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## All ears on? A survey on podcasters' profiles, practices and self-perceptions

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### Abstract

Despite the continuous growth in podcast consumption among listeners and podcast offerings on various streaming platforms, there remains a lack of research concerning podcasters. This paper presents an exploratory analysis of the profiles, practices, role perceptions, and values of podcasters based on the results of an online survey among 1073 podcasters from Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. The findings reveal that podcasters are predominantly male, middle-aged, and academically educated. Regarding their professional practices and profiles, the majority of podcasters lack prior experience in the field of journalism despite often taking on journalistic functions. Concerning their perception of their roles and values, podcasters place significant emphasis on the relevance of entertainment, education, and information dissemination. Overall, they demonstrate a strong orientation towards the needs of their audiences. As podcasts continue to gain popularity among audiences, studying podcast producers helps to better understand their content creation processes, prioritized topics, and approaches to engaging with their audiences.

### Keywords

podcast, audio, emerging media, role perception, audio, profession, values, practices

## 1 Introduction

The popularity of podcasts is on a consistent rise, with increasing consumption rates observed not only among listeners but also among creators. Over recent years, podcasts have transitioned from being a niche offering to attaining the status of a “new digital mass medium” (Bonini, 2022, p. 21). Podcasts are audio-based, non-linear, and serialised media formats that allow individuals self-sovereign control over their consumption as they can be accessed at any time or place through various online streaming platforms such as Spotify, Apple Podcasts, or Google Podcasts, where users can readily access and engage with the content made available by the podcasters (Katzenberger et al., 2022a, p. 11).

Originally, podcasts emerged as an open and participatory grassroots medium (Lührmann, 2019, p. 58). They were initially produced and published by independent amateur producers (Attig, 2022, p. 52). The medium’s strong appeal is undoubtedly due to its inherent characteristics: Its low barriers of entry allow creators to produce and distribute

at minimal cost and with easy access, requiring minimal technical or practical knowledge. In addition, creators enjoy a high degree of flexibility and autonomy when it comes to the content, topic, and timing of their offerings, allowing them to shape their podcasts according to their respective creative visions. However, today’s podcasts are being created in ever greater proportions by professional media organizations, including radio broadcasters (Wild, 2021) or newspaper and magazine publishers (Wild & Katzenberger, 2021). Many media organizations allocate resources towards podcasting due to its cost-effectiveness, capacity to foster enduring connections with audiences, and effectiveness in attracting younger demographics. Notably, public broadcasters such as ARD in Germany, ORF in Austria, and SRF in Switzerland, as well as newspaper publishers like the German *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the Austrian *Der Standard*, or the Swiss *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, have made investments in the development of original podcast shows and the construction of their distribution platforms. Other media professionals rely on podcasts, too. A growing



cohort of renowned individuals, including prominent figures from the realms of music, film industry, literature, and comedy (Puffer & Schröter, 2018, p. 366), are actively engaged in producing and disseminating podcasts, often with the backing of specialized podcast production studios.

When podcasts were first launched, there were a few thousand podcasts available (Jobs, 2005). Over the past ten years, there has been a significant proliferation in the availability of podcasts, as evidenced by the presence of approximately 2 million distinct shows listed in the Apple index (Apple, 2021), as well as the approximately 3.6 million podcasts featured in the Spotify index, among them 70 000 shows in German language (Spotify, 2022). It is worth noting that the rise in the quantity of podcasts has been accompanied by a parallel surge in the size of the podcast audience. The Reuters Digital News Report 2023 shows that, on average, just under one-third of the population worldwide listens to podcasts at least once a month (Newman, 2023, p. 34). According to most recent studies, the usage of podcasts within the past month among the population of Germany stood at 28% (Newman et al., 2023, p. 77). Correspondingly, the consumption rate in Austria reached 34% (Newman et al., 2023, p. 61), while in Switzerland, it surged to 36% (Newman et al., 2023, p. 106).

Hence, podcasts persist as a swiftly evolving, dynamic, and innovative part of the media landscape worldwide. On the one hand, they hold significant appeal for media outlets and media professionals due to their ability to attract a younger demographic with higher levels of wealth, rendering them exceptionally desirable to advertisers who seek to target this lucrative audience segment (Domenichini, 2018a, p. 46; Domenichini, 2018b, p. 583). On the other hand, they are highly attractive to listeners for their independent, non-linear style of consumption as well as their authentic, intimate mode of storytelling.

This paper explores podcasts as drivers of digital audio innovation in the DACH region. The DACH region refers to the three Central European countries of Germany (D), Austria (A), and Switzerland (CH). It takes the perspective of the podcast producers by examining their roles and values based on an

extensive online survey among 1 073 podcasters from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. While the number of listeners and consumption rates of podcasts have been discussed from many angles, this producer-oriented approach is still underrepresented. This paper presents results on their sociodemographic and professional profiles, practices, role perceptions, and values.

## 2 Podcasts as a digital audio innovation

When discussing podcasts, conventional radio broadcasting is often utilized as a frame of reference (Berry, 2006). However, it is frequently argued that podcasts are not an alternative form of radio broadcasting but rather a new variety (Bonini, 2015). For example, podcasts take up familiar forms of radio presentation, including well-established genres such as the interview or the magazine (Frühbrodt & Auerbacher, 2021, p. 14). While classic radio is considered a “side medium” or “companion medium” (Kleinsteuber, 2012, p. 18), podcasts are characterized by their often active and conscious use. In this regard, podcasts are frequently described as “push-pull technology” (Spinelli & Dann, 2019, pp. 7–8): Listeners initially discover and subscribe to the offerings consciously and then receive new content automatically. Radio is considered an established mass medium that reaches a broad audience and belongs to the “classic canon of media” (Kleinsteuber, 2012, p. 18), whereas podcasts – although becoming more and more established in the media repertoire – are still considered more of a “niche medium” (Lührmann, 2019, p. 37) or, as mentioned above, a “new digital mass medium” (Bonini, 2022, p. 21). All things considered, podcasts can and must be thought of independently of radio and should be treated as a medium in their own right (Berry, 2018, p. 15).

