest that production studies can provide valuable insights into the changing nature of cultural work in the digital age. Rauh (2018) also argues that critical media industries studies and production studies can benefit from research about grassroots cultural production. Such analysis supports this thesis by showing how personal storytelling, perceived listener relationships, and creative labour operate within broader market and platform constraints (Wang, 2022).

The current study analyses podcast production across macro and micro levels to examine how platformisation, commercialisation, professionalisation, and institutionalisation shape authenticities in Irish podcasting. Investigating Irish podcasters through a political economy lens highlights how local cultural aspirations interact with global platform structures and institutional power. The study connects systemic constraints with podcasters' experiences of creative control, audience relationships, cultural identity, genre expectations, and production practice. Previous research has not sufficiently examined how these forces complicate podcasting's promises of openness and authenticity. By examining podcasting as platformised cultural production, this research offers insight into how political and economic forces shape podcasters' creative practices and identities. The following section examines how different genres, format conventions, and cultural expectations shape authenticities in podcasting.

2.4 Genre Conventions in Podcasting

This section develops a framework for understanding authenticities as contextual constructs that differ across podcast genres. It defines genre as a set of socially constructed conventions that shape production and reception. It then explains how podcast genres organise expectations

about voice, evidence, intimacy, realism, spontaneity, and production style. These expectations matter because they influence how podcasters make production decisions and how they believe authenticities become recognisable within different genres. The section then outlines the three genre categories used in this study, discusses the relationship between genre and format, and identifies the research gap addressed by the thesis.

Genres are historically rooted in social action, communicative purpose, and shared conventions (Chandler, 1997; Miller, 1984; Swales, 1990). Genres are shaped by industry norms, platformisation, audience expectations, and cultural aspects (Amit-Danhi & Shifman, 2018). In this thesis, genre refers to conventions and expectations shared by producers, audiences, platforms, and publishers that guide how media content is produced, organised, and interpreted (Brackett, 2016; Toynbee, 2000). Genre conventions, often contested and continually negotiated, shape podcasters' practices by setting and challenging expectations among audiences and within the industry. Genre is also negotiated rather than fixed (Van et al., 2025). They provide both constraints and opportunities for podcasters to produce content while adhering to or subverting conventions. Early case studies of podcasts suggest that different podcast genres cultivate authenticity through distinct techniques, and according to McGregor (2022), the role and meaning of authenticity vary depending on podcast genres.

In podcasting, genres are organised through content type, presentation style, thematic category, and niche focus. Some podcasts are understood through content type, such as fiction or narrative non-fiction. Others are recognised through format or style, such as conversational, interview, solo conversational, panel conversational, comedy, or news podcasts. The distinction between genre and format is discussed later in the section. For this research, I adopt three main genre categories, namely conversations, narrative non-fiction, and fiction, following Berry (2020) and McHugh (2022). These categories provide a clear basis for analysing how genre conventions shape authenticity markers and production norms across different podcasts.

To connect genre theory to the empirical analysis, this thesis treats genre as an analytical lens rather than a classification exercise. Mittell (2001) frames genre as a cultural category shaped through repeated practices and expectations. Negus (1999) also argues that genre conventions support the routinisation and institutionalisation of cultural production. For podcasting, this means that authenticity is analysed through genre-specific expectations about voice, evidence, realism, intimacy, and production style. Hilmes and Bottomley (2024) further show that audience interests, aesthetic expectations, and norms of vocal recording shape how audio

genres are recognised. These perspectives inform the analysis of narrative non-fiction, conversational, and fiction podcasts in Chapter 7. They help explain why factual accuracy may support authenticity in journalism podcasts, why spontaneity may matter in conversational formats, and why believable performance and suspension of disbelief shape authenticity in fiction podcasts.

Authenticities can vary according to genre conventions. Conventional standards and expectations of authenticity and immediacy in fiction and non-fiction podcasting often shape producers' beliefs about what constitutes successful content (Wincott & Preger, 2024). Fiction podcasts (e.g., audio dramas) may deploy realism in sound design and naturalistic dialogue to make scripted content feel authentic. In fiction podcasts, authenticity depends less on factual truth and more on narrative coherence, believable performance, and suspension of disbelief, where listeners accept the fictional world as authentic within the terms of the genre (Karhulahti, 2012). Narrative non-fiction and journalism podcasts often build authenticity through transparency, reportage, recorded evidence, field interviews, and moments of uncertainty in the story (Fletcher, 2020). Conversational, comedy, and interview podcasts may signal authenticity through informality, improvisation, vulnerability, disclosure, and spontaneous interaction. Meserko's (2015a) analysis of *Marc Maron's WTF podcast* found that the long-form, improvisational conventions allowed for unusually candid conversations where hosts and guests could "reveal themselves in ways previously unseen publicly" in legacy media (p. 797). Previous scholarship on authenticity in the comedy genre has predominantly focused on US and UK podcasts (Maloney Yorganci & McMurtry, 2024; Meserko, 2015a, 2015b; Symons, 2016). Therefore, this study explores Irish comedy podcasters to address the gap.

Journalism podcasts employ storytelling techniques that shape notions of authenticity in the genre. These podcasts are characterised by distinctive features such as personal storytelling, mediated subjectivity, storytelling experimentation, intimacy, self-disclosure, and journalistic norms (Bird, 2025; Lindgren, 2016, 2023; Nah, 2022). Moreover, independent news podcasters cultivate audience trust by incorporating first-person narratives and emphasising authenticity, empathy, and emotional engagement (Jorgensen, 2021b). Ultimately, journalism podcasts establish authenticity through trustworthiness, achieved via self-disclosure, subjectivity, performances of friendliness, and interactive engagement with listeners both online and offline (Beckett & Deuze, 2016; Bird, 2025). Other similar podcasts, such as true crime podcasts, provide listeners with insight into journalists' moral dilemmas and subjective storytelling,

aligning with participatory culture in the digital media landscape (Dowling & Miller, 2019). These conventions show that podcast journalism often constructs authenticity through trustworthiness, process, voice, and selected forms of disclosure.

Claims of authenticity in journalism podcasting are often criticised for being perceived as performative. News podcasts may capitalise on audience perceptions of media performers' authenticity through self-disclosure and message acceptance (Nah, 2022). For instance, conservative news podcasts in America portray mainstream journalism as a biased opponent of a "silent conservative majority" (Calhoun, 2019; Funk et al., 2023). Recent podcast scholarship (e.g., Bird, 2025) acknowledges that journalism podcasts attempt to "manufacture" authenticity through careful and selective decisions about revealing certain personas and processes while concealing other elements. This critique aligns with Serazio's (2023) work, which describes the commodification and curated appearances of authenticity by producers, products, and platforms as "authenticity industries". MacCannell's (1973) concept of 'staged authenticity' is also useful here because it shows how apparently direct access to a more private self may itself be shaped through performance, selection, and arrangement. For podcasting, this helps explain how disclosure, informality, and production transparency may appear authentic while remaining carefully selected and mediated by producers.

In podcasting, genres and formats are often used interchangeably, but they are different concepts. Podcast scholars define genre as "medium content" and format as "medium grammar" (Berg, 2021a, p. 116). In this context, format can be understood as the technique of presentation, whereas genre refers to the content presented. Sterne (2012) argues that format denotes a whole range of decisions that affect the look, feel, experience, and workings of a medium. Formats also reflect media production, distribution, consumption, aesthetics, economic motives, and market positions (Belackova et al., 2011; Volmar, 2017). The hybridity of genres and formats, as well as the affordability of (re)publishing any content as a podcast, poses challenges in making a systematic differentiation between podcast genres and formats (Sharon, 2021). McHugh (2022) argues that podcast tags and categories are unstable, since one person's interview could be another person's talk show, and narrative non-fiction could be investigative journalism for others. The distinction remains useful because this thesis examines how both genre conventions and production formats shape authenticities in podcasting.

There is a need to address underexplored areas, such as differences in genre conventions and the influence of genres on authenticity construction. Berg (2021b) highlights the need to

identify national differences in podcast production across different genres. Likewise, Berry (2018) argues that podcasts have developed distinctive medium identities, which warrant genre-specific analysis of practice. Drew (2017) calls for more studies on how genre conventions in production shape content and authenticity, revealing a gap in genre-specific perspectives beyond podcast consumption. Moreover, genre conventions and expectations may vary depending on podcasters' institutional or working frameworks. Therefore, a qualitative inquiry into genre conventions is needed to analyse how genre conventions and production formats shape authenticities. Past research has shown less interest in the effects of genre on production practices and podcasters' understanding of authenticity. This research addresses this gap by examining how podcast genre conventions, expectations, and limitations shape podcasters' production practices and perceptions of authenticities.

2.5 Conclusion

Chapter 2 contextualises podcasting through its technological emergence, remediation, cultural evolution, and transformation into a professionalised medium that is shaped by platformisation, political economy, podcast production, professional norms, and genre conventions. This helps to explain how various perspectives inform the understanding of authenticity in the next chapters. The discussion illustrated how early technological optimism, characterised by ideals of openness and autonomy, set the stage for discourses of authenticity. Through examining remediation theory, the chapter assessed podcasting's relationship to traditional radio broadcasting, highlighting how new media inherit but also reconstruct legacy media conventions. By addressing podcasting as a cultural practice, the analysis uncovered the role of amateurism, informality, and participatory cultures in shaping podcasters' approaches to authenticity. However, it also revealed limitations inherent in technologically deterministic perspectives. This gap emphasises the necessity of integrating social, cultural, political, and experiential dimensions to fully comprehend podcasting's development and practices. Further, the chapter critically evaluated the implications of podcasting's political economy, particularly platformisation and cultural labour, noting how these lenses are useful for examining podcasters' cultural practices both at micro and macro levels.

Scholars in the political economy of the cultural industries call for studies in diverse cultural contexts to avoid over-generalising from a narrow set of cases (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). There is a need to integrate perspectives from field theory and cultural production with analyses of

political economy. Insights from podcast studies provide a deeper understanding of decision-making processes within various podcast genres, highlighting the importance of genre conventions, listener expectations, and industrial norms in influencing performances of authenticity. The chapter has explored how podcast genres influence podcasters' understanding and constructions of authenticity by examining the interrelation between genre conventions, production practices, and audience expectations. Drawing on key works on genre, this review highlighted that genres are socially constructed categories shaped by shared conventions, communicative purposes, and cultural contexts. The analysis showed that different podcast genres offer distinct approaches to constructing and performing authenticity. Formats complement genre as an analytical lens and are especially useful for podcasting, given the breadth of practice and the wide variance among cultural texts. The chapter also showed key tensions in the production of podcast genres, including the pressures of platformisation, audience expectations, and the commodification of authenticity.

Building on this chapter's account of how podcasting technology, practice, political economy, and genre shape authenticities, the next chapter examines the deeper philosophical foundations of authenticity and positions it within broader media and cultural production contexts. Chapter 3 provides a wide-ranging perspective for understanding the contextual description of authenticities in podcasting.

Chapter 3. Authenticities in Podcasting

> The most misleading term in cultural theory is… 'authenticity'.
>
> Simon Frith (1987, as cited in Moore, 1998, p. 5)

3.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews how authenticity can be conceptualised in philosophical, production, theoretical, relational, and cultural contexts. It synthesises philosophical and sociological frameworks of authenticity, applying them to personal motivations, professionalisation (competence, autonomy), and relational contexts (parasocial, culture). The chapter maps authenticity's philosophical, media, and podcast-specific dimensions. This aligns with the study aim to examine Irish podcasters' negotiations of authenticity amid cultural and structural pressures. The review supports the study design and builds the case for the research questions. The chapter proceeds to media production (3.2), podcast authenticities (3.3), theoretical frameworks (3.4), and cultural contexts (3.5), concluding with gaps justifying the research questions (3.6).

Contemporary notions of authenticity are based on its early foundations laid out by classic theologians and philosophers, such as Socrates and Augustine. Western literature has extensively explored sincerity, authenticity, and their inherent contradictions. Celebrated thinkers, from early modern philosophers to existentialists, have discussed the ideals and moral dilemmas of authenticity. Rousseau (1762/2016) described authenticity as a central concern in modern thought. He emphasised the role of inner sentiment and the natural self against societal corruption (Taylor, 1992). Likewise, Kierkegaard (1846/1941) emphasised 'infinite passion' and inwardness to achieve the authentic self. Goffman's (1959) performance model supports a social reading of authenticity and self-presentation. Likewise, Taylor (1992) argued that authentic identity is not simply about being true to oneself but also about being true to other people through collaboration.

Trilling's *Sincerity and Authenticity* serves as a key work on authenticity in modern literature. Trilling (1972) defines authenticity as an essential value and moral pursuit of "staying true to oneself" (p. 11). Likewise, Anton (2001), in his work *Selfhood and Authenticity*, describes authenticity as a moral ideal that should be pursued to achieve self-fulfilment, self-realisation,

and personal development. Taylor (2014) notes that artists gain 'authenticity of positionality' by refusing to "sell out" to commercial interests. The goal of authenticity, according to Grossberg (1992), is to establish a sense of belonging in the audience through the presentation of counterculture. Recent studies (e.g., Patry-Beaudoin et al., 2025) reject romanticised ideas of authenticity as a fixed or essential value (innate essence, per Trilling, 1972). Likewise, Thompson and Kumar (2022) view authenticity as culturally contested meanings rather than essential attributes. It is useful to understand how these contested ideas of authenticity are studied in media and cultural production.

An academic enquiry into authenticity is theoretically complex, given the various research contexts and definitions associated with the term. Hilmes and Bottomley (2024) criticised bold claims about podcasting's authenticity, particularly in the literature from 2010–2020, that equated this period with the golden age of podcasting. Despite this theoretical difficulty, authenticity as a construct is valuable for analysing an object, practice, or person's qualities within its communicative context that reflects society or culture at large (Donison, 2024). Meserko (2014) claims that podcasts provide greater opportunities to display an authentic, vulnerable, and private self as compared with other forms of media. The challenge to be authentic is not merely on the individual but on "interpersonal, institutional, and even cultural levels" (Ryan & Ryan, 2019, p. 108). Constructing authenticity can be challenging for podcasters, and they often struggle with issues such as autonomy, independence, control, creative freedom, economic viability, competence, and engagement. Understanding how podcasters navigate these challenges is important because authenticity is linked to the true expressions of shared identity, aspirations, emotions, and experiences through feelings, thoughts, relations, and non-mediated and spontaneous behaviour (Dubrofsky & Wood, 2014; Grossberg, 1992; van Leeuwen, 2001).

3.2 Authenticity in Media and Cultural Production

Twentieth-century scholarship in cultural production has devoted substantial effort to deconstructing the concept of "authenticity" in cultural output. From Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935/2018) to John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972), scholars viewed authenticity as a means of validating privilege and preserving value. Benjamin (1935/2018) critiqued the lack of authenticity inherent in the mass production of artistic works. However, cultural products are not inherently authentic. As Wright (2022)

argues, “authenticity is not, nor could ever be, an inherent property of a product. Rather, it is a claim made on behalf of a product by an agent” (p. 19). According to Moore (2002), “authenticity is understood as a shared notion between creators and users based on the historicised interpretations made within the framework of a culture in which artists are listened to” (p. 10). Therefore, authenticity is interpreted and negotiated within a particular culture.

Since the mid-2010s, scholarship has intensified around authenticity across cultural products, shaped by the rise of platformised creator economies, renewed concerns about trust in political communication on social media, and advances in generative AI that can simulate traditional markers of authenticity. Scholars have studied authenticity across domains such as art (Newman & Bloom, 2012), AI-generated art (Salas Espasa & Camacho, 2025), brands (Moulard et al., 2021), advertising (Becker et al., 2019), public relations (Molleda, 2010), popular music (Ferguson & Thanyodom, 2024; Speers, 2017), reality television (Allen & Mendick, 2013), films (Singh, 2014), and influencer culture (Audrezet et al., 2020). Related work (e.g., Enli, 2025; Luebke & Steffan, 2025) shows how politicians’ self-presentation on social media shapes perceived authenticity and trust building, and how authenticity functions in rebuilding media confidence across democracies (Valgarðsson et al., 2025). Findings on news and information credibility in new media environments indicate similar trust dynamics (Bai, 2025). Likewise, Berry (2025) cautions that traditional markers of authenticity may become unreliable when AI systems can convincingly simulate them. Scholars (e.g., Schlegel et al., 2025; Smith & Du, 2025; Zogaj et al., 2024) have also questioned the centrality of authenticity in contemporary cultural practices.

The production of authentic identity and voice is described as “staging” in celebrity studies (Hou, 2018). Celebrities’ interaction with their followers on social media enables them to create an image of commonality (Abidin, 2015). By appropriating and mobilising intimacies, influencers create an impression of “perceived interconnectedness” with their followers (Abidin, 2015). Likewise, Dubrofsky (2016) analysed Trump’s persona on television and argued that Trump performed authenticity through curated displays of unfiltered self-expression. Contemporaneous podcast commentary, such as Slate’s *Trumpcast*, examined similar performative claims in an audio format, offering a parallel lens on mediated authenticity (Enli, 2015). Higgins (2019) extends this to celebrity politics, framing Trump’s “tell it like it is” style as mediated authenticity, relying on spontaneity, passion, and unscripted markers to counter intellectualism and build popular appeal (Enli, 2015).

Insights from art, celebrity, branding, and influencer research help explain how authenticity operates in podcasting when read through genre and performance. Authenticity is constructed through performance, style, and disclosure, which aligns with Goffman's (1959) argument that we are always performing versions of ourselves. In effect, performance replaces a single 'true self' with multiple 'true selves'. Under the same logic, podcasting is better understood in terms of authenticities, with genre expectations generating distinct performative authenticities for each genre. Goffman's account relates to impression management, which involves presenting a particular image and identity in public. Performance of self and impression management are carried out to achieve certain social objectives. Cultural producers also face the "creator's dilemma" of balancing authenticity with financial success (Hofstetter & Gollnhofer, 2024). Brown et al. (2003) suggest authenticity can help create a genuine identity for the producer and intensify the efficacy of communication among users. Media industries scholarship links claims of authenticity to value and legitimacy across platforms (Brown et al., 2003; Morhart et al., 2015). Such claims are particularly relevant to genres (e.g., comedy and drama) where performance and disclosure operate as key markers of authenticity.

Illouz's (2007) account of emotional capitalism extends this discussion by showing how emotional honesty, intimacy, and self-expression may acquire economic value within contemporary cultural life. This perspective is relevant to podcasting because authenticity is often communicated through personal disclosure, vulnerability, and conversational openness. These qualities may support trust and connection, but they can also become marketable resources when podcasters use intimacy to sustain audiences, funding, visibility, and commercial viability. Marwick and boyd's (2011) account of micro-celebrity helps clarify this as performed intimacy, where creators reveal selected personal information to produce closeness while managing a public persona. In podcasting, this makes intimacy a curated practice rather than a simple expression of private feeling.

Authenticity in radio presenters, hosts, DJs, and television hosts is related to ordinariness and everydayness (Bennett, 2011; Tolson, 2006). Stiernstedt (2014) found that authenticity is performed on the radio through a presentation that is personal, direct, and informal, revealing everyday trivialities and anecdotes from private life. Political media shows how these cues travel across genres and platforms (Higgins, 2019). Platformed intimacy can normalise disclosure while deepening parasocial connection, which shapes how audiences read authenticity cues. Cues identified in other media translate into audio through seriality, intimacy,

and community interaction, which shape how cultural producers recognise or contest authentic claims in podcasts.

Authenticity in this thesis refers to 'contextual' authenticity, a socially and culturally agreed construct that extends beyond an artist's identity, place, and source (Peterson, 2013). Authentic identities are constructed and manifested in the relationships between celebrity brands and their users (Ilicic & Webster, 2016). Meserko (2015a) suggests that authenticity is "inwardly evoked and outwardly observed" (p. 801). In other words, perceptions of authenticity or inauthenticity may vary from one user to another (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016; Rose & Wood, 2005).

Research on authenticity in music discourse provides a useful framework to study various dimensions of authenticities in podcasts. The first dimension deals with the artist's integrity of being true to oneself (Armstrong, 2004). Moore (2002) classifies this as first-person authenticity, which looks at the individuality and the self-creation of the artists as the fundamental value for authentication. According to Moore, the primary focus is on "who" is being authenticated rather than "what" is being authenticated. First-person authenticity is not merely embodied in the object, subject matter, or artefact but in the artist's perception and performativity of their true self (see Chapter 5 for detailed analysis). A second form of authenticity lies in how artists legitimise their proximity and relation to the craft's originality in terms of performance, production, genre, and subject matter. Moore (2002) identified this as authenticity of execution or third-person authenticity. The third form associates authenticity with the local allegiances and territorial identities of the artists (Armstrong, 2004). Second-person authenticity, or authenticity of experience, occurs when the artist creates an impression that the listener's experience of life is being validated (Moore, 2002, p. 220).

Peterson's (2005) account further supports this plural approach by showing that authenticity is culturally constructed and negotiated within specific genre conventions and audience expectations, rather than being an inherent property of cultural objects. Vannini and Williams (2009) similarly argue for treating authenticity as multiple and context-dependent. They discuss different ways authenticity is performed and evaluated, including sincerity (linked to perceived honesty or self-consistency), iconic authenticity (linked to recognisable stylistic or genre conventions), and indexical authenticity (linked to perceived connections to origins, experience, or material traces). These distinctions are useful for this thesis because they provide a framework for examining how authenticity operates across different dimensions of

podcasting practice. They also explain why studying authenticities, rather than a singular notion of authenticity, is analytically important.

The thesis organises authenticities as related analytical categories. Personal authenticities concern self-presentation, motivation, vulnerability, self-congruence, and ethical limits. Relational and cultural authenticities concern trust, intimacy, recognition, community, and Irishness. Genre and production authenticities concern factual care, emotional truth, sound, editing, craft, and genre conventions. Field and structural authenticities concern autonomy, capital, platformisation, commercialisation, institutional position, and professionalisation. These categories help analyse where participants' accounts extend, refine, or differ from existing scholarly understandings of authenticity. They also connect everyday production choices with the wider field conditions that shape what can be claimed, recognised, or challenged as authentic in Irish podcasting.

As a socially constructed phenomenon, authenticity is observed through interactions between content creators and users (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). This interaction enables users to be co-creators of authenticity (Leigh et al., 2006; Rose & Wood, 2005). By comparing on-air and offline behaviour and interactions of content creators, the audience discovers authenticity (Cunningham & Craig, 2017). Authenticity can also encompass how social media users distinguish a creator from competitors on the basis of realness, uniqueness, scarcity, longevity, and longitudinal consistency (Moulard et al., 2016). Nunes et al. (2021) offer a useful bridge between marketing and media accounts by defining authenticity as a consumer assessment shaped by accuracy, connectedness, integrity, legitimacy, originality, and proficiency. Their framework helps specify how audiences may judge podcasters' autonomy, competence, cultural fit, and creative distinctiveness. Digital creators report creator burnout and mental health strain that complicate authentic presentation over time (Lorenz, 2021). The increasing use of AI-generated content and synthetic voices reveals manufactured or manipulative forms of authenticity via parasocial relationships (Berry, 2025).

The study uses authenticities as an analytical lens to explain how podcasters make, circulate, and promote their work within a platform-shaped media environment. The next section focuses on the podcast-specific claims of authenticities.

3.3 Authenticities in Podcasting

Authenticity is central to podcasting, serving as an aspirational ideal and guiding principle for podcasters. It is embedded in their thoughts and practices. In synthesising the diverse claims about authenticity within podcast studies, prior research reveals a multifaceted construct that encompasses emotional, stylistic, ethical, relational, and technical dimensions. Understanding authenticity is vital because it connects production choices, genre conventions, and audience relations to trust, legitimacy, and value in podcasting. It anchors the thesis by providing a framework to analyse how podcasters make, perform, and evaluate claims to authenticity across working models in the Irish context. The authenticity of a podcaster is determined by the consistency of their creative practices and performances (Donison, 2024). However, there is a lack of evidence on how one can differentiate an 'authentic self' from an 'inauthentic self'. This performative aspect has not received enough attention from podcast studies researchers.

According to McHugh (2022), authenticity is presented as a central pillar in podcasting. Sullivan (2018) observes that podcasters emphasise authenticity through the concepts of self-expression, self-exploration, and self-branding. The aspiration to be considered authentic is rooted in the host's ability to self-evaluate. For Meserko (2014), it is the host's unrestrained voice and personalised expression that makes them relatable to their listeners. Meserko claimed that the informal, dynamic, and liberating characteristics of podcasts allow podcasters to communicate more authentic selfhood as compared to regulated radio. Likewise, Nadora (2019) observed authenticity based on "how the hosts naturally interact with and react to the content" (p. 17). Authentic performances consist of performative acts viewed as authentic by both listeners and podcasters simultaneously. Mottram (2016) examined the vocal aspects of podcasting and found that "achieving 'authenticity' in podcasting signifies hosting the podcast as oneself, without any aspect of one's personality and presentation style, including one's voice, being 'put on for the recording device'" (p. 53).

Recent research on journalism podcasts highlights ethical negotiations in authenticity. For instance, Wang et al. (2025) highlight that podcasters struggle to redefine journalistic norms by adopting a more personal and emotional storytelling approach. This finding resonates with global concerns about maintaining credibility in audio journalism. Maloney Yorganci and McMurtry (2024) echo this, noting that podcast hosts who cultivate a "truth-teller" persona could inadvertently lend credence to conspiracy theories or hate speech under the guise of being

real or anti-establishment. Addressing these issues will fill a gap in understanding the performative and discursive dimensions of authenticity in mediated storytelling, ensuring that authenticity is examined not only as a personal or commercial aspect but also as a practice with professional and social implications.

Authenticity is also linked with careful, deliberately unpolished editing and narrative storytelling, which manufactures a sense of authenticity in podcasts, for example, retaining pauses, breaths, and room tone (Sharon & John, 2024b). Likewise, Meserko (2014) suggests that authenticity is constructed through a seemingly transparent self-revelation by the podcast hosts and guests. It is also through the development of real-time authentic selfhood that listeners and hosts are able to form relationships by "acting together" to diminish shared imperfections (Meserko, 2014, p. 463). By contrast, Schlütz and Hedder (2021) described this as performative, highlighting biases in Western comedians that overlook global variations. Skoglund (2022) found that being honest about imperfections, using humour, cheerfulness, passion, and conversing about self-improvement are recurring parts of how authenticity is constructed in podcasts. Few studies trace planning, scripting, editing, and review as ongoing authenticity work. This study addresses how podcasters' choices shape authenticities and argues that these choices are genre-dependent (as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.4).

There are considerable differences in how media studies and marketing fields conceptualise and critique authenticity in podcasting. Media studies scholars are more prone to a critical view of promotional cultures and their effects in society, including how appeals to authenticity organise attention and power. On the other hand, marketing tends to provide a much more instrumental vision of authenticity and frames it as a desirable quality associated with higher listenership, brand loyalty, and financial benefits (and is much less critical of the negative aspects of promotionalism). The study brings these two fields together while highlighting their differences. The study argues that a critical account is needed to assess power, labour, and institutional constraints, along with how perceived authenticity links to trust, commercial success, and engagement.

The chapter now discusses three frameworks that help analyse authenticities.

3.4 Theoretical Contexts for Examining Authenticity in Podcasting

The section reviews three frameworks of cultural production and how they can help understand authenticities in podcasting. The first framework reviews the relevance of Bourdieu's field theory in examining podcasters' approach to authenticity through cultural capital. Secondly, I show how self-determination theory deals with motivations and autonomy. The final subsection discusses the role of parasocial relations in co-constructing authenticity. The three theoretical lenses guide the analysis of empirical data in later chapters.

3.4.1 Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Capital

Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production provides a valuable framework for understanding the dynamics of power, capital (in various manifestations), and autonomy in podcasting. It allows us to conceptualise the cultural industries as structured spaces where stakeholders struggle for legitimacy, recognition, and various forms of capital. According to Bourdieu (1986), the field refers to a set of structural rules, hierarchies, and power relations in which agents operate. Bourdieu's (1986) field of capital and cultural production is often applied to examine tensions within media and cultural production between economic or commercial imperatives and creative or intellectual imperatives. Capital represents the scarce resources for which social actors compete, including economic, cultural, symbolic, and social capital. Economic capital consists of money or assets that can be converted into financial resources. Cultural capital includes social assets such as educational credentials, technical expertise, general knowledge, verbal abilities, and artistic sensibilities (Benson, 2006). Symbolic capital manifests through reputation, recognition, prestige, fame, or awards (English, 2016; Perreault, 2024). Social capital is reflected in the extent and influence of one's network (Perreault, 2024).

The specific form of capital varies within each field of cultural production (Benson, 2006). All fields of cultural production operate within distinct systems of valuation, which include artistic and aesthetic merit, notions of truth and justice, and assessments of what is considered correct and worthy (Bourdieu, 1993). Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital has been widely applied in research on cultural production (Hesmondhalgh, 2006), cultural entrepreneurship (Scott, 2012), alternative economic practices and making a living in cultural labour (McRobbie, 2018; Alacovska, 2022), symbolic capital in platformised fields of cultural production (Woods &

Scott, 2024), involuted labour and digital burnout (Scott & Woods, 2024; Woods & Davis, 2024), and media practice and class-making (Lindell & Kas, 2024). Bourdieu's theories of cultural production (1993) and forms of capital (1986) have also been applied to the study of podcast production practices (Kerrigan et al., 2021), the cultural entrepreneurship of independent podcasting (Jorgensen, 2021a), and journalism (Perreault, 2024) and sports podcasts (Rookwood & Hoey, 2024). This theory is useful for the analysis of authenticity in podcasting because it allows authenticity to be framed as a form of strategic positioning within the field. For instance, independent producers capitalise on authenticity gained from their subjective storytelling and self-disclosure, which is associated with a greater degree of autonomy than that of their corporate counterparts. The performative aspects of authenticity can also be seen as a form of habitus that allows producers to navigate the social structures within the field of cultural production.

Becker's theory of Art Worlds (2023) complements Bourdieu's field theory by shifting attention from field position and capital to the collaborative organisation of creative work. Becker argues that artistic production depends on networks of cooperation, shared conventions, resources, and systems of recognition rather than individual talent alone. This framework is useful for podcasting because originality is often produced through collective work involving hosts, producers, editors, guests, funders, platforms, and audiences. It helps explain why authenticity in podcasting cannot be reduced to an individual podcaster's voice or intention. Instead, authenticity and originality are negotiated through the social arrangements that make creative production possible.

In cultural production fields such as podcasting, the nature of capital is reshaped by the intervention of algorithmic systems and quantified metrics (Woods & Davis, 2024). Jorgensen (2021a) observed that many independent producers act as cultural entrepreneurs. These cultural entrepreneurs are not aiming to build economic capital but rather to build alternative forms of cultural and social capital for themselves and their community (Jorgensen, 2021a). In other words, these creators are motivated to experiment with content and form, seeking credibility, influence, or artistic fulfilment over profit. Independent podcast producers tend to have "low levels of economic capital and high levels of autonomy relative to those occupying a more mainstream or orthodox position" (Mason, 2014, p. 167). Rather than replicating established strategies and tactics to attract audiences and generate revenue, these producers develop alternative forms of capital that may eventually be converted into economic capital.

Building on this discussion of how alternative forms of capital may be converted into economic capital, Klein (2020) and Klein et al. (2017) use the term 'selling out' to refer to a cultural judgement about autonomy, compromise, and the movement between symbolic and economic value. Commercial partnerships, branding, and promotional labour have become routine features of creative practice, yet they continue to raise questions about integrity and cultural legitimacy (Klein, 2020; Klein et al., 2017). Applied to podcasting, this framework helps explain why sponsorship, advertising, subscriptions, or paid work may support sustainability and recognition without automatically weakening authenticity. However, these practices still raise concerns about independence, audience trust, and the conversion of creative voice into economic capital.

Independent production of podcasts is also associated with structural constraints and cognitive, emotional, and physical burdens, including burnout experienced by creative individuals (McRobbie, 2018; Scott, 2012). Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labour extends this account of cultural work by examining how workers manage feelings and expressions in line with occupational expectations. Originally developed in the context of service work, the concept has been applied more broadly to forms of cultural and creative labour where emotional presentation is integral to professional practice. In the context of podcasting, this framework is useful for understanding how hosts may regulate tone, warmth, humour, vulnerability, and responsiveness as part of sustaining audience engagement and perceived authenticity. Such emotional management has been discussed in the literature as both a resource for building audience connection and a potential source of strain within creative labour under conditions shaped by financial, institutional, and platform pressures.

Recent scholarship on cultural production describes this creative labour as 'wageless' work (Alacovska, 2022). Woods and Scott's (2024) neo-Bourdieusian analysis critiques these creative labour practices. They examine how creative producers react to the demands of contract, freelance, and project-driven production. They discover that involuted labour leads to exhaustion instead of the meritocratic productivity that democratic discourses envision. Burnout is exacerbated by social media, platform capitalism, competitive social ranking systems, and the frequent demand for success (Woods & Davis, 2024).

In this thesis, autonomy is not treated as a condition that makes authenticity possible, nor as direct evidence of authenticity. Within studies of cultural work, Banks's (2010) account offers the clearest basis for connecting autonomy and authenticity. Banks argues that cultural

autonomy gives workers scope for self-realisation, because it allows them to work in ways that express the self and resist commercial and managerial constraints. In podcasting, autonomy becomes relevant to authenticity when producers retain authority over voice, form, relationships, and limits, even while working within audience expectations, institutions, platforms, and markets. Drawing on self-determination theory, autonomy refers to self-endorsed action rather than the absence of all constraint, as Deci and Ryan (2000) and Ryan and Deci (2000) argue. The empirical analysis links autonomy to authenticity only where participants associate self-direction with ownership, credibility, voice, or ethical accountability.

Previous studies have applied the theory of cultural capital to examine independent podcast producers' practices. However, they have failed to offer a holistic view of the tensions between commercial success and autonomy for both independent and institutional podcasters. This study extends the application of Bourdieusian theory to the context of independent, institutional, and platformised cultural production. Bourdieu's cultural production framework offers a valuable approach for analysing production practices, explaining how podcasts are created both by media producers new to the medium and by established media institutions.

The comparative analysis of independent and institutional podcast production models, employing concepts from Bourdieu's (1993) theory of cultural and economic capital, can help reveal significant variations in how authenticity is constructed across different production contexts. Moreover, there is a limited understanding of the working conditions of podcasters. Scholars suggest adopting a "meso-level" approach to studying the national fields of podcast production (Jorgensen, 2021a). A national-level analysis of podcasters' practices is necessary due to the variations in cultural capital involved in podcast production in different countries.

Podcasting scholarship often associates early podcast authenticity with amateur sound, intimacy, and low barriers to production (Berry, 2016a; Spinelli & Dann, 2019). This association should be historicised rather than treated as stable. As podcasting industries professionalise, listeners and producers may judge care, craft, and competence as markers of authenticity. Bourdieu's (1993) account of cultural production helps explain this change because producers develop a practical sense of what counts as legitimate within a field. Polish can operate as cultural capital when it signals craft and care. It can also invite suspicion when it appears shaped mainly by commercial or platform demands.

Bourdieu's framework has been widely used in media and cultural studies to connect micro-level practices with broader field conditions (Bourdieu, 1993; Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Scholars drawing on this approach argue that creative decisions such as voice, disclosure, motivation, sponsorship, editing, and genre can be understood as field-positioned practices rather than purely individual preferences (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Within this literature, claims to authenticity are often linked to the conversion of different forms of capital, including symbolic recognition, cultural legitimacy, technical competence, audience trust, and economic sustainability (Moore, 2002; Peterson, 2005). In this thesis, this perspective supports the use of authenticities as an analytical concept by showing how different forms of authenticity emerge from specific field positions, capital configurations, and production conditions. Rather than treating authenticity as a single value, the analysis examines how authenticities operate differently across personal, relational, structural, genre-based, and production contexts within podcasting.

Building on this discussion of production motivations, the next section introduces theoretical frameworks that help explore claims about authenticity in podcasting, beginning with self-determination theory.

3.4.2 Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-determination theory (SDT) provides a lens for examining the motivations of cultural producers. It links authenticity to three dimensions (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness), offering criteria for analysis of perceived authenticity in media contexts (Ryan & Deci, 2000). It is particularly useful for describing authenticity and examining human motivations (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). It posits intrinsic motivations and self-determined, enjoyable, spontaneous, and satisfactory behaviour as authentic (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivations refer to actions driven by external consequences, rewards, or sanctions, and are often experienced as controlled or imposed. They operate alongside intrinsic motivations, with perceived authenticity varying according to the degree of internalisation.

SDT asserts that individuals produce media content to satisfy their psychological needs for *autonomy*, *competence*, and *relatedness* (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy refers to the sense of having personal agency to take deliberate action. Competence refers to a feeling of control, self-efficacy, and learning new things. Relatedness involves feelings of belonging, recognition,

and connection (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT places the issue of authenticity at the centre of individuals' behaviours, engagements, motivations, and gratifications. Being authentic is increasingly difficult in modern societies with digital media, where attitudes, opinions, and expressions of self are scrutinised and stigmatised (Ryan & Ryan, 2019). SDT suggests that psychological growth requires satisfaction of the basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

SDT is a suitable framework to examine how podcasters deal with the various challenges of authenticity in social, professional, and cultural contexts. Work on creator and streamer motivation indicates SDT's transferability across digital production contexts (Törhönen et al., 2021). Studies of digital creators apply SDT to explain sustained production under constraints, where perceived autonomy and competence predict persistence and attention to craft (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Vansteenkiste et al., 2006). Drawing on SDT, Perry (2024) highlights the need for research on competence and autonomy in podcasting, noting gaps in applying SDT to creative freedom and motivation in audio production. Moreover, Actor-Network Theory (ANT) foregrounds social phenomena such as autonomy as distributed across human and non-human elements (Wiard, 2019). Both algorithmic and human editorial curation shape what shows gain visibility (Freeman, Gibbs, & Nansen, 2023). Policy reviews also document concerns about the effects of recommendation systems on cultural production, particularly in music (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2023). Podcast research has also found that sponsors, institutional oversight, or brand demands can affect creative freedom and autonomy (Wasko, 2014; Perks & Turner, 2019).

Scholars often attribute podcasting's rise to podcasters' desires for greater autonomy and authentic self-expression in cultural production. Independent podcasters frequently frame their work as a passion project driven by personal values and creative freedom rather than commercial gain, thus a strongly intrinsically motivated activity. According to Berg (2021a), independent podcasting is characterised by the greatest degree of autonomy as compared to institutional and branded podcasts created by public, corporate, or commercial media organisations. Independent podcasts provide a foundation for honest and unfiltered conversations, allowing hosts and guests to authentically express themselves (Vaarala, 2025). This idealised view of authenticity by independent producers suggests an absence of gatekeeping, fewer restrictions on genre and format, reduced external pressures on decision-making, and a disinterest in appealing to mass audiences (Berg, 2021b; Sullivan, 2018). This

contrasts with legacy media pathways and reflects a deliberate rejection of the inauthentic or formulaic content they associate with mainstream broadcasting (Tennant, 2023). In Tennant's interviews with independent New Zealand podcasters, participants unanimously viewed legacy media formats as "inauthentic", praising podcasting instead as a more genuine, unfiltered format that allowed them to "be themselves" and serve niche audiences. However, financial rewards can function as both intrinsic and extrinsic motives. This challenges the notion that money-making is always external and negative.

As podcasting evolves from hobbyism to a formal industry, its autonomy is reshaped by commercial and professional logics. This shift also reflects the evolving professional–amateur spectrum common across cultural industries, where practices once perceived as casual or amateur now coexist with professionalised, highly structured formats (Sullivan, 2018). Martín-Morán and Martín Nieto (2022) argue that growing business involvement has consolidated the space for professionalisation with higher production standards and a shift away from the medium's purely amateur roots. Reading through the lens of self-determination theory, professionalisation can support or constrain autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which in turn shape perceived authenticity. In practical terms, this can mean reconciling the raw, improvised style that early podcast audiences loved with the expectations of consistency, skill, and competence that a larger audience (and advertisers) might demand. Likewise, McHugh (2016) emphasised the importance of technical proficiency, interview technique, audio engineering, and storytelling. However, there is a risk that professionalisation could lead to a blurring of authenticity, as heavily edited or scripted podcasts may lose the feeling of a genuine, unfiltered voice. On the other hand, professionalisation can also enhance authenticity in certain respects. For instance, by improving storytelling craft, or by allowing creators to pursue podcasting full-time. The net effect of professionalisation on authenticity remains an underexplored area needing scholarly attention.

Limited research connects SDT constructs to day-to-day editorial choices in podcast production. Motivation and autonomy research in podcasting remains limited, especially outside large markets. Research question RQ1 examines how autonomy and competence shape production under constraint. Platform rules may weigh differently in small markets with public service traditions. Ireland offers a strong case to test such patterns. In the following section, the relational dimension of authenticity is discussed.

3.4.3 Parasocial Relations in Podcasting

The power of the relationship between the audience and a podcaster depends on an "unmeasurable, intangible, and subjective quality: authenticity" (MacGregor, 2020, p. 65). Likewise, McGregor (2022) argues that audiences desire "authenticity— a quality that reinforces the intimacy and parasociality of podcasts" (pp. 9–10). Literature on podcasters' relationships and cultural production reveals gaps in how authenticity is co-constructed through interactions with audiences, guests, and communities, especially in transnational media influenced by cultural contexts. Banet-Weiser (2012), in *Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture*, argues that authentic relationships with consumers are invoked by brands through familiarisation, intimacy, personal narratives, personalisation, and unique storytelling. Banet-Weiser (2012) calls authenticity a "brand culture" that "is not only understood and experienced as the pure, inner self of the individual, it is also a relationship between individuals and commodity culture that is constructed as 'authentic'" (p. 14).

Parasocial theory derives from Horton and Wohl's (1956) foundational work on parasocial interaction, which refers to a "simulacrum of conversational give-and-take" that users experience in response to media performers (p. 215). Parasocial interaction occurs when a performer directly addresses an audience during their performances through informal speech and conversational styles (Horton & Strauss, 1957). Scholarly inquiries on parasocial theory and relationships initially focused on television and radio. The interpretation and meaning of parasocial relationships have changed with the advent of new media forms, formats, styles, and genres. Zuraikat (2020) emphasised the need to study and compare podcasting's parasocial relationships with other media forms.

As a multi-sensory auditory experience, podcasts combine the senses of "what we see, taste, smell, and touch with what we hear" through auditory immersion (MacDougall, 2012, p. 170). Because of the immersive sensory experience, listeners can develop parasocial relationships with podcast hosts through an imaginary feeling of interacting and having a real conversation. With headphones, the host's voice is capable of "getting inside someone's head", which is "akin to having someone speaking to/with you while walking, sitting, or standing next to you" (MacDougall, 2012, p. 179). Podcast hosts create an informal experience and intimacy through tone, voice, and pattern. Euritt and Korfmacher (2022) argue that podcasts build authenticity and intimacy through domesticity. Domesticity refers to recording podcasts in a domestic

setting, such as a living room or kitchen, using the available equipment. However, producing lower-quality audio than a studio recording does not justify the claims of authenticity without the quality of conversation (Euritt, 2022). This supports my research objective of understanding the role of production processes (particularly the recording setting), which is analysed in Chapter 8.

Maloney Yorganci and McMurtry (2024) identified several markers of authenticity in podcast hosting that listeners associate with feeling an authentic connection. These include a host's ordinariness and relatability, their spontaneity or imperfections, and the unfiltered sharing of personal stories or confessions. Such traits made listeners describe the host, in Maloney Yorganci and McMurtry's (2024) words as "one of us", creating the feeling of friendship and familiarity that is the hallmark of podcast intimacy. Audiences often return weekly not just for content, but to spend time with personalities they perceive as authentic companions (Vilceanu, 2025). When long-running podcasts underwent changes (such as a host departure or format shift), dedicated listeners expressed a sense of nostalgia and personal loss, underscoring how strongly parasocial relationships drive audience engagement (Vilceanu, 2025).

There are several parasocial relationship pathways in podcast consumption, including feelings of sociability, connection, engagement, visibility of the host, the ability to contact the host via social media, and a conversational perspective (Perks & Turner, 2019). Current podcast scholarship suggests that podcast consumption is influenced by social factors, such as sociality, reciprocity, and perceived connections between the podcast host and the listeners (Pavelko & Myrick, 2020; Perks et al., 2019). According to Chan-Olmsted and Wang (2020), "Podcast listening is a personal experience which builds a relationship with podcast creators and podcasting communities" (p. 16). A one-sided connection to the host may result in parasocial relationships (Hartmann, 2016; Schlütz & Hedder, 2021). The strength of parasocial relationships in interview- and conversation-style podcasts depends on guests' self-disclosures and the host's communication style (Tobin & Guadagno, 2022). Guest preparation, briefing, and off-mic rapport can reveal the conditions for authentic disclosure during recording. Contrary to the one-sided parasociality, podcast scholars (e.g., McHugh, 2022) argue that podcasts connect listeners and hosts to create a two-way parasocial relationship.

Podcast audiences feel a unique closeness and trust toward their favourite hosts due to the perceived intimacy. Intimacy refers to a sense of physical, aural, and emotional closeness between a listener, audio content, and the podcast host. Euritt (2022) describes intimacy as a

hyperauthentic ideal, stating, “some strains of podcast sound design encourage listeners to interpret content as coming from their own community by using amateur sound”. According to McHugh (2022), “the currency of podcasting is pretty much the same: the intimate sense of connection that audio can build via voice, especially when that voice is speaking right into your ear, in your headphones or earbuds” (p. 14). For listeners, an intimate sense of podcasters makes them “one of them, a member of their community, whether defined by geography, ethnicity, culture, or social group” (Murrell et al., 2022, p. 148). Listeners feel that podcasters are like one of them, expressing their true feelings without any “pre-mediation” (Molleda, 2010, p. 282). Spinelli and Dann (2019) argued that the re-embodiment of intimacy goes beyond metaphor and serves as a physical experience of internalising the sound. According to Lindgren (2021), listeners’ experiences of connectedness and intimacy are “constructed through soundwork elements, narrative approaches, and scripting techniques” (p. 12). Personal storytelling helps build intimacy between podcasters and listeners (Lindgren, 2016; Valdez, 2017).

Podcasts are often celebrated for advancing intimacy and trust, allowing hosts to project a “real” persona and form authentic connections with audiences (Milovan, Dobre, & Moisescu, 2025). Digital intimacy scholarship helps specify how podcast closeness operates as a mediated relation rather than a private bond. Smith et al. (2019) define digital intimacies as practices of connection, communication, and sharing shaped by digital technologies and wider social contexts. Berryman and Kavka’s (2017) study of beauty vloggers shows how creators cultivate strategic intimacy by appearing as friends, sisters, or confidants. Applied to podcasting, these perspectives help explain how voice, serial listening, disclosure, and informal address can produce an authentic connection while remaining shaped by platformed performance.

A stronger parasocial relationship is claimed to be associated with higher listenership, social interaction, and audience engagement, especially where hosts appear competent and authentic (Marx et al., 2021; Perks & Turner, 2019; Schlütz & Hedder, 2021). Listeners go beyond listening to the podcast and engage with hosts and communities on social media and discussion forums (Boling & Hull, 2018). Listening to podcasts cultivates communal engagement (Spinelli & Dann, 2019) through transmedia events (Edmond, 2015) and listening parties (Sharon & John, 2019). In contrast to these claims of engagement, Wendland (2025) found that true interactive behaviours are still uncommon, with most podcasts failing to advance beyond minimal engagement. To understand how different producers approach their relationship with

their audience, audience engagement research needs to include production-oriented studies. To explore how perceptions around authenticity influence podcaster-audience relationships, there is a need to understand how podcasts are produced.

Despite the ubiquity of one-sided relations, recent scholarship suggests that authenticity in podcast relationships is co-constructed in complex ways. Intimacy is constructed through an imagined co-presence of audiences and an extended version of an artificial authenticity (Lindgren & Loviglio, 2022). According to Sharon and John (2024b), podcasters' perception of intimacy was mostly self-centred rather than listener-oriented. They argued that for most podcast creators, intimacy was inevitably related to their own authenticity. Podcast hosts actively imagine and shape their audience interactions, creating what Sharon and John (2024b) described as "inverse parasocial relationships". An inverse parasocial relationship "reverses the direction of the illusory connection between media personae and their audiences" (Sharon & John, 2024b, p. 1). Sharon and John (2024b) found that podcasters often conceive of an "imagined listener" to whom they speak as if in personal dialogue. Podcasters' perceptions of authenticity are associated with being connected to their listeners.

Looking at audience-podcaster relations through the perceptions of podcasters helps explain why podcasts feel personal, as hosts frequently adopt a friendly, direct tone (using second-person address, inside jokes, or confessional speech) as if each listener were a close friend, thereby performing authenticity on their side of the relationship. Sharon and John caution that this inward-looking construction of authenticity might limit authentic interaction, since even interactive features (social media feedback, listener mail) are filtered through the host's narrative control.

In addition to perceived audience relations, authenticity also relates to a sense of belonging. Beyond individual mediated relationships, claims around authenticities operate within broader cultural contexts.

3.5 Cultural Contexts of Authenticity

Scholars exploring relationships and authenticity in podcasting have urged more geographically diverse studies, noting that podcasting is a global phenomenon with locally specific expressions. Drawing on Benedict Anderson's (2020) concept of "imagined communities", this research aims to analyse the lived experiences and relational patterns that

shape the perception and multiple (and often contested) expressions of Irishness in the podcasting sphere.

Despite its contested meanings, it is important to operationalise the concepts of Irishness and Irish identity. Identity provides a sense of being and belonging to individuals and communities (Abercrombie et al., 2006). At the micro level, identity refers to individuals, and at the macro level, it refers to collections of individuals. Identity in communication and linguistics refers to language choices and personae in immediate social environments (Fuller, 2007; Scotton, 1980). Terrazas-Calero (2020) defines identity as a cultural construct shaped by social, historical, and political factors. The audience interprets the persona, communication form, and content of speakers to determine their national, regional, ethnic, or social group identity (Joseph, 2004). Meserko (2015a) found that self-disclosure from podcasters and guests creates a perception of authentic identity.

The concept of national identity is a complex issue in Ireland due to differences in local cultures, political divisions, and linguistic styles (Cronin, 1999). Irishness and Irish identity have been explored in previous studies on media, literature, and digital platforms (Terrazas-Calero, 2020; Vaughan & Moriarty, 2020). According to Vaughan and Moriarty (2020), stylisation plays an important role in the formation of identities. Performances of identity through voice and style enhance audience experience and reflexivity (Amador-Moreno & Villanueva, 2018; Bauman, 1975). Irish producers tend to flavour their speech with words from Irish, using *cúpla focal*, which means using "a couple of words" (Kallen, 2013). Accent and vernacular act as identity resources that can welcome some listeners and distance others. It is important to examine how podcasters manage this balance in style and address. Regional identity is also apparent in Irish podcasts because it is how podcasters express their sense of place and geographical connection. There is often a clear description of podcasters' feelings about the place where podcasts are created. For example, David Chambers of *The Blindboy Podcast* often mentions his Limerick accent.

Comparative work on podcasting outside North America remains limited. Recent calls urge context-sensitive analyses that track how identity work varies by nation and sector (Sharon & John, 2024b). Maloney Yorganci and McMurtry (2024) recommend examining how cultural differences or geographical background alter listeners' authenticity criteria. An Irish podcaster's sense of authenticity might involve particular inflections, for instance, integrating local humour, Irish colloquialisms, or accents, referencing shared social experiences, or

grappling with stereotypes of "Irishness" in media. Similarly, Irish audiences may respond differently to certain authenticity markers than American or British audiences, given distinct cultural expectations (such as a historically strong oral storytelling tradition in Ireland or attitudes shaped by Irish public broadcasting standards). Sharon and John (2024b) point out that most podcast research has concentrated on North America. One of the few related studies outside the Western mainstream is Wang et al.'s (2025) research on Chinese podcasters, which illustrates how context-specific values mediate authenticity by localising the podcasting style to align with cultural communication norms.

Authenticity is defined and negotiated within cultural and discursive frameworks. Ireland presents a distinct media setting that offers a valuable perspective on how podcast conventions have evolved. Ireland is a small nation with its own public service media ethos, diasporic global connections, and a mix of independent and institutional podcast producers, making it a rich site to examine how local cultural narratives and identities intersect with the quest for authenticity. This study addresses how elements of Irish cultural identity (e.g., local humour, national issues, solidarity, or notions of community) inform Irish podcasters' connections and authenticities. Limited studies explain how cultural relations inform style, address, and belonging in podcasts. This responds directly to calls in the literature (e.g., Nieborg & Poell, 2018) for culturally contextualised production studies and contributes original insights into authenticity as a socially determined phenomenon. The chapter now summarises the gaps and revisits study questions.

3.6 Conclusion

Across podcast theory, production, and relations, authenticity functions as a contextual practice rather than an inherent quality or essence. The use of authenticities in the plural therefore allows the thesis to compare how authenticity operates across self, audience, genre, production, culture, and field position. The literature review found four areas of enquiry. First, there is a need to examine motivation and production processes from the podcasters' perspective. Secondly, relational co-construction needs analysis beyond audience-only accounts. External challenges to autonomy, such as platformisation in small nations, also warrant attention. Finally, Irish settings offer a strong case for cultural belonging within audio practice. These gaps also justify the qualitative lens for original insights.

The gaps in the literature directly inform the research questions and objectives. Studies have primarily focused on podcast audiences or content rather than the perspectives and practices of producers. Research on media authenticity more broadly often privileges individual self-expression or institutional claims, leaving little attention to the ways authenticity is negotiated through relationships, organisational frameworks, production choices, and genre. The limited attention to podcasters' reflexive understanding of authenticity (a gap in intrinsic motivation literature) motivates RQ1, which asks, "In what ways do podcasters in the Republic of Ireland pursue authenticity in relation to their self-presentation, motivations, values, and creative practices?" The need to better understand the co-construction of authenticity with audiences (a gap in parasocial/intimacy research) underpins RQ2, "How do podcasters negotiate and construct authenticity through their mediated, interpersonal, and cultural relationships with audiences, guests, collaborators, and communities in the Republic of Ireland?" The un(der)explored role of genre and production choices (a gap in production and genre research) shapes research question RQ3, which addresses, "How do genre conventions and podcasters' creative and editorial choices across production stages shape their approaches to authenticity in the Republic of Ireland?" The widely noted influence of platformisation, commercialisation, and institutional contexts (a gap in autonomy and PEM research) is addressed by research question RQ4, which asks, "In what ways do autonomy, platformisation, commercialisation, institutionalisation, and professionalisation influence podcasters' ability to negotiate authenticity in creative and editorial decision-making in the Republic of Ireland?"

In the next chapter, I discuss the research process by explaining the approach, methods, and processes of data collection and analysis.

Chapter 4. Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This thesis employs qualitative methodology to examine podcasting practices in Ireland, aiming to explore the nuances and complexities inherent in the medium. To do so, the thesis investigates the persona, relational, cultural, and organisational conditions that shape authentic practice, and analyses how genre conventions and production processes influence podcasters' approaches to authenticity. The thesis examines the extent to which podcasters perceive their practices as authentic, how notions of authenticity inform their activities, and the limitations or contradictions that arise when their actions do not match their perception of authenticity. Moreover, it analyses how structures and social influences shape individual decisions taken in podcasting.

Qualitative methodology is well-suited to this study, since it is grounded in a theoretical framework that views authenticity as subjective, multidimensional, contextual, and socially constructed. Recent studies have adopted qualitative methodologies to examine notions of authenticity (e.g., Heiselberg & Have, 2023), showing that the approach can provide a deeper understanding of mediated practices. Qualitative inquiry is also appropriate for investigating media production because it looks at the micro level, in-depth, and contextual dimensions of authenticities in podcasting.

This chapter outlines the qualitative methodological approach used to investigate the research questions. It details the interpretivist paradigm and its foundational role in the project, followed by details about the qualitative research design, the use of purposive sampling for participant recruitment, data-gathering via in-depth, semi-structured interviews, the six-stage coding and thematic data analysis procedures, overall ethical considerations, and the steps taken to ensure trustworthiness and rigour (i.e., credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability). The chapter also includes a detailed account of the researcher's positionality and reflexivity. It concludes with a note on the methodology's limitations.

4.2 Research Paradigm

This research is situated within an interpretive paradigm. The interpretivist philosophy posits that reality is socially constructed and that knowledge emerges from individuals' subjective experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In contrast to a positivist perspective, which aims to measure and predict objective truths, interpretivism emphasises individual interpretation and the construction of meaning within specific contexts. The interpretive philosophy is well-suited for this research because it frames authenticity as a socially constructed phenomenon that is negotiated and shaped by individual, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional contexts of podcast production. The paradigm suits the aims and objectives of the project.

