Article

Narrative Techniques in Romanian Podcasts: A Qualitative Case Study Analysis

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Abstract

Podcasting in Romania has experienced notable growth in recent years, evolving from a niche medium into a widely consumed form of digital communication. This expansion is driven by the flexibility of podcasts, which allow audiences to access content conveniently across various contexts, from commuting to leisure time, and by the increasing demand for stories that resonate with listeners personal experiences. This study examines the storytelling techniques employed by Romanian podcasters and their effects on audience engagement. Using a case study methodology, the research analyzes a selection of representative podcasts to explore how creators structure narratives, integrate cultural and social elements, and employ techniques such as thematic consistency, character development, and progressive disclosure of information. Findings indicate that the Romanian podcasters in this study have adapted both traditional and contemporary narrative strategies to build immersive, emotionally engaging content, balancing depth and accessibility. The analysis also highlights how narrative structures contribute to sustained listener attention and foster a sense of connection between hosts and audiences. Overall, this study provides insight into the role of storytelling in shaping podcast consumption in Romania and offers practical implications for content creators aiming to cultivate meaningful engagement and listener loyalty.

Keywords: podcast; storytelling; digital communication; engagement; audience

1. Introduction

Podcasting has rapidly evolved from a niche medium into a mainstream platform for content delivery over the past two decades (Berry, 2016). The term *podcast* was coined in 2004 by *Guardian* columnist Ben Hammersley, combining *iPod* with *broadcast* (Hammersley, 2004). Early podcasting was a small-scale, hobbyist domain, but a post-2014 resurgence—marked by the global success of narrative series like *Serial*—propelled podcasts into a "Golden Age" of audio storytelling (Llinares et al., 2018). As McHugh (2022) argues, the power of podcasting lies in sound itself—its ability to create intimacy and evoke emotion in ways that visuals often cannot.

By 2023, there were an estimated 464 million podcast listeners worldwide (up from ~332 million in 2020) and over 2 million podcasts available globally (Edison Research, 2024; DemandSage, 2023). As Cwynar (2015) observed in studying CBC's Radio 3 podcast, podcasting was emerging as more than a 'VCR for Radio'—it represented a distinct medium with unique affordances for content delivery and audience engagement. Major media organizations have embraced podcasting as part of their digital strategies, attracted by the

medium's affluent and educated audience base; as Newman observed in the 2023 *Digital News Report*, "podcasting may not yet be a mass market medium, but its audience profile is extremely interesting to publishers", with podcast audiences tending to have higher incomes and education levels (Newman et al., 2023, p. 48). Recent computational approaches to podcast analysis, such as Litterer et al.'s (2024) structured podcast research corpus, illustrate the growing academic interest in systematically mapping and understanding the podcast ecosystem at scale.

Digitization has led to disruptions in journalism on various levels; positively, these disruptions have enabled a range of innovations. One of the most important areas of innovation over the last decade has been podcasting (Katzenberger et al., 2023). In short, podcasts have become a core format in the media landscape, driving entertainment, engagement, and even brand connection. Creators and journalists are crafting compelling stories that "have done nothing less than revolutionize modern media," building dedicated fandoms of listeners who "can't get enough" of their favorite shows (Spinelli & Dann, 2019; McHugh, 2016a).

A defining feature of modern podcasts is their extensive use of storytelling techniques. Unlike traditional radio broadcasts or printed journalism, podcasts often leverage episodic narratives, personal anecdotes, and serial structures to captivate audiences (McHugh, 2016a). McHugh notes how podcast storytelling has evolved beyond audio-only format, with some narrative podcasts adapting their content across multiple media formats, demonstrating the versatility and appeal of podcast narrative structures. (McHugh, 2016a) Many successful podcasts intentionally integrate narrative elements usually associated with fiction—such as suspenseful build-ups, character development, and dramatic arcs—into non-fiction content (Berry, 2015; Spinelli & Dann, 2019). This storytelling-focused format cultivates a deep level of listener involvement, comparable to the immersive experience of binge-watching TV dramas. The concept of *binge-listening* has even emerged to describe how audiences devour multi-part podcast series with the same fervor once reserved for on-demand television (Llinares et al., 2018). Research suggests that this phenomenon stems from the medium's ability to produce immersive and emotionally engaging narratives that foster parasocial relationships and repeated listening behavior (Bottomley, 2015; Meserko, 2014). Computational analysis by Reddy et al. (2021) has identified specific linguistic patterns that correlate with listener engagement, providing empirical support for the relationship between language choices and audience retention in podcasts. The goal of any podcast is to build trust and loyalty with listeners, and "storytelling is an excellent avenue to make that happen" (Spinelli & Dann, 2019, p. 132).

Critically, podcast storytelling often differs from traditional radio journalism in style and execution. At the heart of all podcast formats, from interviews to chat shows, lies storytelling, which McHugh (2022) identifies as the essential element that transforms audio into a compelling narrative experience. Scholars observe that podcasting is shaping "a new, more informal genre of audio narrative" centered on a strong host–listener relationship (McHugh, 2016b, p. 66). Podcast narratives tend to be conversational ("talkier") and less strictly edited or scripted than classic radio documentaries, often blurring the lines between professional journalism and personal storytelling (Berry, 2016; Spinelli & Dann, 2019). The intimate, on-demand nature of podcasts enables hosts to speak more freely and personally, forging a sense of closeness with the audience (Llinares et al., 2018). This informal storytelling style can humanize content and deepen listener engagement, helping audiences form emotional attachments to hosts and their narratives (Andok, 2025). Murray's (2019) analysis of podcasting's 'intimate soundwork' reveals how this medium facilitates a unique form of 'collective individualism', where individual listening experiences contribute to broader community formation around shared narratives. This informal storytelling style

reflects the motivations of many podcasters who, as Markman (2015) found, are driven by desires to 'make friends' and create community through their content, rather than merely disseminate information in traditional broadcast formats.

Podcasts are seen as drivers of audio innovation, introducing new narrative forms, organizational structures, and monetization models, while maintaining some traditional journalistic values (Körner & Graßl, 2024). This innovation is particularly evident in how even news-oriented podcasts frequently adopt a personable tone: for example, reporters might share behind-the-scenes insights or personal reflections as part of their reporting—an approach that is far less common in legacy broadcast news (Sullivan, 2018). The narrative intimacy of podcasts is increasingly seen as a major factor in their popularity. Studies indicate that listeners feel "more engaged when [they're] listening to somebody tell their story" (McHugh, 2016b, p. 73), suggesting that the act of storytelling in audio triggers emotional and cognitive engagement beyond what impersonal formats achieve (Lindgren, 2016). Scherer and Cohen's (2024) research on 'ear buddies' reveals how the mobile, intimate context of podcast listening strengthens these parasocial connections, with hosts becoming trusted companions in listeners' daily routines Indeed, podcasts are uniquely positioned to provide not just information but also social and emotional gratification to listeners through storytelling, building what some researchers describe as meaningful parasocial relationships between hosts and audiences (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021; Vîlceanu, 2025). Research into podcast consumption motivations reveals that listeners are drawn to the medium for reasons beyond simple information seeking. McClung and Johnson (2010) found that podcast users are motivated by factors such as convenience, entertainment value, and the ability to access specialized content, suggesting that successful podcasts must address multiple audience needs simultaneously.

Podcasts represent a distinct medium with new affordances: on-demand distribution, mobile consumption, and freedom from time constraints have allowed podcasting to break away from the limitations of linear programming and explore stories in greater depth. Sharon and John (2024) propose the concept of "inverse parasocial relationships" to describe how podcast hosts imagine and address their audiences, shaping the content through an imagined intimacy that was less viable in traditional broadcasting. This affordance allows podcasters to establish more nuanced and emotionally resonant relationships with niche audiences, creating personalized and immersive storytelling environments.

Moreover, podcast formats vary widely. Some podcasts—such as daily news briefings or panel discussions—rely less on narrative structure and more on straightforward information delivery or casual dialogue. These formats might eschew elaborate storytelling, focusing instead on breadth of coverage or expert analysis. As Bradshaw (2012) illustrated, a single-issue narrative podcast (e.g., *Freakonomics*) uses character development, setting, and plot movement to sustain interest, whereas a news roundup podcast (e.g., *Guardian Media Talk*) covers multiple topics and thus employs narrative elements more sparingly. In a recent research, Vîlceanu (2025) analyzed over 12,000 podcast listener reviews, finding that audiences often value storytelling not just for its informational function but for its ability to create emotional and nostalgic bonds. This emotional component is particularly evident in reviews referencing podcast hosts' personal anecdotes or recurring themes, which cultivate a form of narrative intimacy that traditional radio often lacked (Vîlceanu, 2025).