Overall, podcasts are increasingly considered to be a relevant medium and one of the most significant innovations in the field of journalism and mass media (Meier et al., 2022, p. 709). They have not only complemented already existing mass media but have become a disruptive technology in the context of information, education, and entertainment.

Podcasts possess several innovative character traits as an audio medium, which contribute to their growing popularity and unique appeal. First, the podcasting industry has established *new narrative and storytelling forms*. For instance, podcasts often rely on self-reflexive transparency and meta-commentary (Dowling & Miller, 2019, p. 168), as podcasts frequently make references to their own journalistic production process, for instance, by addressing dilemmas, challenges in decision-making or personal biases within the production process (Dowling & Miller, 2019, p. 170). They also rely on personal and subjective approaches to storytelling (Lindgren, 2016, p.33). They purposefully employ subjective and immersive narrative techniques such as subjective perspectives, personalization, contextualization, and transparency to establish a sense of proximity and provide opportunities for identification (Schlütz, 2020, p.9). Podcasts have a “strong element of personal involvement by the presenter(s)” (Lindgren, 2016, p. 27). Most of these aspects are linked to the fact that podcasts are liberated from traditional radio broadcasting schedules and routines, allowing for experimentation with new styles and the emancipation of traditions (Lindgren, 2016, p.23).

Second, podcasts introduce *new modes of audience involvement* and foster a strong connection between content creators and consumers (Meier et al., 2022, p. 711). Listeners often form close parasocial bonds with podcast hosts. On the one hand, this is due to their openness, authenticity, visibility, and informal style of addressing listeners. Presenters are “informal and conversational” (Lindgren, 2016, p. 27), and they sound “relaxed and personal” (Lindgren, 2016, p.27) like friends might do. On the other hand, audience involvement in podcasting is rooted in the intimate reception mode of podcasts. Podcasts are often and mostly listened to through headphones, which is considered intimate (Markman, 2015, p. 241). Since podcasts are “intimately whispered into our ears” (Lindgren, 2016, p. 24), a form of “hyper-intimacy” (Berry, 2016, p. 666) can emerge. The recipients often feel that they have a friendly relationship with the hosts (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021, p. 10). This relationship tends to be distinguished by heightened loyalty towards the

hosts, which is reinforced by the distinctive content attributes of podcasts, such as the focus on niche topics.

The “podcast ecosystem” (Sherril, 2022) is characterized by the interplay of creativity and structure – in terms of content but also during the production process and the interaction of the actors involved (Jorgensen, 2021; Kerrigan et al., 2021). This is why three *new organizational forms and workflows* have been established in and by podcasting. Podcasts benefit from their independence from fixed slots and formats in the linear programming of traditional radio stations. This independence allows podcasts to be more flexible, which often aligns with the content better than the structural fixation in programme schedules. Podcasts can take the time to contextualize events, provide detailed background beyond individual cases, or discuss the long-term implications of issues. At the same time, their audience has the freedom to choose whether and when they want to listen to, skip, or stop the show (Spinelli & Dann, 2019, p. 7). It is presumed that such frameworks’ flexible and independent production processes can promote innovation (Bottomley, 2015).

Fourth, *new monetisation and marketing models* in podcasting have created new potential for commercialization at the level of media economics. Podcasts frequently rely on donations, sponsors, native ads, or other innovative marketing models (Drössler, 2022, pp.189–192). Podcast listeners are regarded as a valuable demographic for advertising purposes, as their self-directed mode of consumption and heightened attentiveness while listening to podcasts enhance advertising messages’ effectiveness. This categorization positions them as a premium advertising target group (Domenichini, 2018, p. 46). Podcasts often use a long-tail distribution method (Anderson, 2009), meaning that they market their content to a niche audience and attract further listeners over a longer period. This principle applies to all content types, including those with a broad audience appeal. However, it holds particular significance for content aimed at small and specific listener groups, as the long-tail distribution logic renders it financially feasible and capable of generating substantial impact through cumulative growth over time.

### 3 Roles and values of podcast producers

The body of conceptions for the theoretical and empirical understanding of roles is enormous and has occupied mass communication research in general and journalism studies in particular for many decades (Cohen, 1963; Janowitz, 1975; Johnstone et al., 1976; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986, 1996). Usually, roles are defined as the ideas and ideals that media professionals such as journalists associate with their work (Hanitzsch & Laurer, 2019, p. 135). They find expression in the self-imposed goals related to their practices (Hanitzsch & Laurer, 2019, p. 137). In the current debate, the conception of roles is increasingly understood as an ongoing, discursive negotiation process (Raemy & Vos, 2021). Role perceptions are also closely tied to value orientations.

The predominant focus of research on the conception and execution of journalistic roles has mostly been directed toward traditional forms of media, such as journalism in print newspapers and television broadcasting (Mellado et al., 2024, p. 377). Thus, for a long time, the debate on role conceptions was primarily focused on journalism and on journalists who were characterized by roles like “interpreter,” “disseminator,” “adversarial,” or “populist mobilizer” (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1981). However, it seems logical that the exploration and analysis of role conceptions transcends the traditional boundaries of conventional journalism. The approach of role conceptions can and is already applied to other media professionals who contribute to the collection, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of information in mass media discourse. The concept of role perceptions has been linked to new and digital media creators like influencers on Instagram (Maares & Hanusch, 2020), creators on YouTube (Lichtenstein et al., 2021), and bloggers (Hoffjann & Haidukiewicz, 2018). With podcasts and podcasters assuming a more prominent position in the digital media landscape and being a driver of digital audio innovation (see Chapter 2), it is promising to broaden the discourse on role conceptions within the podcasting realm and explore the roles and values held by those who create podcasts.

