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RHETORICAL AND COMMUNICATIVE FEATURES OF PODCASTS IN BULGARIA

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Abstract

Podcasts are establishing themselves as a media genre in the 21st century in different countries and particularly in Bulgaria. Podcasts are also evolving into an independent communication channel featuring content created by representatives of business organizations, cultural and educational institutions, NGOs, and others. The dialogical format of podcasts is preferred in its implementation and has specific communicative and rhetorical features. The subject of analysis is the dynamics of directing the dialogue, asking questions, giving answers, using rhetorical techniques, and ad verecundiam. A selection of podcasts in Bulgaria for the period 1st January 2024 – 1st February 2026 is made. The methodology includes rhetorical and critical discourse analysis. The results of the analysis show that podcasts do not represent a homogeneous genre or format, and their rhetorical features are realized both during the creation of podcasts and in the post-communication stage, when they are advertised and promoted on platforms and social networks. Digital tools contribute to podcasts functioning as a specific manifestation of virtual multimodal rhetoric. Ethos, as a fundamental rhetorical canon, has specific manifestations in podcasts through the use of appeals to authority and storytelling. Another feature of podcasts is the presentation of advice and expert assessments based on the principle of sharing. A third feature at the rhetorical level is the use of humour and self-irony by both podcasters and participants.

Keywords: rhetoric, podcast, ethos, argumentation, storytelling, humour, platformization



1. Introduction

In Bulgaria, podcasts have emerged as a significant cultural and media phenomenon during the second and third decades of the twenty-first century. As a relatively new form of communication, podcasting constitutes a specific activity within the broader framework of the media ecosystem as well as the creative industries. While initially associated primarily with journalism and electronic (radio and television) and online media, podcasts have evolved, and their producers are now business organizations. Increasingly, podcasts are produced by individuals, businesses, cultural and educational institutions, as well as non-governmental organizations. Podcasts present topics to AI, GenAI, personal self-improvement, career development, and even esotericism as well as current processes in internal and international environments. Podcasts address not only a wide range of topics but they are also used to convince virtual audiences by combining arguments with storytelling, humour, etc. Podcasters and guests discuss the topics in an engaging way from communicative and rhetorical perspectives. The participants provide commentary on societal trends, and offer in-depth interpretations of issues relevant to specific communities and small or large groups' interests.

2. The emergence and development of podcasts in the world

July 2003 is considered the beginning of podcasts, according to the publication *First podcast*¹, when American journalist Christopher Lydon and software developer Dave Winer created the conditions for audio files to be delivered automatically via subscription to a blog.

In 2004, ARTE² was launched, offering on-demand audio opportunities and establishing this model not only in France and Germany but also in Europe. This platform influenced the development of so-called narrative podcasting. The development of podcasts is in content, technology, creativity, and the media ecosystem.

In February 2004, chronologically, the term “podcasting” was first coined by Ben Hammersley in an article in *The Guardian* (Hammersley 2004).

Podcasts emerged in the first decade of the 21st century, when systems and software that allowed automatic audio files to be downloaded were already in use. The creativity of the creators, the development of technology, and changes in the media ecosystem are some of the factors behind the dynamic development of podcasts and their changes, some of which include the use of not only audio but also video formats and the transition from distribution via blogs and websites to platforms and multichannel distribution.

Podcasts are developing rapidly and dynamically across Europe, North and South America, Australia, and Africa, while scholars and analysts are examining their diverse manifestations and forms of expression.

Britta Jorgensen presents results of a study conducted by “semi-structured interviews with 16 Australian podcast producers and participant observations at three consecutive Audiocraft events (national podcasting conference)” and comes to the conclusion that “Independent podcasting in Australia continuously evolved throughout 2016–2019, with an increasing focus on generating economic capital” (Jorgensen 2021, 1).

¹ First podcast. Guinness World Records. <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/381973-first-podcast>.

² ARTE Radio. ARTE Radio presents itself as “La fine fleur du podcast par ARTE Des podcasts à gogo: émissions, témoignages, documentaires audio”. <https://www.arteradio.com/>.



Podcasting is also becoming recognizable in South Africa, research shows Edison Research study:

According to a 2019 Edison Research study in South Africa, 22 percent of the country's population had heard of podcasting, which was considerably lower than the 77 percent who were aware of podcasting in the United States for the same year. The same report noted that 19 percent of South Africans had listened to a podcast in comparison to 51 percent of Americans who had. (Fox and Karianjahi 2021)

Leoz-Aizpuru Asier and Pedrero-Esteban Luis Miguel underscored the potential of storytelling to redefine the canon of audio news narratives and to position radio in Spain in the digital ecosystem (Asier and Miguel 2022, 1–15).

David García-Marín analyses the first Spanish podcast community and the pioneers of podcasting in Spain, and he concludes that:

After its first two decades, radio began a period of increased professionalism, the establishment of a robust business model, and the introduction of its own industry language, which are precisely the challenges that Spanish podcasting must address in the coming decades. (García-Marín 2022, 11)

Lisbeth Morlandstø and Birgit Røe Mathisen analyze four Norwegian podcasts in 2020 and 2021; they use the term “commentary journalism” and discuss how podcasts draw commentary journalism in a dialogical direction (Morlandstø and Mathisen 2022, 61–83).

The authors Vera Katzenberger, Jana Keil and Michael Wild conducted an online survey of 378 podcast journalists from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland and concluded that “Podcasts have established themselves in the digital media landscape as an integral part of information gathering and opinion forming for many consumers” (Katzenberger et al. 2025, 1).

