Université de Neuchâtel
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SLICES-OF-LIFE PODCASTS IN FRENCH-SPEAKING SWITZERLAND

Construction, tensions and negotiation of a journalistic activity on the margins of an ecosystem in crisis

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by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the production of life story podcasts by professional journalists in French-speaking Switzerland, referred to here as slices-of-life podcasts. These productions give voice to ordinary people who talk about their jobs, their personal trajectories, the initiatives they have undertaken, or the moments when their lives changed (Lesaunier, 2023).

Positioned at the intersection of journalism and podcast studies, this thesis examines how, in a time of professional crisis, this format emerges as a site where innovative practices, role perceptions, and relationships between journalists and sources are negotiated. Slices-of-life podcasts are analytically significant because they illuminate persistent tensions within journalism and provide a vantage point for addressing contemporary challenges in the profession.

This study mainly draws on the content analysis (Bardin, 2013) of semi-directive interviews with podcast-producing journalists and participating sources. Methodologically, it follows an inductive orientation (Charmaz, 2001), informed by approaches such as newsmaking reconstruction (Reich & Barnoy, 2020) and narratives of practice (Bertaux, 2016).

The findings of this thesis are presented in three research papers. The first explores journalists' motivations for producing slices-of-life podcasts, highlighting personal, structural, and contextual drivers. Podcasts thus emerge as both refuge and laboratory: marginal within media outlets yet central for experimenting with new forms and redefining journalistic identity. The second examines role perceptions, showing how journalists portray themselves primarily as connectors (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016), friends (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016), or truth-seekers, while sources emphasize care and support. These podcasts reconfigure traditional journalistic norms—objectivity, detachment, and the watchdog function—into more relational and flexible roles, albeit with tensions around professional legitimacy. The third paper analyzes journalist–source relationships, demonstrating how trust is co-constructed through disclosure, proximity, and time. Through specific journalistic practices, sources assume an active role in production. This active role fosters—according to participants—

more nuanced representations of lived experience and shifting journalistic ethics toward relational rather than strictly normative principles.

Taken together, the three articles show that slices-of-life podcasts constitute a marginal yet meaningful space within the French-speaking Swiss media ecosystem. They foster innovation and tensions in motivations, roles, and relationships, offering an experimental, relational, and reflexive mode of journalism in the midst of a broader legitimacy and economic crisis.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse examine la production de podcasts de récits de vie par des journalistes professionnelles[1] en Suisse romande, désignés ici sous le terme de « podcasts tranches de vie ». Ces productions donnent la parole à des personnes ordinaires qui évoquent leur travail, leur parcours personnel, les initiatives qu'elles ont entreprises ou encore les moments où leur vie a basculé (Lesaunier, 2023).
Située à l'intersection des *journalism studies* et des *podcast studies*, cette thèse analyse comment, dans un contexte de crise professionnelle, ce format émerge comme un espace où se négocient des pratiques innovantes, des conceptions des rôles journalistiques et des relations entre journalistes et sources. Les podcasts tranches de vie présentent un intérêt analytique particulier par leur mise en lumière de tensions persistantes au sein du journalisme et offrent un point de vue privilégié pour interroger les défis contemporains de la profession.

L'étude s'appuie principalement sur une analyse de contenu (Bardin, 2013) d'entretiens semi-directifs menés auprès de journalistes productrices de podcasts et de sources ayant participé à ces productions. Sur le plan méthodologique, elle adopte une orientation inductive (Charmaz, 2001), inspirée notamment par les approches de reconstruction du processus de production de l'information (*newsmaking reconstruction* ; Reich & Barnoy, 2020) et de récits de pratique (Bertaux, 2016).

Les résultats de cette thèse sont présentés sous la forme de trois articles scientifiques. Le premier explore les motivations des journalistes à produire des podcasts tranches de vie, en mettant en évidence des facteurs personnels, structurels et contextuels. Les podcasts apparaissent ainsi à la fois comme refuge et laboratoire : marginaux dans les rédactions, mais centraux pour expérimenter de nouvelles formes et redéfinir l'identité journalistique. Le deuxième article analyse les perceptions des rôles journalistiques, montrant que les journalistes se décrivent principalement comme des *connectors* (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016), des amies (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016) ou des chercheuses de vérité, tandis que les sources mettent l'accent sur les dimensions de soin et de soutien. Ces podcasts reconfigurent les normes

[1] Pour des raisons d'anonymisation et de représentativité de l'échantillon, toutes les participantes à l'étude sont adressées au féminin dans cette thèse.

journalistiques traditionnelles—objectivité, distance et fonction de « chien de garde »—en des rôles plus relationnels et flexibles, tout en suscitant des tensions quant à leur légitimité professionnelle. Le troisième article porte sur les relations entre journalistes et sources et montre comment la confiance est co-construite à travers la transparence, la proximité et le temps. Par des pratiques journalistiques spécifiques, les sources assument un rôle actif dans la production. Selon les participantes, ce rôle actif favorise des représentations plus nuancées de l'expérience vécue et un déplacement de l'éthique journalistique vers des principes relationnels plutôt que strictement normatifs.

Pris ensemble, ces trois articles montrent que les podcasts tranches de vie constituent un espace marginal mais porteur de sens dans l'écosystème médiatique romand. Ils favorisent l'innovation tout en cristallisant des tensions autour des motivations, des rôles et des relations, offrant une forme de journalisme expérimental, relationnel et réflexif dans un contexte plus large de crise de légitimité et de crise économique.

CONTENTS

OPENING REMARKS AND THANKS

After grappling with several issues related to the media world during my studies in social and political sciences at the University of Lausanne, I began my professional training as a journalist in 2019. Since my education took place at the Academy of Journalism and Media at the University of Neuchâtel, learning the practice of journalism was always intrinsically linked to academic reflections on the evolution of the profession. During my studies, I encountered a field in crisis, populated by professionals who were often disappointed, anxious, and exhausted. Yet there were also individuals brimming with hope, resourcefulness, and creativity, firmly convinced that they were pursuing a profession vital to society. The crisis facing journalism had not defeated them, nor diminished their motivation.

At the same time, my early career as a journalist offered me a different perspective on the world. I was enriched by encounters—some more pleasant than others—with the diverse individuals who make up society. Working as a journalist at a local radio station in Neuchâtel, I became increasingly convinced that everyone has stories to tell, experiences to share, and opinions to express. I felt it was my role to gather and broadcast these narratives.

However, I could not simply practice this profession without questioning it, especially when it was under so many attacks and constantly being called into question. What could be better (and perhaps crazier) than embarking on a PhD in journalism studies to satisfy the curiosity that the media world had sparked in me? This thesis has not answered all the questions I had, but it has allowed me to meet professionals who are not content to simply reproduce what they were taught, and who are eager to propose alternatives to a system that sometimes feels on its last legs.

I am deeply grateful to all the people who gave me the gift of their time so that this thesis could come to light. I would especially like to thank those who devoted precious hours to participating in this research and answering my questions. These discussions have been enriching, both scientifically and personally. Thank you very much.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Journalism is in crisis. This statement is hardly surprising, given how much has been written about it in both research and the media in recent years. Journalists are partly responsible for this crisis, but they are also its first victims. In French-speaking Switzerland, where this thesis is situated, many jobs and media outlets have recently been restructured or simply cut[2]. But the crisis affecting the profession is not solely an economic one. This multifaceted crisis is also a crisis of public trust (Fink, 2018) and a crisis of journalism's legitimacy (Amigo et al., 2023). Moreover, a technological revolution and shifting patterns in information consumption are profoundly destabilizing the foundations of journalism (Grevisse, 2016, p.10). Faced with this situation, several alternatives appear to be available to professionals. One option is investing in historically and symbolically prestigious forms of journalism, such as investigative journalism (Wuergler & Dubied, 2023), a practice celebrated by critics and audiences alike. Another increasingly common option is leaving the profession altogether (Charon & Pigeolat, 2021; Devillard & Le Saulnier, 2016). Yet there are also professionals who, though weary of journalism as it is currently practiced, are inspired by this period of change. They seek out spaces at the margins of traditional practices where they can pursue forms of journalism they believe in—formats they hope will respond to what they perceive as the current needs of audiences.

This thesis focuses on one such space of questioning and experimentation. Podcasts, which emerged in the 2000s and gained popularity in the 2010s (Berry, 2015), have been embraced by many professions, including journalism, as more or less innovative alternatives (Nee & Santana, 2021). In journalism, podcasts have sometimes been used to distribute information in ways similar to other media, with the hope of reaching younger audiences and generating additional revenue (Newman & Gallo, 2019). But they have also offered opportunities for some journalists to

[2] In the most recent announcements, the French-speaking Swiss free newspaper *20 minutes* announced in June 2025 that it would be discontinuing its print edition. This decision could eliminate up to 80 jobs (20 minutes, 17.06.25). Generally speaking, the annual report on media quality in Switzerland has, for several years, deplored the concentration of titles, a loss of public interest, and numerous cost-cutting measures (fög, 2024).

propose alternative formats and topics of interests—then little or not addressed by traditional outlets—allowing them to free themselves from certain constraints of established media such as television, print, or radio (Lindgren, 2016; Nee & Santana, 2021). This is the case with podcasts that focus on the life stories of ordinary people, or what is called in this thesis *slices-of-life podcasts*. While the novelty of the podcast medium is debated (Lacey, 2009), research suggests that it can address certain issues in more in-depth and intimate ways (Lindgren, 2023; Swiatek, 2018).

In this period of crisis and potential transformation, it is essential to move beyond fatalistic observations and study marginal media spaces where relatively innovative places, roles, and practices are being negotiated. These spaces are significant because they surface the tensions inherent in journalism and provide an entry point for addressing contemporary issues in the study of the profession. They are also significant in contrast to investigative journalism, which seeks to maintain public trust through formats that fully embody the profession's core values—a focus on hard facts, a watchdog role, and so on (Cancela et al., 2021). By contrast, slices-of-life podcasts operate at the other end of the spectrum, privileging intimate, everyday subjects and adopting subjective, personal, and emotional perspectives.

This thesis examines the issues and tensions raised by these practices by studying the production of slices-of-life podcasts by professional journalists in French-speaking Switzerland. It seeks to understand why journalists turn to these spaces, what role these podcasts play within the French-speaking Swiss media ecosystem, and how journalism is perceived and practiced through them.

To this end, I analyze the production of slices-of-life podcasts in this region through the discourse of both journalists and sources involved in their creation. Specifically, I examine how these formats are constructed and negotiated within the French-speaking Swiss media ecosystem, and what tensions emerge from their use.

The value of a local qualitative study lies in its capacity to generate essential context-dependent knowledge, which is crucial for understanding complex phenomena embedded in local settings (Flyvbjerg, 2006). In a field that has thus far remained largely unexplored by scientific research, the aim is to contribute to

scientific development through the force of the example examined in this thesis. This approach aims to foster a fine-grained, nuanced, and embodied understanding of local journalistic practices in the field of slices-of-life podcast production.

This thesis is structured around three main perspectives, corresponding to three scientific papers submitted to peer-reviewed journals. An overview of these contributions is presented below.