There is a huge variety of models on role conceptions. One common conception takes journalism as a point of reference and suggests the following roles (Mellado, 2015): The first dimension is the interventionist role. In this role, media professionals like journalists are present in the story, taking sides, interpreting events, or promoting actions. Power relations are relevant to the second dimension, which includes both the *role of observer* and the *role of loyal facilitator*. In the former, the media professionals observe the government and report about its actions in their media coverage, foregrounding values such as objectivity, while in the latter, the media professionals support the narratives of the government or nation-state. The third dimension is devoted to the audience approach and values like comprehensibility, relevance, or audience communication. In the context of this dimension, three roles are differentiated. For example, when media professionals share consumer tips or make recommendations that people can apply to their daily lives, they take on the *service provider role*. If they disseminate content that is designed to entertain and engage the audience, this indicates the *role of the infotainer*. They can also take on the *role of citizen*, which means that they put the voices and actions of citizens at the center of their media coverage and educate them about complex issues to help them make political decisions (Mellado, 2015), often highlighting values like multiperspectivity. This conception has subsequently been validated (Mellado et al., 2017; Mellado, 2021; Mellado & van Dalen, 2017).

Other conceptions differentiate between *monitorial*, *collaborative*, *interventionist*, and *accommodative roles* (Hanitzsch et al., 2019, p. 162). The *monitorial role* is firmly rooted in the concept of journalism as the “Fourth Estate,” where media professionals like journalists assume the responsibility of expressing criticism, holding those in positions of power accountable, and thus fostering a citizenry that is inclined towards critical thinking (Hanitzsch et al., 2019, p. 168). In the *collaborative role*, media professionals assume the role of government partners, providing assistance in endeavours aimed at promoting development and social welfare. They also support

authorities in safeguarding the social order, particularly in the face of crime, conflict, and natural emergencies (Hanitzsch et al., 2019, p.169). An *interventionist role* is distinguished by a fervent inclination to pursue a specific mission and advocate for particular values in media reporting. Here, values like activism are central. Within this role, media professionals often exhibit active involvement, social dedication, and a strong motivation to participate in societal matters (Hanitzsch et al., 2019, pp. 169–170). The *accommodative role* is primarily focused on audience members as consumers. Within this role, the aim is to offer guidance and support in navigating everyday life. This can be expressed through consumer journalism, which showcases different commercial products and leisure activities. Alternatively, it may involve providing assistance, advice, guidance, and information on various aspects of daily life through “news-you-can-use” content (Hanitzsch et al., 2019, p. 170). In this context, values like utility, reliability, or solution orientation are relevant, among others. This perspective is adapted to the World of Journalism Study and used to interpret its results on media professionals’ roles in the DACH region (Hanitzsch & Lauerer, 2019).

Research has not yet conclusively clarified the relevance of role understandings in actual practice. Some researchers report a modest association between conceived roles and practice (Van Dalen et al., 2012). Other researchers state that orientations may not consistently or comprehensively manifest in actual practice, particularly when external factors limit media professionals’ editorial autonomy (Hanitzsch et al., 2019, p. 163). In fact, the majority of studies indicate a disparity between the roles that they aspire to fulfill and the roles they actually carry out in practice (Mellado & Van Dalen, 2014; Tandoc et al., 2013). This is why it is important to keep the following in mind: Media professionals articulate and enact various roles on different levels, and the examination of roles might encompass the exploration of normative ideas (what journalists should do), cognitive orientations (what they want to do), professional practice (what they really do), and narrated performance (what they say they do) (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017, p.118).

As these elaborations show, research on role perceptions and values has been extensively conducted for various types of traditional communicators, such as journalists (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017, 2018; Hanitzsch & Lauerer, 2019; Hellmueller & Mellado, 2015; Raemy & Vos, 2020). Only recently, media professionals from new and digital media such as social media or weblogs have been considered, too (Maeres & Hanusch, 2020; Lichtenstein et al., 2021; Hoffmann & Haidukiewicz, 2018). In order to understand the content creation processes, prioritized topics, and approaches to engaging with the audiences of those new communicators, it is relevant to examine their role perceptions, too. So far, there is a lack of exploration of the role perceptions and values of those digital content creators. This analysis aims to fill this gap and to broaden the discourse around the role perception of those media professionals. This paper considers the role perception of podcasters because of the central role podcasts take as drivers of digital audio innovation in today’s media landscape:

**RQ 1:** How do podcasters describe their professional practices and profiles?

**RQ 2:** How do podcasters understand their role, and what values do podcasters follow?

#### 4 Material and methods

In order to address the research questions above and bridge the existing research gap, a standardized, quantitative online survey was conducted among podcasters in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Given the dispersion across a large geographic area, this approach was suitable. This research draws data from previous studies (Katzenberger et al., 2022b). In this context, podcasters were defined as individuals who create, manage, and/or host at least one podcast in their free time or profession and who make it accessible to the public through an audio platform. Unfortunately, a precise quantification of all podcasters or podcasts in the DACH region is impossible due to the absence of a central directory. However, there are an estimated

70 000 German-language podcasts in 2022 (Spotify, 2022).

According to the 2023 Reuters News Report, Apple Podcasts is one of the most relevant and significant audio-streaming providers, maintaining their global position for several years (Newman et al., 2023, p.53). For this study, the application programming interfaces (API) of Apple Podcasts were used. API are “platform-specific pipelines for obtaining machine-readable digital data” (Ohme et al., 2023, p.127) from a variety of platforms, such as social media platforms or streaming platforms. API offer interfaces for the collection and analysis of public data. Originally, most APIs were created to grant third-party commercial services access to user data from specific platforms. However, today, they are increasingly popular among media scholars and have been established in communication science and journalism research (Haim & Haase, 2023, p. 4). With the help of programming languages such as R, it is possible to collect data directly from APIs or indirectly by using software packages for research purposes (Jünger et al., 2022). Research via API has to deal with a variety of specific challenges: Gathered data might vary in type, volume, and timespan (Ohme et al., 2023, p. 127). In some cases, there is a lack of reproducibility and completeness of collected data (Lazer et al., 2021). Recently, some platforms even restricted their data access via API (Freelon, 2018, p.665), likely complicating research via API in the future.