Divergent perspectives in the literature highlight that while storytelling is a powerful tool for engagement, its application in podcasting is highly context-dependent. The balance between narrative and other content elements can differ by genre, purpose, and editorial intention. Podcast hosts, who exhibit empathy, consistency, and authenticity, are more likely to foster parasocial bonds—yet these traits may be less emphasized in genres like daily news or corporate communication podcasts. This ongoing debate underlines the

importance of studying how storytelling is actually employed across podcasts and cultural contexts—a key aim of the present work (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021).

Symbolic storytelling methods powerfully mediate complex societal issues like sustainability, influencing collective consciousness and public attitudes through culturally resonant narratives. Digital storytelling highlights how new media technologies transform traditional symbolic narratives, facilitating deeper audience engagement through adapted forms of cultural and religious symbolism (Tudor & Bratosin, 2021). This theoretical lens is particularly valuable in understanding podcasting as a digital narrative medium, revealing how podcasters can leverage symbolic storytelling to deepen emotional engagement and cultural relevance for their listeners.

In the context of narrative communication, Galmisch (2015) identifies three principal types of storytelling—autobiographical, citizen, and collective. Autobiographical storytelling involves the speaker recounting personal experiences to construct an ethos of authenticity, while citizen narratives draw on stories of everyday individuals to foster empathy and identification. Collective narratives invoke shared historical or cultural references to unite the audience around common values and identity. This interplay between personal, communal, and historical stories reflects a socio-constructivist approach to identity, wherein meaning and ethos are co-constructed through discourse. In podcasting, these storytelling types can be applied to create layered, resonant narratives: hosts may share personal anecdotes, feature listener stories, or situate discussions within broader cultural contexts. The narrative circle thus provides a powerful framework for podcasts aiming to build trust, emotional engagement, and thematic coherence.

Recent scholarship has further illuminated the mechanisms through which podcast narratives achieve their effects. McHugh's comprehensive study, *The Power of Podcasting: Telling stories through sound* (McHugh, 2022), demonstrates how the medium's unique affordances—portability, intimacy, and seriality—enable new forms of "deep listening" that foster both cognitive and emotional engagement. Verma (2024) extends this analysis by examining what he terms "narrative podcasting in an age of obsession," arguing that contemporary podcasts cultivate intense listener investment through carefully structured narrative obsessions that span multiple episodes or seasons.

The relationship between narrative technique and audience intimacy has received particular attention in recent years. Lindgren (2021) analyzed award-winning podcasts to identify how emotional disclosure, conversational interviewing styles, and vulnerability create intimate connections between hosts and listeners, finding that these elements are not merely stylistic choices but strategic narrative techniques that enhance journalistic impact. García de Torres et al. (2025) examine the ethical dimensions of this intimacy in news podcasts, noting both its potential to deepen engagement with complex issues and its risks of blurring boundaries between journalism and entertainment. Bird and Lindgren (2024) position podcast journalism as a site of "storytelling experimentation" where traditional journalistic conventions are being reimagined through narrative innovation, while Dowling (2024) provides a critical assessment of both the promise and perils of this evolution, cautioning that narrative emphasis must be balanced with journalistic rigor. Dowling and Miller (2019) specifically analyze "immersive audio storytelling" in documentary podcasts, identifying techniques such as scene-setting, sound design, and serialized revelation that create deeply engaging listening experiences comparable to prestige television.

The Romanian podcasting landscape provides a compelling context to explore these issues, with podcasting being a relatively young but rapidly growing medium. The true power of podcasts is the intimate bond they create between host and listener. Unlike traditional mass media, podcasts feel like one-to-one conversations—a voice speaking directly into the listener's ear—which fosters trust, authenticity, and even parasocial rela-

tionships (McHugh, 2022). A 2020 national study by BRAT and Thinkdigital found that 37.8% of Romanian internet users aged 16–50 years were podcast listeners—approximately 3.2 million people. Penetration was notably higher in urban areas (44%) than in rural ones (29%), and the audience skewed toward a higher-income and more educated demographic, with around 30% holding higher education degrees and above-average household incomes. In terms of genre preferences, comedy podcasts were the most popular, attracting over half of listeners (Edison Research, 2024). These figures underscore that by the early 2020s, a significant segment of the Romanian public had embraced podcasts as a source of both entertainment and information. Nonetheless, experts have described the Romanian podcast sector as still "at the beginning", an emergent domain that remains underdeveloped and not yet a mainstream habit for all audiences. This dual reality—rapid growth but early-stage adoption—makes Romania an interesting case for studying podcast storytelling. Content creators in Romania are experimenting with narrative techniques to attract and retain listeners in a media market where podcasts are not yet fully entrenched.

Within this context, the present research explores storytelling techniques in Romanian podcasts. Specifically, our study examines how narrative elements are employed in five Romanian podcast series spanning different genres. The choice to focus on storytelling arises from its presumed importance in engaging listeners and differentiating podcasts from other media. By analyzing a sample of podcasts in the Romanian language, we aim to understand what storytelling strategies are used (e.g., narrative structure, character development, use of description and emotion, etc.), how these strategies vary by podcast type and target audience, and what this implies for the broader role of podcasts in digital journalism and media. A review of relevant literature suggests that effective storytelling can deepen listener engagement and loyalty, and that podcasts may fuse journalism with narrative in novel ways. However, little scholarly attention has been given to Romanian podcasts to date, and it is unclear whether global trends hold in this local context.

The significance of this research is twofold. First, it contributes to filling a gap in academic knowledge about Romanian media: podcasting in Romania has not been extensively studied, especially regarding content and narrative style. Understanding how Romanian creators use storytelling can shed light on the localization of global media trends and possibly guide local content producers in improving their craft. Second, this study offers insights into the practice of digital storytelling in journalism and mass communication. If podcasts are indeed a new frontier for journalistic storytelling, examining their narrative techniques (and their effectiveness) can inform how media professionals approach audience engagement in the digital age. Our analysis connects to broader discussions about narrative journalism, media convergence, and audience-centered content strategies.

Research Questions

Based on the literature reviewed and the identified gaps in understanding Romanian podcast storytelling, this study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Romanian podcasters employ storytelling techniques in their content?
RQ2: What narrative structures or elements are most common, and what purposes do they serve (engagement, explanation, emotional impact)?
RQ3: How do these storytelling practices differ by podcast genre or format?
RQ4: What might these findings suggest about the role of storytelling in digital media and journalism, particularly in the Romanian context?

In summary, the aim of this work is to critically examine the storytelling techniques deployed in five Romanian podcasts and to discuss the implications of these techniques. We provide a qualitative analysis of narrative structures in each podcast, identify common patterns and distinct approaches, and relate our findings to existing literature on audio

storytelling. We also consider how these narrative practices target and engage audiences, and how podcast storytelling might influence or reflect contemporary journalistic practices in Romania. The study's conclusion, previewed here, is that storytelling emerged as a central component across the five analyzed Romanian podcasts, suggesting this may be a broader pattern worth investigating: all five analyzed podcasts make substantial use of narrative elements to captivate listeners, though the form and function of storytelling differ according to each show's format and audience. These findings reinforce the idea that storytelling is a powerful tool in digital media, while also highlighting the adaptability of narrative techniques to fit various content niches. The following sections detail our methodological approach, present the analysis results, discuss their significance, and conclude with key takeaways for media practitioners and scholars.

2. Materials and Methods

This study was designed as a qualitative content analysis focusing on narrative techniques in podcasts. We employed a multiple-case study approach, selecting five Romanian podcast series as case studies for in-depth analysis. Each podcast in the sample serves as a unit of analysis through which we explore the use of storytelling. A qualitative design was chosen because our research interest centers on *how* and *why* storytelling is woven into podcast content—questions that are best answered by examining content and context rather than by numerical measurement. The analysis draws on principles of narrative analysis and thematic content analysis. Narrative analysis, in this context, means we attentively examined how each podcast constructs stories (structure, characters, plot progression, etc.), while thematic analysis allowed us to identify recurring storytelling strategies and themes across the sample.

2.1. Sample Selection: Five Romanian Podcasts

We deliberately selected five podcasts that vary in genre, format, and target audience, to capture a broad range of storytelling practices. The selection was based on purposive sampling: we included podcasts that are well-known or influential in Romania and that we anticipated would demonstrate rich use of narrative techniques. The final sample comprised:

1. *Vorbitorincii*—Cătălin Striblea & Radu Paraschivescu: Combining cultural analysis and satire, this podcast adopts a relaxed, intellectual tone. Through dialogue, humor, and literary references, the hosts build multi-layered narratives that reflect on societal behaviors and current affairs. This podcast was chosen for its explicit narrative focus: symbolically, it balances pragmatic and dogmatic forms—promoting reflection, tolerance, and cultural wisdom.

