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Podcast as a transmedia sound extension of audio-visual fiction

El podcast como extensión transmedia sonora de la ficción audiovisual

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Abstract

The flexibility of the podcast, a format which favors the listener autonomy and control in the access to the content and the intimacy and personalization in the listening, allows us to expand the reach of audiovisual fiction through transmedia stories that expand the possibilities of the user's connection with their stories, backgrounds, and characters. This paper analyses the fifteen podcasts produced in Spain during the period 2015-2021 as extensions of series launched on broadcast television channels (La1, Telecinco and Antena 3), pay channels (FOX) and video-on-demand platforms (Movistar+, HBO Max and Amazon Prime Video). The analysis confirms that all of them give continuity to the original narrative universe through a wide variety of sound genres –audio-fictions, interviews, talk shows, reports, and documentaries– and exclusive, distinctive, and valuable story contributions. At the same time, it is notable that, in some cases, distribution strategies are not well defined and do not take advantage of all platforms and devices for accessing content. In any case, the great potential of digital audio as a creative, efficient, and economically accessible resource, both artistically and commercially, is evident. It favors the generation of engagement and promotes a culture of participation and interaction among fans that becomes an effective response to the growing fragmentation of audiences in the contemporary digital ecosystem.

Keywords

Transmedia; Series; Podcast; Audio; Storytelling

Resumen

La ductilidad del podcast, un formato que favorece la autonomía y el control del oyente en el acceso al contenido y la intimidad y personalización en su escucha, permite expandir el alcance de la ficción audiovisual a través de relatos transmedia que amplían las posibilidades de conexión del usuario con sus historias, entornos y personajes. Esta investigación analiza los quince podcasts producidos en España durante el periodo 2015-2021 como extensiones de series estrenadas en cadenas de televisión en abierto (La1, Telecinco y Antena 3), canales de pago (FOX) y plataformas de video bajo demanda (Movistar+, HBO Max y Amazon Prime Video). El estudio confirma que todos ellos dan continuidad al universo narrativo original mediante una amplia variedad de géneros sonoros –audioficciones, entrevistas, tertulias, reportajes y documentales– y aportaciones argumentales exclusivas, distintivas y valiosas. Al mismo tiempo, se constata que, en algunos casos, las estrategias de distribución no están bien definidas ni aprovechan todas las plataformas y dispositivos de acceso al contenido. En todo caso, se evidencia el gran potencial del audio digital como un recurso creativo, eficiente y económicamente asequible tanto a nivel artístico como comercial. Con él se favorece la generación del engagement y se promueve una cultura de participación e interacción entre los fans que se convierte en una efectiva réplica a la creciente fragmentación de las audiencias en el contemporáneo ecosistema digital.

Palabras clave

Transmedia; Series; Podcast; Audio; Narrativa

1. Introduction

The consolidation of internet as a convergent scenario for the distribution and consumption of information and audio-visual entertainment has not only redefined the communications industry's production and commercialisation processes, but also the relationship between providers and audiences, which is increasingly influenced by technology (Pérez-Tornero and Pedrero-Esteban, 2020: 49). The exponential increase in contents, the multiplicity and portability of devices, the simplicity and immediacy of access and the resulting fragmentation of the audience have all combined to standardise the intrinsic properties present in almost all digital creations: ubiquity, timelessness, reversibility, multimodality and interactivity (Sádaba and Pérez-Escoda, 2020: 101).

These elements provide the foundation for the recent transformation processes affecting the media sector over the last few years, particularly in the audio market (Martínez-Costa and Legorburu, 2020: 304). This change began with the spread of radio wave frequencies on the internet, followed by customised audio formats, and expanded into original forms of multimedia expression inspired by digital players. The growth in listening options has led to an increase in the time spent on online sound, as well as the frequency of use and the devices used to access it (Barrios Rubio and Gutiérrez García, 2021: 52), accompanied by an increasing impact on users' consumption habits (Terol-Bolínches, Pedrero-Esteban and Pérez-Alaejos, 2021: 477). This explains the growing interest in the design and distribution of audio contents which broaden the reach of products created in other languages: audiobooks, press articles read aloud by their authors or podcasts designed as transmedia stories (Piñero-Otero and Pedrero-Esteban, 2022: 5).

Transmedia storytelling — referred to in professional and academic spheres by the initials TS — combines the enormous range of possibilities offered by the digital ecosystem for the creation, diversification and distribution of stories. According to Henry Jenkins, the pioneer in this field (2008: 25), transmedia storytelling represents a cultural phenomenon that is typical of the current era of convergence in which essential elements of a narrative fiction can be dispersed across multiple channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience by combining all of them (Rodríguez Ferrándiz, 2014: 22). The idea is that each medium or channel makes a unique, distinctive and valuable contribution to the unfolding of the story, that is to say, it is not an adaptation, transposition or intersemiotic translation.

Given that they are global stories created from different tales, the traditional way of structuring of a story in acts has disappeared due the quantity of media involved. However, each individual medium maintains the traditional structures, as each tale needs to stand alone from the rest and be understandable on its own, without requiring any knowledge of other parts of the story. For this reason, the narrative universe is likely to spread across different channels and platforms in a coordinated way in order to elaborate on the storyline in more detail (Rodríguez-Ferrándiz, Ortiz Gordo and Sáez Núñez, 2014: 76).