30 political podcasts in the USA are analyzed with a focus on conversational structure, repetitive patterns, figurative language, organic patterns, and harmful language (Rizwan et al. 2025, 1).

Podcasts in the context of the Ibero-American community are studied through semi-structured interviews with podcasters, and the second focus of examination is on artistic and experimental formats, radio reports, narrative structures and storytellings practices (Rodríguez-Ortiz and Fernández-Sande 2025, 1–19).

Over the past two decades, podcasts have undergone rapid and dynamic development, not only in Europe and the US. The changes are that podcasts are created and distributed not only through radio, but are also entering television. Now, podcasts are no longer created and recorded only by journalists and media outlets in professionally equipped studios, but also by representatives of educational institutions, business corporations, non-governmental organizations, artists, psychologists, doctors, and others. These podcasts are published on YouTube as videos and then as audio files.

Podcasts are studied from multiple perspectives and with diverse methods. For instance, Samuel Kakungulu examined podcasts in Uganda, emphasizing their dual nature as platforms of both reliable information and disinformation (Kakungulu 2025, 60–66). Storytelling, as a rhetorical and narrative practice, is increasingly central to podcasting.

Podcasting is developing at different rates across countries, displaying marked asymmetries; nevertheless, it is gradually consolidating as a stable communicative form. Its evolution typically begins with audio formats rooted in radio traditions, progresses toward video formats, and advances incrementally toward platformization and multichannel distribution.



Narrativity, personal storytelling, the sharing of lived experience, and the provision of expert knowledge are among the defining characteristics of podcasts as a genre. The information presented in “Podcast Statistics 2026: Top Highlights” show that:

As of January 2026, there are 4.58 million podcasts available worldwide. 480.6K podcasts were published in the last 3 months, and 332.7K podcasts were published in the last 30 days. Around 584.1 million people across the globe listened to podcasts. One in three people in the U.S. listen to podcasts on YouTube, making it the most popular platform for podcasts. On average, podcast listeners spend about 7 hours per week listening to their favorite shows.³

Given that the present objective is not to provide a historical overview or comprehensive mapping, the focus is instead placed on identifying the types of podcasts and their manifestations within a specific national context, as well as on the modes of organization and media techniques they employ. Podcasts are increasingly established as a parallel – and at times alternative – communication channel. They inform diverse segments of society and are produced not only by media organizations and journalists but also by educational institutions and business entities.

3. Podcasts in Bulgaria

Podcasts in Bulgaria emerged at the beginning of the 21st century, with the first notable example being *Binar*, produced by the Bulgarian National Radio (BNR) in 2009. This podcast combined analog, digital, and internet technologies, functioning as a streaming platform for six hours during the tenure of Valeri Todorov as Director General. The hosts varied, while BNR's music library provided content as part of the creative production process. *Binar* continues in 2026, and the present-day platform's slogan is “Your new digital world”.⁴ BNR expanded this initiative, creating a dedicated podcast platform on its website featuring over ten different series, some exceeding 200 episodes, including *The Ambulance* and *The Patrol*. Another example is *Dama Cast*, collaboration between Bulgarian National Television (BNR) and BNR.

The concept of modern information delivery was well received in Bulgaria's competitive media market. Private media outlets such as Darik Radio, Radio Free Europe, and newspapers like *Capital* and *Banker* launched podcasts thematically focused on politics, business, and finance. The business sector also began developing specialized podcasts addressing human resources, real estate, finance, credit, architecture, and more, including titles such as *Career for You*, *Women Speak Leadership*, *Finance in Focus*, *Money Talks*, *TechBalon*, *Beyond Numbers*, *Life Unbottled*, *Social Snack*, and *Podcast of Things*. Entrepreneurial and creative individuals, such as those behind *Internet Speaks*, established podcasts as virtual tribunes for diverse opinions, addressing current and socially sensitive topics such as AI, drug addiction, and gambling.

The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed podcast production in Bulgaria by providing timely information, facilitating collaboration and experience sharing, and demonstrating the potential for individuals outside traditional media to create podcasts. According to data from Everybodywiki⁵, by January 2026, there were approximately 300 podcasts in Bulgaria, spanning various thematic areas. Episode durations range from 20 to 120 minutes, with both audio and video formats being established.

³ Podcast Statistics 2026: Top Highlights. <https://podcaststatistics.com/>

⁴ Binar. Bulgarian National Radio. <https://binar.bg/>

⁵ Everybodywiki. <https://bg.everybodywiki.com/>



Podcasters include journalists producing content within media organizations – for example, the public broadcaster BNT offers podcasts such as *Geopolitics* with Simeon Ivanov, *The Truth About* with Nadya Obretenova, and podcasts aimed at youth audiences hosted by Flora Stratieva. Experienced journalists such as Martin Karbovski, Yavor Dachkov, and Neli Hadjiyska also produce independent podcasts. Most podcasts contribute to the development of Bulgaria's media ecosystem by focusing on thematic content for specific audiences rather than attempting comprehensive media coverage.