2. *Vocea Nației*—A commentary and news-analysis podcast hosted by journalist Dragoș Pătraru. The title means "The Voice of the Nation." Pătraru, known from TV, uses the podcast to discuss current events, social issues, and behind-the-scenes media insights in a candid, often humorous monologue style. We selected *Vocea Nației* to represent a socio-political genre where storytelling might appear in the form of personal anecdotes, satire, and rhetorical storytelling devices that engage listeners in news topics.

3. *MCN Podcast*—A conversational comedy podcast hosted by the popular stand-up comedian Cosmin "Micutzu" Nedelcu (hence *MCN*). This show typically involves Micutzu and occasional guests discussing everyday experiences, pop culture, and humorous anecdotes. It was included as an example of a comedy/humor podcast, given that comedy is a top podcast genre in Romania (53% of listeners enjoy it). We anticipated that *MCN Podcast* would showcase spontaneous oral storytelling, banter, and the use of humor as a narrative technique to captivate a younger audience.

4. *Banii Vorbesc*—A financial education podcast hosted by Laurențiu Mihai and Sorin Amzu. The name translates to "Money Talks." This podcast covers personal finance tips, investing, and money management, often featuring interviews or discussions of real-life financial stories. We chose *Banii Vorbesc* to observe storytelling in an educational/informative context. Personal finance can be dry, so the hypothesis was that the hosts use storytelling (such as success stories, cautionary tales, or metaphors) to illustrate concepts and keep listeners engaged.

5. *Fain & Simplu—Mihai* Morar: This personal development podcast utilizes an emotionally engaging conversational format. Morar structures his episodes around inspirational journeys of his guests, using introspective questions, anecdotal storytelling, and a tone of emotional vulnerability. Symbolically, the podcast frequently draws on dogmatic representations—such as redemption and inner peace—resonating deeply with listeners seeking growth and clarity.

These five podcasts span a spectrum from journalism to comedy, education and personal development, providing a diverse ground to explore storytelling techniques. All selected podcasts publish in the Romanian language and had an established listener base at the time of study. (Table 1) By analyzing such varied examples, we aimed to identify both common narrative techniques (practices that appear across podcasts) and genre-specific techniques (unique to a particular format or audience strategy). Our analysis of different podcast types as distinct genres draws on established digital media scholarship. Miller and Shepherd (2004) showed how digital platforms like blogs function as unique genres with their own communicative purposes and community-building functions, supporting our approach to examining how different podcast formats employ storytelling techniques to serve varied social and communicative goals.

Table 1. Context and characteristics of analyzed podcasts.

Podcast Name	Year Started	Average Episode Duration	Release Frequency	Estimated Listeners	Publisher Type
Vorbitorincii	2021	3 h	Twice a month	90 K (4th place in Apple podcast ranking)	Independent
Fain și Simplu	2020	1.5–2 h	Weekly	From 300 k to 950 k (1st place in Apple podcast ranking)	Part of Radio Zu, MEDIA CAMINA (G.M.C.) SRL
MCN Podcast	2019	2 h	Twice a month	Depends on the episode, from 85 k to 1.5 million	Independent
Banii Vorbesc	2017	1 h	Weekly	8 k	Independent
Starea Nației	2019	30 min	Weekly	50 k	Produced by the independent media project *Starea Nației*

The five selected Romanian podcasts vary considerably in terms of production background, format, and audience reach. Most are independently produced, reflecting the broader decentralization of podcasting as a medium that allows creators to operate outside traditional media institutions. The analyzed series also differ in frequency and duration, ranging from shorter, topic-focused episodes (*Banii Vorbesc*) to long-form conversational formats (*Vorbitorincii, Fain & Simplu*, *MCN Podcast*). This variety demonstrates how Romanian podcasters adapt global storytelling practices to local contexts, combining journalistic, conversational, and reflective narrative styles to attract diverse audiences. All podcasts are distributed through major platforms (Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Youtube) and maintain active social media presences.

2.2. Data Collection

For each podcast, we collected and analyzed a sample of episodes. Given resource constraints and to maintain depth of analysis, we focused on a limited number of episodes per podcast. Specifically, we selected 3 recent episodes from each series (as of the time of research, which was 2024). The selection of three episodes per podcast was determined by several factors: first, representativeness—episodes were chosen based on (a) thematic consistency with each show's stated description, (b) recurrence of narrative devices observed across the podcast's history, and (c) popularity metrics or audience feedback indicating typical rather than exceptional content. Second, analytical saturation—preliminary analysis revealed that core narrative patterns (personal anecdotes, hooks, conversational tone, audience address) appeared consistently across the first two episodes of each podcast, with the third episode serving as confirmatory evidence rather than revealing substantially new techniques. Third, depth versus breadth—given the study's focus on *how* storytelling techniques function (RQ1–RQ2) rather than content variation, we prioritized deep qualitative analysis of narrative structures over large-scale sampling. Finally, practical constraints— full manual transcription and coding of Romanian-language audio required substantial time investment; limiting to three episodes per podcast enabled the analytical depth necessary for identifying subtle narrative patterns while still capturing genre diversity across five distinct formats. All sampled episodes were listened to in full. Transcription was performed with an AI software, TurboScribe. Then, we revised the transcription, manually for high accuracy in capturing Romanian dialogue, including filler words or exclamations that might be relevant to storytelling tone.

2.3. Analytic Framework

We applied a coding scheme that combined deductive categories drawn from storytelling literature with inductive codes that emerged from the data. Prior to analysis, we reviewed relevant frameworks of narrative structure. For example, we considered Labov's classic model of narrative (which includes elements like Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Action, Resolution, Coda) as a sensitizing concept for what parts of a story to look for. We also drew on media-specific insights such as Bradshaw's three core principles of narrative in audio: *characters*, *setting*, and *movement* (*plot progression*). These concepts informed our initial codebook. We began coding transcripts for elements like: Characters (who is the protagonist or focal figure in the story?; for example, the host themselves, a guest, a third-person figure being discussed), Setting/Scene (descriptions of time and place, context establishment), Plot/Arc (problem-solution structures, conflicts, or suspenseful questions raised and answered), Emotional cues (moments designed to evoke emotion or empathy), Humor (use of jokes or comic storytelling), Direct audience address (instances where hosts speak directly to "you" the listener, or involve the audience in the narrative), and Calls-to-action or engagement (e.g., prompting listeners to imagine something, or soliciting listener stories).

Coding was carried out manually, to ensure close engagement with the transcripts and the narrative subtleties of each podcast episode. Though manual coding involves greater time investment and interpretive decisions, this approach was necessary to identify the subtle narrative patterns and contextual storytelling elements specific to the podcast medium. A combined deductive–inductive approach was employed. Deductive codes were derived from established frameworks in narrative and storytelling studies (Labov, Bradshaw, Galmisch, Tudor), while inductive codes emerged during the iterative process of transcript review. This manual approach allowed for the identification of additional storytelling practices that were not initially anticipated in the codebook. For example, "media references" was introduced to capture moments when hosts recounted behind-

the-scenes stories from journalistic or media practice (notably in *Vocea Nației*), and "serial narrative hooks" was added to code episodes ending with cliffhangers or teasers for subsequent installments. Manual coding thus ensured both theoretical grounding and openness to emergent narrative patterns.

To ensure coding reliability, the first author conducted initial coding of all transcripts. Both authors then independently reviewed coded segments from one episode per podcast (representing 33% of the total sample). Discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached, and ambiguous codes were refined through iterative peer debriefing. This process enhanced inter-coder agreement and ensured consistent application of both deductive codes (derived from Labov, Bradshaw, Galmisch) and inductive codes that emerged from the data. The collaborative refinement of the codebook (Tables 2 and 3) reflects this validation process.

Table 2. Deductive coding scheme for storytelling techniques.

Code Category	Description	Theoretical Source
Characters	Identification of protagonists (hosts, guests, public figures) who drive the story.	Bradshaw (2012); Labov (1972)
Setting/Scene	Establishing context: time, place, or situation in which events unfold.	Labov (1972)
Plot/Arc	Narrative movement through conflict, climax, resolution, or suspense.	Labov (1972); McHugh (2016a)
Autobiographical storytelling	Use of personal experiences to establish authenticity.	Galmisch (2015); Legorburu et al. (2021)
Citizen storytelling	Narratives of everyday individuals to foster empathy.	Galmisch (2015)
Collective storytelling	Shared cultural or historical references to build collective identity.	Galmisch (2015)
Symbolic/mythical narratives	Founding, dogmatic, and pragmatic representations (e.g., paradise, redemption, love).	Tudor and Bratosin (2021)
Emotional cues	Use of vulnerability, humor, or dramatic tone to elicit emotions.	McHugh (2016b); Meserko (2014)
Direct audience address	Rhetorical questions, 'you' statements, invitations to imagine scenarios.	Sharon and John (2024)
Serial hooks	Cliffhangers, teasers, or continuity across episodes.	Llinares et al. (2018); Legorburu et al. (2021)

Table 3. Inductive codes emerging from Romanian podcast analysis.