TS creates narrative worlds which include stories, characters, places and a vast sweep of time. These contents make the public want to explore them and discover their secrets, enabling the audience to become immersed in the stories, which fulfils the purpose of creating narratives that are complex, coherent and consistent with a time sequence that is clear and comprehensible, although it may not be linear (Cabezuelo-Lorenzo, Miranda-Galbe and Barceló, 2020: 28). According to Klastrup and Tosca (2014: 58), the transmedia world incorporates three complementary dimensions to achieve narrative efficiency: a) *Mythos*, namely the reference to the historical or cultural backstory of the narrative world; b) *Topos*, the definition of the space and time in which the stories are set; and c) *Ethos*, or the moral and/or ethical aspect which defines the characters.

These three dimensions of the transmedia universe help the fans and creators to generate a mental images, therefore each narrative associated with a main story should consider these aspects to expand the universe and achieve the narrative richness and complexity inherent in TS. The most relevant, valuable element in the process, and which sets it apart from conventional forms of narrative, is the extension of the story: if there is no extension, it cannot be said to be TS. Audiences will only try other platforms if they find content there which provides them with new details and experiences (Albadalejo and Sánchez-Martínez, 2019: 18). Each content should add something new to the story to resume the narrative tension and provide new information so that the user feels that the narrative universe is being expanded. This expansion may be guided in different directions if there are elements in each case that are unknown up to that point; rather than repeating or reiterating details or events, it is important to offer new levels of understanding to gain users' loyalty. The expansion of the story should not be approached sequentially, it can be also be achieved asynchronously, at different points in the story, without affecting comprehension (Scolari and Piñón, 2016: 26).

All media, devices, platforms or environments — physical or virtual — can be used as vehicles for TS; essentially, each new contribution should be adapted to the characteristics of these media or channels and some indispensable components should be maintained: the geography or space; the history or time; and the characters. The key to TS lies not so much in a change of the tale's ingredients as in the

way it readjusts to fit a framework in which the structure has less importance than the spatio-temporal dimension (Vázquez, González and Quintás, 2019: 75).

The transmediality of a story is not always planned before it unfolds; Scolari, Jiménez and Guerrero (2012: 141) identified two variants according to how they are executed: strategic, when the temporal or spatial expansion is planned beforehand; and tactical, when the idea does not exist before the extension, it develops progressively and may even arise for reasons which were unknown at the beginning of the project. A system of degrees of extension is needed, based on whether they are based on time, space, characters or action: in the first case, TS offers stories which happen at different times to the main story; strategies based on physical space refer to content that presents different places to those already known; characters are used as a basis to expand the story's boundaries with new characters (or the appearance of those who had been named but were not part of the story) or to explore existing ones further; finally, strategies based on action allow the story to be expanded with new plots or existing ones in greater detail (Pedrero-Esteban, Establés-Heras and Alcázar, 2022: 146).

2. The podcast as a transmedia resource

The podcast is increasingly used as a way to broaden the narrative universes of series and films and strengthen their relationship with their fans. This is due to the combination of the nature of the podcast — flexible, malleable and specialised — and its growing presence in digital leisure (worldwide, an average of 34% of internet users listen to this format every month, according to the 2022 *Digital News Report*). As indicated by García-Marín and Aparici (2018: 1074), podcasts have their own independent, specific narrative structure which provides creative transmedia experiences by extending stories to other platforms and building different types of content. In Spain commitment to transmediality in serial productions has been growing and is increasingly firm, particularly in the second decade of this new century; this is reflected in different papers, among others, Scolari, Jiménez and Guerrero, 2012; Costa-Sánchez and Piñero-Otero, 2012; Rodríguez Ferrándiz, Ortiz Gordo and Sáez Núñez, 2014; Cascajosa and Molina, 2017; Ivars-Nicolás and Zaragoza-Fuster, 2017; Olmedo and López Villafranca, 2019; or Ortega and Padilla, 2020. However, at that time transmedia expansion had not yet explored the potential of audio compared to other physical or virtual formats: video blogs, webisodes, social media, books, comics, board games, puzzles, video games, plays...

During the process of sharing immersive experiences through different channels, radio — or audio — has taken a while to find its place as a vehicle for transmedia storytelling; however, mention should be made of the ground-breaking work by the Radio TEA FM School in Zaragoza, such as *Pop Pins* (based on the stories of a woman writer who creates parallel worlds through radio fiction), *Red 3.0*, a radio web series which lets the listener produce content and contribute to the storyline, or *Híbridos Sonoros*, transmedia radio documentaries which are disseminated on the website and feature user interaction (López Villafranca, 2018: 69). However, it was Radio Nacional de España (RNE) that first backed audio stories linked to television fiction series. The government-owned public service radio station had already been a pioneer in radio series during the period following the Spanish Civil War, although the launch of audio narrative as a vehicle for the extension and expansion of fiction series was not consolidated as an effective transmedia strategy until 2015, with *Carlos Rey Emperador* and, particularly, *El Ministerio del Tiempo* (*The Ministry of Time*), both of which were released on the channel TVE.