(1) **Motivations:** The first paper investigates the motivations of professional journalists in French-speaking Switzerland who produce slices-of-life podcasts within traditional media organizations. The study demonstrates that podcasting operates simultaneously as a coping strategy in the face of professional crisis and as a site of innovation, fostering creative autonomy and narrative experimentation. Positioned at the margins of newsrooms, these podcasts are discursively framed by journalists as marginal and emancipatory practices—"a media within the media"—that enable resistance to institutional constraints while renegotiating journalism's boundaries.

(2) **Roles:** The second paper examines how journalistic roles are perceived and negotiated in spaces at the margins of traditional journalism. Journalists predominantly describe themselves as connectors or friends (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016), seeking to build social ties through information and to help the public navigate the complexities of everyday life. In their discourse, these roles are articulated in contrast to the normative and traditional roles they were taught. Yet such perceptions generate uncertainties and raise questions among professionals, ultimately challenging the legitimacy of their practice.

(3) **Practices:** The third paper highlights a practice that distinguishes journalists producing slices-of-life podcasts from their colleagues: their use of ordinary people as primary sources. Far from being insignificant, this choice reflects a distinctive understanding of the journalistic profession in its relationship to sources and in the exercise of journalistic practice. By incorporating the perspective of the sources themselves into the research process, I show that a relationship of mutual trust is co-constructed through dynamic processes, fostering greater horizontality between sources and journalists.

To preface these three papers, I will outline and discuss several key contextual elements. Chapter 2 defines the object of this doctoral research more precisely by engaging with the contemporary literature on podcasting. It introduces essential definitions, traces the emergence of the podcast medium, and considers the questions it raises in relation to this thesis. The theoretical framework (chapter 3) establishes a foundation for this research, positioned at the intersection of journalism studies and podcast studies, and drawing on grounded theory (among others) within a qualitative and inductive approach. After establishing the contextual and theoretical frameworks in chapters 2 and 3, a brief chapter (chapter 4) is dedicated to refining and articulating the central research problem.

Chapter 5 details the construction of the sample to ensure that readers have the contextual elements necessary for understanding the discussions developed in this thesis. Finally, chapter 6 justifies and explains the methods of data collection and analysis.

2. PODCASTING: CONTINUITY, RENEWAL, AND USES OF AN EMERGING MEDIUM

This thesis contributes to a growing body of research on podcasting. Without attempting to review all of the literature on the subject—much of which lies beyond the field of journalism—the aim here is to highlight findings that help delineate the scope of this study and to identify the key questions and insights that have emerged to date.

2.1 PODCASTING: DEFINITIONS AND SPECIFICITIES

After its emergence around 2004, podcasting is often described as having reached its golden age around 2015 (Berry, 2015; Bottomley, 2015), following major successes such as the true crime podcast *Serial*, hosted by the American journalist Sarah Koenig. The popular success of the medium has sparked scholarly interest which, in simplified terms, appears divided into two main perspectives. On the one hand, some view podcasting as merely an adaptation or continuum of radio; on the other, some argue that it should be considered "a creative medium distinct from radio, with its own unique modes of not just dissemination but also production, listening, and engagement" (Spinelli & Dan, 2019, p. 2). Even within this second perspective, however, it seems difficult to dispense entirely with references and comparisons to its "big sister" (Spinelli & Dan, 2019). For this reason, some prefer to describe podcasting as a *relatively* new medium, positioning it as a middle ground (Llinares et al., 2018). Another approach, which I adopt in this thesis, is Berry's (2018) proposal to understand podcasts as a "process of innovation" (p. 16). In any case, the first step is to define what constitutes a medium, regardless of how new or innovative it may appear.

2.1.1 PODCASTS AS A TECHNOLOGY

Firstly, podcasts can be defined through their technology: "On the surface, podcasting is a delivery mechanism, a means of distributing MP3 audio files across the internet" (Llinares et al., 2018, p. 5). While these technical considerations may appear mundane at first glance, they are crucial to understanding why this medium

is accessible with little to no training. These technological features "cultivate an autonomy of approach that results in conversational, informal, personal, even supportive atmospheres" (Llinares et al., 2018, p. 2). It is also thanks to this simplicity that many non-professionals have embraced podcasting, as have professionals with limited experience in sound production. Moreover, the development of RSS, which made the emergence of podcasts possible, was originally intended for amateurs rather than professionals (Berry, 2018). Its low-cost creativity was certainly a major factor in its adoption by some media outlets at a time of renewal but also of economic crisis, with the hope of reaching mass audiences (Sullivan, 2018).

From a technological standpoint, another key distinction between podcasts and radio lies in their distribution model. Unlike live radio—and despite the on-demand rebroadcasts offered on most platforms—podcasts are designed exclusively for on-demand listening. The vast majority are freely available, often supported by limited advertising (Spinelli & Dan, 2019). Once again, these technical aspects are far from trivial, as they profoundly shape the relationship between broadcasters and audiences, leading to distinctive production practices and strongly influencing the content offered through this medium (Chan-Olmsted & Wang, 2020).

Technology thus provides a first step in understanding how, over the past twenty years, podcasts have established themselves as a significant vehicle for education, communication, and information. Yet, as this thesis aims to demonstrate, podcasts are far more than mere technical objects.

2.1.2 Podcast as a popular medium

The popularity of podcasts is striking. In 2025, the number of podcasts worldwide is estimated at 4.52 million, according to the specialist website podcastatistics.com (Podcast Statistics, 2025). In the United States, the birthplace of podcasting, around 55% of the population—approximately 158 million people—listen to podcasts every month (Spinelli & Dan, 2019). In 2014, the hit series *Serial* recorded 4 million downloads per episode, and by 2016, 3.6 million people were listening to BBC podcasts each month (Spinelli & Dan, 2019).

These figures indicate several things. First, they have justified, and continue to justify, investment in the medium as well as research on it. Second, at a time when radio has been losing listeners (notably due to technical broadcasting changes, at least in Switzerland[3]) and struggling to reach younger audiences (Gutiérrez, 2016), the popularity of podcasts has offered hope to certain media outlets, which sometimes portray them as a "miracle solution"—a medium that could magically attract a younger, more engaged, and more loyal audience (Newman & Gallo, 2019). Yet podcasting is by no means a miracle product in itself; it is what creators choose to make of it that draws audiences.

2.1.3 Podcasts as practices

As early as 2005, some voices were already calling for a more cautious perspective on the podcasting phenomenon, whose audience figures were undeniably striking (Llinares et al., 2018). Yet, as has been noted, this fascination with numbers often overshadowed "what was really interesting and important about this moment: namely, that new modes of expression were taking shape and new ways of generating meaning and forming relationships were growing around this emerging medium" (Spinelli & Dan, 2019, pp. 1–2). Since then, podcasting has developed into "a specific set of practices and cultural meanings" (Morris & Patterson, 2015, p. 221), with production methods, presentation styles, audience engagement, and creators' intentions distinguishing it more clearly from traditional radio (Llinares et al., 2018, p. 5).

In 2015, Markman suggested that part of podcasting's success could be attributed to the way it "has breathed new life into established, and in some cases largely forgotten tropes and forms" (in Spinelli & Dan, 2019, p. 241). While this view may appear either naive or bold, Spinelli and Dan (2019) argue that it deserves attention, as it highlights how various fields—including journalism—are reinventing themselves through the possibilities offered by this medium.

[3] In 2025, Swiss public radio lost around a quarter of its listeners when it stopped broadcasting on FM, benefiting regional radio stations in French-speaking Switzerland (Le Temps, 10.07.2025).

Although scholars continue to debate the extent to which podcasting constitutes a genuinely new medium, *The Audio Media Revolution* (Spinelli & Dan, 2019) emphasizes that podcast producers themselves consistently regard it as such. For them, podcasting was never merely an extension of radio but rather an opportunity to invent or reimagine the audio experience (Spinelli & Dan, 2019). As Llinares and colleagues observe (2018), "the flexibility of listening and the relative lack of editorial and format scrutiny in production marks the medium as something different, more radical, and more culturally urgent than radio" (p. 2).

Insert 1. Distinctive features of podcasts, according to Spinelli & Dan (2019)

One of the most distinctive features of podcasts, according to Spinelli and Dan (2019), is the engagement they inspire (p. 12). To more precisely define this medium, the authors propose a list of elements that distinguish podcasts, summarized below (Spinelli & Dan, 2019, pp. 7–8):

- Consumption via headphones induces intimate listening, a different quality of listening, and a different relationship with the audience;
- It is a mobile medium, consumed in public spaces;
- The medium gives listeners more control over how they consume it;
- Listening to podcasts requires more selection and active engagement on the part of the audience;
- Podcasts benefit from a global niche audience rather than material, regional, or national communities;
- Podcasts are intertwined with social media;
- Podcasts can be broadcast without external validation;
- Podcasts are generally free to access;
- Podcasts are timeless;
- Podcast episodes are not final and may be subject to change;
- Podcasts are not subject to any constraints in terms of publication scheduling.

The distinctive features of podcasting, including its specific practices, have introduced challenges and dilemmas not encountered in radio (Spinelli & Dan, 2019). One key tension, recurrent throughout this thesis, concerns oral communication

more broadly: the opposition between objective and subjective knowledge—a tension amplified in the digital age (Llinares et al., 2018).

Podcasting also distinguishes itself through the kinds of content it attracts. As Llinares and colleagues (2018) note, it exemplifies the maxim that "the specific is universal" by creating spaces for niche or cult content that speaks to idiosyncratic cultures of interest (p. 2). This culture is simultaneously personal and collective, a dynamic closely tied to listeners' active engagement and to the intimate listening environments—headphones, car sound systems, mobile devices—that reinforce a sense of sonic closeness (Llinares et al., 2018, p. 2). While a wide range of genres have thrived in podcasting—from true crime (Sherill, 2022) to science (Barrios-O'Neill, 2018) and educational formats (Drew, 2017)—this thesis focuses on one in particular: the rise of intimate content in journalism.

Podcasts offer "a chance to connect with others in different and distant places around the globe, to hear remarkable personal stories at entirely self-chosen times, and to gain new insights, all delivered in a way that feels intimate" (Swiatek, 2018, p. 173). This intimacy operates on multiple levels. It is first forged between host and listener, intensified by direct address and the headphone experience, which places the host's voice directly into the listener's ears (Hendricks & Mims, 2018). Swiatek (2018) further describes podcasting as an "intimate bridging medium" that fosters connections across diverse audiences. The format also seems particularly suited to intimate topics: while radio is often associated with clarity, podcasting, as Spinelli and Dan (2019) argue, is "for subtlety" (p. 13).

Frequently described as inherently intimate, podcasting renders the very notion of intimacy somewhat blurred (Euritt, 2022). To address this ambiguity, Adler Berg (2023) identifies four key dimensions: "intimacy in listening, intimacy in what is said, intimacy in how it is said, and intimacy in cross-media interactions – most significantly via social media" (Adler Berg, 2023, p. 1423). Intimacy, however, has also long been associated with radio (Spinelli & Dan, 2019, p. 70). This raises a central question: in what ways does podcasting differ?