Code Category	Description	Example from Romanian Podcasts
Dialogic storytelling	Co-creation of narratives through host–guest exchanges or banter.	Vorbitorincii—hosts weaving anecdotes into dialogue.
Humor and exaggeration	Anecdotes built around hyperbole, punchlines, or comedic reenactment.	MCN Podcast—everyday stories told for laughs.
Financial parables	Hypothetical or real financial case studies used to illustrate abstract advice.	Banii Vorbesc—using 'Ana with credit card debt'.
Biographical arcs	Guest's life presented as a hero's journey (origins–conflict–resolution).	Fain & Simplu—inspirational guest narratives.
Cultural references	Integration of Romanian idioms, history, or literature into stories.	Vorbitorincii—drawing on literary characters.

Table 3. *Cont.*

Code Category	Description	Example from Romanian Podcasts
Narrative loops	Returning to an initial anecdote or theme later in the episode.	Vocea Nației—closing with takeaways tied to the opening story.
Recurring themes/motifs	Repeated narrative structures across episodes (e.g., resilience, failure, irony).	Fain & Simplu—recurring themes of personal growth.

2.4. Analytical Focus

After coding, we analyzed the data in two main ways. First, we performed a within-case analysis for each podcast: summarizing how storytelling functions in that particular series. We wrote analytic memos describing each podcast's narrative style, structure, and notable techniques, supported by representative examples from transcripts. For instance, we documented the structure of a typical *Vorbitorincii* episode (introduction of guest, early life story, challenges faced, climax with a pivotal career moment, conclusion with reflections) and noted how the host guided that narrative. Similarly, we charted the flow of a *Vocea Nației* episode, which might start with a personal anecdote as a hook, segue into analysis of a news event, and then circle back to a moral or takeaway—effectively using a narrative loop to frame news commentary.

Second, we conducted a cross-case thematic analysis to identify commonalities and differences across the five podcasts. This involved comparing the coded data across podcasts: for example, examining all instances of "character introduction" across the sample to see how hosts introduce characters or personal elements in each show, or comparing how humor is used differently in a comedy podcast versus a non-comedy one. We looked for patterns such as: Are there storytelling techniques that *all* podcasts use? Which techniques are unique or more pronounced in one genre versus another? We also considered the audience targeting aspect: how each podcast's narrative style seems tailored to its intended audience or community. This was informed by looking at tone, language (formal vs. colloquial), assumptions of listener knowledge, and direct references to the audience or their interests.

Ethical considerations: All data used (podcast episodes) were publicly available. Our analysis did not involve human subjects directly (no interviews or interventions), so formal ethical approval was not required. However, we approached the content respectfully, especially since personal stories are involved—our intent is to analyze narrative technique, not to critique the individuals sharing their stories. Where we quote or describe podcast content in the Results, we do so in a way that preserves the anonymity of any third parties mentioned in the episodes (only public figures or the hosts themselves are named).

In summary, our methodology combined qualitative narrative analysis with thematic coding across a purposive sample of five diverse Romanian podcasts. This approach is well-suited to uncover nuanced storytelling techniques and to provide a rich, contextualized understanding of how podcasts captivate and engage their audiences through narrative means. The next section will present the results of this analysis, structured around the key findings on narrative structures, common techniques, differences among the podcasts, and strategies used to target and engage audiences.

3. Results

3.1. Narrative Structures in the Five Podcasts

Despite differences in genre and format, all five analyzed podcasts exhibit recognizable narrative structures within their episodes. A core finding is that each podcast, in

its own way, builds content around stories or story-like progressions rather than mere disjointed information.

Vorbitorincii blends cultural commentary with conversational storytelling, producing episodes that feel both intellectual and intimate. Rather than following a rigid narrative arc, each episode is structured around a theme (often literature, history, or contemporary cultural issues) and develops through the exchange of stories between the hosts. Paraschivescu frequently draws on his wide literary knowledge and personal anecdotes, while Striblea anchors the conversation in accessible, often humorous reflections. A typical technique is the use of historical or literary anecdotes that act as mini-stories contextualizing abstract ideas. For instance, Paraschivescu might recall a historical episode or a character from Romanian literature, setting up a scenario (the "story"), introducing tension (a conflict, irony, or absurdity), and then linking it back to a contemporary issue. The storytelling thus serves as a bridge between the past and present. Moreover, the show makes heavy use of dialogic storytelling: one host begins narrating an episode from his life or a cultural vignette, and the other reacts, elaborates, or counters with his own related story.

In addition, *Vorbitorincii* employs a strong sense of place and identity in its storytelling. Episodes frequently highlight Romanian cultural particularities—dialects, idioms, historical memory, or regional customs—which are narrated with both affection and irony.

Vocea Nației shows a different but still clear use of narrative structure. As a commentary show, it does not tell a single story per episode; instead, each episode is segmented by topics, yet each segment often contains a story or narrative vignette. Typically, Pătraru opens an episode with a personal anecdote or a satirical "story of the day". This might be a recent real-life incident or a comedic fictional scenario that allegorically introduces a serious issue. For instance, the host might narrate "*I was at the supermarket yesterday and noticed something that perfectly explains our economic situation...*", thereby using a small story as a microcosm of a larger point. This serves as the hook and establishes a relatable setting (the host's personal life or a common situation). The use of recurring characters (e.g., referring to known public figures with nicknames, almost like characters in an ongoing saga of Romanian public life) further adds a narrative continuity across episodes. Additionally, *Vocea Nației* frequently employs cliffhangers or teasers when splitting a topic across episodes: Pătraru might end an episode hinting at "*a story we'll uncover next time*", which is a classic serial storytelling technique to retain audience interest.

The *MCN Podcast*, being an unscripted comedy talk show, might appear less structured at first glance, but it too relies heavily on narrative elements. Rather than a single coherent story, *MCN* episodes are a chain of anecdotes and humorous narratives. Micutzu and his co-host or guests engage in free-flowing conversation, but they constantly trade personal stories—recounting absurd events from their daily lives, childhood misadventures, or comedic observations turned into mini-stories. Each anecdote typically has a setup and punchline structure, which is essentially a condensed narrative (setup = situation/characters, punchline = twist or resolution). For example, the host might start narrating, "*So, I tried to fix my sink last week...*" and proceed through a comedic sequence of events that ends in a gag. While *MCN Podcast* does not follow a single narrative arc per episode, its content is rich with narrative fragments. The common storytelling techniques here include hyperbolic exaggeration (to make stories funnier), dialogic reenactment (the host might mimic voices or act out dialogues in the story), and relatable everyday settings (many anecdotes are rooted in ordinary life, making them easy for the audience to imagine). These techniques align with the fact that humor and storytelling are closely linked in audio entertainment—the narrative gives structure to the comedy, and the comedy provides entertainment value to the narrative.

In *Banii Vorbesc*, the structure tends to be topic-driven (e.g., "How to save for retirement" or "Investing 101"), but storytelling is used as a pedagogical tool within that structure. Typically, an episode will start with a real-world scenario or case study to contextualize the financial topic. For instance, the hosts might introduce an imaginary character or a composite of real people: "*Imagine a young professional, let's call her Ana, who finds herself with mounting credit card debt...*". This immediately sets up a narrative that the audience can follow. As the episode progresses into advice and analysis, the hosts periodically return to Ana's "story"—perhaps explaining how a certain financial strategy would help her, thus weaving practical tips into a narrative context. The use of second-person address is notable—the hosts frequently address the listener as "you," positioning *you* as the protagonist who can take action, which is a form of narrative immersion and audience targeting. Even though the primary goal is to convey information, wrapping it in storytelling (be it hypothetical scenarios or real anecdotes) makes the content more engaging and memorable. It transforms abstract financial concepts into concrete narratives, aligning with educational research that storytelling enhances retention of information.

Fain & Simplu operates in a more interview-driven narrative style, where storytelling is central both to structure and to emotional engagement. At its core, the podcast is designed to draw out the life stories of its guests, framing each episode as a journey rather than a simple Q&A. The show combines elements of biographical narrative, confessional storytelling, and philosophical reflection, which together create an intimate atmosphere. Morar often opens episodes with reflective monologues or short anecdotes that set the tone. These introductions work as narrative hooks: they frame the guest's story as part of a larger exploration of meaning, resilience, or authenticity. By sharing a personal observation (e.g., a memory, a lesson from daily life, or a cultural reference), Morar establishes common ground and invites the listener into a space of vulnerability. This technique positions the conversation not just as an interview but as a shared story-building exercise.