However, for this study, Apple Podcast served as the foundation for research and recruitment of participants. Initially, the (RSS<sup>1</sup>) feed URLs of all podcasts with the country codes for Germany, Austria, and Switzerland were gathered via Apple Podcast. All the data was collected anonymously, ensuring that no individual identities could be discerned or conclusions drawn about specific persons. The data was obtained through a public, authorized API, ensuring its legitimacy and adherence to privacy protocols. Subsequently,

the hosts of the 8 043 identified podcasts were invited to participate in the online survey between June 9th and June 24th, 2021. 1340 podcasters took part, resulting in a response rate of 17%. After data cleansing, the final data set consisted of 1 073 cases, making it the largest podcaster survey in the German-speaking countries to date (Status: August 13th, 2024). Unfortunately, the data set does not allow for the differentiation of the responses with regard to the specific countries Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. A country-specific evaluation of the data set is, therefore, not possible.

Overall, the questionnaire comprised 26 questions, with six open-ended and 20 close-ended questions. On average, participants required approximately 15 minutes to complete the survey. The questions were divided into four sections: 1.) Characteristics of the podcasts and content, 2.) role perception, 3.) values and standards, and 4.) sociodemographic background and professional status.

Questions related to 1.) characteristics of the podcasts and content included aspects such as the podcast’s topic, target audience, target size, publication frequency, income, and revenue sources. Additionally, the respondents were asked about various tasks linked to podcast production, including research, marketing, and recording.

The 2.) role perception ( $\alpha = .832$ ) was operationalized based on existing scales of Hanitzsch and Lauerer (2019) drawn from the second wave of the Worlds of Journalism Study (see Chapter 3), which was simultaneously conducted in 67 countries. Role perception was assessed through six sub-dimensions that are based on the latest discourse on this issue as elaborated above (see chapter 3): *Information; Mediation and Analysis; Criticism and Control; Political Articulation and Participation; Social Engagement; Entertainment and Audience Orientation and Education and Culture*. Each dimension comprised two to five items. Respondents were asked to evaluate the importance of each item on a five-point rating scale ranging from 1 (“not important at all”) to 5 (“extremely important”).

The 3.) values and standards ( $\alpha = .791$ ) that guide podcasters in making their content were assessed based on the work of Paterson et al. (2015) and Lin et al. (2015). In total, the respondents had to evaluate the importance of nine items on a scale from 1 (“not import-

1 “RSS is an XML-based feed format and technology designed for content distribution containing headlines and descriptions of information. It is largely used in news industry to disseminate news items extracted from user favorite feed sources and consumed using RSS readers or news aggregators” (Getahun & Chbeir, 2018, p.47).

ant at all”) to 5 (“extremely important”), e. g., *Comprehensibility, Objectivity, Actuality, and Precision of Information*.

The last part of the questionnaire addressed the 4.) sociodemographic background of the podcasters, assessing their age, gender, and general education. Additionally, respondents were asked to give insights into their professional status through questions on journalistic training, occupation, and income.

## 5 Results

In the sociodemographic composition of podcasters (see Table 1), women accounted for 32.9% of the sample, while 1% identified as

non-binary. The age range of the participants spanned from 15 to 72 years, with an average of approximately 40 years. 17.8% of respondents were 30 or younger, 39.9% were between 31 and 40, 25.4% were between 41 and 50, and 16.9% were over 50. In regard to the level of education of the podcasters in the DACH region, 64.4% of the sample reported having obtained a university degree, while 7.4% had a doctorate. Besides the academically educated podcasters, 0.3% had a “Hauptschulabschluss,” 4% had a “Mittlere Reife,” 14.6% had the “(Fach-) Hochschulreife” 2, and 7.7 had completed an apprenticeship or a dual study program. 1.6% reported having a different educational qualification. Overall, the average podcaster can therefore

Table 1: Sociodemographic background of the podcasters (\*multiple selections possible)

	Category	%
Sex N = 1059	Female	32.9
	Male	64.8
	Divers	1.0
Age N = 1073	≤ 30	17.8
	31–40	39.9
	41–50	25.4
	51 ≥	16.9
Education N = 1073	No degree	0.0
	“Volkshochschul-/ Hauptschulabschluss”	0.3
	“Mittlere Reife”	4.0
	“(Fach-) Hochschulreife”	14.6
	(Dual) apprenticeship	7.7
	University degree	64.4
	Doctoral degree	7.4
Other	1.6	
Journalistic background N = 1073	Never worked as a journalist	64.8
	Currently working as a journalist	16.8
	Has worked as a journalist	18.5
Journalistic training N = 271	Traineeship	31.6
	Studies of Marketing, PR, etc.	28.4
	Studies of Communication	17.4
	Studies of Journalism	13.3
	Journalism School	9.3
Professional context of podcast N = 1210*	Private Citizen	39.7
	Freelancer	31.0
	Employee	17.3
	Service provider	10.0
	Volunteer	1.9

be described as male (64.8%), middle-aged (around 40 years old), and highly educated (71.8%). These findings support previous research conducted on podcasters (Attig, 2020; Markman & Sawyer, 2014; Markman, 2012; Mocigemba & Riechmann, 2007).

### 5.1 Professional practices and profiles

In addition to educational qualifications, the podcasters in the DACH region were also asked about their journalistic background. Among them, 64.8% stated that they had never worked as a journalist, 16.8% were working as journalists at the time the survey was conducted, and 18.5% reported having worked as

Table 2: Profiles and practices of the podcasters (\*multiple selections possible)