When switching from the series *Isabel* to *Carlos Rey Emperador* in 2015, we can see that there is a content gap between the two stories which needs to be covered in some way to assist fans in making the transition from one story to the other. This is how *Carlos de Gante* came into being, a fictional conversation with Charles V during his retirement at Yuste where he recalls his childhood in Flanders, which establishes his character the emperor as seen in the series (Espinosa de los Monteros, 2018, par. 6).

Thus, the use of the podcast established itself as a vehicle for narrative continuity beyond being just a formula used by producers to connect with the fans; this is the case of *Chernobyl*, *Watchmen* or *The Good Place*, shows which were released on television channels or video-on-demand platforms (HBO or Netflix), whose directors, producers and actors recorded podcasts once the respective seasons had ended in order to talk to audiences and answer their questions. Fans themselves have reinforced this community feeling by using this format: this happened with *Hielo y Fuego*, a podcast about *Game of Thrones* which produced over 230 episodes, gained 35,000 fans on Facebook and Twitter, and even inspired a mass gathering in the town of Osuna (Gil, 2020, par. 4).

Moreover, the television industry has begun to view the podcast as a format that is more accessible, direct and efficient in testing new fiction series than the traditional pilot episodes, whilst providing inspiration for screen adaptations of stories that originally only existed as audio in the increasingly competitive world of video platforms. In the United States podcasts are associated with high quality productions where the narrative is based on the audio-aspect and focuses on the photography, sound

effects and music (Olmedo and López Villafranca, 2017: 209); hence their attraction as a source for audio-visual adaptation. One of the most prolific podcast networks is Wondery, owned by Amazon, whose shows have been the starting point for series on Apple TV+ (*The Shrink Next Door*) or Peacock (*Dr. Death* and *Joe vs. Carole*) (Dams, 2022, par. 4). In Spain the series *Apagón* on Movistar+ (Buendía Estudios, 2022) was inspired by the podcast *El Gran Apagón* (Podium Podcast, 2016), and Pokeepsie Films plans to adapt the audio fiction *Santuario* (Phi Beta Lambda, Audible, 2021) for Atresmedia. Its purpose? As its creator José Ángel Esteban remarks, “the key lies in the search for the ‘disseminated audience’, that is to say, the hunt for somebody who can read, listen and watch on different devices” (Labastida, 2021, par. 2).

3. Methodology and sample

The purpose of this study is to analyse all the creations in the podcast format which have been designed as transmedia extensions of audio-visual fiction series released in Spain between 2015 (the date of the first show of this type: *Carlos de Gante*, an audio extension of *Carlos, Rey Emperador*) and 2021. The study identifies the narrative, expressive and strategic features of these audio productions designed as a prologue, epilogue or extension of the audio-visual story in order to widen the arenas for communication, provide more information and introduce formulas for social interaction. The sample is composed of fifteen audio series linked to thirteen audio-visual series: six were broadcast on linear television channels — three on RTVE’s channel La 1, two on Telecinco-Mediaset and one on Antena 3 and the subscription channel FOX — and nine on SVOD platforms (five on Movistar+ and one on HBO Max). In total, the study analyses 109 podcasts with a combined duration of 44 hours.

The research tools used to identify the narrative expansion strategies in this format were based on previous studies — Jenkins, 2008; Scolari, Jiménez and Guerrero, 2012; Rodríguez Ferrándiz, Ortiz Gordo and Sáez Núñez, 2014; Tur-Viñes and Rodríguez Ferrándiz (2014) — and the analysis tool was based on the tool validated by Ivars-Nicolás and Zaragoza-Fuster (2018: 262) to recognise transmediality in storytelling.

Table 1. Scope of analysis of the transmediality of a podcast

1. Media and platforms		2. Narrative dispersion		3. Narrative expansion	
1.1. Interface	Audio/ Video	2.1. Number of pieces		3.1. Expanded access (web, app, voice)	
	Audio	2.2. Duration		3.2. Adapted content	
	Proprietary	2.3. Modality		Textual extension	
	Proprietary	2.3. Modality	Strategic	3.3. Expanded content	Relevant information
Third party	Tactical		Extratextual information		
1.2. Platform	Third party	2.4. Order of pieces	Previous	3.4. Social interaction	
			Synchronous	3.5. Interactivity	Mechanical
			Posterior		Content interaction

Source: Author’s own compilation based on Ivars-Nicolás and Fuster-Zaragoza (2018)

This measurement considers three aspects of the variables of technology, production and expression; media and platforms, narrative dispersion, and narrative extension; the first case refers to the nature and control of the sound libraries which can be used to listen to each podcast; the second includes the indicators for evaluation of the production strategy; and the third, in accordance with the storytelling touchpoints developed by Askwith (2007), determines whether the audio pieces represent a transmedia extension and to what extent, according to the issues of access, contribution to the story and possibilities for interaction. The study technique involved observation and analysis of each product based on the elements indicated above.