The interpretivist paradigm offers ontological advantages to the analysis of authenticities in podcasting, in large part because it allows the analysis of multiple realities coexisting and being shaped by individual, social, historical, and cultural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These realities are actively constructed through individual perceptions and beliefs. This study posits that every podcaster perceives authenticity in a unique manner due to their personal background, motivations, relationships with listeners, working models, genre preferences, cultural relations, production techniques, and technological preferences. The implication for the methods is that the project examines multiple authenticities shaped by different contexts, instead of a singular authenticity. For these reasons, the study employed semi-structured interviews. For instance, interviews with news podcasters investigated fact-checking and gatekeeping, while interviews with comedy podcasters focused on performative aspects of the subgenre.

The epistemological stance of the study (defined as the nature of knowledge, how to access it, and the best way to research it) is grounded in the interpretive paradigm, wherein data are co-produced by the researcher and participants (Schwandt, 1994). Knowledge, however, is produced through the researcher's interpretation and meaning-making of the data. As the researcher, I played an active role in the knowledge creation process, with the nature, manner, and technique of my questions influencing participants' responses. The meaning-making that emerges from the interactions during interviews is shaped by my background in media production and participants' lived experiences of podcasting. I asked semi-structured questions, responded to their insights, and further probed for clarifications based on their distinct experiences, which shaped the co-production of knowledge.

The study acknowledges the role of values or axiological considerations in qualitative inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study adopts an explicit axiological stance that privileges fairness, accountability, and respect for participants. In line with those commitments, I made a deliberate effort to examine how platformisation, working models, genre expectations, commercialisation, and professionalisation might affect the power relations in podcasting. Some participants might have more influence, resources, institutional support, training, or expertise than others. These differences between participants might influence the perceptions and performances of authenticity. These considerations guided decisions on participant selection, sampling technique, interview questions, and the themes generated during data analysis. Since interpretivism stimulates reflexivity, the researcher's position, prior knowledge and experiences, and potential biases become a resource for understanding rather than a limitation (Maxwell, 2012). In the interpretive process, I distinguished between the co-created data, which emerged collaboratively from interactions with participants, and the knowledge I constructed through reflexive meaning-making. This knowledge creation highlights agency as the researcher, where I actively interpret, synthesise, and transform the data into meaningful insights, recognising that both data generation and knowledge production are interpretative acts grounded in the study's axiological framework.

The interpretive paradigm informed all major aspects of the study. It guided the choice of qualitative semi-structured interviews, the recruitment of a diverse sample, and thematic analysis. Participants were selected for their ability to speak to different understandings of authenticity. The conversational format of semi-structured interviews allowed for flexible and adaptive inquiry. It enabled participants to express detailed views and reflections on authenticity. Interviews allowed participants to share how they understand and perform authenticity (Smith, 1975). Thematic analysis involved coding and categorising through an iterative process. The researcher moved between transcript excerpts and emerging interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The paradigm's focus on context, co-construction of meaning, and reflexivity supports the study's credibility and relevance. It also aligns with the layered theoretical framework. The personal, professional, and relational dimensions of authenticity were examined through participants' lived experiences. The methodological implications of interpretivism shaped the research design.

4.3 Research Design

The present study employed a qualitative, ethnographic, and thematic research design. This design aligns with the overall aim of the research to examine podcasters' practices and perceptions of authenticities in Ireland. Qualitative methods provide the flexibility to uncover how podcasters understand, negotiate, and perform authenticities within specific professional, relational, cultural, organisational, and personal settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The ethnographic design highlights subjective experiences while situating them in broader social, institutional, and economic conditions.

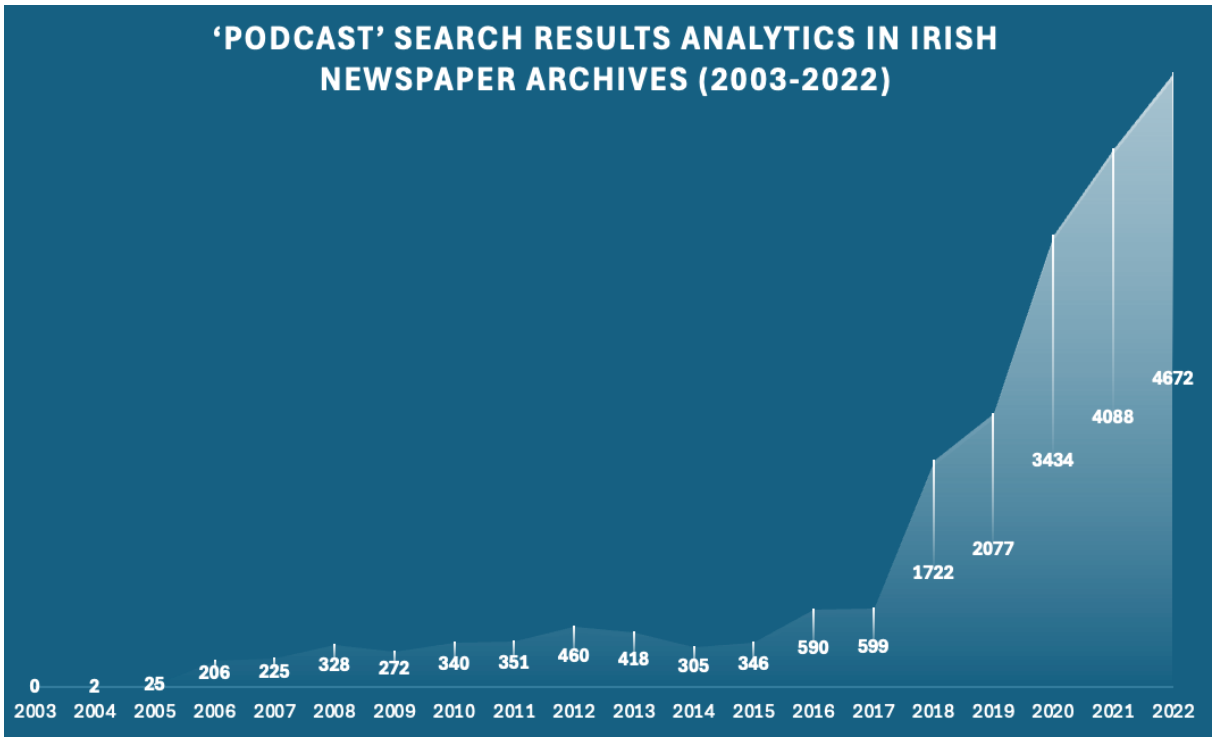
An ethnographic approach underpins the qualitative design of this study. Ethnography involves an insider's view of how meaning is created, negotiated, and shared within specific cultural or professional communities (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). The ethnographic approach helped to highlight the human aspects of podcast production and revealed the relationships and other factors that shape authenticities. Each participant's insights are shaped by personal histories, production norms, genre conventions, working model constraints, and audience expectations. Semi-structured interviews draw on ethnographic thinking by investigating how podcasters in Ireland recount professional practices, creative decisions, and authenticity. The focus on localised experiences and self-reported practices aligns with ethnographic principles. These principles emphasise participants' viewpoints within their own context (Pink, 2015). The design encouraged detailed accounts of participants' experiences, resulting in a nuanced portrait of podcasting in Ireland. Reflexivity remained central to the approach, as I acknowledged personal assumptions and recognise my role as an engaged interpreter of meaning to participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rigour and trustworthiness guide the study's design and execution (see Section 4.8 for details). The project aligns with an interpretivist approach to make decisions about data collection, analysis, and reporting (Braun & Clarke, 2025; Noble & Smith, 2025).

Theoretical frameworks guided the data collection and analysis. These include political economy, platform studies, production studies, authenticity-related frameworks (e.g., performativity), Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, self-determination theory, and parasocial relational theory. Political economy and platformisation consider structural constraints and industry shifts (Dowling & Miller, 2019; Sullivan, 2019). Production studies and authenticity theories address creative processes, motivations, and identities. Self-determination theory and

parasocial relational theory foreground autonomy, competence, and relationships. Reference to podcast studies enriches the theoretical framework with findings about podcasting that further illustrate and bridge the gap between practice and theory. These frameworks informed the research design to examine macro, meso, and micro levels of podcasting. Central to this research is the micro level, where personal motivations and understandings of the true self are shaped by wider social and economic forces. Participants' accounts are viewed as subjective experiences shaped by institutional settings, interpersonal relations, motivations, cultural context, and production practices. At the macro level, structural issues such as commercialisation and institutionalisation are examined through the lens of lived experience rather than assumed to function uniformly across the podcast sector. At the meso-level, the study focuses on podcasters' relationships with their audiences and communities.

Desk research on podcasting in Ireland formed part of the early research stage. This included reviewing all media coverage related to podcasting in Ireland published in national newspapers from 2003 to 2022. I used the Irish Newspaper Archive to search for the term "podcast" (including its variations podcasting, podcasts, and podcaster) in the titles and main text of news articles. The results of the archival analysis are shown in figure 1.

Figure 1. Desk Research Results



The archival research also informed participant selection and helped establish the rationale for their inclusion. Podcast audiences are growing in Ireland; however, the industrial norms regarding podcasting are still evolving. While not a formal content analysis, this process offered insight into how podcasting is practised and framed in Ireland. It provided evidence of initial-stage field mapping that strengthened the validity of purposive sampling.

The two pilot interviews, conducted in early 2023, informed minor adjustments to the interview guide when new themes emerged. For example, one podcaster highlighted the challenges of visibility on podcast distribution platforms. This led me to include follow-up questions on platform visibility. The iterative process in this research reflects that new insights often arise mid-study and should be incorporated (Tracy, 2013). Data collection and initial analysis ran concurrently (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). I conducted 30 interviews with podcast hosts, producers, writers, trainers, and experts. As the data collection progressed, memos and notes documented recurring or unexpected ideas, aiding in refining questions for subsequent participants. The Republic of Ireland was chosen because of its evolving podcast sector, which includes independent, commercial, and public service productions. A purposive sample ensured variation in genre and working frameworks, which revealed shared or contrasting practices in different working models and genres. The study prioritised detailed understandings of a broad range of views about podcasting and theoretical insights. It did not aim for statistical representativeness. Therefore, the findings represent the range of podcasting practices in Ireland at a specific point in time of data collection.

The data analysis incorporated thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), to identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes within the data. This analytical method ensured systematic coding, organisation, and retrieval of data (Aronson, 1994). This research did not follow a grounded theory approach. Rather, the coding and theme development process incorporated both inductive (emerging) and deductive (informed by prior conceptual understanding) elements. This flexible methodological orientation for data analysis allowed for responsiveness to the data without imposing a rigid pre-conceived conceptual framework. Moreover, aligned with interpretive research principles, trustworthiness was pursued through reflexive memo-writing, peer debriefs, and ongoing checks for consistency between coded themes and original transcripts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thematic analysis allowed for a systematic and rigorous exploration of the diverse ways in which Irish podcasters conceptualise and enact various forms of authenticities.

4.4 Participant Recruitment

4.4.1 Sampling Approach

Participants were primarily recruited through a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling allowed me to recruit participants based on their ability to provide varied and comprehensive insights on the research question focused on authenticity and podcast production (Denzin, 2009). Although the primary technique was purposive, the study also employed snowball sampling to reach underrepresented participants and specialised producers whose expertise was identified by peers. Purposive sampling enabled the inclusion of podcasters with diverse experiences and perspectives on authenticity practices across the Irish podcasting landscape, aiming for a cross-section of podcasting experiences. As elaborated in Chapter 1 (Sections 1.1 and 1.4), the Republic of Ireland serves as the primary data site, featuring an evolving podcast ecosystem that includes independent, commercial, and public service productions. This is in keeping with the proposition that qualitative research should use purposive sampling, where the empirical site is determined by its relevance to the research question (Denzin, 2009). The participants were chosen strategically to meet the research objectives, as is standard in purposive sampling (Robson, 2002).

The study did not impose a popularity threshold. Instead, purposive selection aimed for variation across prominence, genre, and working model. Public ranking sources such as Irish podcast charts were consulted to ensure representation of higher-visibility shows, while historical review work informed the identification of podcasts that might not rank highly at present. Potential bias in purposive selection was addressed through the extended recruitment window, staged outreach across the sector, and the use of snowball sampling to reach underrepresented participants. These strategies supported the validity of purposive sampling by widening the frame beyond convenience and by aligning recruitment with the historical mapping of the field conducted earlier in the project.

4.4.2 Sample Size

A total of 30 participants were recruited. The detailed demographics of the participants are discussed in Section 4.4.5. The sample comprised 13 independent podcasters, 5 commercial podcasters, and 4 public service podcasters, with 8 participants working across several models.

The distribution skews toward independent producers. The skew was not intentional but emerged as part of the research process, reflecting recruitment patterns and the relative accessibility of independent producers. The composition strengthens the analysis of independent practice while still permitting comparison with commercial and public service cases. Participants' ages ranged from mid-20s to 60s, and their experience with audio and podcasting ranged from under one year to 36 years. The sample size was guided by principles of data saturation while maintaining manageability for analysis (Guest et al., 2006). Ninety potential participants were contacted between June 2023 and March 2024. More than 50 responded, and 30 agreed to be interviewed. The extended period reflected staged snowball sampling designed to reach underrepresented female podcasters and RTÉ-affiliated producers. Interviews proceeded in several phases until all sampling criteria were satisfied, and thematic saturation was reached. The sample size is substantial, as according to Simons (2014), it seeks "to see what we learn in-depth from the uniqueness of the single case itself" and is not aimed at generalising (p. 465). Qualitative research emphasises depth and richness of data over statistical representativeness, and a sample size of around 20–30 in-depth interviews is often considered sufficient to achieve thematic saturation in studies exploring complex social phenomena such as authenticity (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.4.3 Selection Criteria

The participants of this research are podcasters, who are defined in this research as podcast producers, hosts, and other personnel involved in podcast production, hosting, and distribution. The criteria determining who is considered a podcaster is covered in more detail in the introduction (Section 1.3). Participants were recruited based on several criteria, including working model, genre, and production role.

Podcasters were recruited to represent three distinct working models prevalent in the Irish podcasting sector, namely independent, commercial media organisations, and public service media. The independent podcast model is characterised by podcast creators who produce, disseminate, and promote podcasts with a greater degree of editorial, financial, and commercial independence from external media institutions. The commercial podcasting model includes podcasters working within commercially driven media groups owned by private companies and corporate organisations, as well as podcast production networks that produce branded

podcasts commissioned by third-party clients. Public service podcasters include podcasters working for Ireland's national public service media organisation, RTÉ.

Participants were selected according to the range of genres in podcasting in the Republic of Ireland. The aim was to examine how distinct podcast genres shape the perception of authenticities by podcasters. To this purpose, the concept of genre functions as frameworks, conventions, and expectations shared by relevant stakeholders, including podcasters, audiences, audio publishers, and online platforms. The sample used a pragmatic genre typology with three widely represented forms in Irish podcasting, namely narrative non-fiction, conversational programmes or chatcasts, and fiction podcasts. The typology structured recruitment and comparison rather than claiming to exhaust the full spectrum of podcast genres or subgenres. The participants were chosen from these three broader genres because each has its distinct conventions and audience expectations, which in turn shape distinct forms of authenticities.

The roles (or functions) performed by podcasters served as another sampling criterion. Podcasting roles often combine creative, technical, and managerial tasks. Producers might plan content and coordinate production schedules. Hosts present the podcast, guide conversations, and shape tone. Editors handle editing and post-production, while distribution personnel oversee marketing, publishing, and platform-level operations. Smaller or independent podcasters carry several responsibilities at a time. Therefore, I recruited participants working in varied roles as hosts, producers, directors, writers, editors, sound engineers, publishers, marketers, and trainers to see how their perspectives and practices of authenticities are shared or differ based on their work.

4.4.4 Recruitment Process

Research participants were identified from publicly available podcast platforms and directories such as Spotify, Apple, Acast, GoLoud, RTÉ, Google, YouTube, and SoundCloud. The approach supported an inclusive sample that covered both prominent and niche voices in the Irish podcast sector. Irish podcast directories and hosting platforms were searched to find podcasters who met the sampling criteria. Social media platforms such as Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, and X, along with professional networks in the Irish media and podcasting industry, were used to identify and contact potential participants. Snowball sampling formed part of

recruitment by asking participants to suggest other podcasters who might be relevant and willing to participate. Potential participants were contacted by email and through direct messages on social media. Recruitment materials outlined the research purpose, participant involvement, ethical considerations, and the voluntary nature of participation.

Gender balance and geographic diversity were two key challenges during the recruitment process. Achieving proportional gender representation proved difficult. The study ensured that female podcasters' voices were heard and that their experiences were taken into account through targeted outreach and snowball sampling, rather than pursuing strict proportionality. Interviews indicated that a substantial share of independent female podcasters in Ireland produced from home or other domestic settings. The pattern provides further insight into the balance of working models, with a greater proportion operating independently. This presented a potential barrier to recruitment for in-person interviews, possibly due to my positionality as a male researcher and participants' comfort or safety considerations within domestic spaces. To address gender imbalance and to ensure the inclusion of diverse voices, I offered online interview options via Zoom for the final two female participants recruited. This adaptation to the recruitment strategy helped the inclusion of these valuable perspectives, though a perfectly equal balance remained elusive, as documented in existing podcast research and industry reports (Edison Research & Sounds Profitable, 2022). The second challenge concerned the geographic diversity of the participants. I also note a geographical concentration in Dublin and urban areas, due to the Dublin-centric nature of media industries in Ireland. Recruiting from rural regions proved difficult, and participants themselves frequently noted the geographical concentration of media opportunities and networks in the capital. Fieldwork occurred at a time when generative AI tools were beginning to appear. This helped frame the temporal boundaries of this study and justified the absence of AI-related data while acknowledging its broader relevance.

4.4.5 Participant Characteristics and Overview

After finalising the sampling strategy, thirty podcasters were recruited. Among the 30 participants, 18 identified as male, 9 identified as female, and 3 identified as non-binary. In terms of working models, the sample included 13 independent podcasters, 5 commercial podcasters, and 4 public service podcasters, while 8 podcasters were working across several working models. Participants' podcasts spanned a diverse range of genres, including narrative

non-fiction, conversations/chatcasts, and fiction podcasts. Several podcasters produced across a variety of genres, so it was challenging to quantify according to genre. Participants' ages ranged from mid-20s to 60s, and their experience with audio and podcasting ranged from under one year to 35 years, capturing perspectives from beginners to very established figures in the Irish podcasting landscape.

Table 1 presents participant details in chronological order of interview date, including each participant's name, role, working model, genres, and sub-genres. The table provides contextual information that aids interpretation, and a copy also appears in Appendix K. Detailed information on the podcasts referenced in this study, including target audience, episode structure, recurring themes, and genre, is provided in Appendix L.

Table 1. List of Participants

No.	Name	Role(s)	Working Model	Genre(s)	Sub-genre(s)
1	Liam Geraghty	Producer, Host	Independent, Commercial	Fiction, Conversational	Drama, Interview
2	Pat O'Mahony	Producer, Host	Independent	Conversational	Interview
3	Peter Dunne	Writer, Director	Independent	Fiction	Drama
4	Robbie Lawlor	Co-Host	Independent	Narrative Non-Fiction, Conversational	Activist, Interview
5	Rob Flynn	Producer, Host	Independent	Narrative Non-Fiction, Conversational, Fiction	Documentary, Monologue, Drama
6	Niall Kitson	Co-Host	Independent	Conversational	Panel, Interview
7	Hugh Linehan	Host	Commercial	Narrative Non-Fiction, Conversational	Journalism, Interview
8	Ian Doyle	Producer, Host	Commercial	Narrative Non-Fiction, Conversational	True Crime, Panel
9	Dusty Rhodes	Producer, Co-Host	Independent, Commercial	Conversational	Panel, Interview
10	Bernice Harrison	Host	Commercial	Narrative Non-Fiction	Journalism, Interview
11	Mario Rosenstock	Host	Independent	Conversational	Comedy, Interview
12	Cian Sullivan	Host, Producer	Independent	Conversational	Panel, Interview
13	John Davis	Co-Host, Producer	Independent	Conversational	Panel, Interview
14	John Roche	Producer	Independent	Fiction, Non-Fiction	Drama, Documentary
15	Ken Early	Co-Host	Independent, Commercial	Conversational	Panel Conversation
16	Ed Roche	Host	Independent	Narrative Non-Fiction, Conversational	Activist, Interview
17	Nicky Ryan	Producer	Commercial	Narrative Non-Fiction	Journalism, Documentary, Panel

18	Sinead O'Moore	Host	Independent	Conversational	Interview
19	Patrick Haughey	Host, Trainer, Producer	Independent, Commercial	Conversational, Narrative Non-Fiction	Interview, Documentary, Panel
20	Leon Diop	Host	Public Service	Conversational	Panel Conversation
21	Emma Ní Chearúil	Host, Producer	Independent, Commercial	Conversational, Narrative Non-Fiction	Interview, Panel, Documentary
22	Oliver Callan	Host	Public Service	Conversational	Monologue,Interview
23	Dee Reddy	Host, Producer	Independent, Commercial	Conversational, Narrative Non-Fiction	Interview, Panel
24	Conor Reid	Host, Producer	Independent, Commercial	Conversational, Non-Fiction, Fiction	Monologue, Interview, Drama
25	Órla Ryan	Host,Producer	Commercial	Narrative Non-Fiction	Documentary,Activist
26	Rebecca Kelly	Host	Independent	Conversational	Interview
27	Ciarán Murphy	Host	Independent, Commercial	Conversational	Panel Conversation
28	Helen Shaw	Producer, Trainer	Independent	Non-Fiction, Fiction, Conversational	Activist, Interview, Documentary, Panel
29	Maura Fay	Producer, Co-host	Public Service	Conversational	Panel Conversation
30	Jacqui Hurley	Host	Public Service	Conversational	Panel Conversation

4.5 Data Collection

4.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

The primary method of data collection for this research was in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Interviews are well-suited to exploring background, attitudes, and motives in depth (Smith, 1975) and provide the opportunity to assess the validity of a participant's response by observing nonverbal cues (Gordon, 1975). Interview is a suitable method for examining power relations and social processes constituted in geographical patterns (DeLyser & Sui, 2014). Semi-structured interviews allowed additional questions beyond the pre-decided original set. This is relevant to the project because participants in this study represent a wide range of professional backgrounds, podcast content, genre, and audiences. A semi-structured interview guide was developed (see Appendix D). The guide was informed by the research questions, the theoretical framework, the initial literature review, and desk research. It included closed-ended questions, open-ended questions, and follow-up questions tailored to each participant. I also included room for improvisation to explore emerging themes and interests through follow-up questions and clarifications (Camfield, 2014).

4.5.2 Interview Procedure

Prior to commencing the main data collection phase, two pilot interviews were conducted with podcasters. The pilot interviews allowed me to assess the interview guide, structure, setting, question wording, and approach, and identify any unforeseen practical challenges at an early stage. Interviews were conducted in three phases between 27 July 2023 and 3 March 2024. The first 28 interviews were conducted at the place of the participants' choice (e.g., workplace, home, university, or restaurant/café) according to their comfort and accessibility. The last two interviews were conducted online via the videoconferencing platform Zoom to increase gender representation. Online interviewing offered logistical advantages for scheduling and inclusion for recruiting more female podcasters. It also presented methodological challenges, including rapport building, reduced access to some nonverbal cues, and heightened attention to privacy. These were addressed through longer pre-interview briefings and clear consent procedures. Prior work supported qualitative online interviews for dispersed samples while acknowledging reduced interactional richness (Salmons, 2016). Each interview lasted approximately 1.5 hours, ranging from 1 hour to 2 hours.

Before each interview, participants were provided with a Plain Language Statement outlining the research purpose, categories of personal data, details of what participant involvement in the research study would require, potential risks to participants, any benefits to participants from involvement in the research study, confidentiality of data, the right to withdraw consent, data retention/disposal (see Appendix B). Moreover, the Informed Consent Form for Interviews was also shared to obtain verbal informed consent before the commencement of the interview (see Appendix C). Interviews were audio-recorded using a Zoom H5 recorder. Written informed consent was obtained after the interview to allow participants to choose whether they wanted their personal or discussed details to be anonymised. Field notes were also taken during and immediately after each interview to note contextual details, nonverbal cues, and initial reflections. Participants often referred to specific episodes or public debates during interviews, which were then listened to deepen contextual understanding.

4.6 Data Analysis

4.6.1 Thematic Analysis

I transcribed and analysed recorded interviews using thematic analysis, following the six-phase framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). I started conducting data analysis simultaneously with data collection to categorise information based on emerging themes and patterns (Aronson, 1994; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Thematic analysis was a particularly well-suited method for analysing the semi-structured interview data generated in this research. It has the flexibility and systematic approach that allow for the identification of both broad patterns and nuanced variations in podcasters' perspectives on authenticity. Thematic analysis is effective for exploring the range of meanings, experiences, and practices expressed by participants in relation to the research questions, enabling a rich and in-depth understanding of authenticity practices within Irish podcasting. The qualitative data analysis software NVivo was used to assist in the organisation and management of the data, coding process, visual exploration of codes, and themes.

4.6.2 Phases of Thematic Analysis

4.6.2.1 Familiarisation with the Data

The first phase involved thorough familiarisation with the data corpus. This included repeatedly listening to audio recordings of the interviews and reading and re-reading the verbatim transcripts.

4.6.2.2 Generating Initial Codes

In Phase 2, systematic coding was undertaken. This phase involved line-by-line open coding (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). I labelled each meaningful unit in the transcripts with initial codes that represented participants' ideas or experiences (Saldaña, 2025). Examples of initial codes included 'being yourself', 'creating safe space', 'ownership of voice', 'relationship with listeners'. This process generated more than 200 initial codes. Table 2 provides a few initial codes from the early stages of analysis (also see Appendix I). An iterative coding process was employed, with codes being refined and new codes added as analysis progressed (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019).

Table 2. Sample of Initial Codes

Data Excerpt (Interview)	Initial Codes
- I think authenticity happens naturally through storytelling. - I think just the authenticity of capturing real stories. - Authenticity is being yourself, being able to share your opinion and your interests.	- Sharing personal story and interest - Being yourself - Real and Honest
- My authentic self is how can I hold space for people to feel safe to talk about them. - I would like to think that we're in that space where we tell the truth and when we get it wrong, we say we got it wrong.	- Acknowledging mistakes - Creating a safe space
- But actually, it's more authentic for me to record those sounds, even though it's easier to get them from a library. - You're still trying to have the authenticity, but you have to write that.	- Audio Recording - Performance
- People really value authenticity, and they value hearing people that they connect with. - Authenticity is more of a listener and host relationship and that's what I get for authenticity. - I actually think being a bit authentically Irish is a good thing. - What the two Johnnies do is being their authentic Irish self, that's them.	- Relationship with listeners - Irishness

4.6.2.3 Searching for Themes

In Phase 3, I conducted focused coding, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Charmaz (2025), to search for broader themes by examining the relationships between initial codes. The codes were grouped into various sub-themes based on shared meanings and patterns to build relationships and coherence in the data. The coding was done on the basis of organisational, substantive, and theoretical categories (Maxwell, 2012). The final set of dominant categories, along with their subcategories, was analysed (see Appendix G. Coding Sheet and Appendix J. Codes Treemap). Initial themes began to emerge, reflecting different dimensions of authenticities in podcasting. I organised and merged overlapping codes into a series of sub-themes.

4.6.2.4 Reviewing Themes

In Phase 4, the sub-themes were reviewed and refined. This involved returning to the data extracts associated with each theme to ensure they were coherent, data-supported, and distinct from each other. Themes were assessed for internal homogeneity (cohesion within themes) and external heterogeneity (distinctiveness between themes). Some initial sub-themes were refined, combined, or discarded during this phase based on their coherence and data support.

4.6.2.5 Defining and Naming Themes

Phase 5 involved further refining the themes and generating clear definitions and names for each theme. Detailed descriptions were developed for each theme, outlining its core meaning, scope, and key characteristics. Excerpts from the data that exemplified each theme were selected to illustrate and support the thematic descriptions. The result was a set of 8 overarching themes, each corresponding to one or more research questions (see Appendix H for list of main themes and sub-themes).

4.6.2.6 Producing the Analysis

The final phase involved the write-up of the analysis, presenting the thematic findings in a clear, coherent, and compelling manner. This involved providing rich descriptions of each identified theme, supported by data extracts from the interviews. The in-depth presentation of these themes, supported by participant quotations, is detailed in four findings and analysis chapters (Chapters 5 to 8).

4.7 Ethical Considerations

4.7.1 Institutional Approval

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from Dublin City University's Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix A). The study complies with the Committee's guidelines on participant recruitment, data management, data protection, and research dissemination.

4.7.2 Informed Consent

Participants were provided with a Plain Language Statement and asked to confirm their understanding of the study (Appendix B). Verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants before the commencement of the interview. Written consent was sought at the end of each interview, with a copy of the signed form provided to the participant (Appendix C). Consent was recorded through a series of yes/no responses, including confirmation that they had read the Plain Language Statement, understood the information provided (including data protection), and had the opportunity to ask questions. Participants acknowledged that their interview would be audio-recorded and indicated whether they agreed to be quoted directly

using their real name. They confirmed their awareness that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw consent.

4.7.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Participants were informed that confidentiality could only be maintained within the limitations of the law. Podcasters are public figures, and the study examines their public personas and publicly available podcasts. Privacy implications exist, but they remain within the expectations the participants set for themselves by publishing their work in the public realm. Non-anonymous interviews have also been suggested in recent research on podcasters (Berg, 2021b). Personal data were identified unless participants requested anonymity, which none did. Situational vulnerability or temporary risk arising from contextual circumstances during research interactions was considered, especially if participants revealed personal challenges or sensitive details (Sieber & Tolich, 2013). Although no direct questions were asked regarding the racial or ethnic origin of the participants, if they disclosed it during the interview, it was processed accordingly. For example, this applied to the interview with the host of the identity-related *Black and Irish podcast*. Participants had the right to access the interview data by contacting me through email or phone.

The commitment to participant confidentiality was further demonstrated through the member-checking process. When the interview transcripts were sent back to the participants, one participant requested anonymisation of a specific name in their transcript for privacy reasons. This request was immediately honoured, reinforcing the participant's control over their data and representation (see Appendix E). They will also be offered information about the outcomes of the study upon request.

4.7.4 Potential Risks and Benefits

There were no foreseeable risks to participants in this research, and the potential for any harm was not greater than that encountered by them in their everyday lives. While the research was deemed to be of minimal risk, interviews exploring professional practices and perceptions of authenticity touched upon sensitive areas related to creative autonomy, commercial pressures, organisational constraints, and professional identity. Participants were assured of their right to decline to answer any question. The topic of the research and the data collected are not expected

to be sensitive or potentially harmful to them. I also offered to anonymise any information at any stage of the research to ensure the participants' safety and privacy. Interviews were conducted at a location convenient and safe for participants.[12]

While the participants' involvement in this research brought no direct benefits to them, they may find the findings and conclusions useful in terms of informing the work they do. These include self-reflection, professional development, contributing to a better understanding of how podcasting works for a broader audience, and building trust and transparency with Irish society through their practice of authenticities. Other potential benefits include contributing to a deeper understanding of podcasting practices in Ireland, informing production practices, and contributing to broader academic debates on cultural labour, political economy of media, platformisation, and authenticity in media and communication.

4.7.5 Reflexivity in Ethical Decision-Making

Throughout the research process, ethical reflexivity was maintained. I remained attentive to potential power dynamics in the researcher–participant relationship and sought to conduct interviews in a respectful, empathetic, and participant-centred manner. Reflexivity involved being open about my background and acknowledging areas of limited familiarity during interviews. For instance, I explicitly disclosed my non-Irish background when asking participants about their perceptions and experiences of Irishness, thus contextualising the questions posed. Similarly, when interviewing an Irish-speaking podcaster, I requested clarification of specific terms and names in Irish, demonstrating transparency about my language limitations. Ethical considerations were continuously discussed with research supervisors throughout the project.

4.7.6 Data Protection

Following the DCU data protection guidelines, all data were encrypted and securely stored on the DCU-provided password-protected data management systems accessed remotely via a virtual private network. Hard copies of consent forms and other physical data were stored in a

[12] Despite these considerations to minimise risks, it proved difficult to recruit participants from Ireland's public service broadcaster, RTÉ. This could be due to the ongoing RTÉ payment scandal during the data collection period.

lockable drawer at the DCU campus. The data were accessed only by the Principal Investigator through a password provided over the phone. Manual transcription took place within the DCU Glasnevin campus using a password-protected, encrypted computer in a locked office. The coding and data processing of the transcripts were done using DCU-provided qualitative data analysis software within the DCU Glasnevin campus on a password-protected, encrypted computer. The data will be retained only for the period necessary in relation to the purpose for which the data are processed, in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

4.7.7 Generative AI Use

The study used DCU-approved generative AI tools minimally. Google NotebookLM supported researcher preparation to gather interviewee-specific information from recent episodes, which did not constitute primary data, to enable more specific, respectful, and focused interviews. NotebookLM also provided background support to manage the exceptional length and complexity of the *Mother and Baby Homes Report* mentioned by one participant. Using AI to clarify the Report's complex findings helped the researcher build an accurate foundation. Google Gemini was used to inform the researcher about potential future directions in the use of AI in podcast production. The study maintains integrity throughout, with analysis, framing, and conclusions based only on primary qualitative data and independent engagement with scholarly sources. The details of tools, outputs, prompts, and iterations appear on page iv and Appendix F.

These ethical practices were aimed at enhancing transparency, maintaining trust, and ensuring respectful engagement with data. The following sections provide a detailed account of rigour and trustworthiness.

4.8 Rigour and Trustworthiness

Qualitative scholars use various concepts to discuss study quality (e.g., validity, reliability, trust, and rigour). This thesis adopts the terminology of rigour and trustworthiness to remain consistent with its interpretive approach. Ayton (2023) defines rigour as the soundness or integrity of the study procedures. The related term trustworthiness encompasses the idea that qualitative findings are worthy of belief when readers can trust the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The trustworthiness of this study depends on the appropriateness of the research

question, methodology, data, and overall process (Leung, 2015). To ensure the rigour and trustworthiness of this research, I followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, rather than traditional notions of validity and reliability that are less suited to qualitative inquiry (Megheirkouni & Moir, 2023). According to Noble and Smith (2025), these four quality criteria (defined in Table 3) are parallel to the quantitative ideas of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity, respectively.

Table 3. Guba's Quality Criteria and Strategies

Quality Criteria	Definition	Strategies in this research
Credibility	The confidence placed in the truth of the research findings.	• Trust and rapport with participants • Member checking • Internal Triangulation • Prolonged engagement • Persistent observation
Dependability	The extent to which the research findings are stable over time.	• Clear Description of methodology • Audit trail • Reflexive notes • Changes during the research process
Transferability	The degree to which the research findings could be transferred to other settings and respondents.	• Field notes • Sampling decisions • Contextual descriptions
Confirmability	Establishes whether the research data and interpretations are the investigator's imagination or whether they are derived from the statements of respondents.	• Direct quotes • Details of data collection • Reflexive stance • Line-by-line coding • Combining inductive and deductive coding

4.8.1 Credibility

The credibility of this research was established through feedback from participants (member checking), varied data sources (triangulation), and reflexive records (reflexive diary). To enhance the credibility of the findings, member checking was undertaken. Verbatim transcripts were sent to participants, inviting them to review the transcript for accuracy and to comment on whether it resonated with their experiences and intended meanings. While approximately half of the participants did not respond directly to this request, those who did reply indicated that they were satisfied with the accuracy of the transcript. The feedback received from those who engaged in member checking strengthened the credibility of the data as a valid representation of participant perspectives.

Credibility was strengthened through internal triangulation within the interview data. The approach supports the validity of podcasters' accounts, while not claiming to validate the broader landscape, which would require distinct sources or methods. Prolonged engagement with the data through repeated reading and analysis of transcripts allowed for an in-depth understanding of participant perspectives. Comparison and internal triangulation of data collection were made by collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings (Maxwell, 2012). I was aware of the discrepant evidence and negative cases around the operationalisation of authenticity. Accordingly, this study presented discrepant perspectives to allow readers to formulate their inferences (Maxwell, 2012; Wolcott, 1990). Consistent accounts across multiple interviews, illustrating similar phenomena, enhance the trustworthiness of findings. For example, participants across different podcast genres and working models described the ability of their podcasts to create communities and facilitate meaningful conversations among listeners. The accounts from multiple podcasters across diverse contexts within Irish podcasting constitute a form of internal triangulation (Denzin, 2018). Minimal observation of public interactions between podcasters and audiences on social media was undertaken to corroborate interview accounts and support credibility with contextual evidence.

A reflexive diary was also kept from the start of fieldwork. Weekly entries, in the form of written notes and audio recordings, documented my personal impressions after each interview. These reflections informed ongoing adjustments in questioning and interpretation. These steps increased the confidence in the truth of the findings (Connelly, 2016).

4.8.2 Dependability

Dependability was enhanced through a clear and transparent description of the research methodology, as detailed in this chapter. An audit trail was maintained throughout the research process, including detailed records of data collection, coding decisions, theme development, and reflexive notes. During the data collection stage, the interview questions of the study evolved as new insights emerged. The data collection was completed in three phases over a period of nine months, so my understanding and responsiveness to participants also evolved. For example, in the initial interviews, I asked what Irishness is without providing the detail that I was an outsider looking at the cultural production in Ireland. Clarifying my position in the later interviews proved useful. I also started taking notes after listening to the podcasts prior to the commencement of interviews. For example, when asking a comedy podcaster about authenticity, the nature of the enquiry was based on performativity rather than factual accuracy, as compared to interviewing a news podcaster. These genre conventions were consistently considered across different podcasters. Frequent consultations with the supervisor and peers addressed potential blind spots throughout the data collection and analysis. Concerns such as overlapping categories (e.g., empathy and compassion or discoverability and reach) were resolved systematically. Careful consideration was given to the interview protocol, data management, and the analysis through software in order to minimise researcher bias.

4.8.3 Transferability

Transferability of this research was addressed by providing sufficient information about the context and process of the research. Detailed descriptions of the Irish podcasting context, participant characteristics, and the thematic findings are provided to enable readers to assess the potential transferability of the findings to other similar contexts. Field notes and observations also indicated contextual factors which supported a richer discussion in subsequent analysis. Purposive sampling was employed to include diverse perspectives, which contributes to the transferability of the research. I recruited individuals with varied professional roles, working models, and genre preferences (for details, see Section 4.4). Their distinct experiences allowed broad thematic comparisons. The rationale behind these choices helps readers assess wider relevance. The geographical distribution of the sample, with over-representation of Dublin-based podcasters, should be considered when assessing the transferability of these findings. As noted, the Dublin-centric nature of media industries in

Ireland was also highlighted by participants themselves as a feature of the national media landscape. Readers seeking to apply these findings to other contexts should consider the specific geographical and regional dynamics of media production in those contexts, and the extent to which Dublin-centric perspectives may or may not be representative of podcasting practices more broadly. The transferability of the research is significant when assessing podcasting and cultural production in a comparative manner between different genres and working models.

4.8.4 Confirmability

The confirmability of the findings is evidenced through direct quotes, the number of participants, details of data collection, a reflexive stance, peer review of coding, line-by-line coding, and the combination of inductive and deductive coding approaches. These approaches ensured that the findings were grounded in data and not in the researcher's bias or preconceptions. Quotes from participants are used to demonstrate that the themes are generated from the data. Initial coding outputs were shared with the supervisor and an academic colleague for feedback. Their comments prompted re-examination of certain categories. The transcripts were also shared with the participants to achieve respondent validation and offer corrections to the interpretations (Bryman, 1988). Silverman's (2013) approaches of constant data comparison, comprehensive data use, and inclusion of the deviant case were used to enhance the confirmability of this research. Confirmability was addressed through reflexivity.

4.9 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

4.9.1 Professional Background and Bracketing Assumptions

My background as a workshop facilitator in audio production and a former television producer offered useful insights that both benefit and potentially bias this project. Firstly, my media production experience provided technical knowledge and a shared language with podcast producers, helping to establish rapport. It also allowed me to understand audio production processes with more depth. To minimise bias, I asked participants to elaborate on key concepts even if I was familiar with them. I was also mindful that my background can lead to assumptions and biases. Having worked in legacy media, I carry certain assumptions about production values, audience expectations, and what 'authenticity' means. For instance, my media

background in all three sectors – independent, commercial, and public service – influenced expectations around well-being and production. Having experienced burnout in media roles, I anticipated similar descriptions from podcast creators. However, most participants acknowledged emotional and mental demands without using the term 'burnout'. Realising this, I adjusted my framing and allowed participants to articulate their experiences without importing labels they did not endorse. Recognising the duality of my insider and outsider position, I openly acknowledge my standpoint so that its influence on the research is accounted for rather than ignored. I worked to bracket my preconceptions during coding and theme development, constantly asking whether an interpretation arose from the data or from my prior biases.

At the outset of the research, I bracketed the assumption that authenticity was a singular ideal that podcasters looked to attain. Participants revealed multiple, often contrasting, understandings of what authenticity meant in practice.

4.9.2 Reflexivity in Data Collection Through Journaling

I engaged in reflexive practice throughout fieldwork, chiefly by maintaining a reflexive journal. After each interview, I recorded my immediate reactions, any notable power dynamics or emotions, and thoughts on how my background may have shaped the encounter. One early reflection followed an interview with a male podcaster who claimed there was no gender imbalance in podcast production. This surprised me, as it contrasted with my understanding of gender disparities in the field. Rather than dismissing his account, I noted my reaction and revised the interview guide. In subsequent interviews with female podcasters, I explored their perspectives on gender representation more deliberately. Their responses detailed specific challenges that validated the need for gender-aware analysis of cultural productions. The reflexive journal supported a move away from researcher-imposed assumptions towards a participant-led understanding.

Reflexivity also helped me monitor my interviewing technique. I initially filled silences with verbal cues like 'hmm' or 'okay', which I later realised disrupted participants' flow. Through journaling and reviewing transcripts, I noticed that silence often encouraged deeper elaboration. I modified my approach accordingly, using minimal non-verbal feedback and allowing pauses to unfold.

Several podcasters cited the unreliability of audience data as a major challenge. Prior to the interviews, I had assumed that discoverability would be the primary concern. However, participants expressed that the absence of credible audience metrics hindered planning and monetisation. The discrepancy between my assumptions and their lived experiences was noted in the journal and shaped the development of analytical categories.

4.9.3 Reflexivity on Cultural and Social Positionality

Another area of reflexive adjustment involved interviewing participants who produce gender identity-related content (especially topics regarding queer culture, LGBTQIA+ or drag queens). As a cisgender heterosexual male with limited knowledge of queer issues, I recognised early in the study that I was not adequately equipped to ask in-depth questions without first developing a foundational understanding of the broader context. I was transparent with participants about this and reframed my interview approach by beginning with general questions. I encouraged open and honest conversation during interviews (Legard et al., 2003). This openness created a more comfortable space for participants to educate me on relevant topics, and it improved the clarity and depth of later questions.

Reflexive practice extended to how I interpreted social and cultural references. As a Pakistani national without prior lived experience of working in Ireland before the study, my understanding of Irish cultural production and identity was limited. Recognising this, I refrained from imposing interpretations and allowed participants to define terms such as ‘Irishness’ or ‘national identity’ in their own way. This led to more open-ended and clarifying questions in subsequent interviews, encouraging richer accounts. At times, I introduced comparative frames drawn from media contexts I am familiar with. Reflecting on this positional distance helped me maintain curiosity and humility during data collection.

4.10 Research Limitations

Although the initial research plan included a survey of podcast audiences to assess how listeners perceive authenticity, this component was discarded. The decision was informed by several factors. First, during the PhD progression process, feedback from the review panel emphasised the need for a more focused and manageable scope. The original research questions were too broad, and a scoping exercise was recommended. I revised the study’s focus to concentrate on

podcasters' practices and perspectives. Secondly, upon reviewing the literature, I noted a growing body of audience-centred research in podcast studies. Given the limited resources available when conducting doctoral research, the study was delimited to focus on the production aspects of podcasting. Consequently, the research design prioritised depth of insight into podcasters' accounts of authenticities rather than breadth of coverage across audiences. The data consisted of participants' reflections, opinions, and self-assessments. As a result, authenticity was approached not as a measurable quality of a podcast, but as a construct that emerged through participants' discourses and experiences. By visiting production studios, first-hand observation of the production process likely increased trustworthiness by minimising the potential for biased declarative data. There are technological developments in the digital use of sound that may have more profound impacts on what podcast researchers currently think of as podcasting. For example, there are tools that allow podcasts to be recorded without human voices through text-to-speech features. There are certain cultural aspects of platforms, including the power struggle between users and platforms, which can be studied through digital methods like walkthrough research (van Dijck, 2013). The research limitations and directions for future research are discussed in detail in Section 10.3.

4.11 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the robust qualitative methodology employed in this research. A qualitative, interpretive approach was employed to analyse podcasters' account. Semi-structured interviews formed the core method. The sample of 30 participants was recruited through purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Data were coded and analysed thematically. Ethical protocols were observed. Strategies to ensure rigour and trustworthiness, along with an acknowledgement of researcher positionality and reflexivity, have been elaborated. The qualitative methodological framework provided a rigorous foundation to address the research problem by examining how and why podcasters in the Republic of Ireland negotiate and perform authenticity, and what challenges arise in that pursuit.

The thesis proceeds to Part II to address the four research questions. The following four chapters present the findings and analysis.

PART 2 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Chapter 5. Personal Authenticity: Self-Expression and Motivation in Podcasting

5.1 Introduction

This is the first empirical chapter that analyses data collected during the project and presents key findings about podcasting in the Republic of Ireland. The chapter shows how podcasters construct personal authenticity as one negotiated and performative form within the wider field of authenticities in podcasting. It argues that personal authenticity is grounded in self-presentation of multiple true selves, ownership of voice, disclosure, intrinsic motivation, and ethical boundaries. The chapter provides answers to the first research question that asked, "In what ways do podcasters in the Republic of Ireland pursue authenticity in relation to their self-presentation, motivations, values, and creative practices?"

Authenticity operates as a complex framework encompassing self-presentation, performative practices, and guiding principles that collectively shape podcasting practices. Research participants referred to authenticity as "a buzzword" and "a vague concept". The struggle to define authenticity among podcasters nonetheless operates with an implicit realisation of how to perform it. This apparent contradiction of not being able to articulate authenticity yet acting in ways that are informed by it offers insight into the power of implicit negotiations, normalised discourses, and performances of authenticity within podcasting culture. The difficulty in defining authenticity may be symptomatic of life in a highly mediatised society, where individuals are always performing for imagined audiences. In such a context, continuous performance makes it difficult to express a singular self. The concept of having multiple authentic selves aligns with Goffman's (1959) argument on performativity, where individuals consistently play different roles for different audiences. Accordingly, examining podcasters' creative decisions and the ways in which they rationalise them provides a valuable opportunity to explore how they perform in ways that reflect implicit and often ambiguous beliefs about authenticities.

This chapter analyses personal authenticity as one form of authenticities, which refers to the process of being true to oneself, sharing aspects of self, identity, experiences, vulnerabilities, and weaknesses, and adhering to intrinsic motivations. Taken together, these factors shape the podcasters' conception of authenticity, which the present work describes as personal authenticity. Personal authenticity functions as one form of authenticities rather than as a fixed value or stable property of podcasting. The concept is adopted from Moore's (2002) concept of first-person authenticity, which looks at the individuality and self-creation of the artist as the fundamental value for authentication. This understanding of authenticity also resonates with longstanding theoretical ideas in Western thought about the romantic-authentic self that is genuine and true (Taylor, 1992; Trilling, 1972). Likewise, self-determination theory holds that acting from intrinsic motivation (i.e., doing something for its inherent satisfaction) creates a sense of authenticity (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The podcasters in this study, perhaps implicitly, echo these ideas. They stress genuine self-expression and relationship building with audiences (i.e., reflecting a desire for genuine connection). Moreover, podcasters do not see authenticity and commercial success as mutually exclusive, but they describe authenticity as a balance between intrinsic and extrinsic motives. This helps demystify the notion that money-making is always external and inherently negative.

This chapter examines personal authenticity through four key dimensions, beginning with expressions of true selves (5.2), moving through vulnerability and transparency (5.3), exploring intrinsic motivations (5.4), and addressing the tensions between commercial success and claims of authenticity (5.5–5.6). Each aspect reveals guiding principles that help to explain what authenticity means to podcasters and how it shapes their practice.

5.2 Authenticity as Expression of True Selves

Podcasters often describe authenticity in terms of "being yourself" or "being real". Authenticity is perceived to arise when they view their podcasting persona as an expression of their real selves, demonstrated through sharing personal stories, opinions, and interests. For instance, Helen Shaw, founder of Podcasting Ireland[13], stated that authenticity is found in the "ownership of your voice and your story" and remaining "true to yourself and the story". Podcasters often

[13] *Podcasting Ireland* is one of Ireland's pioneering independent podcast companies, launched in 2006 by Helen Shaw's independent content creation company, *Athena Media*, to provide podcasting consultancy, training, and production.

believe that embodying aspects of their "true selves", including ownership over content, enables them to sound authentic. Managing Director of independent podcast production company Poddle Audio, Dee Reddy, argues that podcasters need to lean into the medium and avoid self-censorship to sound authentic. She notes, "Don't overproduce, don't self-censor too much because if you're self-censoring, then you're removing elements of yourself". Similarly, other podcasters emphasised that authenticity is constructed through unfiltered self-expression. For instance, independent podcaster Cian Sullivan, who hosts conversational podcasts *Sissy That Pod* and *Queer Classified*[14], argued that authenticity is shaped by "letting your listeners into who you are". Sullivan defined authenticity as being honest about one's feelings and not censoring oneself for fear of a negative reaction.

Podcasters believe that authenticity allows them to present one of several authentic selves. Personal and professional authenticity can diverge in podcasting, shaping selective self-presentation. Rebecca Kelly, the host of the independent podcast *Everywhere We Go*[15], described the significance of authentic expression of aspects of her personal life that were usually hidden in her professional environment. She notes:

> When people start listening to the podcast, they can't believe that's a side of my personality because I'm so fiery at my work and everything. I'm always speaking out. I'm always fighting for myself or fighting for what I need at work. And especially my colleagues, when they've listened, they were like, "I can't believe that's you. Because I've learned it, that's why I have to adjust.

The contrast between Kelly's work persona and her podcast persona illustrates how being true to herself on the podcast allowed her to express a more reflective and calm side that she typically held back in the office. The multiplicity of authenticities aligns with the framework of multiple selves, rather than one fixed self. In practice, podcasters choose which aspects of themselves to highlight and present according to the context. At times, they emphasise vulnerability, at other times expertise.

The difficulty of navigating public and private personas further illustrates how podcasters perform authenticity through selective self-presentation. A powerful illustration of 'being true to self' came from Ed Roche, PPI Radio Award-winning presenter, and the host of *Our Unique*

[14] *Sissy That Pod* and *Queer Classified* are independently produced podcasts that cover queer cultural topics. Detailed information on the podcasts referenced in this study, including target audience, episode structure, recurring themes, and genre, is provided in Appendix L.
[15] *Everywhere We Go* is an independently produced interview podcast about personal stories and struggles.

Tales[16]. Roche emphasises the importance of expressing their real self, stating, "When people listen, that's 100% me, no act, just me being authentic". Roche shared how authenticity for them was linked to being open about their identity, and explained how it adapted:

> It [being authentic] hasn't always been that way. When I started the show, I was still closeted, so I wasn't truly being my authentic self yet. I came out later in my career, and that's when I really began to feel that I could be fully myself on air.

Roche's account demonstrates alignment between public persona and lived identity. After coming out, they spoke openly about their experience on air, used preferred pronouns, and introduced LGBTQ-focused topics, which made the 'on-air self' match the 'off-air self'. Roche's account aligns with Goffman's performative framework, which argues that some degree of frontstage management is always in play. Conversely, Mario Rosenstock, Irish comedian, and host of *The Mario Rosenstock Podcast*[17], discussed the challenge of aligning one's true self with their public persona. Rosenstock highlights that podcasters are aware of the complexities of authenticity as expression or performance of self. These accounts indicate that notions of authenticity work as guiding principles and inform certain decisions in podcast production.

Podcasters often find it easier to be authentic in podcasting than in radio. Independent podcaster and host of *Big Fan* podcast[18], Emma Ní Chearúil, who also works as a presenter at Irish language music radio station Raidió Rí-Rá, states that she gained a lot of followers on the radio but felt "unable to truly be yourself" because "so many people are observing". However, 'being yourself' on a podcast is not always easy from the start for all podcasters. Sinéad O'Moore, host and producer of *Stretch Marks Podcast*[19], recalls her initial self-consciousness when she began the independent podcast after years in a more scripted broadcasting environment. She described her feelings in the first episode as terrified, nervous, and worried about how she would come across. However, after experiencing a mix of nervousness and enjoyment in the first episode, she fell in love with what she described as her authentic self by the second

[16] *Our Unique Tales* is a five-part interview podcast featuring real-life stories of LGBTQIA+ people growing up in Ireland.
[17] *The Mario Rosenstock Podcast* is an independently produced interview-based comedy podcast.
[18] *Big Fan* is an independent podcast about music, fans, bands, and icons.
[19] *Stretch Marks Podcast* is an interview podcast about the challenging aspects of parental, personal, and professional lives.

episode, recognising that there is an untapped truth, an opportunity to have authenticity, by courageously talking about the parts of herself that were hard to share.

This section highlights that expressing one's true self serves as a basis for personal authenticity in podcasting. Podcasters often navigate the challenge of expressing a version of the self that is deemed authentic at the time, shaped by context and audience. The expression of true selves is reinforced by strategic vulnerability and transparency.

5.3 Authenticity as Expression of Vulnerability and Transparency

Podcasters framed authenticity through a commitment to openness and transparency. Authenticity is embedded in podcasters' willingness to share individual experiences, vulnerabilities, and beliefs with transparency. They often attribute personal storytelling, unfiltered content, and the sharing of struggles and vulnerabilities as an important dimension of authenticity. Robbie Lawlor, HIV activist and co-host of *Poz Vibe Podcast*[20], exemplifies how vulnerability and transparency are constituents of authenticity. Lawlor produces the podcast to raise awareness around HIV by sharing their personal struggles and experiences of dealing with HIV stigma. They shared how, at one point, they realised that by keeping their personal story to themselves, they were inadvertently "part of the problem". Lawlor explained, "I wasn't sharing my story. This silence was going to continue. My goal was to break this cycle by sharing my story". Lawlor emphasises the power of sharing personal stories:

> One of the things that I find works best to change minds and hearts is the personal story. It's humanising the experience. My story is about overcoming internalised stigma and internalised shame. It's about being empowered to share my story with others. It creates a conversation that's more than just about HIV. It's way more than that, bringing a really human element to it.

Lawlor's account shows how they associate personal authenticity with the public sharing of personal struggle. They believe that their use of personal vulnerability helps construct an open, credible, and ethically committed dialogue with listeners. Rather than treating vulnerability as inherently authentic, this example shows how authenticity becomes attached to a particular mode of advocacy. In this sense, Lawlor's account contributes to the chapter's wider argument that authenticities are produced through situated practices rather than discovered as fixed

[20] *Poz Vibe Podcast* focuses on the experiences of people living with HIV in Ireland.

values. By discussing stigma and shame, Lawlor frames the podcast as a space in which empathy and understanding can be invited through situated self-disclosure. In a similar manner, Leon Diop, co-founder and host of the *Black and Irish Podcast*[21], described authenticity in podcasting as the ability of "being vulnerable and sharing difficulties". Diop and his co-hosts use their podcast to share and address challenges related to their lived experiences of racism as Black and mixed-race individuals.

Transparency is another important aspect of authenticity, though its expression varies by podcast genre. Maura Fay, producer and co-host of a comedy podcast, *The 2 Johnnies Podcast*[22], believes that authenticity emerges from candid, unfiltered conversations. She describes authenticity as "letting those conversations happen where you articulate your thoughts naturally. Instead of having the thought process inside your head, you have it outside with the people around you". Fay argues that this spontaneity and openness to imperfection make the interaction feel real and authentic. However, this level of transparency and accountability is genre-specific and is usually found in conversational podcasts. RTÉ sports journalist and host of *RTÉ GAA Podcast*[23], Jacqui Hurley, emphasises the importance of acknowledging mistakes to build authenticity:

> I would like to think that we're in that space where we tell the truth, and when we get it wrong, we say we got it wrong. Sometimes, people might say something on a podcast in particular that people disagree with. I think you have to be able to go and pick up the phone and say, "Hi, how's it going? Maybe we got that wrong".