Bulgarian podcasts have attracted researchers' attention in the country. Genika Grigorova analyzed musical podcasts and categorized the different types of Bulgarian podcasts using the criteria of genre, topics, duration, content quality, changes in the media ecosystem, etc. (Grigorova 2019, 290–318). The role of podcasts in marketing, particularly their influence on target audiences in Bulgaria, has also been explored, and the focus is on establishing popularity and recognition of business organizations, managers, and products (Boychev 2019, 94–99). Desislava Antova studied media-produced podcasts in Bulgaria, concluding that they exhibit a hybrid media form and that podcasters expand on topics including socially significant problems (Antova 2021, 178–198). Iliia Valkov, Georgi Minev, and Antonina Lozanova examined university podcasts designed to support academic education, including within Bulgarian universities (Valkov et al. 2021, 52–79). Justine Toms, in her monograph *Podcasts – The Voice of the Internet*, offers a thorough analysis including methodological and practical guidance for creating and producing podcasts, examples from Bulgaria, and practices drawn from interviews with podcasters (Toms 2022). In summary, Bulgarian podcasts have evolved into a diverse and dynamic medium, bridging traditional media, independent creators, and specialized thematic content, while simultaneously serving as a platform for public discourse, education, and audience engagement.

4. Theoretical observation, manifestations, and features of podcasts

Some of the main features of podcasts can be outlined through a brief theoretical overview. Before discussing the specific features of podcasts, attention is paid here to an aspect that has been insufficiently explored by rhetoric from the perspective of sound, voice, and audio. Petra Aczél explains the term “aural rhetoric”, she concludes, “Neglected as it is, aural rhetoric does not cease to offer an enriched view of new media argumentation and persuasion. It highlights the aural dimension of a media-message as a rhetorical activity” (Aczél 2013, 341–42). The audio aspect and the so-called ‘aural rhetoric’ or ‘aural virtual media rhetoric’ are features of podcasts in a different virtual media environment. Podcasts start out as audio formats, but even when they are already in video clips, thanks to platformization and digital tools, they also have audio versions. That is why it is important to note this feature of podcasts.

Tiziano Bonini analyzes podcasts, and the focus is on technological aspects: podcasting is a technology used for the distribution, reception, and on-demand listening to audio content, traditionally produced by institutions such as radio stations, publishers, journalists, and educational organizations (Bonini 2015, 21). Bottomley also compared podcasts to radio and analyzed their innovations at the audio level (Bottomley 2015, 164–69). Later, he emphasized modes of distribution and consumption, referring to podcasts as a form of “internet radio” (Bottomley 2016).

Lionel Felix and Damien Stolarz have expanded the discussion to include podcasts beyond audio. They compared video podcasts to video blogs and even provided practical and methodological guidelines in the form of a handbook (Felix and Stolarz 2016).



Podcasts possess distinct genre features and undergo dynamic transformation throughout the first three decades of the twenty-first century.

David Nieborg and Thomas Poell emphasized the role of platformization, which encompasses both the post-production stage – making podcasts available on multiple platforms – and their contribution to the cultural industries (Nieborg and Poell 2018, 4275–92). John Sullivan also examined platformization, focusing on services that reach users, virtual audiences, and storage practices for podcasts (Sullivan 2019, 1–7). Scholars have thus assessed platformization as a contemporary mode of audio and video consumption across digital devices.

Digital technologies shape distinctive patterns of communicative behaviour across virtual audiences. Listeners and viewers interact with podcasts selectively, choosing between complete episodes, shorter fragments, or promotional teasers, and often returning to specific segments while omitting others. This selective consumption reflects a new behaviour from a rhetorical standpoint in digital media.

The essence of podcasting is characterized by the integration of elements from the creative industries with expert knowledge and practical skills in media production, combined with the digital media competence of creators and podcasters. This synergy allows for the development of sustainable formats that combine narrative techniques, expert analysis, and personalized content for the audience.

Podcasts have gradually established themselves as a parallel information channel, providing opportunities to present diverse perspectives, tell personal and collective stories, and share professional expertise and experience from established figures in business, the arts, culture, and science. Podcast content is distributed through various digital platforms, available in both audio and video formats, reflecting the trend toward multiplatform distribution and adaptability to contemporary virtual audience habits.

The dialogical format remains preferred by most podcasters, while in academic and scientific podcasts, monological structures are also observed, emphasizing the analytical nature of the content. The language used in podcasts is accessible and comprehensible to the audience, avoiding communicative barriers and often employing strategies such as humour, narrative metaphors, and storytelling techniques to capture attention and engage listeners.

Podcasting emerges as a flexible, innovative, and multifunctional media format that combines digitalization, creativity, and expert competence, while simultaneously expanding opportunities for civic engagement and social communication in the digital era.

5. Methods and materials

A selection of podcasts in Bulgaria for the period 1st January 2024 – 1st February 2026 is made. The selection of 100 episodes from 25 podcasts is based on predefined research objectives, covering criteria such as title, subject matter, podcasters, hosts, and participants. With regard to format, podcasts can be categorized as either dialogic or monologic, with the former predominantly featuring interview-style dialogue. Despite the fact that some podcasts discontinue their activity, the dynamics of the media environment attest to a pattern of steady expansion: as of February 2026, approximately 250 active podcasts are in operation.

The methodology includes rhetorical and discursive analysis. The rhetorical analysis is oriented toward the examination of ethos, appeals to authority, *argumentum ad verecundiam*, rhetorical



techniques, as well as visual and multimodal elements in podcasts. For the sake of clarity, the concepts and terms are introduced in each section prior to the analysis during the process of creating, implementing, and distributing podcasts.

