



# Journalists as radio advertising endorsers in news or talk radio stations

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## Abstract

This exploratory investigation studies the presence of journalists as advertising endorsers in news or talk radio stations when a mention or testimonial is embedded within programme, the characteristics of these advertisements, and the degree of their involvement with the message and the product and brand. The research analysed all programming contents from a sample of national stations, focusing on type, subject and length of endorsement, role of endorser, and frequency of brand mention and call to action. The results show that many cases do not respect the codes of conduct of the sector and bypass the distinction between editorial and commercial contents.

## Keywords

Advertising, endorser, ethics, journalist, radio

## Introduction

The Spanish consider the radio to be the most reliable news source, with 82 per cent of Spaniards considering it trustworthy, ahead of the Internet (80%), written press (55%)

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and television (51%), according to a recent sociological report by Metroscopia (Toharia, 2017). This trust has led to a stable; loyal audience of 27,312,000 listeners; 12,047,000 of whom (Asociación para la Investigación de Medios de Comunicación (AIMC), 2015) tune in daily to Spanish news or talk radio stations (N/TRSSs) that broadcast programmes on current affairs and various types of news throughout the day in different formats (talk shows, interviews, sport programmes, news programmes etc.). These stations include both full-service and talk radio formats. In this information context, journalists, in their roles as radio hosts and collaborators, have considerable social influence as reporters and opinion leaders.

Advertising is the main and often only source of funding for commercial and news radio. It is embedded within the programming as an additional item broadcast with the news, in between programmes or segments or even within them. The most common practice is to broadcast radio spots in commercial breaks that are clearly separated from the programming, thereby allowing listeners to distinguish the advertising message from the regular programme content, although also often generating rather negative attitudes (Potter, 2009). However, radio advertising tends to blend in with the information essence of the medium (native advertising). In Spain, almost one in five radio spots (18.7%) imitate radio and journalistic formats such as news stories, talk shows, interviews or radio contests (Muela-Molina, 2010).

Since the advent of radio as a form of mass media, it has been a common practice for journalists themselves or their collaborators to voice advertising embedded in the editorial content of programmes, making the messages feel like part of the station's programming (iHeartMedia, 2014). A collaborator is a well-known journalist who collaborates in certain segments of a programme as a guest, commentator or reporter. In this regard, advertisers consider news programmes to be highly engaging and likely to hold listeners' attention, enhancing the effectiveness of the accompanying advertisements (Norris and Colman, 1996). They further consider these advertisements to be more effective in terms of memory, when they are embedded in programmes rated significantly more interesting (Norris and Colman, 1996).

Unlike music radio, whose main objective is to entertain, news radio requires a higher cognitive effort on the part of listeners, who need to understand and process the stories or commentary in order to form a personal opinion. Advertisers take advantage of this active listening to broadcast advertising since the amount of attention paid to the programme enhances the attention paid to commercials and the recall thereof (Moorman et al., 2005). However, when advertising is embedded in the programme as an additional item introduced by the journalist, listeners are less likely to activate their attention filters voluntarily (Nebenzahl and Jaffe, 1998) when the unexpected commercial communication is included in an information or news context.

Industry-sponsored research, such as the Clear Channel Media study (All Access, 2014) conducted in conjunction with the University of Southern California, supports the effectiveness of the presence and use of radio personalities because listeners equate an on-air personality's endorsement with the recommendation of a friend, and 6 out of 10 listeners trust the opinions of radio hosts. More than half of the study's participants trusted brands, products and services recommended by their favourite on-air personality, with whom they had developed a powerful relationship; the familiarity and personal

touch of radio hosts invites listeners to take the message to heart and, therefore, take action (All Access, 2014). Another University of Southern California study found that 51 per cent of respondents considered or purchased a product advertised during their favourite personality's show, while 52 per cent stated that their favourite personality influences their opinion (Radio Advertising Bureau, 2015). Thus, radio personalities are viewed as 'relatable' and 'authentic' stars and tastemakers, and many listeners remain loyal, listening to the same personality for years (All Access, 2014).