Hurley frames accountability as a way for podcasters to support authentic relationships with their listeners. In contrast to sports or comedy, podcasters in news and politics describe authenticity as acknowledging one's limitations. For example, Nicky Ryan, the producer of Journal Media's news and documentary podcasts, including *The Explainer*, *Stardust*, and *Redacted Lives*, observes, "I think it's very authentic when you can hear that the person just knows one element of it and doesn't talk beyond that". Nicky's quote emphasises the significance of self-restraint on matters beyond one's expertise.

[21] *Black and Irish Podcast*, produced by RTÉ, features the lived experiences of black and mixed-race people living in Ireland through conversations about culture, society, and family.
[22] *The 2 Johnnies Podcast* is Ireland's most listened-to comedy podcast with over 750,000 weekly listeners, according to digital audio sales house *AudioOne*.
[23] *RTÉ GAA Podcast* covers the biggest issues and events in football and hurling in Ireland.

In genres such as true crime, authenticity is often expressed through editorial transparency and self-reflexivity. For example, podcast producer Dee Reddy explains, "authenticity is not trying to be something that you're not. So, if you're not an experienced journalist and you want to do a documentary-style show, then bring the audience along with that learning journey where you start out". This reflects a form of editorial transparency, acknowledging one's limitations and using that as a tool for effective podcasting. Reddy gave the example of *Your Own Backyard*, an American true crime podcast created by Chris Lambert, who had no formal training or experience in journalism or investigative research. The podcast investigates the disappearance of Kristin Smart, a student at California Polytechnic State University. In the first five episodes, Lambert explains why he was captivated to tell the story and why he felt compelled to produce the podcast. Reddy explains how Lambert managed to transition from being an interested party to a podcaster, stating, "he didn't pretend to be something that he wasn't. And yet still delivered one of the best true crime series, despite not being a professional journalist". Reddy's statement presents an example of a podcaster exhibiting personal authenticity through their transparency with audiences. This example illustrates how personal transparency can contribute to a podcast's authenticity, despite a podcaster's lack of professional expertise and formal training (see Section 8.4 for details). Such transparency is noticeable across various podcast genres, especially those that blend storytelling, factual reporting, and personal narrative. In Chapter 7, I analyse how genre conventions shape authenticity in more detail.

This section has shown that there is room for flexibility and adaptation in the ways podcasters express authenticity depending on genre expectations and personal values. The complexity of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in podcasting also contributes to podcasters' authenticity.

5.4 Authenticity as Intrinsic Motivations: Passion, Growth, and Advocacy

Participants often linked personal authenticity to intrinsic motivations. Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity or behaviour because it is inherently satisfying, enjoyable, or fulfilling, rather than for external rewards or pressures (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In participants' accounts, personal authenticity was often associated with intrinsic motivations such as personal interest, passion, creative fulfilment, personal growth and self-discovery, advocacy, community building, and connection with others. Participants expressed that when a podcast is produced as a "labour of love", motivated by personal enthusiasm or values, it conveys a

sense of authenticity that is perceptible to listeners. Oliver Callan (comedian and host of RTÉ's *Callan's Kicks* podcast) described that authenticity is the outcome of trust, where the audience is imagined as recognising the podcaster's motives are valid. However, the intersection between extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, and how they enhance or undermine authenticity, is a constant challenge that podcasters have to engage with. In the following paragraphs, I explore three main intrinsic motivations and values (personal interest and passion; personal growth; and advocacy and community building) that participants associated with authenticity.

Participants perceived intrinsic motivations rooted in personal interest, enjoyment, and passion as more authentic than those oriented around external rewards. For example, Liam Geraghty, whose debut podcast, *The Comic Cast,* was the first podcast to be archived by the National Library of Ireland for its cultural significance, recounts the early days of launching a podcast purely out of curiosity and passion. Similarly, independent podcaster Cian Sullivan expresses enjoyment as the key motivation behind podcasting, particularly because they enjoy critiquing culture that represents the queer community. Podcasters' sense of enjoyment shows that their perceptions of authenticity stem from personal gratification in the act of podcasting. The motivation of enjoyment as a driving force behind podcasters' claims to authenticity is echoed by Ian Doyle, audio producer at The Irish Independent and former head of podcasting for the Wireless Group. Doyle reflects on his first independent podcast, *With Relish Podcast*[24], as a shared experience of fun and enjoyment with his friends:

> It was very unorganised and all over the place, but it was fun to make. If you listen back to that now, the levels are terrible, the production of it maybe isn't great, but you can tell we're all having a lot of fun while doing it because for us it was a hobby. It was something that we weren't getting paid for. And there was that level of authenticity with that, where you hear it right away. It was three friends making a podcast.

Doyle's reflection suggests that he understands authenticity as an immediate aural quality that listeners may perceive. Although listeners' perception of authenticity is beyond the scope of this project, podcasters often believe that audiences respond to the podcaster's genuine interest.

Shared enjoyment and genuine interest were a recurrent theme, particularly among podcasters in genres such as sports and comedy. Podcasters believed that they create a sense of authenticity when audiences realise that they care deeply about the subject matter. This suggests that these

[24] *With Relish Podcast* is a food podcast looking at Ireland's culinary industry and identity.

genres may be more driven by the intrinsic incentive of shared enjoyment than others, such as news. There is also a sub-cultural dimension, where podcasting in these genres reflects a sense of both individual and collective identity. In the Irish context, this implies that authenticity is shaped through participation in shared cultural practices. Jacqui Hurley (host of *RTÉ GAA Podcast*) described how sharing the same passion as her listeners made her podcast feel authentic and inclusive, stating, "we're all in this together". In positioning herself as "just a fan" of GAA, Hurley emphasises that her motivation for podcasting about sports comes from sincere fandom and community spirit. She seeks to be perceived as one of them, which reinforces the authenticity of her role. Likewise, Maura Fay (producer and co-host of *The 2 Johnnies Podcast*), whose show revolves around Irish pop culture and comedy, highlighted that there is a clear alignment between their content, personal interests, and their audience and community. Maura Fay states:

> We genuinely have an interest in our local community, and we genuinely play GAA [Gaelic games]. These are not things that we say or do to be popular or the things to get an audience. It's just how we are. I think that's where the authenticity comes from: being true to who you are and what you stand for.

Fay's co-hosts, Johnny McMahon and Johnny O'Brien, are known for being rooted in grassroots, local humour, and love of GAA sports. Fay's statement indicates that their podcasting persona and content choices are organically derived from their personal interests.

Intrinsic motivations also revolve around advocacy and community-building when podcasters produce podcasts as a means of amplifying silenced or marginalised voices. Robbie Lawlor, for example, aims to humanise the experience of HIV across Ireland and give a voice to those living with HIV. Lawlor describes their podcasts as a grassroots movement for social change, which opens space for people to share their lived experiences. Lawlor equates the power of podcasting as "the power of the community" to do things that are not based on financial benefits. Órla Ryan, the creator of the award-winning podcast *Redacted Lives*[25], also highlights how the podcast aimed to preserve the voices of survivors from Ireland's mother and baby homes. Ryan highlights her motive to centre the personal and collective stories of survivors:

> [...] the origins were sort of that I wanted to create something. But that idea of preserving survivors' voices on the record. I thought there was something very

[25] *Redacted Lives* is a documentary podcast that tells the story of mother and baby homes in Ireland.

> powerful in them, telling their own stories with their own voices and in their own words.

Ryan's motive to produce *Redacted Lives* highlights the authenticity of capturing real stories and experiences that might otherwise remain unheard. Likewise, Nicky Ryan, the producer of *Stardust*, a six-part journalism podcast on the tragic fire that led to the loss of lives at the Stardust nightclub in Ireland in 1981, explains the significance of podcasts driven by the aim of amplifying unheard voices:

> It's something I care about. There's a clear narrative as well. We could see the story that could be told, and the families were at that stage of fighting for justice. They were willing to talk to us, willing to share their stories, their horrific stories. People hadn't really spoken in this way about it for years.

Nicky's quote shows a motivation to use podcasting for social justice. His goal was to ensure that listeners connect with the victims as real people, stating, "this could be me going on a night out with my friends in Dublin two days ago". Nicky also explained that his production team were highly conscious of how the narrative was presented through ethical storytelling, highlighting the genre expectations in journalism podcasts.

Pursuing passion projects often leads to personal growth and self-discovery for podcasters. Podcast host Mario Rosenstock describes his podcasting practice as a form of "self-therapy", stating, "It is incredible that you are discovering more about who you are". He refers to podcasting as an opportunity for "a little bit of magic", as he describes a sense of growth, healing, and learning. Processes of self-reflexivity, learning, and personal development are key sources of personal gratification in podcasting. Rebecca Kelly observes that the podcast she hosts has had a greater impact on her own growth than on that of her audience. Kelly values podcasting for personal fulfilment, expression, and growth. Likewise, Rob Flynn, independent podcaster of *Changing Coasts*[26] and *Resident*[27], describes podcasting as "a way of trying to understand the world and your place in it". Although these are mainly accounts of independent podcasters highlighting personal growth, it could also be argued that self-reflexivity, learning,

[26] *Changing Coasts* is an audio drama podcast set in an Irish coastal town about the threats of rising sea levels.
[27] *Resident* is a documentary podcast that explores individual perspectives on identity, culture, and the immigrant experience in Ireland.

and development apply in professional podcasting contexts. As discussed in Section 8.4, competence and professionalisation can be framed as both intrinsic and extrinsic incentives.

For many participants, podcasting began as a passion project produced without concern for financial viability or mass appeal. For instance, Conor Reid, host of independent podcast *Words To That Effect*[28], explained that his first podcast "had to be a passion project. It's not really viable, but I didn't build it to be a financially viable operation". Likewise, Liam Geraghty, host of *Meet Your Maker*[29], argued that being overconcerned about commercialisation reveals that "you don't really want to make this podcast for the right reasons". However, his view may reflect an idealistic or privileged position, where financial concerns are not pressing. Describing financial viability as not "right reasons" raises questions about accessibility, since podcasters without financial security may be excluded from such a definition of "authentic" podcasting. Podcasters (e.g., Geraghty) who work full-time as podcast producers may not need to worry about financial stability in the same way as independent or emerging podcasters. By distinguishing "right" and "wrong" reasons, Geraghty articulates moral values associated with economic circumstances, echoing classed judgements that Bourdieu associated with the middle and upper-middle groups (Bourdieu, 1984). The distinction also shows broader debates around high versus low art and the tensions between art and commerce in cultural production. Geraghty refers to his podcast *Meet Your Maker* as a passion project, describing it as "basically just an excuse for me to interview childhood heroes and animated stuff". Later, when Geraghty produced a partially funded horror anthology podcast, *Petrified*, he associated authenticity with his passion, despite getting funding from the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI). In Geraghty's words:

> Making this podcast [*Petrified*], I feel like it was half passion project and half fun because even though we were being paid, we were still being paid so little that you still just had to bring your passion to make and to bring it to life. *Petrified* doesn't make money.

Geraghty's account highlights a broader phenomenon within podcasting where passion projects rarely generate significant financial returns. Geraghty's normative framing constructs a hierarchy of motivations, where passion and intrinsic interest are valued over financial incentives. Geraghty's comment reflects a value system embedded in cultural capital, where

[28] *Words To That Effect* is a literary storytelling podcast that covers fiction and popular culture.
[29] *Meet Your Maker* is an independent interview podcast that won Bronze for 'Best Culture Podcast' at the New York Festivals Radio Awards.

recognition is tied to creative integrity and personal commitment rather than economic return (Bourdieu, 1986). Geraghty's account suggests that authenticity in podcasting is not only about how content is made but also about why it is produced, highlighting the broader cultural values linked to podcast production. However, passion projects can yield other forms of value for podcasters, such as the accumulation of sociocultural capital, building credibility and recognition within podcasting networks and industries. Podcasters also develop technical expertise, storytelling skills, and professional reputations, which may later translate into more sustainable career opportunities. Moreover, relationships built with audiences and peers can strengthen the podcaster's position in a competitive media environment.

In summary, podcasters identified a variety of intrinsic motivations that all fed into their sense of authenticity. These motivations include passion for content, enjoyment, personal fulfilment and growth, advocacy and giving voice, community connection, and commitment to truthful storytelling. By adhering to these internal drives, podcasters felt they were upholding their personal authenticity. Participants were also aware that authenticity is not necessarily absent when external rewards or recognition are involved.

5.5 External Rewards, Financial Success, and Authenticity

Participants suggest that extrinsic aspirations, such as commercial success, recognition, career growth, networking, and influencing audiences, do not necessarily undermine authenticity. Importantly, participants acknowledged aspirations for success or income, although they noted conditions under which commercial demands can constrain authentic practice. Commercial success and financial motivations operate as both extrinsic and intrinsic (e.g., being rewarded financially can be seen as a sign of competency). Contrary to the assumption that authenticity is only pursued through resistance to monetary and commercial goals, several participants recognised the role of the incentives provided by commercialisation and audience growth. Independent podcaster Sinéad O'Moore, for instance, emphasised that creators should own what is being created, but they should also receive the full monetary benefit. For her, being authentic included retaining ownership and creative control over her work (see Section 8.2.2 for the detailed analysis of creative control and ownership). Independent podcaster Emma Ní Chearúil offered the example of Emma Chamberlain, an American YouTuber who launched a podcast and faced accusations of "selling out" and self-promotion. Ní Chearúil challenged the assumption that monetary benefit makes podcasts inauthentic and argued,

> I don't really like the idea of a sell-out. There is a lot of criticism around the podcaster and YouTuber Emma Chamberlain at the moment. Because she started her podcast and people [were] like, she's just doing this for self-promotion. I am like, she's literally a YouTuber. It is what she has always been doing. And now, just because you recognise that, you don't like her. I think that is not really fair. I wouldn't say that other people who are doing it for profit or for whatever reason are necessarily inauthentic because they're still doing what they want to do, I hope.

Emma's optimism about financial incentives challenges the notion that making podcasts for financial gain undermines authenticity. Instead, it suggests that authenticity can also be retained in the presence of financial goals. However, podcasters believe that financial motivations may still complicate how authenticity is perceived by audiences. While not the focus of this study, future research could explore how listeners evaluate authenticity in relation to commercialisation and sponsorship.

Authenticity depends on the perceived alignment between commercial values and the podcast's mission. The host of *Poz Vibe*, Robbie Lawlor, argues that financial support "loses its meaning" when it compromises the podcast's values and mission. Over the years, Lawlor has rejected sponsorship offers from private health insurance and pharmaceutical companies. However, Lawlor acknowledges the unsustainability of unpaid labour, stating, "a lot of activism is done for free, and while it's brilliant and a lot should be done for free, you get burnt out quicker. Is it sustainable?" Therefore, Lawlor accepts funding from the community organisation Dublin Pride for production and related activities because it is aligned with *Poz Vibe*'s values and goals. Thus, it preserves Lawlor's editorial independence more effectively than corporate sponsors.

In branded podcasts, which are commissioned by commercial brands as a means of business communication, authenticity depends on the host's sincere personal interest in the topic. Podcasters working with branded podcasts consider it essential for the hosts to have passion for the subject matter, as this contributes to a layer of authenticity. For instance, Dusty Rhodes (Founder of DustPod[30], and co-host of *Tech Radio Ireland*[31]) highlights the significance of genuine interest in building authenticity in branded podcasts. Rhodes observes:

> When it comes to authenticity with brands, you need somebody who is valid and is actually interested in the topic [….] We learned that very quickly with brand

[30] DustPod is a podcast production company that produces podcasts for brands.
[31] *Tech Radio Ireland* has been Ireland's longest-running tech news podcast since 2006.

> podcasting, we would have professionals and radio presenters; they were so professional, it was so smooth, and everything was fantastic. But they just wouldn't know what to speak about in the podcast. They just miss the kind of things that somebody passionate about the topic [will not miss]. And of course, everybody who's listening is passionate about the topic, so they'll know it's not genuine. That's where I say the authenticity comes in.

Rhodes's quote illustrates that genuine interest is valued across the spectrum of podcasting, from independent passion projects to corporate podcasting. There are also parallels with socio-cultural capital, as the qualities are brought by hosts who have a personal investment and interest in the topic.

Participants sometimes framed financial success as compatible with, and supportive of, the authenticities they sought to construct. Ciarán Murphy, founder and co-host of *The Second Captains Podcast*[32], has worked within legacy media, crowdfunding models, and commercial sponsorships. He observed that creators must value their work financially to survive. Murphy explained:

> Podcasters know how much they enjoy their work. They know how much value they get from it themselves in a non-monetary way. But then they also have to try and drive a hard bargain to say, listen, this is actually about respecting the amount of work that I put into it. And that is really difficult.

Murphy's quote captures the complexity of financial goals as both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. On one hand, podcasters derive non-monetary benefits such as enjoyment, fulfilment, and community. On the other hand, they must assert their right to monetary compensation to make it financially sustainable. If being entirely non-commercial threatens the continuation of a good project, then some degree of financial gain might be necessary for authenticity. A few participants argued that making their podcast financially viable was an authentic choice as it proved that they value their own labour and that they are serious about their craft. This finding challenges a simplistic view that authenticity means rejecting all economic considerations. Instead, podcasters paint a picture of nuanced negotiation, where authenticity is supported through careful alignment of external pursuits with one's values and interests. Bourdieu's (1986) field framework helps interpret this finding as more than a conflict between authenticity and commerce. The analysis shows that podcasters seek to protect

[32] *The Second Captains Podcast* is an award-winning independent sports podcast. The podcast is one of the most successful Irish podcasts on Patreon.

symbolic and cultural capital while also securing the economic capital needed to sustain their work.

While authenticity and financial success are often seen in tension, participants also discussed the challenges of using authenticity as an aspirational ideal. They recognised that authenticity requires careful management, as being 'too real' or unfiltered can introduce challenges of excessive authenticity.

5.6 Excessive Authenticity: Boundaries and Limitations

Podcasters identified various ethical and professional risks when authenticity is pursued without boundaries in podcasting. *Excessive authenticity* is an interpretive concept developed from recurring concerns in podcasters' accounts, which points to how notions of authenticity can be overvalued or misapplied. Excessive authenticity can be understood as instances in which complete, unfiltered expression becomes counterproductive or potentially harmful to podcasters or the community. Participants' accounts suggest that excessive authenticity can impede communication, risk alienating audiences, or affect personal development in performance or personal presentation.

The participants indicated a potential downside to the pressure of sharing deeply personal and potentially traumatic experiences. As host of *Stretch Marks Podcast*, Sinéad O'Moore notes, while sharing these stories can be empowering, "your personal growth on social is attached to how often you can go through something traumatic. You'll stay in a loop of wanting to talk about things that are really hard for you". This quote indicates that podcasters often negotiate a tension between authentic storytelling and ethical responsibility, particularly when dealing with controversial or harmful content. Controversial stories and revealing statements are often seen as a form of authentic storytelling, regardless of their potential detriments to society. However, Irish podcasters view this quest for excessive authenticity with caution. For example, independent podcaster Rebecca Kelly interviewed a gangland figure, whom she described as "absolutely bonkers and mental". She did not publish the episode because the interviewee appeared to glorify gangland and drug use, which she was not comfortable giving a platform to. On another occasion, Rebecca recorded a four-hour podcast with a high-profile influencer. During the recording, the guest slated her ex-partner and his new wife. "She said an awful lot

of things in it", Rebecca said. Rebecca decided not to upload the episode, despite having obtained consent. As she explains, "I didn't put that up because that girl will be destroyed".

These experiences show podcasters' awareness of ethical boundaries and responsibility. Leon Diop, host and co-founder of *Black and Irish*, highlighted the complexity of balancing openness and responsibility. He noted that podcasts can encourage a level of comfort that leads to unintended or harmful disclosures. Leon states:

> I think you can really get too comfortable with podcasts sometimes. You could say something a little crazy that would be seen by society as not acceptable, and that can get you into a lot of trouble. I think podcasts should be a safe space, but you can't guarantee how the public will receive it. And when I say safe space, I mean if people have a level of regret or they think, "actually, I said that in the wrong way and it might come across as harmful to our society or harmful to me. I'd like to redact it". Then it should be allowed. But then again, that will take away the authenticity of a podcast.

Leon's view illustrates that, although he places a high value on honesty and openness, his practices often reflect a conscious negotiation between authenticity and responsibility. Drawing on Goffman's (1959) concept of frontstage-work, I argue that podcasters manage their self-presentation to avoid embarrassment or potential harm, both to themselves and others. Their practices reflect similar concerns around performance and social accountability. This may involve editing out sensitive content, holding back certain opinions, or reconsidering statements made in the moment. These practices are not necessarily inauthentic; rather, they reflect an awareness that authenticity is always situated within social contexts. Participants' accounts suggest that excessive or unfiltered authenticity, particularly when it involves controversial or harmful content, may compromise ethical responsibility or relational trust.

Another dimension of authenticity in podcasting involves the absence of deliberate self-performance. Host of *Meet Your Maker* Liam Geraghty reflects on not thinking too much about being authentic in his early days of podcasting, stating:

> The element of authenticity is an interesting one because you're always striving to be. I was going to say you're always striving to be authentic. But actually, I suppose we didn't really. When we were starting out, we didn't really think about that. I think that's maybe what helped us as well, because we were actually those early podcasts which were totally unfiltered, they weren't really edited. I don't think we thought about it that much. Whereas now, you're always just striving to

> be authentic or get authentic audio, because people can spot it a mile away when it's not.

Geraghty's account highlights an important dimension of authenticity as a performance that gains credibility when it is perceived as unselfconscious, rather than deliberately constructed. His observation aligns with the idea that authenticity is most observed when it appears spontaneously and uninhibited. In this case, the lack of deliberate effort to perform authenticity can contribute to a perception of authenticity.

The pursuit of authenticity becomes problematic or excessive when cultural production is merely performed for audience metrics and a globalised audience. Podcasters may present simplified or stereotypical versions of their culture to meet the expectations of a global audience. Such commodification can distort and diminish complex cultural practices (Urry, 2013). An overemphasis on non-monetary podcasting as a form of authenticity could conflict with podcasters' potential to sustain their podcasting endeavours. The excessive demand to reveal personal stories to be perceived as authentic is criticised by podcasters. For example, Sinéad O'Moore states:

> While the job of my hosting self is to encourage people to feel safe and to talk about their stories, which may include the issues that their child has. I do try to do it in as much of a respectful way as possible and not sensationalise it for high ratings. I do have a firmer boundary for myself, but then sometimes I feel guilty, why am I putting a mic in front of other people's faces that don't necessarily have that boundary?

Sinéad's concern about sensitive personal experiences on her interview podcast, particularly those involving children, shows ethical complexities in podcasting. She maintains that her focus remains on the participants' experience rather than on eliciting emotionally charged or invasive content. For Sinéad, the line between authenticity and sensationalism is maintained through careful boundary-setting, including in her own role as a parent. She explains, "I don't want my children to discover anything about their childhood through all of these hours of audio". Sinéad's reflections show how authenticity, for some podcasters, is shaped by ethics and respect for others' privacy.

Some podcasters express concern that podcasting's emphasis on authenticity can contribute to ideological bubbles, where people have their pre-existing beliefs reinforced again. Hugh

Linehan, editor and host for The Irish Times' *Inside Politics* podcast [33], highlights this risk, stating, "It is much easier to listen to people who you think are right, and they think you are right. People want to feel comfortable in a podcast, and I am not sure if everybody wants to be challenged". Linehan cautions that excessive demand for authenticity may discourage critical engagement and create spaces of ideological reinforcement, which he describes as "not always a healthy thing". Similarly, maintaining a distinctive personality is essential to podcasters' authentic approach. However, co-host of a conversational sports podcast Ciarán Murphy critiques the excessive personalisation in podcasting, saying:

> A lot of it is attitude and personality-based; that is the awful thing about radio broadcasting, TV broadcasting, and podcasting. For better or worse, oftentimes it is like a referendum on your personality, which is like really harsh. But that's the reality. There has to be some element of likability or even intense *dislikability* about you that makes you different.

The rise of excessive personalisation, accelerated by podcasting and social media, complicates the idea of authenticity. The shift occurs within a broader context of promotional cultures, where self-presentation and visibility are increasingly shaped by the logics of promotion (Davis, 2013). The Irish Times' podcaster Hugh Linehan argues that podcasting has absorbed and amplified a cultural shift, where the personal brand and personality of the podcaster often dominate. He warns that while personal voice is important, there must be a "balance between bringing your personality to the table but not too much", as overemphasising personal authenticity risks undermining critical journalism and encouraging content that prioritises personality over substance.

The tensions identified in excessive authenticity inform the broader theoretical reflections I conclude with.

5.7 Conclusion

Podcasters perform authenticit*ies* through various overlapping practices (i.e., being true to themselves, self-disclosure, sharing vulnerabilities, adhering to intrinsic motivations, and navigating financial realities). Authenticity is a selective and situational practice of self-expression, shaped by multiple 'authentic selves', performed based on context, audience, and

[33] The *Inside Politics* podcast offers analysis of the Irish political scene.

podcast genre. Podcasters frame authenticity not merely as self-expression but as an ethical practice that shapes conversations about sensitive topics. The chapter presents a more nuanced understanding than simplistic notions of 'being real' by showing that podcasters negotiate authenticity as an aspiration. Authenticity in podcasting functions as a continuous process of alignment between internal values and external expression. The prominence of intrinsic motivations in participants' accounts aligns with self-determination theory, which posits that fulfilling intrinsic needs (e.g., enjoyment, personal growth) facilitates personal development (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Podcasters draw meaning from passion and values but do not necessarily see financial goals as inauthentic or a form of 'selling out'. As Klein (2020) and Rauh (2024) argued, the sell-out debate has its continuing relevance in cultural production and creative industries. Financial rewards can validate quality and motivation and are not in opposition to authenticity. This challenges the binary of 'authentic vs commercial' and has implications for cultural production in the age of platforms. The type of authenticity in podcasting is qualitatively distinct from what we have seen among independent artists, and one that is not only typical of podcasting but a hallmark of the production process of culture in the age of platforms. Podcasting is a form of cultural practice that is native to platforms, unlike music, which precedes them. Podcasting differs from traditional art forms such as music, where authenticity is often tied to notions of artistic integrity and purity that artists claim. Podcasting aligns more with journalistic principles, where authenticity is defined as being true to the story, narrative, audience, and source. The findings contribute to the ongoing debates about the intersections of art, commerce, and authenticity in digital cultural production (see Section 8.4 on the implications of financial rewards in shaping authenticity).

The notions of authenticity shape podcasters' decisions to prefer community sponsorships and audience funding over commercial sponsors. The way podcasters approach monetary goals aligns with research on digital content creators striving to sustain authenticity while earning income. For instance, research on YouTubers has found that audiences perceive sponsorship positively if the creator is transparent about it and the sponsored content aligns with their usual content (Audrezet et al., 2020). Similarly, the podcasters in this study indicated that authenticity, to them, is compatible with financial sustainability so long as it is handled with transparency and ethics. However, participants also illustrated the complexity of certain

funding sources, which might undermine credibility, even if the host's intentions remain genuine.

The pursuit of authenticity also relates to cultural labour and the labour-of-love ethos. The participants' insistence on intrinsic motivation reflects what Erin Duffy (2017) calls 'aspirational labour', where content creators invest significant effort into projects they love, aspiring that their passion will eventually pay off. Creative workers often emphasise passion for the work as a justification for enduring long hours, financial insecurity, and lower remuneration (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011). This rhetoric of 'doing it for love, not money' requires careful balancing. On one hand, it genuinely reflects that many creative workers feel driven by passion. On the other hand, it can become an expectation or ideology that creative industries can exploit (Banks & Hesmondhalgh, 2009). It is worth noting that the ability to prioritise intrinsic satisfaction assumes a degree of financial or social flexibility. Some participants hinted at this, acknowledging day jobs or other support. This aligns with literature that finds creative workers often subsidise their passion with other work. The enthusiasm for passion-driven work echoes broader cultural narratives in the creative industries, where the ethos of 'do what you love' is commonplace (McRobbie, 2018; Duffy, 2017). Such practices may also function to increase cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). In podcasting, cultural capital involves gaining symbolic legitimacy, expertise, and recognition within the field. The forms of capital in the podcasting field impact notions of authenticity. Independent podcasters tend to prioritise symbolic and cultural capital, valuing creative freedom and "authentic" artistic expression, while those in institutional or commercial settings negotiate economic and institutional capital demands.

The need for boundaries and ethical self-censorship challenges celebratory discourses around authenticity. Participants' caution about 'excessive' authenticity or oversharing highlights the need for personal boundaries and aligns with research on context collapse and imagined audiences (Marwick & boyd, 2011). While the existing scholarship in podcast studies praises openness, the findings suggest that being too unfiltered can have repercussions. Further, the idea that authenticity might feed into audience echo chambers, where listeners seek out authentic voices that validate their own worldviews, potentially reinforcing ideological

bubbles[34]. Participants' accounts suggest a sociopolitical dimension of authenticity, where perceived authenticity and trust may be understood as confined within certain communities.

From a cultural standpoint, the value placed on authenticity by the participants reflects a wider cultural moment. Sociologist Eva Illouz (2007) has written about the 'emotional capitalism' of this era, where authenticity, emotional honesty, and vulnerability have become cultural commodities. Within this literature, audiences are often described as seeking authentic experiences and personalities, perhaps as an antidote to perceived corporate blandness or social media pretence. Some scholars, like Banet-Weiser (2012), discussed the branding of authenticity (i.e., how being authentic becomes part of one's brand identity and value proposition). While participants spoke of authenticity in creative terms, it also serves as a differentiator for their content in a saturated market. Thus, authenticity is both a sincere goal and a strategic move that is instrumentalised in the attention economy (Pooley, 2010).

Authenticities in podcasting extend beyond simplistic notions of 'being yourself' to encompass complex negotiations of self-presentation, vulnerability, motivation, commercial success, and performativity. By grounding these findings in theoretical frameworks such as self-determination theory, Goffman's performativity theory, and cultural labour, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of authenticity in digital media contexts. Reframing authenticity as a contextual, relational, and intentional construct offers valuable theoretical insights for creators navigating the complex issue of self-presentation in podcasting.

Having analysed personal authenticity as one form of authenticities, the next chapter addresses authenticity as a relational concept, examining how podcasters approach authenticities through their connections with audiences, co-hosts, guests, team, and culture. Chapter 6 is more extensive in scope than Chapter 5 and is consequently longer in length.

[34] The notion of ideological "bubbles" remains contested in the literature, with evidence both supporting and questioning it (Bruns, 2019; Ross et al., 2022).

Chapter 6. Relational Authenticities in Podcasting: Mediated, Personal, and Cultural Contexts

> I was looking to see what could be the main ingredients that make something authenticated because, at the end of the day, it is the listener. It is like an experience that is co-created by both the host and the listener.
>
> Hugh Linehan, Editor and Podcast Host, The Irish Times.

6.1 Introduction

This chapter develops a relational model of authenticities by exploring the second research question: How do podcasters negotiate and construct authenticity through their mediated, interpersonal, and cultural relationships with audiences, guests, collaborators, and communities in the Republic of Ireland? Podcasters believe that authenticity is co-constructed through three relational practices: (i) mediated audience relations, (ii) interpersonal relations (guests and production team), and (iii) cultural contexts. Building on the previous chapter's examination of personal authenticity, this chapter argues that relational work constructs a form of relational authenticity. The concept of relational authenticity is drawn from Allan Moore's (2002) concepts of "second person authenticity" and "authenticity of experience", which can be used to examine how podcasters believe they create impressions that may validate listeners' lived experiences (p. 220). In podcasting, relational authenticity is examined through podcasters' accounts of mediated, personal, and community relationships between podcasters and audiences, guests, production team, and cultural contexts.

Relational authenticity, as one form of authenticities, extends beyond the individual podcaster to incorporate the social and cultural labour across various contexts (i.e., shared cultural traits, identities, practices, and values). The cultural contexts include the place and location of the podcaster, symbolised in local allegiances and identities of the podcasters (Armstrong, 2004). Within media studies and cultural production, scholars describe authenticity as adherence to tradition (Beverland, 2005), meeting social standards (Moulard et al., 2021), expressing cultural traditions, and sharing norms or rules (Nunes et al., 2021). Participants described relational authenticity as continuously co-constructed, negotiated, and characterised by

informality, trustworthiness, intimacy, engagement, parasociality, and cultural proximity. The relational work to build authenticity has been previously framed in the literature as 'relational labour', a term coined by Nancy Baym (2018) to address the "ongoing, interactive, affective, material, and cognitive work of communicating with people over time to create structures that can support continued work" (p. 19).

In participants' accounts, relational authenticities are constructed through ongoing relational labour as podcasters attempt to build trust over time by balancing personal expression with responsiveness to audience expectations. Podcasters engage in relational labour through their efforts to form connections they understand as authentic with audiences, guests, and production teams. Podcasters work in personalised, intimate, and primarily audio-based settings where they believe listeners may feel a close relationship with the host. Podcasters often framed relational authenticity as dependent on relationships with audiences and guests. Relational authenticity is not only a frontstage (on-mic) performance but is also linked to backstage relationships with guests, co-hosts, and the production team. For podcasters, relational authenticity provides validation, establishes trust, builds loyal audiences, and creates meaningful connections that can support their podcasting practices.

This chapter is organised into four sections, each corresponding to a key element of contextual relationships: with audiences (6.2), guests (6.3), production team (6.4), and cultural contexts (6.5). The first section shows that relational authenticity is constructed and negotiated through several interrelated features, including informality, the creation of a safe space, trust, intimacy, meeting audience expectations, audience engagement, and parasocial relationships. The second section illustrates that authenticity is co-constructed by the podcaster's relationship with guests through shared vulnerability, self-disclosure, a supportive environment, and guest selection. The third section analyses the role of relationships between hosts and the production team, highlighting that shared values, informality, complementary roles, and collaborative efforts contribute to the perception of authenticity. The concluding section analyses how relational authenticity in podcasting is negotiated through podcasters' engagement with community-driven podcasting, local narratives, national traditions, and multiple, sometimes competing, notions of Irishness.

6.2 Podcaster and Audience Relationship

Podcasters understand authenticity in podcasting as shaped by their relationship with audiences. Podcasters highly value their interaction with listeners, from casual social media exchanges and live events to direct feedback, as part of what makes their persona and content feel authentic. Ian Doyle, who has produced several true crime podcasts for the Wireless Group and News UK and Ireland, describes the significance of audience relationships for authenticity:

> Authenticity is more of a listener and host relationship, and that is what I understand as authenticity. It is that they build up an authentic relationship with you, where you feel as though you are nearly eavesdropping on the conversation rather than it being a very performative and formal voice. It is more informal; it is authentic, essentially.

Doyle's statement shows that podcasting offers a more complex form of parasocial interaction shaped by audience analytics, social media feedback, and offline engagement. Before analysing the reciprocity and parasociality in podcasting, I set out the foundational characteristics (i.e., informality, trust, and intimacy) of podcasting that shape relationships.

Podcasters described their relationships with audiences as marked by informal qualities, such as spontaneity, flexibility, conversationality, and long-form. Informality in podcasting is characterised by conversational styles and less structured formats in contrast to the conventions of legacy broadcast media. Podcasters value the absence of rigid broadcast constraints, with some noting they did not feel, in their words, "boxed in by an ad break" in podcasting. Ciarán Murphy, co-host of *The Second Captains*[35], remarked, "You can be authentic on the radio, of course, but you have to be authentic while the clock is ticking". Murphy highlighted that podcasting's long-form, conversational format mirrors everyday interactions, which participants often interpret as authentic. News podcasters also indicated the desire to move away from a formal, structured interview format towards a more conversational exchange. Bernice Harrison, host of *In the News*[36] podcast at The Irish Times, notes, "while I am reporting the facts, it has to be a conversation with whoever I am interviewing". Former Head of RTÉ

[35] *The Second Captains Podcast* is an award-winning independent sports podcast. The podcast is one of the most successful Irish podcasts on Patreon. Detailed information on the podcasts referenced in this study, including target audience, episode structure, recurring themes, and genre, is provided in Appendix L.
[36] *In the News* is a daily podcast that covers stories in Ireland and around the world.

Radio and Founder of Podcasting Ireland[37], Helen Shaw, further highlights how the flexible nature of podcasts mirrors real-life interactions, stating, "people relate to the imperfections in podcasts. It is what makes them feel real". However, host of *Black and Irish Podcast*[38], Leon Diop, cautioned against the risks of informality and suggested that a balance between informality and responsibility is essential to maintaining authenticity. Participants believed that an informal approach allows them to connect with audiences on a more personal and accessible level, creating a perceived atmosphere of trust that underpins relational authenticity.

Podcasters put emphasis on building trust and transparency with their audience about their production process and editorial decisions. Jacqui Hurley, *RTÉ GAA Podcast*[39] host, states, "It does not work if it is not authentic. People can feel like they are firing shots from a mile away, but if you are not real to these people, they just will not listen. They do not care". The role of trust in building authenticity is particularly highlighted by podcasters working in professional media organisations. For example, Órla Ryan, a journalist and podcast host at The Journal, describes authenticity through the lens of building trust:

> I think authenticity does mean everything. Arguably, there are too many podcasts. It is a very saturated medium. In terms of something like *Redacted Lives*, or any kind of documentary narrative storytelling like this, the most important thing is building a connection between the listener and whoever is speaking. Authenticity is like building trust, which is on me and on us, and then facilitating that connection between who is telling their story and the person listening to that story.

Ryan's quote suggests that due to a lot of competition in the podcast industry, people are looking for trusted voices and content. Likewise, The Irish Times' news podcaster Bernice Harrison[40] also aims to be a trusted voice for her audience, emphasising the role of 'institutional credibility' that a podcaster derives from their association with a reputable institution.

Participants framed aural intimacy as another key characteristic of podcasting, facilitating perceived relational authenticity through a feeling of closeness, vocal style, sound design, and listening practices. Podcasters strategically create parasocial intimacy through direct address,

[37] Podcasting Ireland is one of Ireland's pioneering independent podcast companies, launched in 2006 by Helen Shaw's independent content creation company, Athena Media, to provide podcasting consultancy, training, and production.
[38] *Black and Irish Podcast*, produced by RTÉ, features the lived experiences of black and mixed-race people living in Ireland.
[39] *RTÉ GAA Podcast* covers the biggest issues and events in football and hurling in Ireland.
[40] Bernice Harrison hosts *In the News*, a daily podcast by The Irish Times that covers stories in Ireland and around the world.

self-disclosure, and incorporating audience feedback. Intimacy is not only a technical affordance of the medium but also an outcome of sustained relational practices between podcasters and listeners. Podcasters believed that the intimate aspect of podcast listening could create an emotional connection, active engagement, and a heightened sense of immersion. Participants associated active and private listening, along with direct delivery into the ears, with a perceived intimate connection between podcast creators and their audiences. Hugh Linehan, a journalist and podcast host for The Irish Times, believes that the intimacy of the human voice enables the listener to feel that they know the host. Although participants valued intimacy as central to podcasting, they also acknowledged its performative potential in a competitive media environment. Ed Roche, host of *Our Unique Tales*[41], believes that intimacy can be manipulated through creative, vocal, and technical techniques to make podcasts sound authentic. Roche believes that intimacy and trust are both intentional and intuitive for podcasters. Podcasters can build authenticity without being intimate, especially in genres that are more formal (for example, news podcasts). Participants suggested that even in more structured or formal podcast formats, listeners may still perceive a degree of intimacy due to conversational vocal style. Intimacy operates as a contextual and relational mechanism through which authenticity may be perceived and reinforced.

Expanding on how informality, trust, and intimacy facilitate relational authenticity, the following subsections focus on specific aspects of the podcaster-audience relationship for building authenticity: (i) parasocial relationships, and (ii) audience engagement.

6.2.1 Parasocial Relations and Authenticity

Parasocial relationships involve one-sided, affective bonds from audiences towards media figures (Horton & Wohl, 1956). The research participants offered diverse perspectives on contemporary parasocial relationships, highlighting the interactive and reciprocal nature of the host-audience relationship in podcasting.

Participants believed that the absence of visual cues in audio podcasting enhances the intimacy of the listening experience and contributes to the development of parasocial bonds. Without visual reference, listeners may attend more closely to vocal tone, rhythm, and affect, and when

[41] *Our Unique Tales* is an independent interview podcast featuring real-life stories of LGBTQIA+ people growing up in Ireland.

combined with the self-revelation and informal style characteristic of many podcasts, this heightened attention, in participants' view, creates a stronger sense of parasocial connection. Podcast producer Rob Flynn[42] suggests that the lack of visual reference allows listeners to focus solely on the host's voice, creating a sense of immediacy akin to being in the same room. This applies to both chat shows and documentary-style podcasts, as the appeal of these formats lies in creating a sense of connection. The aural intimacy in podcasting is grounded in the aural qualities of the human voice. Participants suggested that intimacy, cultivated by the audio format and the host's personal disclosures, contributes to feelings of closeness and familiarity, leading some listeners to develop a sense of personal connection with the host.

The digital environment surrounding podcasts allows for reciprocity that challenges the boundaries of parasociality. The wider online environment, including social media, messaging platforms, and other interactive tools, enables more reciprocal and responsive communication than legacy broadcast media. Podcasting, as a primarily audio-based medium, does not inherently provide interactive affordances. However, its integration within a broader digital environment enables the use of additional tools that support what podcasters perceive as social interaction and facilitate two-way engagement and sociality. The combination of intimate audio content and interactive online engagement is distinctive in the podcasting field. Rebecca Kelly, who records *Everywhere We Go*[43] podcast in her living room, notes that listeners often tell her they feel as though they are "sitting at [her] kitchen table" while listening to the podcast. Kelly aims to create a listening experience that allows audiences to feel as if "they are having a cup of tea with their friends while listening to the podcast". The host of the *Poz Vibe Podcast*[44], Robbie Lawlor, describes their relationship with listeners as more than just a podcaster, stating, "you become a mentor, a friend, a shoulder to cry on, a confidant".

The long-form, informal, intimate, and episodic nature of podcasting allows for a more sustained and personal form of engagement beyond fixed broadcast schedules, which challenges the notion of one-sided parasociality. However, audience engagement in podcasting is not entirely distinct or novel (for example, radio talk-show hosts and DJs have long taken calls or read letters from listeners). Many hosts actively incorporate feedback into their shows, adjusting their approach or addressing concerns raised by listeners. Two-way interaction can signal procedural transparency about audience input and responsiveness. It may also reflect

[42] Flynn has produced audio drama podcast *Changing Coasts* and documentary podcast *Resident*.
[43] *Everywhere We Go* is an independently produced interview podcast about personal stories and struggles.
[44] *Poz Vibe Podcast* focuses on the experiences of people living with HIV in Ireland.

platform incentives for attention and engagement rather than shared ownership and collaboration. Producer and co-host of *The 2 Johnnies Podcast*[45], Maura Fay, for instance, firmly rejects the label of "parasocial relations" in the context of podcasting, asserting that it is a "two-way relationship".

> It is not a one-way relationship. We love to hear their ideas, and we love to hear their feedback. We recently did a survey of where they listen to the podcast, what time of the day they listen to the podcast, and what they would like to see more of in the podcast. All the time, we are trying to cater to and give our audience a better product and give them what they want to listen to.

While Fay emphasises two-way interaction through feedback and surveys, the relationship remains imbalanced because podcasters hold greater individual power than any single listener. Moreover, the perceived reciprocal relationship is in reality a connection with 'the audience' as a collective, not with every individual listener. Maura's quote offers an opportunity to question the notion of full reciprocity. Podcasters like Fay take their audiences seriously yet may mislead themselves by believing this forms a personal relationship. Her refusal to accept the idea of it being one-way is revealing, as it appears to defend her position against a view or critique she perceives as contradicting her own experience with the medium. Participants' accounts suggest that contemporary podcaster–listener ties are actively shaped by hosts through relational labour. This supports a "neo-parasociality" in podcasting that demands more work from podcasters. While audience engagement challenges the idea of parasociality as entirely one-sided, it also has limitations. The relationship can feel mutual to podcasters, yet power remains asymmetric. Many of the podcasters in this study have relatively modest listener numbers, which makes such interaction feasible, but it would be difficult to sustain at scale. Parallels can be drawn with other forms of fandom, particularly DIY approaches and industry-led production, where reciprocity and accessibility often diminish as audiences grow.

The integration of financial support mechanisms, such as subscriptions and Patreon, introduces a new layer of complexity to the relationship between podcasters and audiences. Participants acknowledged that monetary contributions from audiences contribute to a parasocial economy of podcasting, in which emotional connection is, in their words, "monetised". By financially supporting their favourite podcasters, listeners become more than passive recipients; they become financial contributors to the podcast's sustainability. Ciarán Murphy, co-host of the

[45] *The 2 Johnnies Podcast* is Ireland's most listened-to comedy podcast, according to AudioOne.

most subscribed Irish podcast on Patreon, *The Second Captains Podcast,* acknowledges the parasocial economy, suggesting that listeners who pay for the subscription "own it a little":

> They [audience] do have an investment in what the show is, and what they want us to cover. They are not shy about telling us either. And that's absolutely perfect. That's brilliant. All of our listeners are incredibly invested in it. We know that any misstep won't go unnoticed. And that just keeps us in on our game hugely, and we kind of love that.

The financial investment leads to a deepened sense of ownership, influence, and expectations. Creating authentic relationships with audiences often requires podcasters to produce podcasts that resonate with audience interests, which may not always align with the podcasters' own preferences. Relational authenticity involves prioritising audience interests over personal preferences in certain contexts. The relational economy in podcasting reflects broader trends in digital media, where financial patronage and affective engagement converge, aligning with emerging models of platform capitalism that monetise audience relationships (Fisher, 2015; Duffy, 2017; Johnson, 2022).

Contemporary parasocial relations and relational authenticity were not treated by participants as mutually exclusive in the context of podcasting. The medium's intimate qualities, reinforced by personal disclosure, responsive communication, and audience feedback, are understood by podcasters as enabling listeners to feel recognised, even within structurally one-sided relationships. While podcasting facilitates parasocial bonds, they are often complicated by the host's active efforts to maintain connection, adapt content, and acknowledge audience participation. The increasing commercialisation of relationships through subscription models contributes to a relational economy that merges emotional, social, and financial links.

Having analysed that hosts' parasocial relationships with audiences contribute to the construction of relational authenticity, I now analyse how audience engagement builds authenticity.

6.2.2 Audience Engagement and Authenticity

Authentic interactions help podcasters to establish strong relationships with their listeners, facilitating a sense of belonging and engagement. This subsection analyses how podcasters interpret and respond to perceived forms of audience engagement, while acknowledging that

this analysis is based solely on podcasters' accounts rather than direct data from audiences themselves.

Participants associated higher listener engagement with a deeper perceived emotional connection to both the podcast content and its creators. *The Second Captains Podcast's* host Ciarán Murphy discusses the significance of audience engagement by referring to the notion of the "day one subscriber" as "a badge of honour" that his listeners proudly claim. As Murphy puts it, "I definitely do think that there is a sense of commonality. The listeners will have grown up with us; they will have heard us growing a bit as well". Hugh Linehan suggests that listeners may develop a "recognition of a voice" and a sense of familiarity with podcast hosts, which, in his view, contributes to relational authenticity. Dusty Rhodes[46] contrasts engagement in podcasting with what he perceives as the much shorter length of attention associated with other comparable media formats, such as YouTube. Rhodes's statement reflects a perception among podcasters that podcasting encourages a distinct and sustained engagement in ways that differ from other media formats and genres. However, long-form videos demonstrate that sustained engagement is not exclusive to podcasting. Rhodes's comment highlights how podcasters may construct podcasting as distinct by drawing contrasts with other platforms, even when such contrasts are not always empirically supported.

Podcasters reported that audiences actively engage with podcasters, both online and offline. These engagements include messages, letters, emails, social media interactions, and offline interactions. Social media platforms provide avenues for interaction, allowing listeners to connect with hosts. Maura Fay, producer of *The 2 Johnnies Podcast*, describes the role of social media in audience engagement: "Because of social media, now you can have quite direct engagements with your fans, which makes the production of the podcast a lot more fun. It feels like you can be really catering to people's tastes in a very direct way". Podcasters strengthen the relational authenticity of their shows by actively engaging with listeners and responding to their feedback, as well as encouraging active participation, feedback, and interaction from listeners.

The offline connections between podcasters and their audiences offer further insights into how relational authenticity is constructed in podcasting. Offline interactions demonstrate the closeness and familiarity that can extend beyond the online space. Mario Rosenstock, popular

[46] Dusty Rhodes is the founder of DustPod, a podcast production company that produces podcasts for brands. Rhodes also hosts tech news podcast *Tech Radio Ireland*.

Irish comedian and host of *The Mario Rosenstock Podcast*[47], reflects on the feeling of being present in listeners' daily lives, saying, "I often walk by people, and they go, 'they are listening right now'. I love that. And you feel, wow, I am in their head, and I hope that is a good conversation". Rosenstock describes his "favourite" offline interaction as when somebody walks by him on the street, and he sees them just smile and walk on. He explains that the reason they are smiling is because he has entered their "memory bank, and in their memory bank, they remember themselves laughing, and that is a lovely, lovely feeling". Rosenstock believes that such interactions are not a burden but rather a validation of the listener's appreciation for his work.

Geographical limitations and close social proximity in Ireland may facilitate more frequent offline engagement, which can reinforce the sense of intimacy and connection through podcasting. The Irish Times editor Hugh Linehan reflects on the specificity of the Irish context, noting, "Ireland's a small country, so you just meet people all the time who listen to the podcasts as well. And we end up talking to them". However, Linehan's account reflects podcasters' perceptions rather than audience-reported experiences, and the role of national context in shaping this intimacy should be approached with caution. While the small scale of Irish society may contribute to a unique relational dynamic, it also risks invoking cultural generalisations that require further critical reflection.

Podcasters recognise the one-sided yet familiar nature of parasocial interactions, where they believed listeners may feel a personal connection with the host despite the lack of reciprocity. Ciarán Murphy reflects on the experience of being recognised by listeners: "People do come up to you on the street... and they often say, I need to remind myself that you do not know me, even though I know you exactly". While these offline interactions appear to signal a relationship, it is more accurately understood as a parasocial connection, characterised by emotional intimacy without interpersonal reciprocity. In the context of podcasters and their audiences, this is a valuable insight into engagement and authenticity, as it highlights moments where audiences may recognise the one-sidedness of the relationship when meeting or interacting with the podcaster. These encounters led podcasters to infer that some listeners may internalise a sense of familiarity through repeated listening, even though the host does not know

[47] *The Mario Rosenstock Podcast* is an independently produced interview-based comedy podcast.

them individually. What podcasters interpret as "relational" is arguably shaped by their perception of a collective audience.

While the host-audience relationship is a central focus in discussions of relational authenticity in podcasting, the participants also discussed the indirect connections developed among listeners. Similar patterns appear in podcast fandoms in Europe (Mañas-Pellejero & Paz, 2022) and in gaming communities on Twitch, where different styles of interaction shape engagement (Flores-Saviaga et al., 2019). Órla Ryan describes how *Redacted Lives*, a podcast about the mother and baby homes in Ireland, prompted online and offline conversations among listeners:

> It [*Redacted Lives*] was a conversation starter for a lot of families where they said, "Oh, well, actually, my aunt put it in the family WhatsApp chat and started a conversation about something that happened to their granny or their aunt or something like years ago". It was powerful to think.

Ryan's quote demonstrates the potential of podcasts to enable meaningful conversations beyond the immediate listener-host dynamic. However, the interactions between listeners are not consistently present across all podcast formats (especially small indie podcasts). For example, independent podcaster Cian Sullivan reflects on their experience of *Sissy That Pod*[48], noting that they are unsure of the extent to which their audience interacts with one another.

Authenticity is primarily shaped through podcasters' mediated relationships with listeners, often expressed through informality, trust, intimacy, revealing conversations, and online and offline engagement. The next section shifts focus from host and audience relationships to host and guest relationships, illustrating how authenticity is co-constructed in these exchanges through guest selection, shared vulnerability, self-disclosure, and a non-confrontational and supportive environment.

6.3 Podcaster and Guest Relationship

Relational authenticity in podcasting is constructed through a triangulated relationship between host, guest, and audience. The host and guest relationship is viewed as secondary to the primary host and audience relationship. In interview-based podcasts, guests are invited as speakers to contribute to the dialogue, while in journalism podcasts, they are often expert contributors

[48] *Sissy That Pod* recaps RuPaul's Drag Race UK and features discussions about drag culture.

offering specialised commentary. Participants suggested that trust between host and guest influences how authenticity is produced in conversation and later signalled to the audience. Podcasters draw on their competence, resources, and efforts to build a rapport with guests that enables authentic conversations. They invest in relational work with guests, an effort analogous to Baym's (2015) concept of relational labour. The podcaster and guest relationship is shaped not only by interpersonal connection but also by the podcaster's awareness of audience expectations, making it partly performative. Podcasters emphasised the reversal of the usual performance structure. They intentionally shift focus away from themselves to foreground the guest's narrative and encourage more open and authentic expression. Journalist and podcast host Órla Ryan states, "Authenticity is like building trust, which is on me and on us, and then facilitating that connection between who is telling their story and the person listening to that story".

Podcasters believed that their relationships with guests, particularly when marked by trust, rapport, shared vulnerability, and supportive environment could shape listeners' perceptions of authenticity in the finished podcast. The relevance of these qualities (i.e., supporting environment, vulnerability, and guest choice) is expressed differently in journalistic podcasts, where professional distance and editorial framing often take precedence. Facilitating guest-centred conversations requires hosts to create a comfortable and supportive environment that enables openness and ease during the recording process.

6.3.1 Non-confrontational and Supportive Environment

Participants emphasised a non-confrontational and supportive environment to facilitate authentic interaction. They create an environment in which guests feel emotionally and physically comfortable to express themselves. Hosts take deliberate steps to minimise pressures that might negatively influence the guest's comfort and openness. Maura Fay emphasises the importance of creating a supportive environment for guests, stating, "they [guests] know that Johnny B and Johnny Smacks [hosts] are not going to be rude to them or ask them embarrassing questions".

A supportive environment can encourage guests to share candidly, thereby contributing to perceptions of authenticity. However, what constitutes a "supportive" setting varies across podcasting genres. In conversational formats, comfort may involve emotional rapport,

empathy, informal tone, a familiar setting, or a shared understanding of sensitive boundaries. In journalistic or political formats, a non-confrontational approach may involve pre-interview negotiation, clarity of intent, and editorial framing. These differences highlight how genre conventions inform not only the degree of openness encouraged but also the host's role in managing authenticity as a relational competence.

Participants also acknowledged the challenges of collaborating with guests who may be nervous or unfamiliar in a more studio-based, formal environment. Sinéad O'Moore, host of *Stretch Marks Podcast*[49], describes the anxiety experienced by guests who are not media savvy:

> The truth was, they felt so nervous and intimidated about the day of the recording…They came into the studio, they would be greeted, they'd be in this building. They'd be asked to wear headphones. They'd be told how to position their bodies in front of the mic.

Sinéad's view illustrates the ways in which the structures of the recording environment may undermine the conditions through which participants seek to construct authenticity. Guests are put into a situation that is uncommon in their lives, with the pressures of being recorded. Similar to Sinéad's approach, interview podcaster Rebecca Kelly notes that recording podcasts at her home helps to create a sense of a comfort and authenticity.

Podcast hosts employ various strategies, such as informal pre-interviews and building a friendly rapport before recording, to make their guests feel at ease. For institutional podcasters, such as The Irish Times*'* Bernice Harrison, a producer does more extensive pre-production work with guests, which is then followed by what Harrison describes as "we would have had two minutes beforehand to establish a nice, easy-going rapport". For independent podcasters, pre-interview activity requires extensive work. For instance, Cian Sullivan states, "I try to just sit down and talk to them for 25 minutes before we even start recording. So at least we are not recording off nothing".

The practice of pre-interviewing was seen as both useful and challenging by the participants, reflecting varying genre expectations. The journalism podcasts' collaborative and guest-led approach of pre-interviewing guests for factual accuracy stands in contrast to the norms of investigative journalism, where withholding questions is often considered essential to preserve

[49] *Stretch Marks Podcast* is an interview podcast about the challenging aspects of parental, personal, and professional lives.

editorial independence and spontaneity. The practice of sharing questions and conducting pre-interviews with guests creates various challenges to authenticity, as guests may exploit the pre-interview to avoid the most important questions of the podcast. Contrary to the pre-interview approaches discussed above, the host of *Everywhere We Go*, an interview podcast about personal stories and struggles, Rebecca Kelly, states that she does not send any questions to participants before the interviews. Kelly's approach of not doing pre-interviews or a pre-script stems from her commitment to being genuinely surprised by novel revelations, as she believes people might think that she is performing if she already knows the answers. For her, authenticity depends on being genuinely moved, surprised, or affected in real time. Kelly's approach challenges conventional norms of journalistic preparation, aligning instead with a relational ethic of vulnerability and shared discovery.