The intimate character of podcasting creates several affordances: "enhanced storytelling capabilities, deeper audience connections, and the ability to address social justice issues more effectively" (Lindgren, 2025, p. 1). Among these, podcasts have become platforms for victims of sexual violence to share their stories in the aftermath of the #MeToo movement, offering a non-visual and safe space for testimony, and thereby embodying a form of "quiet activism" (Karathanasopoulou & Williams, 2023). This has led some scholars to study podcasts as feminist spaces, where women can amplify intimate experiences often marginalized by traditional media (Richardson & Green, 2018). Through transparency codes, podcast hosts also tend to be more willing than their radio counterparts to share personal experiences and engage in self-reflection (Dowling & Miller, 2019; Lindgren, 2023).

2.1.4 Podcasts and intimacy as a journalistic tool

In podcast studies, contributions from a wide range of professional groups (such as journalists, communication specialists, and educators) are often blurred together with those of amateur creators. Nonetheless, a growing body of research focusing specifically on journalistic podcast productions—particularly those addressing intimate topics—offers valuable insights that inform this thesis.

Building on the literature on the medium's intimacy, scholars have shown that journalists use podcasts as a privileged space for personal storytelling that is less visible in mainstream journalism (Schukar, 2022). Yet, as Lindgren (2025) warns, intimacy in journalistic podcasting is not without risks. Her recent work identifies concerns such as "the potential for parasocial relationships to compromise journalistic integrity, the challenge of maintaining professional standards while fostering audience connection, and the possibility of reinforcing echo chambers rather than bridging societal divides" (Lindgren, 2025, p. 1). Balancing intimacy and journalistic rigor proves especially challenging, as these practices sometimes conflict with established journalistic norms (Wang et al., 2025). This adds to the challenges of being a respectful observer (Grevisse, 2016), a challenge that arises for professionals whenever they work on issues related to intimacy, and even more so when the people involved are (potentially) in a position of vulnerability (Grevisse, 2016).

These tensions are closely linked to broader notions of professionalism. Journalistic professionalism refers to a set of values, routines, and norms—including public service, fairness, and impartiality—and functions as a form of boundary work through which journalists assert expertise and professional identity (Carlson & Lewis, 2015; Deuze, 2005). However, professionalism is not fixed: it is shaped by ideology, media culture, and technological change, and is constantly negotiated (Splichal & Dahlgren, 2016).

At the heart of the professional dilemmas raised by intimate podcast narratives lies the question of objectivity (García de Torres, 2025; Wang et al., 2025). The emotional turn in journalism, theorized by Wahl-Jorgensen (2019), has challenged longstanding ideals of detachment, showing how journalism increasingly incorporates emotion and personal narrative. Journalists, as individuals, must navigate these tensions. Wang and colleagues (2025), in interviews with Chinese podcast journalists, demonstrate how practitioners from legacy media attempt to reconcile traditional journalistic values with the intimacy of the podcast form. While the notion of professionalism in podcasting remains undefined, these journalists emphasize the importance of maintaining high standards while allowing space for personal expression—thereby reshaping professional norms through a balance between intimate narration and journalistic rigor (Wang et al., 2025).

2.2 SLICES-OF-LIFE PODCASTS

As noted above, podcasts have enabled the exploration of more intimate topics through their mode of distribution, and many award-winning productions are built around personal, subjective stories and narrative styles (Lindgren, 2021).

It is within this trend that the podcasts examined in this thesis can be situated: slices-of-life podcasts. French researcher Lesaunier (2023) defines these as podcasts that give voice to ordinary people who talk about their jobs, their stories, what has happened to them, the initiatives they have taken, or the day their lives changed, and so on (p. 41). In her mapping of the podcast offering in France, Lesaunier (2023) identifies this format as representing 5 percent of available podcasts in 2022. In this thesis, I adopt the term "slices-of-life podcasts", a translation of the French word "tranches de vie", to ensure conceptual consistency, given that no consensus has yet been reached in the literature.

As considered here, slices-of-life podcasts are intimate in "what is said" (Adler Berg, 2023), notably because they offer "narrow and in-depth content. They take the time that is deemed necessary to go deep with their topic" (Adler Berg, 2023, p. 1428). In this thesis, intimacy does not necessarily stem from what journalists themselves say: not all journalists are self-reflective or disclose personal information in podcasts episodes. Rather, slices-of-life podcasts give voice to ordinary people—understood as individuals generally unknown to the wider public and unaffiliated with any organizations (De Swert & Kuypers, 2020, p. 1039)—while journalists often recede into the background of the final production. In this sense, intimacy "in what is said" derives from the personal or sensitive nature of the topics covered, one of the characteristics of podcast themes identified by Spinelli and Dan (2019). The topics addressed in slices-of-life podcasts are generally unrelated to current events, another recurring feature of certain podcast formats (Adler Berg, 2023). According to Bottomley and Oneonta (2017), these podcasts echo Nick Couldry's argument that voice—the capacity to give a subjective account of one's own experiences—is a fundamental human capability and a powerful means of resisting neoliberal forms of power, even for marginalized populations. Moreover, Nick Couldry (2010) argues that it is not merely about multiplying voices in public but about valuing them,

recognizing personal narratives as meaningful and thereby affirming that their lives and experiences matter. A process, argue Bottomley and Oneonta (2017) that is exemplified by audio storytelling centered on individual voices. Yet, as they note, the tendency to highlight spectacular or highly emotional accounts may privilege the extraordinary over more nuanced and contextualized portrayals of everyday life. In practice, the so-called stories of "ordinary" people often turn out to be anything but ordinary (see chapter 5.5.2).

Although they differ in some respects, slices-of-life podcasts bear significant similarities to the formats studied by Deleu (2000) under the label of *radio documentaries*, which may help further define the genre. In his analysis, Deleu (2000) identifies a form of journalistic storytelling that makes extensive use of ordinary voices. What he calls "documentary speech" refers to edited interviews in which the journalist steps back to allow an ordinary person to narrate an experience (Deleu, 2000, p. 145). Such narratives bear a strong resemblance to the life stories traditionally collected by sociologists and ethnographers (Deleu, 2000, p. 145).

As with other types of podcasts, slices-of-life podcasts are produced by both professional journalists working within established media outlets (or as self-employed) and amateurs. I exclude the latter from the scope of this thesis not because their contributions are uninteresting or unimportant, but because this research in journalism studies focuses specifically on how professional journalists adopt this format and the challenges it poses for the profession.

Accordingly, I propose the following working definition of slices-of-life podcasts for this research: they are **native podcasts produced by professional journalists, centered on ordinary sources who, in the final production, appear to express themselves freely and in a relatively unguided manner about an aspect of their lives or a personal experience, whether ordinary or extraordinary.**

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis, as previously mentioned, situates itself in the field of journalism studies, more precisely within its sociological turn that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, marked by "a stronger influence of sociology and anthropology on journalism research" (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2020, p. 6), with a focus that "shifted to a critical engagement with journalism's conventions and routines, professional and occupational ideologies and cultures, interpretive communities, and to concepts related to news texts, such as framing, storytelling, and narrative" (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2020, p. 6). This shift has been reflected in qualitative research, as is the case in this thesis.

Insert 2: Journalism studies

Journalism studies is an interdisciplinary field of research (Deuze, 2004), "a relatively recent designation, used mainly in the past two decades by researchers seeking to develop an identity away from other fields" (Carlson et al., 2018, p. 7). This field of research features specific commitments, "embedded and localized presumptive understandings of how best to approach a topic of scholarly inquiry" (Carlson et al., 2018, p. 7). According to Carlson and colleagues (2018), six commitments distinguish journalism studies as a specific field of research: contextual sensitivity, holistic relationality, comparative inclination, normative awareness, embedded communicative power, and methodological pluralism.

A period of "prehistory," as Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2020) explain, laid the foundations for the discipline with a normative view of what journalism should be. Then, "interest in the structures and processes of news production, as well as the people and practices involved, began to emerge in the context of journalism training" (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2020, p. 4). An empirical shift then occurred, stemming from disciplines such as sociology, political science, and psychology, followed by a sociological turn and an international comparative turn (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2020).

The evolution of journalism studies is characterized by the contextual specificities of its subject matter. Indeed, while the discipline has "stabilized (…) journalism as an object of study has destabilized and become increasingly slippery" (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2020, p. 3). "To capture the rapidly growing diversity within the field by a single, predominant paradigm (or 'turn') would be an oversimplification. However, we can identify a number of distinctive approaches that have taken root in recent research," warn Wahl-

Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2020, p. 3). They identify several strands of research, such as journalism as discourse (Carlson & Lewis, 2015). This discursive approach builds on the work of Barbie Zelizer (1993), who considered journalism as "a culture created and recreated by journalists as interpretative communities" (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2020, p. 7). Two other trends stand out: a focus on practices (Anderson, 2013; Graves, 2016) and on audiences.

The present research is part of contemporary trends in journalism studies. By focusing on production practices in slices-of-life podcasts, it extends work that considers journalism as a culture in perpetual negotiation, shaped by professional and public discourse (Zelizer, 1993; Carlson & Lewis, 2015). Through an approach centered on the concrete practices of journalists producing podcasts, it also draws on the work of Anderson (2013) and Graves (2016), while using qualitative methods inspired by sociology (Neveu, 2019). Finally, by questioning how journalists redefine their professional benchmarks when confronted with intimate narratives, this research contributes to recent reflections on the redefinition of the boundaries of journalism and the diversity of forms of information considered legitimate and valuable (Costera Meijer, 2022; Hanusch, 2014).

In a context marked by the increasing fragmentation of journalism, this thesis aims to document media forms that fall outside dominant professional frameworks, while fully participating in contemporary dynamics of meaning production. The study of slices-of-life podcasts in French-speaking Switzerland—a hybrid, narrative genre strongly rooted in emotions—provides insight into this diversification of journalistic practices in the digital age.

Slices-of-life podcasts challenge traditional standards of journalism, particularly in terms of objectivity, editorial authority, and the hierarchy of voices. As Valérie Manasterski (2025) demonstrates, drawing on the work of Hopper & Huxford (2015, 2017) and Richards & Rees (2011), the idealized standard of objectivity in the journalism profession has clashed with the integration of emotions into practice, giving rise to "augmented objectivity" (Schmidt, 2021, p. 1174). Manasterski (2025) points out that in certain contexts, empathy is used as a professional resource, particularly when greater proximity to sources is accepted (Glück, 2016).

Slices-of-life podcasts provide a privileged site for observing the reconfigurations at work in the profession, where more personalized, collaborative, and affective forms of journalism are emerging. In this sense, this work contributes to a broader understanding of contemporary journalism, attentive to popular and emotional expressions of information, which remain too often dismissed in research (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2020).

Furthermore, by analyzing these productions through the prisms of digital technology and intimacy, this study contributes to reflections on the effects of the *unfinished digital revolution* (Nielsen, 2016), particularly on the reconfiguration of the roles of author, narrator, and witness. The field of digital journalism studies has also taken up issues such as idealized objectivity, showing that digital platforms, inspired by social media codes (Lasorsa et al., 2012), have fostered formats detached from journalists' traditional objectivity (Pantti, 2019).