However, while many professionals defend the use of journalists as brand spokespersons and/or ambassadors in advertising and its effectiveness for advertisers and campaigns, critics respond that blurring the lines between advertising and journalism erodes consumers' trust in the media, turning advertising into a subterfuge that influences purchase decisions and breaches the principle of journalistic independence (Joyella, 2014; NewsLab, 2014; Powell, 2013). This can lead to conflicts of interest should the brand ambassador, in his or her role as journalist, have to report news about unethical behaviour by the brand (Bermejo, 2014). In this regard, it is worth noting that most journalist endorsers come from television and, especially, from radio.

The main objective of this study is to analyse whether and to what extent radio hosts endorse products in ways that could generate a conflict with their professional codes of conduct. For this purpose, the presence of journalists as radio endorsers and the way in which they make their endorsements are explored in order to (1) analyse the presence of radio journalists as endorsers during the production and broadcast of N/TRS programmes, although their own professional code of conduct does not allow such participation in advertising and (2) identify and analyse the factors related to journalist involvement with the message, product and brand, understanding 'involvement' as the way in or degree to which the journalist participates in the delivery of the message and the relationship established between the journalist and the brand.

To this end, three research questions have been formulated regarding the degree of implication of endorsers in messages, using a series of factors that measure it directly and indirectly. The results will make it possible to determine how radio journalists are used as endorsers by both advertisers, who solicit this type of advertising, and radio station owners, who broadcast it. In addition, this article will provide insight into the participation of journalists – who voice these mentions – as opinion leaders in their dual role as news presenters and advertising endorsers.

## **Research background**

### *The use of endorsers and prevalence of celebrities in advertising*

In radio advertising, the verbal input, that is, the words, provides information about the advertised product or service, while the voice identifies who is communicating the message. Thus, different advertising mechanisms are used to imbue brands with 'personality', that is, to personify the product (Fleck et al., 2014). In the radio medium, it is quite common to use spokespersons, whether testimonial or not, as advertising execution. Traditionally, four different types of spokespersons have been used (Belch and Belch, 2013; Fleck et al., 2014): (1) celebrities, (2) typical consumers, (3) professional

experts and (4) company spokespersons. This use of personalities in advertising has received attention from researchers in many different fields, often with a view to showing that their inclusion increases the advertising's effectiveness. In this classification, journalists can be considered a type of celebrity.

Many previous papers have analysed endorsers as a source of credibility, as credibility is a relevant factor in a communicator's persuasiveness since messages cannot be received independently of their source (McCroskey, 1997). Indeed, because of its influence on the communication process, source credibility is considered one of the most important factors in selecting a suitable spokesperson for radio (Warhurst et al., 2013, Warhurst, McCabe, Yiu et al., 2013).

Source credibility is the 'attitude toward a source of communication held at a given time by a receiver' (McCroskey and Young, 1981: 24), which affects how the receiver accepts a message (Ohanian, 1990). This line of research is based on Attribution Theory, which suggests that the degree of credibility of the source determines the level of agreement with the transmitted message (Yilmaz et al., 2011). Several empirical studies have attempted to determine the characteristics or qualities spokespersons should have to enhance their credibility and, thus, the persuasiveness of their message. The trustworthiness, expertise, objectivity, empathy, safety, qualification and attractiveness of the source have all been proposed as dimensions of source credibility. These dimensions are part of the three classic dimensions of source credibility: expertise, trustworthiness and physical attractiveness (Amos et al., 2008; Mittelstaedt et al., 2000; Priester and Petty, 2003; Siemens et al., 2008). In particular, McGinnies and Ward (1980) argued that a trustworthy communicator was more persuasive whether or not he or she was an expert, since trustworthiness reflects the apparent honesty and integrity of the source, whereas expertise refers to competence and knowledge.

Other research has been based on the meaning transfer model (Amos *et al.*, 2008; Doss, 2011; Silvera and Austad, 2004), which holds that, unlike anonymous models or actors, celebrities add value through the process of meaning transfer because they deliver meanings of extra subtlety, depth and power (McCracken, 1989). Another variable to receive significant attention is congruence, understood as the proper identification or matchup between the personality of the endorsed brand and that of the celebrity (Farhat and Khan, 2011; Fleck et al., 2012; Rossiter and Smidts, 2012).

Although most of the research in this field has been conducted using experimental techniques, content analysis is also a suitable technique to analyse the form and presence of endorsers in advertising. Previous studies have primarily focused on television and print media – mainly magazines – with only one study analysing radio spots. This study concluded that, in Spain, 13.5% of these commercials include the presence of brand personalities, whether celebrities (4.5% of the spots), company spokespersons (1.2%) or consumers or experts (7.8%) (Muela-Molina, 2001).