Table 2. Transmedia podcasts of fiction series in Spain (2015–2021)

Audio-visual Series	Year	Operator	Episodes	Transmedia Podcast	Episodes	Duration
<i>Carlos, Rey Emperador</i>	2015	RTVE	17	<i>Carlos de Gante</i>	5	7'
<i>El Ministerio del Tiempo (The Ministry of Time) (S2)</i>	2016	RTVE	13	<i>Tiempo de Valientes</i>	6	3-4'
<i>El Ministerio del Tiempo (The Ministry of Time) (S3)</i>	2017	RTVE	13	<i>Una Llamada a Tiempo</i>	4	5-6'
<i>Estoy Vivo (S1)</i>	2017	RTVE	7	<i>Bienvenido a la Pasarela</i>	7	4-8'
<i>La Zona</i>	2017	Movistar+	8	<i>Desde el Búnker</i>	9	7'
<i>La Zona</i>	2017	Movistar+	8	<i>El Contador Geiger</i>	3	17'-20'
<i>La Peste (S1)</i>	2018	Movistar+	6	<i>El Confesor</i>	6	10'
<i>En el Corredor de la Muerte</i>	2019	Movistar+	4	<i>En el Corredor de la Muerte</i>	5	30-45'
<i>Vis a Vis (S4)</i>	2019	FOX	8	<i>Vis a Vis: Cara B</i>	12	20'
<i>La Línea Invisible</i>	2020	Movistar+	8	<i>La Línea Invisible</i>	5 + 1	30-45'
<i>Acacias 38 (S5)</i>	2020	RTVE	1,283*	<i>Maitino: el Podcast</i>	12	7'-12'
<i>Patria</i>	2020	HBO	8	<i>Patria: el Podcast</i>	8	60'-80'
<i>LQSA (S12-1)</i>	2020	Mediaset	8	<i>La Que Se Avecina</i>	10	25'
<i>El Pueblo (S2)</i>	2021	Mediaset	8	<i>El Pueblo: la Audioserie</i>	10	25'
<i>La Fortuna</i>	2021	Movistar+	6	<i>La Fortuna: el Podcast</i>	6	30'

(*) Chapters broadcast before the start of the podcast *Maitino*.

Source: Author's own compilation

The analysis was designed and structured in three consecutive stages: firstly, identification and collection of data on the series used by the podcast as a transmedia tool in the period studied; subsequently, observation (viewing and listening) to these productions and the categorisation of the reference indicators in order to evaluate their strategy; and, finally, evaluation of the data. The following is a description of the original fiction series and the transmedia audio extensions of each one, in order to reach a better understanding of the creative purpose in continuing the respective stories.

3.1. *Carlos de Gante*

Carlos, Rey Emperador is a series produced by Diagonal TV and was shown on La 1 (TVE) from September 2015 to January 2016; it consists of 17 hour-long episodes. Through the podcast it became an audio extension of five 7-minute episodes accessible on the RTVE website, iVoox and Google Podcast. The television series tells the story of Charles I of Spain: his rise to power and the plots and threats that he suffered during his reign over the Crown of Castile from 1516 to 1556, and as Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, until his retirement to the Monastery of Yuste. The podcast *Carlos de Gante* represents his reflections during his retirement, where he recalls his period of childhood and learning.

3.2. Tiempo de valientes *El diario de Julián Martínez*

El Ministerio del Tiempo (*The Ministry of Time*) is a historical fiction series in the fantasy genre produced by Onza Partners and Cliffhanger. The first season was broadcast in February 2015 on La 1. The storyline revolves around a secret government institution answering to the President of the Government, whose objective is to detect and prevent any intruders from the past to the present — or vice versa — who intend to change the course of history to their advantage. Following the first season's positive reception, February 2016 saw the launch of the second season, with 13 episodes, which led to the transmedia spin-off, the podcast *Tiempo de valientes. El diario de Julián Martínez*. The six episodes, lasting 3–4 minutes, provide continuity to the story of Julián, whose actor left the series, and whose journey to Cuba in 1898 is told in this audio fiction.

3.3. Una Llamada a Tiempo

The third season of *El Ministerio del Tiempo* (*The Ministry of Time*) was shown on 1 June 2017 on La 1. Once again, the podcast was used in parallel to explain what Pacino — the character played by Hugo Silva — had been doing in his absence from the Ministry, in a series called *Una Llamada a Tiempo* consisting of 4 episodes, each five minutes long. The audio fiction scripts were written by Agustín Alonso and Pablo Lara and supervised by Javier Olivares and Anaïs Schaaff, the series' creator and screenwriter. Benigno Moreno and Mayca Aguilera were in charge of production at RNE.

3.4. Bienvenido a la Pasarela

Estoy Vivo is a Globomedia series which was released on La 1 on 7 September 2017. It tells the story of how Andrés Vargas comes back to life. He is a policeman who was murdered whilst chasing a psychopath; in his attempt to apprehend the criminal, he is assisted by 'El Enlace' ('*The Link*') and his own daughter, who is now a young policewoman. The first season contained 13 episodes and the second and third seasons were released with the same number of episodes in the following two years (2018 and 2019). The fourth season was released in 2021, as well as an adaptation in Italy and France. Following on from the first season, the audio extension appeared as the podcast *Bienvenido a la Pasarela*, with seven episodes of 4–8 minutes; as far as the plot is concerned, it is a prequel to explain who 'El Enlace' is before he assumes the role of guiding Vargas when he is brought back to life.