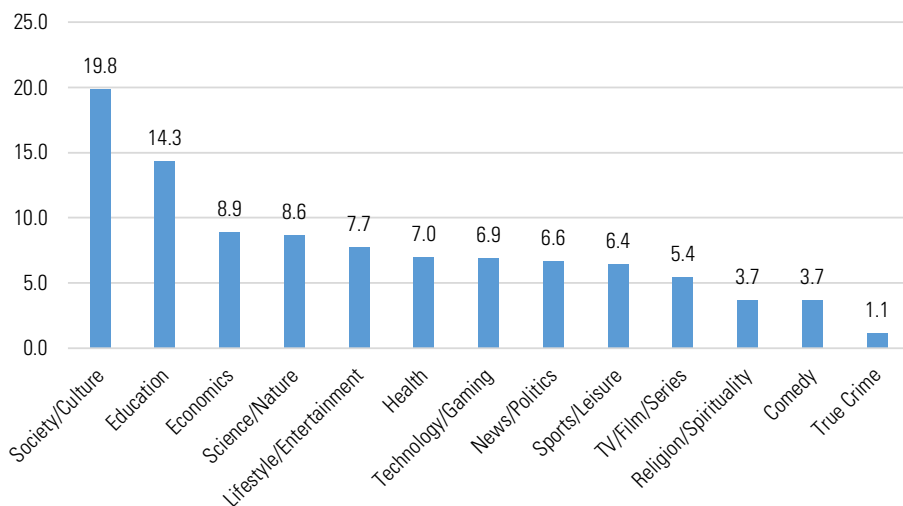
	Category	%
Tasks N=1073	Recording and technical production	44.4
	Research	22.3
	Organizational activities	11.4
	Marketing	10.4
	Community management	7.0
	Other activities	4.6
Frequency of Publication N = 1073	Several times a month	26.9
	Weekly	22.8
	Monthly	22.5
	Irregularly	14.7
	Other rhythm	5.4
	Several times a week	5.3
	Daily	1.2
Age of target group N=1834*	Several times a day	0.3
	≤ 13	1.1
	14–29	24.2
	30–49	35.3
	50 ≥	18.6
Revenue sources N=1256*	No specific age of target group	20.7
	No revenue	55.7
	Donations (e. g. Steady, Patreon, direct bank transfer)	13.2
	Sponsoring	10.0
	Indirect through financing of further “products” (e. g. lectures, merchandise)	5.7
	Native advertising	4.3
	Audio spots	4.1
Fee/Wage as service provider	4.1	
Amount of revenue (monthly) N=305	Paid subscriptions	3.0
	<100€	33.1
	100€ to 500€	27.9
	500€ to 1000€	13.1
	1000€ to 2000€	12.1
	2000€ to 5000€	7.5
5000€>	6.2	

journalists at some point in their careers. The 35.5% with a background in journalism were further asked about their journalistic training. 31.6% had completed a traineeship, 28.4% had obtained a degree in marketing, PR, etc., 17.4% in communications studies, and 13.3% in journalism studies. 9.3% of the podcasters had attended a journalism school. With regard to the professional context of their podcasts, the majority of respondents (39.7%) indicated that they produced their podcasts as private citizens, 31% reported they podcasted as freelancers, 17.3% as employees, 10% as service providers, and 1.9% as volunteers.

The podcasters were also asked about the topic (see Figure 1) and characteristics of their podcast(s), as well as (work) practices (see Table 2). Since podcasts are primarily a pull medium (Spinelli & Dann, 2019, p.8), the podcast's topic is crucial for both the respective podcast and its creator(s). Additionally, as certain topics are particularly popular among listeners, the choice of topic also influences the target audience, its size, and the revenue potential. Among the sample, the majority of podcasts covered topics related to society and culture (19.8%) and education (14.3%). Comedy (3.7%) and true crime (1.1%) occupied the last two positions. This is surprising, considering that according to the ARD-ZDF Online Study, these topics are among the most popular genres among listeners in the DACH region (Reichow & Schröter, 2020, p. 501).

In regard to their practices, podcasters in the DACH region typically produced more than one podcast ( $M = 5.4 / SD = 20.623 / \text{Mdn.} = 1$ ). They reported spending 6:02 hours per week on the production of their podcasts. Additionally, the podcasters were asked to estimate the percentage of their time dedicated to a variety of tasks. The survey participants indicated that the task that took up most of their time was the recording and technical production. On average, the respondents dedicated 44.4% (approximately 2:42 hours) of their weekly time to this task. They needed 22.3% (approx. 1:18 hours) for research, 11.4% (approx. 42 min.) for organizational activities, 10.4% (approx. 36 min.) for marketing, 7% (approx. 24 min.) for community management, and 4.6% (approx. 18 min.) for other tasks related to the production of their podcasts. The amount of time per week spent on production largely depended on the frequency of publication. The majority of respondents (26.9%) stated that they released their podcasts multiple times per month, followed by a weekly (22.8%) and monthly (22.5%) rhythm. High publication frequencies were rare: Only 5.3% of respondents reported publishing multiple times per week, 1.2% published daily, and 0.3% said they released new podcast content multiple times per day. Just like the podcasters themselves, their target audience was predominantly middle-aged, between 30 and 49 years old (35.3%). 24.2% of respondents stated that

Figure 1: Topics of the podcasts ( $N = 2963$ , multiple selection possible, rounded to %)



their target audience was 14 to 29, while 18.6% mentioned that they focused on an audience older than 50. Children were the target audience for only 1.1% of podcasters in the sample, although 20.7% stated that they did not target a particular age group. Furthermore, the size of the audience varied greatly within the sample. While some podcasters only had a few dozen listeners, other respondents reported having several thousand listeners. Within the sample, the maximum number of listeners reported was 2.5 million per episode, followed by two podcasts with an audience of about 1.5 million. The sample's mean audience size was 8917, with a median of 500. Half of the respondents had an audience size ranging from 150 to 2 000 listeners.

When asked about the amount of monthly revenue generated through the podcast, 55.7% of the respondents stated that they did not generate any income. Among the podcasters who generated revenue, the majority (61%) made less than €500 a month. 25.2% of the sample earned between €500 and €2 000, and 7.5% earned up to €5 000 per month through their podcast. Only 6.2% of podcasters reported earning more than €5 000 per month. The primary sources of income were donations (13.2%) and sponsorships (10%). Surprisingly, podcast- or audio-specific revenue sources such as native advertising (4.3%) and audio spots (4.1%) were less important.