## Ethical framework

The literature review found no academic studies empirically analysing the presence and use of journalists as advertising endorsers to promote products or services or the characteristics of such endorsements, despite journalists' influence on public opinion in their

role as news presenters. As a result of this lack of previous work on which to base the present study, it was necessary to analyse the deontological framework regulating the presence of endorsers in advertising, specifically in the radio medium.

Point 19 of the Spanish code of conduct for advertising practices establishes the requirements for testimonials – regardless of the type or medium of the message – stating that they must be true both in terms of the content of the recommendation and for the person delivering it on behalf of the product or service (Autocontrol, 2011). Additionally, Point 6 of the deontological code for Spanish journalists – compliance with which, although not legally enforced, is compulsory for members of the profession who may be expelled from the association, although not disqualified from practising their profession, in the event of infringement of any principle included in the code – provides that in order to avoid misleading or confusing users, journalists must make a formal and rigorous distinction between information and advertising, and Point 7 asserts that journalists must not accept, directly or indirectly, payments or rewards from third parties to promote, guide, influence or publish information or opinions of any nature (Federación de Asociaciones de Periodistas de España (FAPE), 2017). Within this deontological framework, fulfilment of this latter principle requires journalists to refuse to recommend, give their opinion of or provide information on the characteristics of any product or service in exchange for economic compensation. The Code of Ethics of the American Society of Professional Journalists (2014) is more explicit, adding that in order to preserve journalistic independence and avoid conflicts of interest, journalists must distinguish news from advertising and shun any hybrids that blur the lines between the two.

In the United Kingdom, in order to ensure the protection of listeners, Rule 10.8 of the Broadcasting Code states that testimonials and endorsements require confirmation or substantiation prior to broadcast, noting that ‘the purpose of [appropriate clearance] is to provide adequate consumer protection, while allowing “natural” references to brands, products and/or services’ (Office of Communications (OfCom), 2011: 10). Furthermore, the rule of recognition of advertising of the Code of Broadcast Advertising specifically refers to the participation of journalists in advertising, providing, ‘A person who currently and regularly reads the news on radio or television may voice radio advertisements but must not advertise products or services that are likely to be seen to compromise the impartiality of their news-reading role’ (Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP), 2014: 13). An important distinction can therefore be made between the roles that journalists can play in advertising: that of celebrity featured in advertising campaigns in different mass media, which, on the radio, would be broadcast as spots in commercial breaks and between programmes and that of journalist, advertising products or services live on their own programmes.

Although the ethical codes analysed so far have not been very specific on the issue of endorsements and testimonials in advertising, the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) (2009) has developed a complete guide on their correct use, defining various characteristics and types and providing that the ‘effective use of endorsements requires an understanding of the legal parameters imposed’ (p. 13). This guide distinguishes between consumer, expert and organisation endorsements but not between endorsements and testimonials, as it considers the latter to be a type of the former. Thus, an endorsement is defined as

any advertising message (including verbal statements, demonstrations, or depictions of the name, signature, likeness or other identifying personal characteristics of an individual or the name or seal of an organization) that consumers are likely to believe reflects the opinions, beliefs, findings, or experiences of a party other than the sponsoring advertiser, even if the views expressed by that party are identical to those of the sponsoring advertiser. (FTC, 2009: 53124)

Journalists can be considered celebrity endorsers, defined as ‘any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good’ (McCracken, 1989: 310). Their advertising effectiveness depends partly upon the meanings they bring to the endorsement process (McCracken, 1989), which, in the case of journalists, are the credibility, trustworthiness and influence on public opinion they have as reporters, which are then transferred to the advertised product or brand. In this context, although advertisers are ultimately responsible for their advertising, the FTC (2009) holds that ‘because celebrity endorsers are liable for what they say, not for the rest of the advertisement, their lack of control over the final version of a commercial does not warrant [...] immunity’ (p. 53128).

## Research questions

### *Presence of journalists by type and person of the endorsement*

In using individuals as endorsers, advertisers seek to capitalise on their perceived trustworthiness and to create an image for the brand through the person rather than through the product itself (Kertz and Ohanian, 1992). When journalists are used as endorsers, advertisers take advantage of their credibility, opinion leadership and audience trust, using them to advertise products and brands that, in many cases, the journalists themselves do not even know or have not tried. In Spain, it is not obligatory for these celebrities or journalists who act as endorsers to be actual users of the product or brand or to have first-hand experience of it.