3.5. Maitino: el Podcast

Acacias 38 is a daily series produced by RTVE and Boomerang TV which was released simultaneously on La 1 and La 2 on 15 April 2015, and which was broadcast on La 1 from 16 April to 4 May 2021 in the afternoons. Set between 1899 and 1920 in the middle-class neighbourhood of a large Spanish town, it tells the story of a group of maids and the families for whom they work. Among the characters in the fifth season (1913–1914) are the painter Maite Zaldúa and her student Camino Pasamar, who embark on a love affair which is unthinkable in that era and which forces them to leave for Paris. Episode 1,283 marks the end of the series and the beginning of the podcast, whose name, *Maitino*, arose from the contraction of the protagonists' names. The audio series describes their relationship in the city of Paris over the course of twelve episodes, which last between 7 and 12 minutes, its success, particularly with younger audiences (in contrast to the television series' audience) led TVE to announce an *Acacias 38* spin-off based on the main characters.

Figure 1: Series and transmedia podcasts on RTVE



Source: Author's own compilation (images courtesy of RTVE)

3.6. Desde el Búnker

La Zona is a series produced by Movistar+. It was released on 27 October 2017, with a total of eight 50-minute episodes. It describes the investigation into a murder in the exclusion zone around a nuclear reactor in the north of Spain, led by Inspector Héctor Uría, the sole survivor of the first group that went to help at the power plant. The podcast of *La Zona* is called *Desde el Búnker*, and was developed by the production company El Cañonazo Transmedia. The nine episodes, each lasting seven minutes, explain how @arcan_hell, an anonymous internet with a great number of followers, spreads conspiracy theories concerning the zone.

3.7. El Contador Geiger

El Cañonazo Transmedia designed a second podcast linked to *La Zona* entitled *El Contador Geiger*; in three episodes of between 17 and 20 minutes, the series directors — Alberto and Jorge Cabezudo — explain the technical details and analyse the production process. Some of the protagonists raise questions about how the series was created, in the style of a radio broadcast. The podcast resembles the well-known 'making-of' formula but on this occasion as a version solely in audio.

3.8. El Confesor

La Peste is an original production by Movistar+ and contains six episodes created by Alfredo Rodríguez and Rafael Cobos; it was released on 12 January 2018. The series recreates sixteenth-century Seville against the backdrop of an epidemic of the plague. In 1597 several people connected to Protestantism are murdered, which leads the Grand Inquisitor to summon Mateo, a soldier and printer sentenced by this institution, to investigate the crimes. The production company El Cañonazo Transmedia designed an audio series of six 10-minute episodes in which the screenwriter Rafael Cobos is sentenced by the Inquisition to listen to his characters, after confessing which elements in the narrative universe are real and which are not. In each episode he talks to the characters and provides clues to the story and details about the city's past.

3.9. En el Corredor de la Muerte

The series *En el Corredor de la Muerte* is produced by Bambú for Movistar+ and is based on the book of the same name by Nacho Carretero. It tells the true story of the Spanish-American prisoner Pablo Ibar, who was imprisoned in 1994 for the murder of the owner of a night-club and two models, despite the fact that the evidence did not prove he was the murderer. The series, containing four episodes of 50 minutes, was released on the channel #0 on 13 September 2019. The storyline of the podcast, told over five episodes, is in line with the investigation by journalist Nacho Carretero: a documentary which accurately exposes the weaknesses of the legal proceedings and includes original interviews with the prisoner and his family. Four episodes — between 30 and 45 minutes — follow the time sequence of the story and a fifth additional one provides the creators with the opportunity to talk about the construction of the story.

Figure 2. Series and transmedia podcasts on Movistar+



Source: Author's own compilation (images courtesy of Movistar+ and Podium Podcast)

3.10. *La Línea Invisible*

La Línea Invisible is a series of six episodes produced by Movistar and released in April 2020. Directed by Mariano Barroso, with an ensemble cast in which Antonio de la Torre, Álex Monner and Anna Castillo are outstanding, this fiction based on true events describes how the terrorist organisation ETA began its armed struggle in 1968 with the murder of José Antonio Pardines, a civil guard. The audio extension has a five-episode structure — in line with the episodes in the work of fiction — and an additional episode. They show the journalist Conchi Cejudo using numerous interviews to reconstruct how and why ETA's history of violence began and who its protagonists were. The pieces, directed by Pablo González Batista and produced by Lavinia Voice, Goroka and Sentido Films, last between 30 and 45 minutes.