The methodology includes a critical discourse analysis (CDA), as presented by Teun van Dijk (Dijk 2015, 466–85). In the past two decades, CDA approaches to the media have multiplied. These studies have not only investigated the social and communicative contexts of news and other press or broadcast genres, as is the case in critical media studies, but have also related these to a systematic analysis of the structures of media discourse, such as lexicon, syntax, topics, metaphor, coherence, actor description, social identities, genres, modality, presupposition, rhetorical figures, interaction, news schemas, and multimodal analysis of images, among many other structures (Dijk 2015, 466). This method has been adapted to the objectives of this study, assuming that podcasts are part of the media ecosystem, have specific genre characteristics, and influence the opinions of certain groups in society by sharing opinions, personal, and professional experiences.

The first hypothesis is that the ethos of the podcast and the ethos of the guest in the dialogical form of podcasts have specific manifestations, realized through behaviour in which the participants aim to share expertise and experience, in most cases avoiding the demonstration of a unilateral and universally valid opinion and allowing for counterarguments.

The second hypothesis is that the argumentation includes the argument from authority, the argument *ad verecundiam*, personal experience, and personal stories, which creates a specific media rhetorical situation in which a change in the traditional media discourse between journalist and interviewee is achieved, and sometimes even a semi-formal conversation between the podcaster and the guest takes place.

The third hypothesis is that humour and self-irony are combined with words and expressions from colloquial language, which also contributes to a change in media rhetorical communication, turning podcasts into a virtual platform for presenting personal experience, giving advice and recommendations, and announcing news from a given field.

6. Ethos and arguments

6.1. Ethos

In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle defines ethos (ἦθος) as one of the three fundamental modes of persuasion, alongside logos and pathos. His most systematic descriptions are presented in *Rhetoric*, Book I, Chapter 2. There Aristotle argues that persuasion is achieved not only through logical demonstration or emotional appeal, but also through the character projected by the speaker in the act of speaking itself. Aristotle maintains that ethos is not merely a matter of prior reputation; it must be established by the audience during the delivery of speech in a concrete rhetorical situation (Aristotle 1986, 98–101). Aristotle further specifies that credibility grounded in character arises from three qualities manifested in discourse: phronēsis (practical wisdom), aretē (moral virtue), and eunoia (goodwill toward the audience). Ethos functions as a rhetorical canon, generated through speech rather than imposed externally and the credibility emerges from the character of the orator, and persuasion depends on the integrity of the orator (Aristotle 1986, 98–101).

In the book *Institutes of Oratory* (Institutio Oratoria XII.1.1), Quintilian articulates a conception of ethos that is inseparable from moral philosophy and civic responsibility. Quintilian grounds the authority in the ethics of the speaker. For him, rhetoric is intrinsically bound to virtue: “Vir bonus



dicendi peritus” (Quintilian 1982, 702–6). This concise formulation presents Quintilian’s entire ethical-rhetorical doctrine. The orator must first be a *vir bonus* – a morally good person – before he can properly be described as *dicendi peritus*, skilled in the art of speaking. Ethos in Quintilian is not merely a persuasive strategy constructed within discourse, but the outward manifestation of an authentically virtuous character. The credibility of the speaker arises from lived moral excellence – *virtus* – which must be cultivated through comprehensive education, ethical discipline, and civic engagement. Quintilian concludes that rhetoric attains legitimacy only when grounded in moral goodness, and the orator is defined by the unity of ethical being and rhetorical competence (Quintilian 1982, 702–6).

Jens Kjelsen and Aaron Hees analyze ethos in new rhetorical communication and how ethos is constructed by the debate system Project Debater (from IBM) and ChatGPT chatbots, they talk about machine ethos, and conclude that phronetic ethos appeals through general arguments and facts and “Simultaneously, in an algorithmic attempt to take a position of authenticity, debating chatbots may use strategies for animating the inanimate” (Kjelsen and Hees 2024, 1–32).

Agnieszka Budzyńska-Daca analyzes ethos as a rhetorical category through by reviewing major works on rhetoric, tracing its development from classical theory to contemporary scholarship in philosophy and psychology, with a particular emphasis on positive psychology and, more specifically, on the VIA model of character strengths. The author concludes that

“Both the classical formula *vir bonus dicendi peritus* and the contemporary VIA model, based on the recognition of character strengths, stem from the same conviction: that rhetoric does not begin with technique, but with the human person. At the foundation of effective and responsible communicative action lies ethos – understood as a value-rooted disposition to be oneself in and through speech. (Budzyńska-Daca 2025, 154–55)

Ethos should be understood as a multidimensional category that extends beyond the rhetorical dimension of charisma, moral, education, and expertise. Ethos in podcasts is constructed through a complex interplay of social, cultural, professional, and personal elements. In this context, the personal branding of podcasters and participants in different episodes emerges as a dynamic process in which personal narrative and the demonstration of expertise acquire particular significance. These components enable podcast hosts and their guests to establish an authentic and trustworthy image with their audiences. The communicative behaviour of podcasters and guests involves ethos manifestations through sharing and narrating in specific ways in the context of virtual media communication. The fundamental components of ethos as professional experience, friendly and positive attitude towards the audience, striving to provide reliable information are present, but their configuration varies, and each element carries a different degree of weight in different podcasts. The assumption is that charisma, rhetorical skills, expertise, credibility, transparency, and visibility, not only within the professional domain but also in the media and public spheres, play a significant role in the development of a personal brand of podcasters and podcast guests.

The principle “*Vir bonus dicendi peritus*” has manifested in podcasts in a different way, as participants pursue concrete aims of sharing and convincing (persuasion from a rhetorical point of view) the virtual audience. Podcast guests combine narrative, personal storytelling and information in understandable, moderately figurative language avoiding communication barriers.