Consequently, radio advertising becomes more expensive when it involves the presence of a journalist, with prices depending on the journalist’s social recognition and/or audience rating. When recommending a product, the journalist can address the audience as a spokesperson or as a consumer (Seno and Lukas, 2007). The role of the endorser can moreover differ depending on whether the endorsement is explicit (a testimonial) or co-presentational (a mention) (McCracken, 1989; Seno and Lukas, 2007). With mentions, the journalist assumes the role of spokesperson, whereas with testimonials he or she assumes the role of consumer.

For Keel and Natarajan (2012), ‘the perception of the endorser’s involvement exerts more influence on consumers’ attitudes and purchase intent than [the] actual involvement’ (p. 695). To this end, various advertising strategies are used to increase the audience’s perception of the endorser’s involvement with the advertised product, service or brand, including, among others, the use of a testimonial style, in which the endorser declares himself or herself to be a user of the product, and the delivery of the message in the first person, which opens the doors to a variety of sales pitches. Speakers use the first-person pronoun ‘I’ when addressing the audience as ‘you’. This use of ‘I’ is also called

the 'implied author' because the presenter reveals personal details about himself or herself. What the 'I' says is assumed to be 'true' because it is a candid revelation by the presenter, who has no reason to lie. The main ethical risk lies in misleading the recipient of this information about the status of this first person (Tulloch, 2014). The presence of a pure first person in a radio commercial is related to radio's status as a personal medium, in which a narrator often speaks confidentially to a listener in an intimate manner (Stern, 1991). However, the third person, which uses proper nouns or the pronouns 'he', 'she', 'it', 'they' and so forth, is an authoritative source, whose authority stems from both its omniscience and impartiality (she or he knows everything but is not directly involved and thus has no reason to lie) (Stern, 1991). Generally, a radio presenter is viewed as a truthful commentator who aspires to win an audience's confidence and is a vehicle for informational appeals, whose goal is to convey information about products or users rather than to talk about himself or herself (Stern, 1991). Accordingly, the following question was formulated with regard to the type of endorsement (mention or testimonial) and person (first, second or third) used by the journalist in the advertisement:

*RQ1.* What is the most prevalent endorsement type and which person is used most frequently in endorsements?

### *Presence of journalists by endorser role and length of endorsement*

Priester and Petty (2003) hold that if recipients can be confident that an expert source will be willing to provide accurate information because of his or her high trustworthiness, they may forgo the effortful task of scrutinising the message and, instead, unthinkingly accept the source's conclusion as valid. As radio journalists provide accurate daily information about current affairs, they are considered highly trustworthy expert sources by their audiences. Moreover, listeners tune in to specific radio hosts because they reinforce their beliefs and attitudes and have greater influence as opinion leaders than collaborators. For many listeners, the voices of their preferred programmes' presenters become familiar, and listening to them is part of their everyday routine (Spangardt et al., 2016). It is thus important to determine whether endorsements are voiced by the radio hosts themselves or by another person taking part in the programme as a collaborator or other news commentator (Buchholz and Smith, 1991). Therefore, journalists can play the role of endorser as a well-known journalist responsible for the overall running of their programme (radio host), as a well-known journalist collaborating on certain segments of a programme as a guest, commentator or reporter (collaborator), or as another type of brand spokesperson who collaborates with the radio host or collaborator to deliver the advertising message.

Additionally, endorsements including a detailed description of the product require longer advertisement lengths and, therefore, the perception of higher involvement by the journalist with the product. In consideration of all of these factors, the following question was proposed:

*RQ2.* What is the most prevalent role of journalist endorsers and what is the most frequent endorsement length?

### *Presence of journalists' calls to action by endorsement length, endorsement person and brand mention frequency*

Although the person used in the advertising message is one of the main indicators of the endorser's involvement, the endorser's appeal to the listener to act in a certain way is also an indicator. For Spangardt et al. (2016), the primary function of a radio presenter is to create bonds between radio stations and their listeners, to which end they often address the audience directly, creating the conditions for parasocial dialogue, interactions and relationships between the presenters and their listeners. Personality endorsements are more likely to incite participants to take action (All Access, 2014), for example, if imperatives are used in the call to action at the end of the message (McCracken, 1989; Seno and Lukas, 2007). In this regard, conative parasocial interaction is related to a specific media personality in a specific situation (Spangardt et al., 2016). The level of involvement will be reflected in the number of times the brand or product name is mentioned, which, in turn, will depend on the length of the endorsement. In view of these considerations, the following questions were proposed:

*RQ3<sub>1</sub>*. How does the journalist's call to action relate to the length of the endorsement?