## 5.2 Role Perceptions and Values

Among the six dimensions that shape the understanding of the role of a podcaster (see Table 3), *Entertainment and audience Orientation* was the most important ( $M=3.2/SD=1.007$ ). 31.2% of all podcasts in the DACH region stated that providing advice, guidance, and assistance, as well as content that attracted a wide audience, was “very important” or “extremely important” to them. *Education & Culture* was second ( $M=3.1/SD=1.166$ ). Promoting tolerance and cultural diversity, as well as conveying the world through storytelling, was considered “very important” or “extremely important” by 33.3% of all respondents. Following the two most influential facets, *Information, Mediation & Analysis* was in third place ( $M=2.8/SD=1.074$ ). On average, 18.2% of podcasters in the sample stated that being

a detached observer, reporting things as they are, or classifying and analysing current events was “very” or “extremely important.” The subsequent facet was *Political Articulation and Participation* ( $M=2.3/SD=1.060$ ). Communicating political information, providing individuals with a platform to express their views (e.g., through submissions, social media, or comment sections), and encouraging the audience to engage in political events were considered “very” or “extremely important” by 10.8% of all respondents. *Social Commitment* ( $M=2.1/SD=0.886$ ), which encompasses aspects such as setting the political agenda, influencing public opinion, advocating for social change, and supporting national development, was ranked fifth. On average, 3.7% of all podcasters who participated in the study found it to be “very” or “extremely important.” Overall, the role perception was least influenced by *Criticism and Control* ( $M=1.3/SD=0.657$ ). Only 1.3% of podcasters considered controlling the government and the economy, as well as acting as a counterbalance to the government, to be “very important” or “extremely important.”

Regardless of their categorization within specific dimensions of the role perception, offering advice, guidance, and assistance (60.8%), promoting tolerance and cultural diversity (55.6%), and reporting things as they are (49.5%) were most essential in the podcasters' understanding of their role overall. However, it is critical to note that all the findings on the role perceptions were derived from self-assessments by the survey participants. At present, the existence of a correlation between perceived roles and actual practice, as well as its strength, remains uncertain and requires further examination (see Chapter 3).

The findings on the values and standards indicate that podcasters in the DACH region impose high expectations on themselves in regard to the podcasts they produce. Overall, all items received high approval rates of  $M \approx 3.5$  and above (see table 4). The two most important values were *comprehensibility* ( $M=4.4/SD=0.755$ ) and *accuracy of information* ( $M=4.4/SD=0.874$ ). 89.9% and 87.7% indicated that they were “very” or “extremely important.” *Relevance* ( $M=4.0/SD=1.055$ ) and *multiperspectivity* ( $M=3.9/SD=1.109$ ) followed with approval ratings of about 70%,

**Table 3:** Role perception of podcasters, Hanitzsch et al., 2019,  $N=1073$ , ranging from 1 (“not important at all”) to 5 (“extremely important”), % = percentage of respondents rating the specific item as “very important” or “extremely important” ( $\alpha = .832$ )

	%	$M(SD)$
Entertainment & Audience Orientation	31.2	3.2 (1.007)
Offer advice, guidance and assistance	60.8	3.6 (1.319)
Offer content that attracts the largest possible audience	26.4	2.7 (1.271)
Education & Culture	33.3	3.1 (1.166)
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	55.6	3.5 (1.386)
Communicating the world in stories as a storyteller	36.0	2.8 (1.483)
Information, Mediation & Analysis	18.2	2.8 (1.074)
Being a detached observer	21.2	2.3 (1.345)
Report things as they are	49.5	3.3 (1.425)
Classify and analyse current events	34.1	2.8 (1.421)
Political Articulation & Participation	10.8	2.3 (1.060)
Communicating political information	14.5	2.0 (1.246)
Giving people the opportunity to articulate their views	34.8	2.8 (1.404)
Motivating people to participate in political events	19.8	2.2 (1.348)
Social Commitment	3.7	2.1 (0.886)
Set the political agenda	4.1	1.5 (0.857)
Influence public opinion	18.0	2.3 (1.232)
Advocate for social change	34.7	2.8 (1.427)
Support national development	10.7	1.8 (1.141)
Criticism & Control	1.3	1.3 (0.657)
Control the government	2.3	1.2 (0.681)
Control the economy	2.9	1.3 (0.730)
Counterbalance the government	4.5	1.4 (0.866)

respectively. *Objectivity* ( $M=3.8 / SD=1.159$ ) was also highly relevant to 65% of the respondents. Surprisingly, podcasters attributed a relatively low priority to the values and standards related to their audience: *Considering suggestions and wishes from the audience* ( $M=3.7 / SD=1.069$ ), *establishing a relationship with them* ( $M=3.6 / SD=1.171$ ), and *communication with them* ( $M=4.4 / SD=1.204$ ) were considered “very important” or “ex-

tremely important” by comparatively few participants, the items received 59.2%, 54.8%, and 51.1%, respectively. These findings contrast with other study results, as audience orientation and entertainment are the highest-rated aspects of role perception overall. The least relevant value and standard for the podcasters in the DACH region was *actuality* ( $M=3.2 / SD=1.212$ ), with an average approval rate of 43.1%. Once more, it is crucial to em-

**Table 4:** Values and standards of podcasters, Paterson et al., 2015; Lin et al., 2015,  $N=1,073$ , ranging from 1 (“not important at all”) to 5 (“extremely important”), % = percentage of respondents rating the specific item as “very important” or “extremely important” ( $\alpha = .791$ )

	%	<i>M (SD)</i>
Comprehensibility	89.9	4.4 (0.755)
Accuracy of Information	87.7	4.4 (0.874)
Relevance	71.8	4.0 (1.055)
Multiperspectivity	69.0	3.9 (1.109)
Objectivity	65.0	3.8 (1.159)
Consider suggestions and wishes from the audience	59.2	3.7 (1.069)
Establish relationship with the audience	54.8	3.6 (1.171)
Quick and easy communication with audience	51.1	3.4 (1.204)
Actuality	43.1	3.2 (1.212)

phasise that all statements are based on the self-assessment of the podcasters. The implications of this fact will be elaborated later on (see Chapter 7).

## 6 Discussion

Concerning RQ 1, the survey found that the podcasters in the DACH region are a relatively homogenous group of middle-aged, highly educated men (see Chapter 5). On one hand, these findings are consistent with many other podcast studies (Attig, 2020; Markman & Sawyer, 2014; Markman, 2012; Mocigemba & Riechmann, 2007). On the other hand, they once again emphasise a lack of representation of individuals who do not fit into these categories. This can be linked to some negative consequences. For example, it is plausible that a low diversity among producers is associated with a limited diversity of perspectives and topics. In this regard, recent research showed that podcasts produced by women tend to cover genres such as “society & culture,” “health,” and “education & advice” more frequently than male podcasters and do so from a specific angle (Attig, 2022, p. 63). Beyond sociodemographic characteristics such as gender, age, and education, other studies explored diversity factors like race, migration,

religion, or sexuality and revealed that only a small minority of the most popular podcasts in the DACH region exhibit diversity at all (Reiterer, 2022, p. 79). Overall, this lack of representation reinforces and reproduces social inequality (Reiterer, 2022, p.96).