The analyzed episodes follow a biographical arc, where the guest is cast as the protagonist of their own story. The arc typically unfolds in stages: *origins* (childhood anecdotes, family influences, early aspirations); *conflict* (struggles, failures, crises, or turning points); *climax*: moments of revelation or transformation (e.g., career breakthroughs, personal healing); *resolution* (lessons learned, values embraced, or advice for others).

This mirrors the hero's journey structure and makes the episode emotionally compelling, as listeners track the guest's evolution.

Even though each guest brings a unique story, *Fain & Simplu* maintains recurring thematic arcs: the search for purpose, resilience after failure, the meaning of family, spirituality, or self-discovery. These themes act as a meta-narrative that ties episodes together, giving loyal listeners a sense that they are part of an ongoing exploration. Thus, while each episode stands alone, collectively they build a tapestry of interconnected human stories.

Morar frequently speaks directly to the audience, using "you" to position the listener as part of the story. For example, after a guest recounts a struggle, Morar might turn to the audience with reflections such as "And you probably felt something similar at some point." This creates a shared storytelling space where listeners project themselves into the narrative, enhancing identification and immersion.

Episodes usually end with a moment of closure—either a summarizing moral, a philosophical reflection, or a practical takeaway. This provides the resolution of the narrative arc, leaving listeners with both emotional satisfaction and intellectual or spiritual insight. In this way, *Fain & Simplu* functions not only as storytelling but as a kind of guided life lesson.

3.2. Common Storytelling Techniques

Across the five podcasts, we identified several common storytelling techniques that appeared repeatedly, albeit adapted to each show's style:

Use of personal anecdotes: In all podcasts, personal anecdotes (told either by the host or a guest) are a staple device. These anecdotes serve to illustrate points (in *Vocea Nației* and *Banii Vorbesc*), to entertain (in *MCN Podcast*), or to deeply inform and humanize content (in *Fain & Simplu* and *Vorbitorincii*). The personal anecdote establishes authenticity and credibility—listeners hear real experiences, which builds trust. This aligns with the notion that authenticity in storytelling fosters a loyal audience. Even in structured interviews like *Fain & Simplu*, the host occasionally shares bits of their own perspective or story to empathize with the guest, creating a two-way narrative exchange. In the more talkative formats, anecdotes often emerge spontaneously, but their cumulative effect is to weave a fabric of personal stories that listeners can relate to.

"Hook" openings: Each podcast tends to start episodes with a strong hook, often narrative in nature. Rather than opening with dry announcements, the hosts jump into an interesting story, question, or scenario within the first minute or two. For example, as noted, *Vorbitorincii* might open with a teaser from the guest's life, *Vocea Nației* with a witty anecdote or provocative statement, *Fain și Simplu* with an immersive scene, etc. The hook functions to grab attention immediately, much like the lead of a good written story or the cold open of a TV show. In our observations, episodes that began with a narrative hook had a more cohesive structure and kept our attention more than those (few) that started with generic preambles. This technique is evidently well-understood by podcasters as a best practice to prevent drop-off at the beginning of episodes.

Conversational tone and informal language: All podcasts used a conversational tone, even when dealing with formal topics. This is a narrative strategy in that it establishes the *voice* of the narrator as a friendly, familiar figure—essentially a character the audience comes to know. The language used across these podcasts tends to be informal, often employing Romanian colloquialisms, humor, and even slang (especially in *MCN Podcast* and *Vocea Nației*). This informal speech style is part of what makes podcast storytelling distinct from traditional journalism; it creates a sense of intimacy and approachability. Listeners are addressed as peers. In terms of narrative, this voice invites the listener "into the story" as if hearing it from a friend, which can heighten engagement.

Rich descriptions and imagery: Particularly in *Vorbitorincii*, but also in segments of *Fain si Simplu* and *Vocea Nației*, hosts frequently employ vivid descriptions. They "paint a picture" with words—whether it is describing a physical setting, a person's appearance and emotions, or even an abstract concept via metaphor. For instance, Pătraru in *Vocea Nației* might describe bureaucratic corruption with a metaphorical narrative (like likening it to a leaking old ship to illustrate a point), effectively telling a mini-story. Descriptive storytelling appeals to the imagination and emotions, which is crucial in audio because there are no visuals; the words must serve that function. The travel podcast obviously uses this to the fullest extent (evoking landscapes, city atmospheres, etc.), which not only informs but *transports* the audience, making them feel present in the narrative world of the podcast.

Structural segmentation: Many episodes (especially in *Vocea Nației* and *Banii Vorbesc*) were segmented into parts or sections, each with its own narrative example or story. This segmentation is often signaled by musical jingles, sound effects, or a change in the presenter's tone. From a storytelling perspective, segmenting content into story units helps maintain pace and gives listeners mental "breaks" between topics. It also allows multiple narratives to be packed into one episode in an organized way. For example, a *Banii Vorbesc* episode on "5 Tips for Investing" might be broken into five segments, each introduced by a

short scenario (story of an investor making a mistake or a triumph corresponding to the tip). This approach keeps the listener engaged through variety while still tying back to a unifying theme.

Direct audience involvement: Another common technique is directly addressing or involving the audience in the narrative. This can take forms like rhetorical questions ("*Have you ever experienced something like this?*"), invitations to imagine scenarios ("*Picture yourself in this situation: . . .*"), or even soliciting input for future episodes (e.g., "*Send us your story about X and we might discuss it next time*"). By doing this, podcasters create an interactive feel. It positions the listener not just as a passive consumer but as a participant in the story (even if just in their own mind, as they answer the rhetorical question or imagine the scenario). We observed such techniques especially in *Banii Vorbesc* (to personalize advice) and *Vocea Nației* (to challenge the listener to think about their stance on issues), but also in *MCN Podcast* when hosts read listener comments or messages as a springboard for more storytelling. This strategy likely helps build a community of listeners who feel heard and engaged, reinforcing loyalty.

Recurring themes and callbacks: Over multiple episodes, podcasts often develop recurring themes or motifs in their storytelling. For instance, *Fain & Simplu* frequently touches on the theme of overcoming failure—nearly every guest has a chapter of failure or rejection, and the narrative of "bouncing back" becomes a powerful, repeated message. In *MCN Podcast*, there are running jokes or references to previous funny stories, which become part of the podcast's lore. These callbacks reward long-time listeners (creating a sense of inside knowledge) and give a serial narrative continuity beyond individual episodes. It is akin to character development in a TV series—the audience gets to know the cast of characters (including the hosts' own personas) more deeply over time, through recurring storylines and references. This technique strengthens the listener's bond with the podcast and encourages listening to multiple episodes (to catch references and follow ongoing narrative threads, however loose they may be in a talk show format).

3.3. Differences and Genre-Specific Strategies

While the above techniques were observed in all podcasts to some extent, there were also notable differences in storytelling approach aligned with each podcast's genre and audience. We highlight a few key contrasts:

Narrative depth vs. breadth: *Vorbitorincii* and *Fain & Simplu* can be characterized as deep-dive narrative podcasts—they stick largely to one story (the guest's life story or a travel journey) per episode, allowing extensive development of narrative depth, detail, and emotional arcs. Both *Vorbitorincii* and *Fain & Simplu* can be situated within the category of deep-dive narrative podcasts, where each episode is organized around a single extended story arc rather than a series of shorter narrative fragments. In *Vorbitorincii*, this often takes the form of a cultural or historical journey, with Paraschivescu and Striblea weaving anecdotes, literary references, and personal stories into a thematic exploration. The dialogic structure allows one host to setup a narrative—whether drawn from history, literature, or daily life—while the other responds, elaborates, or counters with a parallel story. This rhythm produces narrative depth: each vignette is unpacked with detail, context, and reflection, transforming individual stories into layered commentaries on Romanian culture. Humor and irony frequently serve as narrative resolution, softening the critique and maintaining accessibility. *Fain & Simplu*, by contrast, achieves narrative depth through a biographical and confessional structure. Episodes are anchored in the guest's life story, typically unfolding along a hero's journey arc: early influences and origins, conflicts or crises, transformative moments, and eventual resolution through lessons learned. Morar guides the guest to re-live experiences vividly, often by prompting for sensory details,

emotional context, or reenacted dialogue. The result is immersive, emotionally charged storytelling that sustains a single extended narrative across the entire episode. Unlike *Vorbitorincii*, which layers multiple shorter vignettes into one thematic whole, *Fain & Simplu* privileges a prolonged emotional arc, building tension through vulnerability and releasing it through reflective closure. In both cases, the format dictates the use of narrative depth rather than breadth: the emphasis is on immersion, extended storytelling tension, and elaborate setups that allow listeners to become absorbed in one story-world per episode. In contrast, *Vocea Nației* and, to a degree, *Banii Vorbesc* handle multiple sub-narratives within an episode (breadth). They cover several topics and thus present shorter narrative segments for each topic rather than one long story. This difference is dictated by format: an interview benefits from immersive storytelling, whereas a commentary or magazine-style show aims to cover different points in one sitting. Consequently, the narrative techniques differ: deep-dive podcasts invest in elaborate setups and prolonged storytelling tension, whereas breadth-oriented podcasts use quicker anecdotes and punchier stories that can deliver insight in a compressed time before moving on. Both approaches leverage storytelling, but the pacing and scale of stories differ.