6.2. Ethos and arguments from authority

Ethos has specific manifestations in podcasts, with the analysis focusing on the participants and how they use the argument from authority when presenting these ideas, proposals, and analysis results. The ethos of the participants is the basis for achieving rhetorical and communicative impact. It includes charisma, talent, education, experience, expertise, and adherence to moral and ethical standards. The results are presented in stages, so the definitions must be presented before the analysis.

Leo Groarke and Christopher Tindale give the following definition:

Arguments from authority provide evidence for a claim by establishing that it is endorsed by authorities. A good argument from authority supports a claim on the basis that the person or group that endorses it is deemed to have (1) certain stated credentials, which are (2) relevant to the claim in question, and (3) no biases that are likely to interfere with their assessment of the claim, provided that (4) the claim in question concerns an area in which there is wide agreement among the relevant experts, and that (5) the claim concerns an area of knowledge in which consensus is possible.” (Groarke and Tindale 2012, 318)

The results of the analysis of authority-based argumentation, conducted according to its definition, reveal several specific features in the podcast environment. Podcasts do not represent a typical rhetorical situation; rather, they constitute a hybrid form positioned between media rhetoric and virtual communication. Within this framework, the argument from authority is constructed in distinctive ways. The first structural element of authority-based argumentation remains valid: participants often possess professional qualifications and expertise, and they are recognized figures in their respective domains – from medicine to information technology. However, regarding the second element, these qualifications are not always directly related to the claims being made. Specialists in philosophy, sociology, political science, medicine, or artificial intelligence may also speak on cultural topics, approaching them from the standpoint of engaged citizens. The third element involves bias. Even when not extreme, personal sympathies or antipathies toward a cause, idea, or process are frequently present. With respect to the fourth structural element, one cannot claim that podcasts express broad expert consensus; in fact, they typically serve as a virtual media forum for articulating perspectives that differ from official or institutionalized opinions. The fifth element indicates that the purpose of podcasts is not to achieve consensus but rather to present arguments in support of positions that diverge from those promoted through institutional public relations and certain traditional media outlets.

In podcasts, arguments from authority and ethos are combined, thereby grounded in different parameters. Hosts and participants are often well-known public figures, professionals with established experience, and individuals displaying active civic engagement.

For example, Hristo Popov, an entrepreneur of international experience who returned to Bulgaria, contributes to initiatives such as *Bulgaria Wants You*. In podcasts, he discusses career development, motivation, values, and behavioral models, presenting himself as both charismatic and communicative. In the Limitless podcast, he reflects on governance, society, and democracy, and presents quotes from famous philosophers from antiquity to support his thesis with arguments of authority.

What is the problem with democracy? Both Socrates and Aristotle say something smart. The power of your vote should be proportional to the education you have. The voice of an economics professor cannot have the same weight as the voice of someone who has never read a single book in their life.⁶

⁶ Limitless. Peace in the chaos with Hristo Popov. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cE3tt2RdUPc>



Professor Ivo Hristov, a Bulgarian lawyer and sociologist, addresses topics related to history, domestic and foreign politics, social processes, education, culture, and the Z generation as well. Professor Daniel Valchev, lawyer and former Minister of Education and Science, analyzes processes in society and current events on the international stage, giving examples from history from antiquity to the present day, and demonstrating erudition and expertise not only in the field of law and the judicial system.

The Internet Speaks podcast and its sub-brands (*Money Speaks*, *Artist Speaks*, *Amateur*, *Television on Radio*, *Natural Intelligence*, *Transistor*) cover a wide range of themes. The participants are experts and the dialogues include the introduction of the euro currency in Bulgaria; open data with Boyan Yurukov (computer scientist, blogger, activist); open science is discussed with the scientist Ana Lazarova; scientific communication and funding with Lyubo Baburov from Ratio (scientific podcast), digital marketing with Genadi Vorobyov, discussions on OpenAI with the host of the podcast and the newly adopted AI Act, the impact of social media on children, manipulative practices in television series, as well as regional and local issues. Even within a single episode, participants address a broad spectrum of topics, illustrating the diversity and rhetorical richness of the podcast genre.

6.3. Ethos and *argumentum ad verecundiam*

Jean Goodwin describes two types of manifestations of *argumentum ad verecundiam*, namely the authority of command, the authority of expertise, and posits a third type, the authority of dignity, as a manifestation of the real *ad verecundiam* (Goodwin 1998, 278).

The *argumentum ad verecundiam* manifests in all three of its classical forms within the rhetorical conduct of participants in Bulgarian podcasts.

Podcast participants frequently present themselves as specialists or experts in particular domains. Some are political leaders, such as Svetlyo Vitkov (leader of the party Vox populi vox Dei) and Kornelia Ninova (former leader of the Bulgarian Socialist Party). Others have achieved prominence through successful careers in music and production, such as Denis Rizov. A further group comprises individuals who have managed business corporations (Hristo Popov, Plamen Petrov), as well as figures with experience in non-governmental organizations and the media (Slavi Vassilev, Kristian Shkvarek).

A second category invokes the argument from expertise more explicitly, consisting of participants who hold academic degrees and occupy university positions. These include Prof. Mihail Mirchev (associated with *People Power*), Prof. Petar Stoyanovich (featured in *CoMinds Chatters* and *The Bureau of Konstantin Valkov*), and Assoc. Prof. Mariana Todorova (appearing in *CoMinds Chatters*, *Chefo*, *5stotinki podcast*, *At ToTo Podcast*).