This thesis proposes a bridge between journalism studies and podcast studies. For some, interdisciplinarity is essential in the study of podcasts (Llinares et al., 2018, p. 7), as it is in journalism studies. The question of whether podcasting requires its own specific discipline—podcast studies—emerging but not yet as institutionalized as journalism studies, has not been fully resolved (Llinares et al., 2018, p. 7). Until now, podcast research has followed certain conceptual trends, such as borrowing from radio studies (Llinares et al., 2018), as I have already mentioned. However, the field in which podcast studies has been most active is pedagogy and the use of podcasts as a learning tool, leaving room for a field of study positioned between journalism studies and approaches that consider the specificities of the podcast medium.

Insert 3: Podcast studies

Podcast studies, unlike journalism studies, is still an emerging field of research, not yet as institutionalized as others and still strongly connected to radio studies. However, researchers have emphasized the need for "new analytical approaches rooted in an understanding of the medium's history, affordances, and politics" (McGregor, 2022). The definition of the term *podcast studies* "decentres—without ignoring—technological categorization, in favour of cultural forms and practice" (Lindgren & Loviglio, 2022, p. 1). According to McGregor (2022), "the incorporation of podcasting into the landscape of scholarly communication points to how the study of podcasting has the potential to transform not just what scholars study but also how scholars do their work" (p. 1).

Podcast studies is highly interdisciplinary, especially since podcast productions can be journalistic, amateur, communicational, educational, and more. The objects of inquiry are as varied as these different contributors, with interests ranging from the history of the format (e.g., Bonini, 2022) to its aesthetics (e.g., Soltani, 2018), genres (e.g., Battles & Keeler, 2022; Verma, 2022), audiences (e.g., Wilson, 2018), and business models (e.g., Schmitz, 2015).

Thus, while taking into account the specificities of the podcast medium and drawing inspiration from existing work in podcast studies, this thesis engages in dialogue with approaches and concepts specific to journalism studies. Among these approaches, it draws in particular on role studies (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016, 2017; Mellado, 2019)—especially in the second article (see chapter 8.2) —and on practice theory (Witschge & Harbers, 2018).

Witschge and Harbers (2018) invite us to mobilize practice theory "to theorize and examine the way journalism is developing" (p. 105). This perspective is crucial for understanding journalism as a cultural practice in a fundamentally changing context (Witschge & Harbers, 2018). It also helps understand what journalism is today, since we can no longer rely on "a priori definitions of what journalism or its societal function should be" (Witschge & Harbers, 2018, p. 105). In this work, practice theory helps me to grasp a fundamental tension that emerges in slices-of-life podcasts. These "a priori" definitions, from a normative perspective, still influence the way journalism is perceived, as Witschge and Harbers (2018) remind us. Yet these

definitions do not always correspond to the actual practice of professionals, which has long been viewed from a "top-down perspective as a coherent set of practices, in which norms govern routines and routines direct the characteristics of the output" (Witschge & Harbers, 2018, pp. 105-106). According to the authors, this perspective is limiting and does not account for the complexity and plurality of practices. Practice theory instead considers journalism in a bottom-up way, as an open practice that reflects the dynamic nature of professional activity. From this perspective, the definition of journalism is determined both by the activities that constitute it and by its own understanding of those activities.

In this thesis, particularly in the second article (see chapter 8.2), practice theory is linked to role studies. Both perspectives suggest (at least in more recent writings on role studies) that idealized conceptions of a profession (rules, norms, or perceptions of roles) do not always translate into the practical reality of professionals. This is the distinction between "role orientations (normative and cognitive roles) and role performance (practiced and narrated roles)" (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017, p. 130).

According to Hanitzsch and Vos (2017), "studying the roles of journalists is central to our understanding of journalism's identity and place in society" (p. 115). Journalistic roles are discursive constructs that define the relationship between professionals and society, and through which they justify their work and practices (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). In 2020, Mellado defined them as follows: "Roles serve to analyze cultural and social life in terms of standards (norms), values (ideals), and performance qualities (practices)" (p. 24).

Early on, the study of roles was examined empirically, often through descriptive and quantitative approaches (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). In their theorization of role research, Hanitzsch and Vos (2017) argued that, "by understanding journalism as a discursive institution, we look at journalistic roles as shortcuts through which journalists navigate the complexities and uncertainties of news making" (p. 115).

In general, research on journalistic roles demonstrates "that the normative core of journalism around the world is still invariably built on the news media's contribution to political processes and conversations, while other areas, such as the

management of self and everyday life, remain marginalized" (Standaert et al., 2021, p.919). Furthermore, findings from the 2016 World of Journalism study shed light on how Swiss journalists tend to perceive their professional roles. The results suggest a predominance of "traditional" role conceptions: 82.8% of respondents align with the idea of being "a detached observer," 94.4% with "reporting things as they are," and 46.6% with "monitoring and scrutinizing political leaders" (World of Journalism, 2016). By contrast, identifications with roles associated with a "softer" practice of journalism appear less widespread, though they are not absent. For instance, 21.5% of participants see themselves as "advocates for social change," 39.2% as providers of "advice, orientation, and direction for daily life," and nearly 50.4% as supporters of the role "promote tolerance and cultural diversity" (World of Journalism, 2016).

Finally, in Switzerland, a study on journalistic roles in relation to political activity identifies a predominance of roles such as *advocating watchdog*, *monitoring watchdog*, *adversarial analyst*, *educating disseminator*, and *mediating analyst* (Raemy et al., 2018).

4. A THESIS ON SLICES-OF-LIFE PODCASTS

Having outlined the key features and challenges of podcasts, situated slices-of-life productions within these debates, and introduced the theoretical framework underpinning this study, it is now necessary to refine the research problem and articulate the research questions that will guide the subsequent analysis.

This thesis in journalism studies examines how slices-of-life podcasts are constructed and negotiated within the French-speaking Swiss media ecosystem, and what tensions emerge from their use. Remaining consistent with an inductive approach, which will be discussed in detail in a later chapter, the problem is addressed "in the continuity of exploration" (Quivy & Van Campenhoudt, 2011, p. 81), and the questions formulated here are the result of nearly four years of continuous research.

This thesis is distinctive in several respects:

1. It seeks to establish a dialogue between journalism studies and podcast studies.
2. It examines an innovative media form emerging partly from traditional media structures in crisis, with a focus on the individual, thereby offering insight into how journalistic principles, values, and practices are negotiated in such a context.
3. It integrates the perspective of sources into journalism research, which has long been underexplored.
4. It concentrates on a microcosm to which I had access to nearly all the actors, enabling an in-depth analysis that captures the complexity of the issues involved.
5. It focuses on Switzerland, a country that has been relatively under-researched, but which provides insights that can, to some extent, be generalized to a European and Western context.

General problem. By approaching podcasting as a *process of innovation* (Berry, 2018), this thesis seeks to understand how and why slices-of-life podcasts have

been embraced by professional journalists in Switzerland. These formats are deeply intimate in terms of "what is said" (Adler Berg, 2023) while being produced within traditional media structures. This thesis analyzes discourses on practices at the individual level—those of both journalists and sources—to examine the construction, tensions, and negotiations surrounding this journalistic activity at the margins of a media ecosystem in crisis.

Research questions. To address this overarching issue, the thesis is structured around five research questions, which are addressed in three scientific papers:

1. For what reasons, and in what contexts, do journalists in French-speaking Switzerland turn to slices-of-life podcast production? (Paper 1)
2. How do sources and journalists perceive journalistic roles in slices-of-life podcasts? (Paper 2)
3. How are these roles discursively negotiated in relation to practice and institutional norms? (Paper 2)
4. How is the relationship between ordinary sources and journalists constructed in slices-of-life podcasts? (Paper 3)
5. What impact does this relationship have on journalistic production? (Paper 3)

5. Delimitation of the research field

Having first identified podcasting as a subject worthy of doctoral research—primarily for reasons outlined in chapter 2, namely its recent popularity and its potential for innovation in journalism—the precise definition of the research object was shaped both strategically and inductively, following an exploratory phase that allowed for a relatively open-ended construction of the research field.

5.1 An inductive and strategic construction of the research object

Building on an inductive orientation and grounded theory approach, this section details how the research object was constructed on the basis of personal interests, exploratory interviews, exploratory observations, and literature review, eventually leading to the precise research field described below.

In the early stages of my doctoral work, three themes had particularly attracted my attention from earlier readings and academic work: (a) podcasts, (b) the use of ordinary sources by journalists, and (c) the participation of non-journalists in the production of news. To ensure that my research questions would remain aligned with concrete journalistic concerns and practices in French-speaking Switzerland—and not entirely detached from the field or French-language production—I organized three exploratory meetings in 2022 with professionals from radio, print, and digital journalism. These conversations served two purposes: first, to launch my doctoral project on an inductive basis; and second, to create distance from my own preconceptions and interests—an inherent challenge for any researcher. The aim was to ground the project in observable realities that could be problematized scientifically.

These exploratory interviews, each lasting up to two hours, were loosely structured and intended to surface, in the most inductive way possible, the tensions and questions professionals themselves associated with particular practices, so as to identify potential research avenues. Methodologically, they were inspired by the recursive open interview as defined by Sherman Heyl (2001) and applied by Meunier and

Lambotte (2010) during the exploratory phase of their research on practices in Information and Communication Sciences.

I did not use an interview guide, but all three conversations began in the same way: I asked participants to recount, as precisely as possible, the process of producing a journalistic story from its very beginning within their newsroom. This approach, which I later recognized as part of *newsmaking reconstruction* (Reich & Barnoy, 2020), would become central to my data collection strategy (see chapter 6). These initial prompts then steered the conversations toward two themes that particularly interested me: the role of ordinary sources in journalistic work and the participation of non-journalists.

The main conclusion I drew from these exploratory interviews was that reporting based on personal accounts occupied a somewhat ambivalent place for professionals. On the one hand, it appeared to be one of the rare contexts in which ordinary speech was valued; on the other hand, these same professionals tended to dismiss ordinary discourse in other contexts. Although the three participants expressed strong reservations about participatory journalism—emphasizing their professional expertise and criticizing the poor quality of amateur contributions—they nonetheless adopted relatively collaborative approaches with their sources when gathering personal stories. Moreover, the main journalistic principles they cited—such as cross-checking sources, verifying information, and ensuring diversity of viewpoints—seemed to recede in importance within this practice, sparking my curiosity as a researcher.

At the same time, a systematic review of French-language Swiss daily newspapers over several weeks reinforced this impression: ordinary sources appeared most often in relation to intimate topics or, more commonly, in foreign reporting.

When I compared these observations with my own listening to podcasts, I concluded that slices-of-life podcasts offered a particularly fruitful site for studying the relationship between journalists and ordinary sources, as well as journalists' perceptions of them in French-speaking Switzerland. In this format, the voices of ordinary people were placed at the center of journalistic storytelling, with little or no

confrontation with expert or elite sources, and with minimal challenge or questioning from journalists—at least at first glance. In this sense, slices-of-life podcasts seemed to constitute an anomaly within the Swiss media landscape, one that merited academic attention.