3.11. *La Fortuna*

La Fortuna is a six-episode series on Movistar+, produced by AMC Studios and MOD Pictures and directed by Alejandro Amenábar. It was released on 30 September 2021. Inspired by the comic *El Tesoro del Cisne Negro*, by Paco Roca, it is a reconstruction of the lawsuit between the Spanish government and a US treasure-hunting company, which lasted from 2007 to 2012 and concerned the treasure on the frigate *Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes*. Gold coins and jewels valued at over 500 million dollars were recovered from the ship. This is the context for the concept of *La Fortuna: el Podcast*, an investigation of twenty-first century pirates and those who fight the plundering of art. The journalist Arturo Lezcano directs this audio documentary from The Voice Village, hosted by Eixchélt González. The podcast is composed of six episodes of 30' which were released on 14, 21 and 28 October 2021 on the audio platforms Spotify and iVoox, as well as on YouTube.

3.12. *Patria*

Patria is based on the novel by Fernando Aramburu which recreates the Basque conflict in a small town in Euskadi where two closely-linked families find themselves on opposite sides: on one hand, a mother with a son who is an imprisoned ETA member; on the other, a woman who has been widowed by an ETA killing. The series, on HBO Max, consists of eight episodes which cover the thirty years of the armed conflict and is completed by two extra episodes containing statements from the artistic team about the filming of the series. Regarding its expansion, over the course of eight hour-long episodes, *Patria: el Podcast* analyses each weekly episode released on HBO (script, acting, trivia...), and adds an interview to provide contrast (except in episodes 4 and 7) between two actors who represent the two 'factions' in the story. This podcast is only available on Spotify.

Figure 3. Series and transmedia podcasts on HBO-Spotify and Prime Video-Audible



Source: Author's own compilation (images courtesy of HBO, Spotify, Amazon Prime Video and Audible)

3.13. *Vis a Vis: Cara B*

Vis a Vis is a series produced by Globomedia whose first two seasons (2015 and 2016) were shown on Antena 3 and the last two (2018 and 2019) on the subscription channel FOX España. Set in a prison, it focuses on the story of Macarena, who is sent to a women's prison after being accused of embezzlement and tax evasion. After 40 episodes — and eight more belonging to the spin-off *Vis a Vis: el Oasis*, which FOX released in 2020 — José Ángel Esteban created and directed *Vis a Vis: Cara B* for Audible, starring the actresses Maggie Civantos and Najwa Nimri, under the supervision of the original production's showrunner Iván Escobar. The transmedia audio extension consists of 12 episodes lasting 20 minutes each, in which a plot unfolds that, whilst respecting the spirit of the series, introduces elements which make sound an essential ingredient and give the story its own, distinctive existence, in line with the features of this storytelling tool.

3.14. *La Que Se Avecina*

La Que Se Avecina is an audio-visual series created by siblings Alberto and Laura Caballero with Daniel Deorador for Telecinco. It was released on 22 April 2007 and describes the problems of an residents' association in the upscale housing development of Mirador de Montepinar, on the outskirts of Madrid, which advertises non-existent services. After an agreement was reached with Mediaset España and Amazon Prime Video, the series, from the twelfth season onwards, is available on the streaming platform before being released on the free-to-air channel. The first half (eight episodes) was first shown on Amazon on 29 May 2020 and on Telecinco on 11 November. On 9 October ten episodes were released on Audible containing original stories narrated by the actors themselves. The pieces, lasting between 20 and 32 minutes, were directed by Araceli Álvarez and Daniel Deorador for Contubernio Films.

3.15. *El Pueblo*

El Pueblo is a Spanish comedy created by Alberto Caballero, Nando Abad and Julián Sastre for the production company Contubernio Films. The first season was released as an exclusive on Amazon Prime Video on 14 May 2019 and shown on Telecinco on 15 January 2020. The series is about a group of urbanites who decide to move to Peñafría, a small town in Soria where they have been promised a place to live and a lifestyle which will be more beneficial to their health. However, they find that adaptation to the new environment is not so easy and the contrast with the mentality of the neighbours there emphasises the differences between rural and urban life. Following two seasons, each with eight episodes (2019 and 2020), the third season was released on 2 December 2021 on Amazon Prime Video at the same time as the transmedia podcast *El pueblo: la Audioserie* on Audible: ten episodes of 25 minutes in duration with the same protagonists as the series, but with different storylines which can be listened to either as a complement to the series or an alternative.

4. Results

By using indicators to measure the transmediality of the fifteen podcasts produced in Spain between 2015 and 2021 as narrative extensions of fiction series, this study has identified the strategies involved in using this technique, as well as the opportunities, both in terms of creation and expression, and commercially, that it generates of reinforcing the connection with the fanbase and reaching new audiences through audio. In general, all the podcasts prove to be transmedia when they extend each series' story; the information contained in the audio is relevant, that is to say, it expands the storyline, the characters' features or the action's spatial and temporal settings.