A third group encompasses active participants in Bulgarian civil society processes, such as attorney Tatyana Doncheva. A fourth group derives authority from frequent appearances in media programs, for example, the psychologist Madlen Algafari and the singer Denis Rizov in *Freedom of Speech* – podcaster Karbovski, and *Chefo Podcast*.

The *argumentum ad verecundiam* appears in multiple forms here. Podcast participants present their public visibility and professional status as sufficient grounds to offer analysis and advice beyond their areas of expertise. Through these appearances, they reinforce their prominence by commenting on Bulgaria's domestic and foreign policy and on criminal cases, as in the cases of Prof. Ivo Hristov and Assoc. Prof. Valentin Vatsev.



For example, Svetlyo Vitkov – singer, performer, and leader of the political party Vox populi vox Dei – states in *Chefo Podcast*: “I selected politicians using a polygraph.”⁷ He explains that he evaluated team members during interviews to assess whether they had experience, moral integrity, and principled commitments. Vitkov employs argumentum *ad verecundiam* in the form of positional authority – the legitimacy derives from the office he holds rather than from his actual competence.

Denis Rizov, who has lived and pursued a professional career in the United States, declares in *Chefo Podcast*: “Trump became arrogant and acquired absolute power!” – a statement framed in the episode as coming from “the Republican from Florida, Denis Rizov”.⁸ Here, the appeal to authority is grounded in biographical proximity and experiential capital (residence and career in the U.S.), which implicitly serves to legitimize his political evaluation of developments in American governance.

Kristian Shkvarek, in the *The New Knowledge* podcast hosted by Stoycho Kerev, comments on the Epstein affair: “How can such a crime be excused? Even the national security of a state does not excuse and cannot excuse such monstrous acts.”⁹ In this case, the rhetorical force stems from moral absolutism combined with public-intellectual positioning, whereby condemnation is advanced with the implicit authority of civic and ethical judgment.

Psychiatrist Vladimir Simov states in the podcast *Limitless*, hosted by Zhivko Krastev:

Only 15% of the human population has a stable psyche, and they are called super-normal. You can see that society has been completely shaken. We are whipping our own brains and our own psyches with various substances.¹⁰

In this instance, professional medical authority is mobilized to frame broad social and psychological diagnoses. The appeal derives its persuasive force from Simov’s clinical status, which implicitly legitimizes generalizations concerning collective mental stability and contemporary social dynamics.

Daniel Gekov, a criminal psychologist, declares in the *Consciousness and Meaning* podcast, hosted by Eli Aleksandrova:

It is no coincidence that major fraudsters are individuals with high intelligence, creativity, and cognitive capacity. However, we must not confuse the fear and anxiety of an innocent person with the deceptive behavior of a guilty one.¹¹

Here, the argument draws on criminological expertise to differentiate psychological states, invoking disciplinary knowledge as a source of epistemic authority in the interpretation of criminal behaviour. Tatyana Doncheva states in a podcast hosted by Martin Karbovski:

The decentralization of the registration of parties and associations has now led to a situation in which some clerk at the Registry Agency makes the assessment. But that person is either a lawyer with very limited qualifications or perhaps not even that. They have simply been told the formal criteria that must

7 Chefo Podcast. Guest Svetlyo Vitkov. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pUynjOTQh6c>

8 Chefo Podcast. Guest Denis Rizov. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dt4oEgRMWXw>

9 The New Knowledge. Guest Kristian Shkvarek. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbAjlGh-8k>

10 Limitless. Guest Vladimir Simov. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=23oomeszViM>

11 Consciousness and Meaning. Guest Daniel Gekov. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leOEFEOtnUE>



be met. When such a person sees that two professors have signed the documents, they begin to feel a sense of deference.¹²

In this case, the rhetoric explicitly foregrounds academic titles (“two professors”) as a trigger for institutional deference, thereby illustrating a direct and reflexive acknowledgment of *argumentum ad verecundiam* in practice – authority functioning as a persuasive substitute for substantive evaluation.

Associate Professor Mariana Todorova – a philosopher and futurist researching artificial intelligence – appearing as a guest on *Chefo Podcast*, addresses a topic outside her immediate specialization, yet advances her interpretation in an expert capacity:

Lifestyle determines longevity to a much greater extent than genetic predisposition. Epigenetics is a very interesting science because it shows that the sense of poverty in African countries was embedded generations ago, and people there are more responsible toward food.¹³

In this case, academic authority in philosophy and futurology, together with experience in artificial intelligence research, is extended to areas such as epigenetics and socio-cultural behavior. The claim does not rest on evidence presented in the discussion, but on the speaker’s academic status, which implicitly legitimizes cross-disciplinary generalizations.

In the *CoMinds Chatters* podcast, Assoc. Prof. Mariana Todorova further states:

Artificial intelligence is the perfect sociopath. It understands logical human action extremely well and imitates it, but there is no emotion behind it, no shared experience, no empathy. Not because AI is evil or demonic, but because it is not a natural biological consciousness.¹⁴

Here, metaphorical framing (“the perfect sociopath”) functions as a rhetorically powerful interpretative device. The authority of academic expertise in AI studies lends epistemic weight to an ontological claim about the nature of artificial intelligence, illustrating once more how *argumentum ad verecundiam* operates by projecting scholarly credibility into broader philosophical and anthropological generalizations.

6.4. Ethos, narratives, and storytelling

Ethos should be understood as a multidimensional category that extends beyond its rhetorical dimension of credibility. It is constructed through a complex interplay of social, cultural, professional, and personal elements. Within this framework, personal branding emerges as a dynamic process in which personal narrative, demonstrating expertise, and expressing vulnerability play a decisive role. These components enable podcast hosts and their guests/participants to establish an authentic and trustworthy image before their audiences.