The identification of the research topic for this thesis was thus shaped partly through inductive reasoning, but also through strategic considerations. First, French-speaking Switzerland offered a particularly accessible field, both because I live in the region and because its scale allowed for an almost exhaustive and realistic sample for analysis. It is exhaustive, as the fieldwork provides access to nearly all the actors in the field, and realistic, as the size of this group is suitable for a complex qualitative analysis of the actors. Second, since podcasts in this region remain largely unstudied—particularly in relation to their connections with traditional journalism—it was a strategic decision to focus on this area in order to contribute to a notable blind spot in the literature.

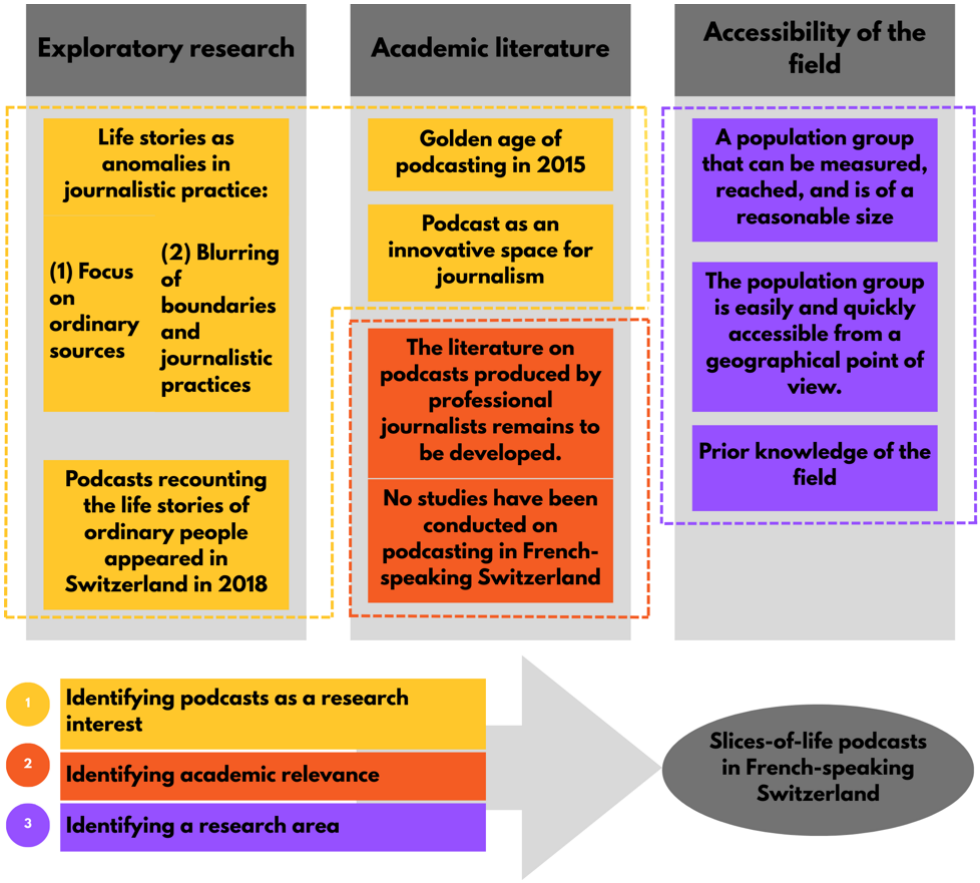

Figure 1: Identification of the research object and field

5.2 Podcasting in French-speaking Switzerland

Far from the birthplace of podcasting, the United States, Switzerland—and particularly French-speaking Switzerland—has nevertheless proved to be a fertile ground for studying podcasts. Yet this terrain has its own specific characteristics that must be examined in order to contextualize this thesis. The purpose of this section is therefore to explore the relationship between this small linguistic region (approximately 2 million inhabitants, or 25% of the country's population) and podcast production. This thesis is among the first to examine podcasts in French-speaking Switzerland. As such, very little data exist on podcast production and listening practices in the country. For instance, there is no census of podcasts produced in Switzerland, nor are there reliable statistics on Swiss audiences' listening habits (concerning podcasts). By combining documentary research, data gathered during my doctoral work, and observations from my own practice, I aim to provide an overview of the specificities of this field in order to situate slices-of-life podcasts within it.

To address these gaps, I conducted a census of podcasts produced in French-speaking Switzerland newsrooms since 2018, the year the first native podcast was launched within a French-speaking media outlet. The tables below, whose methodology I outline here, provide a basis for understanding the context in which slices-of-life podcasts are produced in this region and in institutional context.

I began by compiling an exhaustive list of professional media outlets in French-speaking Switzerland, drawing on my personal knowledge and cross-checking with existing inventories[4]. I then expanded this census using a web scraping tool. Specifically, I employed the software *Octoparse*, which enabled me to extract data from media websites producing podcasts. In most cases, outlets hosting podcasts maintain dedicated pages on their websites, from which the data were extracted. At each stage, a manual check was carried out to ensure that the extracted data corresponded accurately to what was available online.

[4] https://swissdox.ch/fr/archives-media/liste-de-medias/

After extraction, the data were cleaned and organized into Excel tables separated by media outlet, with anonymization applied when necessary (so that podcasts belonging to my sample could not be identified). Finally, all datasets were merged to produce the tables and figures presented below.

A more detailed survey, which would constitute research in itself, on the podcast offering within and outside the established media in Switzerland would be necessary to draw general conclusions about the podcast offering in the country. However, my census provides a first overview and provide observations related to the context, which will provide a better understanding of the results and the composition of the sample for this thesis.

Firstly, although the range of podcasts offered by French-speaking Swiss media is extensive (n=85), it remains modest compared to other countries. This relatively modest development in terms of production numbers should be viewed in the context of (1) the size of this small linguistic region and (2) the fact that French-speaking Swiss audiences probably consume podcasts in French but from other French-speaking countries.

This survey puts into perspective the number of podcasts identified as slices-of-life podcasts. This thesis identified 15 podcasts belonging to the genre between 2018 and 2022 (see chapter 5.3). At first glance, this figure may seem relatively small and could therefore call into question the validity of focusing on such a marginal format. However, when placed in the context of overall production, it becomes clear that the number is not so insignificant, representing 13,6% percent of native podcast productions in newsrooms in French-speaking Switzerland between 2018 and 2022. Alongside culture, it is the genre with the highest number of productions between 2018 and 2025 (n=16). These results are broadly consistent with the figures reported by Lesaunier (2023) in her mapping of the podcast landscape in France, while keeping in mind that her sample is more general as it includes podcasts created by various actors, not only by journalists within established media outlets.

Table 1: Distribution of podcasts produced by French-speaking Swiss media by genre

Type of podcasts[5]	**Number of podcasts**
Sports	6
Health	4
Crime/justice	4
Economy/employment	6
Slices-of-life	16
Social and society	7
Politics	5
Culture	16
Environment/nature	3
Everyday life and practical matters	1
General news	8
Other	1
History	2
Journalism	2
Sciences	3
Political life	1
Total	**85**

It is worth noting that, when focusing on media outlets that have invested in the creation of native podcasts, print media have invested significantly in this genre (n=35). National audiovisual media, which already work partly with the radio format, are the most important podcast producers (n=41). By contrast, regional radio stations, which are numerous in Switzerland, have not invested in the genre at all[6].

[5] For consistency, the podcast typology is based on Lesaunier's (2023) work on podcast offerings in France, where she defines 17 types of podcasts: (1) General news (podcasts dealing with current events, in the broad sense) (2) Culture (3) Environment/nature (4) Economy/employment (5) Crime/justice (6) History (7) Journalism (podcasts dealing with journalistic practice, showing "behind the scenes," an opportunity for reflective discourse on the profession) (8) Politics (podcasts dealing with political issues: feminism, racism, social struggles, war, etc.) (9) Religion (10) Health (11) Science (12) Social and society (podcasts dealing with societal issues such as housing, purchasing power, education, family, sexuality, etc.) (13) Sports (14) Slices-of-life (15) Political life (podcasts dealing with the political game: elections, etc.) (16) Everyday life and practical matters (podcasts dealing with small topics and everyday concerns, most often in the form of "tutorials" or with a humorous tone) (17) Other (podcasts whose subject varies from one episode to another. These are often titles that emphasize sound experimentation rather than any particular theme.) (p. 41).

[6] A significant methodological clarification is required regarding the inventory presented in this study. As previously mentioned, the aim of this overview is not to provide an exhaustive or definitive

What they present as “podcasts” on their websites are in fact not native podcasts, but radio content rebroadcast on the internet. This observation is striking, as one might have assumed that these actors would be more inclined than, for instance, the print press to engage in such audio productions, given that they already possess the necessary technical resources. A possible hypothesis—one that would of course need to be substantiated through further research—is that regional radio stations in French-speaking Switzerland operate with fewer resources and smaller staffs than other media organizations, which forces them to concentrate their efforts on on-air productions rather than on other channels.

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account of the podcast offer in French-speaking Switzerland, but rather to shed light on the broader context in which the analysis is situated. This choice inevitably entails certain limitations that must be acknowledged.

One of the main challenges encountered during this mapping exercise concerns the categorisation of content produced by regional radio stations. In almost all cases, these broadcasters now include a “podcasts” section on their websites. However, closer examination of these offerings reveals that they are, for the most part, radio programmes originally aired on broadcast channels and subsequently made available online as catch-up podcasts, rather than productions specifically conceived for digital-first distribution. The distinction between these two editorial logics—native production on the one hand and rebroadcasting on the other—is made even more complex by the fact that many websites do not clearly differentiate between them. Some stations indiscriminately label a wide variety of content as “podcasts,” thereby blurring terminological boundaries and complicating precise identification.

For the purposes of this research, I chose to classify as “native podcasts” only those productions designed for digital dissemination without prior broadcast on traditional radio. This methodological decision allows the analysis to focus on the editorial dynamics specific to native podcasting, but it also leads to findings that must be interpreted in light of this restriction. For instance, while the results indicate that regional radio stations produce very few native podcasts, this should not be read as evidence of their absence from the digital audio landscape, but rather as an indication that their presence is primarily characterised by repurposed broadcast content.

This observation also highlights the value of future research in overcoming the limitations of such an inventory. A more comprehensive study could, for example, incorporate interviews with editorial decision-makers at these stations in order to better understand their distribution strategies and clarify the nature of the content they offer. Such an approach would help refine the typology of digital audio production and provide a more nuanced understanding of the place of regional radio within the podcast ecosystem.

Table 2: Podcast distribution by media outlet type

Type of media outlet	**Number of podcasts**
Regional print media	2
National online media	9
National printed media	19
Supraregional print media	9
Printed magazine	5
National audiovisual media	41
Total	**85**

Notably—especially as it helps justify the relevance of this thesis's research topic—among the first podcasts to appear in newsrooms around 2018 and 2019 (n=14), six are slices-of-life podcasts. This positions the journalists behind these formats as pioneers of the genre in French-speaking Switzerland, making their study all the more relevant.