In regard to their product and practices, most respondents of the study are involved in the production of more than one podcast. In making their podcast, they usually work independently, detached from strict professional or organizational norms, as they create their podcasts largely as private citizens or freelancers. Their audio products are mostly published on a regular basis, following a rhythm of several times per month or on a weekly basis. Only a few respondents stated that they release their podcasts irregularly. Publishing daily or multiple times a day is rare among the sample. In terms of their target audience, the majority of podcasters focus on attracting a middle-aged demographic of listeners. This approach seems reasonable since podcasts are most frequently consumed by these age groups (von Oehsen, 2022, p. 481; for an overview, see Hoffmann, 2022, p. 832). Although podcast production involves various tasks, recording, and technical production take up most of the surveyed podcasters’ time. Of the average six hours the respondents spend on

their podcasts per week, they allocate almost half of the time to this task.

Regarding monetisation, the results of this study show that more than half of the surveyed podcasters do not earn any money from their podcasts. Of those who do make money, the majority earn less than €500 per month. Furthermore, it seems plausible that the amount of revenue correlates with the size of the audience. This study found a strong statistical correlation between the two factors ( $r_s = .494$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This indicates that podcasts with many listeners are more appealing to advertisers and that there is potential for podcasters to monetise their product and the reach that goes along with it. In line with these findings, recent research shows that the majority of podcasters are not financially motivated when making their podcast. Only 18.7% of podcasters are primarily motivated by financial considerations (Katzenberger et al., 2022b, p. 49). Other studies have yielded comparable results regarding political influencers who engage in podcasting, indicating that these influencers do not generate substantial revenue from their podcasting endeavors (Sehl & Schützeneder, 2023). Instead, podcasting mainly serves as a tool for branding and presenting content in audio form. This is also true for media outlets and their podcasts. Additionally, recent findings show that even print publishers in the podcast domain have not fully utilized marketing opportunities (Wild & Katzenberger, 2021). Thus, although podcasters have a variety of innovative and creative monetisation and marketing strategies at their disposal (Katzenberger & Wild, 2024, in press), they mostly do not draw on them.

Conversely, from a normative perspective, these findings can be considered encouraging, as they suggest that the originally grassroots medium's discursive culture remains intact despite the gradual progression of commercialization (Drössler, 2022, p. 181). The fact that podcasters are not primarily focused on generating the largest possible audience and earning money through their podcasts is also evident in their genre choices. Some of the topics that are particularly popular among the audience, such as true crime and comedy (Reichow & Schröter, 2020, p. 501), were least favoured by the podcasters in the sample.

However, it is worth noting that podcasters, as well as their listeners, largely complement each other in their topic choices despite these differences. Entertaining and/or informative content is popular among both groups. In addition to entertainment, podcasters provide a multitude of journalistic services and contributions (see Chapter 2). They disseminate, analyse and interpret information of public interest, thereby influencing the formation of opinions among their listeners. Nevertheless, only a few respondents have a journalistic background or training.

Concerning RQ 2, the results from this study show the following: Podcasters emphasise the significance of entertaining and serving their audience through their content, view themselves as cultural and educational mediators, and consider observing and reporting on (social) reality as well as providing informative content a relevant objective in their endeavours (see chapter 5).

First, in their understanding of their role, most podcasters from the DACH region emphasise aspects such as *entertainment and audience orientation*. About entertainment as a central dimension in the role understanding, it should be noted that it is a popular user motive as well. Research shows that the primary drivers for podcast consumption are centered around the listener's desire for entertainment (Chan-Olmsted, 2020, p. 9). Popular among listeners in the DACH region are classic entertainment topics such as movies or TV series, comedy, sports, or recreation (Domenichini, 2018, p. 47). Thus, the results of this study could be an indicator that producers of podcasts are anticipating the needs of their listeners and deliberately addressing them with their content. The significance podcasters attribute to audience orientation in their role understanding indicates that podcasters care about providing advice and assistance to their audience, sharing consumer tips, and making recommendations, thus meeting the needs of their listeners. In doing so, podcasters take up an understanding of the role that has been established in traditional media, as outlined above and is often summarized as the "service role" of media professionals (Mellado et al., 2023, p. 3). The podcasters' emphasis on service orientation may be because podcasters introduce new and innovative modes of audi-

ence involvement that foster a strong and intimate connection between content creators and consumers (Meier et al., 2022, p. 711). However, the results also show that the podcasters do not attach the same importance to the audience in terms of their values. Relevant aspects such as considering suggestions and wishes from the audience as well as communicating and establishing a relationship with them achieve comparatively low approval rates in the survey. Similar results can be seen in connection to their professional practices: Among the various tasks undertaken by podcasters regularly, community management is the one that receives the least allocation of time.

With regard to the audience, the results from the survey are quite ambivalent. How can these contradictions be interpreted? It is possible that podcasters attach greater importance to their audience in their self-perception than in their professional practices. This could be explained by the fact that not all self-held orientations manifest themselves consistently or comprehensively in practice (Hanitzsch et al., 2019, p. 163).

Second, podcasters from the DACH region interpret their roles as cultural and educational multipliers for their audiences. Consequently, they also highlight values and standards like diversity or multiperspectivity in their work. This may indicate that podcasters assign a high educational benefit to the medium of podcasts. This aligns with the prevailing discourse in the field of podcast research: Podcasts are frequently discussed as a new and innovative learning resource, and studies show that podcasts can bring various benefits to education and classroom environments (McGarr, 2009; Drew, 2017; Goldman, 2018). The fact that producers highlight role perceptions like promoting cultural diversity or tolerance and emphasise values like multiperspectivity might be an indicator of the medium's potential concerning educational purposes and learning processes.