*RQ3<sub>2</sub>*. How does the journalist's call to action relate to the person of the endorsement?

*RQ3<sub>3</sub>*. How does the journalist's call to action relate to the frequency with which the brand is mentioned?

## **Methodology**

### *Variables*

The literature review, current radio and advertising policies, and research questions were the basis for the operationalisation of the variables with their corresponding attributes.

- 1) *Endorsement type*. In keeping with previous works (McCracken, 1989; Seno and Lukas, 2007), endorsement types can be explicit or co-presentational (merely appearing with the product) (McCracken, 1989; Seno and Lukas, 2007), entailing different roles for the endorser. The attributes of this variable were thus operationalised as follows:
  1. *Mention*. A co-presentational form in which the journalist plays the role of a spokesperson who refers to a brand or describes a product or offer through a descriptive message. The mention is read live within the programme.
  2. *Testimonial*. An explicit form in which the journalist plays the role of a consumer who is highly involved with the advertised product. The endorsement is based on personal knowledge of the characteristics or benefits of the product and on the positive experience that the journalist, as a consumer, shares with the listener. The level of involvement is thus high. Testimonials are also read live within the programme.



- 2) *Endorsement person*. In keeping with previous works (McCracken, 1989; Seno and Lukas, 2007; Stern, 1991), this variable consists of three attributes, namely, the three persons in singular and plural:
  1. First person (I, we).
  2. Second person (you).
  3. Third person (he, she, it, they).
- 3) *Endorsement length*. Although the average length of a radio spot is 20 seconds, the length of endorsements varies significantly. This variable was thus broken down into intervals measured in seconds:
  1. Between 0 and 29 seconds.
  2. Between 30 and 59 seconds.
  3. 60 seconds or more.
- 4) *Role of endorser*. This variable refers to the identification of the voice delivering the advertisement, based on the responsibility the endorser has within the programme and his or her level of influence with the listener (Cantril, 1939). To this end, it has the following attributes:
  1. *Radio host*. A well-known journalist responsible for the overall running of the programme. As public opinion leaders, radio hosts enjoy public recognition and have considerable influence with their audiences. When they make endorsements, they use this recognition on behalf of a consumer good while fulfilling their roles as editor, reporter and commentator.
  2. *Collaborator*. A well-known journalist who collaborates on certain segments of a programme in the role of guest, commentator or reporter.
  3. *Other*. A brand spokesperson who collaborates with the radio host or collaborator to deliver the advertising message. Generally speaking, the radio host or collaborator introduces the product or brand, only rather than describing it directly, he or she introduces the brand spokesperson, who is the endorser in this case.
- 5) *Brand mention frequency*. The number of times the journalist mentions the brand. This variable has the following attributes:
  1. Once or twice.
  2. Three or four times.
  3. Five times or more.
- 6) *Call to action*. Usually, a radio commercial starts out with the key benefits and description of the product, detailed in the body copy, 'and ends with the announcer asking the listener to try the product' by calling him or her to action (Blakeman, 2007: 175). When the level of involvement with the endorsed product or brand is

high, the journalist not only delivers the message but also asks the audience to purchase the product, call for more information or visit a website, among other imperatives (McCracken, 1989; Seno and Lukas, 2007; Stern, 1991). This variable thus has two attributes:

1. Absent.
2. Present.

### Sample

Although the research conducted for most of the literature in this field has been based on experimental techniques, content analysis is also a suitable technique to analyse the presence and characteristics of endorsers in advertising. Accordingly, the design and objectives of the present study required quantitative research based on content analysis, the objectives of which are to identify, code and categorise primary models arising from data (Krippendorff, 2004).