Regardless of the working framework or genre, pre-recording relational labour is a key step in the production process and has significant implications for the relational authenticity between podcaster and guest. These efforts to show trust and comfort are often precursors to moments of vulnerability, where guests share personal reflections that contribute to the perception of authenticity.

6.3.2 Vulnerability and Relational Authenticity

The perception of authenticity is shaped by the host and guest's willingness to share personal stories, vulnerabilities, or emotionally resonant experiences. For podcasters, most authentic moments arise when guests share deeply personal, difficult, or challenging experiences. Mario Rosenstock recounted an example of an episode of his interview podcast to describe the connection between authenticity and guests' vulnerability:

> There's a great moment in an interview I did a couple of weeks ago with Al Porter. Al Porter is a comedian who was cancelled in 2017. Incredible difficulty in his life. But he got into a moment late in the episode where he started talking, and he was completely with me. And he starts talking about the moment he feels he is coming back into the world, and that he meets again his 17-year-old self before he became famous. And I could feel him, that he had forgotten he was in a room. He had forgotten he was on a podcast. He was just talking. I said nothing. And it nearly brought me to tears, and it nearly brought the person who was recording it at the time to tears because he was so authentic in that moment.

Rosenstock's quote highlights how vulnerability is often linked to authenticity, as guests reveal aspects of their lives that may be emotionally difficult to share. Rosenstock's interviewing technique was to disarm and make people feel safe and relaxed. Moments of unguarded expression are often perceived as the most authentic, but they occur against the backdrop of careful production and interpersonal trust.

Active listening and taking a step back to give agency to guests help podcasters create authentic conversations. Such sentiment resonates with Sinéad O'Moore, host and producer of *Stretch Marks Podcast* and former host of the award-winning parenting podcast *Everymum*, who considers herself "best" when she is "not trying to be the celebrity" with a podcast. Sinéad elaborates:

> I am not trying to raise my own profile to a level of that which we see now in the podcasting world… You can be a facilitator of really compelling and engaging conversations without having to be the person who interrupts, talks loudest, is most controversial, and steals the shine… Actually, I wasn't a failure if I didn't speak for the whole episode and impart some kind of wisdom. That's not a failure. That's a success from a hosting position—of somebody feeling so safe that they could completely just talk.

Sinéad's approach of encouraging reciprocal openness from the guest aligns with established interviewing techniques found in other interpersonal contexts (e.g., conflict resolution or hostage negotiation) where swift emotional rapport is necessary to build trust.

The relationship between authenticity and vulnerability is not without its complications, particularly when vulnerability becomes a performance expectation rather than a spontaneous expression. Podcasters highlighted the ethical dimensions of podcasting, particularly when dealing with sensitive content. In contexts aligned with investigative journalism, such moments demand a careful balance between amplifying unheard voices and ensuring that participants are not exposed to unintended harm or re-traumatisation. The ethical considerations surrounding vulnerability and protection also inform podcasters' decisions about guest selection.

6.3.3 Guest Selection and Relational Authenticity

Relational authenticity in podcasting extends beyond host and guest interaction to decisions about who is invited as a guest and what types of stories are prioritised. Many podcasters are keen to create content that goes beyond the typical narratives found in traditional and legacy media by prioritising the stories of ordinary people. For example, host of interview podcast *Our Unique Tales*, Ed Roche, highlights a shift in their preferences for inviting guests, noting, "I am not as excited about interviewing a celebrity… I actually get more excitement out of chatting to our listeners or real people with real stories". Roche's emphasis on revealing everyday experiences reflects their desire to counter homogenised narratives presented in legacy media. Likewise, Sinéad O'Moore prioritises unheard and authentic voices over well-known personalities:

> To find and convince a woman who has never done anything publicly, but I know she has a really compelling and interesting story to tell. Getting her to agree and feel safe and brave and courageous to come on is part of my authentic hosting self.

The focus on bringing unheard voices is important to relational authenticity. Podcasters' attempts at capturing unique stories contribute to their perception of authenticity and highlight the potential of podcasts to give a platform to unheard voices. Podcasters, particularly those working within media institutions or seeking to grow their listenership, feel pressure to include more high-profile guests to attract a larger audience, meet editorial demands, or meet audience expectations. Podcasters believed that decisions to interview media-trained guests, subject-matter experts, or public figures could shape the audience's perception of authenticity. Hugh Linehan, editor of The Irish Time*s* and host of *Inside Politics*[50] podcast, criticises the idea of interviewing media-trained guests on his podcasts, saying:

> There is another reason we don't have politicians, which is that, nearly always, if you have a politician, it takes a while to stop them behaving as if they're on a radio station. They've all been to a certain extent media trained... to talk down the clock and not answer the question directly. Which is completely not the kind of vibe that we're looking for.

[50] *Inside Politics* podcast offers analysis of the Irish political scene featuring journalists, political thinkers, and the occasional politician.

This section has shown that podcast hosts make intentional decisions to create conditions that allow for authentic expression, ranging from setting a comfortable environment to building trust through vulnerability and openness. This approach involves prioritising the guest's voice, moving away from the performative aspects of legacy media, and often seeking to give a platform to unheard stories. However, the relational construction of authenticity in podcasting is an ongoing process of negotiation and adaptation, reflecting the shifting nature of relationships between hosts, guests, and listeners.

Building on the relational pattern between hosts and guests, the following section examines relational dynamics among podcast hosts, co-hosts, and production teams. While less visible to the audience than guest interactions, the connections among a podcast's team also contribute to the perception of authenticity in podcasting.

6.4 Relationships between Hosts and Production Team

The interpersonal relationships between co-hosts, producers, editors, and other production members constitute a specific form of relational authenticity between co-workers. This section shows that long-standing friendships, shared values, informality, complementary roles, and collaborative efforts shape podcasters' perceptions of authenticity.

6.4.1 Relationship between Co-hosts

Podcasts that have multiple hosts shape authenticity through personal and professional relationships. This relational dynamic is seen by podcasters as perceptible and meaningful to listeners. Podcasters often pointed to their chemistry, banter, informality, and long-term friendship as drivers of authenticity. Participants believed that the relationship between hosts sets the stage for how listeners engage with and perceive the podcast. Co-host of *The David McWilliams Podcast*[51], John Davis, suggested that long-standing friendships are a basis for authentic on-air interactions between co-hosts that resonate with listeners. Alongside familiarity, co-host relationships require intentional effort and work to develop an on-mic dynamic that resonates as authentic. Niall Kitson, co-host of *Tech Radio Ireland*[52], offered a

[51] *The David McWilliams Podcast* is an independent podcast and covers economics. John Davis co-hosts the podcast with Irish economist and author David McWilliams.
[52] *Tech Radio Ireland* has been Ireland's longest-running tech news podcast since 2006.

candid reflection, “I think authenticity is something that has to be worked on. [...] Dusty [co-host] and I have worked hard on our dynamic over the years”. Kitson suggests that even with a long-standing connection, a successful podcast partnership needs continuous effort and relational work to cultivate chemistry.

Informality is another element of relational practices through which co-hosts perform and shape authenticity. Informality is partly genuine, reflecting rapport, but it is also consciously performed to align with the style of the podcast. Hosts of conversational-style podcasts often describe their podcasts as casual conversations, replicating everyday interactions. However, in many cases, these conversations are guided by scripts or structured outlines, much like semi-structured interviews. Participants suggested that the interaction between hosts strengthens the podcast’s content and may facilitate a sense of community among listeners. Participants stressed that an informal dynamic needs to feel natural and not forced, which is precisely what skilled performers aim to achieve. John Davis, co-host of a conversational podcast, elaborates on the importance of banter and informality between co-hosts by suggesting that listeners can distinguish manufactured banter from genuine interaction, noting, “it’s hard to mimic that, and a lot of people try to do that, and it sounds false or forced or contrived”. The difficulty of artificially recreating authentic conversation and relationships reinforces the idea that a strong connection between co-hosts is difficult to perform without a solid foundation. This foundation is also related to behind-the-scenes collaboration.

6.4.2 Relationship among Production Team

The relationship and collaboration within production teams is another factor that shapes the authenticity of podcasters. Production teams influence authenticity through editorial decisions, critical feedback, and creative choices, even if audiences are unaware of the individuals behind these processes. Producer of comedy podcast *The 2 Johnnies Podcast,* Maura Fay, explains an indirect effect of team relationships on listeners’ perceived authenticity, saying, “I can pull them [podcast hosts] back a little bit if I think they’re going too far on something or they’re kind of losing perspective on a situation or just maybe lacking in knowledge. I can just better inform the conversation”. Fay further illustrates that a small team can lead to greater creative control, which in turn allows for a more authentic representation of the hosts’ voices and ideas. However, the producer of several Irish language commissioned podcasts, Emma Ní Chearúil, appreciates the creative support a larger team can provide, stating, “having someone to send

those ideas off and having a wider team to depend on is really nice". Team feedback and collaboration help hosts create powerful stories. This collaborative process can enhance the clarity and resonance of the podcast, ensuring that the hosts come across as engaging. The balance between creative independence and collaborative oversight reflects broader challenges in podcast production. While higher levels of autonomy support authentic self-expression, they can sometimes result in a lack of editorial guidance or quality control (see Chapter 8, which analyses how autonomy shapes authenticity).

Authenticity is constructed through effort and ongoing relational work, supported by connections, complementary roles, and collaborative practices. The next section shifts to the broader sociocultural dimensions of relational authenticity. It examines how cultural elements such as national identity, tradition, and community intersect with perceptions of authenticity in podcasting.

6.5 Authenticities and Cultural Contexts: Irishness, Identity, Globalisation, and Community

Relational authenticity in podcasting is deeply intertwined with cultural identities, shared histories, values, local affiliations, and community relations. It is negotiated by podcasters through their connections with local narratives, national traditions, community-driven podcasting, and multiple and competing notions of *Irishness*. Irishness is a dynamic, multifaceted, and actively negotiated construct rather than a unified national identity. In this context, the term Irishness stands for a significant cultural dimension influencing podcasting practices and audience interactions in Ireland. Rather than presenting Irishness as a singular identity claim, this chapter shows that Irish podcasters draw pragmatically on local contexts, including traditions of storytelling, humour, community, solidarity, and understated self-presentation or self-deprecation. While such portrayals risk reinforcing stereotypical notions of Irishness, they can also be understood as part of a broader mythical foundation. These cultural references are not necessarily factually true or false, but they offer explanatory force in understanding how Irishness is conceptualised by podcasters and how it shapes their podcasting practices. The expression and portrayal of Irishness are negotiated through shared meanings, customs, norms, values, and symbols that Irish podcasters use to organise and explain lived experiences.

This section shows that Irishness is a flexible and contested concept. By doing so, it analyses how the idea of Irishness is expressed, performed, and contested within podcasting, and how these articulations contribute to podcasters' perception of relational authenticity. This section also examines contradictions between commercialisation and authenticity, highlighting how Irish podcasters balance authenticity with self-promotion and commercial success in a globalised media environment. Podcasters in Ireland often viewed monetisation and visibility as conflicting with cultural values of modesty and communal orientation. At the same time, they navigate dominant Anglo-American norms by adapting global formats while keeping Irish voices and narratives.

In the following sub-sections, I first introduce Irishness as an important and contested aspect of cultural authenticity. I then analyse the role of regional identities in building connections. This is followed by an examination of how various elements of Irishness are contested due to global imperatives. I conclude by showing that authenticity extends beyond content production to community engagement, as podcasters seek deeper connections by addressing community issues, facilitating supportive interactions, and empowering underrepresented voices.

6.5.1 Irishness and Authenticity

Irishness functions as a contested, relational, and performed construct in podcasting in Ireland, shaped by cultural, historical, and social contexts. Rather than focusing on a singular, unified imagined Irishness, there are multifaceted, contested, and often contradictory ways in which Irishness is performed, challenged, and rearticulated through podcasting. Departing from Benedict Anderson's (2020) concept of imagined communities, this research shows the lived experiences and relational patterns that shape the perception and expression of Irishness in podcasting. Irishness is actively constructed through podcasters' relationships with tradition, local identities, and communities. The Irish Times editor Hugh Linehan remarked, "Irishness is a very complex construct, a place of ambiguities which is rooted obviously in a lot of history, emigration, and relative poverty". Linehan's framing of Irishness challenges the notion of a singular Irish identity by emphasising its diversity and evolution.

Ireland's tradition of oral storytelling, conversational style, and humour is a key cultural element that shapes Irish podcasters' authenticity. The cultural value placed on verbal expression and connecting with others translates well to the intimate audio format. However,

it is the individual, in-your-ear, one-to-one aural experience that ultimately shapes how podcasting is experienced. Irish comedian Mario Rosenstock described a satirical legacy, stating, “Irish people love bending reality. What you see is what you do not get. What you say is not what you mean. They love that difference”. Rosenstock suggests that Irishness can manifest in a kind of self-deprecating humour or a discomfort with self-promotion. Likewise, RTÉ GAA Podcast host Jacqui Hurley believes that Irish podcasts offer a unique combination of humour and warmth:

> It is the sense of humour that makes any Irish podcast worthwhile. A lot of my friends who are not from Ireland would often say, “Jesus! Irish people have such a random sense of humour, but they do make you feel warm, and they do make you feel welcome”. [...] I hope that's never lost because our sense of humour is something that we are known for in the world.

Participants often grounded Irishness in cultural attitudes and shared values, particularly those shaped by historical experiences such as hospitality, solidarity, suffering, and oppression. This understanding is expressed by Leon Diop, founder and host of the *Black and Irish* podcast, who states:

> Irishness for me is a way of life. It's not a particular look. It's not a particular sound. But it is a particular way of living. For me, Irishness is being very hospitable, being very welcoming, being able to tell a story, and being able to have a laugh because we have seen horrors in our history. Irishness is being fun and light-hearted, and it's always rooting for the person who is being oppressed because we recognise our history of being oppressed as well.

Diop’s account highlights how Irishness is shaped by collective memory and everyday values rather than by appearance or sound. Diop’s quote shows a tendency to link Irishness to a heritage of oppression that is, in many ways, very distant from present-day lives. Irishness is not something one inherently possesses but something that is actively negotiated in relation to perceived expectations of audiences.

Authentic expressions of Irishness are contextually grounded and distinct from stereotypical or commodified performances. For instance, independent podcaster Ed Roche notes, “I definitely think having a sense of Irishness in Ireland in the podcasting industry can help. But sometimes I feel like it's fake and it's forced”. Some podcasters deliberately play with traditional Irish

tropes, while others feel it is important to move beyond them. For example, producer of *Brisim Achan Riail*[53] podcast, Emma Ní Chearúil states:

> I am thinking of some creators who are making stuff that looks very Irish, in that where they wear tweed jackets and they have the Paddy cap ironically or the knitted jumper. I mean, I love that. I do. But I think it nearly becomes a caricature. Maybe that is the point.

Emma's quote highlights a challenge between a desire to connect with an authentic Irish identity and a recognition that such authenticity can be easily commodified, stereotyped, or misrepresented. Since all participants of this research are Irish, their view of Irishness is rooted in local experiences. This is markedly distinct from diasporic or emigrant perspectives, such as those of North Americans with Irish heritage, where Irishness is often understood as symbolic or inherited rather than lived daily.

The diversity of Irishness and related experiences highlights the need to move beyond stereotypical portrayals of identity. As Ed Roche puts it, "what is being Irish because me doing that impression is not somebody else's version of being Irish". Roche's comment recognises that Irishness is experienced differently by each individual and highlights Irishness as flexible and situational. Podcast host Pat O'Mahony[54] questions the distinctiveness of Irish podcasting, stating, "most things that are typically Irish are not going to do with being Irish. And so, is there a characteristic that makes Irish podcasting or broadcasting stand out? I don't think so".

The critique of using Irishness to distinguish Irish podcasting from other countries highlights the challenge between celebrating local identities and engaging with wider narratives that extend beyond territorial boundaries. Identity is broader than geography and includes culture, language, history, and diasporic ties. The chapter highlights the geographical dimension because of the project's scope to focus on the Republic of Ireland, while acknowledging non-territorial forms of belonging that shape production and reception. The findings suggest a post-colonial reading of Irishness as a pragmatic and flexible resource rather than a fixed cultural essence. This reflects a typical post-colonial strategic use of national identity within a globalised context. References to Irish identity work strategically, as they can anchor a podcast

[53] *Brisim Achan Riail* is an Irish language podcast that explores the music of minority languages and the connection between music, language, and community. The podcast features interviews with Huw Stephens (BBC & Other Voices), DJ Próvaí (Kneecap), and others.
[54] Pat O'Mahony is the former RTÉ journalist, host, and independent producer of *Off Message* podcast. Off Message covers media development in Ireland.

in local experience, signal authenticity to diasporic listeners, or differentiate content within a crowded global market. Such uses echo post-colonial arguments that formerly colonised cultures negotiate between asserting specificity and engaging wider narratives. Irishness in podcasting functions less as an inherent trait and more as a situational dimension, performed according to audience, genre, and commercial aims.

While Irishness operates as a broad cultural framework, podcasters also construct authenticity through more localised identities. The next sub-section examines how regional identity shapes relational authenticity in Irish podcasting. Participants emphasised the role of local accents, colloquialisms, and place-based storytelling, while several criticised the Dublin-centric media structures, arguing that they marginalise regional voices.

6.5.2 Local Identities and Authenticity

Local identities play a meaningful role in constructing relational authenticity through local accents, colloquialisms, and local storytelling practices. Participants suggested that linguistic markers not only root podcasts in specific locales but also establish connections with listeners who identify with the regional nuances. Podcast producer Patrick Haughey[55] emphasised the importance of local authenticity, stating, "we expect Blindboy to be a little bit local… it's kind of unique to them". Participants understood localisation as potentially resonating with audiences by creating a shared belonging, even as it challenges definitions of Irish identity imagined as unified and singular. The intersection of locality and authenticity is also evident in storytelling practices. Producer of *The Kinahans*[56], Ian Doyle recounted how regional narratives shaped their podcast's tone, "In a Dublin story, it's not just about the city; it's about making the story accessible and relatable for listeners in Middle America too". These comments highlight how relational authenticity requires navigating both local and global expectations.

Relational authenticity is also reinforced through podcasters' geographic ties within their communities. Several hosts intentionally nurture these connections, creating a sense of tribe or representing voices often overlooked, such as those outside urban centres. The commitment to

[55] Patrick Haughey is Ireland's leading podcast trainer and independent producer of *The Mario Rosenstock Podcast*, *Ireland Unfiltered* and several branded podcasts.
[56] *The Kinahans* is a true crime series from The Irish Sun telling the complete story of Ireland's most feared crime family.

represent the reality of the communities and their lived experience provides a contrast to the local aspects of mediated communication found in legacy media. Maura Fay believes that *The 2 Johnnies Podcast'*s hosts (Johnny B and Johnny Smacks) are genuinely part of their community, and they do their podcast from Cahir, a town in their home county, Tipperary. Maura Fay believes that the production of *The 2 Johnnies Podcast* outside Dublin is part of its authentic charm. In her words, "people really like that, and they really respect the guys for not getting notions and moving to Dublin". The term notions and what it means in the local Irish context is discussed in the Subsection 6.5.3.

Podcasters voiced concerns over Dublin-centric media hegemony, arguing that it limits authenticity by excluding regional voices and lived experiences. They linked authenticity to media geography, arguing that Ireland's heavily Dublin-centred media economy narrows the range of voices and stories that reach national and global audiences. The concentration of media in Dublin is seen as a barrier to inclusivity. Limerick-based podcaster and presenter of SPIN South West Radio, Ed Roche highlighted the concern, "In that sense, it [concentration of media in Dublin] alienates a lot of people. I think it's important for other voices to be heard… whether that's from the farming community of County Kerry or from Limerick". The emphasis on diverse regional identities reflects a commitment to inclusivity, which strengthens relational authenticity by amplifying underrepresented voices. The Dublin-centric concentration of media also affects what kind of stories are told, as noted by Maura Fay:

> I cannot abide the media concentration in Dublin… If you take production out of that area and go into rural parts of Ireland, you get different stories, different experiences, different life perspectives, and a much more realistic view of how a community functions. The reality that is quite often portrayed in mainstream media isn't the reality for the vast majority of people who live outside Dublin.

Beyond national and regional identities, relational authenticity is shaped by wider structural conditions and national narratives in a global context. The following section explores how Irish podcasters react to pressures between authenticity, commercialisation, and global podcasting formats.

6.5.3 Self-promotion, Globalisation, and Authenticities

Participants expressed concerns about self-promotion and commercial success, viewing these as challenging in the creative industries. For example, Irish language podcaster Emma Ní

Chearúil notes, “It is not very Irish to be like, ‘look at this thing I made’.” She suggests that due to social media, the creator focuses on self-promotion as opposed to a community-building approach. Ní Chearúil criticises the influence of globalisation and Americanisation on Irish media, observing that “Irishness is not really being portrayed. It is more like a globalised, maybe even Americanised version of what we think we should be presenting”. She argues that when cultural references become generic and detached from context, the result is content she calls “a lot more performative than it needs to be” and “not necessarily always genuine”. Ní Chearúil’s comments highlight how cultural elements shape the performative strategies employed by podcasters.

The idea of “not chasing the money” or “notions” is connected to a cultural attitude resembling the Tall Poppy Syndrome. While the Tall Poppy Syndrome is not an Irish expression, it describes a dynamic that resonates in the Irish context. It refers to the tendency to mock or criticise those perceived as being too ambitious or successful. Irish comedian and podcast host Mario Rosenstock explains:

> We love mocking people, to bring them down to size. We have a special expression in Ireland called Notions. Notions is hilarious because it means something very, very specific in Ireland. So, let's say, the way somebody speaks, but then when they are on the phone at home, they have a different voice. They put on a posh voice. Or when a guest comes to the house, they bring out these biscuits that are just like expensive biscuits. That person is said to have notions.

Economic constraints and global market pressures complicate efforts to maintain a distinctly Irish voice in podcasting. Former RTÉ 2FM presenter and host of *Tech Radio Ireland*, Dusty Rhodes, comments on Ireland’s position in the global media landscape, “Ireland punches way above its weight… but the market is just not here to do anything really big”. This quote highlights the constraints of scale and resources that shape the relational strategies employed by Irish podcasters to communicate authenticity while reaching broader audiences. It also points to a pressure between financial success and authenticity, which is particularly noteworthy in a country often seen as firmly embedded in neoliberal global finance.

The influence of podcasting formats, techniques, promotional strategies, and production models in the United States and the United Kingdom prompts anxiety among Irish podcasters about cultural distinctiveness. They emphasised the importance of localising content to maintain cultural specificity, perspectives, accents, and narratives. The commercial pressures

raise questions about the distinctiveness of Irish podcasting and the challenges of carving out a unique space in a globalised media landscape. However, the podcasters interviewed for the study also emphasised adopting a "glocal" approach where they incorporate successful structural features of podcasting while infusing them with Irish references, humour, and sociopolitical context. The negotiation between local and global narratives also manifests in how podcasters address culturally specific content. Rebecca Kelly described how "maintaining authenticity in Irish stories while making them universally relatable" was a key focus, emphasising the relational work required to bridge these narratives effectively. This "glocal" approach echoes small-nation media scholarship, which argues that peripheral industries survive by hybridising global formats with local content (Chalaby, 2016; Leotta, 2014; Lobato, 2019; Szczepanik et al., 2020).

While commercial and global forces challenge the authenticities that participants seek to construct, many podcasters find grounding in their relationships with local communities. The next sub-section shows that authenticity is co-constructed through connections with the local community.

6.5.4 Community Building and Authenticity

Relational authenticity in Irish podcasting is often constructed through podcasters' relationships with local communities, where shared values and connections deepen trust and belonging. In doing so, podcasting operates as a medium through which relational authenticity is performed through broader ties to place, tradition, and social responsibility. This sub-section begins with an analysis of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) as a site of affective community, before turning to examples of podcasting for social impact. It then considers the limits of podcasting's community-building promise, highlighting issues around inclusion and ideological echo chambers.

Participants described connections to local communities and shared cultural institutions, such as the GAA, as shaping relational authenticity. Jacqui Hurley, who hosts a GAA podcast on RTÉ, highlights the importance of her relationship with the GAA community:

> You have to be really aware that, particularly the people who listen to GAA in Ireland, are really, really invested in the product because it's their local club, it's their local community. It's people who teach their children. It's some of their

> children. So, it's a really, really important thing to them. Not that professional sport in Ireland isn't, but it's just a different connection.

Hurley's observation illustrates that GAA is deeply embedded in Ireland's local-national fabric. The GAA is historically linked to the cultural revival that accompanied the struggle for Irish independence. GAA matches are experienced as communal rituals. Because players are neighbours, teachers, or even family members, participants suggested that audiences may feel an affective investment that merges sport with location-based identity and classed notions of belonging (Cronin, 1999). Podcast hosts who cover the GAA must negotiate this tapestry of local loyalty, social history, and cultural nationalism, which is quite distinct from interviewing, for instance, Premier League athletes. Jacqui Hurley reflects on the importance of her personal connection to the GAA community, emphasising that her listeners are aware of her deep commitment to the GAA and her family's involvement. This frames authenticity as a long-standing commitment towards the community. It also raises potential conflicts of interest and bias. She suggests that her audience not only recognises her active participation in the sport, including coaching her children and still playing herself, but also perceives her genuine passion for the community and the product. This shared understanding, Hurley believes, creates a collective experience that she calls "we're all in this together". Through her openness about these personal connections, she accentuates the role of shared values in building a strong, authentic relationship with her audience. She shares, "A lot of the stewards, a lot of the groundsmen… they're the ones that I'm just naturally gravitating towards". These relationships, embedded in shared spaces and experiences, illustrate the relational nature of authenticity, which extends beyond the podcast to the broader community context.

Community-driven podcasters aim to have a positive impact on their communities by raising awareness about social issues, providing resources, and facilitating connections between individuals. Serving the audience through informative and supportive content takes precedence over podcasters' personal motives, particularly in genres where the emphasis is on the social role of podcasting. The social purpose of community-driven podcasting discussed in this thesis, such as HIV awareness, LGBTQ rights, mother and baby homes, migrant experiences, and the Black and Irish community, as described earlier in Section 6.3, contributes to the perceived authenticity of the host and their work.

Despite podcasting's promise of democratising community voices through relational authenticity, some participants expressed concern that the medium may also reproduce

dominant voices. Pat O'Mahony, host of interview podcast *Off Message*, observes that while podcasts give a voice to people who do not normally get interviewed, they also give a voice to people who are interviewed too often. Pat states, "Podcasting hasn't opened up our ears to wisdom and new innovative ways of thinking. As far as I can see, most of the big podcasts are done by fascist, right-wing Nazi nutjobs". Pat's remark highlights a central contradiction in podcasting's community-building promise. Podcasting exemplifies what Mosco (2004) calls the "digital sublime", a utopian rhetoric that celebrates connectivity while obscuring the structural conditions that shape who is heard and who remains marginal. The celebration of community created by digital technology can be naïve, as if gathering people and forming groups is inherently desirable and produces positive outcomes for all. Scholarship on online echo chambers and filter bubbles cautions that community-building affordances can intensify ideological homophily, reinforcing rather than diversifying listeners' worldviews (Pariser, 2011; Sunstein, 2018). Pat's critique invites a more sceptical reading of relational authenticity in podcasting. The analysis acknowledges both its capacity to widen the public conversation and its potential risk of reproducing existing hierarchies of voice and power.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that relational authenticity is constructed through ongoing relational work that involves consistent, thoughtful engagement of podcasters with diverse stakeholders. The chapter presented a relational account of authenticities in podcasting by showing how participants associated authenticity with trust, intimacy, responsiveness, shared values, and cultural connection. The findings are situated within broader theoretical perspectives including podcast studies, parasocial theory, digital intimacy, mediated authenticity, relational labour, small-nation scholarship, and the negotiation of national identity on global platforms. A theoretical discussion of these findings is presented later in Chapter 9.

Authenticit*ies* in podcasting are fundamentally relational, negotiated through podcasters' ongoing interactions with audiences, guests, production teams, and cultural contexts. The relational dimension is significant for podcasters because it emphasises that what is perceived as authentic relies on relationships and connections. The finding aligns closely with Moore's (2002) notion of 'second person authenticity' or 'authenticity of experience', whereby authenticity may be attributed when performers appear to confirm the lived experiences of their listeners. Moreover, Irish podcasters actively engage in 'relational labour' (Baym, 2015)

through ongoing, interactive, affective, material, and cognitive work. The framing extends authenticity beyond traditional individualistic conceptions, and aligns with contemporary scholarship that recognises authenticity as socially constructed and negotiated in practice (Duffy et al., 2023; Wang, 2025). Podcasters claimed cultivating trust through candid communication about mistakes or uncertainties, through consistency between their on-mic persona and off-mic behaviour, and through engaging honestly with feedback, including admitting mistakes or knowledge gaps. The analysis supports Enli's (2015, 2025) theory of mediated authenticity by showing how the "authenticity contract" between creators and audiences operates in the podcasting sphere. Podcasters employ a variety of strategies to enhance engagement through prolonged attention, emotional connection, and active participation, transforming listeners, in podcasters' accounts, as engaged contributors of mediated authenticity. Participants framed authenticity as the foundation for these interactions, enabling hosts to seek trust, relatability, and shared experiences.

Authenticity is constructed through a combination of interpersonal exchange and deliberate editorial craft. Podcasters in this study consistently emphasised the value of informality, conversational styles, and openness to imperfection, aligning with audience expectations identified by Markman and Sawyer (2014), where authenticity equates less to polished performances and more to perceived genuineness and accessibility. The informal style of podcasting also raises questions about the deliberate choices made to achieve this style, blurring the line between authenticity and artifice. Hosts seek to make conversations appear spontaneous, informal, and emotionally open, yet both they and their production teams shape this spontaneity in ways that podcasters believe are largely imperceptible to listeners. The 2024 US presidential election has brought discussion of the informal aspect of authenticity to the forefront. Podcast appearances became a strategic centrepiece of the 2024 US presidential campaign, allowing candidates to project an image of unfiltered, personable identity that bypassed legacy media gatekeeping (Chakraborty, 2024; Wheeler, 2024). Podcasts such as *The Joe Rogan Experience* and *Call Her Daddy* offered long-form, conversational settings in which policy detail gave way to anecdote, humour, and intimacy (Kalinauskas, 2024). The emphasis on personality and relatability over polished rhetoric has contributed to a broader public perception of authenticity as style, informality, and parasociality (Wheeler, 2024).

Ethical dilemmas often arise concerning the connections between hosts and guests. Applying the ethical lens to podcasting, podcasters must navigate between encouraging authentic

disclosures and protecting participants from potential emotional, social, or psychological harm. However, these relationships also present challenges, as frictions between personal expression and professional collaboration can complicate the pursuit of authenticity. From a journalistic perspective, the higher degree of comfort and non-confrontation can also imply compromise. Podcasts are generally less confrontational than other forms of interview, but there are downsides to non-confrontational stances, particularly when interviewing more controversial guests. In such settings, fact-checking can be seen as confrontational or uncomfortable, but not doing so might run the risk of propagating mis/disinformation, propaganda, or purposeful lying. Podcasting often feels like a cosy conversation among friends, even when the guest is making false claims. The finding invites discussion on the limitations of a non-confrontational approach for critical public discourse. Moreover, expressions of intimacy and vulnerability align with algorithmic visibility and follow the financial incentives of podcasting in the age of platformisation of cultural production. This reflects a broader political-economic dynamic, where emotional disclosure works as content (see Section 5.7 Excessive Authenticity).

The chapter highlighted the role of relational labour (Baym, 2018) in the podcasting field, emphasising that emotional work and community engagement by podcasters reinforce the perception of authenticity. The findings resonate with recent scholarly work (e.g., Maloney Yorganci and McMurtry, 2024) on parasocial and digital intimacy which identified ordinariness, spontaneity, and perceived imperfection as key to creating authenticity. The parasocial relationships in podcasting are nuanced because of the engagement practices that give podcasters a sense of reciprocity. Podcasters do not know their audiences on an individual level. They have a mediated connection with them through online engagement facilitated by social media. The offline engagements serve as important markers of how relational authenticity is shaped through deeper connections that are not limited to digital spaces.

While some Irish podcasters see a natural affinity between Irish culture and the conversational aspect of podcasting, others caution against oversimplifying ‘Irishness’ or relying on stereotypes. Although the chapter acknowledges the relevance of Anderson’s (2020) concept of imagined communities in examining cultural relations, the evidence challenges the notion of a singular Irish identity by emphasising its diversity and evolution. The connection is further complicated by the globalised media landscape, where Irish podcasters are both influenced by and seeking to differentiate themselves from international trends. Podcasters in Ireland realise that they must negotiate between the efficiency and audience reach afforded by dominant

Anglo-American models and the desire to articulate a recognisably Irish voice. Further research might situate this negotiation within media imperialism debates and small-nation cultural production theory, asking whether Irish podcasts extend global audio homogeneity or enable more diverse expressions of authenticity through localised adaptations. Irish podcasters grapple with the challenges of creating meaningful connections with listeners. Globalisation and transnational media consumption have introduced new complexities into how Irishness is experienced, performed, and contested in podcasting. Although this study concentrates on podcasts produced in the Republic of Ireland, many participants referenced all-island symbols (from GAA rivalries to Kneecap's performances), highlighting how Irishness is continually negotiated across internal borders and transnational influences. This research is limited in scope in terms of podcaster-only data without an audience study, as well as not interviewing podcasters from Northern Ireland about their perceptions and practices of Irishness.

The next chapter analyses how genre conventions and production decisions shape authenticities.

Chapter 7. Authenticities Across Genre Conventions and Production Processes

7.1 Introduction

Podcasters described genre as a powerful structural force shaping audience expectations, potentially as significant as individual motivations or professional roles. This chapter analyses how podcasters construct authenticities through genre conventions and production decisions. By addressing the third research question, "How do genre conventions and podcasters' creative and editorial choices across production stages shape their approaches to authenticity in the Republic of Ireland?", this chapter builds on the preceding chapters, which have demonstrated that authenticity is a negotiated process. Genres are understood as conventions and expectations shared by podcasters, audiences, platforms, and publishers (Brackett, 2016; Toynbee, 2000). These conventions influence how podcasters understand, claim, and operationalise authenticity.

The central argument of this chapter is that authenticities in podcasting are shaped through genre expectations, editorial judgement, and production choices. The chapter develops three connected analytical points. First, genre conventions establish different criteria for what sounds authentic across narrative non-fiction, conversational, and fiction podcasts. Second, production decisions do not simply move podcasts towards or away from a fixed value of authenticity. Instead, planning, scripting, recording, editing, and sound design help podcasters produce authenticity in ways that fit genre expectations. Third, rawness and polish do not carry fixed meanings. Their value depends on whether they support the podcast's intended tone, audience relationship, and editorial purpose.

The chapter develops this argument in two stages. Section 7.2 examines how genre conventions shape authenticities across narrative non-fiction, conversational, and fiction podcasts. Narrative non-fiction podcasts prioritise factual accuracy, ethical responsibility, and emotional resonance. Conversational podcasts give value to spontaneity, personal voice, and interaction. Fiction podcasts depend on believable characters, immersive sound design, and suspension of disbelief. This genre-specific construction challenges fixed definitions of authenticity and

instead further positions it as context-dependent. Section 7.3 then examines how authenticity is produced through decisions made across pre-production, production, and post-production. Across these stages, podcasters evaluate authenticity in relation to genre norms, audience expectations, and production constraints. Through a multi-genre and production stage analysis, this chapter shows that authenticity works as a guiding concept that podcasters value in relation to genre conventions, production necessities, audience expectations, and creative constraints.

7.2 Genre and the Construction of Authenticities

Genres serve as guides for thematic focus, narrative style, and delivery format. This section focuses on three distinct podcast genres: narrative non-fiction, conversations or chatcasts, and fiction. These genres were identified through analysis of podcast scholarship and participants' descriptions of podcast formats, content categories, and production practices. The distinction between genre and format is not always clear-cut, as many podcasts draw on elements of multiple genres and adapt formats to suit creative or audience needs. Three genres were selected for their prominence in the Irish podcasting landscape and their distinct approaches to authenticity. By selecting these three genres, the section highlights how podcasters work within and sometimes against genre expectations in shaping practices that podcasters understand as authentic.

7.2.1 Narrative Non-fiction Podcasts

Narrative non-fiction podcasts are often characterised by their emphasis on factual accuracy, editorial credibility, ethical representation, real-world relevance, and emotional resonance. Subgenres within this genre include news, documentary, true crime, personal narrative, and activist podcasts. Each subgenre brings particular expectations that podcasters navigate to produce podcasts they regard as authentic.

In the context of news podcasting, podcasters construct their claims to authenticity through journalistic values, such as fact-checking, reliance on experts, and editorial autonomy. News podcasters set up a clear distinction between analysis and news reporting to construct authenticity. Bernice Harrison, host of *In the News*[57] podcast at The Irish Times, emphasises

[57] *In the News* is a daily podcast that covers stories in Ireland and around the world. Detailed information on the podcasts referenced in this study is provided in Appendix L.

the "very clear line between analysis and news", asserting that her podcast is "not opinion-led". The strong emphasis on the separation between opinion and news highlights the subgenre's reliance on factual accuracy as a key element of authenticity. Harrison also criticises the idea of subjectivity in journalism podcasts, stating, "There are the facts. I am a serious person. Those two things must be at the forefront". Harrison distinguishes facts and opinions by asking clear questions to the experts and contributors, but she is aware that not all journalism podcasts adhere to these principles of accuracy and objectivity, saying, "I do know that some podcasts are not necessarily such. You get to the end of it and think, hold on a second, that was that guy's opinion". Harrison's statement suggests that her podcast maintains authenticity by applying standards of reporting news through what she refers to as authoritative voices. Authoritative voices are considered those coming from experts in a particular field. The need to have expert voices is considered important for established news organisations such as The Irish Times, as Harrison notes:

> The authenticity really, really lives in the expert voice. All these panel discussions you see, that does not fly with us. We are interviewing one person who is an expert. That is where the authenticity lies. That is the authenticity of it. We are always very, very, very sure that we need an authoritative voice. Because it needs to fit in with The Irish Times. The Irish Times is an authoritative voice, and our podcast must also be an authoritative voice.

Despite these rigid journalistic parameters, podcasters are also adapting to evolving listener expectations by combining conversational formats with journalistic values. The commitment to factual accuracy extends to acknowledging any limitations or potential biases. Hugh Linehan, host of the *Inside Politics* podcast, states:

> Now, in order for a podcast to feel authentic, which is another important signifier of what a podcast actually is, you have to bring yourself to the table. While I am conscious of some of the rules around being an Irish Times journalist in terms of expressing an opinion. There is no doubt that my political perspective or some of my views are going to slip out from time to time, and they are going to inform the thing [...] And we know enough about life to know that there is no such thing as pure objectivity. But what you can do is you can bring your own beliefs to the table and then approach the subject in a fair way.

This acknowledgement of subjectivity reflects a shift from strict objectivity toward reflexive and critically informed practice in contemporary journalism podcasting. News podcasts are moving away from traditional news formats to a more relaxed and conversational style, which

they believe provides an authentic sense of real-time reaction to events. However, while podcasters think that openness and personal experiences contribute to an authentic listening experience, the emphasis remains on factual reporting. This blending of journalistic rigour with narrative storytelling demonstrates that podcasters adapt genre conventions to changing listener expectations without compromising their authenticity. Furthermore, the rise of personal narrative journalism podcasts that focus on storytelling and real-life experiences introduces a different nuance of authenticity, as news becomes narrative-driven, blending analysis, commentary, and reporting.

Moving to documentary podcasting, authenticity is constructed through a blend of factual presentation, narrative interpretation, and emotional resonance. These characteristics highlight the narrative and journalistic expectations that documentary podcasters must navigate to produce content they regard as authentic. Nicky Ryan, podcast producer at The Journal, emphasised rigorous fact-checking in documentary podcasts, stating, "If anyone makes any claims or any figures, we would be double-checking those. And not saying that other publications do not do that, but there will be a lower bar". Fact-checking and objectivity were important aspects of Ryan's *Stardust* podcast[58], which investigated the state's handling of a fatal fire incident at the nightclub. Although Ryan personally believes that the state's handling of the matter was poor, The Journal sought to approach the topic without preconceived notions. At the same time, the documentary aimed to combine factual reporting on the state's failures with commentary that built emotional connections among listeners. Ryan describes the goal as "you listen, and you think, this could be me going on a night out with my friends in Dublin two days ago". This example highlights that, to seek authenticity, documentary podcasters balance journalistic values and audience expectations of emotional resonance.

Ethical responsibility towards interview participants is another marker of authenticity in documentary podcasts. For instance, John Roche, producer of the documentary series *Yarn*[59], described his approach as "about getting your point across and being as honest as you can with it", showing a prioritisation of interpretation. Roche criticised certain documentary podcasts as an easy way for influencers and celebrities to advance their personal interests and self-promotion. Roche remarks, "There is this trend now of celebrity documentaries. I would say they are unauthentic. They are just puff pieces. I am very cynical about stuff like that. And that

[58] *Stardust* is a documentary podcast on the tragic fire that led to the loss of 48 lives at the Stardust nightclub in Ireland in 1981.
[59] *Yarn* is an independent documentary and docu-drama podcast.

has just blown up recently". Roche highlighted the need for documentary podcasters to be aware of the fine line they must tread between taking advantage of people and authentically telling their stories. Unlike news and conversational podcasters who challenge their guests and experts during conversations, Roche believes that challenging sources while talking to them is "somewhat disingenuous" in documentaries. He believes that authenticity can be constructed through the editing process, where he can purposely edit the podcast in such a way that the listener can come to their own conclusions, creating a more authentic experience.

True crime podcasts require a balance between storytelling, emotional engagement, journalistic integrity, and ethical responsibility to construct authenticity. Podcasters in the true crime subgenre described their podcasts as operating across multiple genres, often shaped by how listeners perceived the subject matter. This aligns with Brackett's (2016) argument that cross-genre practices reinforce genre conventions rather than challenge them. Órla Ryan acknowledges that some people view her podcast *Redacted Lives*, which examines mother and baby homes[60], as falling within the true crime genre, while also noting, in her words, that "crimes were committed in some instances". The producer of several true crime podcasts, Ian Doyle, said that his work on crime podcasts is "very victim-centred, not glorifying necessarily the criminals nor the crime that happens. It is looking at the perspective of someone who has lost someone because of these crimes". This commitment to centring victims contributes to a sense of authenticity by respecting the lived experiences of those affected.

True crime podcasts blend conventions from journalism and documentary, but they are criticised for using victims' voices to cater to the commercial incentives of wider reach. For instance, John Roche, producer of the documentary series *Yarn*, stated: "Are you using [subjects] just to tell a story?" The nuance between authenticity and ethical values appears in Doyle's assumption that authenticity does not necessarily equate to rigid adherence to facts alone. He explains, "Authenticity does not necessarily have to mean that all of your content is necessarily factually correct, and obviously it should be. But like the news podcast, it does not necessarily mean that you have to go down certain paths". However, not all participants viewed such an approach in the true crime genre positively. For instance, Sinéad O'Moore, host of the

[60] The Irish state and Catholic Church established Magdalene laundries and Mother and Baby Homes in Ireland. These institutions forcibly housed unwed women who became pregnant. It is estimated that 35,000 women were forced into these institutions and 6,000 babies died in their care. In 2014, a mass grave of babies and children was found in the septic tank at Bon Secours Mother and Baby Home in Tuam, County Galway (Clark, 2021).

Stretch Marks Podcast[61], believes that "trauma stories are kind of high engagement stories". Sinéad suggests that podcasters' personal growth on social media is attached to how often they go through something traumatic.

Activist and personal narrative podcasts, while distinct in purpose, share structural and narrative similarities. Both subgenres emphasise lived experience, personal testimony, and the articulation of marginalised perspectives. Personal narrative podcasts place the podcaster's own experiences at the centre, making authenticity tied to their personal vulnerability, self-disclosure, and self-expression. Ed Roche's reflections on the LGBTQIA+ podcast *Our Unique Tales*[62] illustrates how the personal narrative genre enables authentic expression by centring the podcaster's subjectivity and lived experience. Roche said, "Although *Our Unique Tales* was about everybody else's story, I felt like I needed to have an input of me in there as well". This comment shows how personal narrative podcasting enables podcasters to position their own subjectivity alongside others' stories, allowing for moments of personal vulnerability to inform and shape the broader narrative arc. While personal narratives centre primarily on individual expression and identity, activist podcasts explicitly align authenticity with advocacy for a collective or community. Dee Reddy[63] suggests that niche community-oriented shows "benefit a local community… because they get exactly what they want, which is the content nobody else is making for them". Such targeted content supports authenticity by responding directly to audience needs and values.

Across narrative non-fiction podcasting, authenticity is constructed in relation to the values, expectations, and production practices of specific subgenres. While news podcasts rely on factual precision and institutional authority, documentary and true crime podcasts negotiate between journalistic and emotional modes of storytelling. Personal narrative and activist podcasts draw on the power of lived experience and audience engagement. Moving from an emphasis on fact-checking and responsibility, the next sub-section analyses how conversational podcasters construct authenticity through spontaneity, commentary, and interpersonal style.

[61] *Stretch Marks Podcast* discusses challenging aspects of parental, personal, and professional lives.
[62] *Our Unique Tales* is an interview podcast featuring real-life stories of LGBTQIA+ people growing up in Ireland.
[63] Dee Reddy is a producer and founder of independent podcast production company PoddleAudio. She also served as head of content development at GoLoud, a leading platform for digital audio in Ireland.

7.2.2 Chatcasts and Conversational Podcasts

Conversational podcasts construct authenticity through a sense of spontaneity, relatability, and personal connections. This sub-section analyses how podcasters frame authenticity within this genre, including comedy, interviews, panel discussions, and monologues. Podcasts in conversational formats adopt a more informal, unrestricted, and spontaneous direction, in contrast to scripted genres such as narrative non-fiction, which often depend on longer planning and research. Maura Fay, producer of *The 2 Johnnies Podcast*[64], states, "conversational podcasts are not really scripted… you are articulating your thoughts by talking out loud". However, the informality in conversational podcasts can also contribute to discrepancies in perceived authenticity. The issue is clearly captured in Fay's argument when she acknowledges, "sometimes those thoughts may not be perfectly articulated". This statement shows how some conversational podcasts reconcile their raw and more coherent parts to perform authenticity.

In contrast to panel conversations, monologue podcasts (i.e., single host speaking to the audience) rely on the podcaster's ability to construct authenticity through their personal expression and perspective. Monologue podcasters often draw their authenticity from personal and lived experience, offering a strong link to the podcaster's personal identity, personality, and opinions. One of the most popular podcasts in Ireland, *The BlindBoy Podcast*, is a prominent example of monologue podcasts from the Irish context. Monologue podcasts may give the impression that they are individual or solo in terms of their production process. However, the participants recognised that, while monologue-style podcasting features an individual voice, it still involves a larger production operation. Podcast producer Nicky Ryan[65] echoes this argument:

> Even for someone like Blindboy, who just sits down and talks to someone—he has a producer, people working behind the scenes, booking guests, briefing them, and organising everything. Industry professionals are aware of that, but sometimes people entering the industry don't realise how much work goes into it.

Blindboy draws a perception of authenticity from a sense of confession, self-improvement, and being kind to oneself. Indie podcaster John Roche states, "Blindboy's style of podcast is

[64] *The 2 Johnnies Podcast* is Ireland's most listened-to comedy podcast.
[65] Nicky Ryan works at Journal Media and has produced news and documentary podcasts.

supposed to be rambling, and it's all about digging deep and talking and getting close to the audience". Fay Mercier (2021) notes that *The Blindboy Podcast* contains a mixture of comedic ramblings and short stories, as well as Blindboy's own musings on prominent social and political issues, including mental health and social movements.

Interview podcasters construct authenticity through interaction and revealing conversations between the host and guests. For instance, host of *Everywhere We Go*[66], Rebecca Kelly states, "I had one podcast where there was a big silence […] You have to give people the space to be ready to talk, especially if it's about mental health, grief, suicidal thoughts". Interview skills, such as the use of silence, are employed to show patience and empathy with guests. Interview podcasts allow the podcasters to build rapport in an intimate manner. Therefore, the authenticity of an interview depends on the skills hosts acquire to respond to their guests. However, constructing authenticity requires careful balancing. Hosts must balance maintaining their own voice and allowing guests to share their stories in ways that may be claimed as authentic by podcasters. Chapter 6, Section 6.3.2 on guests and host relationships has examined this phenomenon.

Comedy podcasts often capitalise on spontaneity, humour, revealing conversations, vulnerability, and personal expression to seek an authentic connection with listeners. When comedy podcasters are accurate and transparent, it makes it easier for people to see the fictional version of a real person that a comedian impersonates. Oliver Callan, comedian and host of *Callan's Kicks* on RTÉ, explains the relationship between authenticity and accuracy in comedy:

> Authenticity is getting all your facts lined up, doing a portrayal as honestly as you can, without an agenda behind it. That is what I say to myself all the time. And sometimes I catch myself and go, it was a bit hard on that person or that particular point this week. Thankfully, we have got other weeks to correct that and balance it as we go.

While comedy podcasts are often scripted, they still fall under the conversational genre due to their informal style. Oliver Callan[67] discusses the ability of audiences to discern between a comedian's persona and their true self. Likewise, sports podcaster Ken Early's[68] account shows

[66] *Everywhere We Go* is an independently produced interview podcast about personal stories and struggles.
[67] Oliver Callan is an Irish comedian who hosts *Callan's Kicks* podcast and works as a presenter for RTÉ Radio 1.
[68] Ken Early is the co-host of sports podcasts *The Second Captains*.

a further complication since reactions that appear spontaneous can become copied and performed. His observation that "people are learning how to fake it" shows that conversational authenticity depends not only on informality, but also on whether listeners accept the reaction as credible within the format.

Each subgenre within conversational podcasting contributes to distinct interpretations of authenticity, whether through informality, interview sensitivity, monologue introspection, or comedic self-awareness. The next section examines fiction podcasts where authenticity is shaped by conventions of suspension of disbelief.

7.2.3 Fiction Podcasts

Fiction podcasts (e.g., audio dramas) construct authenticity through scripting, creativity, storytelling, believable performance, and immersive sound design. Despite being based on constructed narratives, fiction podcasts can maintain a sense of authenticity that may resonate with audiences. Fiction podcasts, unlike other genres, face the challenge of building authenticity within an inherently artificial context. This contrasts with non-fictional subgenres, which approach authenticity through factual storytelling and ethical considerations. Fiction podcasting exemplifies the creative potential of the podcasting medium, offering a space where innovation, representation, and emotional resonance converge.

The key element of authenticity in fiction podcasting is the creation of believable characters and immersive worlds. Podcast writer and director Peter Dunne, who comes from a theatre background, highlights the importance of "building the characters" for the horror drama podcast *Petrified*, stating, "I wanted it to feel like these were real people, that things were happening to them, that it all felt believable". Dunne's approach aligns with what he understood as listeners' expectations of authenticity, even within fictional contexts. Before writing *Petrified*, Dunne had an extensive background in writing for theatre but did not have much prior experience in podcasting. Dunne criticises other fiction podcasts for lacking world-building and having "very heightened" performances, which he describes as sounding "very fake and inauthentic".

Dunne's account shows that fiction podcasts construct authenticity through believable performance rather than factual truth. In this genre, authenticity depends on whether the writing, acting, and sound design sustain the listener's willingness to accept the fictional world.

Fiction podcasting provides clear evidence of how contextual authenticities are constructed. Participants suggested that even when audiences know the content is fiction, they may accept it as authentic or true as long as it builds suspension of disbelief. Participants assumed that audiences recognise that a fiction podcast is a performance. In fiction, authenticity is about telling a story that people are engaged in through world-building and the suspension of disbelief. Suspension of disbelief is an essential expression used frequently in fiction. If that is broken (for example, through plot holes, inconsistent character behaviour, or poor world-building), engagement is lost, and the podcast may sound fake. Karhulahti (2012) argues that suspending disbelief at narrative improbabilities is a skill required to construct narrative coherence. In fiction podcasts, participants assumed that audiences expect a sense of authenticity to follow genre standards, particularly the expectation of 'believable' fiction.

This section shows that notions of authenticity are shaped by genre conventions. However, authenticities are also shaped by production processes.

7.3 Production Process and Authenticities

The decisions made by podcasters across the three stages of podcast creation (pre-production, production, and post-production) inform their understanding, construction, and performance of authenticities. These decisions are shaped not only by genre conventions but also by the practical and creative requirements of producing the work. For instance, fiction podcasts typically require more extensive post-production for world-building and sound effects. Authenticities continuously shape creative, editorial, and technical choices at every stage of the production process. From early content planning to recording strategies and final editing and publishing, podcasters described how they make intentional decisions to create what they perceive as an authentic listening experience.

To analyse how production decisions shape authenticity, podcasters' accounts of pre-production (planning and scripting) are offered first. The analysis then examines recording settings and post-production (editing, sound design, publication, and promotion).

7.3.1 Pre-Production

Pre-production is the initial stage where podcasters decide the podcast's identity, thematic objectives, format, audience, and scope. It involves planning, research, writing, and scripting, all of which contribute to how authentic a podcast may be perceived.

7.3.1.1 Planning and Research

Podcasters begin constructing authenticity through planning and research to ensure the podcast aligns with its intended purpose and audience expectations. While some podcasters emphasise control and novelty, others adopt flexible and audience-focused approaches, illustrating diverse interpretations of authenticity in pre-production.

Participants described a range of planning strategies, such as researching audience expectations about topics, quality, content, and guests when producing content they regarded as authentic. During the initial stages of planning a podcast, founder of an independent production studio, Dee Reddy, focused on aligning content with audience expectations, which involves considerations such as "what's the content I want to make, and who is the potential audience for it?" This reflects a more audience-centric view of authenticity, where podcasters prioritise what they believe may resonate with listeners. Planning also includes careful analysis of the audience's needs and expectations regarding potential guests. Órla Ryan, who produced a documentary podcast *Redacted Lives*[69], described investing significant time "gathering some interviews over the course of a year" to ensure a robust understanding of her subjects. This long-term engagement in the documentary and news genre suggests that participants associated authenticity with depth in storytelling.

In contrast to a more structured and planned approach, podcast producer Nicky Ryan shared an evolving approach to planning, noting that their podcast's structure has become more adaptable over time. He remarked, "Previously, we would have come with much more structure. Now what we do is decide on one topic and ensure it has a long shelf life". Ryan's approach highlights the need for flexibility, allowing for spontaneous but meaningful engagement with topics, which he believes contributes to a sense of realness and timeliness. The less structured approach can contribute to a sense of spontaneity, which some podcasters view as more

[69] *Redacted Lives* is a documentary podcast that tells the story of the victims of mother and baby homes.

authentic. The flexibility is often associated with conversational and narrative non-fiction genres discussed earlier.

These reflections on planning reveal how podcasters calibrate structure, spontaneity, and audience expectations to plan content they regard as authentic. Building on these initial intentions, the writing and scripting phase further shapes how authenticity is performed and perceived during production.

7.3.1.2 Writing and Scripting

The writing and scripting of a podcast influence its perceived authenticity, with participants expressing differing opinions on the level of scripting in their podcasts. Several podcasters write outlines or bullet points to maintain focus and ensure coverage of key themes. Liam Geraghty, host of podcast *Meet Your Maker*, insists that scripted elements can support claims to authenticity, stating:

> It is this style of writing but trying to make it sound like you are just talking. And you can really hear it now in a lot of podcasts ... That is the way *Meet Your Maker* would have been written. It is very much trying to keep it casual and trying to make it authentic. I am using that word loosely, but because it is a documentary, you are still trying to have the authenticity, but you have to write that.

Geraghty's comment highlights a 'scripted naturalism', which means that carefully arranged dialogue can sound authentic if it is written in a conversational style and delivered convincingly to listeners. Geraghty also recounts how traditional writers often adjusted scripts to align with conventional writing norms. He explains, "Sometimes I might show them a script, and they'll change it slightly to be more like as if it was to be read on a website". Geraghty's insistence on preserving the aural essence of podcast scripts reflects a commitment to an authentic auditory experience, even if it clashes with conventional writing practices.

While conversational-style writing ensures clarity and coherence, it also highlights the performative element of authenticity in podcasts. Some podcasters acknowledge the risk if they consciously try to produce authentic performances instead of focusing on producing quality content and aiming for authenticity as a by-product of that. For instance, host of *Words to That*

Effect[70] Conor Reid argues, "You do not want it to sound scripted. You do not want to sound like you are reading something. But you are not trying to trick someone into thinking, 'Oh my God, this is all totally spontaneous'." Reid's statement signifies that producing authentic-sounding audio typically takes a significant amount of thought and work. Reid discusses adopting a hybrid approach of structure and spontaneity:

> The idea of being fully prepared but then going completely off track if something comes out of the interview, which you realise in the moment—that is the thing that we should be going for. Because podcasts are not live, you can really shape that kind of stuff afterwards.