The final two figures from the census of podcasts created by media outlets in French-speaking Switzerland provide descriptive information on both the number of episodes per podcast and their dates of creation. These productions generally contain no more than ten episodes. The data also reveal an upward trend between 2018 and a peak in 2022, followed by a decline in the number of new podcasts between 2023 and 2025.

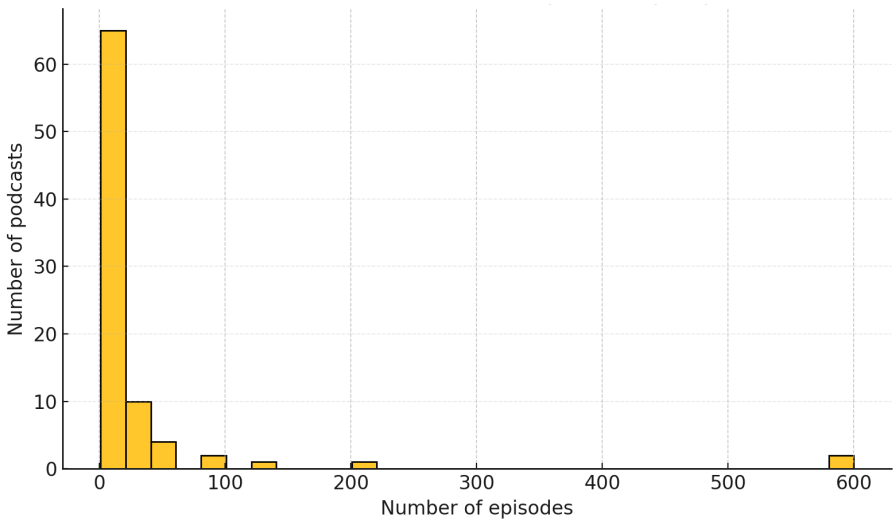

Figure 2: Number of episodes per podcast title

Table 3: Podcasts' distribution by year of creation

Date of creation	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	**Total**
Number of podcasts	6	8	11	15	16	11	10	8	**85**

Insert 4. Podcast listening in Switzerland

A study conducted by Qualinsight in 2024 among more than 750 respondents aged 17 and over in French-speaking Switzerland found that nearly 51% reported listening to podcasts. The survey showed that 17–34-year-olds are the most frequent listeners and that the audience is evenly distributed across urban, suburban, and rural areas—suggesting, according to the study's authors, that the medium reaches a wide range of profiles. The main motivations for listening were, in order of importance: entertainment (66%), learning and personal development (62%), keeping up with the news (58%), and inspiration and motivation (34%). The most popular topics included health and well-being (52%), personal development (44%), news and politics (38%), and comedy and entertainment (37%). An interesting finding, which seems to point to the added value of native podcasts compared to rebroadcasts of radio programs, is that listeners expressed a preference for original productions.

These results contrast with those of other studies, such as one published in 2024 by MACH Strategy (Marchand, 2024). This study offered a more conservative estimate, suggesting that around 15% of the Swiss population listens to podcasts, with a slightly lower share in

French-speaking Switzerland (11.5%) compared to the German-speaking regions. It also indicated that young adults aged 14 to 29 are the most enthusiastic consumers of the format. Given these disparities between studies, it remains difficult to draw firm conclusions about podcast consumption habits in Switzerland or to generalize them.

Other indicators can help assess the scale of the native podcast phenomenon in Switzerland, particularly listening figures—although these are often not publicly disclosed by producers. For instance, one of the most popular podcasts in German-speaking Switzerland, *Beziehungskosmos* by journalist Sabine Meyer, has reportedly reached a total of 10 million downloads and averages around 100,000 listens per episode, according to its producer in an interview with *Edito* magazine in June 2025 (Zehnder, 2025). This figure corresponds to what is considered the norm for a successful podcast in Switzerland (80,000–100,000 listens per episode), according to Nico Leuenberger, founder and director of Podcastschmiede, in the same issue of *Edito* (2025).

In French-speaking Switzerland, however, average listening figures appear lower. In January 2024, *Le Temps* reported that its podcast *Brise-Glace*—likely one of the most listened to in the region—had accumulated over 2.2 million listens, averaging around 22,000 per episode (Frammery, 17.01.2024). In January 2025, the Swiss public broadcaster RTS announced that its podcasts had attracted 21,300 daily listeners in 2024, representing a 30% increase compared to 2023.

5.3 PODCASTS STUDIED IN THIS RESEARCH UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

5.3.1 IDENTIFICATION AND EVOLUTION OF THE SAMPLE

The sample of podcasts on which this research is based was created through two parallel and interdependent processes. On the one hand, an internet search of Swiss newsroom websites quickly identified podcasts that met the research criteria. This method of research risked overlooking productions by independent professional journalists. These cases, along with others, were identified through a snowball process. As the interviews progressed, I asked the journalist if they knew of any other examples or professionals. This method allowed me to fill in the gaps. I considered the list complete once the same names started to appear repeatedly. Thus, between 2018 (when the first slices-of-life podcasts appeared) and 2022 (the starting point of the research), 15 native podcasts met the criteria for slices-of-life podcasts, and 14 were studied in this thesis. The podcast that was left out was simply because the journalist who produced the content was not available for this research.

The criteria established for selecting the sample were as follows:

- Be a native podcast
- Be produced by a professional journalist (holding a press card in the country or meeting the criteria to obtain one)
- Be centered on the testimony of an ordinary source
- If other points of view were present (experts, elites, etc.), the ordinary testimony had to remain the main focus of the episodes

5.3.2 DETAILS OF THE PODCAST SAMPLE

Of the 15 slices-of-life podcasts identified at the beginning of this research, 14 were analyzed and used as source material for this doctoral study.

The sample for this thesis consists primarily of podcasts that had been completed at the time of the research (12/14). Most of the podcasts studied were produced by public service and audiovisual media, with a significant and relatively balanced

share originating from print media and from independent productions, i.e. outside established media organizations.

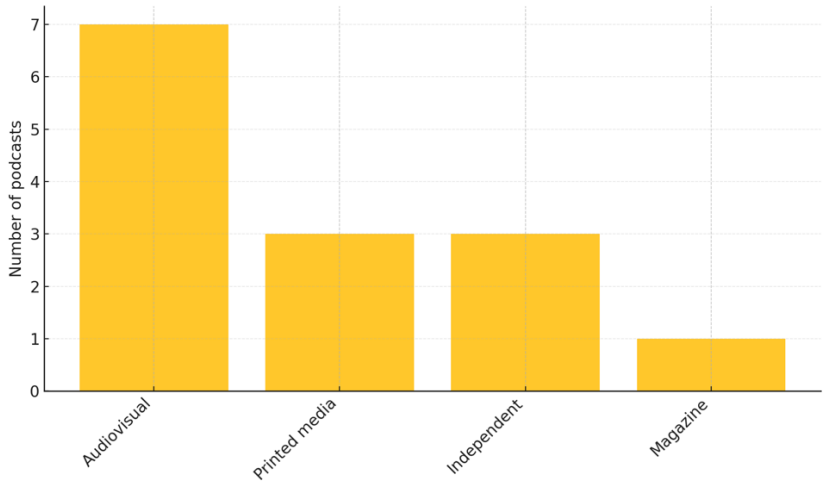

Figure 3: Distribution of podcast sample by media outlet type (n=14)[7]

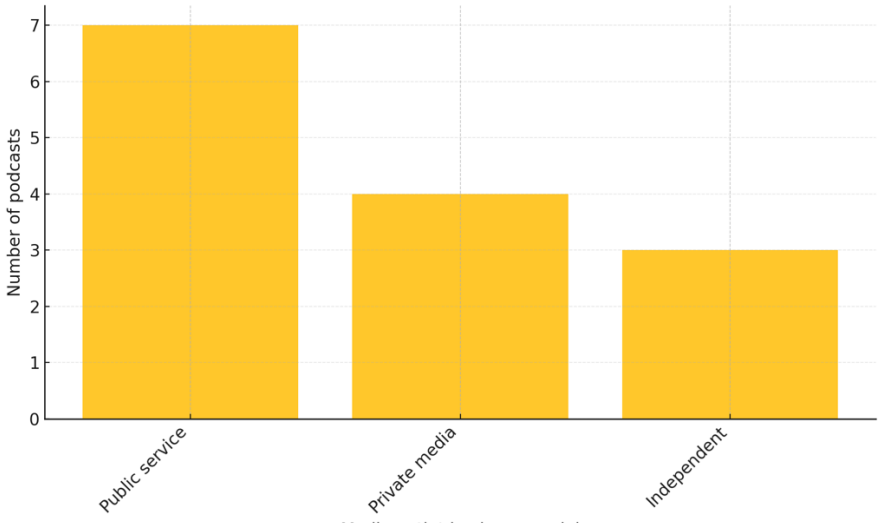

Figure 4: Distribution of podcast sample by media outlet business model (n=14)

[7] The use of visual representations is not intended to serve a quantitative purpose that would imply statistical representativeness, but rather as a means of shedding light on the composition of this thesis's sample.

For reasons of confidentiality, the podcast topics are presented here in general terms and can be grouped into the following categories: stories of unusual lives, issues related to discrimination of various kinds, health and body, everydaylife practice, and romantic relationship.

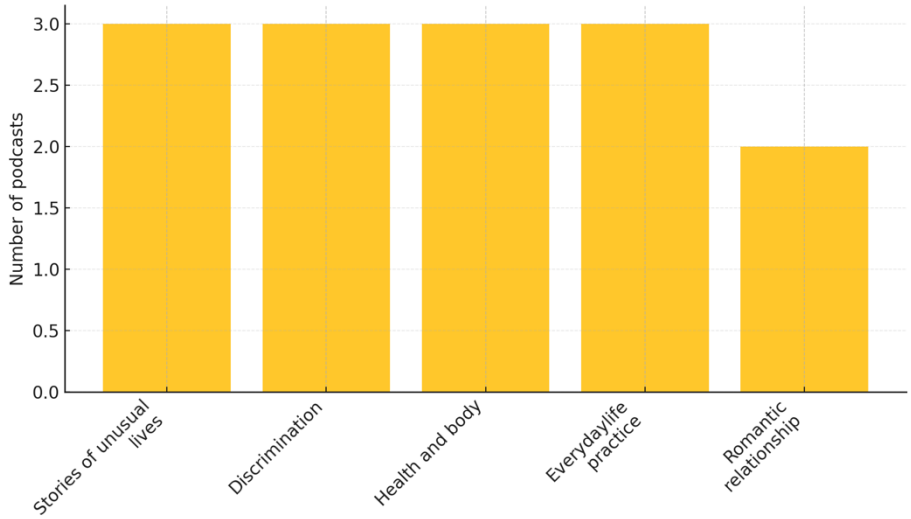

Figure 5: Distribution of podcast sample by topic (n=14)

With regard to content, the podcasts are characterized by the varying degrees of presence of journalists in the final product. Journalists who are “not very present” limit their role to follow-up questions, while those who are present typically frame the episodes with introductions and conclusions that they deliver themselves. Journalists who are highly present play a more active role, combining the testimonies of ordinary sources with their own experiences, feelings, and observations. By contrast, journalists who are absent leave the entire space to their sources, who appear to speak on their own behalf.