The N/TRS sample consisted of the national, privately owned radio stations with the highest audience ratings, selected based on the data for the last 4-month period published in the *Estudio General de Medios* (EGM (General Media Study)) (AIMC, 2013). The month for obtaining the sample was chosen according to strategic intentional criteria and based on data published by Infoadex (2013), the annual study and benchmark for advertising investment in Spain. We observed that the investment behaviour of advertisers follows a similar pattern each year and coincides with other media, indicating that one of the months with the highest levels of advertising activity is October. The sample for the present study includes the N/TRSs with the highest audience ratings from Monday to Friday.

Once the N/TRSs were identified, only those that broadcast nationally and in Spanish were selected, resulting in the following sample: Cadena Ser, Onda Cero and Cadena Cope. A fourth radio station was rejected because of its public nature and lack of advertising, and others were ruled out because they are regional. It could thus be argued that the analysis included all national N/TRS radio programming, reaching a target audience of 9,185,000 listeners (76%) out of a total of 12,081,000 listeners (AIMC, 2013). The entire 24-hour broadcast of all three radio stations was recorded the same week on consecutive days (Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday) on an external storage device. Audio software (Sony Sound Forge Audio Studio 9.0) was then used to listen to all the recorded programming for the purpose of building the sample and editing all the endorsements broadcast by journalists.

First, a single coder actively listened to the 72-hour period of programming to detect and record all instances of advertising references by radio journalists. The criteria used by the first coder to decide whether a message should be considered for the sample were related to the commercial context in which the brand was mentioned. For example, when a brand was mentioned and a product was described in detail in a way unrelated to the content of the programming at that moment, the message was included in the sample. Thus, when a mention referred to a news item or was a discursive element in a news story or current-affairs analysis and, consequently, part of a programme's editorial content, it

was not considered a paid endorsement. Based on these criteria, the final sample consisted of 63 endorsements voiced by journalists. The sample also operationalised sound signals used to alert listeners that they were listening to a commercial. In all, 28.2% of the mentions were not preceded by such a signal, and 31.9% of the endorsements were not followed by one to mark the shift in content and inform the audience of the return to normal programming (Muela-Molina et al., 2016).

Second, each of the co-authors analysed the sample of the 63 advertising spots or commercial mentions made by journalist endorsers. Each co-author created a database to record the characteristics of the commercial messages (endorsement type, person, length and so on).

Third, the detected discrepancies were resolved. In this process, the variable generating the greatest discrepancies was the person used in the endorsement, as in some cases multiple persons were used in a single commercial. In such cases, the problem was resolved by coding for the pronoun used most often. In addition, only the body copy of the advertising message was used to code the person and endorsement type, excluding the calls to action at the end of the endorsements. The entire message was considered to calculate the endorsement length and brand mention frequency. Only the end of the message was considered for the variable 'call to action'.

## Results

A descriptive analysis of the study variables was performed before the research questions were answered. Table 1 provides the results of this analysis, showing that in most cases advertising radio endorsements are between 30 and 59 seconds long (57.1%), not testimonial in nature (93.7%) and made by radio hosts (42.9%) or collaborators (25.4%); use second- or third-person pronouns (80.9%); call on the listener to act in a certain way (nearly 60%) and, finally, mention the brand three or four times (47.6%).

Due to the exploratory nature of this work, the existence of bivariate relationships between the different variables was analysed. Because of the qualitative nature of the variables, the chi-square statistic was used to determine the existence of associations between them. Table 2 provides the results of this analysis, showing the existence of six statistically significant associations, which are described in more detail below.

With regard to RQ1, the results confirm that the use of journalists as radio endorsers by endorsement type and person conditions the characteristics of the message. As can be seen in Table 3, first-person pronouns predominated in testimonials, as expected, while third-person pronouns were more common when the journalist only mentioned the brand. In any case, the most frequent type of endorsement was mentions, in which journalists distance themselves to a certain extent from the message and the advertised product, which reinforces the preference for the third person.

The objective of RQ2 was to describe the presence of journalists by the endorser's role in the programming and how it relates to endorsement length. As can be seen in Table 4, message length conditioned the type of voice used, since the longer the message, the less likely the radio host was to deliver it himself or herself.