Geraghty and Reid show that scripting does not automatically weaken authenticity. For these podcasters, authentic-sounding audio requires preparation that remains compatible with speech, rhythm, and spontaneous response. The key issue is not whether the podcast is scripted, but whether the script sounds appropriate to the genre and listening context.

Moving from pre-production to recording involves decisions that affect how claims of authenticity are operationalised.

7.3.2 Production Phase

The production phase involves decisions about recording space, the host's voice, and performance techniques. These decisions provide evidence that illustrates how podcasters' ideas of authenticity influence their actions and, consequently, podcasts.

7.3.2.1 Audio Recording: Settings, Techniques, and Quality

The physical recording environment and setting can influence the perceived authenticity of a podcast. The participants highlighted distinct approaches to recording environments, such as home, studio, indoor/outdoor location, or online. Rebecca Kelly highlighted the sense of comfort that arises when she invites interviewees into an in-person setting: "The fact that they're at my kitchen table and they meet my children […] we calm down and we get the nerves out". The domestic setting creates a more relaxed atmosphere, encouraging guests to speak candidly and develop a rapport with the host. Conversely, online recording can introduce

[70] *Words To That Effect* is an independent research-based literary podcast that covers fiction and popular culture.

technical glitches that disrupt the show's flow, though it may broaden the range of guests. However, not all podcast settings are the same. Liam Geraghty explained that *Petrified* podcast was recorded in the writer's sitting room, with all actors around a table. He also discussed recording outdoors for a more realistic feel. He admitted that sometimes, for practical reasons, they recorded indoors and added outdoor atmosphere later, which most listeners would not notice. Such practice relies, in participants' accounts, on listeners' suspension of disbelief and supports world-building, both central to perceived authenticity in fiction podcasts. This highlights the fact that podcasters must find a compromise between an ideal setting and one that is feasible.

Participants also linked authenticity to production value, although they did not treat polish as universally authentic across all genres. Niall Kitson[71] stressed the importance of maintaining, in his words, "a professional sheen" in podcast production, stating, "it reflects well on us because some of the things that I found to be absolutely essential in delivering a good podcast are sound quality, uniformity, regularity, and slick presentation". Kitson's comment reflects the increasing competition in the podcasting industry and the role of technical excellence in attracting and retaining audiences. Former Head of RTÉ Radio Helen Shaw emphasised, "If you're just doing average and if you're doing poor audio, you're going to disappear and you're not going to have any traction". Dusty Rhodes[72] remarked that some older "microphone on a kitchen table" podcasts survive despite subpar audio, but now "the successful podcasts are professionally made". The importance of audio quality and production values in constructing authenticity has been analysed in detail in Chapter 8, Section 8.4.2, Audio Quality, Production Value, and Editing.

The diversity of recording approaches highlights the multifaceted nature of authenticity in podcasting. While studio-based shows often produce high-quality audio, some participants prefer a raw or "as live" sound. They intentionally keep a degree of ambient noise or minor glitches, which is understood by podcasters as facilitating immediacy by conveying a sense of presence to listeners, as if they are part of the recording environment. Overly produced studio sound may also feel overly corporate or processed, diminishing the sense of intimacy that

[71] Niall Kitson is the editor of TechCentral.ie and co-host of Tech Radio Ireland. *Tech Radio Ireland* is Ireland's longest-running tech news podcast since 2006.
[72] Dusty Rhodes is the founder of DustPod, a podcast production company that produces podcasts for brands. Rhodes also co-hosts *Tech Radio Ireland*.

podcasts often promise. These contrasting practices show that authenticity is constructed and perceived differently by podcasters.

While notions of the recording environment and audio quality influence how authenticity is perceived sonically, podcasters also shape authenticity through vocal delivery and performative choices.

7.3.2.2 Podcaster Voice and Performativity

The aural performativity in the podcaster's voice elevates the production value and appeal. However, some podcasters believe that it may compromise the perception of authenticity. Pat O'Mahony, host of *Off Message*[73], highlights a paradox between performance and authenticity in podcasting:

> I think as soon as you set up microphones, people start to perform. It changes the dynamic. It is like if you are conducting an experiment: as soon as you observe the experiment, it changes its nature. There is a microphone down there, which means that we are both aware that it is being recorded and that it will be heard by people, and so we up our game. Sometimes we up our game for the better; sometimes not. So, every podcast has a performance element to it, which means you could argue it is not authentic.

An observer dilemma arises when the observer's presence or perspective affects the outcome. Likewise, podcasters are aware of audiences' expectations. This aligns with Labov's (1972) concept of the "observer's paradox", which showed that awareness of observation changes behaviour. O'Mahony's argument also supports the notion of increased professionalism and being a good communicator in the media. A good interviewer, for instance, is someone who can put the interviewee at ease enough so that the observer's dilemma is minimised in the pursuit of something that sounds authentic. It is more than the podcaster's voice; it is about being a very good communicator, which is an expectation of increasing professionalisation in podcasting.

Voice and vocal style construct an aural personality to create connection and perceptions of authenticity. Audio producer Ian Doyle described the role of voice, stating, "The narrator for

[73] *Off Message* is an interview podcast that covers media development in Ireland.

the series [*The Kinahans*[74]] has a very working-class Dublin accent. It's very rich and very bold. It really adds a lot of authenticity to it". By aligning the narrator's accent with the story's setting, Doyle sought to immerse listeners in the narrative. While some podcasters make use of their vocal identity to strengthen their content, others grappled with self-perception and the pressure to meet audience expectations. Hugh Linehan suggested that a podcast voice should be "musical and lulling" to provide a pleasant and engaging listener experience. Performative elements in podcasting, shaped by self-awareness and cultural influences, reveal tensions between professionalism, informality, and authenticity. Órla Ryan attempts to distinguish between her day-to-day speech style and podcast voice by making sure she "says things properly or puts on a more professional voice". However, this self-awareness introduces an element of deliberation, which, while sometimes beneficial, can also erode the rawness often associated with authenticity.

Vocal performance challenges any simple view of authenticity as unmediated self-expression. Podcasters do not merely speak into a microphone. They adjust tone, pace, accent, and delivery in anticipation of listeners. In comedy and drama, such performance may strengthen authenticity when it fits genre expectations. In journalism or personal narrative formats, excessive performance may weaken authenticity if it sounds detached from the speaker's ordinary voice or editorial purpose.

While aural performativity is often seen as antithetical to authenticity, in podcasting, the two can be closely intertwined. For some podcasters in performance-driven podcasts, such as comedy or drama, integrating certain performative elements may support claims to authenticity as it aligns with genre expectations of audiences. For instance, producer of comedy podcast *The 2 Johnnies Podcast*, Maura Fay, argues that authenticity can coexist with performance, provided the performative techniques do not overshadow the individual's authentic characteristics:

> When they [hosts] come on the podcast, they are not really putting on or representing a version of themselves. It is not a Shtick [a performer's gimmick]. That is genuinely how they are. They are aware that the camera is on, and they are

[74] *The Kinahans* is a true crime series from The Irish Sun telling the complete story of Ireland's most feared crime family.

> aware they are going to perform. But they do not put on a persona. It is, "this is how we act, and this is how we feel about things".

Fay's quote illustrates the blurred line between performative authenticity and self-presentation, which can be a mark of an experienced and talented mass communicator (particularly a comedian). The varied performative practices illustrate that participants strive to balance preparation and improvisation. While some participants prefer structure and control, others embrace spontaneity to reflect their authentic selves.

Having explored how authenticity is shaped through vocal performance and delivery during recording, the next stage considers how authenticity is constructed in the post-production phase.

7.3.3 Post-Production

The post-production phase involves editing, sound design, publishing, and promotion decisions that are shaped by podcasters' perceptions of authenticities. Authenticity in podcasting is conflated with casual or unpolished production, particularly by podcasters and industry commentators. This view assumes that less structured or minimally edited formats are more authentic. However, considerable editing and sound work often goes on behind creating the perception of spontaneity and authenticity.

7.3.3.1 Editing and Sound Design

Editing and sound design play a significant role in shaping how authenticity is constructed and perceived by podcasters. The editing process is handled differently by each podcaster, depending on the genre conventions, working frameworks, and resources. Some podcasters prefer minimal editing, while others prioritise more polished audio. For instance, Emma Ní Chearúil, who produces an independent interview podcast, takes a minimal editing approach, which allows her to maintain trust with her guests, as she only removes content that might not be suitable for her guests' image or persona. However, this approach also raises questions about the authenticity of the production, as the audience may miss out on the spontaneous, vulnerable, and raw moments that are important for the authenticity of a conversational podcast. Rebecca Kelly's decision to keep background sounds, such as "the dishwasher, or the ice cream man", shows that apparently mundane audio can produce a sense of authenticity. Likewise, Ciarán

Murphy[75] states, “we are very clear on making the podcast sound unedited, but it is edited every day, of course”. His comment highlights podcasters’ awareness that editing remains necessary, even when aiming for a seemingly unpolished sound that aligns with genre expectations of authenticity. In contrast to the minimal editing technique, some participants argued that extensive editing helps create a pleasant listener experience. For example, Sinéad O'Moore, who hosts an interview podcast, said, “I edit out parts because I want to respect the guest”. This approach suggests that editing enhances narrative clarity while preserving the integrity of participants’ contributions.

Sound design shapes how authenticity is perceived, particularly through music, sound effects, and spacing. Participants described music as important in shaping the listener’s experience. Ian Doyle, producer of true crime podcast *The Kinahans*, explained the power of music in podcast production:

> Music has been hugely important, particularly for things like driving tension and for driving emotion. We recorded some incredibly emotive interviews for the podcast. But if you listen to the interviews before there's music put under them, the difference is remarkable. They're still sad, emotional interviews, but it's not nearly the same. And you can really, as well, change the whole scene with what music is put into it. Something that seems not particularly important or it shouldn't be that dramatic; if you have the right music underneath, it becomes really, really important.

Soundtracks shape the emotional context of a narrative to make it resonate deeply with listeners. Doyle used music to build tension in a scene about the Regency Hotel shooting in *The Kinahans* podcast. He decided to use a techno song, incorporating the bass and continuous rhythm to develop the intensity of the scene. Doyle felt it was nearly parallel to what happened during the shooting itself. Doyle said, “There was this innocuous boxing weigh-in, and by the end of it, all hell had broken loose, and that builds with the music that had taken place within it”. Some podcasters emphasised the importance of keeping music subtle so that it does not distract from the spoken word. Podcast host Órla Ryan noted, “A lot of big podcasts have excellent production values, but sometimes you listen to podcasts, and the music is really jarring or comes in at the wrong moment”. These examples demonstrate the various approaches

[75] Ciarán Murphy is the co-host of the independent conversational sports podcast *The Second Captains Podcast.*

to sound design and how podcasters use music to bring their podcasts to life, creating what podcasters understand as an immersive listening experience.

In addition to music, decisions about sound effects influence perceived authenticity. While some podcasters prioritised natural sound recordings, others relied on sound libraries and post-production techniques to mix audio effects. These varied approaches reflect subjective interpretations of what constitutes an authentic auditory experience. Audio producer Rob Flynn highlights the importance of capturing authentic and realistic soundscapes, particularly in his podcast *Changing Coasts*[76]. Given that the story was set in the near future, he did not want the soundscape to feel 'too current'. For beach scenes, they recorded at Killiney Beach, moving far down the shore to avoid noise from other people. He explained, "Getting as much of that on location as possible was key, and really grounding it […] you get that sort of authenticity". Flynn's focus on natural soundscapes aligns with his background in film, where audio is often used to enhance visual storytelling. He believed that incorporating subtle, location-specific sounds added depth to the audio. Sound effects are also key to bringing a scene to life. However, Liam Geraghty noted the challenges and compromises involved in creating soundscapes in fiction podcasts. He shared an example where conversations intended to be set outdoors were recorded indoors, with layers of outdoor atmosphere added later. He admitted, "Most people listening would just accept that", but expressed a preference for recording on location for greater authenticity. However, participants acknowledged that employing stock or library effects can also be effective, especially when resources or time constraints limit field recording.

Participants, particularly those producing documentary podcasts, emphasised pacing to create space for audience interpretation. Audio producer Ian Doyle suggested that people often do not give much thought to the pace and cadence in sound design. Doyle said, "I love to play around with that spacing, that you might leave four or five seconds in between a piece where it's an emotive interview… and give that small bit of breathing space so that the audience can actually interpret". Rebecca Kelly, host of the *Everywhere We Go* podcast, argues that spacing and silence allow the audience to interpret the meaning. These examples suggest that careful control over silence and pacing can encourage emotional engagement and reflective listening. For

[76]*Changing Coasts is* an audio drama podcast set in an Irish coastal town about the threats of rising sea levels.

participants such as Doyle and Kelly, silence was not an absence of sound but a deliberate technique to allow audiences time to process emotionally charged content.

This section has shown how editing and sound design can influence the ways authenticity is constructed in podcasts. In the next sub-section, I show that decisions about publishing, promotion, and audience engagement likewise shape how authenticity is perceived, as they determine a show's accessibility and the nature of interactions with audiences.

7.3.3.2 Publishing and Promotion

For independent producers, publishing and promotion form the last step of the production process, since they are responsible for both tasks. In institutional settings, these functions are handled by dedicated staff. Podcasters believe that the decision to place a podcast behind a paywall or make it freely available shapes audience perceptions of authenticity. The choice of platform is influenced by factors such as cost, ease of use, and accessibility for the audience. Podcasters often face challenges in finding a publishing schedule or episodic rhythm that balances audience expectations with authenticity. Participants associated regular release of podcasts with a sense of reliability and trust. Leon Diop, who hosts *Black and Irish*[77] podcast, described progressing from a limited episodic structure to a more regular schedule based on audience demand and production resources. High-frequency schedules can enhance a podcast's relevance by staying closely aligned with real-time events. However, these schedules can also risk over-saturation if the content does not provide value consistently. This provides further evidence of the professionalisation of podcasting and the adoption of broadcast production models that embrace strict deadlines and production schedules (see Section 8.4 Professionalisation and Competence for a detailed analysis).

Promotion strategies also play a role in shaping perceptions of authenticity. Some participants discussed the challenge between performing a persona on social platforms and keeping a sense of private self. Therefore, the marketing dimension reveals the friction between visibility and authenticity. Podcasters have to remain discoverable in a saturated market, but over-engineered marketing can weaken their claims of authenticity. Audience feedback and engagement often reinforce or challenge podcasters' perceptions of authenticity. Incorporating fan interactions during scripting and recording creates a sense of shared ownership, which can enhance

[77] *Black and Irish Podcast*, produced by RTÉ, features the lived experiences of mixed-race people living in Ireland.

relatability. Consequently, feedback can work as a real-time authenticity check, highlighting any perceived dissonance between the podcast's aim and its delivered content (see Chapter 6, Section 6.2.2).

7.4 Conclusion

Producing authentic-sounding podcasts involves adherence to genre conventions and requires technical expertise in podcast production. Authenticities are shaped by the conventions of each genre. Genres operate as cultural categories within industry, audience, and cultural practices (Mittell, 2001). These include the factual accuracy and emotional resonance of narrative non-fiction, the personal connection and spontaneity of chatcasts and conversational podcasts, and the character development and performance of fiction podcasts. By responding to genre conventions, podcasters promote the "routinisation and institutionalisation" of cultural production (Negus, 1999, p. 28). Therefore, some podcasters optimise their work to fit within listeners and distribution platforms' expectations of recognised genres. However, many podcasts manage to blend elements from different genres, creating distinct approaches to authenticity. Innovation within a genre can redefine its boundaries. This innovative approach shows that podcasters often view genres not as rigid structures but as changing forms for experimentation and audience engagement.

Each genre sets distinctive criteria for what sounds authentic, from factual precision to suspension of disbelief. Even in fiction, participants assumed that listeners know the content is not real but still bring certain expectations that things will feel real, coherent, and natural. Participants often equated authenticity of fiction podcasts with a sense of suspension of disbelief. Genre conventions about audience interests, aesthetic expectations, and norms of vocal recording shape authenticity in podcasting (Hilmes & Bottomley, 2024). What seems authentic in a comedy chatcast, such as irreverent candour and visible camaraderie, would not be the same as in a news podcast, where authority and accuracy are key. For instance, in narrative non-fiction podcasts such as true crime and documentary series, participants often equated authenticity with rigorous truth-telling, credibility, and ethical storytelling. Irish news and documentary podcasters in this study stressed the importance of thorough research, fact-checking, and including diverse voices to produce content that audiences perceive as honest and trustworthy. This finding aligns with journalistic standards and shows how podcasting in these genres upholds an "accuracy-based authenticity". On the other hand, in chatcast or

comedy formats, spontaneity and unfiltered personality were reported as key markers of authenticity. Comedy podcasters spoke about the value of improvisation and reacting in the moment. Such genres cultivate authenticity through intimacy and relatability, consistent with Spinelli and Dann's (2019) observation that podcasting's informal nature invites a uniquely intimate connection.

The complexity of producing authentic-sounding podcasts emerges across production stages. Podcasters' decisions, such as planning and research, writing and scripting, recording settings and techniques, vocal style, editing, sound design, and publishing, shape their interpretations of authenticity. Some prefer a more structured, carefully planned approach, while others favour an agile approach with more room for spontaneity. Authenticity is continuously negotiated through creative, editorial, and technical decisions at every stage of production. These findings contribute to a process-based understanding of authenticity, highlighting the performative and negotiated qualities of podcasting practice. When podcasters plan content, they filter ideas through an authenticity lens, asking whether a topic or format fits the tone they promise to their audience. During recording, they modulate their speech and reactions to sustain a performance that may be recognised as authentic. In editing, they deliberately include or exclude material based on what they believe will sustain authenticity. Podcasters consciously employ editorial choices and performative techniques such as warmth, unscripted tones and recording in non-studio settings to create intimacy. In post-production, rather than simply editing out all mistakes, producers reported a careful curation of content. Authenticities serve as guiding values and criteria at each stage of creative decision-making. The process-based perspective advances theory by proposing that authenticity is not a static outcome but part of the creative workflow.

The main contribution of the chapter is a genre-based and process-based account of authenticity in podcasting. Authenticity is not only a value claimed by podcasters. It works as a practical criterion that guides editorial judgement across the production process. Podcasters decide what to script, what to leave in, what to remove, what to polish, and what to let remain rough. These decisions show that authenticities in contemporary podcasting are constructed through the relationship between genre expectations, production practice, and listener judgement. Skilled podcasters craft content that appears spontaneous and unscripted, just as a good performer can disguise serious practice and performance skills as improvisation. Podcasters often treat

audience as arbiters and validators of authenticities, responding to what sounds authentic regardless of how it was produced.

The next chapter focuses on how autonomy, external pressures, and professionalisation shape podcasters' negotiation of authenticities.

Chapter 8. Authenticities in Working Frameworks: Autonomy and Structural Challenges in Podcasting

8.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the final research question, which asks how autonomy, platformisation, commercialisation, institutionalisation, and professionalisation influence podcasters' ability to negotiate authenticity in creative and editorial decision-making in the Republic of Ireland. The chapter shows that wider structural conditions of production, including platform, market, institutional, and professional forces, shape how podcasters construct authenticities in practice. The chapter argues that authenticities in podcasting are negotiated through different degrees of autonomy. Autonomy does not mean complete freedom from constraint. Rather, it refers to podcasters' capacity to exercise authority over voice, form, representation, production values, and accountability within a particular working model. The basis for this relationship was outlined in Chapter 3, where Banks (2010) identified autonomy as a foundation of authenticity because it enables cultural work to express its maker rather than respond primarily to commercial or managerial demands. In this chapter, authenticity is treated as a negotiated value that is shaped within particular working frameworks rather than as a fixed property of independent or institutional podcasting. The plural term authenticities marks the different ways podcasters connect authenticity with autonomy, ownership, competence, institutional credibility, commercial viability, and professional standards. Autonomy does not automatically produce authenticity. Rather, it provides one set of conditions through which podcasters attempt to make their work appear credible, self-directed, and ethically accountable.

In this chapter, authenticity is examined as a negotiated cultural value shaped within the Irish podcasting field, where podcasters seek to maintain autonomy, symbolic recognition, and cultural legitimacy while also responding to economic sustainability and platform dependency. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of field and capital, this research shows that authenticity operates as a value shaped by symbolic recognition, cultural legitimacy, and economic sustainability. Independent podcasters often draw on cultural and social capital through voice, community, specialist knowledge, and self-directed production. Institutional podcasters may draw on the symbolic capital of established media organisations, editorial standards, and public service authority. Commercial podcasters also convert economic capital

into production quality, reach, and sustainability without losing the symbolic value attached to authenticity. The approach links podcasters' micro-level decisions about voice, editing, sponsorship, and accountability to working frameworks and wider platform and market conditions.

The chapter develops the central argument that authenticity in Irish podcasting is shaped through negotiated autonomy. Section 8.2 identifies five dimensions of autonomy, namely creative agency, creative control, originality, freedom, and flexibility. These dimensions show how podcasters understand the conditions that allow their work to feel self-directed and credible. Section 8.3 examines how platformisation and commercialisation restrict those conditions through ownership, discoverability, sponsorship, metrics, and funding structures. Section 8.4 then shows how podcasters respond through professionalisation, particularly through competence, production quality, training, recognition, and sustainable working practices. Taken together, these sections show that Irish podcasters do not simply seek freedom from external influence. They negotiate authenticity by deciding which constraints can be accepted, which must be resisted, and which forms of professionalisation can support their work without compromising its perceived integrity. The chapter further argues that authenticity in Irish podcasting is being redefined as the medium becomes increasingly platformised, commercialised, and professionalised. Participants describe a movement away from the amateur and DIY ideals associated with early podcasting towards a more negotiated and strategic form of authenticity, in which polished and competent production can carry as much legitimacy as independence or informality. Despite these changes, autonomy remains central to how podcasters understand and evaluate authenticity.

8.2 Dimensions of Autonomy

The purpose of this section is not to treat these five dimensions as separate findings. Rather, they build a single argument about how authenticities depend on the conditions of creative decision-making. Creative agency concerns who has the authority to speak. Creative control concerns who shapes the final work. Originality concerns how podcasters distinguish their voice or form. Freedom concerns the limits placed on expression. Flexibility concerns the control of time, labour, and working routines. Across these dimensions, autonomy matters because it allows podcasters to align creative practice with their values, audiences, and sense

of responsibility. The first dimension of autonomy is creative agency, particularly the ways in which narrative ownership and representation are exercised.

8.2.1 Creative Agency: Narrative Ownership and Representation

Creative agency is an important element of autonomy in independent podcasting practice, particularly in relation to creative decision-making throughout the production chain. It relates to the ability to initiate and make deliberate creative decisions that shape podcast practice. Podcasters describe a higher degree of agency when they retain narrative ownership over creative vision, storytelling, and the production process. These aspects appear particularly valued among independent producers who exercise agency over how stories are framed and represented. A higher level of agency is important to podcasters from marginalised communities in the Republic of Ireland, who often find it more difficult to be heard and place a high value on having a greater say in creative decisions and narrative ownership. For instance, Leon Diop started *The Black and Irish Podcast*[78] to exercise agency in sharing stories of Black and Irish people, owning the narrative, and turning it into an audio version via podcast. Diop argues that the underrepresentation of race-related issues in the Irish media is closely linked to the rise of far-right sentiments. Diop notes that Black voices are often only called upon by radio stations in the wake of racially charged incidents (e.g., the deaths of George Nkencho in Ireland or George Floyd in the United States), rather than being part of an ongoing inclusive dialogue.

A higher degree of creative agency in independent podcasting disrupts traditional gatekeeping structures in broadcast media, creating more space for marginalised voices and underrepresented communities. Diop's account provides stronger evidence than a general claim about podcasting's democratic character. It shows that creative agency matters because it gives underrepresented producers greater authority over the terms of representation. In this case, authenticity is claimed through voice, ownership, and the ability to address subjects that have often been filtered through legacy media institutions.

Representation is particularly important in aural media such as radio and audio podcasts, where the lack of representation is less noticeable than in visual media such as television advertisements or theatre. The absence of visuals in audio podcasting places greater emphasis

[78] *Black and Irish Podcast*, produced by RTÉ, features the lived experiences of black and mixed-race people living in Ireland. Detailed information on the podcasts referenced in this study is provided in Appendix L.

on voice, sound, and tone as primary vehicles of meaning and identity. However, the rise of audiovisual podcasts, particularly those distributed via YouTube, complicates these conventions by introducing visual cues that foreground appearance and body, potentially reconfiguring how representation is performed and perceived. Podcasts such as *The Black and Irish* aim to address these representational gaps through sustained conversations, which Diop characterises as "the beginning to break the mould". He uses the analogy of "sweeping under the carpet" to illustrate that taking agency in addressing racial and minority issues in Ireland is critical for podcasters.

The following subsection offers an analysis of how independent and institutional podcasters pursue autonomy through creative control.

8.2.2 Creative Control and Autonomy

Creative control refers to the extent to which cultural producers, such as podcasters, can exercise authority and make decisions throughout the different stages of production, with the intent of exerting greater degrees of influence over their final outcomes (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011). Independent podcasters value podcasting for greater creative control, experimentation, and audience connection compared to legacy broadcast media. Peter Dunne, director and writer of the independent podcast *Petrified*[79], contrasts his experience with theatre writing, describing podcasting as "incredibly freeing". This sense of creative liberation is echoed by *The Second Captains'*[80] host Ciarán Murphy, who highlights the advantages of the independent production model within Ireland's podcasting landscape. Murphy states:

> We are allowed to shape it however we want to shape it, and that has worked out really well, and that has been profitable for us. We can do what we want as much as we want or as less we want. And there is a psychological benefit to that as well, where you can always say, this is something just for me. You make your own decisions around.

Murphy does not describe this experience using the language of authenticity. Its relevance lies in his emphasis on ownership, self-direction, and being able to treat the podcast as "something just for me". When considered alongside the earlier chapters on personal and relational authenticity, Murphy's account shows that creative control can help independent podcasters

[79] *Petrified* is a horror anthology podcast.
[80] *The Second Captains Podcast* covers sports and is the most-subscribed Irish podcast on Patreon.

protect self-congruence and ownership over their work. Autonomy does not automatically produce authenticity. Rather, it gives podcasters greater authority over the voice, form, and limits through which authenticity is performed. Podcasters believe that the capacity to make creative decisions without external direction enables their work to be heard as authentic.

Podcasters working within commercial institutions described varying degrees of autonomy, shaped by institutional expectations. Hugh Linehan, despite acknowledging the ethical guidelines of The Irish Times, finds ways to inject his personality and perspective into his *Inside Politics* podcast, recognising that "in order for a podcast to feel authentic, you have to bring yourself to the table". Authenticity is negotiated as podcasters balance personal expression with institutional constraints. Head of podcasts at The Podcast Studios[81], Conor Reid, notes that when he began editing shows for clients, it involved adhering to very specific parameters. However, with his independent podcast *Words To That Effect*, he appreciates the greater creative autonomy it affords. While he enjoys the freedom to make editorial choices without institutional constraints, he stays aware that audience expectations still shape aspects of his decision-making.

In institutional podcasting, content production is subject to established procedures and measures of editorial control, which can limit the degree of podcasters' creative control. Maura Fay notes that when someone from a diverse background is brought onto legacy media, "they are being put through the lens of a producer who is probably white, maybe male and of a certain age". Maura believes that this can inadvertently result in focusing on only one aspect of their character and story. In contrast, if that person creates their own podcast, they have more creative control over how their story is represented, offering a fuller account of who the person is. The Irish Times news podcaster Bernice Harrison[82] states, "you cannot get away from the fact that it [podcast] has got The Irish Times name and that lends it a third authenticity". Harrison's comment suggests that institutional frameworks can also contribute to authenticity through established standards, credibility, and perceived audience trust.

Podcasters working within public service institutions acknowledge the challenges and benefits of institutional expectations on podcasting, which in turn often impacts the autonomy of podcasters. Public service podcasting is shaped by a commitment to factual accuracy, editorial

[81] The Podcast Studios is a podcast production studio, and a part of network, HeadStuff Podcasts.
[82] Bernice Harrison hosts *In the News*, a daily podcast by The Irish Times that covers stories in Ireland and around the world.

balance, and cultural preservation, and thus offers distinctive benefits, particularly in supporting culturally significant or socially underrepresented content that may not appeal to commercial funders. Ireland's national public service broadcaster, RTÉ, produces, commissions, and publishes podcasts in line with its stated commitment to serve the public without political, commercial, or other external influence. Its operations are sustained through a hybrid funding model, based on public funding and advertising revenue. RTÉ's vision is "to champion Irish culture" with content that challenges, educates, and entertains. RTÉ-funded podcasts illustrate the organisation's commitment to socially relevant and culturally rich storytelling. For instance, *Black & Irish* addresses race, identity, and belonging in modern Ireland, highlighting voices that are often underrepresented in legacy media. Leon Diop, co-host of the *Black & Irish* podcast, described his relationship with RTÉ as follows:

> RTÉ is the national broadcaster, so it has to ensure that the content that I put out is balanced. Naturally, that can cause a little bit of tension when we want to create maybe a little bit more hard-hitting episode. At the end of the day, RTÉ has been very fair to us. They've been able to explain why we take certain approaches or why we can or can't discuss certain topics.

Diop's quote indicates a negotiated arrangement in which RTÉ's editorial standards and public service responsibilities must be accounted for in the podcast's content. Although framed as collaborative production, the process reveals that podcast funders play a significant role in shaping the scope and direction of content. A contrasting perspective is offered by Liam Geraghty, producer of the horror drama podcast *Petrified*. He deliberately chose not to seek RTÉ funding, despite acknowledging that its commissions would offer more financial support than alternatives such as the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland. Geraghty, who previously worked for RTÉ Radio 1, cited administrative burden and creative restrictions as reasons for his decision. He believed that RTÉ's editorial criteria and processes did not suit the genre of *Petrified*, which he describes as "a strong horror drama". This led him to choose the community radio route to reduce external oversight. While the community radio route did not result in complete creative freedom, as the audience still plays a role in shaping expectations, it allowed greater editorial control compared to working within a public service framework. While RTÉ's investment in podcasting is relatively recent, former Managing Director of RTÉ Radio, Helen Shaw, believes that RTÉ has historically produced podcasts of low production value. Shaw, formerly a senior editor with the BBC, notes that, unlike the UK – where both the BBC and

The Guardian began podcasting as early as 2004 – RTÉ lacked leadership in podcasting for many years.

These accounts show that public service podcasting creates a different autonomy arrangement rather than a simple loss of freedom. RTÉ's editorial standards can restrict topic selection, tone, and the degree of direct expression. At the same time, its public service identity can lend authority, credibility, and cultural value to particular projects. The authenticity claimed within this framework is less strongly tied to individual ownership than to institutional trust, balance, and public responsibility.

These contrasting examples reveal both the constraints and advantages associated with public service podcasting. Podcasters believed that RTÉ may limit the range of expression or topics based on its editorial remit, but it also invests in projects with cultural, civic, or educational value. Public service podcasters may not enjoy the same level of creative control as independent creators, yet they often claim authenticity through institutional authority and balanced perspectives.

I now turn to analyse how podcasters' efforts to develop distinctive content through originality and creativity shape their autonomy and authenticity.

8.2.3 Originality and Creativity

Originality is analysed here as a dimension of autonomy because it concerns podcasters' capacity to decide what counts as distinctive within a crowded media field. It links to authenticity when participants describe originality as ownership of voice, format, perspective, or sonic texture, rather than novelty for its own sake. Becker's (2023) account of Art Worlds is useful here because originality is not treated as an isolated individual act. It is produced through creative decisions made among podcasters, editors, funders, platforms, audiences, and genre conventions. Mario Rosenstock captures this need for distinction when he argues that "there are so many podcasts out there, I think you have to find your own USP".

The resistance to established media narratives enables podcasters to pursue novel content strategies and distinguish their content from legacy media. The host of The Irish Times podcast *Inside Politics*, Hugh Linehan, exemplifies this by choosing not to invite guests who regularly appear on RTÉ. Linehan's guiding editorial principle operates through a simple criterion,

which he states in his own words, “Is this something you would hear on RTÉ Radio? And if it is, let’s not do it”. Linehan considers his own interviews more effective, as they offer extended duration and are less constrained by traditional radio formats. Linehan’s approach is also intended to avoid cannibalising audiences from other RTÉ programmes. This strategy suggests an underlying merger of creativity and market(ing) principles, such as the earlier reference to unique selling points (USP), indicating that some institutional podcasters may be more at ease with the commercial imperatives in podcast production.

Podcasters producing fiction podcasts (e.g., drama) often seek originality in sound design rather than narrative alone. Several podcasters emphasise the significance of using original sound recordings to create unique sonic environments. This use of original audio material contributes to constructing a distinctive sonic identity for the podcast. Liam Geraghty, producer of the horror drama podcast *Petrified*, believes that his commitment to original audio recording enhances the podcast’s sonic identity and sense of uniqueness. Geraghty provides the example of recording foley (i.e. footsteps) to enhance the podcast’s originality:

> You go to the sound library. You can get a million footsteps, but it’s very like the Foley sound, so it’s very clump, clump, clump, clump. I would record all of that myself. Also, you can time it to the person or the actors. You kind of know that this person would have been walking a bit slowly, they’re scared, and then they go to open the door, and then they stop. You just can’t get that with the library. You have to do it yourself.

Podcasters’ efforts to create original and creative content are often challenged by existing media texts, genres, and narrative styles. Conor Reid, Head of podcasts at The Podcast Studios, argues that revenue targets and editorial hierarchies undermine experimentation and creative risk. Other podcasters believe that although existing formats and narratives shape podcasting, Irish podcasters have developed a distinct voice and community. Podcast host Leon Diop notes: “Irish podcasting has managed to carve out a space for itself that's distinct from the US. There's a real sense of community in Irish podcasting, and that's reflected in the type of stories that are being told”. Diop’s quote suggests that Irish podcasters remain optimistic about the originality of podcasting in Ireland.

The creative expression and stylistic innovation allow podcasters to craft original content. However, these efforts take place within broader institutional, commercial, and regulatory

contexts. The next subsection examines how freedom and accountability shape podcasters' editorial autonomy.

8.2.4 Creative Freedom and Accountability

Creative freedom denotes the degree to which podcasters can make decisions in response to institutional, commercial, or regulatory pressures. Creative freedom is not absolute but relative and negotiated, depending on the structures within which podcasters work. Podcasters remain accountable, even if not to institutions, then to audiences. This dynamic demonstrates that authenticities are not the result of an individual pursuit but are continuously negotiated between stakeholders. Such a view helps to critique the myth of individual freedom as authentic creative expression.

Independent podcasters often face fewer institutional stakeholders, but platform algorithms still influence choices. Freedom involves not only the degree but the quality and transparency of control. Podcasters reported that audience and community expectations can direct creative decisions. In contrast, institutional podcasts often involve multiple levels of editorial approval, brand requirements, and decision-making. Independent podcaster Robbie Lawlor argues that, in contrast to legacy media, where decision-making is shaped by writers, editors, and other gatekeepers, the power of podcasting lies in its connection with the community. However, Lawlor's approach also reflects a form of editorial accountability as content decisions become subject to audience preferences and sensitivities. Host of *Black and Irish Podcast*, Leon Diop recognises the need to be wary of the "court of public opinion". Diop's reflection reveals the myth of authenticity as free from external factors. The shift from institutional oversight to community-driven accountability highlights autonomy as negotiated across stakeholders and settings, rather than fixed. At the same time, independent cultural production is also shaped by a set of enduring structures, norms, and practices that organise cultural production and give it stability over time (Hesmondhalgh, 2019).

Lack of formal regulations allows independent podcasters to include complicated, sensitive, and controversial topics that are subject to greater scrutiny in more regulated media environments. For instance, podcast producer Maura Fay notes, "I know at the minute,

podcasters don't have to worry about getting a BAI[83] complaint, which doesn't inhibit our creative process as much as it would if you are under the Coimisiún na Meán". This relative lack of oversight by regulators enables a variety of viewpoints and freedom for diverse voices. Former radio editor with BBC Northern Ireland (1996-1997) and Head of RTÉ Radio (1997-2002), Helen Shaw, notes that if the host of *The Blindboy Podcast*, David Chambers, were commissioned by RTÉ, he would not be able to do the type of podcast with the same degree of editorial freedom. She argues that the primary reason the podcast exists in its current form and has gained such popularity is because it is independently produced. It is not under the same editorial structures, institutional constraints, or legal requirements as RTÉ's commissioned podcasters. However, *The Blindboy Podcast* was a riskier project due to the lack of editorial oversight, and using public funds might have been judged outside a public service mandate.

The relative absence of regulatory frameworks and formal oversight raises concerns about misinformation, harmful content, and a lack of editorial accountability, which can undermine trust and ethical responsibility in podcasting. For instance, Pat O'Mahony (former RTÉ journalist, host, and independent producer of *Off Message* podcast) argues that companies working in the online space often face fewer restrictions, which, in his view, makes the internet and social media an "ideal misinformation platform" where truth and impartiality are not valued. He argues that podcasting is at a stage today where there is no monitoring, no standards, and no truth, stating that everything "just depends on algorithms and robots". Pat describes the internet as "the Wild West", recalling an earlier optimism about the internet and digital media:

> Back in the day, we thought there would be a voice for everyone. And there was this notion that everyone would be out there fighting for human rights, telling the truth, because it's the Wild West, and the Wild West was a brutal place. And now it's more of the same. Podcasting is the same because there is no regulation.

The comparison between podcasting and the early internet raises important questions about editorial accountability in a media space that is largely self-(un)regulated. Today, platform-driven distribution and ranking systems shape visibility and moderation, which raises questions about editorial accountability in podcasting. Podcasting also follows foundational web structures where responsibility and regulation differ by jurisdiction rather than "online" in general. Pat's view also contrasts with recent developments in digital governance, particularly

[83] The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland has been replaced by *Coimisiún na Meán*, Ireland's new commission for regulating broadcasters and online media.

within the European Union. Legislation such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the Digital Services Act, the right to be forgotten, and other digital rights frameworks signal an increasing effort to regulate digital content and protect individual rights, suggesting that the digital landscape is no longer entirely unregulated. Cian Sullivan[84] expresses concern about the applicability of existing copyright laws to podcasting, noting that the legislation was originally designed for older forms of media and has not been adequately updated to address newer technologies.

Legal uncertainty restricts claims of a higher degree of freedom, especially for journalism podcasts in Ireland. Podcasters recognise Ireland's punitive libel system as a significant challenge to exercising freedom. In a regulated media market, certain gatekeeping and standards exist, though these practices and standards (e.g., objectivity and accountability) might not be universally agreed upon. The Irish Times editor and podcast host Hugh Linehan notes that, in theory, commentary is not subject to these laws, but Ireland has one of the strictest defamation laws in the world. Given these legal considerations, podcasters in Ireland are careful about what they say about other people. These contrasting perspectives illustrate the complexities of podcasting's openness, where creative freedom coexists with potential ethical challenges. To address the challenge, John Davis (producer and co-host of *The David McWilliams Podcast*) emphasises that self-accountability is important in podcasting.

Podcasters working for media companies and public service broadcasters report that their freedom in making editorial decisions is reliant on the organisation's goals, standards, and editorial policies. Irish Times news podcaster Bernice Harrison states, "Nobody, the news editor, the editor, nobody comes down and says you must do a podcast on this. That literally never happens. So, we are autonomous in our own podcast team". While she presents this as evidence of editorial independence, her autonomy can be understood as being exercised within the broader boundaries of the organisation's editorial culture, rather than outside of it. Her decisions may already align with institutional expectations, editorial guidelines, and constraints.

The flexibility in scheduling and working conditions is another factor influencing podcasters' autonomy.

[84] Cian Sullivan is an independent podcaster who hosts *Sissy That Pod*, an unofficial RuPaul's Drag Race recap podcast.

8.2.5 Flexibility and Autonomy

Independent podcasters enjoy a higher degree of flexibility because they can set their own schedules and organise their work on their own terms, without the constraints of institutional timetables or production deadlines. Independent podcasters praise podcasting's flexibility and low barrier to entry, enabling them to prioritise authenticity and personal connections over market demands. Host of *Big Fan*[85] podcast Emma Ní Chearúil highlights the flexibility to produce content that genuinely interests her, instead of producing something that is just a 'filler'. Emma states, "I would rather wait a month before putting out a podcast than speaking to someone for the sake of it". Emma's comment reflects the conventions of the conversational podcast genre, which operates on a longer timescale compared to news reporting. More flexibility enables podcasters to create content that aligns with their personal commitments and creative fulfilment. The initial lack of competition in the Irish podcast industry allowed for a more organic approach focused on passion projects rather than market pressures. Independent podcaster John Roche's[86] decision to produce only three podcast episodes a year helps him to keep a flexible production approach.

Flexibility allows independent podcasters to work on their own schedules and with the people of their choosing. For example, Dusty Rhodes founded DustPod, an independent podcast production company started in 2006 to produce branded podcasts in Ireland. He says, "I want to work remotely. I want to have more flexibility. I don't want to be working on live schedules, so pre-recording stuff is good for us". Rhodes's comments suggest that he appears to value a relatively greater flexibility in deadlines than what is typical in news radio or broadcast media. However, there are still demands from his clients in branded podcasts that likely impose stricter deadlines. Therefore, it is more accurate to frame his practice in terms of 'degrees of flexibility', which plays out differently across various podcast genres. News podcasts, such as those produced by The Irish Times, often resemble broadcast schedules. Other subgenres, such as true crime, operate with different types of flexibility and constraints, including longer production timelines, extensive research, and fact-checking.

Taken together, these dimensions of autonomy show that podcasting is perceived as authentic by podcasters when creative decisions reflect the producer's voice, values, community, and

[85] *Big Fan* is an independent podcast about music, fans, bands, and icons.
[86] John Roche is an independent producer of the narrative documentary and docu-drama series *Yarn*.

working purpose. The evidence also shows that the level and degree of autonomy are negotiated across institutional and independent working frameworks. Independent podcasters may have greater control over voice and format, but they remain constrained by audiences, platforms, funding, discoverability, and labour pressures. Institutional podcasters may have less individual control, but they can draw authenticity from editorial standards, public service values, or organisational credibility. The next section turns from the dimensions of autonomy to the structures that make autonomy difficult to sustain in contemporary Irish podcasting.

8.3 Challenges of Autonomy: Platformisation and Commercialisation

Podcasters' autonomy is continuously challenged and negotiated across two overlapping structural incentives and external pressures. First, platformisation can undermine some creators' ownership and visibility through hidden mechanisms such as algorithmic boosting. Second, commercialisation transforms the medium into a revenue engine through sponsorships, branded content, and market consolidation. These macro-structures (platforms, markets, production standards, and institutions) shape working conditions in ways that can produce challenges such as emotional strain, precarious labour, and threats to well-being (see Section 8.4.5 Well-being and Precarity). At the same time, they also create opportunities, resources, and forms of professional recognition (as analysed in Section 8.4). In the following sub-section, I show that authenticities in podcasting are challenged by platform pressures.

8.3.1 Platformisation and the Limits of Autonomy

Podcasting has shifted from its early days as a grassroots, low-barrier medium to a largely platform-driven digital medium. There is an increasing role of third-party platforms in the production, circulation, and consumption of podcasts. These include audio-focused platforms such as Spotify and Acast, as well as broader technology companies like YouTube and Apple, whose involvement in podcasting operates alongside other digital activities. Analysing the influences of these actors together is useful for the analysis because they function as intermediaries between podcasters and audiences, shaping discoverability, distribution, and monetisation in ways that influence the cultural position of podcasting. The increasing role of audio distribution companies and publishing platforms is part of the platformisation of cultural

production. Platformisation reconfigures the conditions through which podcasters construct and evaluate authenticity by steering content creators toward metrics, algorithms, and commercial partnerships (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). Platforms also shape the practices, opportunities, and limitations that podcasters encounter, especially in areas such as control, ownership, and discoverability.

Some podcasters were more critical of platforms' restrictive practices and their impact on creative control than others. Ian Doyle, audio producer and former head of podcasting for the Wireless Group, notes that, in Ireland, the relationship with platforms is "not as important because we don't get the same access to Spotify exclusives, the promotion of content and stuff like that". Doyle's comment suggests that independent podcasters in Ireland do not receive the same access to platforms, exclusive deals, content promotion, and other support compared to independent podcasters in the UK or the USA. Dee Reddy[87] describes how Spotify altered its ownership terms after acquiring the podcast creation tool Anchor:

> Under the radar, they [Spotify] changed their terms and conditions ... so that if you started a podcast in Anchor, it didn't automatically generate an RSS feed for you, which is completely changing the rules of engagement of what a podcast is. It ties people and their IP to Spotify forever.

Such restrictions compromise independent podcasters' independence and ability to define and own their work on their own terms. Host of *Everywhere We Go*[88], Rebecca Kelly, highlights the challenges posed by platforms, stating, "Even someone said to me, why don't you go to GoLoud? And I said no because I wouldn't have full autonomy over it, and I would have mad pressure". Kelly's reluctance to work with a specific platform due to fears of losing autonomy illustrates the conundrum between platformisation and the perception of autonomy.

In addition to human-centred constraints, non-human actors such as platform algorithms and technical infrastructures also shape the conditions under which autonomy is enacted. Platformisation considerations align with the conceptual concerns of Actor-Network Theory (ANT), which foregrounds social phenomena such as autonomy as distributed across human and non-human elements (Wiard, 2019). Advances in AI offer automation features, such as noise reduction and removing natural filler words (e.g., ah and umm). However, Nicky Ryan,

[87]Dee Reddy is the founder of independent podcast production company PoddleAudio and served as head of content development at digital audio platform *GoLoud* (owned by Bauer Media Ireland).
[88] *Everywhere We Go* is an independently produced interview podcast about personal stories and struggles.

the producer of Journal Media's news and documentary podcasts, argues, "I think there's like the hidden formality [in how a podcast sounds], which is very, very difficult to do with AI". Ryan's comment shows podcasters' concern about the use of non-human actors (in this case, automation and AI) in podcast production.

Independent podcasters reported a decline in podcast reach and *discoverability* due to the power and influence of third-party platforms. The term discoverability is commonly used in platform studies to describe the degree to which content can be found and promoted through algorithmic recommendation systems and platform-based visibility features. Podcaster and industry expert Dusty Rhodes notes that independent podcasters have limited control over discoverability on major platforms, as these platforms tend to favour established media outlets and well-known personalities. Rhodes states, "They are massive platforms and they're throwing their weight around […] All of these podcasts are just extra free content for their platform, but they still own the platform". The expectation of free content puts pressure on podcasters to conform to platformisation and prioritise visibility at the cost of autonomy. Independent podcaster Sinéad O'Moore reflects on the destruction of creative value in contemporary media, stating, "We've seen erosion of creative worth in the music industry and writers. For the creator, we haven't moved much further than the Renaissance". Sinéad's critique brings to light the continuing struggle between the demands of platforms and the need to protect authenticity and creator autonomy. The financial implications of platformisation weigh heavily on independent podcasters and, at times, result in the homogenisation of content as creators adjust to the pressures of platforms, threatening the diversity and authenticity of the medium.

The platformisation of podcasting undermines autonomy through power over ownership, visibility, and revenue. These platformisation pressures also contribute to wider commercial demands placed upon podcasters. The next subsection explores commercialisation challenges.

8.3.2 Commercialisation and Autonomy: Revenue and Market Pressures

As podcasting has evolved from hobbyism to a formalised industry, its autonomy is reshaped by commercial logics. Ireland's leading podcast trainer and producer Patrick Haughey[89], describes the current state of podcasting as "more mature, more regulated, and heavily

[89] Patrick Haughey is Ireland's leading podcast trainer and independent producer of *The Mario Rosenstock Podcast*, *Ireland Unfiltered,* and several branded podcasts.

commercialised", while New York Festivals Radio Awards-winning podcast producer Nicky Ryan calls it the "podcast industrial complex". Podcasters' autonomy is challenged and negotiated in various commercial aspects, such as financial and revenue models, sponsorships, resource concentration, and branded content.

The early scholarly romanticism around podcasting as a democratising force in cultural production has been undermined by the commercialisation and platform-led distribution (Berry, 2006; Sullivan, 2019). Independent podcast producer Pat O'Mahony observed that podcasting, like other grassroots media, has become increasingly shaped by commercialism. In Pat's words:

> Most podcasters are independent, and they will never get their voice heard because they don't have the budget to market it and whatever. And that's why if you have a big profile and you have a million Twitter or Facebook followers, you know, you put up a podcast, it gets listened to; even if it's crap. So yeah, it's getting through the noise because there's a lot of noise out there.

Pat's remarks reflect the Web 2.0 era's shift from participatory promise to commercial-driven imperatives, aligning with Mosco's (2004) critique of digital utopianism. The struggle to generate revenue offers a clear illustration of the challenges that arise when podcasters attempt to maintain autonomy within a commercial context. Mario Rosenstock, comedian and host of *The Mario Rosenstock Podcast*, emphasises the importance of balancing commercial success and the desire to be perceived as authentic:

> There is a limit to the authenticity because it [podcasting] is driven by commercial realities. For example, I don't have Paschal Donohoe[90] on the radio because I think he's the most interesting person in the world. I have Paschal Donohoe on the radio because he is famous, he is a person of interest, and it's a person people would love to see me talking to, and it will help generate revenue for me. So, I'm trying to think of both at the same time. If I only talked to people in areas that were just of interest to me, I think I would be narrowing it too much, not thinking about my audience and then not thinking about raising and then not thinking about the commercial reality, which is bringing some money in to create more podcasts. And so, my podcast would end.

While Rosenstock draws a distinction between his personal interests and the demands of audience engagement and commercial success, this boundary is fluid. His financial goals are

[90] Paschal Donohoe is an Irish politician and Ireland's Minister for Finance.

themselves of personal importance, showing a merging of public and private selves. The example reflects what scholars identify as the constant performativity of the self in contemporary media and cultural work, where identity is shaped by the need to maintain personal authenticity, economic viability, and public appeal (Giddens, 1991; Illouz, 2007; Marwick & boyd, 2011). Rosenstock's account can be read through Bourdieu (1986) as a negotiation between symbolic and economic capital. Economic capital can sustain production, fund labour, and support professional standards. The risk arises when economic demands appear to dominate the symbolic values through which podcasters claim authenticity.

Independent podcasters often avoid seeking sponsorships, as they believe such arrangements could undermine their creative control and freedom (as discussed previously in Chapter 5, Section 5.5). However, many podcasters adopt a pragmatic approach, viewing branded content as a distinct category where creative freedom might be curtailed. The negotiation of creative control highlights the ongoing tension between artistic vision and commercial interests within the podcasting landscape. Dee Reddy, former head of content development at GoLoud[91], advocates for a hybrid model that combines commercial work with independent projects, allowing for both financial stability and creative exploration.

Although independent podcasting empowers individuals to exercise greater flexibility, it comes with financial constraints. Due to limited resources, independent podcasters feel unable to invest in essential aspects of production, such as recording, as well as promotion, audience growth, and revenue generation. These constraints reveal the limits of podcasting's perceived democratisation, particularly when access to quality production and audience reach depends on material resources. Financial difficulties are a continuous source of anxiety for independent and freelance podcasters. For instance, former head of podcasting at Wireless Group Ian Doyle expresses reluctance to produce independent podcasts due to the difficulty of "making money from it at the moment". Doyle states:

> I do feel bad for a lot of the more independent producers because that's what I love podcasting for, that you don't have to be part of multinational media companies to create content. But you can see a difference now in the market, where people who have resources are able to create a lot more polished product than those who aren't.

[91] GoLoud is a leading platform for digital audio in Ireland and is owned by Bauer Media Group.

Doyle further explained that working in a revenue-focused organisation requires him to create content that is "sponsorable", which in turn affects the type of content he can produce. Likewise, independent podcaster Sinéad O'Moore observes, "Production companies are motivated by margin and profit. They want the guaranteed big hitters, a celebrity who's going to bring scale". Such examples suggest that while commercial pressures are ubiquitous, they have different effects across independent and commercial podcasting.

Within the commercial framework, branded podcasts, defined as commissioned podcasts that are explicitly produced to promote a service, product, or company, offer a nuanced understanding of autonomy. The producer and host of The History Channel's *VIKINGS podcast*[92], Liam Geraghty, explains his approach to autonomy in a branded podcast as follows:

> With the brand podcasts, I do think of them more as a way to make some money. If I'm doing a podcast series for a big brand, I'm not really thinking creatively that I need to make this like [...] Because it's not really my podcast, they're just hiring me to do the work.

The tension between authenticity and financial interests in podcasting highlights the challenges of balancing branded content with compelling storytelling. Branded podcasts often reflect the push and pull between corporate objectives, creative autonomy, and narrative authenticity, resulting in internal contradictions within the content. Liam Geraghty views these projects primarily as a source of income and recognises that brands often request highly specific content delivered according to predetermined expectations. This arrangement frames functional creativity within the collective nature of podcast production as a pragmatic approach common among professionals in the cultural industries. In earlier debates around art and commerce, such collective practices could arouse accusations of selling out. These practices are characteristic of podcasting rather than unique to it, since selling out remains valid in underground and independent music genres, albeit in different manifestations.

While branded podcasting is predominantly driven by marketing and commercial imperatives, its claim to authenticity is framed through accuracy, competence, and alignment between narrative content and the values and expectations of the target audience. This specificity differs from popular music traditions and can signal creativity in the age of content creation, yet it is problematic and carries many of the art versus commerce tensions, including potential conflicts

[92] *VIKINGS podcast* was a behind-the-scenes series that told the story of the making of the show.

of interest. Dusty Rhodes, who produces podcasts for brands, suggests that the demand for accuracy is key to the reputation and perceived authenticity of brands. Rhodes explains that the clients have editorial control, and the producer relies on brands, as brands are involved in the preparation, content production, and hosting. Rhodes suggests that because a brand is essentially a promise, brands do the fact-checking themselves. However, this raises potential conflicts of interest. Unlike journalism, branded podcasts function as marketing tools, and their claims call for further scrutiny. Although Rhodes trusts brands to fact-check themselves, he acknowledges the risks and therefore applies the same rigour of broadcasting laws and regulations to their branded podcasts. This example shows that participants are aware of the dilemma of supporting authentic creative expression while meeting the demands of the brand.

Podcasters strongly believe that state funding schemes systematically privilege established actors over amateur, experimental, or minority voices, and that applying to these schemes requires significant resources, which is draining for professionals and raises the bar for lower-level producers. Securing grants from funding schemes often involves navigating bureaucratic processes, which limit creative choices and change production priorities. Emma Ní Chearúil, who produced *Ómós Áite*, a poetry and travel podcast on Irish-language and Gaeltacht writers, received support from Coimisiún na Meán's Sound and Vision scheme and published the podcast via RTÉ Raidió. She describes the funding application process as "absolutely gruelling", noting that it would be a long time before she applied again. Likewise, Ed Roche, producer of the independent podcast *Our Unique Tales*[93], described the process of securing funding from Coimisiún na Meán as a substantial "headache", particularly due to the complicated paperwork. Reflecting on this experience, Roche explains that if they were to produce a second season, they would likely do it independently. Founder of PoddleAudio, Dee Reddy, echoes these sentiments, calling the BAI's Sound and Vision funding model "notoriously difficult to do". Another challenge for independent podcasters seeking commissions or funding from Coimisiún na Meán or other schemes is the absence of clear, podcast-specific guidelines to date.

The amateur–professional distinction complicates decisions about general funding for the arts. Dee Reddy[94] argues that the structure of podcast-specific funding from Coimisiún na Meán

[93] *Our Unique Tales* is an interview podcast featuring real-life stories of LGBTQIA+ people growing up in Ireland.
[94] Dee Reddy is a producer and founder of independent podcast production company PoddleAudio. Reddy also served as head of content development at GoLoud (a leading platform for digital audio in Ireland).

should differentiate between hobbyists and professionals. Reddy suggests that these two groups should not be placed in direct competition but instead be supported through separate funding categories. However, the distinction between professionals and hobbyists remains a challenge. There is a case to be made for arts funding that is encompassing across the spectrum, rather than being exclusive to either amateurs or professionals. Nevertheless, Reddy's suggestion raises important questions about the underlying rationale for public funding in podcasting. If podcasting is a hobby for some, does it merit institutional support? Or is such funding aimed at nurturing emerging voices and untold stories, regardless of professional status? Musicians in traditional Irish music get institutional support, grant aid, and funds. The example highlights the priorities of state-funded support for art and artists. Reddy's position reflects this latter view. As she puts it, "if you want a bursary as a non-professional, that should be something that's available if there's a story that is worth telling". This emphasis on narrative value over institutional affiliation aligns with wider discussions in community-led cultural initiatives. This argument aligns with scholarly work on community archives, which offers a useful framework for understanding how publicly funded institutions can support storytelling by non-professionals without diminishing standards of value or access (Popple et al., 2020).