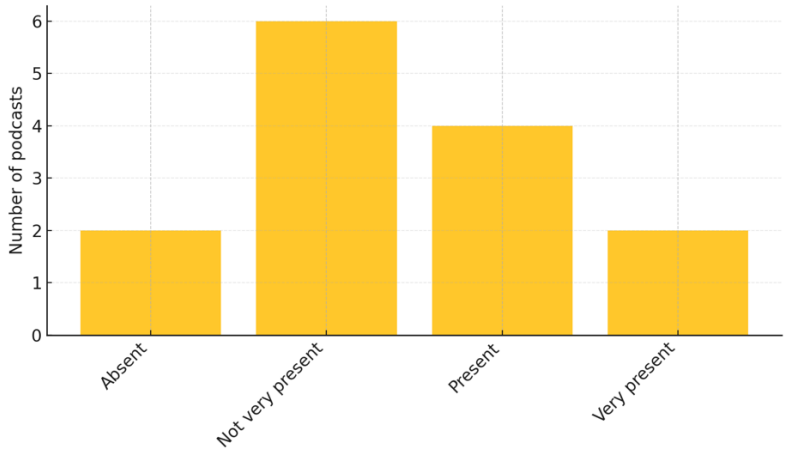

Figure 6: Distribution of podcast sample by journalistic presence in the episodes (n=14)

From a formal perspective, I identified four main content categories in my sample:

1. **Conversation**: a dialogue between journalist and source that appears free and informal, as if the listener were overhearing a private exchange.
2. **Compilation of stories**: several accounts from different individuals are linked together, usually connected by the journalist during editing.
3. **Self-portrait**: a source speaks in a continuous monologue.
4. **Reporting**: the source's account is gathered *in situ*, accompanied by background sounds and reportage-style inserts.

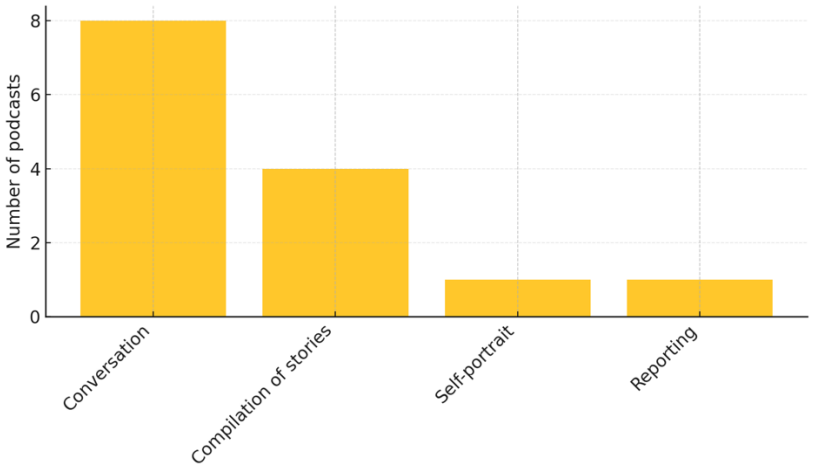

Figure 7: Distribution of podcast sample by formal type of content (n=14)

5.4 THE JOURNALISTS BEHIND THE PODCASTS

The 14 podcasts in my sample were produced by 14 journalists (2 of which are male). Some worked collaboratively on a single podcast, while others produced several of the podcasts included in the sample. Although I cannot present the detailed career paths of these professionals for reasons of confidentiality, it is important to outline certain characteristics of the group in order to better understand who is behind the creation of slices-of-life podcasts in French-speaking Switzerland.

The sample includes journalists working across a range of positions with radio and print journalist most strongly represented, alongside audiovisual and digital positions. The majority of participants are women (n=12), most in their early thirties, with ages ranging from the late twenties to the mid-thirties.

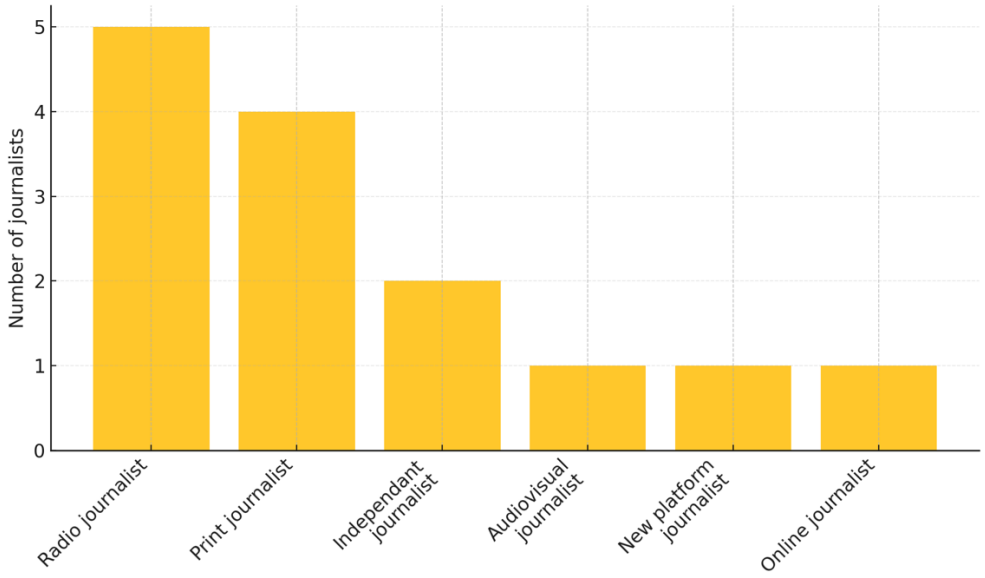

Figure 8: Journalist's position at the time of the research interviews (n=14)

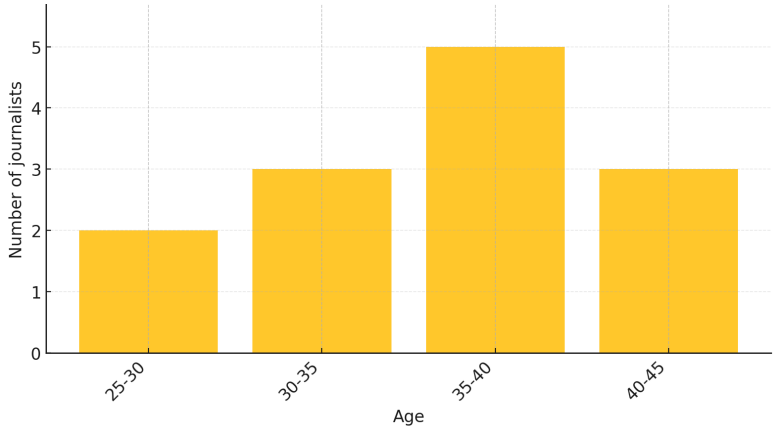

Figure 9: Age distribution in the sample of journalists (n=14)

In terms of professional experience, the group is composed primarily of early-career journalists, generally with between four and ten years of practice. Regarding education, most hold a Master's degree (in journalism or other), sometimes combined with professional training or a Bachelor's degree. Overall, the sample reflects a young, well-educated cohort of journalists working across diverse media sectors, while still at a relatively early stage of their careers.

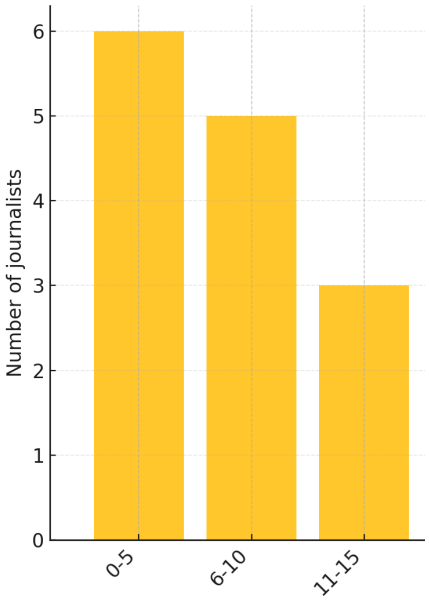

Figure 10: Journalists' years of experience at the time of the research interviews (n=14)

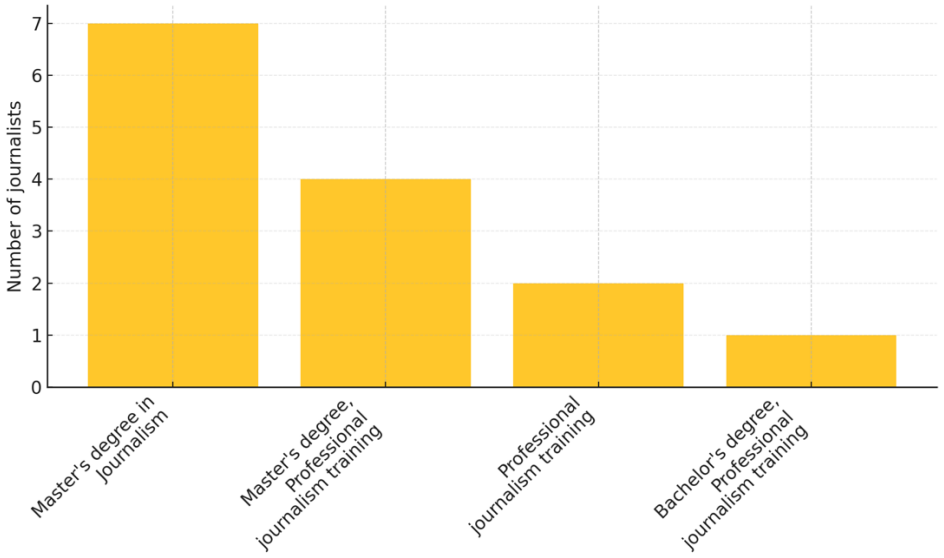

Figure 11: Journalists' level of education and type of journalistic training (n=14)

Another characteristic that emerged from the interviews is that all of the journalists—though to varying degrees—expressed a worldview with a strong emphasis on issues of social justice and on discrimination related to gender, race, disability, and sexual or romantic orientation. This finding echoes Deleu's (2000) analysis, which, based on an in-depth study of several radio documentary cases, showed that some producers demonstrated strong social commitments, occasionally leading them toward forms of militant journalism. This orientation was reflected in a persistent denunciation of injustices experienced by individuals, at times with the explicit aim of contributing to social change (Deleu, 2000, p. 152).

5.5 Sources behind the podcasts

In this thesis, the perspectives of sources were also collected in order to discuss them with those of journalists. Rather than treating sources merely as a variable for "verification," I considered them full participants in the podcast production process, capable of providing as much insight into production practices as professional journalists. Accordingly, in two of my articles, the discourse of sources is analyzed in the same way as that of journalists, with distinctions drawn only when comparison was particularly relevant (see papers 2 and 3).