Finally, the results shown in Table 5 provide an answer to RQ3<sub>1,2,3</sub>. The table includes the results of the three bivariate analyses performed with regard to the journalists' calls

**Table 1.** Presence and use of journalists as endorsers in radio advertising.

Variable	N	%	Variable	N	%
Brand mention frequency			Role of endorser		
1–2 times	15	23.8	Radio host	27	42.9
3–4 times	30	47.6	Collaborator	16	25.4
5 or more times	18	28.6	Other	20	31.7
Endorsement length			Endorsement person		
0–29 seconds	10	15.9	1st person	12	19.0
30–59 seconds	36	57.1	2nd person	20	31.7
60 seconds or more	17	27.0	3rd person	31	49.2
Endorsement type			Call to action		
Mention	59	93.7	Absent	26	41.3
Testimonial	4	6.3	Present	37	58.7

**Table 2.** Significance levels of the associations between the study variables.

Variable	Endorsement length	Endorsement type	Role of endorser	Endorsement person	Brand mention frequency	Call to action
Endorsement length	–	–	–	–	–	–
Endorsement type	0.446	–	–	–	–	–
Role of endorser	0.025	0.303	–	–	–	–
Endorsement person	0.276	0.010	0.164	–	–	–
Brand mention frequency	0.000	0.293	0.381	0.410	–	–
Call to action	0.019	0.495	0.548	0.010	0.024	–

**Table 3.** Presence of journalists as radio endorsers by endorsement type and person.

Variable	Endorsement person						$\chi^2$ (p)
	1st person		2nd person		3rd person		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Endorsement type							9.183 (0.010)
Mention	9	15.3	19	32.2	31	52.5	
Testimonial	3	75.0	1	25.0	0	0.0	

to action. Concerning the relationship between the number of times a brand is mentioned and the calls to action journalists make to their audiences in their role as radio endorsers, the results show that when a brand was mentioned often, calls to action were less frequent. In contrast, when the brand was mentioned three or four times, calls to action were more frequent. Message length also conditioned the use of calls to action, with longer

**Table 4.** Presence of journalists as radio endorsers by role of the endorser and endorsement length.

Variable	Endorsement length						$\chi^2$ (p)
	0–29 seconds		30–59 seconds		60 seconds or more		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Role of endorser							
Radio host	7	70.0	17	47.2	3	17.6	11.124 (0.025)
Collaborator	1	10.0	11	30.6	4	23.5	
Other	2	20.0	8	22.2	10	58.8	

**Table 5.** Presence of call to action by journalists by brand mention frequency and endorsement length and person.

Variable	Call to action				$\chi^2$ (p)
	Absent		Present		
	N	%	N	%	
Brand mention frequency					
1–2 times	6	40.0	9	60.0	7.440 (0.024)
3–4 times	8	26.7	22	73.3	
5 or more times	12	66.7	6	33.3	
Endorsement length					
0–29 seconds	8	80.0	2	20.0	7.894 (0.019)
30–59 seconds	11	30.6	25	69.4	
60 seconds or more	7	41.2	10	58.8	
Endorsement person					
1st person	5	41.7	7	58.3	9.303 (0.010)
2nd person	3	15.0	17	85.0	
3rd person	18	58.1	13	41.9	

messages being more likely to include an appeal to the audience to buy a product. Finally, the person used for the endorsement likewise conditioned the inclusion of a call to action, as calls to buy a product generally use the second person.

## Conclusion and discussion

The results of this study open a two-fold line of research: first, the study of endorsers in a medium that, although second in audience ratings after television, receives little attention from researchers and, second, the study of journalists as a type of celebrity, that is, professionals who have considerable influence on public opinion, as well as a certain social responsibility due to their credibility and the trust their audiences place in them.

This study has sought to analyse the presence of journalists in advertising and the forms their collaboration takes. In this regard, with a view to preserving their impartiality as journalists and opinion leaders, the industry's code of ethics calls upon them not to participate in commercial messages and to refuse all payments not arising from their journalistic work. The main contribution of this study has been to confirm that, in Spain, journalists, in their role as endorsers in radio advertising campaigns, fail to comply with the codes of ethics that regulate their profession.

To protect consumers, when acting as radio endorsers, journalists must draw a clear and explicit distinction between journalistic and commercial information and alert their listeners when any advertising is broadcast during their programme. This study confirms that, in the case of N/TRSs, these distinctions and alerts are not made. In fact, advertisements by radio endorsers tend to imitate the journalistic style used for news items, reports or interviews, potentially creating confusion in listeners due to their belief that the opinions and/or experiences expressed by journalists are honest and genuine (FTC, 2009). In compliance with their professional code of ethics, to avoid possible conflicts of interests and preserve their impartiality, journalists must refuse any payment by a third party offered in exchange for advertising a product or service. However, in the authors' view, this measure is insufficient and does not guarantee the ethical behaviour of all parties involved in the advertising process, as radio stations may reach agreements with advertisers and use their position of power to coerce journalists.