Except in one instance, the content can be assimilated independently by listening to the audio pieces; *Carlos de Gante* is the only podcast designed for consumption on a screen interface, with images which complete the information contained in the audio. This study has found a wide range of genres in the sample analysed: fiction, interviews, reports, columns and documentaries, of a consistently high level in terms of the processing and texture of the language used, and the quality of the recordings. In accordance with the three dimensions analysed, this study has established the following evidence:

Table 3. Distribution platforms of the transmedia podcasts analysed

Transmedia Podcast	Apple	Google	iVoox	Podium	Audible	Spotify	YouTube	Website
1. Carlos de Gante		•	•					•
2. Tiempo de Valientes		•	•					•
3. Una Llamada a Tiempo		•	•					•
4. Bienvenido a la Pasarela		•	•					•
5. Maitino: el Podcast							•	•
6. Desde el Búnker	•	•						•
7. El Contador Geiger		•				•		•

Transmedia Podcast	Apple	Google	iVoox	Podium	Audible	Spotify	YouTube	Website
8. El Confesor		•	•			•		•
9. En el Corredor de la Muerte	•	•	•	•		•		•
10. La Línea Invisible		•	•			•		
11. La Fortuna: el Podcast			•			•	•	
12. Patria: el Podcast						•		
13. Vis a Vis: Cara B					•			
14. La Que Se Avecina					•			
15. El Pueblo: la Audioserie					•			

Source: Author's own compilation

- a) The section on distribution and access interfaces (media and platforms) confirms the difference between podcasts by RTVE and private operators; in the first instance, availability is limited to their archives (the RTVE website and app) and to the iVoox and Google platforms, and is only suitable for devices with screens. In contrast, the podcasts for the Movistar+ series are available on several services (Spotify, Apple Podcast, Google Podcast), although not on all of them (Table 3). The only podcasts created by operators in the podcasting sector are *En el Corredor de la Muerte* (Podium Podcast) and *Vis a Vis*, *La Que Se Avecina* and *El Pueblo* (Audible); these are also the only ones available for use with voice-activated smart speakers. It is significant that the last three are part of a subscription platform's catalogue and therefore focus on attracting subscribers; in fact, Audible has more transmedia series from other countries (such as *The X-Files*), which proves its commercial efficiency. *Patria* is also an exclusive show, in this case on Spotify, but it is available through free-to-air channels as well. All the transmedia podcasts are fully independent audio pieces, except for *Carlos de Gante*, which requires visual interaction with images on the series website to provide context.
- b) In relation to narrative dispersion in the podcasts, strategic design prevails, that is to say, everything prior to the launch of the audio-visual series that helps each medium make a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole, as required by Jenkins (2008). The production of the different parts, audio-visual and audio, is linked by an intertextual correlation which lends depth to the storytelling, thereby enabling users to understand the plots and characters more fully, or discover them if they have not seen the series. The podcast represents one of the main transmedia techniques used in *La Zona* and *La Peste*, which were designed by El Cañonazo Transmedia; for the first series, two podcasts were produced, although one of them is considered to be tactical — namely, *El Contador Geiger*, which includes a posteriori details regarding the processes of creation and production. The three episodes in this podcast last around 20' and only *La Línea Invisible* has longer episodes, of almost 45'; this production's narrative is the closest in style to radio storytelling, along with *En el Corredor de la Muerte*, as it contains interviews and reports involving the protagonists of the events described in the series as fiction. The podcast for *La Fortuna*, planned during the filming of the series, clearly illustrates the potential of this type of storytelling to inform and communicate, since it sheds light on a little-known aspect of reality through its association with the series, by using columns and reports. The tactical modality includes the audio fictions for *El Ministerio del Tiempo* (*The Ministry of Time*), created to cover the absences of two of its protagonists (Rodolfo Sancho in *Tiempo de Valientes* and Hugo Silva in *Una llamada a tiempo*); *Maitino*, which elaborates on the romance between its two protagonists; and *Vis a Vis*, *La Que Se Avecina* and *El Pueblo*, Amazon-Audible's bids to attract the audience of the television series.
- c) Finally, the analysis of narrative expansion confirms that all the podcasts analysed are truly transmedia, that is to say, they are extensions of the main story contained the series that they complement. In most cases the information is relevant and completes the story with facts that occur prior to the fiction (*Bienvenido a la Pasarela*) or afterwards (*Carlos de Gante*), or they elaborate

on it using situations which are parallel to the main storyline or simultaneous (*La Fortuna*). The user's interaction with these podcasts is of the type referred to as 'mechanical' by Askwith (2007: 95), and is rather limited, except in the case of the audio series *Desde el Búnker*: the protagonist, @arcan_hell, is not part of the story in *La Zona*, but he does expand the series' narrative universe. The character also comes to life on social media (Twitter and Facebook), where fans can interact with him, and on the website where they discover more details about the 'Adversus' movement, with which he has connections. This is a representative sample of the potential of transmedia podcasts to promote Jenkins' idea of participatory culture and activity among fans: the aim of each story is to undergo a complete transformation, influenced top-down by decisions taken in corporate meeting rooms; and bottom-up by decisions formed in adolescents' bedrooms (Hidalgo-Marí and Segarra-Saavedra, 2020: 114).