When speaking about India, Professor Ivo Hristov is remarkably engaging: he weaves a narrative that combines facts from diverse domains – history, geography, and mythology – while employing vivid, yet accessible metaphors. He recalls:

¹² Freedom of Speech. Guest Tatyana Doncheva. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=waf-LFhO3ik>

¹³ Chefo Podcast. Guest Mariana Todorova. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Plkoo418Ndw>

¹⁴ CoMinds Chatters. Guest Mariana Todorova. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1176774091284383>



An astonishing world. I found it fascinating as we approached the Taj Mahal by plane. It is located in the capital of Uttar Pradesh, a state in the Himalayas, which is now the residence of the Dalai Lama. High in the Himalayas, when you fly at 2,000 meters from the south, from Punjab toward the mountains, you see five rivers rising: the Indus, the Ganges, the Brahmaputra... before you stands the 'roof of the world,' the Himalayan wall, eight kilometers high. Behind it stretches the Tibetan Plateau. The scale is gigantic, incredible, incomparable. One realizes, in the words of Nehru, that when you lean over it, India seems to be the very source of history. It does not merely reflect like a well – it gushes forth. This is the world of the Mahābhārata, the realm of India's epic heroes. It is a living history. It is a nation of 1.5 billion young people. If one has the sensitivity, one there feels the very engine of history throbbing. A colossal mechanism that has once again been set into motion.¹⁵

Dr. Miroslav Nenkov, an anesthesiologist with a brief tenure as Deputy Minister of Health, is a skilled communicator and a popular media figure. He provides arguments on issues of high social sensitivity, not only in healthcare but also in education, institutional functioning, decision-making mechanisms, and project funding. He explains one of the reasons for the problems in healthcare and the dissatisfaction of patients as follows:

The lack of training in our education as doctors on how to communicate with patients, how a doctor should treat a doctor, a nurse, an orderly and the patient's mother. I was lucky to learn from practice that in front of me is a patient, but this is a person. Patients receive information, but it is not enough. Patients want someone to sit down and talk to them. However, doctors do not have time for this, unfortunately.¹⁶

From a communicative and rhetorical standpoint, content analysis reveals that participants in podcasts frequently employ argumentation strategies to substantiate claims grounded, albeit subjectively, in ethics and fairness. In doing so, they not only reinforce the moral dimension of their messages but also create a sense of social responsibility and engagement. At the same time, through personal stories and statements, participants continuously reaffirm their credibility, thereby strengthening their connection with the audience and sustaining a high level of trust. Manager and entrepreneur Hristo Popov states:

And the second conclusion that I have at least made, how you feel, should not be related to whether you have achieved the goal or not [...] You have to fall in love with the process of achieving the goal. And then you can't go wrong. You have to fall in love with your image 10-15 years later. You have to imagine, this is what I want to be.¹⁷

7. Rhetorical techniques, visual and multimodal arguments

As already mentioned, podcasts are a specific manifestation in the media ecosystem; they most often take the form of a semi-formal conversation, there are no communication barriers, there are stories and examples, and participants give advice as experts. This requires images that are easy to understand, so allegories and symbols are avoided. On the other hand, the stories also include irony and self-irony to attract and retain the audience's attention.

¹⁵ Yavor Dachkov podcast. Guest Ivo Hristov. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161pCeVOjqw&list=PLSYi15wAFyR-pLpN2cp1VA6KAEwterOgOX>

¹⁶ Podcast About Health. Guest Dr. Miroslav Nenkov. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fn_Ewt6yDAY

¹⁷ To slay the dragon. Guest Hristo Popov. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3QFTxv8q7W8&ab_channel=%D0%94%D0%B0%D0%A3%D0%B1%D0%B8%D0%B5%D1%88%D0%94%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%9F%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%82%D1%81VelizarV



The humour used by the participants helps them appear more human and approachable, even though they are experts and well-known personalities. The listener and viewer feel that they are not just receiving information, but are “attending” a friendly conversation. In addition, selected parts of the podcast, such as funny excerpts, can easily be turned into TikTok clips or memes for. In this way, the podcast can reach an audience through teasers or as a secondary product after its publication on the platforms.

Doctor Miroslav Nenkov (an anesthesiologist and a comedian who also tells jokes) provides answers and shares fascinating stories from his practice as a doctor, using his sense of humour:

The anesthesiologist puts you to sleep. His job seems very easy. Bye-bye and you fall asleep. I spend a lot of time talking to my patients. Whoever walks into the operating room feels fear. I am able to help overcome that fear to some extent.¹⁸

He participates in the 5 *Stotinki* podcast, wears a T-shirt with the inscription “I am a doctor, not a magician” and says: “An idiot generates an idiot.”¹⁹

Irony and self-irony are communicative techniques for some participants, for example, Militsa Gladnishka – a comedian actress - as a participant in the *At To To's* podcast, uses this technique several times:

I was not a very beautiful child, but then I blossomed like Monica Bellucci.
I did not lose weight, but I took very good pictures of the landscapes.²⁰

Representatives of the artistic community and science use images, and their style and language are interesting and aesthetically pleasing from a rhetorical point of view.

The combination of figurative and everyday language is not typical of official public statements, but given the specific characteristics of podcasts, it is common, especially when participants present examples from their practice and describe their expertise in a popular and understandable way.

Psychologist Madlene Algafari uses the same model; she mixes popular language and pronouns (“we,” “you”) as anaphora from a rhetorical standpoint. The aim is to bridge the distance and to present that all are members of a community, she uses a mechanism of identification.