Although exposing the unethical practices of journalists in advertising is essential, it is also important to analyse the level of journalist involvement in the delivery of the commercial message. In this regard, longer endorsements – which contain more detailed descriptions of the products and, therefore, more informative messages – generally end with a call to action by the endorser to his or her listeners. In contrast, mentioning a brand multiple times reinforces listeners' attention and recall rates. The prevailing message thus targets cognitive and affective aspects, rather than conative ones and, consequently, is less likely to end with a call to action aimed at listeners.

This research has shown that journalists have two means of distancing themselves from the delivery of the message, in the description of the product and through their engagement with the brand. First, the use of second- and third-person pronouns, typical of the co-presentational format, allows them to be more objective and impartial commentators. Second, radio hosts' involvement is mainly concentrated in shorter messages. With longer messages, their involvement is limited to introducing the advertised brand or product, before allowing a collaborator or another person to describe it, perhaps in an attempt to preserve their role as opinion leaders. In any case, journalists decide whether to make endorsements based on their professional ethics and sense of responsibility towards their audiences. This research has shown that not all journalists act as endorsers; on the contrary, many choose to adhere to the codes of conduct that regulate their professional activity, and in fact the proportion of journalists or endorsers within the analysed programming is low.

Since journalists' trustworthiness is based on the honesty and integrity (McGinnies and Ward, 1980) of their work, the total immunity of journalists with regard to the content of commercial messages broadcast in their programmes is understandable; as opinion leaders, they have a responsibility towards their audiences. Due to the influence that journalists

have as endorsers on their listeners, the public policy implications of the present study can be summarised as follows: (1) social responsibility must be expanded to include the media, such that radio stations should implement policies to regulate the use of journalists in advertising within programmes and (2) self-regulatory organisations should develop codes of conduct to regulate the use and form of endorsers in advertising.

### *Limitations and future research*

The main limitation of this study is its N/TRS context. Future research should broaden the size and design of the sample to include representativeness by days, weeks, months, type of station and geographic coverage.

In addition, the exclusion of certain variables concerning the characteristics of the radio station, programme, audience and product provides a broad basis for future research (1) to analyse journalist endorsements by radio station in order to establish whether the higher or lower presence of such endorsements is in any way related to the editorial line of the station or the ethical principles of the journalists themselves; (2) to determine whether journalists' endorsement behaviour is related to the time of broadcast in order to establish whether programmes with higher audience ratings also have more journalist endorsements; (3) to investigate how different market segments might be affected by endorsements and (4) to study endorsements by product category to gain insight into the tendency of journalists to advertise sensitive products related to healthcare, food and finance, among others, subject to specific regulatory laws and/or codes of ethics.

The endorsements included in the sample for the present study were always embedded in the programming, in some cases with a continuity that made it more difficult for listeners to distinguish them from the regular information content. The results could be supplemented with research on journalists' attitudes towards (1) the use of endorsements designed to ensure information continuity for commercial purposes; (2) the recruitment process for advertising in which the advertiser requests the involvement of a radio endorser and (3) the payment journalists receive for their collaboration in delivering the advertising and the variables influencing the established rates. In this context, sport programmes and, especially, broadcasts of sport events integrate mentions and testimonials within the information discourse as additional content. Sports commentators become most passionate and excited when describing the best plays, such as a goal in a football match, and take advantage to celebrate them, there and then, with a given product and a committed and dedicated audience. This practice could be the subject of future research on the commercial discourse of these programmes and on journalists' attitudes towards such advertising.

For Priester and Petty (2003), a trustworthy endorser is one whom people perceive to be honest and sincere; therefore, a trustworthy journalist 'can lead to more nonthoughtful attitudes' (p. 419). On this basis, an in-depth study on the effects of source credibility in advertising could be performed, comparing journalists with other endorsers, such as consumers, celebrities, CEOs or experts. The lack of previous studies on the subject of this article also raises the question of whether the use of journalists as endorsers is specific to Spain or standard practice in radio worldwide. It would thus be interesting to conduct comparative studies with other countries.

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