5. Discussion and conclusions

The following reflections and conclusions can be extracted from the analysis of the variables revealing the transmedia nature of the podcasts produced as extensions of series in Spain between 2015 and 2022:

- The podcast represents an attractive and efficient vehicle for transmedia expansion due to the nature of its 'sound language', which is consumed in an individual and personalised way, as it is compatible with other tasks and can be adapted to multiple devices, channels and distribution systems. The progressive and widespread penetration of this format on a global scale enables series creators to extend the stories' reach and strengthen their emotional connection with followers and fans. The examples analysed in Spain and the established tendencies in other countries — especially in the United States — mean that support is likely to grow for audio fiction, conversation or documentation in order to sustain interest in series or films distributed through cinemas, television channels or subscription VOD platforms, as well as to achieve better publicity or increased consumption.
- This tool encourages competitiveness among the podcast networks themselves, some of which include this variant as an exclusive product in their catalogues; this explains why Netflix has announced that its service will include podcasts on its series and also why HBO Max has already produced an original podcast linked to one of its top shows: *Batman, The Audio Adventures*, starring Jeffrey Wright as the Dark Knight, Rosario Dawson as Catwoman and John Leguizamo as The Riddler; the first two episodes were free to view on all the podcast platforms but the remaining eight were only available by subscription on the HBO Max's own platform. As already indicated, the platform Audible (Amazon) hosts many audio shows consisting of transmedia extensions of series on Amazon Prime Video.
- The potential for expansion of the podcast linked to a fiction series makes it ideal for operators and media groups with their own brands in the audio-visual and audio market: the audio series which were produced by RNE as extensions of the series broadcast on TVE point the way forward for public corporations in autonomous regions of Spain with their own radio and television networks, either with new shows or by recovering successful television series from other eras which can use audio to revisit old plots or create new storylines. The same strategy is feasible for private operators: In March Atresmedia used its subscription platform Atresplayer to launch the series *La Edad de la Ira*, based on the novel by the playwright and theatre director Nando López. The author himself hosts the podcast of the same name which was released simultaneously and is available on the channel's website, as well as on Spotify and iVoox. To date, this is the most recent example of the mutually beneficial relationship between stories in audio-visual and audio formats in terms of narrative.
- These possibilities increase when multiplied by the variety, eloquence and expressivity of the genres available as a framework for stories made to be listened to (Kischinhevsky, 2009: 234). The fact that audio fiction gives free rein to the imagination, supported by the voices of the actors that the listener knows from the television series, combines with the effectiveness of the interviews, talks and reports that complement the fictional stories based on true events: the testimony of the real-life protagonists of both stories endows the television series with greater authenticity and provides continuity to the action of informing about newsworthy facts (as in the podcasts on Audible which expand on the documentaries *El desafío: ETA* and *El desafío: 11M* on Amazon Prime Video).
- The high-quality production in transmedia podcasts demonstrates the great care and thoroughness employed in their making, regardless of the number of episodes or their length. This aspect is not only noteworthy regarding the pieces produced by RNE — whose experience in audio fiction is well-known (Cascajosa and Molina, 2017; Rodero, Pérez-Maíllo and Espinosa de los Monteros, 2019: 154) — but also in relation to the podcasts created by El Cañonazo Transmedia, Podium Podcast and Lavinia Voice. The cost of producing high-quality podcasts is more reasonable: as Alberto Caballero,

director of *La Que Se Vecina* states, “we call audio stories ‘the impossible stories’ because they deal with the parts that are complicated to produce due to their expense” (Herruzo, 2020, par. 5).

- Although the design, narration and production of the transmedia podcasts analysed should be evaluated highly for the reasons indicated above, it would be advisable to improve their distribution to create a greater impact in terms of audiences: in the case of audio extensions by RTVE, their dissemination is limited to the Corporation’s digital channels (website and apps) and only two third-party platforms, which reduces the possibilities for audiences to locate and listen to these podcasts. In the case of the transmedia series on Movistar+, it is surprising that they are not available through all the distributors (Apple Podcast, Google Podcast, Spotify e iVoox), most of whom offer international availability (Pérez-Alaejos, Terol-Bolinches and Barrios-Rubio, 2022: 5), but only on some of them, although they are on others which have a lower rate of penetration, such as Spreaker. In addition, these podcasts lack integration with voice-assisted devices (smart speakers, smartphone assistants...), which would be of assistance in achieving greater dissemination and popularity as they are increasingly part of user’s daily life and digital consumption habits.

In view of the above, this research reveals that the extension of stories contained in audio-visual fiction — films and series— through the sound language of transmedia podcasts expands the main story and helps to shape the narrative universe which contemporary creators strive for; furthermore, it promotes the creation of the engagement sought by producers in order to create communities and boost the fan effect within the context of consolidating transmedia literacy (Alonso-López and Terol-Bolinches, 2020: 145). This expansion strategy is of great value, both for the ease of its production and multiplatform distribution and for its emotional impact on the user, without forgetting the opportunities to generate business. In summary, the transmedia podcast consists of one of the most effective forms of expression in preventing the audience fragmentation caused by the exponential offer of content and channels for information, leisure and digital entertainment.

6. Contributions

Contributions	Authors
Research design	Author 1, Author 2, Author 3
Documentary search	Author 1, Author 2, Author 3
Data collection	Author 1, Author 2, Author 3
Critical data analysis and interpretation	Author 1, Author 2, Author 3
Review and approval of versions	Author 1, Author 2, Author 3

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