In this, authenticity is not about mindset.
We are full of clichés. But we also differ.
We have different introjects.
We believe different things. But what makes us most individuals is what we feel.²¹

The topic of visual elements, signs, and rhetoric is studied by scholars and researchers from various universities and schools. The terms rhetoric of vision, visual rhetoric, visual mode of rhetoric,

¹⁸ At ToTo: The doctor who will make you laugh! Guest Doctor Miroslav Nenkov https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yvG-zPkl68a8&ab_channel=ToToYotovn Retrieved on 12.08.2025.

¹⁹ 5stotinki podcast. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHs8ocOX7CQ&ab_channel=5stotinkipodcast. Retrieved on 12.08.2025.

²⁰ At ToTo: Guest Militsa Gladnishka. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-hz4VHsR-k&ab_channel=ToToYotov

²¹ Authenticity podcast. Episode 180. Guest Madlene Algafari. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDK8btYn2tl&ab_channel=%D0%9F%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%82%D0%90%D0%B2%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%87%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82. Retrieved on 12.08.2025.



language of vision, etc. are explained by Stanly Meltzoff (Meltzoff 1970, 27–38). Semiotic researchers also study visual elements from the perspective of signs and channels for conveying meaning and messages (Groupe μ 1992, 58). Sonja K. Foss has displayed a constant interest in visual rhetoric (Foss 2004, 303–314). The term visual rhetoric is used in connection with photojournalism and democratic public culture (Lucaites and Hariman 2001, 37–42). Leo Groarke and Christopher Tindale give a definition of visual arguments:

Visual arguments – are arguments that convey premises and conclusions with non-verbal images one finds in drawing, photographs, films, videos, sculpture, natural objects, and so on. In most cases they combine visual and verbal cues that can be understood as arguments. (Groarke and Tindale 2012, 455)

The analysis, from the perspective of visual argumentation, demonstrates that the microphone is the most frequently used symbol in podcast logos, followed by headphones and sound wave motifs. In order to enhance recognizability and indicate thematic orientation, some podcasts incorporate elements drawn from cooking, the arts, sports, and other fields. The analysis indicates that such images do not generate communicative barriers; rather, they consist of standardized or stylized representations of animals, plants, buildings, well-known geographic landmarks, and similar elements. In short-format episodes designed for platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and in the so-called thumbnails, there is an increasing reliance not on abstract symbols or metaphors, but on participants' faces. Recognized as public figures, these faces function as promotional devices for the episode. In addition, large fonts, concise messages, short titles, legible typefaces, and vivid colours are employed. Within mainstream environments, these strategies aim, first, to ensure recognizability; second, to attract attention; and third, to motivate virtual audiences to watch and listen to the complete podcast.

The multimodal elements in podcasts manifest on several levels. First, in the full video recordings of episodes, practices reveal a tendency to integrate dialogue images: photos, logos, maps, diagrams, infographics, etc. Secondly, short video clips or teasers include images often generated with the help of artificial intelligence, chatbots, etc. From rhetorical and communicative standpoints, these assembly techniques create dynamism and sustain audience attention during viewing.

The multimodal argument combines sound, image, and text, and is employed by podcast producers and hosts to capture attention, reinforce the message, and persuade audiences of a given thesis, claim, or cause. Multimodal arguments are frequently created after the initial recording of a video file using digital tools. These arguments are subsequently integrated and incorporated into the original recording, thereby generating an additional layer of rhetorical impact. In this way, in the final version of the podcast, multimodal arguments unfold across a network of modalities. From both rhetorical and communicative perspectives, this constitutes a relevant mode of content production, particularly in light of platform-based dissemination.

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It is not possible to provide an unequivocal evaluation of the use of multimodal arguments in podcasts. On the one hand, multimodality enhances audience engagement – primarily through visualizations, animated effects, and interactive elements that attract and sustain attention. The production of multimodal arguments in podcasts also takes into account the dynamics of platformization, including algorithmic filtering, the fluidity of the virtual environment, the rapid decline of audience attention, and the redirection of users toward other mainstream video content. On the other hand, platformization can also lead to fragmented attention.

8. Conclusion

The present study examined the rhetorical and communicative characteristics of podcasts within the contemporary Bulgarian media environment, focusing on ethos construction, argumentative strategies, and communicative style. Through the combined application of rhetorical analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis, as proposed by Teun van Dijk, the research demonstrates that podcasting functions as a distinct format within the digital media ecosystem. The findings indicate that podcasting operates as a dynamic virtual tribune, where hosts and guests not only present content but actively construct immediate connections with their audiences through rhetoric and argumentation.

The ethos of the podcaster and the ethos of the guests in dialogical formats manifest in specific ways, grounded in the sharing of expertise and experience, while generally avoiding unilateral and universally valid claims. Hosts present themselves as facilitators of discussion. Guests build credibility primarily through references to professional competence, and they present different or alternative points of view.

Argumentation combines argument from authority, *argumentum ad verecundiam*, and appeals to personal experience, thereby producing a different communicative situation. This integration of formal and informal argumentative modes reshapes the media interaction. The findings show that humour functions to reduce communicative distance and signal authenticity of podcast participants. Colloquial expressions and conversational markers further differentiate podcast discourse from traditional journalistic registers. Informality becomes a communicative resource used by podcasters and guests. Podcasts operate as virtual platforms where participants present advice, commentary, and current information, combining expertise and relatability.

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