Use of humor: Humor is present across the board but plays a central role in the comedy genre and a supporting role elsewhere. In *MCN Podcast*, humor *is* the point, so every story is told for comedic effect. That leads to exaggeration, playful tone, and even occasional fictitious embellishments purely for laughs. In *Vocea Nației*, humor (often dark or sarcastic) is used strategically to critique or lighten heavy political content. Pătraru might recount a humorous hypothetical to expose an issue's absurdity, but then pivot to serious commentary—the humor is a narrative sugar-coating to make serious topics more palatable and shareable. In *Vorbitorincii*, humor emerges naturally in conversation; it is used to build rapport or highlight a personality trait of the guest. *Banii Vorbesc* uses only light humor (maybe a funny analogy or a lighthearted personal problem with money) to keep the tone friendly; the priority there is clarity and reassurance, so humor is toned down. Thus, genre influences not just whether humor is used, but how: in comedy podcasts, narrative serves humor; in non-comedy podcasts, humor serves narrative (or content) by keeping it engaging.

Target audience tailoring: Each podcast's storytelling reflects assumptions about and appeals to their target audience's interests and values. For example, *Vocea Nației* targets an audience that is civic-minded, skeptical, and likely follows current events; hence, its storytelling often references Romanian political culture, media controversies, and shared national experiences (it assumes the listener has a certain knowledge or investment in these narratives). The language is sometimes edgy or subversive, resonating with listeners who may feel mainstream media does not speak to them candidly. Storytelling in *Vorbitorincii* reflects the assumption that its audience consists of culturally engaged, educated listeners with an interest in literature, history, and intellectual commentary. The hosts frequently draw on literary references, historical anecdotes, or linguistic humor that presuppose a shared cultural knowledge base. This narrative style flatters the audience's cultural capital: by alluding to canonical writers, historical events, or idiomatic turns of phrase, the podcast positions its listeners as part of a community that values intellectual depth and wit. Humor and irony further align with this audience's taste for nuanced critique—serious issues are presented in an accessible way without being didactic. In this sense, the storytelling appeals to listeners who see themselves as reflective participants in Romanian cultural life, eager for both intellectual stimulation and entertainment. *MCN Podcast* clearly aims at a younger, entertainment-seeking crowd; its stories are filled with colloquial references (including internet memes, local pop culture, etc.) that this public appreciates. The style is deliberately unfiltered—profanity and slang appear—creating authenticity that the target

audience values in comedy. *Banii Vorbesc* targets listeners interested in self-improvement and practical advice (likely 20s–40s, financially motivated individuals). Its storytelling is thus didactic: simplified characters like "Ana with credit card debt" represent the audience themselves, making the advice feel directly relevant. The tone is encouraging and avoids technical jargon without context—every concept is "storified" to some extent because the hosts assume the audience might not stay engaged with raw numbers or theory. Finally, *Fain & Simplu* tailors its storytelling to an audience seeking personal growth, authenticity, and emotional resonance. The target demographic—often younger adults, professionals, or spiritually curious listeners—is invited to immerse themselves in the life stories of guests framed as journeys of struggle, resilience, and meaning. Morar's narrative techniques—emphasizing vulnerability, intimacy, and detailed reenactment of personal experiences—directly appeal to listeners who value deep emotional connection and the search for purpose. The tone is reflective rather than ironic; the guest is positioned as a role model or guide, while the listener is addressed as someone who might find inspiration or validation in these stories. References are less academic and more universal (family, love, failure, redemption), ensuring accessibility across a wide audience while fostering a sense of shared humanity. In sum, audience targeting strategies manifest in narrative content through the choice of references, tone (casual vs. formal), complexity of language, and the framing of stories to either challenge, inspire, or entertain the presumed listener.

Overall, the five podcasts demonstrate that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to storytelling in podcasting. Instead, each genre adapts narrative techniques to its objectives—whether to inform, entertain, inspire, or persuade. What they all share is a recognition that story is a powerful connector: even in data-driven or talk-heavy content, wrapping messages in a narrative makes them more digestible and engaging. The Romanian podcasts we analyzed uniformly leverage the human affinity for stories, but they tune their storytelling style to their content domain and audience profile.

3.4. Cross-Case Synthesis

RQ1: How do Romanian podcasters employ storytelling techniques in their content?

All five podcasts demonstrated systematic use of four core techniques: (1) personal anecdotes to establish authenticity and illustrate concepts; (2) narrative hooks in episode openings to immediately engage listeners; (3) conversational tone with direct audience address using "you" statements and rhetorical questions; and (4) recurring themes and callbacks creating serialized continuity. Beyond these universal practices, format-specific adaptations emerged: interview shows employed biographical arcs (origins–conflict–resolution), educational content used hypothetical case studies, and commentary formats leveraged narrative loops for framing.

RQ2: What narrative structures or elements are most common, and what purposes do they serve?

Three structures dominated: Episodic micro-narratives (short anecdotes within episodes) served explanatory and retention functions, particularly in *Vocea Nației*, *MCN Podcast*, and *Banii Vorbesc*. Extended biographical arcs structured entire episodes of *Fain & Simplu* and *Vorbitorincii*, prioritizing emotional depth and parasocial intimacy. Dialogic co-construction characterized conversational formats, creating spontaneity through host exchanges. Key narrative elements included vivid descriptions (compensating for audio-only format), character development (of hosts and guests), and structural segmentation (maintaining pace across multiple topics).

RQ3: How do these storytelling practices differ by podcast genre or format?

Genres diverged along three dimensions: Narrative depth versus breadth—interview podcasts (*Vorbitorincii*, *Fain & Simplu*) developed single elaborate arcs per episode, while commentary/educational shows (*Vocea Nației*, *Banii Vorbesc*) employed multiple compressed narratives. Humor's function—central to *MCN Podcast's* comedic purpose, but serving as critique-softening in *Vocea Nației* or rapport-building in *Vorbitorincii*. Audience targeting—each podcast's narrative choices reflected assumptions about listeners: political references for civic-minded audiences (*Vocea Nației*), literary allusions for educated listeners (*Vorbitorincii*), colloquialisms for youth (*MCN Podcast*), simplified scenarios for financial novices (*Banii Vorbesc*), and vulnerability-centered narratives for personal growth seekers (*Fain & Simplu*).

RQ4: What might these findings suggest about the role of storytelling in digital media and journalism, particularly in the Romanian context?

The findings suggest storytelling functions as a strategic tool for democratizing journalism and educational content in Romania's emerging podcast landscape. *Vocea Nației* demonstrates how narrative techniques transform political commentary into accessible civic engagement, potentially reaching audiences alienated by traditional news media's formal tone. Similarly, *Banii Vorbesc* shows storytelling's pedagogical value in making technical subjects comprehensible through relatable scenarios. This narrative-driven approach addresses the dual challenge facing Romanian podcasters: building audiences in a market where podcasting remains "at the beginning" while competing against established media. The heavy reliance on personal authenticity and conversational intimacy across all five podcasts suggests that in contexts with lower media trust, storytelling may serve a credibility-building function beyond mere entertainment. Furthermore, the cultural specificity observed—Romanian idioms, historical references, local political satire—indicates that podcasting enables localized narrative journalism that bridges global format conventions with distinctly national concerns, creating what might be termed "glocal" storytelling practices.

3.5. Synthesis

Romanian podcasters employ storytelling as foundational architecture rather than embellishment. While universal techniques appear across formats—suggesting convergence with global practices—their application is highly context-dependent. Genre dictates whether storytelling prioritizes depth or breadth, entertainment or education, cultural specificity or accessibility, demonstrating podcasting's capacity for "glocal" narrative production.

4. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that storytelling functions as a strategic engagement mechanism across diverse Romanian podcast formats, confirming and extending international research while revealing culturally specific applications. Fundamentally, our findings underscore that storytelling is a cornerstone of podcast content, serving as a key mechanism for engaging listeners across different formats. The distribution of Galmisch's storytelling types across the analyzed podcasts also reflects specific cultural and professional dynamics in Romanian journalism. Autobiographical storytelling dominates because Romanian media culture values personal authenticity and lived experience, which compensate for declining trust in institutional voices. We argue that the prevalence of personal, first-person narratives across all five podcasts reflects Romania's post-communist media context, where decades of state-controlled, impersonal journalism created audience skepticism toward institutional voices. Autobiographical storytelling functions as a credibility-rebuilding mechanism—hosts establish authenticity through personal vulnerability rather than institutional authority. This pattern appears strongest in *Vocea Nației* (where Pătraru's personal

anecdotes counter traditional news formality) and *Fain & Simplu* (where biographical confession positions guests as trustworthy guides rather than distant experts). Citizen storytelling emerges most clearly in podcasts like *Vocea Nației* and *Banii Vorbesc*, where everyday examples democratize discourse and invite identification with ordinary people. Collective storytelling—invoking shared history, idioms, or national references—is especially prominent in *Vorbitorincii*, revealing how podcasting can reaffirm collective identity while maintaining irony and critique. These overlaps suggest that Romanian podcasters negotiate between personal credibility, social empathy, and collective belonging, turning storytelling into both a journalistic and cultural act.