Third, in their understanding of their role, podcasters from the DACH region emphasise the importance of role dimensions such as *information, mediation, and analysis*. The results clearly indicate that podcasters aim to provide their listeners with informative content, with an emphasis on providing neu-

tral information and factual analysis in their podcasts. Podcasters show high approval ratings for traditional role conceptions like the “detached observer,” the “objective witness,” or the “mirror of reality” (Hanitzsch et al., 2019a). Such an understanding of roles is familiar from journalism and traditional media (see Chapter 3). Even though most podcasters do not have a journalistic background or education, it can be said that their professional ideology is shaped by the epistemological idea of depicting reality as it actually is. This is also in line with other results from the survey, which show that podcasters spend a lot of time researching their content. Much like in journalism, research holds considerable importance in podcasting because it helps producers provide precise and dependable information, thereby facilitating informed decision-making processes among the audience. Additionally, it plays a pivotal role in upholding accountability standards within the domain of podcasting, ensuring the credibility and reliability of the medium. Also in line with these results is that podcasters rate values like objectivity as very important. So, at least in their self-assessment, it seems essential to them to put aside personal assessments and opinions and forward information. Despite podcasts being commonly associated with entertainment, the findings indicate that the content producers also prioritize aspects such as information, mediation, and analysis, while also emphasising values such as objectivity, precision, and relevance. This corresponds with the listeners' needs, who primarily listen to podcasts for information seeking (Chan-Olmsted, 2020, p. 9). In this context, it is notable that the category of news podcasts is growing (Newman, 2023, p. 48), with formats like short-form bulletins or deep daily dives increasingly resonating with audiences (Newman & Gallo, 2019, p. 6). The fact that the producers highlight traditional role conceptions like information and values like objectivity in their self-assessments might also indicate the high quality of their content.

## 7 Conclusion

This study adopted an exploratory approach to examine podcasters in the DACH region,

that is, from Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. It evaluated the professional practices and profiles, as well as the role conceptions, values, and standards of 1073 podcasters through an extensive online survey. The findings reveal that the majority of podcasters in these areas are primarily male, middle-aged, and possess higher levels of academic education while lacking journalistic socialization or prior working experience in the journalistic context. In terms of their role perceptions and values, the results show that podcasters place significant emphasis on entertainment and audience engagement while also valuing standards such as comprehensibility and accuracy.

The results of the present study find their limits, particularly with regard to the representativeness of the sample. Since the population of all podcasters in the DACH region is not known, the sample is inevitably accumulative. Therefore, it is quite possible that the sample only represents German-speaking podcasters in a distorted way. Nevertheless, an examination of recent literature (see Chapter 6) underscores the possibility that this study's sample reasonably captures a representative portion of podcasters in the DACH region. Notably, the results from this study show similarities in crucial aspects such as gender, age, and education in particular, which lend support to the adequacy of the sample in reflecting the broader group of podcasters in the DACH region.

It is also imperative to acknowledge that all the aforementioned conclusions are based upon the self-reports provided by the participants of the survey. These accounts represent subjective self-assessments, and they do not constitute independent or objective measurements. This aspect is of significance when evaluating the robustness and generalizability of the obtained results. Furthermore, an additional limiting factor pertaining to the classification of the findings lies in the potential influence of social desirability on respondents' answers to the survey questions, particularly in the context of role conceptions and value orientations. Recent research has demonstrated that inquiries concerning role perceptions and values within the realm of media professionals can elicit socially desirable responses that align with normative

expectations (Mellado, 2019). This phenomenon warrants particular consideration while interpreting the data, as it may impact the validity and accuracy of the reported results.

Furthermore, it is important to note that recent research has not yet ascertained the extent to which self-reports on role perceptions directly translate into tangible manifestations and actual practice (Hanitzsch et al., 2019). The exact significance and impact of role conceptions on the day-to-day practices of podcasters must remain subject to further investigation and empirical scrutiny. As such, there exists an inherent need for comprehensive and in-depth studies to elucidate the intricate connections between role perceptions and their implementation in the context of podcasting practices.

The findings presented in this paper open up several avenues for future research, which can build upon and further enhance the exploratory insights provided by this study. One of the areas that warrant further investigation is the monetization of podcasts. Along with other studies that showed similar results (albeit for specific subgroups such as political influencers and publishers in the podcast domain), this study found that most podcasters in the DACH region do not earn any money from their podcasts. Although the origins of podcasting lie in the non-profit sector, and podcasts were and sometimes still are seen as an indie medium (Attig, 2022), it is surprising that the opportunity to monetise their product and reach is not utilized by most podcasters in the sample. Especially considering podcast listeners are regarded as a "premium advertising target group" (Domenichini, 2018, p. 46; Drössler, 2022, p. 181) and tend to be wealthier, better educated, and younger than other user groups (Newman, 2023, p. 49). In this context, an intriguing area of investigation lies in exploring the approaches and complexities encountered by podcasters in monetising their podcasts, as well as their responses to these challenges or the possible reasons that may render monetisation less relevant to their pursuits. Social Networking Sites (SNS) also offer interesting starting points for future research: With the assumption that podcasts are heavily intertwined with social media (Spinelli & Dann, 2019, p. 8), it is likely that these platforms have a significant influence

on the dissemination of podcast content, that they offer opportunities for audience engagement, or provide monetisation models. This, in turn, raises further questions: To what extent are SNS like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook connected to podcasts? And: How are SNS utilized to promote podcast content, generate reach, market, and monetise podcasts?

Lastly, the conflicting findings about how podcasters perceive the importance of their audience emphasise the importance of conducting more detailed research to understand better the dynamics of the relationship between podcasters and their listeners. It seems crucial to further investigate this connection from the perspective of listeners and complement research on parasocial relationships (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021): Do listeners feel like the podcast hosts care for them and their community? And if so, what factors contribute to this sense of connection? By further exploring these and other areas, researchers can contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of podcasting, providing insights for researchers, creators, and the podcast landscape alike.

Overall, the study provided first valuable insights into podcasts as a driving force of digital audio innovation, the podcasters in the DACH region, their practices, as well as an exploration of aspects such as their role perception, standards and values, tasks, topics, monetisation, and more.

### Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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