There remains considerable complexity in how podcasters navigate the relationship between autonomy, authenticity, and commercialisation. The following section explains podcasters' reactions to the structural incentives and pressures via the drive to professionalise. It shows how the platformisation and commercialisation of podcasting have shifted the medium towards greater professionalisation, where competence is regarded as an important marker of authenticity.

8.4 Professionalisation and Competence

Professionalisation reflects podcasters' responses to structural pressures by acquiring knowledge, training, technical skills, and commercial success to produce high-quality audio and sustain themselves in an increasingly competitive media environment. Professionalisation comprises professional identity, education, training, skills, production standards, work routines, and values (Deuze, 2005; Martín-Morán & Martín Nieto, 2022). Podcasters' perceptions of professionalisation are influenced by their personal interests, organisational structure, media culture, and technological environment (Meng & Wang, 2025). Participants often treated adherence to established professional standards as supporting perceived

authenticity. However, they also navigate between professional and hobbyist identities as their podcasting practice evolves over time. Therefore, I examine how they respond to external pressures, regardless of whether they identify as professionals or hobbyists.

The external structural pressures discussed in the earlier section (i.e., platforms, markets, and institutional mandates) also generate pressures that operate on the micro-level, such as emotional strain, precarious labour, and threats to well-being. The shift towards professionalisation presents challenges for podcasters, requiring them to adjust and adapt their practices while preserving the core values of autonomy and authenticity that drew them to the medium. Professionalism is criticised for raising skill barriers to entry by distinguishing professional workers from amateurs (Freidson, 2001, as cited in Le Bianic, 2003; Sullivan, 2021). Striving for high production quality can erode autonomy by binding producers to sponsor expectations, platform metrics, and routinised workflows. Despite the convenience of podcasting, achieving high-quality production remains a challenge.

While podcasting has a low barrier to entry, skilful production requires competence. Competence is characterised by quality production, skills, artisanry, self-efficacy, and continuous learning (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Nunes et al., 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Competence encompasses not just technical and subject expertise, but also the ability to effectively manage production and audience engagement requirements. Commercial success, awards, and higher audience numbers are now framed as evidence of competence even when formal training is absent. Contemporary podcasting makes amateur production challenging due to the increased demand for professionalism and competence. Scholarship on cultural labour and the professional amateur spectrum of cultural production offers valuable insight into these working conditions (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; Gill & Pratt, 2008).

This section analyses podcasters' responses to external forces through professionalisation in four sub-sections. The first involves building competence in the form of learning, training, and knowledge. The second entails technical skills in audio recording, editing, and publishing. The third involves achieving commercial success and recognition. The final subsection deals with how professionalisation puts pressure on podcasters' well-being.

8.4.1 Knowledge, Learning, and Training

The professionalisation of podcasting challenges podcasters to build competence in the form of qualifications, (in)formal training, experiential learning, and critical self-reflection. Formal training plays a contested role across podcasting genres, shaping both production techniques and presentational style. Participants with backgrounds in journalism, for instance, often brought conventional reporting practices such as verification, objectivity, editorial balance, and narrative framing. In contrast, participants involved in drama or comedy podcasting drew on training in acting or screenwriting to craft tone, dialogue, and timing. This genre-specific application of training highlights podcasting's interdisciplinary nature, shaped by diverse creative lineages and blending professional conventions from journalism, performance, and digital media. Peter Dunne[95], for example, believes that their experience in theatre improved their narrative skills and helped them discover their unique voice as a creative professional, despite not attending formal art school.

Regardless of their educational background and experience level, podcasters expressed a commitment to continuous self-directed learning, skill development, and self-reflection. Independent podcaster John Roche stresses self-learning, stating, "I didn't go to college for any of this. I just listened to a lot of podcasts and figured things out through trial and error". The participants stressed the need for critical self-reflection to achieve competence. Pat O'Mahony states, "Competence comes with experience. The more you do something, the better you become. If you listen back to yourself and become your own harshest critic". These reflections show podcasters' intentional efforts to evaluate their work and identify opportunities for improvement. Podcasters' commitment to self-directed learning informs their technical choices and creative standards. The next section considers how production quality, editing, and audio proficiency shape professional expectations and influence how authenticity is perceived.

8.4.2 Audio Quality, Production Value, and Editing

The professionalisation of podcasting has reconfigured the criteria by which authenticity is understood, aligning it more closely with commercial production standards than with amateur experimentation. This subsection clarifies a shift in authenticity discourse. It does not claim

[95] Peter Dunne is the director and writer of the independent horror anthology podcast *Petrified*. Dunne also writes for theatre and has produced an immersive audio tour of Dublin.

that polished production is now always authentic, or that amateur sound has lost all value. Rather, the data suggest that the signs through which podcasters judge authenticity have changed as podcasting has become more professionalised and platform-facing. Early podcasting often valued rough sound because it signalled proximity, amateur commitment, and independence from radio norms. In the present study, many participants associate poor sound with a lack of care, skill, or respect for the listener. They believe that polished audio can be recognised as authentic when it supports the podcast's stated purpose, genre, and relationship with the audience. It can still weaken authenticity when it feels formulaic, overproduced, or driven mainly by sponsor or platform demands. Ian Doyle reflects on his first independent podcast *With Relish Podcast*[96]:

> *With Relish Podcast* was very unorganised and all over the place, but it was fun to make. If you listen back to that now, the levels are terrible, the production of it maybe isn't great, but you can tell we are all having a lot of fun while doing it because, for us, it was a hobby; it was something that we were not getting paid for. And there was that level of authenticity with that, which you hear right away.

Doyle's account presents the shift from amateur, low-production podcasting to more professionalised standards as more than nostalgia for low production quality. It shows that participants link amateur authenticity with enjoyment, unpaid commitment, and shared participation. Yet the same rough sound may carry a different meaning in a more competitive field, where rising listener expectations make low production values less likely to signal intimacy or independence. Doyle now works to professional standards but still recognises a sense of authenticity in the unpolished sound of his early work. His account captures an unresolved contradiction, as he values the competence he has gained while regretting the informality that professionalisation may reduce.

Participants believed that listener expectations have gradually shifted towards higher audio standards. John Davis, co-host of *The David McWilliams Podcast*[97], observes that podcast audio standards have evolved over time, stating that early podcasts "sounded like they were done in toilets or a kitchen. They were unedited. And they sounded awful. People do not want that anymore. People expect quality". Davis marks this change in field expectations. The judgement of sound quality now also operates as a judgement of competence. Bourdieu's

[96] *With Relish Podcast* is a food podcast looking at Ireland's culinary industry and identity.
[97] *The David McWilliams Podcast* is an independent podcast and has 35 million+ downloads. John Davis produces and co-hosts the podcast with economist and author David McWilliams.

(1990, 1993) account of cultural production helps explain this shift. Podcasters develop a practical feel for the game as they learn which production values carry legitimacy within their genre and working model. Each producer has a feel for the game of contemporary podcasting, a practical sense of what now counts as good work and what the field will reward. Audio skill can operate as cultural capital, while audience numbers, awards, and platform visibility can act as signs of recognition. Producers convert technical skill and equipment into capital that secures a position in the field, while still drawing on the amateur ideal when it serves them. These forms of capital do not remove the older amateur ideal. They require podcasters to negotiate it within a more professionalised field. This shift parallels the broader trend in platformed media, where podcasting becomes increasingly shaped by platform logics and algorithmic visibility. As in the case of platformisation of cultural production for YouTube (Burgess & Green, 2018), the aesthetics of professionalism and polish are incentivised.

Audio quality is important in podcasting because most podcasts are listened to with headphones, creating an intimate and immersive listening environment. As Bull (2007) argues, personal audio devices produce a form of 'auditory privatization', where sound is experienced in isolation and proximity. In the podcasting context, even minor flaws in sound design, such as uneven levels or background noise, become more pronounced and disruptive. Podcasters are acutely aware of production values and believe that voices need to be musical, providing listeners with a pleasant experience. The Irish Times' podcaster, Hugh Linehan, suggests that if something is not polished to the podcast industry standard, it will not perform particularly well. Podcasters believe that poor audio quality affects perceived authenticity as it may not meet audience expectations. These expectations vary according to genre, format, target audience, and the podcaster's working model. For example, podcasters from journalism backgrounds often emphasise high production values, while independent podcasters focusing on community-building might prioritise spontaneity and relational aspects. Chapter 7 analysed the genre expectations in detail.

Skilful editing is essential to provide smooth listening, as well as a sense of pace and rhythm comparable to natural human conversation. Liam Geraghty, the producer of the New York Festivals Radio Award-winning horror anthology podcast *Petrified*, reflects on the early days of podcasting, stating, "In the early days, we didn't tend to edit at all". Geraghty now recognises the importance of editing for producing high-quality podcasts, stating, "Whereas now, you're always just striving to be authentic or get authentic audio because people can spot it a mile

away when it's not". Similarly, podcast host Ed Roche notes, "The authenticity in podcasting, or the honesty or the truth, comes in the editing of it then". These reflections highlight that editing is a significant stage through which podcasters construct and manage perceived authenticity. The editing process becomes a means through which podcasters craft authentic narratives and ensure that their content resonates with audiences' expectations of quality.

Bourdieu's (1993) account of the field helps explain how podcasters hold these competing standards together. Each producer develops a practical sense of what counts as authentic work in contemporary podcasting. Reading polished audio as authentic forms part of that practical sense. Producers convert technical skill and equipment into capital that supports their position in the field. At the same time, they may still draw on the amateur ideal to signal sincerity or community belonging. Authenticity is not a fixed property of rough or polished sound. It becomes a stake that podcasters negotiate through the capital available to them. The move towards polish reflects a negotiation of competing values, as producers seek legitimacy within a changing field. The move also connects to the strategic authenticity examined in Chapter 5, where podcasters weigh personal expression against commercial demands.

As podcasters strive to meet production standards through audio and editing, attention also turns to non-technical competencies that shape how authenticity is performed.

8.4.3 Beyond Audio Skills

Non-technical competencies (e.g., hosting, preparation, and vocal delivery) are important markers of hosts' professional competence. Hosting skills help perform authenticity, particularly for podcasters who produce podcasts in conversational formats. Hosts highlighted research, listening, and adaptable questioning as core competencies. Former RTÉ host and independent producer Pat O'Mahony highlights that audiences read authenticity in vocal delivery, stating, "I think authenticity is what personally makes a good broadcaster or presenter. You believe them, and you don't believe someone who is just reading a script or is putting on an accent or is trying to be something they are not". This approach prioritises passion and expertise, assuming that audiences are more likely to connect with individuals who believe in the message they are conveying. Bernice Harrison, host of a daily news podcast, emphasises the importance of preparation and research, stating, "It is all very structured and planned. This isn't people having the chats about the first thing that came into their head. Everything is

structured and planned". Extensive research, preparation, active listening, conversational ability, and flexibility demonstrate hosts' competence. Such skills reflect the principles of semi-structured interviewing, where flexibility and depth are prioritised (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Roulston, 2010).

Podcasters use techniques such as creating a welcoming atmosphere, encouraging openness, and drawing out emotionally resonant perspectives to construct authenticity in interviews. These practices are consistent with journalistic norms of building rapport and eliciting narrative depth (Zelizer, 2004; Lindgren, 2021). Selecting guests who are experts in their area of interest further helps podcasters claim authenticity, as it affirms the podcaster's credibility and commitment to delivering informed, meaningful content (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). However, these practices varied across podcast genres, with journalistic formats emphasising accuracy and control, while conversational formats prioritised responsiveness, vulnerability, and mutual trust. Together, such techniques help podcasters build relational authenticity through their interactions with guests (see Section 6.3, Podcaster and Guest Relationship).

The next section considers how recognition and commercial success further influence perceptions of competence and professionalisation in podcasting.

8.4.4 Recognition and Commercial Success

Podcasters' commercial success and recognition contribute to their perception of competence and authenticity. Their ability to attract listenership and generate revenue shows competency and expertise regarding the podcasting industry, genre expectations, audience demands, and production standards (see Chapter 5, Section 5.5 Financial Success and Authenticity).

The contrasting views on what constitutes competence in terms of industry recognition offer valuable insights into the complex understanding of perceived authenticity. Industry awards and recognition from peers and organisations can legitimise producers' competence. Hugh Linehan suggests that in a world where people are trawling through millions of podcasts and looking for something to listen to, if they love a comedy podcast, then the one that won the best comedy podcast is surely a place to start. Similarly, Órla Ryan, creator of the podcast *Redacted Lives*, which focused on the survivors of Mother and Baby Homes and has won several awards, acknowledges that while awards are not her primary motivation, they help gain wider reach. In contrast, for some independent podcasters, maintaining independence from

commercial pressures and resisting market-driven incentives may be seen as a more authentic stance. The commitment to producing high-quality content and audience engagement is a more relevant indicator of competence and authenticity among independent podcasters than commercially driven forms and awards. For example, independent podcaster Rebecca Kelly foregrounds personal fulfilment and emotional healing over metrics such as audience size or fame. Kelly's podcast is rooted in personal storytelling and explores difficult social issues such as addiction and poverty.

Although knowledge, skills, and success can signal competence, they often introduce pressures that may compromise authenticity. The next section examines precarious creative labour and shows that such pressures affect podcasters' well-being.

8.4.5 Well-being and Precarity

Flexible schedules, creativity pressures, and DIY cultures in independent podcasting generate what Peter Dunne calls "a necessary evil". Drawing on cultural-labour scholarship (e.g., Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; Gill & Pratt, 2008), the present work shows authenticity as a challenging process negotiated through the everyday well-being of podcasters. The myth associated with podcast authenticity translates into financial anxiety, emotional labour, precarity, and potentially burnout.

The platformisation and commercial challenges convert flexibility into perpetual deliverable pressure, especially under subscription models. Independent podcaster Cian Sullivan finds the subscription model challenging because once people commit to paying, Sullivan becomes accountable to them. Sullivan found themselves under more pressure, feeling that they had to provide something that justified listeners' five euros a month, or else they would take it away. Emma Ní Chearúil expresses a similar view about her independent *Big Fan* podcast. She states that she does not want there to be money involved because she does not want to feel like she owes people content, stating, "I don't want that to be another contract". This reflects her desire to preserve personal autonomy over the podcast's production schedule and to avoid the pressures associated with audience or sponsor expectations. She acknowledges that there will be times when burnout and other commitments will limit her ability to produce independent podcasts, and keeping full control allows her to step back when needed without feeling accountable to external demands.

The expectations to consistently publish episodes can place significant pressure on independent podcasters, sometimes at the expense of their personal well-being. For example, independent podcaster Sinéad O'Moore, who usually records podcasts on Zoom after 9:00 p.m. from her home, shares her experience:

> I got very ill this summer, and my voice went; I ended up with pneumonia. It was kind of the world being like stop talking. And again, from an emotional capacity apparently… Our illnesses can often tell you what is happening emotionally, and the lungs represent grief. I do genuinely feel this year the nature of the conversations that I was having; there was a lot of grief. I did need a break, and my body made me have one.

A higher degree of flexibility and self-direction also exposes podcasters to the personal and professional vulnerabilities commonly associated with gig economy labour and precarious work conditions. Self-initiated projects and community expectations can lead to forms of unpaid or emotionally taxing labour often associated with self-exploitation. Sinéad, who hosted the parenting podcast *Everymum* before starting her independent podcast *Stretch Marks*, reflects that although there was creative freedom, it became demanding and frustrating. The *Everymum* podcast was a self-initiated project, and Sinéad "loved it so much" that she was happy to work weekends.

Likewise, producer and host of Irish-language podcasts Emma Ní Chearúil states that there is a huge issue in Irish-language media, where there is an expectation to contribute time and effort *ar son na cúise* (for the sake of the cause). This could involve anything from giving up weekends to taking part in a campaign run by the organisation, where involvement is framed as part of the community rather than as a job requirement, even though one might not be involved if it were not for their job. Similarly, Liam Geraghty states, "it is hard not to burn yourself out when one is working in an independent capacity". While he enjoyed his 'passion project' *Petrified*, he found it difficult to balance work, passion projects, and his full-time job as a podcast producer, leading to burnout. Across these accounts, the line between passion and unpaid labour collapses, resonating with what scholars (e.g., Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; Gill & Pratt, 2008) describe as self-exploitation in cultural and creative labour. In such contexts, personal passion blurs the boundaries between voluntary commitment and unrecognised labour.

8.5 Conclusion

Authenticities in podcasting are negotiated among various stakeholders (podcast producers, platforms, institutions, and industry actors). Chapter 8 has shown that autonomy is one of the conditions through which authenticity is negotiated in Irish podcasting. Autonomy is described as podcasters' capacity to make meaningful decisions about voice, form, representation, production values, and accountability within particular working frameworks. Autonomy operates differently across various production, distribution, and institutional frameworks. The key distinction lies in the degree to which podcasters can exert influence over creative decisions and final outputs, with each working framework presenting different advantages and constraints. Independent producers value autonomy to a relatively higher degree than their institutional counterparts. Although independent podcasting facilitates more autonomy in production, the same levels do not necessarily extend to publishing, promotion, or audience reach as podcasters remain reliant on platform infrastructures and algorithmic (in)visibility. Podcasters navigate a range of institutional and commercial expectations, all of which shape their efforts to keep autonomy in an increasingly complex podcasting environment. Autonomy is shaped not only by institutional or commercial demands but also by relational ethics and perceived audience expectations, aligning with broader concerns in the political economy of media production. Independent podcasters face systemic pressure on the durability of their productions due to financial constraints. They often lack the experience to navigate the commercial side of podcasting. However, market success can both affirm and threaten claims to authenticity, since commercial partnerships often function as markers of artistic achievement while also inviting accusations of "selling out" (Klein et al., 2017).

Many podcasters conflate the relationship between autonomy and the absence of accountability in podcasting. This confusion, especially in areas of podcasting that lean towards political commentary or news, arguably serves some actors more than others. It opens a wider debate concerning editorial responsibility, credibility, and the broader role of podcasting in contemporary journalism. While independent podcasters described themselves as accountable to their audiences, this form of direct accountability does not contradict the ethos of independent podcasting, which values autonomy from institutional oversight. Podcasting's convenience supports the creation of niche content that might not find space in legacy media. However, the absence of oversight, particularly in contrast to broadcast regulations, remains a key issue in debates about trust, truthfulness, and public responsibility in digital audio.

Audience-driven funding dynamics may dictate a populist agenda, potentially reducing editorial control. The expectation to deliver consistent and high-quality content in exchange for financial support can impose creative constraints, reinforcing the point that no working framework is entirely free from obligations. What matters is how those obligations are negotiated, and by whom.

The study deepens the understanding of platformisation effects on audio media. This research aligns with work on platform governance that shows how ranking, recommendation, and policy shape participation and visibility for creative workers, who adapt tactically to reach audiences while trying to protect core values and voice (Gillespie, 2010; Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Poell et al., 2019). Podcasting offers a productive site for examining how authenticities and autonomy are negotiated within platformised media cultures. Podcasters' autonomy is exercised in negotiation with both human actors (colleagues, audiences, sponsors) and non-human actors (platform algorithms, legal frameworks), which reflects a wider feature of the platformisation of cultural production. The findings resonate with Actor-Network Theory's view of distributed agency (Wiard, 2019). Future work could develop a model of creative autonomy that accounts for interactive influence among multiple nodes in a network, such as between creators, audiences, platforms, and institutions.

The chapter also clarifies the relationship between authenticity and professionalisation. Early podcast authenticity was often associated with amateur sound, informality, and freedom from broadcast norms. The shift in perspective, from low production values, limited skills, and unedited audio to well-produced and well-edited sound, indicates that what was once considered part of podcast authenticity is now seen as a lack of competence and professionalism. Participants suggested that skilful production can support credibility, intimacy, and perceived listener trust. However, polish can still compromise authenticity when it appears driven mainly by commercial, platform, or institutional demands. Podcasters negotiate this contradiction with a feel for the game, deploying the capital they hold to claim their work as authentic against both standards. Professionalisation reflects podcasters' responses to structural pressures by acquiring knowledge, training, technical skills, and commercial success to produce high-quality audio and sustain themselves in an increasingly competitive media environment. Podcasters consciously perform and manage strategic authenticity to navigate commercial demands. The focus on production quality echoes evolving professional norms in audio media (Spinelli & Dann, 2019).

The larger argument of the chapter is that authenticity in podcasting is produced through negotiated autonomy within a changing field of cultural production. Bourdieu's (1986) framework helps explain why autonomy differs across independent, commercial, and public service settings. Podcasters draw on different combinations of cultural, social, symbolic, and economic capital to make their work credible and sustainable. Independent podcasters often value ownership, community, and self-direction. Institutional podcasters may draw on editorial standards, public service authority, and organisational trust. Commercial podcasters negotiate the value of revenue, reach, and sponsorship against the symbolic value attached to creative independence. Authenticities operate differently across these positions because the field gives different forms of legitimacy to different practices. There is a push and pull between the desire to create content that participants and listeners may recognise as authentic and the limitations imposed by financial pressures, editorial and legal requirements, brand objectives, creative visions, production values, and audience expectations. The evidence shows that what is seen as authentic within one model may not be perceived as such in another.

The four empirical chapters have shown that authenticities are context-driven constructions that shape podcasters' motives, relations, autonomy, and production processes. The final part of the thesis presents the discussion and contributions.

PART 3 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Chapter 9. Discussion

9.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses and synthesises the findings presented in Chapters 5 to 8, situating them within the theoretical contexts. The study investigated the main research question of how and why podcasters in the Republic of Ireland negotiate and perform authenticity, and what challenges arise in that pursuit. This research shows authenticities as contextual constructs negotiated by podcasters within cultural and institutional settings. It demonstrates that authenticity has remained central from podcasting's early years to the present. That continuity persists despite changes in technologies, platforms, professionalisation, and market conditions. Authenticities are shaped by genre norms, the institutional or independent setting of production, and the working conditions of creators. The findings demonstrate that Irish podcasters are highly reflexive about these factors. In this discussion, authenticity is framed as a form of strategic positioning within the field, while authenticities refer to the different context-specific ways this positioning is enacted. Podcasters attach authenticity to different values depending on their field position, working model, audience relationship, genre, and production practice.

The chapter integrates the findings with current scholarship to identify alignments and disagreements. It provides a critical analysis that situates this study in the broader context of cultural production, creative labour, and digital media scholarship. The chapter begins by presenting a detailed theoretical discussion on major themes identified in the data. Each theme addresses one of the four research questions. After discussing findings to address the research questions, I reflect on the tensions that arise in the performance of authenticity. Following this, I discuss unexpected findings related to the podcasting field.

9.2 Discussion and Synthesis of Findings

This section follows the conceptual arrangement established in Chapter 3. It proceeds from personal authenticities to relational and cultural authenticities, then to genre and production authenticities, before turning to field and structural authenticities. Personal authenticity overlaps with Moore's (2002) first-person authenticity and Vannini and Williams's (2009) sincere authenticity, but the findings show that podcasters actively negotiate boundaries around disclosure, labour, and self-presentation rather than simply expressing an inner self. Relational authenticity resonates with Moore's (2002) second-person authenticity, yet the data highlight how validation is shaped by perceived audience feedback, platform metrics, and community expectations rather than stable recognition. Genre and production authenticity relates to Peterson's (2005) account of culturally constructed authenticity, Moore's (2002) third-person authenticity, and Vannini and Williams's (2009) iconic and indexical authenticities, but demonstrates how podcasters strategically mobilise genre conventions and production markers to signal credibility and differentiation within a crowded field. Field and structural authenticity draws on Bourdieu (1986) by framing authenticity as a position within the podcasting field, where claims to being authentic are shaped by the distribution of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital.

9.2.1 Personal Authenticity: Motivations, Values, and Creative Practices

This section discusses how podcasters understand authenticity on a personal level. It addresses RQ1: In what ways do podcasters in the Republic of Ireland pursue authenticity in relation to their self-presentation, motivations, values, and creative practices? Authenticity in podcasting is deeply tied to the self-presentation, personal motivation, and performance of the podcasters (as analysed in Chapter 5). The discussion contextualises the analysis within the broader scholarly discourse on authenticity, self-presentation, performativity, cultural capital, and motivations.

9.2.1.1 Authenticity as Performance of Multiple Selves

Authenticity is an ongoing performance of multiple authentic selves in different podcasting contexts. Podcasters simultaneously engage in impression management while emphasising spontaneity and unfiltered expression. Goffman (1959) defined authentic performers as those who genuinely believe in the identity they project and are not cynically deceiving the audience.

The present study does not treat the "true self" as a stable origin of authenticity. Rather, it shows that podcasters select, manage, and present aspects of the self in ways that they recognise as authentic. The idealistic belief in a 'true self' stands in contrast to postmodern critiques that see the self as fragmented and performative (Peterson, 2005). The present work shows that this perceived authenticity requires work. For example, podcasters decide what to share, how to phrase speech, and when to display emotional resonance. The podcasters actively construct an authentic self-image through storytelling and interactions, confirming their authenticity through the very act of performing it.

This study contributes to Goffman's dramaturgical framework of front and backstage performance in audio media by showing podcasters' negotiation of public and private personas. The 'front stage' (public performance) and 'backstage' (private preparation) highlight the strategic aspects of authenticity in podcasting. Moreover, findings suggest podcasting complicates this binary by creating a third space, akin to Meyrowitz's (1986) 'middle region', where media blend front and back stages, allowing hosts to reveal selected personal realities while maintaining boundaries. The creation of a 'middle stage' reveals deliberate authenticity in audio formats. Unlike Goffman's theory, where individuals typically maintain distinct front/back separations, podcasters reveal selected vulnerabilities. This sense of deliberate authenticity extends Goffman's framework by showing that digital media creators consciously manipulate the front/backstage boundary as part of their authenticity practice. The finding aligns with prior observations that mediated authenticity is often carefully curated (Marwick & boyd, 2011), even when producers intend it to sound spontaneous.

Podcasters demonstrate self-congruence as a form of personal authenticity by aligning decisions with personal values, such as rejecting misaligned sponsorships. Self-congruence refers to a person's tendency to act in ways that are congruent with their true self across situations and social roles (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Sheldon et al., 1997). One independent podcaster recounted turning down a lucrative sponsorship from a company whose values they questioned, despite the financial sustainability it could have brought. The finding also aligns with the recent scholarship (e.g., Schlegel et al., 2025; Smith & Du, 2025; Zogaj et al., 2024) that argues for self-congruence as a marker of authenticity. Some podcasters, particularly those with activist or community-focused content, saw being authentic as aligning their podcast practices with their social values. Self-congruence might limit some opportunities (i.e., fewer sponsors or a narrower pool of guests), but it reinforced the authenticity of the project's

mission. This finding resonates with Bourdieu's notion of investing in symbolic capital (prestige, moral high ground) over economic capital.

Participants framed podcasting as a performative medium where authenticity is deliberately made audible to secure credibility and perceived proximity with listeners. There is an inherent contradiction in podcast recording and performance. The moment a microphone is turned on, people become aware of being recorded and "start to perform". Nevertheless, podcasters continually aspire to be authentic, and this aspiration guides their performance. This finding resonates with Enli's (2015) concept of 'mediated authenticity', wherein media producers strive to construct an appearance of spontaneity and groundedness that appears 'real' to the audience, even though the exchange is partially staged. The findings showed that creators treat 'being yourself' as both an aspirational claim and a strategic craft move. The performative dimension of cultural production does not contradict authenticity; rather, it is one technique through which authenticity is expressed and perceived by podcasters.

Participants described authenticity in podcasting as a performative process, wherein the emotive and personal qualities of the voice are deliberately harnessed to seek an authentic connection. The findings contribute to an understanding of mediated persona by showing that authenticity is achieved not by erasing performance, but by making the performance transparent and coherent. In podcasting, the host persona is a crafted version of oneself that must remain relatable. Baym (2015) argued that creators engage in relational labour to appear accessible and authentic to their audience. For podcasters, this can involve calibrating how enthusiastic, authoritative, or vulnerable to sound on the microphone. Participants in this study revealed a conflict between wanting to be themselves and recognising that presenting an engaging version of oneself often involves emphasising certain traits and toning down others. Rather than viewing performance and authenticity as opposites, these practitioners treat performance as the vehicle for authenticity. In practical terms, this means using one's natural voice and style but fine-tuning it to support perceived connection with listeners. Self-disclosure functions as another key aspect of performative authenticity.

9.2.1.2 Vulnerability, Self-Disclosure, Motivation, and Ethical Boundaries

Authenticity is also related to how podcasters express vulnerability, disclosure, and transparency. Vulnerability serves a relational purpose (building community and empathy) as well as an authenticating function (showing the host's true self beyond the 'performer'). Self-disclosure is a well-established strategy in communication research to build relational closeness

(Collins & Miller, 1994). Unlike reality TV, where authenticity is performed through confession (Couldry, 2008), podcasters exercise direct agency over what they reveal, making it arguably a more authentic performance, or at least one directly in line with their own narrative control. Greater control can lessen vulnerability and enable strategic displays of vulnerability. Podcast hosts often invite the audience into their backstage by sharing personal anecdotes and admitting flaws to give listeners a sense of witnessing the host in a vulnerable state. Personal revelations create an economy of feeling and a valued cultural resource (Illouz, 2007). Self-disclosure and conversational spontaneity operate as authenticity signals, yet genres set boundaries for what counts as appropriate disclosure. Authenticity markers do not apply universally (as evidenced in genre discussions in Chapter 7). A news podcast host might not share personal anecdotes yet can still be authentic by being transparent about sources or uncertainties. Meanwhile, a comedy host's authenticity might hinge on spontaneity and candid emotion. The contextual performance of authenticity is tailored to genre norms and audience expectations. Selective sharing also reflects that authenticity in media is performative and is curated for public consumption. Podcasters share personal stories to reflect traits of spontaneity, ordinariness, imperfection, and personal confessions (Maloney Yorganci & McMurtry, 2024). These findings extend parasocial theory by specifying practices through which podcasters attempt to produce feelings of closeness.

Podcasters perceive authenticity as a combination of intrinsic motives (e.g., passion, enjoyment, and advocacy) and extrinsic motives (e.g., growth, recognition, and competence building). These findings contribute to Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) by showing that declarations of motive and craft integrity function as a criterion of authenticity and symbolic capital in podcasting. Most podcasters in this research started their shows due to intrinsic motivation, a genuine interest or passion for the topic, a love of the medium, or the simple enjoyment of sharing stories and opinions. They often spoke of podcasting as a creative outlet that allowed them to be themselves in ways their other jobs or daily lives might not. Financial success carried both intrinsic meaning and extrinsic value. Participants seek alignment among financial goals, topic interest, and personal values. Studies of influencers and YouTubers show that transparency and value alignment can preserve perceived authenticity during sponsorships (Audrezet et al., 2020). The findings confirm a similar pattern for podcasting, where podcasters seek selective funding that fits with their goals. Financial returns can convert to recognition and competence building which, may support claims to authenticity when creators retain ownership and editorial control.

Participants cautioned against oversharing, performative candour, and personality cults, and described the need to protect others and themselves. There is a subtle contradiction of authenticity, wherein trying too hard to be authentic can itself seem inauthentic (Banet-Weiser, 2012). The issue of oversharing or excessive authenticity is related to feeling pressure to share more personal information or extreme emotions to appear authentic. Podcasters expressed that in the age of social media, there is a trend of performative vulnerability (people sharing very personal traumas publicly to gain empathy or attention). Podcasters struggle with precarious visibility, constant self-exposure, and affective display. Being authentic through sharing vulnerabilities can be emotionally draining because it requires reliving or exposing sensitive parts of oneself. Unfiltered self-expression creates an authenticity dilemma, which can hinder growth and learning (Ibarra, 2015). The findings align with work on creative fields to track burnout and involuted labour in digital culture (Scott & Woods, 2024). Authenticity as a performance is emotionally costly and requires ongoing ethical and editorial management. Podcasters navigate the challenge between authentic self-expression and responsibility towards audiences, avoiding sensationalism or exploitative storytelling.

Authenticity in podcasting functions as an ongoing process shaped by relational dynamics.

9.2.2 Negotiating Relational Authenticity: Mediated, Interpersonal, and Cultural Contexts

This section addresses RQ2 by setting out a relational model of authenticities in podcasting. It addresses the question "How do podcasters negotiate and construct authenticity through their mediated, interpersonal, and cultural relationships with audiences, guests, collaborators, and communities in the Republic of Ireland?" The empirical findings presented in Chapter 6 showed that podcasters believe authenticity is shaped through audience relations, guest interactions, team collaborations, community building, and cultural contexts.

9.2.2.1 Contemporary Parasocial Relationships and Digital Intimacy

Podcasters' accounts of audience relations suggest a contemporary two-way neo-parasociality facilitated by reciprocity. The study identified a form of neo-parasociality shaped by digital media and the potential for increased communication from audiences. Podcasters often engage with listeners through social media, which can move a one-sided bond toward a perceived reciprocal relationship. The scope of reciprocity depends on scale, since larger audiences limit

direct interaction. Podcasting, though not inherently interactive in the audio itself, is embedded in a digital ecosystem that facilitates interaction. Podcasters often imagine that they are speaking to a specific person or a small group of friends to maintain a warm, genuine tone, rather than thinking of a mass audience or a studio. This imaginative approach relates to the concept of inverse parasocial interaction, where the host actively envisions the audience during recording to foster intimacy (Sharon & John, 2024a). Podcasters described routine responses to messages, careful acknowledgements of listener contributions, and segment design that rewarded regular attention. Podcasting combines the strengths of radio's vocal intimacy with the interactivity of social media. As such, podcasts become fertile ground for exploring how technology mediates relationships that feel deeply personal. The Irish context adds a layer, as it is a relatively small country where cultural references between host and listeners can intensify that sense of closeness.

While there is an increased sense of reciprocity, podcasters intensify parasociality through intimate aural delivery and informal address (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021). Lack of visual cues in audio podcasting encourages a form of imagined closeness. Podcasters emphasise the closeness of the medium, with one participant calling it "the intimacy of the human voice". Podcasting aligns with the egalitarian values of the internet era by using the voice to convey a feeling of authenticity (Llinares, 2018). Podcasters deliberately embrace imperfection (sharing mistakes, laughing at themselves) and spontaneity (unscripted banter) to cultivate a feeling of ordinariness that they believed could deepen parasociality and digital intimacy (Maloney Yorganci & McMurtry, 2024). Digital intimacy refers to the ways intimate social connection is mediated by digital technologies, often blurring public and private boundaries (Smith et al., 2019). Podcasts exemplify digital intimacy as they transform what is essentially mass communication (one person speaking to potentially thousands) into something that feels personal and private. The finding also advances Berryman and Kavka's (2017) analysis of strategic intimacy in digital media by highlighting podcast-specific techniques for creating 'authentic connection' with listeners. Podcasters were cognisant that creating authentic connection and intimacy requires ongoing work and relational labour.

9.2.2.2 Relational Labour and Parasocial Economy of Authenticity

The empirical findings further support Nancy Baym's (2015) idea of relational labour, which she defined as "regular, ongoing communication with audiences over time to build social relationships that foster paid work" (p. 16). Baym (2015) developed this concept primarily in

the context of social media and musicians, describing how artists cultivate fan relationships through interpersonal communication online, effectively doing a form of emotional and social labour as part of their work. The podcasters engage in similar practices, which suggests that podcasting involves relational labour that supports podcasters' claims of authenticity. Podcasters described consistent efforts to connect with audiences through various forms of interaction beyond the podcast itself. This includes responding to feedback, managing online communities, tailoring content based on audience feedback, and consistently showing up as approachable and friendly. While Baym's (2015) research on musicians emphasised the tension between authentic connection and commercial imperatives, podcasters often described relational labour as intrinsically rewarding rather than instrumental for financial goals.

Podcasters frame relational labour as a practice through which authenticity can be claimed and sustained. Authenticity requires continuous relational labour, including emotional work, boundary management, and ethical reflections (Hund, 2023). This perspective extends Baym's (2015) concept by emphasising authenticity as both a goal and a by-product of relational labour. In Baym's (2015) framework, relational labour was often unseen or undervalued, yet essential for creating loyal audiences in a digital economy where engagement matters. The findings indicate that podcasters believe in authenticity as a guiding value, which suggests less cynicism than expected. Podcasters invest significant time in engagement activities. These are laborious activities, even if enjoyable, that do not strictly make the podcast but cultivate the audience relationship. The sample largely comprises independent producers in Ireland, a small market and community. The claims, therefore, differ from cases involving very large media enterprises. Unlike TV or film stars who may rely on publicists or occasional fan meets, podcasters, especially independents, are often personally doing engagement work. The finding supports scholarship on online platforms and creative work (e.g., Alacovska et al., 2024) by showing that creative work is embedded in relational arrangements whose maintenance, stability, and longevity rely on the creative workers' emotional efforts.

Subscription models reshape authentic connections by bringing a parasocial economy into consideration. This is part of the broader platformisation trend where creators find alternative revenue streams with caution. When listeners financially support a podcast, the host-listener relationship creates a transactional layer. Podcasters appreciate the creative freedom that audience funding affords, but they also feel a compulsion to deliver content consistently. Even well-intentioned monetisation (fans supporting content) can create pressures, not because it

turns a hobby into a job, but because it introduces expectations that are associated with financial gains. Participants' accounts point to a parasocial economy in which podcasters perceive listener support, imagined obligation, and monetisation as closely connected (Cunningham & Craig, 2019; Baym, 2018).

The effects of listeners' funding models encapsulate the commodification of intimacy (Illouz, 2007) in digital media, suggesting that intimacy and authenticity become marketable assets in the attention economy. Marwick and boyd's (2011) work on micro-celebrities is relevant to this finding. They argued that internet celebrities strategically reveal personal information to create a sense of authenticity and closeness with fans, a process they call performed intimacy. Podcasters employ strategies such as selectively sharing personal stories, engaging casually on social media, and interacting directly with fans, all to cultivate an image of approachability. Maintaining authenticity does not mean total openness; it means curated openness, a self-conscious performance of the authentic self (Marwick & boyd, 2011). Podcasters might not frame it cynically. However, they are aware of the need to manage their persona and relationships.

There are several risks and limits of relational labour and the commodification of authenticity for the sustainability and well-being of podcasters. As podcasting becomes more professionalised and commercialised, there is growing pressure on creators to perform higher levels of intimacy (Sullivan, 2021, 2024). Podcasters face a challenge between meeting audience expectations for authenticity and maintaining their well-being. Continuous relational labour and engagement with the audience can lead to burnout or emotional exhaustion (Deuze, 2025). Some participants hinted at being overwhelmed by the always-on expectations of social media.

Relational labour extends from mediated relationships with audiences to interpersonal relations and collaborative ties with guests and teams.

9.2.2.3 Collaborative Authenticity in Guest and Team Relationships

Podcasters put effort into building trust and comfort with their collaborators (i.e., co-hosts, guests, and team) as part of the authenticity work. The findings on host and guest relationships revealed that authenticity is shaped and co-created by interpersonal dynamics. Consistent with Tolson's (2006) work on broadcast talk authenticity, the study found that collaborative processes in conversational podcasts help podcasters to produce podcasts that are perceived as

authentic. Host's relations with guests shape authenticity through trust, vulnerability, and ethical care. The analysis showed that genuine rapport, careful guest selection, and unscripted conversation are key to perceived authenticity. Pre-record preparation, warm-up talk, and a respectful environment help reduce anxiety and support candid conversation between podcasters and guests. These measures mirror techniques in oral history and therapeutic interviewing, where creating a non-confrontational environment leads to authentic testimony and appealing content. Producers in journalism settings emphasised verification and correction alongside rapport. Once a trusting rapport is established, guests are more willing to share vulnerable or personal stories, which in turn heightens the authenticity of the content. Hosts sometimes model vulnerability themselves to encourage reciprocity. Participants described the host as a bridge between the guest and the audience, aiming that the authenticity claimed in the interview setting carries through to the listener's experience. Authenticity in interview podcasts depends on relational competence that integrates empathy, protection, and editorial responsibility. That competence can be analysed as a form of cultural labour embedded in teams and routines rather than as an individual trait.

Team relations shape authenticity through coordination and care. Behind-the-scenes or backstage relational dynamics among host, co-host, and production members shape the on-air authenticity. The emphasis placed on genuine relationships among co-hosts and producers challenges individualistic conceptions of media authenticity (e.g., Guignon, 2004; Taylor, 1992) and suggests a need for more relationally oriented theoretical approaches that acknowledge authenticity as collectively produced. The team and co-host relationships can also be seen through a relational labour lens. Backstage or off-air relations contributed to audible authenticity through coordination, critique, and complementary roles. Within production teams, hosts and colleagues engage in relational labour to maintain harmony and ensure a unified, authentic voice. The backstage relational work is rarely visible to audiences, yet it is central to the impression of ease, spontaneity, and credibility.

This research extends the relational labour framework from audience engagement to behind-the-mic relationships, as participants linked those relationships to the perceived authenticity. Podcasters engage in a form of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) to regulate emotions and maintain a friendly tone. Creating authentic podcasts involves collaborative practices and knowledge distributed across teams. While editorial feedback and role differentiation shape the authenticity of cultural products, it also highlights the challenges of collaborative work between

production teams who often work under precarious conditions (Banks et al., 2015; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; Paterson et al., 2016). The findings reinforce a production-centred reading of authenticity. Authenticity can be mapped to the quality of those relations as much as to the qualities of any individual host. This relational perspective emphasises the social constitution of authentic experience and extends symbolic interactionist approaches to authenticity (e.g., Peterson, 2005; Fine, 2003) by demonstrating the specific interactional techniques podcasters employ to create "authentic moments" through collaborative engagement.

9.2.2.4 Community Relations and Authenticity

While scholarship on authenticity in media focuses on individual personas or audience perceptions, the findings in this research emphasise that podcasters understand authenticity as a collective and cultural construct. Irish podcasters situate claims to authenticity in relation to their community bonds. One of the significant contributions of the findings is the emphasis on the role of community in authenticity. Recent research has shown that podcasting is about the creation of "intimate publics" (Spinelli & Dann, 2019) and communities of shared interest built around "hyper-intimate" listening (Berry, 2016b), in which authenticity is collectively produced and policed. Podcast communities often extend beyond the audio itself, encompassing online forums, social media groups, and real-life events. The findings showed that podcasters see themselves as facilitators of community. Research participants treated their audience as a community to serve. They did not see listeners as distant consumers but as members of a "tribe" (in podcaster Robbie Lawlor's words). This reflects the idea of "affinity spaces", places (virtual or physical) where people come together around a shared interest (Gee, 2005).

Participants described podcasts and their social extensions as affinity spaces for like-minded individuals (e.g., HIV-positive community, GAA sports fans). Authenticity in this frame is about adhering to community ethos. The findings show hosts consciously establishing norms of openness, respect, and inclusion (for example, Ed Roche ensuring regional representation, or Jacqui Hurley inviting female sports fans who felt sidelined). By aligning their podcast with the community's values and needs, podcasters authenticate themselves through service to that community. In podcasting, listeners contribute content (comments, questions, stories for the show in some cases). The strong focus on community building also relates to the concept of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006). Participatory culture theory holds that audiences actively

participate to form communities around media properties. Podcasters believed that when listeners see their input reflected, it validates that the host sincerely listens. It is analogous to how participatory art leads participants to feel the outcome is more genuine because they participate in it (Jenkins, 2006).

By serving the community, podcasters sometimes take on roles similar to civic actors. For instance, on social issues, a podcast community can become a civic space for discussion and mobilisation. The analysis can be extended to civic authenticity, meaning being true to one's ethical stance and contributing sincerely to public debate. Authenticity-driven media communities are effective in addressing difficult conversations (such as HIV stigma, mental health, victims of mother and baby homes) because podcasters believe that a foundation of empathy and trust is established. Scholars argue that podcasting offers opportunities for underrepresented voices and new forms of storytelling (McHugh, 2016; Mulki & Crimmins, 2022). Podcasters in the Republic of Ireland are attentive to issues of well-being, cost of living, diversity, inclusion, and representation. The negotiation of 'Irishness', gender, and other identity markers in the data aligns with recent calls for a more intersectional approach to authenticity in digital media (Duffy et al., 2023).

The findings are relevant to the theoretical discussion of media trust[98]. Globally, trust and engagement in the legacy news media are declining (Newman et al., 2025). In that environment, participants interpreted smaller community-driven voices as potential authentic alternatives to legacy media. While podcasters highlighted the positive aspects of building community, they also acknowledged some challenges, particularly the risk of creating echo chambers. By cultivating a community, podcasters gain support but also assume responsibility for that community's values, and in such contexts, authenticity becomes a social contract. Participants' accounts suggest that local podcasts are often understood by producers as more relatable and authentic than polished global or national broadcasters. The turn towards local podcasters is a micro example of a macro trend of audiences turning to influencers, digital creators, and citizen journalists, whom they perceive as more trustworthy and authentic than legacy media (Banjac et al., 2022; Reuters Institute, 2024). Podcasters are acutely aware of trust, which is why transparency is a common strategy, for example, admitting mistakes, explaining decisions, or directly communicating changes.

[98] Kohring and Matthes (2007) define media trust partly as the perception of the media source's value alignment and lack of hidden agendas.

9.2.2.5 Cultural Contexts and Authentic Expressions

For a study centred on podcasting in Ireland, it is fitting to consider how cultural identity, including Irishness, and the broader cultural contexts shape notions of authenticity. The literature review (Section 3.5) touched on authenticity in relation to cultural identity, and the findings (Section 6.5) included reflections on tradition, identity, and what it means to be an authentic voice in Ireland. Irishness functions as a varied and contested resource that producers select and recalibrate across genres and audiences.

Authenticities are situated within specific cultural, linguistic, and historical contexts. Podcasters' claims of authenticity are influenced by the extent to which they represent (or resist) their cultural affiliations and respond to the current media and social environment. The findings on cultural context and authenticity, particularly regarding Irishness, contribute to the theoretical understanding of how authenticity is culturally situated. Podcasters' discussions of how Irish cultural references shaped their authenticity performances support Pennycook's (2007) argument that authenticity is always perceived within specific cultural contexts rather than transcending them. Podcasters strategically navigate both local authenticity (through cultural specificity) and global accessibility (through explanation or moderation of cultural references). The dual orientation challenges theoretical binaries between local and global media authenticity (Waisbord, 2004) by demonstrating that podcasters integrate both positions. Podcasters in the Republic of Ireland adapt global formats to local culture. They use a globally recognisable format, such as interviews or panel discussions, but infuse it with local flavour to create hybrid content that appeals locally and often has diaspora appeal.

While a comprehensive post-colonial analysis of Irish identity is beyond the scope of this study, the evidence suggests that Ireland's post-colonial experience subtly informs authenticity narratives. The desire to highlight local voices and resist homogenisation can be viewed through a post-colonial lens as reclaiming narrative agency. The podcasters also consider how being in a post-colonial nation shapes the pursuit of authenticity. Another aspect is a hyper-awareness of representation, where colonised nations sometimes internalise critical gazes. However, the findings show that podcasters are not seeking validation from outside, as some feared that tailoring to global expectations could weaken their claims to authenticity. This aligns with broader shifts in Ireland's post-colonial identity formation, where there has been increasing confidence in Irish pop culture globally.

Several podcasters in this research explicitly addressed their Irish identity as part of their authentic voice. Irish podcasters often see themselves as modern *seanchaí* (storytellers), blending traditional narrative flair with contemporary topics. For example, Blindboy (a prominent Irish podcaster) often frames his monologues as anecdotes and uses colloquial language richly. Peterson's (2005) work on authenticity in music highlighted that audiences value artists who stay true to their regional roots, such as country musicians who maintain a rural persona. Similarly, Irish podcasters seem to value local particularities and a strong commitment to portraying "authentic Irish stories and voices", seeing their podcasts as a counterbalance to what they viewed as often homogenised or externally influenced media. They felt that embracing local accents or discussing uniquely Irish experiences, from national events to folklore, made their content more authentic, especially to Irish listeners. A sense of authenticity through cultural connections serves as a counter to the often American-dominated podcast field, as it locates the content in a particular cultural context and national field of production.

Although podcasters celebrate local voices, they operate within a capitalist media economy where metrics and monetisation prevail. Some podcasters did mention pressure to grow and monetise, perhaps via ads or international appeal, which could tempt compromise on local focus. However, many seemed inclined to balance commercial interests with authenticity, often aiming for authenticity as a long-term asset. The findings contribute to small-nation media scholarship (e.g., Chalaby, 2016; Leotta, 2014; Lobato, 2019; Szczepanik et al., 2020) and explain that producers in peripheral markets adapt global templates while maintaining local voice as a means of survival and distinction.

Genre conventions and production decisions further shape notions of authenticities.

9.2.3 Genre Conventions and Production Choices Shaping Authenticities

This section addresses the third research question: How do genre conventions and podcasters' creative and editorial choices across production stages shape their approaches to authenticity in the Republic of Ireland? It synthesises the study's findings on genre-specific authenticity practices and shows that genre conventions and production decisions shape authenticities. The research contributes to genre theory by showing that podcasters treat genre norms as reference points for what may be perceived as authentic. Authenticity is constructed through cultural

expectations. Podcasters fulfil, and occasionally subvert, those expectations to signal authenticity to their audience. Overall, across hybrid and evolving genres, podcasters treat authenticity as a process-based and context-driven performance.

9.2.3.1 Genre Conventions as Frameworks for Authenticity

The findings revealed significant variation in how authenticity is conceptualised and performed across podcast genres, with distinct authenticity expectations for narrative non-fiction, conversational, and fiction podcasts. The authenticity of podcasting is an active process that operates differently across media genres with distinct conventions and audience expectations. Podcasters strategically interpret genre as a 'dynamic cultural category' (a concept identified by Mittell, 2001). They do not passively follow rules or genre norms but actively negotiate what authenticity means for a specific podcast. Genre hybridity further complicates authenticity, as podcasters blend conventions to create innovative forms of expression.

For narrative non-fiction podcasts (including true crime, documentary, news, and personal storytelling), authenticity is centred on factual accuracy, ethical representation, research depth, and transparent storytelling techniques. Podcasters working in these genres described a commitment to factual storytelling as central to their authenticity. This aligns with broader media literature that positions authenticity in journalism through accuracy and trustworthiness. Documentary podcasters blend constructed narrative with factual integrity for their authenticity work. In subgenres which blend narrative with opinion (e.g., personal memoir or activist storytelling), authenticity is conveyed through vulnerability and personal expression. Journalistic podcasters grapple with the genre convention of objectivity versus personal voice. Traditional journalism prizes objectivity, yet many podcasts thrive on the host's distinctive persona. The findings indicate that even within investigative shows, hosts develop emotional and personal style (Lindgren, 2023). In doing so, they challenge the notion that professionalisation requires a neutral and impersonal tone, a norm often associated with journalistic objectivity (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). Personalisation in journalism podcasting signals a shift away from associating trust and authenticity with objective and neutral reporting and points to the current crisis of reputability in institutional legacy news outlets. Podcasters present transparent subjectivity as a valid ground for credibility, since making one's perspective explicit is framed as more trustworthy than concealing it.

Authenticity in conversational podcasts (including interviews, panel discussions, and comedy formats) is constructed by podcasters through spontaneity, informality, relatability, and

interpersonal connections. This extends theoretical discussions of talk show authenticity (Tolson, 2006; Montgomery, 2001) by identifying medium-specific techniques podcasters employ to signal conversational authenticity, including strategic use of improvisation, laughter, and minimal editing. Authenticity in conversational podcasts is intertwined with sounding relatable. Many participants mentioned they want listeners to feel "like you are sitting down in the pub and you're having a conversation with friends" (Maura Fay). Conversational podcasts, particularly those with more than one host, create a perception of authenticity through spontaneity, emotional resonance, aural intimacy, and perceived closeness.

In the case of fiction podcasts (e.g., audio dramas), authenticity is discussed in terms of immersive performances, character believability, and sound design, despite their fictional status. Podcasters in fiction podcasts grapple with the paradox of creating "authentic fictionality", a construct used in feminist literature (e.g., Liu, 1995; Noble, 2016), where emotional truth and creative integrity are valued over literal realism. Fiction podcast creators talked about authenticity in terms of narrative coherence and emotional truth, an expectation within drama genres that the story would feel believable. Such evidence supports the claim for contextual, genre-based notions of authenticity. These findings relate to narrative coherence theory and suspension of disbelief. Karhulahti (2012) posited suspension of disbelief as essential for coherent fiction, while Negus (1999) viewed genres as institutionalising production. Even when content is fictional, podcasters assumed that listeners may judge its authenticity by consistency and scripted realism. The genre conventions and perceptions around authenticity also shape podcasters' decisions throughout the production process.

9.2.3.2 Production Decisions and Authenticity

Podcasters' decisions at every stage of production, from planning and scripting to recording techniques to editing and release strategies, can enhance or diminish the sense of authenticity in a podcast. Pre-production choices set the foundation for authenticity, deciding the balance between structure and spontaneity. Podcasts often adopt a hybrid method where they try to sound unscripted while being prepared, a pattern that sits between broadcast discipline and informal talk. Goffman's (1959) notion of the "presentation of self" implies that whenever individuals perform for an audience, they manage impressions, blurring any clear line between genuine behaviour and performed behaviour. In a podcast, even a casual chat takes place in a recorded and publicly shared context, which can alter how they behave. This is similar to the classic "observer's paradox", where the act of observation (or recording) can influence actions

(Labov, 1972). Media studies have noted that formats such as talk radio and reality television cultivate a feeling of liveness and spontaneity, while backstage, there is structure and planning to maintain coherence (Tolson, 2006). Podcast hosts deal with this dilemma of "trying to sound natural" while being prepared. Literature on podcasting highlights its informal, intimate style as a departure from scripted broadcasting (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). However, the findings show that behind the scenes, even the most relaxed-sounding podcasts involve preparation and deliberate choices.

With the plans, or lack thereof, in place, the recording phase is where podcasters actively perform authenticity through voice, interaction, and handling of unscripted happenings during the recording. Podcasters use a variety of recording techniques to sound authentic and to seek connection with listeners. Podcasters' voices and performance style serve as powerful cues for authenticity over time. Podcasters believe that audiences often perceive certain accents or speaking styles as more authentic or trustworthy based on cultural context (Lindgren, 2016). In podcasting, the intimacy of the listening experience, often via headphones, amplifies this effect. Participants believed that the intimate auditory setting and any affectation or inconsistency in the host's voice may be keenly felt by listeners. The findings resonate with these ideas as podcasters were aware of how their speech, style, and accent could enhance or hinder perception of authenticity. The physical or technical setup during recording also contributes to the feeling of authenticity. Several independents prefer recording in non-studio environments, such as a living room, to cultivate a feeling of closeness and ordinariness. In contrast, others preferred a soundproof studio for clarity, then used descriptive language to set an intimate scene verbally. The guiding principle shared by podcasters is to create a recording environment in which speaking feels comfortable because that comfort could translate into perceived authenticity in the audio.

Post-production techniques used in editing and sound design are noteworthy factors in how authenticity is perceived. Podcasters vary widely in their post-production approach, guided by their authenticity ethos and practical constraints. The sonic identity of a podcast is determined by its editing, music selection, sound design, and silencing decisions. In this context, authenticity can be viewed as a set of sonic ethics. Release rhythm, platform reach, and promotional and audience engagement strategies all have an impact on authenticity construction. In summary, a podcast's authenticity is reinforced throughout the delivery chain, from creation to distribution, in line with perceived listeners' expectations.

9.2.4 Role of Autonomy, Platformisation, Commercialisation, and Professionalisation in Authenticity Work

This sub-section addresses the final research question, which asked, "In what ways do autonomy, platformisation, commercialisation, institutionalisation, and professionalisation influence podcasters' ability to negotiate authenticity in creative and editorial decision-making in the Republic of Ireland?"

This analysis applies Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of field and capital to interpret how authenticity is negotiated. The thesis aligns with Bourdieu's framework and shows that authenticity is a field-positioned value negotiated through personal, relational, cultural, social, symbolic, and economic capital. At the micro-level, podcasters make decisions about voice, disclosure, editing, sponsorship, and accountability. At the meso-level, these decisions take shape within independent, commercial, and public service working frameworks. At the macro-level, platformisation, funding systems, advertising markets, and institutional authority shape visibility, resources, and legitimacy.

9.2.4.1 Autonomy as a Constituent of Authenticity

Cultural work, such as podcasting, is situated within structured spaces of power and capital. Autonomy functions as a form of cultural capital that creative actors accumulate to position themselves within the field. As a key constituent of authenticity, autonomy is a valued resource across working frameworks in podcasting. Autonomy helps podcasters construct authenticity by giving them control over production choices. However, podcasters from different working models understand the role of autonomy in constructing authenticity in different ways.