This echoes global observations that podcasts thrive on narrative: creators craft stories (personal tales, journalistic narratives, or comedic anecdotes) to capture attention and build loyalty. In all the cases we studied, from a conversational comedy show to a serious interview series, the hosts leveraged narrative elements to transform content into something more compelling than a dry information dump. This supports the claim that audiences are more likely to become invested in content when it is presented in story form—listeners "trust" and remember narratives in a way that statistics or bullet points alone seldom achieve.

One notable aspect is how intimacy and authenticity emerged as direct consequences of the storytelling approaches employed—indeed, these qualities appear to be intentional outcomes of the narrative techniques observed rather than incidental by-products. Prior research has highlighted that podcasting's informal, conversational style helps forge a strong host-listener relationship, and our findings concretely illustrate this. In each podcast, the host's personality and voice become central "characters" in the ongoing narrative of the series. This finding directly aligns with recent scholarship on podcast intimacy. Lindgren (2021) identified emotional disclosure, conversational style, and vulnerability as key elements fostering intimacy in award-winning Australian and British podcasts—patterns we observed consistently across our Romanian sample, particularly in *Fain & Simplu* and *Vorbitorincii.* García de Torres et al. (2025) argue that intimacy in podcast journalism presents both ethical challenges and opportunities; our analysis of *Vocea Nației* demonstrates how this intimacy can be leveraged for civic engagement, with Pătraru using personal anecdotes to create trust while delivering critical political commentary. This extends García de Torres et al.'s framework by showing how intimacy functions not just in documentary formats but also in satirical news commentary within post-communist media contexts.

Moreover, our findings on parasocial relationships support Chan-Olmsted and Wang's (2020) observation that podcast consumption is driven by perceived intimacy and social connection. The recurring themes and callbacks we identified in *MCN Podcast* and *Fain & Simplu* create what Chan-Olmsted and Wang describe as "community-building through shared narratives," where listeners develop deep attachments to hosts as trusted companions. The Romanian context adds nuance here: in a media environment characterized by lower trust in traditional journalism, the authentic, unfiltered voice of podcast hosts may serve a particularly important function in rebuilding media credibility among younger audiences.

For example, Dragoș Pătraru in *Vocea Nației* and Micutzu in *MCN Podcast* cultivate a persona through repeated storytelling—listeners come to know their quirks, values, and humor as if they were characters in a long-running story. This persona-driven narrative aligns with what Siobhan McHugh (2016a) observed: that podcasting encourages a "new, more informal" audio narrative centered on personal connection. Our study shows this is true not only in the U.S. or Western European context, but also in Romania. Even when dealing with journalistic content, Romanian podcasters tend to eschew the impersonal

tone of traditional media in favor of an accessible, first-person approach. This suggests a broader shift in digital journalism—one in which authentic voice and personal storytelling are increasingly valued as tools to engage an audience that may be skeptical of overly formal or institutional media tones.

The genre-specific differences we found also reinforce existing discussions about the diversity of podcast formats. Scholars like Paul Bradshaw have noted that narrative techniques can be adapted to different editorial demands. Our comparison of deep-dive narratives (like *Fain & Simplu*) versus breadth-oriented shows (*Vocea Nației*, *Banii Vorbesc*) provides a concrete example: both types use storytelling, but in distinct ways. The fact that *Vorbitorincii* mirrors a narrative journalism approach (akin to a long-form magazine profile, but in audio), while *Vocea Nației* mixes narrative with news analysis, demonstrates the flexibility of podcasts as a narrative medium. This aligns with Lindgren's (2016) argument that podcasts enable "personal narrative journalism" and Dowling's (2024) observation that podcast journalism occupies a space similar to long-form magazine features. At the same time, podcasts can also function like talk radio or entertainment programs, blending multiple short narratives or unscripted banter. In essence, the medium supports a hybridization of storytelling styles. Our findings illustrate that Romanian podcasters are experimenting along this spectrum, adapting global podcasting trends to local contexts through culturally specific references (Romanian literary figures, historical memory, regional idioms), Romanian-language humor and wordplay, and engagement with distinctly Romanian socio-political issues—thus contributing culturally situated variations to otherwise global narrative patterns.

Importantly, the Romanian context did not reveal any radically new storytelling techniques that are absent elsewhere—rather, it showed a convergence with global podcasting practices, adapted to local culture. For instance, the heavy use of humor in *MCN Podcast* and the popularity of comedy podcasts in Romania (as indicated by audience data) parallel the global surge in comedic storytelling podcasts. The success of storytelling in a comedic context confirms literature suggesting that narrative is key even in non-fiction audio aimed at entertainment. People connect through shared stories and laughter, and this is as true in Bucharest as it is in New York. Similarly, the narrative-driven interview style of *Vorbitorincii* is reminiscent of renowned English-language interview podcasts (like *WTF with Marc Maron* or *How I Built This*), which use personal narratives to reveal truths about creative or business journeys. The convergence suggests that podcast storytelling taps into universal human interests—personal experiences, journeys of growth, relatable struggles—which transcend borders. At the same time, the local context adds flavor: the references, language, and specific issues in Romanian podcasts are tailored to Romanian society, making the narratives resonate strongly with local listeners. This confirms the idea that while the podcast format is global, its content is often glocal (global formats with local content).

One area where our results provide insight is the impact of storytelling on listener engagement in an era of digital media overload. Industry analyses, including Edison Research's (2024) annual Podcast Consumer reports and Newman et al.'s (2024, 2025) Digital News Report, have noted that podcast audiences demonstrate higher loyalty and engagement compared to other digital media formats. The evidence from our study supports a narrative explanation for this phenomenon. The podcasts we examined consistently invite listeners to form emotional connections—whether it is rooting for a guest on *Vorbitorincii* as they recount their challenges, or feeling part of an inside joke on *MCN Podcast*. These connections are reinforced over time by recurring characters and themes, effectively creating a *serialized experience*. This is analogous to how TV series create returning audiences via continuing storylines and character development. In the podcast realm, it is the hosts and their style that often serve as the continuous thread. The implication is that storytelling

fosters a form of serial engagement: listeners do not just consume one episode in isolation; they become invested in the ongoing "story" of the podcast itself (its community, its evolving discussions, its familiar narrative beats). This might explain why, as the Media Culture Journal article observed, listeners indulge in binge-listening and report being unable to stop once drawn into a narrative podcast (Krause, 2024). Our study's qualitative evidence aligns with that, underscoring that *narrative is a hook that retains audiences*.

Another point of discussion is how our findings relate to the role of podcasting in journalism and media practices Scholars including Bird and Lindgren (2024), Dowling (2024), and Katzenberger et al. (2023) recognize that podcasts represent a new avenue for journalism. Our analysis of *Vocea Nației* in particular highlights how a journalist is utilizing storytelling to make news analysis more accessible and compelling. This aligns with Bird and Lindgren's (2024) observation that podcast journalism involves "storytelling experimentation" that challenges traditional broadcast conventions. Like the immersive audio storytelling described by Dowling and Miller (2019), *Vocea Nației* employs narrative hooks, character development (even of political figures), and serialized structures typically associated with entertainment media. However, our findings extend this literature by demonstrating how these techniques function in a context of political satire rather than investigative reporting. Dowling (2024) warns of the "perils" of podcast journalism, including the risk that narrative emphasis may compromise journalistic objectivity; yet, our analysis suggests that in the Romanian context, narrative and satire may actually enhance critical engagement with news, providing an alternative to both state-influenced and sensationalist commercial media.

The educational function of narrative we observed in *Banii Vorbesc* resonates with McHugh's (2022) argument that podcasts enable "deep dives" into complex topics through extended narrative development. McHugh emphasizes that podcast journalism's longer format allows for contextualization impossible in traditional news; our financial literacy podcast demonstrates this principle in a non-journalistic domain, suggesting that narrative techniques developed in journalism podcasts have broader applications across educational and informational content.

Instead of a formal newscast, Pătraru's approach is closer to that of a storyteller-commentator who educates through narrative and satire. This is consistent with trends in digital journalism where the lines between reporter, commentator, and storyteller are blurring. The success of such formats suggests that podcasting can revitalize public interest in serious topics by packaging them in narrative form. This might be especially pertinent in Romania, where traditional news media face challenges like declining trust or limited youth engagement (as indicated by the BRAT and Banca Transilvania (2020) national study showing 37.8% of Romanian internet users aged 16–50 consume podcasts, with higher urban penetration). Podcasts like *Vocea Nației* potentially help bridge that gap by engaging younger, educated listeners on civic issues through an informal yet informative storytelling approach. This indicates a *complementary role* for podcasts alongside conventional journalism: they can dive deeper into context, provide personal angles, and sustain attention over longer periods (30–60 min of listening) than a typical news article might.

Likewise, in the realm of educational content (*Banii Vorbesc*) and cultural content (*Vorbitorincii*), podcasts are demonstrating how storytelling can effectively disseminate knowledge and promote cultural discourse. The use of narrative case studies in *Banii Vorbesc* mirrors pedagogical strategies that emphasize storytelling as a means of teaching—people often learn better from examples and narratives than from abstract concepts alone. This suggests that other educational initiatives (in areas like health, science, etc.) in Romania could adopt a similar podcast storytelling model to reach and educate the public. In the analyzed podcasts, the blending of journalism with narrative aligns with the global trend

of podcasts and documentaries that aim to foster cross-cultural understanding. It is a form of soft-power journalism—informing listeners about the wider world not by listing facts, but by telling human stories from various places.

Limitations and caveats: It is important to acknowledge the limitations of our study when interpreting these results. These findings should be interpreted as exploratory insights into Romanian podcasting practices rather than definitive patterns across the entire landscape.

- *Sample size and scope:* We analyzed five podcasts, which, while diverse, represent only a small slice of the Romanian podcasting scene. There are dozens of other Romanian podcasts, and some may employ different storytelling strategies (or minimal storytelling) that were not captured here. Our findings, therefore, are not necessarily generalizable to *all* Romanian podcasts, but rather illustrative of how storytelling functions in some prominent examples. Future studies could expand the sample for a more representative picture.

- *Subjectivity in analysis:* Our qualitative approach means that the identification of "storytelling techniques" partly relied on our interpretation. What we coded as a narrative element or technique might be interpreted differently by another researcher. We might have, for example, a slight bias to notice storytelling because we expect to find it. It is possible that we as analysts emphasized narrative aspects and a different lens might focus on, say, ideological content or linguistic style more. However, given our research questions, we believe our focus was appropriate.

- *Lack of direct audience data:* We did not measure listener engagement quantitatively (e.g., through listener statistics, completion rates, etc.) nor did we conduct listener interviews. Our assertions about engagement are inferred from content and anecdotal evidence. While literature supports that storytelling correlates with engagement, we cannot conclusively claim that the narrative techniques caused certain engagement outcomes without further audience research. There could be other factors (like the celebrity of a host, or external promotion) that drive a podcast's popularity alongside or even more than its storytelling quality.

- *Temporal context:* The podcasting landscape is fast-moving. Our analysis was essentially a snapshot (episodes from 2024). Podcast formats can evolve; for example, some podcasts might change their style or new ones might emerge with innovative approaches. The COVID-19 pandemic gave a particular boost and shape to podcasts—as noted, many started in 2020—and as we move forward, the trends might shift (for instance, perhaps more podcasts will incorporate video or interactive elements). Thus, our findings should be seen in the context of the medium's state at the time of study, and not as static characteristics.

Considering these limitations, caution should be used in over-generalizing the results. Nonetheless, the patterns observed provide valuable insights and raise further questions worth exploring.

Implications for Media Professionals

For podcasters, journalists, and content creators, our study highlights practical takeaways: incorporating storytelling techniques can significantly enhance a podcast's appeal. The fact that all successful shows we examined rely on narrative suggests that new or existing podcasts aiming to grow audiences might consider investing in narrative development—for example, structuring episodes more deliberately as stories, training hosts in narrative interviewing techniques, or adding personal anecdotal segments to otherwise dry topics. The alignment of our findings with known audience preferences (e.g., the popularity of humor, the appreciation of authenticity by younger audiences) indicates

that knowing your audience and tailoring the narrative style accordingly is key. A podcast targeting business professionals might incorporate succinct success stories and a confident tone, whereas one targeting teens might use more slang, pop culture references, and raw personal confessions—both are storytelling, but calibrated differently.

Media organizations in Romania (and beyond) can also glean that podcasts are not just a fad but a *complementary platform for storytelling journalism*. As the Newman et al.'s (2023) report implied, while not everyone listens to podcasts yet, those who do are a desirable demographic (young, educated). Crafting narrative podcasts could help media outlets engage segments that are otherwise tuning out of traditional news. This does not mean turning news entirely into entertainment, but using story form to restore the public's attention and emotional connection to journalism. Our results show it is feasible: complex issues were discussed in *Vocea Nației* with rigor *and* narrative flair; financial literacy was promoted in *Banii Vorbesc* through relatable stories, not just numbers. These could serve as models or inspiration for public broadcasters, independent journalists, or educators looking to leverage podcasts.

5. Conclusions

This research has examined how storytelling techniques are employed in Romanian podcasts, revealing that narrative is a persuasive and vital element in this emerging media form. Through a qualitative analysis of five diverse podcasts, we identified common storytelling practices (such as personal anecdotes, narrative hooks, conversational tone, and vivid descriptions) and highlighted how these are adapted to fit different genres and target audiences. Whether in an interview series, a comedic talk show, a news commentary, an educational program, or a biographical narrative podcast, storytelling proved to be the thread that binds the content together and connects it with listeners. All five podcasts, despite their varied purposes, leaned on fundamental narrative principles—establishing characters (often the hosts or guests themselves), setting scenes and context, introducing conflicts or questions, and resolving them in ways that deliver insight or entertainment. This confirms that the power of story—to engage, inform, and inspire—may extend into the digital audio domain.

One key contribution of this study is in demonstrating that the trends noted in global podcasting literature also manifest in the Romanian context. The storytelling techniques identified in these podcasts function in ways that could build audience and community, though whether this represents conscious strategy or evolved practice would require interviewer data with the podcasters themselves. The intimate, informal style of narrative we observed aligns with what has been described as the distinctive ethos of podcasts (versus traditional media). This suggests a convergence where Romanian media creators are part of a broader shift towards more personal, relatable media experiences. It also indicates that audience expectations in Romania—at least among the podcast-listening demographic—mirror those elsewhere: listeners seek content that not only delivers value (be it knowledge or amusement) but does so through a humanized, story-driven approach.

For media professionals and practitioners, our findings have practical implications. Journalists and content creators looking to start or improve podcasts should consider integrating storytelling techniques to a high degree. This might involve training in narrative skills—for example, learning how to structure episodes like narratives with clear arcs, how to use one's personal voice effectively, or how to draw out stories from interviewees. Existing literature suggests that such storytelling approaches are associated with more engaged audiences (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021), though our study's focus on content analysis does not allow us to directly measure audience engagement outcomes. Moreover, storytelling can make complex or dry topics accessible. As seen with *Banii Vorbesc*, financial

advice becomes more digestible when wrapped in a story; similarly, *Vocea Nației* shows that even political commentary can gain traction if it feels like listening to a good story or a friend's insightful rant rather than a lecture. Media organizations might also take note that supporting narrative podcasts can enhance their reach among younger audiences who favor on-demand, story-centric content over traditional formats.

For researchers, this study provides a foundation upon which to build further analysis of podcast narratives. It underscores the importance of examining *content* (not just technological and business aspects) when considering the impact of new media. As podcasts continue to evolve, tracking how narrative methods change or endure will be important for understanding media consumption behaviors. Our research also hints at the rich interdisciplinary territory that podcasts occupy—at once part journalism, part entertainment, part education, and deeply rooted in oral storytelling traditions. They prompt us to revisit classic communication theories (like the narrative paradigm, uses and gratifications, etc.) in a modern context.

In conclusion, the exploration of storytelling techniques in Romanian podcasting reveals a dynamic interplay between an age-old practice—storytelling—and a new-age medium. Podcasts exemplify how technology can revive and amplify traditional storytelling in innovative ways. In Romania, as in many places, podcast creators are effectively modern-day *griots* or storytellers, building communities through voice and narrative. While these findings cannot be generalized to all Romanian podcasts, they provide preliminary evidence that their techniques, while diverse, share a common thread of striving to engage the listener's mind and heart through story. As podcasting grows further and perhaps becomes more saturated, it is likely the quality and authenticity of storytelling that will distinguish the most impactful content. For a medium literally born from "*iPod + broadcasting*", it is fitting that its maturation is measured not just in megabytes or user stats, but in stories told and connections made. The success of narrative podcasting in Romania points to a media future where journalism and storytelling are ever more entwined—and where audiences, craving that connection, follow the story.

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