Podcasters in independent, commercial, and public service settings operate under different conditions of autonomy, resources, and institutional constraints, which in turn influence their performance of authenticity. Each model occupies a distinct position in the field of cultural production, balancing creative and economic imperatives in unique ways. Independent podcasters consistently associate authenticity with high levels of autonomy, personal expression, and creative control in their work. However, they often work with minimal financial support and limited access to high-end production resources. These challenges, along with issues around precarity, well-being, and labour of authenticity, are discussed later in the chapter (see Sub-section 9.2.4.5, The Costs of Pursuing Authenticity). In commercial

podcasting, economic capital and audience size carry substantial weight, which can conflict with the creative aims associated with authenticity. Several commercial podcasters noted that content decisions might involve executives or clients, meaning a host's authentic vision could be overridden by marketing considerations. The commercial logic sometimes demands a formulaic approach, such as sticking to popular genres or formats. Despite these constraints, podcasters in the study also demonstrated strategies to preserve authenticity within a professional framework. Many highlighted the importance of professional standards, such as high production quality and fact-checking, as markers of authenticity. RTÉ, the public service broadcaster in Ireland, presents another distinctive context for authenticity. In this model, podcasters operate within an institution mandated to serve the public interest, uphold editorial standards, and often cater to a broad audience. The findings indicate that authenticity for public service podcasters is closely tied to institutional credibility, serving the public, and cultural responsibility.

Many podcasters operate along a spectrum between amateurism and professionalism, blending motivations of self-expression and audience service with economic considerations. The findings show that authenticity in creative work is negotiated at the intersection of personal agency and collective frameworks, echoing Howard Becker's (2023) view that even individual artistry is embedded in art worlds of collaborators, gatekeepers, and audiences. However, unlike relatively high art worlds, the podcasting landscape is rapidly evolving and less formally regulated, which intensifies the onus on individual creators to navigate these relational dynamics. The study applies Bourdieu's (1993) field framework to the analysis of podcasting. It shows how new media creators pursue situational autonomy, carving out moments or aspects of production where they can be self-determining, even while other aspects are constrained. By highlighting how podcasters negotiate authenticity through autonomy, the research challenges the assumption that independence automatically equates to authenticity. Instead, it suggests a more nuanced model in which even independent voices are shaped by audience and platform interdependencies.

9.2.4.2 Platformisation and Its Impact on Authenticities

A major challenge to podcasters' autonomy is the growing dominance of digital platforms (e.g., Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and YouTube) in how podcasts are distributed, discovered, and monetised. The consolidation of power by technology companies limits podcasters' autonomy by reducing podcasters' control over ownership and audience visibility. Podcasting began as

an open and decentralised medium. However, its distribution and discovery are now largely dominated by a few third-party audio publishing platforms. Platformisation changes the distribution of capital within the podcasting field. Platforms influence which podcasters gain visibility, recognition, revenue, and audience access. These conditions affect whether podcasters can convert cultural and social capital into symbolic and economic capital. The issue is not only that platforms distribute podcasts. Platforms shape the field conditions within which podcasters can sustain claims to autonomy and authenticity.

As third-party platforms become gatekeepers for content dissemination, creators operate in an ecosystem structured by algorithms, recommendation systems, and corporate policies (Poell et al., 2021). Gillespie's (2010) analysis of platforms stresses that companies such as YouTube present themselves as neutral intermediaries, yet they actively shape the terms of participation, from what gets amplified to how creators can earn revenue. The findings support Gillespie's point that the "politics of platforms" lie in design and policy choices, which can invisibly steer creators' visibility. Non-human actors, such as algorithmic discovery systems, influence which podcasts gain traction. This aligns with broader theoretical critiques of Web 2.0's promise: what began as an open, decentralised distribution model, where anyone with an RSS feed could reach an audience, has increasingly been enclosed by platform companies, echoing concerns about the commodification and control of user-generated content (Mosco, 2004; Nieborg & Poell, 2018).

Platformed logics structure podcasting in Ireland by shaping visibility, creative choices, and ownership, despite its smaller market and public service context. Scholars have noted that platform algorithms tend to favour already popular or platform-friendly content and narrow the visibility of niche voices (Duffy, 2017; van Dijck et al., 2018). The findings in Irish podcasting mirror these challenges. Participants stressed that global platforms offer limited support to creators from smaller markets, which corresponds to known patterns of geographic imbalance in platform attention economies. Irish podcasters noted that gaining visibility on these platforms is difficult for independents: "We have little control over discoverability", one podcaster explained, as recommendation algorithms tend to favour already established or celebrity-backed shows. Participants believed that limited platform support could indirectly affect their authenticity work. Some independent podcasters admitted feeling pressure to cater to popular trends or optimise content for algorithms in hopes of increasing their reach. For example, a few indie podcasters noted that interview-format shows are ubiquitous because they

are a familiar format for listeners. Platform dependency can undermine podcasters' ownership of their podcasts. For example, one podcaster noted how a change in a platform's terms of service suddenly meant that content created on a free tool (i.e., Anchor, owned by Spotify) no longer provided a standard RSS feed, effectively locking creators into that platform. This insight is a solid example of "platform lock-in", a phenomenon widely critiqued in digital media scholarship (Gillespie, 2010).

Another finding regarding platformisation was the frustration over monetisation. Several participants noted that advertising revenue from publishing platforms (e.g., Acast or YouTube) was small, with one podcaster describing it as "not like you could quit your day job". The podcasters' reliance on platform-mediated revenue streams illustrates the value extraction typical of platform capitalism, where creators supply free content that enriches the platform, while only a few celebrity figures secure substantial gains (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). The findings underline that platformisation imposes structural limits on autonomy. Even as podcasters act freely in producing content, the discoverability and economic sustainability of that content lie largely outside their control.

These findings contribute to the political economy of digital media theory by revealing platform power in the lived experiences of cultural producers, namely Irish podcasters. The present work informs platform governance debates by illustrating the need for more equitable support for independent creators in smaller markets. The architecture of platforms influences the production and distribution of podcasts, as platform logics may homogenise content and marginalise local voices. Theoretically, the study emphasises that non-human actants amplify inequalities in podcasting, proposing a need for production models that incorporate geographic disparities in platform power. Crucially, the political economy of podcasting increasingly intersects with accuracy and authenticity. With the rise of misinformation and highly partisan content online, being a reliably authentic source of information can be a selling point but might also conflict with algorithms that favour sensational content. Thus, platformisation of podcasting intersects with commercial imperatives.

9.2.4.3 Commercialisation and Negotiations of Authenticities

The combination of market logics such as monetisation, sponsorship, and corporate involvement places significant pressure on podcasters' editorial autonomy. As podcasting in Ireland evolves into a more commercial industry, podcasters must navigate revenue

imperatives that can recalibrate their creative decisions and practices through which authenticity is claimed.

The challenge of commercialisation is related to longstanding debates in cultural production about the tension between artistic integrity and commercial pressures (Negus & Pickering, 2000). The commercial trajectory of podcasting mirrors what Hesmondhalgh (2010) described as the commodification of cultural industries, where initial optimism about democratisation gives way to the realities of market power. The findings also align with Mosco's (2004) observation of the "digital sublime" turning into the mundane business of profit, where the myth of a purely democratic internet collides with advertising and corporate consolidation. Findings challenge overly optimistic views of democratisation, as Irish podcasters reported unequal access compared to larger markets. Podcasters in this study experienced challenges in attracting more downloads, sponsors, or funding to sustain their work. Commercial recognition can affirm an indie creator's credibility, yet it also exposes them to the accusation that they have compromised by selling out (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Klein et al., 2017). The findings echo that paradox, as podcasters dealt with making commercially appealing choices that sometimes felt at odds with their personal creative vision.

The commercialisation of podcasting has created a podcast industrial complex as major players and production studios increasingly control the top charts, making it hard for small independents to compete. Research participants indicated that having a pre-existing celebrity profile or institutional backing confers an enormous advantage in breaking through the noise. The findings align with the critique (e.g., Bonini, 2015a) that podcasting, originally lauded as a subversive medium, has been integrated into mainstream media industry practices.

The findings suggest that rather than a binary of "authentic indie" versus "commercial sell-out", a continuum exists where many creators oscillate between modes or occupy a middle ground. Bourdieu's (1993) field theory posited a dynamic field structured around opposing poles of "pure" and "commercial" production, within which agents negotiate their positions according to different forms of capital. The present study shows that podcasting blurs these poles, since podcasters seek to harness authenticity even while engaging in commerce. Monetisation brings both opportunity and constraint, supporting prior analyses in social media, journalism, and YouTube domains (Cunningham & Craig, 2017, 2019), now with evidence from podcasting. This observation supports and extends Bourdieu's view to contemporary podcast production. While commercialisation certainly pressures autonomy, some podcasters

show agency in finding models to maintain authenticity, for example, alternating between paid and personal projects, or choosing community funding over advertising.

9.2.4.4 Professionalisation and Competence as Authenticity Markers

As podcasting becomes more professionalised, competence in terms of skills, quality standards, and industry recognition has emerged as an important marker of authenticity. Professionalisation can be understood as the process by which an occupational field develops formal standards, training, and a shared identity (Freidson, 2001, as cited in Le Bianic, 2003; Sullivan, 2021). Podcasters are responding to external pressures by adopting professional practices (such as research, high production values, and consistent release schedules) from legacy media. Podcasters are increasingly engaged in continuous learning of technical and presentation skills to meet what they perceive as rising audience expectations. The relationship between authenticity and quality might seem counterintuitive since authenticity is often linked to rawness. However, participants suggested that a well-produced podcast can support credibility when it signals care for the work and respect for listeners, while polish can weaken authenticity when it appears formulaic, over-managed, or shaped mainly by commercial or platform expectations. This finding should be read as a shift in how podcasters negotiate authenticity, rather than as a claim that polish has replaced amateur sound as authentic.

The analysis in Irish podcasting echoes trends reported in other small European countries. Martín-Morán and Martín Nieto (2022) discussed the formalisation of a professional podcasting culture, highlighting markers such as specialised training programmes, the emergence of podcast awards, and corporate investments. Professionalisation of the medium also means more competition from entities with big budgets, such as studios and celebrities. Independent podcasters in Ireland observed that as the field professionalises, audience expectations might shift toward polished or recognisable names, which can marginalise niche voices.

The insistence by podcasters that "people do not want [bad audio] anymore" shows how participants understand a shift in the field, where poor sound is increasingly read by podcasters as a lack of competence rather than as evidence of amateur sincerity. However, some podcasters also cautioned about over-professionalisation. They believe that when a podcast becomes too polished, it risks losing the charm that made it unique. Some in this study reminisced about the spontaneity of early podcasting, implying a potential trade-off between professionalisation and the intimate, informal tone that initially made the medium distinctive. Professionalisation of

podcasting has personal costs for podcasters, such as emotional labour, precarity, and well-being. Interpreted through Bourdieu's framework, this suggests that podcasters develop a practical feel for the game, treating production competence as cultural capital while still drawing on the older value of informality when it supports their authenticity claims.

9.2.4.5 The Costs of Pursuing Authenticity: Precarity, Emotional Labour, and Well-being

The data on podcasters working late nights, pushing through illness, or feeling unable to take breaks strongly echo the debates on creative labour and precarity. Gill et al.'s (2008) notion of the "social factory" posits that cultural workers often internalise capitalist demands, leading them to self-exploit under the guise of pursuing their passion. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) also discussed how autonomy in creative jobs can turn into a burden, as individuals feel personally responsible for their success and therefore tolerate poor working conditions, such as long hours and low pay, as the price of doing what they love. Podcasters often face exploitation by organisations or self-exploitation to extract free labour "for the sake of the cause", resulting in unpaid extra work and guilt for wanting a break, a phenomenon documented in volunteer-based cultural sectors (Popple et al., 2020). Those working for media organisations also felt stress in meeting tight deadlines, delivering to high editorial standards, or balancing podcast duties with other job roles. A common theme was that podcasting is often an "add-on" to podcasters' workload, especially in news organisations, leading to overwork. Without structural support such as financial stability, team support, and flexible schedules, the stress can outweigh the joy of perceived authenticity.

Independent podcasters engage in precarious labour[99] because they often rely on gig income, such as donations and small sponsorships, and lack benefits or job security. Independent podcasters described podcasting as essentially a labour of love undertaken alongside other jobs, since direct financial gains are often minimal. Independent podcasters face uncertainty, economic insecurity, and burnout in exchange for the autonomy to produce content on their own terms (Woods & Scott, 2024). Additionally, the emotional toll noted by participants aligns with theories of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983). Although the concept of emotional labour is typically applied to service jobs, the findings show that podcasters often manage their emotions, such as staying upbeat on the mic or engaging with listener communities empathetically, even when personally drained.

[99] Standing (2011) defined precarious labour as jobs that are insecure, unprotected, and underpaid.

The struggle of precarious and emotional labour reported by Irish podcasters reflects a broader concern in the gig economy and digital creative work literature. Ozimek (2019) described independent cultural producers as "hope labourers", sustained by hope and passion rather than immediate rewards. Many podcasters in this study exemplified this as they poured significant time into content with minimal financial return, hoping eventually for a break or simply deriving non-monetary satisfaction from audience engagement. Such patterns align with research on YouTubers and streamers who also face burnout from the relentless pressure to produce content to maintain visibility (Berryman & Kavka, 2017). The precariousness is heightened in a platformised environment because algorithmic visibility creates involuntary output. Therefore, independent creators feel they cannot pause, or the audience will drift. The anecdote from a podcaster who recorded an episode from a hospital bed starkly confirms that personal boundaries between life and work can dissolve when one is solely accountable for content delivery. The evidence highlights that the autonomy of making independent podcasts often equates to a precarious DIY enterprise where the creator is the host, producer, and marketer.

For podcast studies, it is important to move beyond content and platform analysis to consider labour conditions and care strategies among podcasters. This study's exploration of well-being issues broadens theoretical frameworks by insisting that authentic, autonomous creativity is not automatically idyllic. It is intertwined with economic and emotional vulnerabilities that must be acknowledged in any comprehensive understanding of digital cultural production.

Building on personal, relational, structural, and genre contexts, the next subsection synthesises key tensions that podcasters manage in their pursuit of authenticity.

9.2.5 Negotiating Tensions and Contradictions in Authenticit*ies*

Authenticity in podcasting is not a static quality but an ongoing negotiation, full of tensions and conflicts. Podcasters aspire to be authentic, but in practice, they must balance competing demands such as spontaneity versus polish, personal expression versus marketability, openness versus privacy, and autonomy versus algorithmic visibility. Evidence that flexibility can cause precarity reflects gig economy conditions and the paradoxical aspect of autonomy. These contradictory patterns advance the notions of staged authenticity (MacCannell, 1973) by revealing the specific contradictions podcasters navigate in audio media contexts. Authenticity

in podcasting is also subject to cultural trends and conventions. Previously, raw and unedited audio was seen as authentic. With the medium's evolution, podcasters associate authenticity with audio quality and production value.

One key contradiction is that authenticity requires performance. To appear authentic to an audience, a podcaster must perform in a way that conveys authenticity. This does not necessarily mean being fake; rather, it means that authenticity must be communicated. Podcasters, especially as they grow more experienced, learn how to sound more like themselves deliberately. This is akin to an actor mastering their own persona. As Shtern et al. (2019) noted, creators employ "conscious and identifiable strategies to cultivate" authenticity with their audience. Yet, it raises the question: if one is aware of performing authenticity, does it become inauthentic? This is the classic authenticity paradox. Most podcasters resolve it pragmatically. They believe that if the result appears authentic to both them and listeners, the performance is justified. There is also a psychological and emotional contradiction in performing authenticity. Podcasters perform emotional labour to maintain connections with audiences. The expectation of authenticity through constant engagement can be a burden on podcasters, potentially leading to burnout when they cannot live up to their "authentic self" persona all the time.

Commercialisation and audience growth introduce the tension between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. As discussed, many podcasters start with intrinsic passion, but as their audience reach grows, extrinsic factors such as sponsors, audience metrics, and reviews inevitably come into consideration. The challenge of authenticity is also evident when independent podcasters contemplate format adjustments or when they face pressure to include advertisements that do not fit their values. Accusations of self-promotion as showing off or "selling out" looms as a caution, consistent with similar challenges faced by grassroots electronic dance musicians (Rauh, 2024). Financial and promotional concerns refocus producers' attention away from podcast production and towards other promotional activities. Podcasters navigate such challenges by carefully selecting monetisation routes, such as Patreon support from fans, and by being forthright with their audience about any commercial partnerships. Even so, the risk remains that commercial success can erode perceived authenticity. This phenomenon is noted in media studies, where underground artists, upon mainstream success, are often accused of losing authenticity. However, podcasters did not perceive commercial success as inauthentic. This alludes to the cycle of cultural production, where genuine innovation becomes commercialised. Podcasting is beginning to see this in the form of formulaic "authentic"

content. For instance, countless chatcasts strive to replicate the style of a few successful exemplars. This relates to a broader media trend where authenticity is valued, yet the more it is valorised, the more it is co-opted as a strategy.

In dealing with these tensions, podcasters display a high level of reflexivity. Authenticity, then, is not a simple state to be achieved but a continuous, reflective practice. These contradictions also help explain several departures from expected patterns.

9.3 Unexpected Findings and Anomalies

The section notes several deviations from expected patterns and offers a brief reflection. One unexpected finding was the complex attitude podcasters had toward institutional involvement. The podcast scholarship suggested that independent creators avoid institutional affiliation to protect autonomy. However, some independent podcasters welcomed partnerships with institutions under conditions deemed favourable. Likewise, those working within institutions sometimes yearned for more independence while valuing the legitimacy their institution lent them. This is similar to the fluidity of the poles identified by Bourdieu in his field theory before the evolution of podcasting. For example, the case of the *Black and Irish* podcast funded by RTÉ showed that a collaboration with a public service broadcaster can amplify marginalised voices and lend credibility. This is a form of institutional authenticity claimed through public trust, even though it also introduces some editorial challenges. This is somewhat contrary to common assumptions in authenticity discourse, which often celebrate the independent ethos. It suggests that institutionalisation and authenticity are not always at odds, and that this depends on the type of institution involved. The explanation may lie in Ireland's media landscape. Because it is a smaller community, mainstream institutions such as RTÉ or The Irish Times still carry significant cultural capital. Podcasters view working with them not as "selling out" but as reaching a broad Irish audience through organisations they perceived as trusted.

The shift towards high production values as an authenticity marker contradicted earlier research on unpolished audio in podcasting. While it was expected that quality is important, the extent to which participants associated "sounding professional" with "being trustworthy and real" was surprising. This is somewhat counter to early scholarly work about podcasting that emphasised its rough and amateur charm. Even the most grassroots creators in the study sought technical improvement to meet current audience expectations. Participants interpreted this as a broader

shift in podcast production and reception culture that was not fully accounted for in podcast studies. Podcasters believed that audiences had become more discerning and perhaps assimilated to professional audio norms. Podcasters deal with this challenge through professionalisation and ongoing competence building.

A further unexpected element was how podcasters framed legal regulation or the lack of it. Podcasters, who benefit from the openness of the medium, also acknowledge its drawbacks and even call for some measure of accountability and (self)regulation. While podcasters appreciate the freedom, some also voiced concern that the "Wild West" or unregulated state of online content allows misinformation and unethical practices to flourish. Claims that creators always want zero oversight often circulate in platform policy discourse and creator advocacy debates, yet these positions can mask a more complex interest in keeping regulation light and in protecting platform autonomy. The findings in this study complicate that position since podcasters appreciate openness but also suggest some safeguards for the community. As certain podcasts and online figures gain prominence for spreading harmful content, podcasters worry about reputational spillover, fearing that the medium could be discredited. Podcasters do not want strict regulation, but they recognise the need for ethical self-regulation, accountability to audiences, and community standards.

Motivations in creative work are not uniform, as some participants pursued reach and income, while others prioritised creative or altruistic aims, and several moved between these positions over time. The study mostly synthesised common patterns, but this variability is a caveat. Most podcasters hardly cared about download numbers or money at all, viewing success in terms of personal fulfilment, community impact, or the opportunity to document underrepresented stories. At the same time, several podcasters framed financial success as respect for labour and as a condition for sustaining creative quality. That view complicates simple oppositions between art and commerce in cultural production such as podcasting.

An unexpected insight was that participants did not always treat factual accuracy as the only criterion of authenticity in storytelling genres, particularly in true crime podcasts where emotional truth and storytelling could carry authenticity. This seems counterintuitive, given that truthfulness is typically seen as a marker of authenticity. Such practice in true crime podcasting blurs the line between authenticity and accuracy and might be more useful to storytelling genres where conveying a deeper meaning, emotional resonance, or experience is the priority.

Podcasters in the Republic of Ireland do not portray a cohesive national practitioner community, which is consistent with the earlier argument that there is no unified Irish podcast community. There are local hubs, genre clusters, and small networks rather than a unified field. The unexpected findings and anomalies lend additional depth to the study, suggesting that future work should accommodate such complexities in podcasting.

9.4 Conclusion

Authenticities function as strong guiding principles in podcasting, although they remain contextual and vary according to podcasting models, genres, production practices, and relational settings, as shown in the empirical chapters. This chapter has demonstrated how Irish podcasters perform authenticities across multiple contexts and has addressed each research question in turn. The research has shown how podcasters understand authenticities as shaped by podcasting models (independent, commercial, public service) and genre conventions, how they describe crafting them through production practices, and how they interpret them as personally, professionally, and relationally negotiated. It has also examined the strains that arise when authenticity operates as an ideal, including the compromises and strategies podcasters use to sustain claims to authenticity under commercial, institutional, and platform pressures. The findings demonstrate that authenticities in podcasting are complex, negotiated, and multidimensional constructs shaped by individual agency, structural conditions, genre conventions, and cultural context. Throughout the chapter, the analysis has been situated in wider theoretical and industry contexts, linking the micro-level insights to macro-level trends in cultural production and digital media. These findings have been discussed and synthesised to create a comprehensive understanding of how and why podcasters in the Republic of Ireland negotiate and perform authenticity, and what challenges arise in that pursuit.

Empirically, this thesis provides original insights into podcast production practices and the performance of authenticity, grounded in meso-level analysis of qualitative data from the Irish podcasting field. It expands the empirical scope of podcast studies by documenting how authenticity is understood, negotiated, and enacted by podcasters in Ireland, a national context that has received scant attention in academic literature. Focusing on the Republic of Ireland and podcasting contributes a culturally specific case. The study shows how Irish cultural norms and local media ecosystems shape what is considered authentic. Researchers should consider cultural dimensions in authenticity research, as what seems authentic in one culture might read

differently elsewhere. The Irish example, with its post-colonial undertones and diaspora reach, could be compared to other contexts, such as podcasts in other post-colonial societies or small nations, to build a theory of cultural authenticity in media.

The discussion prepares the ground for the final chapter. In the conclusion chapter that follows, the key contributions of this research to scholarship and practice are provided. The concluding chapter also addresses the limitations and future research directions.

Chapter 10. Conclusion

10.1 Restated Research Aim and Question

Drawing from in-depth interviews with 30 podcasters in the Republic of Ireland, this study examined to what extent their practices are informed by notions of authenticity, how these notions of authenticities are shaped by broader contextual aspects – including genre, production modes, and degrees of autonomy exerted by podcasters – and the effects and limitations for podcasters when they believe their practices may be perceived as non-authentic. The thesis analysed how and why podcasters in the Republic of Ireland negotiate and perform authenticity, as well as the challenges that arise in this pursuit. The main research question is answered by showing authenticities as contextual practices shaped by personal, relational, cultural, industrial, structural, professional, and genre conditions across independent, commercial, and public service contexts.

10.2 Research Contributions

Building on the synthesis in Chapter 9, the present work makes several original contributions to the study of podcasting and, more broadly, to scholarship on cultural production and media production. While focused on podcasting in Ireland, these contributions carry wider implications for understanding cultural production, creative labour, and the political economy of media in the digital age. The thesis contributes to podcast studies by conceptualising authenticities as contextual, performed practices that podcasters use to guide creative, relational, and commercial decisions. It demonstrates that podcasters draw on personal, relational, cultural, genre-based, and structural authenticities that are performed through, among other aspects, the voice, editing, and platform-aware production. Moreover, it argues that a basic level of autonomy provides conditions through which podcasters can claim and perform authenticity, although the degree of autonomy varies across institutional contexts. The thesis also contributes to media and communication scholarship by extending platform studies with detailed micro production-level evidence that shows how creators negotiate autonomy with algorithms, institutions, and audiences. The thesis contributes to cultural labour research by arguing that authenticity operates as an additional mechanism, along with precarious conditions, emotional labour, and self-exploitation, which legitimises grassroots cultural

production. While authenticity is generally lauded by the podcasters, the findings highlight tensions such as the pressure to monetise without 'selling out', the mental and creative toll of maintaining a consistent authentic persona, and the influence of platform algorithms and metrics that may incentivise sensational or formulaic content over the authenticities podcasters seek to sustain. By documenting these dilemmas, the thesis provides a realistic, grounded perspective to discussions of authenticity. It shows that authenticities in podcasting are produced through ongoing negotiation and an "unfulfilled promise" in digital creative work (Mosco, 2004). These insights are valuable for scholars of cultural and creative industries, as they demonstrate that creators navigate the push-and-pull between creative ideals and commercial realities.

The following subsection presents theoretical contributions of the work.

10.2.1 Theoretical Contributions

The study advances the theoretical approaches of authenticity in podcasting by reconceptualising it as multiple authenticit*ies*. Authenticities manifest in distinct but overlapping forms in podcasting, encompassing personal, relational, cultural, and structural dimensions. Podcasters perform multiple authentic selves, switching personae across contexts. As a dynamic and context-dependent social process, authenticity is described by podcasters as socially performed and negotiated through their perceptions of relationship with audiences.

The thesis also strengthens field-based approaches to media production by using Bourdieu (1986) to connect micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis. At the micro-level, podcasters make decisions about voice, disclosure, editing, sponsorship, and accountability. At the meso-level, these decisions take shape within independent, commercial, and public service working frameworks. At the macro-level, platformisation, funding structures, advertising markets, and institutional authority shape visibility, recognition, and sustainability. Bourdieu's concepts of field and capital therefore clarify how these differently positioned conditions shape the ways authenticities are negotiated, valued, and sustained across the field.

By showing that authenticity functions as an intentional practice, the study contributes to dramaturgical, parasocial, and self-determination perspectives. It contributes to Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach by applying it to audio podcasts where vocal cues convey unfiltered emotion. Podcasters used authenticity as a guiding principle to balance self-

expression and responsibility, particularly in narrative-driven formats where personal stories risk distortion for global appeal (Urry, 2013). Authenticity is not an unmediated self-expression, but a successful performance of self that feels truthful to the podcasters. The notion of performed authenticity offers insights into how public figures attempt to cultivate trust to increase their influence. The performativity of multiple selves has implications for political communication as well, since politicians' self-presentation influences perceived authenticity and trust-building (Luebke & Steffan, 2025).

Far from being an unfiltered emanation of the self, authenticity in podcasting often involves emotional, creative, and relational labour. Podcasters construct a social form of authenticity that takes shape within multiple relationships (audience, guests, peers) and levels (individual, community, cultural). The relational model of authenticity shows that authenticity involves ongoing negotiation and boundary work rather than fixed adherence to standards. This study bridges notions of micro (interactional authenticity) and macro (cultural authenticity) in podcasting. Podcasters reported that the reciprocity and sociality enabled by social media allowed for higher engagement with audiences. Podcasters perceive podcasts as intensifying contemporary parasocial dynamics and requiring extensive relational work to balance competing demands. Relational labour is just as fundamental in podcasting as in music or social media contexts. Podcasters put resources, effort, and time into nurturing connections to maintain their authentic image. Importantly, this relational work is not cynical manipulation; podcasters largely undertake it because it aligns with their personal values and community ethos. The extent of perceived reciprocity with audiences is often limited and mediated. Many podcasters believe that reciprocity is genuine because it reflects their own positive view of the medium. Since they are invested in promoting podcasting, even if unconsciously, they may not critically interrogate their own practices.

Taking community and cultural perspectives together, the study shows that podcasters understand authenticities as social constructs shaped by community settings. The research extends the analysis of relational authenticity in podcasting from the relationship between audiences and hosts to the broader relationships between hosts and communities. However, the connection between Irish identity and Irish podcasting appears contested (see Section 6.5). This research finds inconsistencies between symbolic constructions of unified Irish podcasting and observed patterns in the domestic field. Despite the value of the cultural connections, these relationships are driven by context, history, and power imbalances (Engelke, 2017). A cultural

study of authentic national relations needs to set aside stereotypical representations of place to avoid oversimplifying complex social relations, contested histories, and lived experiences (Fiske, 2017; Rickly & Vidon, 2018).

Authenticity operates as the organising value through which podcasters legitimise their labour, attempt to signal credibility to listeners and to protect space for experimentation, even when their work is entangled with sponsorship, algorithms, or institutional mandates. The notions of authenticities operate within promotional cultures, where self-presentation and visibility are shaped by the logics of promotion (Davis, 2013). By unpacking the organising principles provided by authenticities in podcasting, this study challenges celebratory accounts of podcasting as fully democratised and invites media and communication scholarship to integrate platform studies with cultural production approaches to explain how podcasters understand trust, cultural value, and labour precarity in contemporary audio.

The present work contributes to creative labour theory by emphasising that romanticised discourses of autonomy and authenticity can obscure labour issues. Authenticity operates as a source of fulfilment as well as a mechanism of labour exploitation in the creative economy. Podcasters' experiences of burnout and passion-driven self-exploitation emphasise that even self-employed passion projects can fall into patterns of labour precarity. The insights that independent creators sometimes opt out of monetisation to avoid pressure imply an inversion of typical economic logic, where creators willingly forgo income opportunities to preserve autonomy and well-being. The risk is that creators, under the drive to remain authentic and please their community, overwork or under-monetise, effectively subsidising cultural production with their free labour and affective commitment. The commodification of authenticity as an "industry" in media and politics shows that "realness" is strategically produced yet risks exploitation (Serazio, 2023). As media industries evolve, there is a need to ensure that new opportunities for authentic expression do not simply create new underpaid cultural workers who trade job security and benefits for the intangible rewards of "doing what they love". With increasing platformisation pressures, support structures for the sustainability and well-being of independent creators are critical. The Irish context provides an interesting case, as a relatively smaller market where public service and indie producers have a significant presence. Alternative models, like public funding, community support, and hybrid professional and amateur collaborations, can maintain a space for authentic voices even as the field

formalises. The outcomes in podcasting could inform strategies for other creative sectors dealing with platformisation.

Podcasting has undergone professionalisation at the same time as legacy media faces a crisis of trust. The trends appear intertwined rather than coincidental, and while no strict causal claim is made, their simultaneity aligns with wider reorganisation in political economy of media. Evidence points to consolidation in the media sector, shifting advertising revenues, and audience attention moving toward platformed media such as podcasting. Money, trust, and talent have followed these flows, with broadcasters entering podcasting as legacy media budgets are shrinking and media workers are facing increasing precarity. The professionalisation of podcasting has reconfigured the criteria by which authenticity is understood, aligning it more closely with accountable, well-edited and ethically informed production than with purely amateur experimentation. In doing so, participants framed their work as responding to audience demands for trustworthy alternatives to legacy news. Participants framed podcasts as capable of attracting trust because they believed the medium reshapes parasocial relationships through conversational, affective address and transparent subjectivity at a time when legacy media institutions face a crisis of credibility. A sense of authenticity presents an opportunity to reach and engage the public, along with a challenge of misinformation, which can spread via charismatic "authentic" voices (Enli, 2025). The shift also reflects a political economy in which digital platforms capture advertising through targeted delivery while mass media lose sales and targets to broad demographics. Attention, revenue, and talent track these incentives, relocating trust toward platformed audio and personality-led shows. Participants' accounts can be read alongside wider debates about shifting trust in digital media, including podcasting that uphold transparency and independence.

The professionalisation of podcasting reflects a field of cultural production that is evolving, with parallels to record production and audio production in the 1960s, when studios became tools of creative expression. Professionalisation has advanced through platform investment, network consolidation, and the movement of experienced broadcasters switching into podcasting. Professional norms have risen from both the ground up and the top down, not only from independents' experimentation. As podcasting evolves, a process of consolidation and professionalisation has shifted the field closer to that of commercial radio or television, albeit with new gatekeepers such as platform algorithms. This transition is both rewarding and challenging for podcasters. The shift brings investment, technical improvement, and broader

audiences to podcasts, but it also risks edging out smaller, independent voices or pressuring them to conform to more commercial styles.

The thesis offers production and sonic conventions (e.g., recording place, tone, mic proximity, and breath) as a useful frame for analysing aural authenticity. The framework of acoustic performativity in podcasting, where sound enables vulnerability without visual scrutiny, highlights the value of integrating auditory dimensions into theories of mediatisation and authentic presentation. Interdisciplinary dialogue between podcast studies and sound-centred fields such as sound studies, acoustics, and musicology can deepen this framework by drawing on work on vocal style, intimacy, and listening practices. Such approaches open an avenue for future research that undertakes detailed sonic, aural, and spatial analyses of podcasting, including immersive and 360-degree audio, in order to examine how authenticities are produced, signalled, and interpreted in audio-first environments. Although video podcasting allows the clipping of short-form videos to circulate on platforms such as TikTok, these clips fuel the algorithm further. The feedback loop across platforms, promotional activity, and algorithmic incentives shows that podcasting has been integrated into the broader digital world. However, such integration may also erode the sense of authenticity characteristic of the early days of audio podcasting.

The present study situates authenticity within the current stage of a field's development since what is considered 'authentic' or 'sell-out' is time-bound. When a medium such as podcasting evolves, authenticity discourse shifts from stressing difference (rough versus polished) to emphasising competence, with mastery as a possible criterion for authenticity. By showing that informality and perceived casualness are carefully crafted through editing, the present study criticises an over-romantic view of rawness in podcasting. When podcasting was new, rough production values signalled one's independence and dissociation from a polished corporate product. As many independent podcasters have since developed considerable production expertise, similar roughness can now be interpreted as a lack of care rather than a marker of authenticity. The relationship between aesthetic norms and authenticity claims can be applied to other media by examining how producers recalibrate what they read as "authentic" once professional standards diffuse into formerly amateur spaces. For instance, in video content or live streaming, creators may initially value unedited, lo-fi styles, but over time expect clearer sound, without compromising the expectation of personality. Studying such shifts can show how producers redefine authenticity in response to changing production competencies and

perceived audience expectations. In grassroots cultural production forms such as music, poetry, podcasting, and blogging, enthusiastic amateurish practice may confer authenticity. In high art, publicly funded art, and journalism, institutional backing, financial resources, and state sponsorship can provide that sense of authenticity. The analysis of podcasters clarifies that authenticity draws on different sources, from community validation in grassroots work to institutional endorsement in formal fields.

The study advances discussions of the ethics of authenticity and creative practices. Podcasters face ethical dilemmas related to self-representation, privacy, and the commodification of personal experience. These challenges highlight the need for reflective practice and support structures within the podcasting community. Authenticity can become a commodity under neoliberal logic, as seen when podcasters package vulnerability for sponsorships, risking exploitation, echoing risks and precarity. This thesis introduces excessive authenticity as an interpretive concept, highlighting risks such as oversharing, ethical harm, and commodification of vulnerability. Despite the celebratory rhetoric of podcasting's authenticity as an antidote to "over-commercialised, cookie-cutter culture" (Sullivan, 2018, p. 43), authenticity remains a mythical ideal that podcasters continually strive for and perform. The theoretical insight resonates with the idea of authenticity as a mythical yet motivating construct.

Overall, the case of podcasting in the Republic of Ireland exemplifies the broader transformation of media and cultural production in the digital era. Cultural production is increasingly personalised, bringing both improvements, through authentic, diverse content, and new forms of precarity and commodification. Creative labourers are navigating new identities, part artist, part entrepreneur, and part community manager, as they strive to remain authentic while making a living. These broader implications show that the pursuit of authenticit*ies* by podcasters is more than just individual practice; it is part of a larger narrative about how media is evolving and how we, as a society, negotiate the value of being "authentic" in an increasingly mediated world.

10.2.2 Practical and Policy Implications

The insights from this research suggest several practical and policy implications for podcasters, industry stakeholders, digital media literacy, and cultural policymakers in Ireland. For podcasters, the findings underscore the importance of strategically navigating platforms and

commercial opportunities without compromising core creative values. Podcasters may prioritise skill development, continuous learning, and adaptation to increase both the competitiveness and the authenticity they aim to convey.

For organisations and companies involved in podcasting, including media organisations, podcast networks, and production studios, the study highlights the need to balance commercial goals with creative autonomy. Media institutions have much to gain by providing greater degrees of autonomy to podcasters, as greater autonomy may help podcasters preserve the authenticity values they associate with their work. Moreover, the importance of technical quality identified in the study implies that organisations can invest in training and infrastructure for podcast production. Training and capacity-building initiatives could enhance podcasters' capacity for reflexive practice, ethical interviewing, trauma-aware practice, redaction protocols, and community engagement, benefiting the broader media ecosystem. Initiatives that encourage a sense of community and peer support among podcasters are encouraged. Local networks and industry associations are well placed to organise group training sessions and online discussion boards for podcasters to exchange resources and expertise. By facilitating resource sharing and mentorship, such community arrangements could help alleviate some of the difficulties associated with isolated production. Building on these organisational practices, policy interventions could support diversity in digital media.

From a policy perspective, the present work highlights the importance of supporting diverse voices and content styles. A practical implication is the need for enhanced funding and grant opportunities specifically designed for podcasters and for addressing gaps in schemes that currently favour broadcast formats. The Basic Income for the Arts[100] scheme in Ireland shows that sustained public support can reduce income precarity for creative workers and enable long-term cultural productions in visual arts, music, film, literature, and theatre (Alma Economics, 2025). Similar schemes tailored to audio creators and podcasters could help address the structural challenges in this sector. Participants' difficulties with the current Sound & Vision[101] scheme show that the way funding is distributed at present favours broadcast media formats and established media organisations. Policymakers and funding organisations like Coimisiún

[100] The Basic Income for the Arts scheme was launched in 2022 to help artists deal with precarious incomes and to prevent them from leaving the sector for economic reasons (Alma Economics, 2025).
[101] Sound & Vision is a funding scheme for broadcasters and independent producers in Ireland that funds the production of programmes about Irish culture, heritage, and experience to improve literacy.

na Meán could support efforts to create a funding stream just for podcasts with more simplified application processes and categories. The public service broadcaster RTÉ is well placed to adopt an audio-first strategy, prioritising podcast content. Such a shift must weigh obligations, resources, regulation, and digitally excluded publics. This involves reallocating resources or creating hybrid models, such as incubating independent podcasts under the public service umbrella to amplify diverse voices while preserving their autonomy. Public service media is encouraged to run joint mentorship and training schemes that match amateur podcasters with professionals to build skills and strengthen editorial standards.

Regulators and media policymakers may introduce frameworks for podcasting that address misinformation, protect audiences, and require basic transparency, while still preserving the creative openness that podcasters value. The work on ethical self-regulation through shared community standards, audience accountability mechanisms, and platform-level reporting tools may help prevent harmful content. Industry associations are encouraged to publish guidance on disclosure, corrections, and edit transparency that suits both conversational formats and journalism to standardise practice and strengthen audience trust. Podcasters in Ireland exercise particular care when speaking about identifiable individuals or organisations because of the strict defamation laws. This national legal framework differs from the US protections for speech. Therefore, podcasting in Ireland serves as a case study for how stricter libel laws shape content decisions in podcasting, contributing to podcast studies, media studies, and internet studies.

In parallel, the Irish funding bodies could consider awarding projects that demonstrate community benefit. Irish media organisations and cultural agencies should encourage podcast projects that emphasise local authenticity, such as shows in the Irish language or programmes highlighting underrepresented communities, since participants suggested that authenticity resonates strongly when content fills a gap for a specific audience, for example, niche activist podcasts. Support for regional production could widen the diverse voices and counter imbalances between centres and peripheries in access and representation. The discussion about burnout and excessive workload shows that podcasters may need to place sustainable work practices at the forefront. Considering the concerns about well-being, stakeholders are invited to investigate ways to compensate or support independent creators, such as through arts grants or partnerships with creative industry groups. Policymakers may introduce regulations that

address digital audio's precarious labour conditions and promote ethical standards in content creation.

Measures to enhance media literacy about trust in digital media could increase audiences' awareness of the subtle processes and backstage work that make podcasts feel authentic. Digital media literacy should examine how parasocial relationships in podcasting structure trust and how perceived authenticity may shape that trust. Trust may not always rest on goodwill or full transparency in digital media. Therefore, media literacy can clarify production practices, disclosure norms, and monetisation arrangements so that audiences make informed assessments of credibility and intent. To increase digital media literacy, media programmes are encouraged to include critical analysis of audio media content. A podcaster-led code of conduct could formalise basic ethical principles with room for genre-specific adaptation. Such guidance could support curriculum design and professional training, while encouraging communication about editing, sponsorship, and audience engagement.

10.2.3 Methods, Scope, and Focus

The study has several contributions and implications for methods, scope, and focus for future media and podcasting research. A purposive sample across independent, commercial, and public service settings enables comparative insight. Focusing on working models and genre add knowledge about how notions of authenticities shape cultural productions. Podcast scholarship has often centred on content analysis or audience reception in dominant markets such as the United States, with relatively little focus on producers' experiences, especially in smaller media markets. By recruiting Irish podcasters for in-depth semi-structured interviews, the study implements a comparative research design in podcast studies. The cross-sector approach, drawing participants from grassroots independents, corporate podcast networks, and public service broadcasters, is useful. Combining qualitative interviews across diverse podcasting models revealed variations in the effects of platformisation and commercialisation on authenticity practices. This study captured a comparative view that single-case studies could overlook by interviewing a variety of podcasters from various genres and professional backgrounds.

The research used a process-based framework, highlighting genre fluidity and performative tensions unique to cultural contexts and the production cycle. The inclusion of varied genres

allowed for identifying patterns that hold true across contexts, such as the value placed on honest storytelling, as well as divergences, such as differing views on scripting. The production stage-based lens could be applied to other media forms or to studies that bridge production and reception, for instance, comparing creators' intentions at each stage with audience perceptions of authenticity. This research contributes to genre analysis by showing how podcasters understand genres as carrying norms and conventions for how authenticities are performed and interpreted.

Finally, this study shows the benefit of an iterative analytical approach that remains grounded in participants' language while applying theoretical lenses. The study shows the usefulness of reflexive interviewing when dealing with a complex concept such as authenticity. Many participants reflected on their own biases and strategies while discussing authenticity. Encouraging such reflexivity, for example, asking creators to describe why they think their content feels authentic, yielded rich insights.

Following these contributions, the next section outlines the study's limitations and directions for future research.

10.3 Limitations and Future Research

While the findings of this thesis are culturally and contextually specific to the Republic of Ireland, they may have conceptual relevance to other small, platform-dependent media markets and to analyses of podcasting as a cultural practice. Podcasting practices, along with the interplay between authenticities and structural forces, may manifest differently in other national contexts. The Irish podcasting field has a distinct cultural and media context, including a strong public broadcasting tradition and a relatively small media market, which may diverge from larger or non-English-speaking environments. The UK provides a closer comparator, given similar working models, and intertwined market structures. In larger markets such as the United States, or in non-Western podcasting communities with distinct platform ecosystems, additional variables arise, including government censorship or region-specific platform monopolies. To address this, future research could expand the comparative dimension by examining whether the dynamics observed in this study persist in other settings. Cross-national studies or focused case studies beyond the Anglophone West could be valuable for refining the concepts of authenticities and the autonomy spectrum developed in this thesis. Additionally,

comparative work across small nations could highlight how cultural positioning intersects with platform incentives and discoverability systems. Such work could also examine how different configurations of cultural, social, symbolic, and economic capital shape authenticity claims across other podcasting fields.

The podcasting landscape reflected in this study centres on relatively modest-scale productions, with participants largely operating in a grassroots context rather than as global media personalities. The analysis primarily reflects perspectives from the Republic of Ireland, focusing on issues such as region (e.g., Dublin versus other counties) and the role of the Irish language. Podcasters from Northern Ireland, Irish diaspora, and migrant communities were not interviewed. This may limit the diversity of cultural viewpoints represented. The scope was set to focus analytic depth on one jurisdiction, yet the absence of Northern Irish voices is especially salient given the legal, institutional, and market context in the UK. The absence of these voices limits the thesis's analysis to address notions of Irishness among podcasters in Northern Ireland, the Irish diaspora, and migrant communities. Future research could examine how podcasters in Northern Ireland navigate authenticity, given a distinct political context and identity dynamics. Future studies might also expand the sample or focus on specific subgroups, such as exclusively amateur hobbyists or podcasters from marginalised communities. The analysis acknowledges these constraints and encourages further work that expands the corpus and diversifies voices.

The study relies on self-reported experiences from podcasters' interviews. While this approach yields rich qualitative insight into podcasters' intentions and self-reported strategies for authenticity, it does not incorporate data on how listeners interpret or value these efforts. For instance, this study did not quantitatively assess listener perceptions of authenticity or the impact of platform algorithms on content visibility. Future research could address this gap by examining audience responses or employing reception studies to see if what creators consider authentic aligns with listeners' perceptions. Reception studies could be particularly valuable to explore questions such as: which criteria for authenticity do audiences recognise and value? How do audience expectations vary across demographic groups and cultural contexts? Such research could employ survey methods, focus groups, or digital ethnography to capture listener perspectives.

In terms of methodology, the study is qualitative and interpretive, based on a purposive sample of podcasters who were willing to discuss their perceptions and performances of authenticity. This approach introduces potential self-selection bias, as those particularly interested in authenticity might be overrepresented. To mitigate this, future research could employ a broader survey or a quantitative content analysis of podcast episodes. While the study offers a detailed analysis of podcasting in Ireland, its findings could be expanded through broader comparative work, multi-method approaches that include audience perspectives, content analysis, and longitudinal observation as the medium evolves. The triangulation of podcasters' interviews, content analysis, and audience research could complement the present findings by capturing a wider spectrum of practice. Content analysis could systematically examine how often authenticity markers, such as unscripted banter or transparent disclosures by hosts, appear in different genres, which could add another layer of empirical support for the thesis's conclusions. Ethnographic observations within production organisations and podcasters' workflows could illuminate editorial negotiations during the production process. Future studies can also employ studio observation, version tracking of scripts and edits, and small artefacts such as show notes and cue sheets.

The comparative data across independent, commercial, and public service frameworks were uneven, with a sectoral skew toward independent podcasters. Subscription, advertising, and grant funding may shape editorial decision-making in distinct ways. A focused comparison could clarify trade-offs across these models. Future research could focus specifically on how different revenue streams, such as crowdfunding, ad revenue, employer salaries, subscriptions, memberships, or grants, affect creative decision-making. Documentary analysis of sponsorship policies and platform guidance could enrich political economy insights. A related area concerns the impact of authenticity on outcomes. For instance, do podcasts that are perceived as more authentic have better retention, more word-of-mouth growth, or monetisation success? A comparative metric study might correlate engagement statistics with markers of authenticity. For instance, a sentiment analysis of reviews or comments could illustrate the possible economic value of authenticity, which is inferred qualitatively in this thesis. Relatedly, analyses of business models and cultural labour could map how monetisation influences care work, risk management, and editorial boundaries in cultural production.

The genre categorisation employed in this research used a typology of three broad types that was useful for analysing authenticities. In practice, podcasts are fluid and shows often blend

elements of multiple genres. Further studies could explore alternative typologies, examine hybrid or cross-genre forms, such as live podcast storytelling, to analyse how authenticity is constructed when genre boundaries are less clear. The multidimensional authenticity framework (personal, relational, cultural, professional, genre, and production) shown in this research offers a foundation for theoretical development that future research could extend and refine. Comparative studies examining how these dimensions manifest in other media formats could help distinguish podcast-specific authenticity features from broader digital media patterns and potentially develop more comprehensive theoretical models of media authenticity.

The investigation of podcasting practices reveals that while certain activities can be understood as behaviour that podcasters frame as authentic, the notion of authenticity alone does not account for the complexity and contradictions inherent in podcasting. An overemphasis on authenticity may overshadow other critical dimensions of podcasting, such as issues of representation, for example, gender or minority representation among podcasters. Although these issues were briefly discussed, a more systematic analysis is warranted. The under-representation of female podcasters due to practical constraints limits the study's capacity to analyse gendered experiences of authenticity. Baym (2015) suggested that relational labour is often feminised and expected especially of women content creators, who may feel more pressure to do audience engagement or community management. Future research could explore how these social factors intersect with authenticity and how gendered patterns shape podcasting. For example, do women or minority podcasters experience different constraints or community pressures in constructing intimacy and authenticity? The thesis hints at some instances, like the *Black and Irish podcast* example, suggesting that amplifying underrepresented voices is a crucial role that podcasts play. A dedicated study to analyse gender, representation, and diversity in podcasting could help assess how structural forces facilitate or hinder underrepresented voices. By broadening contextual scopes and addressing related issues such as technology, diversity, and economic impacts, future research can deepen understanding of how authenticity operates within digital cultural production.

Several emerging trends in podcasting suggest promising directions for future research. The increasing prevalence of video podcasting challenges audio-only conventions and introduces new visual dimensions to podcast authenticities. Research examining how visual elements shape authenticity performances and audience perceptions could help understand this evolving format. The expansion of non-English-language and Global South podcasting merits

investigation into how authenticity is claimed and interpreted in different cultural contexts. Comparative research examining authenticity across cultural traditions could enhance understanding of both universal and culturally specific aspects of podcast authenticities. The growing integration of podcasting with broader media ecosystems, through adaptation, cross-platform distribution, and transmedia storytelling, raises questions about how authenticity translates across media formats. As podcasts are increasingly being used for political purposes and advocacy, studies could also explore how authenticity enhances persuasion. This raises questions about the medium's potential as a public sphere versus a tool for propaganda. Future research could address ethical challenges of performing authenticity in digital media.

This thesis examines podcasting at a specific moment in its history. The podcast industry is rapidly changing. For instance, since the data collection, there have been new regulations, such as the EU's Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act[102], coming into effect from 2024. As technological affordances, industry structures, boundary norms, and audience expectations continue to shift, the authenticities associated with cultural productions may shift accordingly. Future research could track these developments through longitudinal studies to examine how podcasters' perspectives and strategies have evolved. Such follow-up could validate the structural challenges identified in this thesis.

Finally, the growth of artificial intelligence in podcast production raises questions about authenticity in semi-automated or AI-generated media content. Although empirical analysis did not cover generative AI directly, its relevance and potential disruption require explicit discussion. A human, person-to-person interaction anchors podcasting, which offers a critical backdrop for assessing AI systems that generate voices that sound human but are not human. Generative AI tools for scriptwriting, voice cloning, dubbing, and automated editing may recalibrate perceptions of authenticity, creative agency, editorial accountability, and audience trust. Early evidence remains limited, yet current trends suggest pressures on broadcasters and independent producers. Future research should track how automation reshapes creative decision-making, labour, and policy, and examine domain-specific cases such as AI dubbing in audio documentaries and podcasts (Wincott & Preger, 2024). These are imminent un(der)explored areas for future studies.

[102] The Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act aim to create a safer digital space where the fundamental rights of users are protected.

Podcasters in this study described authenticity as a central organising principle in podcasting, shaping creative work, perceived audience trust, and cultural value across independent, commercial, and public service settings. Podcasting in Ireland shows how podcasters frame authenticity as a shared practice that organises creative labour and their understandings of audience relationships while also exposing creators to structural and affective vulnerabilities. Examining how podcasters use authenticity helps explain how they believe trust is built with audiences. Questions about trust are compounded because it is increasingly founded upon the structures laid by platforms owned by large technology conglomerates operating through opaque systems and undisclosed arrangements. The thesis affirms that authenticity is not an ornamental discourse but a key analytical lens for media and communication scholarship concerned with trust, cultural value, and platformised production. Podcasters perform multiple selves that they recognise as authentic, switching personae across contexts. By unpacking contextual authenticit*ies*, this thesis has shown how podcasters navigate across genres and working models in the pursuit of podcasting practices that they claimed to be authentic.

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Appendices

Appendix A. DCU Research Ethics Committee Approval

Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University

DCU

Waqar Ahmed
School of Communications

Dr. Andreas Rauh
School of Communications

31st May 2022

REC Reference: **DCUREC/2022/101**

Proposal Title: **Podcasting in Ireland: Producing and Consuming Authenticity**

Applicant(s): **Waqar Ahmed & Dr. Andreas Rauh**

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for your application to DCU Research Ethics Committee (REC). Further to expedited 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,

Dr. Melrona Kirrane

Dr. Melrona Kirrane
Chairperson
DCU Research Ethics Committee

DCU
Research & Innovation

Taighde & Nuálaíocht Tacaíocht
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Appendix B. Plain Language Statement

DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY
Plain Language Statement (Interviews)

Podcasting in Ireland: Producing and Consuming Authenticity
School of Communications, Dublin City University
Principal investigators: Waqar Ahmed (PhD Student) ; Dr Andreas Rauh (Supervisor)
Contact Details: waqar.ahmed3@mail.dcu.ie ; : andreas.rauh@dcu.ie

The purpose of the Research
The aim of this research is to identify and analyse podcasters' professional background, motivations, production practices, relationship with listeners, and the challenges and opportunities in the Irish podcast industry. The data obtained from the study will contribute to the critical cultural understanding of how independent, commercial, and public service podcasters and audiences are creating and shaping shared authenticity through podcasting. Despite getting a lot of attention in the media and audio industries, academic research about podcast production and consumption practices in Ireland remains underexplored. Therefore, the findings will help to identify different dimensions of authenticity (autonomy, accuracy, originality, legitimacy, integrity, competence, and relationship) and related challenges such as discoverability, creative freedom, economic viability, platform mediation, and interference.

The categories or types of personal data
The categories or types of personal data to be processed include the participant's name, and gender. Though no direct questions will be asked regarding the racial or ethnic origin of the participants, however, if they disclose it during the interview, it will be processed accordingly. The podcasters are public figures and as such this study will be about their public persona and publicly available podcasts so there are no implications for their privacy. The personal data will be identified unless they want to remain anonymous.

Details of what participant involvement in the Research Study will require
The participant will be interviewed by the researcher. The duration of the interview will be about 90 minutes. It will be conducted in person and will be electronically recorded. The type of questions will involve their professional background in media, motivations of podcasting, production practices of authenticity, engagement and relationship with listeners, and the challenges and opportunities in the Irish podcast industry.

Potential risks to participants
There are no foreseeable potential risks to participants in this research, and the potential of any harm is not greater than that encountered by them in their everyday life. This research does not involve deception and there are no physical, social, psychological legal, economic, or political risks anticipated for the participants of the research. The research will not be offering any confidentiality and protection of participants' identity.

Any benefits to participants from involvement in the Research Study
While the participant's involvement in this research will bring no direct benefits to them, they may find the findings and conclusions useful and interesting in terms of informing the work they do. These include self-reflection, professional development, better practices with audiences, contributing to a better understanding of how podcasting works to broader audiences and building trust and transparency with Irish society through their practice of authenticity.

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.

Right to withdraw consent
Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and participants have a right to withdraw consent at any point during research by emailing the researcher at waqar.ahmed3@mail.dcu.ie. Their participation in the project will end, at the point they withdraw, and all their personal data will be securely deleted.

Data Retention/ Disposal
All research data will be encrypted and securely stored on DCU ISS password-protected drive by using the secure eduroam Wi-Fi network. The data will only be accessed by the Principal Investigators. All research data will be retained only for the period necessary in relation to the PhD thesis described above, as well as in any related academic publications. Recordings will be deleted from the device within 15 days of interview. All data will be deleted after 5 years from the commencement of the study.

The participants will have the right to access their personal data by contacting the researcher at waqar.ahmed3@mail.dcu.ie. The interview transcripts will be sent back to the participants for review. They will also be offered information about the outcomes of the study. They will be offered the results by email on their request, in line with DCU DPU guidelines.

Privacy Notice
If participants have concerns about their personal data and wish to contact DCU Data Protection Officer, please contact Mr. Martin Ward (data.protection@dcu.ie) Ph.: 7005118 / 7008257). The participants have the right to lodge a complaint with the Irish Data Protection Commission.

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

Appendix C. Informed Consent Form

DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY
Informed Consent Form (Interviews)
Podcasting in Ireland: Producing and Consuming Authenticity
School of Communications, Dublin City University
Principal investigators: Waqar Ahmed (PhD Student) and Dr. Andreas Rauh (Supervisor)

The purpose of the research

The aim of this research is to identify and analyse podcasters' professional background, motivations, production practices, relationship with listeners, and the challenges and opportunities in the Irish podcast industry. The data obtained from the study will contribute to the critical cultural understanding of how independent, commercial, and public service podcasters and audiences are creating and shaping shared authenticity through podcasting.

If I agree to participate, I will be interviewed by the researcher. The interview will be done in person, and it will be electronically recorded.

Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)	*Yes/No*
I understand the information provided	*Yes/No*
I understand the information provided in relation to data protection	*Yes/No*
I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study	*Yes/No*
I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions	*Yes/No*
I am aware that my interview will be audiotaped	*Yes/No*
I agree to be quoted directly with my real name	*Yes/No*

I understand that I may withdraw from the research study at any point or ask for the recording device to be switched off.

I understand that my interview can be audio-recorded and transcribed, and my personal data will be identified.

I am aware that 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.

I understand that all research data will be retained only for the period necessary to the purpose stated and deleted after 5 years from the commencement of the study.

If participants have concerns about their personal data and wish to contact DCU Data Protection Officer, please contact Mr. Martin Ward (data.protection@dcu.ie) Ph.: 7005118 / 7008257.

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.

Participant Signature:_____

Name in Block Capitals:_____

Witness:_____

Date:_____

Appendix D. Interview Guide and Questions

Interview Questions

Background

- What is your first memory about podcasting?
- How did you come to start podcasting? What were you doing before podcasting?
- How does podcasting fit in your professional life? What role does podcasting play in your professional activities?

Motivations

- Why do you make podcasts or what drives you to make podcasts?
- How would you describe your early days of podcasting?
- What challenges did you face at the early stage?
- Regarding podcasting, where do you see yourself in 1, 5, or 10 years?

Production practice and authenticity

- Can you tell me how you make your podcasts?
- What persona, professional, and ethical values do you consider important as a podcaster?
- Can you tell me what authenticity and being authentic mean to you?
- Do you behave differently when podcasting, and if so/not why?

Relationship with listeners, community, and culture

- A lot of people talk about 'engagement' online, particularly between online personalities and their audiences. What does the term 'engagement' mean to you?
- How do you go about 'interacting' with your listeners? What form of media and activities do you use for interaction and how often?
- How would you describe your relationship with your listeners?
- How do you want to be recognised among listeners?
- How do you define Irishness? Is there a distinct Irish podcasting?

Challenges and Opportunities of Podcasting in Ireland

- Can you tell me how you see yourself in the Irish podcasting 'scene'?
- How do you see podcasting in Ireland at present?
- What challenges you face in podcasting currently?
- Knowing what you know now, what tips and advice would you give to your younger self (when you began podcasting)? What would you do the same? Why? What would you do differently? Why?
- As an Independent/Commercial/Public Service podcaster, how workable is podcasting for you, in terms of time and money issues?

Other questions

- Podcast-specific questions about episode content and style.
- Is there anything you said that you would like me to edit out or anonymise?
- Is there anything I have not asked that you think is important/I should know?
- Are you willing to participate in any follow-up?

Semi-Structured Interview Thematic Guide

Podcasters' personal and professional background

This theme identified the demographic characteristics, locality, socio-economic background, podcast model (independent, commercial, or public service), podcast genre preferences, and professional background of podcasters. Identifying the background of podcasters helped me understand how and why they started creating podcasts. I also explored whether podcasters came from broadcast media, audio media, art, digital media, or other professional or amateur backgrounds. It encompassed questions such as: What were they doing before podcasting, and how did podcasting fit into their professional lives?

Podcasters' motivations

This theme addressed the motives behind podcast creation. I explored whether podcasters make podcasts to gratify extrinsic or intrinsic motivations. It included questions such as: What drives podcasters to make podcasts? How would they describe their early days of podcasting, and what challenges did they face at the early stage?

Podcasters' perspectives of authenticity

In this part, I explored the performative nature of authenticity in podcast production by looking at how podcasters interact with and react to the content, and how they demonstrate various dimensions of authenticity (i.e., competence, autonomy, and relatedness) to their listeners (Ryan & Deci, 2000). I examined how podcast production processes allow podcasters to create intimate knowledge, shared identities, and unmediated expressions of pop culture and/or counter-culture. I also probed podcasters about their understanding of what authenticity is and what it means to be authentic on podcasts. Finally, I looked into the role of voice, self-reflexivity, production techniques, genre, and stylisation in creating authenticities.

Relationship with listeners

This section of the interview explored the level, medium, and nature of interactions, engagement, and the relationship between podcasters and listeners. It also addressed the expectations of podcasters from their listeners and how they wanted to be identified by listeners. How participants understood and framed local culture, Irishness, and how that shaped their authenticity, were also explored.

Challenges and Opportunities

This section of the interview was related to the technological, cultural, social, and economic challenges and opportunities in the Irish podcast industry for podcasters working in the independent, commercial, and public service sectors.

Podcast(er)-specific questions

Questions about each participant's podcast episode content, setting, production stages, and style were asked throughout these themes. Open-ended questions allowed participants to frame their own stories. Follow-up prompts generated further clarity on points of interest, especially where participants' experiences intersected with issues of working models, production processes, platformisation, commercialisation, genre conventions, and audience relationships.

Appendix E. Transcript Review (Member Check)

Email for PhD Interview Transcript Review

Subject: DCU PhD Interview Transcript Review

Dear participant
I trust this email finds you well.

Please find **attached** the **verbatim transcript** of the recorded interview. This transcript has been provided for your review to e**nsure accuracy and resonance** with your experiences.

It's important to note that the transcript reflects the natural flow of conversation, capturing your **natural spoken language**. Therefore, you may notice variations in grammar or sentence structure, which is typical of conversational speech. Your **insights** are highly valued, and your voice holds precedence over strict adherence to **grammatical correctness**. Please **rest assured** that I will undertake thorough **proofreading, and grammar checks** as part of the thesis. Additionally, any parts or comments that you requested to be **redacted** during or after the interview have been **appropriately** edited out.

Please provide **clarifications** or **additional insights** after reviewing the transcript in response to this email. Alternatively, you can annotate the transcript directly with any comments or provide your remarks at the end of the document.
To guide your feedback, you may **consider addressing the following questions:**
1. How would you reflect on your experience of the interview?
2. How accurately do you feel the transcript captured your thoughts/experiences?
3. What additional information could be added to capture your experiences better?
4. If there is anything you would like removed, what would that be and why?
5. Have you created/ hosted any new podcasts since the interview on 13-03-2024
6. What motivated your decision to participate in the interview?

I kindly request that any comments or **feedback** on the transcript be returned within **two weeks.**
Once again, I am immensely grateful for your valuable contribution and time. I aim to share the **research** findings once the study is **published**.

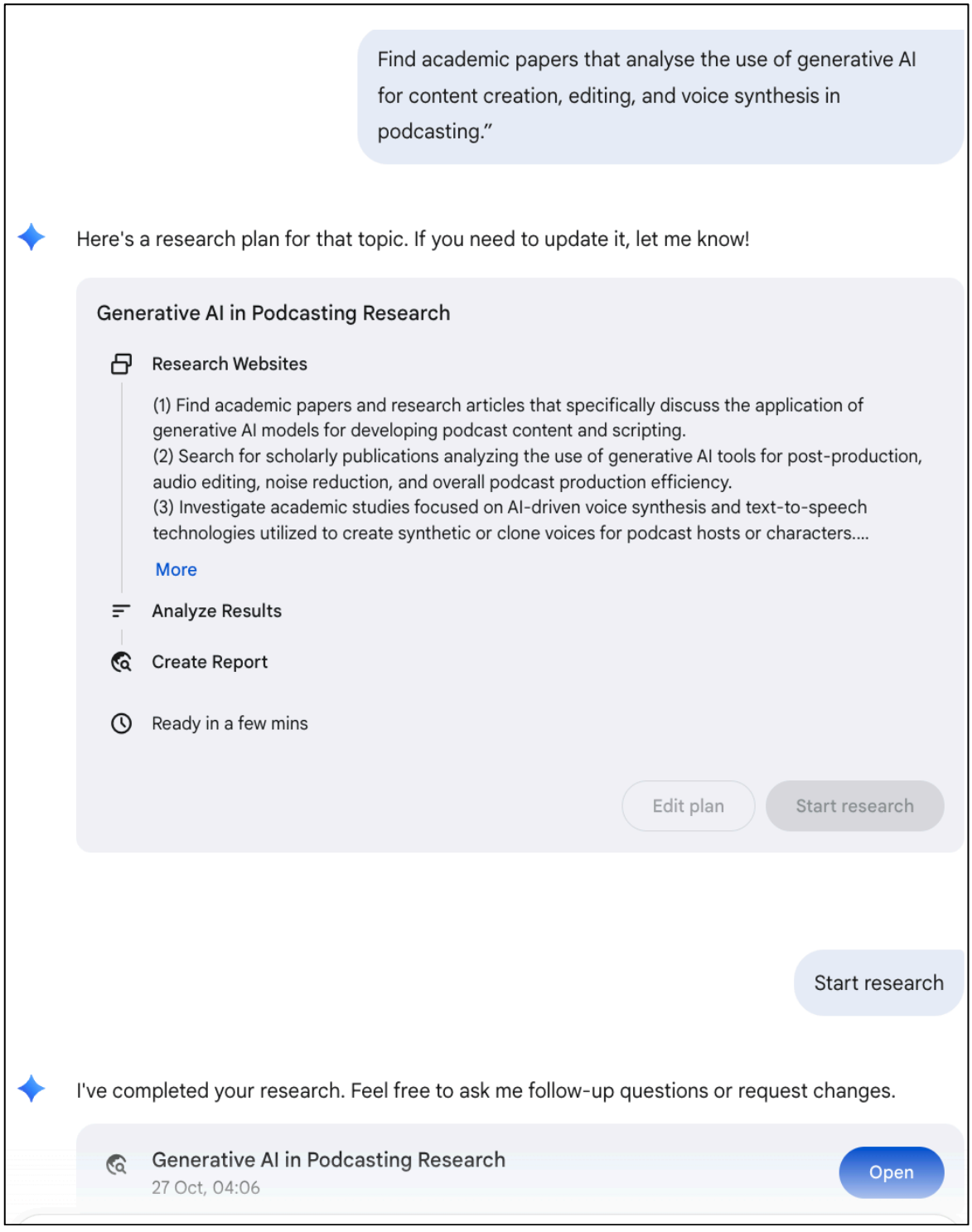
Warm regards

Waqar Ahmed

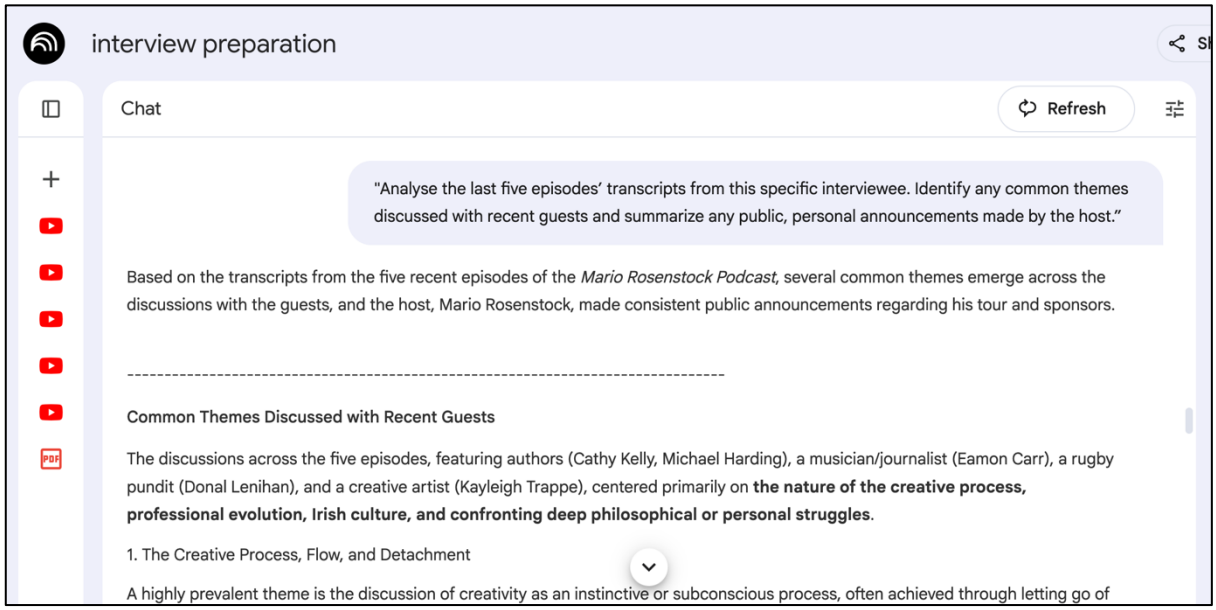
Waqar Ahmed
Ph.D. Student
School of Communications
Dublin City University
C 144, Henry Grattan Building, Dublin City University, Glasnevin Campus, Dublin 9
Email: Waqar.ahmed3@mail.dcu.ie
Phone: +353 85 213 9794

Appendix F. Generative AI Prompts and Outputs

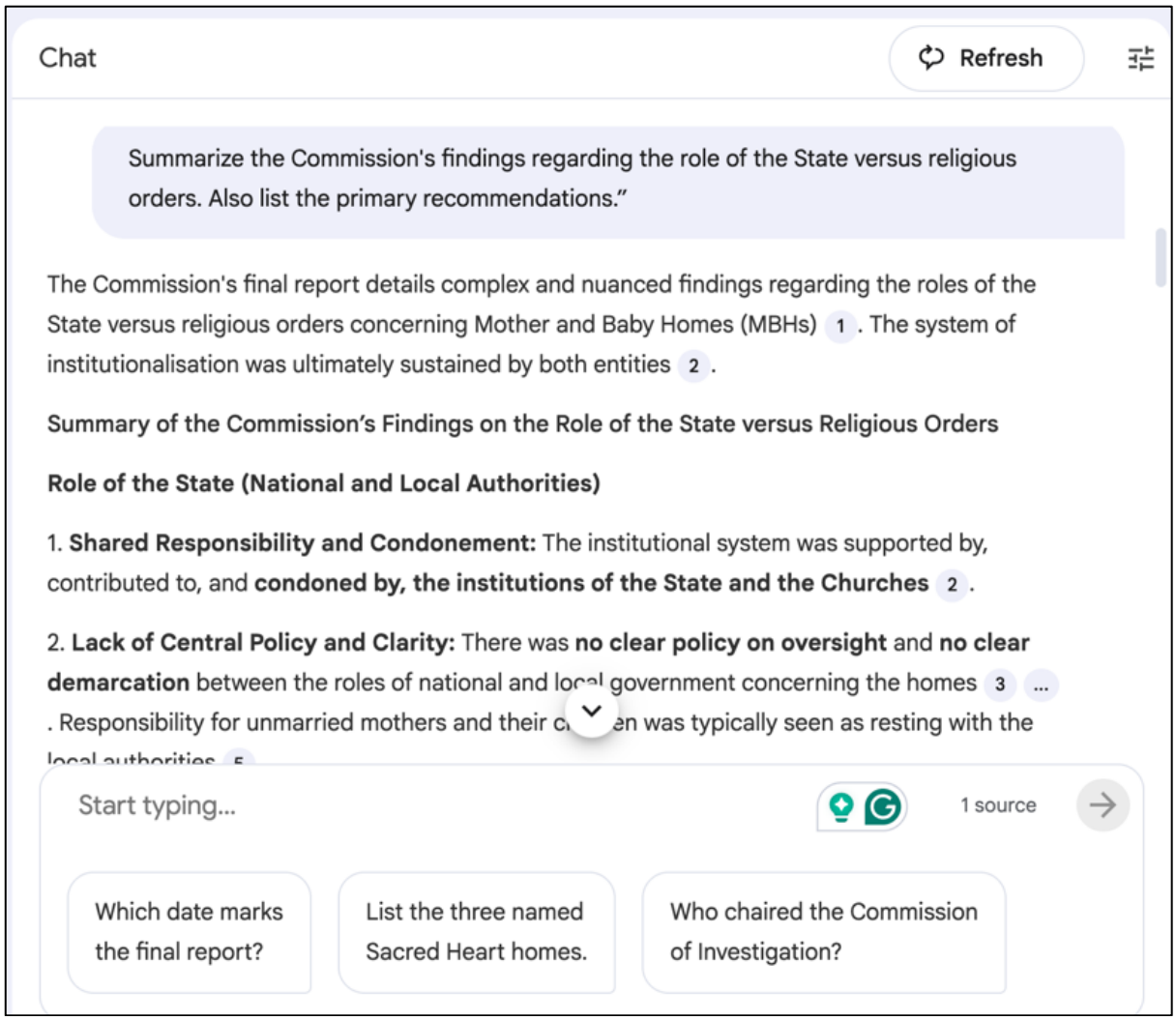
F1. Google Gemini Flash 2.0 (2025)



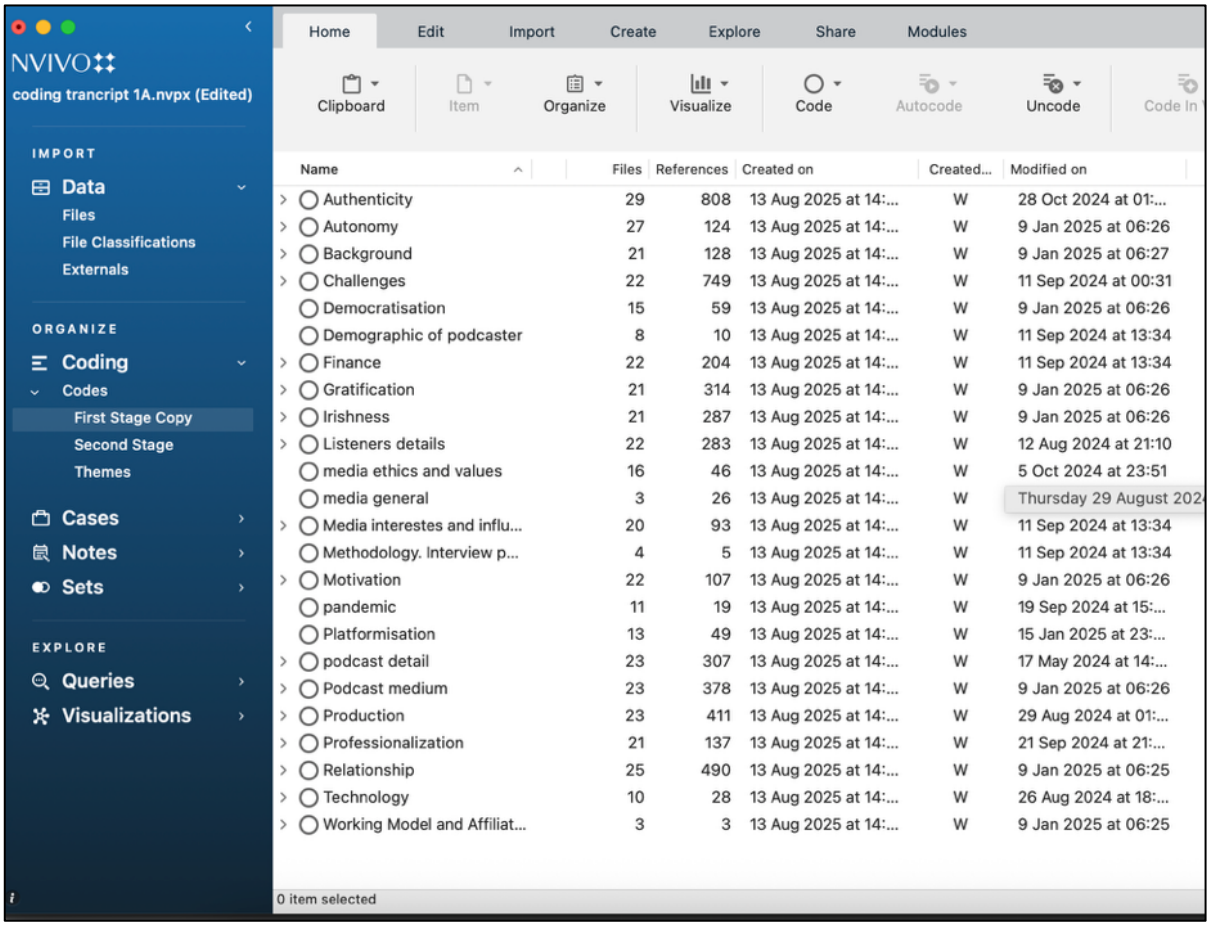
F2. Google NotebookLM (2024)- Interview Preparation



F3. Google NotebookLM (2024)- Report review



Appendix G. Coding Sheet

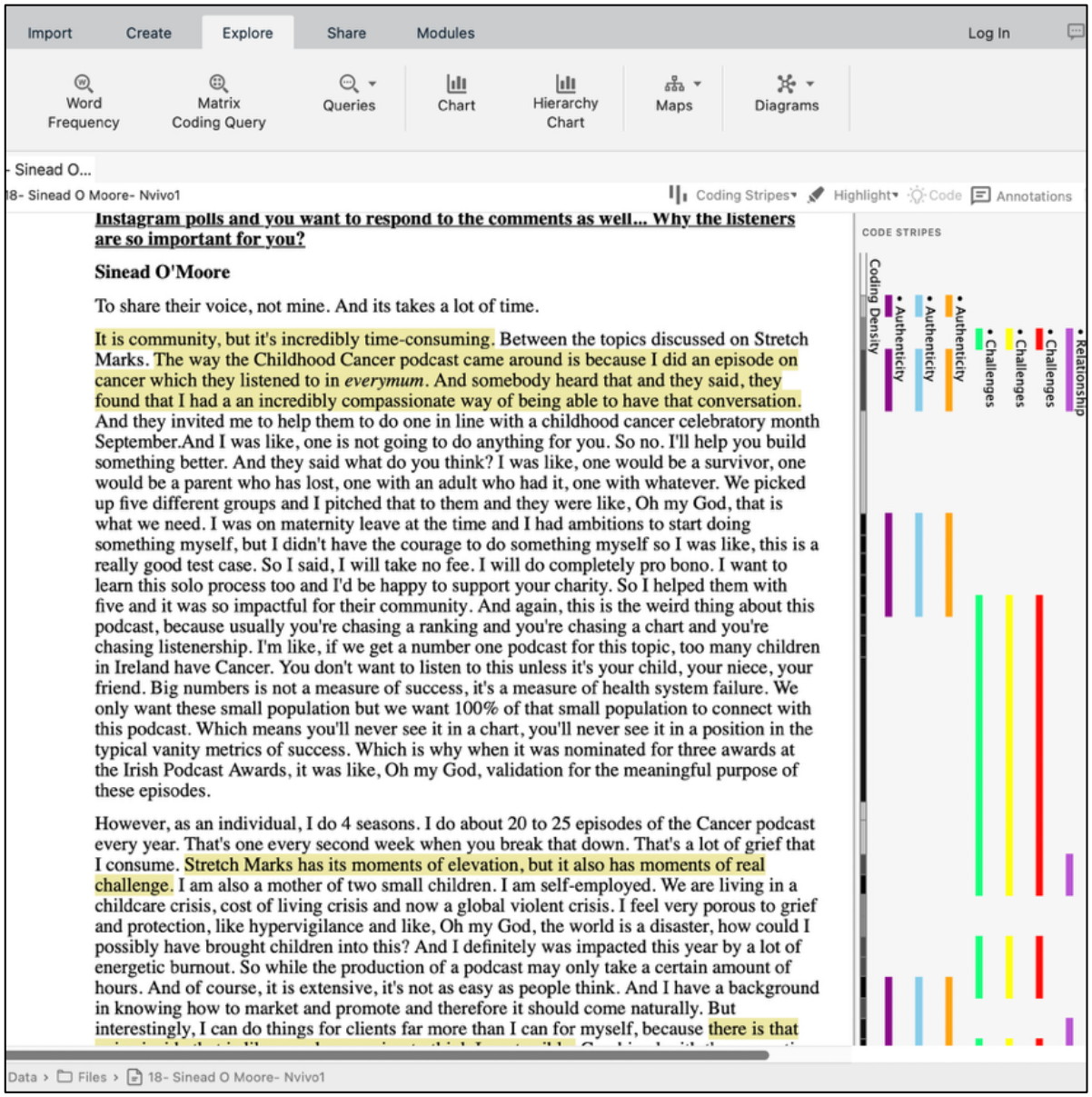


Appendix H. Main Themes and Subthemes

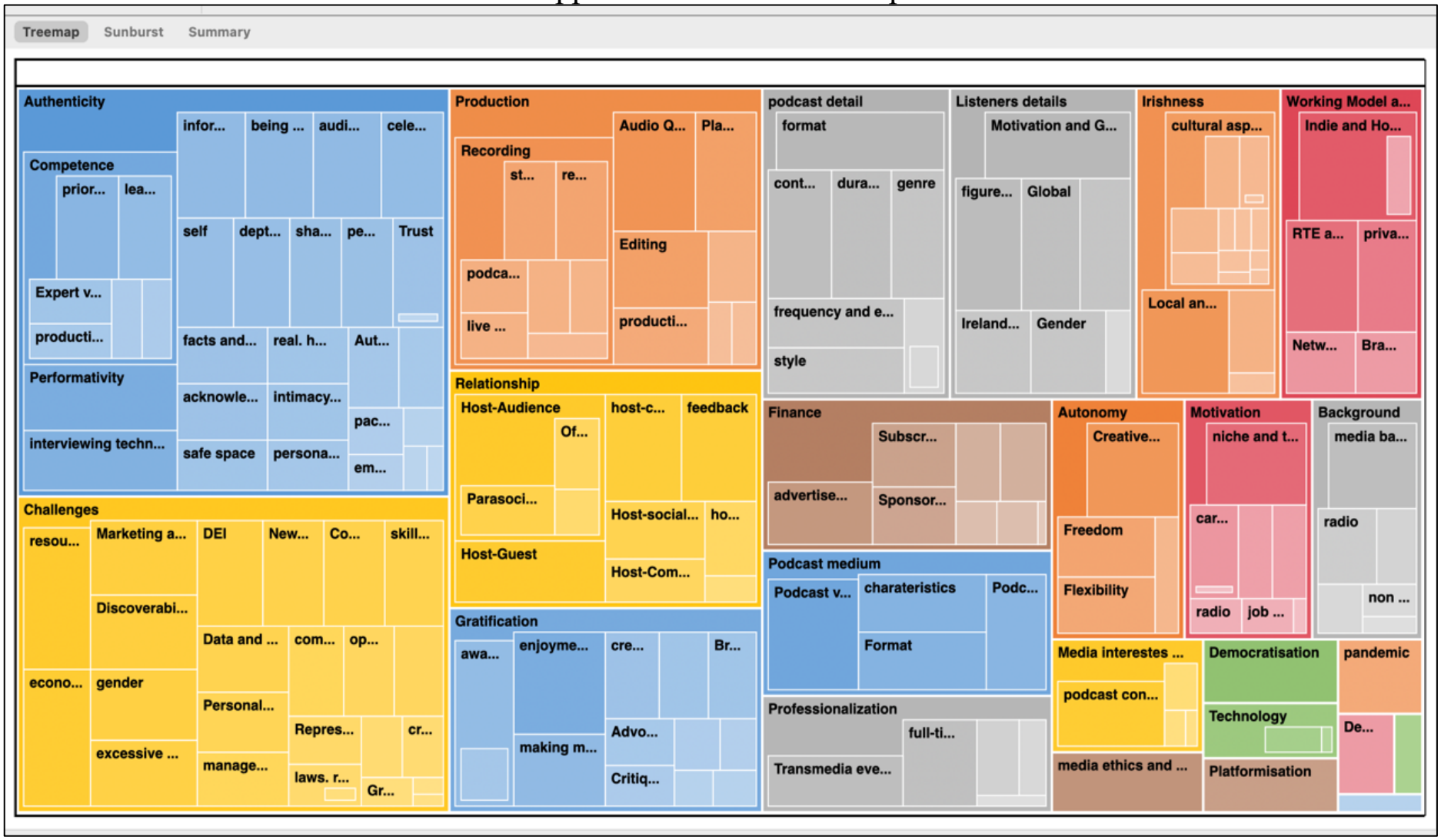
Overarching Themes	Themes	Subthemes
Personal Authenticity	Personal Expression	Being 'true to self', real, honest, and transparent
		Sharing vulnerabilities, personal story, identity, and experiences
		Performance of private and public self
	Motivations	Passion, advocacy, community building, enjoyment, and growth
		Financial success, career growth, recognition, and influencing audience
	Excessive Authenticity	Challenges in being authentic
		Ethics and boundary work
	Foundation Elements	Trust
		Intimacy
		Transparency
Relational Authenticity	Connections with Audiences	Reliability and connection
		Online and offline engagement
		Feedback and audience expectations
		Fan communities
	Relationship with Guests	(Non)confrontation and creating safe space
		Supportive environment
		Shared vulnerability
		Guest selection, rapport, and interview techniques
	Host-cohost and Team Relationship	Openness
		Collaboration and differences
		Personal relationships
	Cultural Context and Irishness	Norms, traditions, values, and avoiding stereotypes
		Self-promotion, storytelling, and humour
		Connections with local community
		Irish language, history, geography, accent
		Race, identity, and diversity
		Localisation and globalisation
Autonomy	Creative Agency	Narrative ownership and representation
	Creative Control	Exercise authority and decision-making
	Originality	Creativity, experimentation, and innovation
		Resistance to established media narratives
	Freedom	Regulations and accountability
		Institutional, commercial, and regulatory pressures
	Flexibility	Schedule and working conditions
Challenges of Autonomy	Platformisation	Ownership
		Discoverability, distribution, and monetisation
	Commercialisation	Funding schemes and revenue models
		Market pressures
		Sponsorships, branded content, and market consolidation
Professionalisation	Competence	Knowledge, learning, and training
		Audio quality and production value
		Non-technical skills

		Technical advances, AI, and automation
		Personal and professional roles
		Recognition and commercial success
	Podcasters' Well-being	Financial anxiety and precarity
		Emotional labour, burnout, and health
Genre Conventions	Narrative non-fiction	Ethical storytelling
		Factual accuracy
		Editorial credibility and reliance on experts
		Real-world relevance
		Emotional resonance
		Narrative interpretation and self-reflexivity
		News and journalism
		Documentary
		True crime
		Personal narratives
		Activist podcasts
	Chatcasts and Conversation	Comedy
		Monologue
		Panel conversation
		Interview
		Spontaneity
		Personal connections and relatability
		Revealing conversations, personal expression, confession, and perspective
	Fiction	Drama
		World-building, believable performance, and suspension of disbelief
		Immersive sound design
		The hybridity of genres
		Scripting, creativity, and storytelling
Production Stages	Pre-production	Planning and research
		Scripting and writing
	Production	Recording location and setting
		Recording sound effects
		Podcaster voice and performative techniques
	Post-production	Editing
		Sound design, music, effects, and silence
		Publishing, episodicity, frequency, paywall, and open access
		Promotion, marketing, and feedback
Misc.	Podcast Affordances	Convenience and amateur production
		Openness and democratisation
		Informality
		Long-form and flexible schedules
		(Non)visual
	Working Model and Affiliations	Independent podcasting
		Commercial podcasting
		Public service podcasting
		Branded podcasting
		Networks and studios
		Institutional constraints
		Demographics of podcasters

Appendix I. Initial Coding Example



Appendix J. Codes Treemap



Appendix K. List of Participants in Alphabetical Order

No.	Name	Role(s)	Working Model(s)	Podcast(s)	Participant Profile
1	Bernice Harrison	Host	Commercial	In The News	Bernice Harrison is an Irish Times journalist and co-host of *In The News* podcast, a daily podcast by The Irish Times that covers stories in Ireland and around the world.
2	Cian Sullivan	Host, Producer	Independent	Sissy That Pod; Queer Classified	Cian Sullivan is a podcast and radio host, who enjoys delving into queer cultural topics on podcasts *Sissy That Pod* and *Queer Classified* and on his weekly radio show Club 96 on RTÉ Pulse.
3	Ciarán Murphy	Host	Independent, Commercial	The Second Captains Podcast	Ciarán Murphy is the co-host of the independent conversational sports podcast *The Second Captains Podcast*. He is also a columnist at The Irish Times and author of *This Is The Life*.
4	Conor Reid	Host, Producer	Independent, Commercial	Words To That Effect	Conor Reid is a podcaster, producer, writer, trainer, and the Head of Podcasts at The Podcast Studios. He hosts and produces his own award-winning arts and culture podcast, *Words To That Effect*. At The Podcast Studios he has edited dozens of branded podcasts for business organisations.
5	Dee Reddy	Host, Producer	Independent, Commercial	Honey You're Ruining Our Kid; Inside Intercom	Dee Reddy is a producer and founder of independent podcast production company PoddleAudio. Dee also served as head of content development at GoLoud (a leading platform for digital audio in Ireland owned by Bauer Media Ireland). Dee has over 14 years of broadcasting experience as a radio presenter, podcast host, contributor, and producer. Currently she is a contributor to *The Last Word* on Today FM where she discusses the music industry news. Previously, she produced and presented a weekly business and tech podcast for Intercom.
6	Dusty Rhodes	Co-Host, Producer	Independent, Commercial	Tech Radio Ireland; Care +	Dusty Rhodes is the founder of independent podcast production company DustPod (Ireland) and BQ Podcast (UK). Dusty also hosts tech news podcast *Tech Radio Ireland*. Previously, Dusty produced and hosted shows on RTÉ 2FM including the station's flagship 'Hotline' show. Dusty has won multiple gold awards at Ireland's Annual IMRO Radio Awards.

7	Ed Roche	Host	Independent	Our Unique Tales	Ed Roche is a PPI Award-winning Irish radio presenter. Ed is the host and a producer of *Our Unique Tales*, a five-part podcast featuring real-life stories of LGBTQIA+ people growing up in Ireland.
8	Emma Ní Chearúil	Host, Producer	Independent, Commercial, RTÉ	Big Fan; Brisim Achan Riail; Ar Leac Mo Dhorais	Emma Ní Chearúil is the Station Manager of Raidió Rí-Rá and host of *Big Fan* podcast. She also works as presenter of Rí-Rá ar RnaG RTÉ, Dublin's Q102, and as a broadcast producer at Newstalk.
9	Helen Shaw	Host, Trainer, Producer	Independent	The Family of Things; The Panti Personals with Panti Bliss	Helen Shaw is the founder of Athena Media and Podcasting Ireland, Ireland's pioneering independent podcast companies, launched in 2006. Helen was the Managing Director of RTÉ Radio 1997-2002 and launched RTÉ lyric fm – Ireland's arts and music national radio channel. Helen hosts the podcast 'The Family of Things' and runs the podcast 'The Panti Personals'. She is a climate solutions storyteller and member of advisory board for New York Radio Awards Festival.
10	Hugh Linehan	Host	Commercial	Inside Politics	Hugh Linehan works as a Duty Editor at The Irish Times and presents the weekly *Inside Politics* podcast. He has previously been Arts and Culture Editor, Features Editor, Online Editor and Digital Development Editor, where he initiated and developed blogs, liveblogs, video and podcasts on irishtimes.com.
11	Ian Doyle	Producer	Commercial	Grief Encounters; The Kinahans; With Relish Podcast	Ian Doyle is an audio and podcast producer at The Irish Independent. Doyle is former Head of Podcasting for the Wireless Group (Urban Media and FM104). He has produced several podcasts, including *With Relish Podcast*, *Grief Encounters*, and *The Kinahans*.
12	Jacqui Hurley	Host	RTÉ	RTÉ GAA Podcast	Jacqui Hurley is a sports presenter on RTÉ and the host of *RTÉ GAA Podcast*. She is RTÉ presenter of The Sunday Game and author of book *Girls Play Too*. She co-presented Sunday Sport on RTÉ Radio 1 from 2009 to 2023.
13	John Davis	Co-Host, Producer	Independent	The David McWilliams Podcast	John Davis is the producer and co-host of *The David McWilliams Podcast*. With over 25 years in media production, John has worked as creative producer and sound mixer on podcasts, animation, radio documentaries, live broadcasting, commercials, and copywriting. He has won PPI Radio Award, New York Festivals, Love Radio Awards, and a Grand Prix Radio Advertising Award 2010.

14	John Roche	Producer	Independent	Yarn | A Story Podcast	John Roche is an independent producer of the narrative documentary and docu-drama series *Yarn*. Roche also works as a user experience designer.
15	Ken Early	Co-Host	Independent, Commercial	The Second Captains Podcast	Ken Early is a sports journalist, and the co-host of the sports podcast *The Second Captains Podcast*.
16	Leon Diop	Host	RTÉ	The Black and Irish Podcast	Leon Diop is the host and co-founder of Black & Irish, a non-profit organisation. Leon advocates for the Black community in Ireland, builds and connects Black communities with wider Irish society, and educates for an anti-racist mindset in Ireland. Leon has the 'An Post Irish Book Awards 2023' for *Black and Irish: Legends, Trailblazers and Everyday Heroes*.
17	Liam Geraghty	Host, Producer	Independent, Commercial	Meet Your Maker; The Comic Cast; Petrified; Inside Intercom	Liam Geraghty was one of the first podcasters in Ireland. His first podcast - The Comic Cast - was the first podcast to be archived by The National Library of Ireland. He currently produces Petrified - a New York Festivals Radio Award winning horror drama podcast. Currently he is audio content producer for tech company Intercom. He also produced and hosted The History Channel's official *Vikings* podcast. He was an IMRO Radio Award-winning reporter. Liam also produced comedy drama podcasts for kids for RTÉ Junior.
18	Mario Rosenstock	Host	Independent	The Mario Rosenstock Podcast	Mario Rosenstock is a multi-award-winning comedian, Ireland's leading comedy podcast host, satirist, and mimic. He is the creator and voice behind GiftGrub (a series of comic sketches, impersonations, and parodies) on the Ian Dempsey breakfast show on Today FM since 1999. Mario has won PPI National Radio Award ten times. He is also the creator and voice behind the satirical football puppet show 'Special 1 TV' which ran on BBC 3.
19	Maura Fay	Co-Host, Producer	RTÉ	The 2 Johnnies Podcast	Maura Fay is the producer at *The 2 Johnnies Podcast*, Ireland's most listened-to comedy podcast. She worked as a researcher at RTÉ with The Late Late Show, The Works Presents, Up For The Match, The Saturday Night Show With Brendan O'Connor, Saturday Night With Miriam and the Brainstorm series on RTÉ Radio 1.
20	Niall Kitson	Co-Host	Independent	Tech Radio Ireland	Niall Kitson is the editor of TechCentral.ie and co-host of *Tech Radio Ireland*, Ireland's longest-running tech news podcast since 2006.
21	Nicky Ryan	Producer	Commercial	The Explainer; Redacted	Nicky Ryan works at Journal Media as Senior Media Producer and has produced news and documentary podcasts.

				Lives; Stardust	
22	Oliver Callan	Host	RTÉ	Callans' Kicks	Oliver Callan is an Irish comedian who hosts *Callan's Kicks* podcast and works as a presenter for RTÉ Radio 1. He is the presenter of the 'Killing Leprechauns' comedy podcast on BBC Sounds. Oliver is the presenter of the prestigious annual Irish Book of the Year Award on RTÉ One television. He's also a columnist and a voiceover artist.
23	Órla Ryan	Host, Producer	Commercial	Redacted Lives	Orla Ryan is the presenter of award-winning podcast *Redacted Lives*. She is also a news correspondent at The Journal.
24	Pat O'Mahony	Host, Producer	Independent	Off Message	Pat O'Mahony is a former RTÉ journalist, host, and independent producer of *Off Message* podcast. Off Message covers media development in Ireland. In Pat O'Mahony's 30 years in broadcasting, he has produced the Emmy-winning Reporters At War series for Discovery in 2003 on the history of war journalism. He has also produced documentaries for RTÉ Radio 1's Documentary On One strand between 2009 and 2012. He has produced several shows in RTÉ Radio 1 and RTÉ 2FM since 2010.
25	Patrick Haughey	Host, Trainer, Producer	Independent, Commercial	The Mario Rosenstock Podcast; Ireland Unfiltered	Patrick Haughey is Ireland's leading podcast trainer, producer, and consultant. He produces *The Mario Rosenstock Podcast*, *Ireland Unfiltered* and several branded podcasts. He is the founder of AudioBrand, Ireland's leading branded podcast agency, working with brands including EY, Lidl, Sisk, Ibec, and Irish Life. He is also the Founder and Director of The Today FM School of Radio and Podcasting.
26	Peter Dunne	Writer, Director	Independent	Petrified	Peter Dunne is the director and writer of the independent horror anthology podcast *Petrified*. Dunne also writes for theatre and has produced an immersive audio tour of Dublin. He is also the founder of The Ghost Story Gathering.
27	Rebecca Kelly	Host	Independent	Everywhere We Go	Rebecca Kelly is the host of Everywhere We Go, an independently produced interview podcast about personal stories and struggles. Rebecca Kelly works as business development director for Vox group. She is a specialist in cruise products.
28	Rob Flynn	Producer	Independent	The Why of Where; Changing	Rob Flynn works as an independent audio producer and has produced fiction and non-fiction radio and podcast productions. Rob has provided post-production services for feature films, television series, short films, documentaries, animation, podcasts, and commercials. Series he has mixed

				Coasts; Resident	have been broadcast on networks including RTÉ, ITV, CBS Reality, Quest Red and TV3.
29	Robbie Lawlor	Co-Host	Independent	Poz Vibe Podcast	Dr Robbie Lawlor is an HIV activist and co-host of independently produced *Poz Vibe Podcast*. The podcast focuses on the experiences of people living with HIV in Ireland. Robbie is also the co-founder of Access to Medicines Ireland.
30	Sinéad O'Moore	Host	Independent	Stretch Marks Podcast; everymum	Sinead is the host and producer of *Stretch Marks Podcast*. She is also a brand and content professional and the founder of @thebrandstory.ie. She is an ex-host and head of brand and content strategy of the parenting podcast, 'everymum'.

Appendix L. Details of Podcast in Alphabetical Order

Sr.	Podcast	Genre(s)	Sub-genre(s)	Categories	Description (Notable themes/ Topics/ Audience)
1	Ar Leac Mo Dhorais	Conversational, Narrative non-fiction	Interview, Panel, Documentary	Irish language, Arts and Culture	Ar Leac Mo Dhorais is a series of podcasts with Raidió na Life sharing the stories of the Gaels during the pandemic as they explore their own areas within strict lockdown restrictions in Ireland.
2	Big Fan	Conversational	Interview, Panel	Arts and Culture	Big Fan is an indie podcast about music, fans, bands, and icons. Hosted by Emma Ní Chearúil, it is a monthly conversation with a fan of an iconic band or musician, discussing the discographies that have soundtracked their favourite memories, darkest moments, and highest highs. From rock legends to hip hop cult classics, fans gush about their most enduring relationships - artists and albums.
3	Brisim Achan Riail	Conversational	Interview	Irish language, Arts and Culture	*Brisim Achan Riail* is an Irish language podcast that explores the music of minority languages and the connection between music, language, and community. The podcast features interviews with Huw Stephens (BBC and Other Voices), DJ Próvaí (Kneecap), and others.
4	Callans' Kicks	Conversational	Monologue, Interview	Comedy	Callan's Kicks is a weekly satire podcast with TV specials, comedy albums, and live shows. Oliver Callan takes on well-known voices in the worlds of entertainment, politics, and sport. Callan's Kicks has been running since 2012 and is followed by a huge audience interested in Irish politics.
5	Care + Conversations	Conversational	Panel Conversation, Interview	Health and Wellbeing, Business, Branded	Care + Conversations is a seven-part podcast series by Careplus Pharmacy. The branded podcast produced by Dusty Rhodes features expert guests who were encouraged to share their own experiences of becoming a first-time mother alongside their professional expertise. The combination of the host being a first-time mother and expert guests sharing their experiences created a compelling connection with the target audience and the CarePlus brand.
6	Changing Coasts	Fiction	Drama	Arts and Culture, Climate change	Changing Coasts is an audio drama podcast set in an Irish coastal town about the threats of rising sea levels. It is written and directed by Rob Flynn and produced by Bjorn Mac Giolla. The story follows

					two researchers tasked with interviewing the remaining residents about the area's past, present, and uncertain future. Through recording on location, they were able to capture naturalistic performances and authentic soundscapes, which were later augmented with original music, foley recordings and sound design. The story is set in the near future but draws on the concerns of today. It delves into contemporary debates around our relationship with nature, activism, migration, and the challenges facing rural communities.
7	everymum	Conversational	Interview	Health and Wellbeing, Kids and Family	Hosted by Aisling Keenan, *everymum* the podcast talks about motherhood. It includes reassuring words, support on the motherhood journey, and authentic honest chat. It reminds listeners that every pregnancy, birth, baby, and mum is unique, and every feeling along the way is completely valid.
8	Everywhere We Go	Conversational	Interview	Health and Wellbeing, Society and Culture	Everywhere We Go is an independently produced weekly interview podcast about personal stories and struggles. The host Rebecca Kelly opens up her home to her guests and brings real stories from real people with topics that have impacted families all over Ireland.
9	Grief Encounters	Conversational	Panel Conversation	Arts and Culture, Health and Wellbeing	Grief Encounters is a weekly podcast series that looks at an issue that affects us all and yet remains so difficult to talk about: grief. Hosts Venetia Quick and Sasha Hamrogue open up the conversation around loss and create a modern platform for people to share their own experiences and start an open dialogue around the subject of death and all that comes with it.
10	Honey You're Ruining Our Kid	Conversational, Narrative Non-fiction	Interview, Panel Conversation	Kids and Family, Technology	Honey You're Ruining Our Kid is a parenting podcast from the team behind An Irishman Abroad. The hosts Jarlath and Tina Regan tackle the questions, the worries and the day-to-day hilarity that comes with modern parenting. Jarlath collects anonymous questions from frazzled and exhausted parents, while Tina shares more than 20 years of experience working in early childhood intellectual, behavioural, and social development.
11	In The News	Narrative non-fiction	Journalism, Interview	News and Politics	In The News is a daily news podcast from The Irish Times that takes a close look at the news stories in Ireland and around the world. The podcast is presented by Bernice Harrison and Sorcha Pollak.

12	Inside Intercom	Conversational	Interview	Technology, Business, Branded	Inside Intercom is a tech-related interview podcast by Intercom. Produced by Liam Geraghty, it features the team from Intercom interview makers and doers from the worlds of product management, design, startups, and marketing.
13	Inside Politics	Narrative non-fiction, Conversational	Journalism, Interview	News and Politics	Inside Politics is an Irish Times news and politics podcast hosted by Hugh Linehan. It offers analysis of the Irish political scene featuring journalists, political thinkers, and the occasional politician.
14	Ireland Unfiltered	Conversational	Interview, Panel Conversation	Arts, Society, and Culture,	Hosted by Dion Fanning, Ireland Unfiltered features conversations with some of the biggest names in Irish entertainment, sport, politics, and media. Fanning also speaks to notable international figures on important issues affecting Ireland today.
15	Meet Your Maker	Conversational	Interview	Arts and Culture	Meet Your Maker is an arts and culture review podcast focusing on the makers. It is hosted by Liam Geraghty and won Bronze for 'Best Culture Podcast' at the New York Festivals Radio Awards. It has featured cartoonists, filmmakers, conservators, and video game makers. The previous seasons have told the stories of a variety of cultural creators, woven together with an attention to audio detail.
16	Off Message	Conversational	Interview	Education, Arts and Culture, Media literacy	Off Message is an educational podcast that covers media development in Ireland. It was produced and hosted by TV-and-radio producer/director Pat O'Mahony in conjunction with his Off Message media blog. It explored diversity in the media, approaches to dealing with a local and a national audience. It also covered Dublin City University's FuJo Institute research into the rapidly changing world of journalism and data technology.
17	Our Unique Tales	Narrative non-fiction, Conversational	Activist, Interview	Health and Wellbeing	Our Unique Tales is a five-part interview podcast featuring real-life stories of LGBTQIA+ people growing up in Ireland. After keeping his sexuality, a secret for over 31 years, Ed Roche, breakfast radio presenter/producer shares his experiences. In this podcast series, we hear the real-life stories of LGBTQIA+ people who grew up in Ireland. We learn what life was like for them growing up and what life is like for these people now.
18	Petrified	Fiction	Drama	Arts and Culture, Horror	Petrified is a horror fiction anthology podcast that tells the chilling tales of ordinary people encountering the supernatural, and their terrifying fates. Produced by Liam Geraghty and directed by Peter

					Dunne, its fourth season comes with a full cast of fourteen Irish actors, along with guest stars Dastmalchian and Dylan Baker.
19	Poz Vibe Podcast	Narrative non-fiction, Conversational	Activist, Interview	Education, Health and Wellbeing, Society and Culture	Poz Vibe Podcast is an independently produced podcast for people living with HIV, their friends, family, and allies. Hosted by HIV activists Veda Lady and Robbie Lawlor, it offers a safe place to share the stories of our HIVIPs while challenging stigma around HIV diagnosis. The podcast's aesthetic aims to be realistic, vibrant, and accessible, encouraging engagement and reducing stigma through a fresh, approachable style.
20	Queer Classified	Conversational	Panel Conversation, Interview	Society and Culture, Education	Queer Classified is an independently produced podcast that covers queer cultural topics. Cian Sullivan and James O'Hagan invite a special guest each week to dissect the most loved/hated/rated queer pop culture moments.
21	Redacted Lives	Narrative non-fiction	Journalism, Documentary	History, True crime	Redacted Lives is a six-part documentary podcast series from The Journal that tells the story of mother and baby homes in Ireland; from what happened within; to how the State continues to deny survivors access to information, proper redress, and ownership of their true stories. Presented by Órla Ryan, produced by Nicky Ryan with executive producer Sinéad O'Carroll.
22	Resident	Narrative non-fiction	Documentary	Education, Society and Culture	Resident is a ten-part podcast series that tells individual stories on identity, culture, and the immigrant experience in Ireland directed by Rob Flynn. Each episode focuses on one person's story, where they explore the unique personal histories that led them here and what home means to them today. The series features a diverse group of contributors, including student who worked on the frontlines during the Syrian civil war, a Brazilian-American, and a Somali filmmaker. The series also highlights the unique challenges faced by immigrants and minority groups during the Covid-19 pandemic.
23	RTÉ GAA Podcast	Conversational	Panel Conversation	Sports	In RTÉ GAA Podcast, RTÉ Sport team takes a look at all the biggest issues in football and hurling, plus preview and review the weekend's action with RTÉ's top GAA analysts.
24	Sissy That Pod	Conversational	Panel Conversation, Interview	Arts and Culture	Sissy That Pod is an independently produced podcast that recaps RuPaul's Drag Race UK and features discussions about drag culture.

25	Stardust	Narrative non-fiction	Journalism, Documentary	History, Investigative	Stardust is a six-part narrative documentary podcast series from The Journal that delves into the tragic fire that led to the loss of 48 lives at the Stardust nightclub in Ireland in 1981. With the families left still fighting for justice almost four decades on, the podcast asks how Ireland got it wrong the first time around. Stardust is presented by Sean Murray and produced by Nicky Ryan.
26	Stretch Marks Podcast	Conversational	Interview	Health and Wellbeing, Kids and Family	Stretch Marks Podcast is an interview podcast that discusses challenging aspects of parental, personal, and professional lives. Sinead O'Moore interviews inspirational and influential guests as they talk about the parts of life/family/career/relationships/self that can truly stretch us. It acknowledges the challenges we face but leaves you feeling empowered.
27	Tech Radio Ireland	Conversational	Panel Conversation, Interview	Technology, Business	Tech Radio Ireland has been Ireland's longest-running tech news podcast since 2006. The weekly podcast traces the story of technology in Ireland at all levels from start-ups formed at the kitchen table, to multinationals drawn here by a motivated and skilled workforce, to artists who use AI to show what it means to be human in the 21st century.
28	The 2 Johnnies Podcast	Conversational	Panel Conversation, Interview	Comedy	The 2 Johnnies Podcast is Ireland's most listened-to comedy podcast with over 750,000 weekly listeners, according to digital audio sales house AudioOne. It covers comedy and life stories from Ireland's comedy duo 'The 2 Johnnies'. It has featured international guests like Eddie Hearn, Neil Razor Ruddock, James Buckley and Liam Gallagher as well as Irish personalities like Tommy Tiernan, Joanne McNally, Roddy Collins, and The Wolfe Tones. Beyond guests, The 2 Johnnies Podcast also covers a vast range of topics, from sextortion and catfishing to household appliances. It won Best Comedy Podcast at The Irish Podcast Awards.
29	The Black and Irish Podcast	Conversational	Panel Conversation	Society and Culture, Race and Identity	The Black and Irish Podcast, produced by RTÉ, features the lived experiences of black and mixed-race people living in Ireland through conversations about culture, society, and family. The podcast features conversations and interviews to create a more equal and inclusive Ireland and improve the quality of life for black and mixed-race people in Ireland.

30	The Comic Cast	Conversational	Interview	Arts and Culture	The Comic Cast is an Irish podcast about comics - both superhero and indie. It is an independently produced interview and conversational podcast by Liam Geraghty. It was the first podcast to be archived by The National Library of Ireland.
31	The David McWilliams Podcast	Conversational	Panel Conversation, Interview	Economy, News and Politics	The David McWilliams Podcast covers economics and has 36 million+ downloads. John Davis produces and co-hosts the podcast with Irish economist and author David McWilliams. The aim of this weekly podcast is to make economics easy, uncomplicated, and accessible. Every week the hosts tease out big economic or political issues facing us, not just in Ireland but in Europe and further afield.
32	The Explainer	Narrative non-fiction	Journalism, Documentary	News and Politics	The Explainer is a weekly news podcast from The Journal that takes a deeper look at one big news story each week. It covers the background, facts, and explains why a story is in the news.
33	The Family of Things	Conversational	Interview, Panel Conversation	Arts, Society, and Culture	The Family of Things is an independent podcast about life, hosted by Helen Shaw. In these fortnightly conversations, Helen talks with guests about their life journey, what formed them, informs them and inspires them.
34	The Kinahans	Narrative non-fiction,	True Crime, Documentary	History, Crime	The Kinahans is a true crime series from The Irish Sun telling the complete story of Ireland's most feared crime family– Kinahans. The podcast looks at how a middle-class man and his two sons from Dublin became Europe’s biggest drugs cartel. The podcast also looks at what comes next for the cartel, as they continue to evade police services globally.
35	The Mario Rosenstock Podcast	Conversational	Comedy, Interview	Comedy	The Mario Rosenstock Podcast is an independently produced interview-based comedy podcast. The podcast is hosted by Mario Rosenstock, Ireland’s popular comic satirist. The podcast features comedy, rants about the state of the world, and interviews with guests along with comic sketches, impersonations, and parodies.
36	The Panti Personals with Panti Bliss	Conversational	Activist, Interview, Panel Conversation	Arts, Society, and Culture	The Panti Personals with Panti Bliss is a podcast from the mothership Pantisocracy. Panti Bliss is the stage name of Rory O'Neill, a renowned Irish drag queen, performer, and prominent LGBTQ+ rights activist. Panti Bliss hosts intimate, one to one conversations with unique performances. The Panti Personals is an Athena Media independent podcast, produced by Helen Shaw.

37	The Second Captains Podcast	Conversational	Panel Conversation	Sports	The Second Captains Podcast is an award-winning independent sports podcast. The podcast is one of the most downloaded Irish podcasts on Patreon. Second Captains is also a production company specialising in sports podcasts and radio. The Second Captains Podcast was launched in March 2013 and quickly became the most popular pod in Ireland, winning the iTunes Podcast of The Year in 2014.
38	The Why of Where	Narrative non-fiction, Conversational	Documentary, Monologue	Education, Arts and Culture, Geography	The Why of Where is a three-part podcast series about geography that tries to answer the why, what, where, when, who, and how about the world we live in. It is an independent educational podcast produced by Rob Flynn.
39	With Relish Podcast	Conversational	Panel Conversation, Monologue	Arts and Culture	With Relish Podcast is a bi-weekly food podcast looking at Ireland's culinary industry and identity, with a focus on the individuals that make it up. The independent podcast was produced and hosted by Ian Doyle.
40	Words To That Effect	Conversational, Non-fiction, Fiction	Monologue, Interview, Conversation, Drama	Arts and Culture	Words To That Effect is an independent research-based literary storytelling podcast that covers fiction and popular culture. It is a narrative storytelling show, hosted and produced by Conor Reid, which explores the intriguing places where fiction, history, science, and popular culture intersect and inspire. From the Victorian past to utopian futures, dinosaurs to detectives, zombies to mummies, it covers how literature shapes our understanding of popular culture.
41	Yarn | A Story Podcast	Fiction, non-fiction	Drama, Documentary	Arts and Culture	Yarn is an independent documentary and docu-drama podcast. Yarn has about 26 different stories now, each in a different style. Most episodes are standalone, but some bigger stories are part of a series. These include a three-part doc series on the history of disability and a two-part docu-drama about a German spy in Ireland during WW2. Yarns have also taken listeners on a trip around the Chernobyl exclusion zone, on a ride-along with a New York police officer and into the bizarre palace of a corrupt dictator.