I chose to treat sources as actors on the same footing as journalists in podcast production because the literature in journalism studies provides a basis for doing so. The interaction between these two groups represents, as Berkowitz (1997) describes, "a long-term, yet dynamic influence on society: the ability to shape ongoing meanings in a culture" (p. 165). While a long tradition of scholarship has framed interactions between sources and journalists as a power struggle, other approaches—including Berkowitz's—emphasize the role of cultural meaning-making. In this regard, the concept of *framing* offers a lens through which to analyze this cultural construction of meaning (Berkowitz, 1997; Shoemaker & Reese, 2013): "Thinking of news meanings like this suggests that issues can be discussed in specific ways, with specific boundaries applied to which meanings are included in the discussion and which meanings are beyond its scope" (Berkowitz, 1997, p. 169).

5.5.1 Ordinary sources

Citizens, anonymous individuals, ordinary sources, everyday people... There are many words used to describe people who are not affiliated with any institution or label and who are unknown to the general public. Choosing among these terms is a delicate matter in research. In this thesis, the preferred term is "ordinary sources." This choice was made by process of elimination, and I will attempt to justify it here. The term "citizens" is too heavily loaded with connotations of participation in democracy. In Switzerland, 77% of the resident population holds Swiss citizenship, according to the Federal Statistical Office. The remaining percentage has neither the right to vote nor the right to stand for election, with a few cantonal exceptions.

Thus, from the perspective of Swiss law, the people who speak in the podcasts are sometimes not considered citizens. This term is also closely linked, in journalism studies, to the citizen or participatory journalism movement, which is often pursued with a view to political participation in community life—a perspective that does not apply here, at least not in an institutional sense.

The term "anonymous" could have been confused with the anonymity granted to some sources in the treatment of their testimonies.

I therefore arrived at the choice of "ordinary sources," as this also reflects how they are perceived by the journalists who turn to them and the role they play as sources in journalistic production. Journalists often seek them out to represent ordinary people, who are sometimes underrepresented in the media.

Indeed, the literature on ordinary sources in journalism shows that, traditionally, these sources are underrepresented compared to so-called "elite" sources (Darras, 2017; De Keyser & Raeymaeckers, 2012; O'Donovan et al., 2022). Recent studies have shown that this trend is leveling out (Beckers & Van Aelst, 2019; De Swert & Kuypers, 2020; Kleemans et al., 2017), though other research has qualified this finding, emphasizing significant differences depending on national contexts (Arrese & Vara-Miguel, 2023) or on specific press coverage (Arrese & Vara-Miguel, 2023; Moorhead, 2024). The underrepresentation or absence of ordinary sources has led some researchers to argue that "journalistic reporting closely follows and amplifies the discourse of elites and excludes those without power and economic capital" (Varma, 2023, cited in Moorhead, 2024, p. 21), resulting in an "elitist framework that often leaves the supposed voice of the people in silence" (Arrese & Vara-Miguel, 2023, p. 931). To a certain extent, this was also the observation of Stuart Hall (1978)—paraphrased by Neveu—who described institutional sources in the 1970s as "primary definers" of information, with "the power to 'define' the situation, to 'frame' it" (Neveu, 2019, p. 172). There is a democratic issue at stake in the overrepresentation of "elite" sources, but, as we shall see, it is not merely a question of increasing the number of ordinary sources in purely quantitative terms to solve this problem. Even when ordinary sources are mobilized, the place given to them—in

more qualitative terms—is questioned by some researchers. Used more often as exemplars (Lefevere et al., 2012) or in vox pops (Beckers, 2017; Kleemans et al., 2017), ordinary sources do not seem to fulfill an expert, substantive, or relevant function in journalistic production in the same way as elite sources (Kleemans et al., 2017). This sometimes results in a caricatured and stereotyped representation of certain population groups (Moorhead, 2024).

In the case of slices-of-life podcasts, ordinary sources are, by definition, represented in the episodes, but they also occupy a substantive place, with their testimonies serving as the main journalistic material. In three cases, the podcasts analyzed also draw on sources considered in the literature as "elite." These are primarily experts who provide perspective on individual testimonies, but whose role remains very marginal in the productions.

Table 4: Types of sources represented in the podcasts sample

Podcast	Ordinary sources	Elite sources
1	x	
2	x	
3	x	
4	x	x
5	x	x
6	x	
7	x	
8	x	x
9	x	
10	x	
11	x	
12	x	
13	x	
14	x	

5.5.2 Sources as ordinary as that?

The choice of sources is an important journalistic decision. In the research interviews with journalists and sources, I collected information about the process behind source selection. In general, five methods of identifying sources emerged:

1. Word of mouth
2. Selection from the journalist's immediate circle
3. Contact through an association active in the relevant topic
4. A source contacting the journalist directly to offer their story
5. Calls for testimonials (usually through the media's social networks)

As for the criteria guiding source selection, three main factors emerged from the research interviews:

1. The interest of the story
2. The storytelling capabilities of the source
3. Oral expression of the source

These three criteria were not directly examined in this thesis, but they will be discussed in the conclusion, as I believe they raise questions about the democratic dimension of these productions. As Swiatek (2018) notes, podcasts also reproduce existing inequalities in the public sphere. And while I have emphasized how the accessibility of podcasting has enabled the emergence of alternative discourses, it must also be acknowledged that the articulate and socially accepted voice of podcasts is not equally available to everyone.

A comprehensive typology of the backgrounds of the ordinary sources featured in the slices-of-life podcasts (particularly socio-professional) was not possible due to their anonymity in the episodes. However, the following table provides some information about the sources that participated in this research. It details my sample but is not representative of all the sources who have participated in such podcasts in French-speaking Switzerland.

Table 5: Characteristics of the source sample

	Age	**Gender**	**Professionnal activity**	**Level of studies**[8]
Source 1	55	Man	Farmer	Apprenticeship
Source 2	48	Woman	Hairdresser	Apprenticeship
Source 3	70	Woman	Retired	University of Applied Sciences and Arts (HES)
Source 4	34	Woman	Self-employed	University of Applied Sciences and Arts (HES)
Source 5	32	Woman	Pharmacy assistant	Apprenticeship
Source 6	36	Woman	Self-employed	University
Source 7	23	Woman	Student	University of Applied Sciences and Arts (HES)
Source 8	33	Woman	Sex worker	School

The idea that ordinary sources are ordinary people with extraordinary stories—justifying their appearance in the media—is an important point in the literature that offers a different perspective on this sample. In the case of this thesis, and based on interviews with journalists and analysis of the podcasts, I note, however, that there are indeed ordinary people with ordinary stories. Some podcasts stand out by choosing to highlight extraordinary stories as their editorial line, but (see figure 5) others focus on everyday practices that are actually very mundane. It is important to recognize here the highly arbitrary distinction between the "ordinary" and the "extraordinary." When I refer to ordinary stories, I mean those in accordance with the normal, usual order of things. Three podcasts in my sample deal

[8] **Swiss context.** The tertiary education sector in Switzerland comprises two types of university-level institutions: (1) research universities (*Universités*), and (2) Universities of Applied Sciences and Arts (*hautes écoles spécialisées, HES*), which are more practice-oriented. Both award Bachelor's and Master's degrees under the Bologna system, but with different orientations and admission routes: HES programmes are typically more professionally oriented and open to graduates of vocational tracks, while research universities emphasize academic training. Holders of a HES Bachelor's degree may be required to complete additional credits in order to access certain university Master's programmes. By contrast, higher vocational colleges (*hautes écoles supérieures / écoles supérieures, /ES*) belong to the professional education sector at tertiary level and lead to Federal/Advanced Federal Diplomas of Higher Education, but do not grant Bachelor's or Master's degrees.

specifically with such usual practices that are nothing exceptional: matters related to the use of technology in daily life, the details of everyday experiences in certain professions, and questions of romantic relationships—without being framed as sensational stories.

Based on my observations from the research interviews and the analysis of the podcasts, I postulate that the extraordinary nature of the sources in the sample lies more in the way their stories are narrated than in the stories themselves. Indeed, it emerged from the journalist interviews that what mattered most in source selection was self-reflexivity and the ability to talk about oneself. Thus, someone who had lived through something extraordinary might not be selected if, according to the journalists interviewed, they were unable to take a step back from their experience or recount it in a self-reflective and engaging way. Conversely, some people who had experienced much more ordinary events narrated them in ways that made them inherently compelling.

Yet not everyone has the ability to tell their own story. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) already warned against the illusion that every life can be spontaneously recounted as a coherent narrative. He emphasized that the ability (and legitimacy) to tell one's story is linked to habitus and capital. This observation is echoed by Bertaux and Kohli (1984), who criticizes the assumption that life stories can be collected as if everyone were equally willing or able to "tell a story." They insist that it is primarily those with cultural capital who have mastered these narrative forms.

Thus, the journalists' selection criteria—oral expression (including a good command of French and expressive ability in general) and narrative capacity (although this is often extensively developed with the journalist at the time of recording)—lead me to hypothesize that it would be naive to assume that slices-of-life podcasts offer a true representation of the groups and stories that constitute our society, based on ordinary people.

This nuance, which I considered essential to include in the preamble to my research, does not appear to be fully supported by the table presented above, where a relatively balanced distribution of sources by socio-professional category is

observed. Once again, this sample cannot claim to be representative and, without anticipating the discussion section of this thesis, it would be particularly relevant to study how—and whether—the criteria for selecting sources (partly constrained by the podcast format, which requires long stretches of speaking and sustained audience attention) affect the representativeness of different population groups. However, it is also important to note that, in the context of this thesis, representativeness is not pursued at all costs, especially since it is not the only criterion of validity, particularly in qualitative research.

6. METHODOLOGY OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

As a reminder, the research design of this thesis is qualitative and inspired by inductive methods. In this section, I detail how the data were collected and analyzed in order to address the central research question of this thesis, namely: How does the production of slices-of-life podcasts in French-speaking Switzerland situate itself within the field of journalism in Switzerland and how does it contribute to a reconfiguration of journalistic roles and professional standards, through the relational and discursive dynamics that develop between journalists and ordinary sources, and what are the effects on production practices ?

6.1 A CROSS-SECTIONAL DATA COLLECTION

Data collection was carried out cross-sectionally, i.e., by studying a defined population (see chapter 4) at a specific point in time, rather than longitudinally (Cummings, 2017). This choice followed logically from the research questions and was also conditioned by time and cost constraints, as is often the case with cross-sectional studies (Cummings, 2017).

This thesis was conducted between 2022 and 2025, and all research interviews took place between February and May 2023, with only one interview per participant.

The research questions and general focus of this thesis required a cross-sectional design: all interviewees had already participated in or produced podcasts before the study began, and it was important not to manipulate too many variables (such as time) in order to draw conclusions useful to my research questions (Cummings, 2017). The purpose of the study was to capture a snapshot of interviewees' perspectives and insights regarding their practices and discourses on slices-of-life podcasting, and to examine how this practice situates itself within the journalistic landscape of French-speaking Switzerland. I hypothesize that these perspectives were unlikely to change significantly during the timeframe imposed for the completion of this thesis.

As past events (sometimes dating back several years) were discussed in the interviews, I used certain techniques to refresh participants' memories (see chapter 6.2.2). Ideally, a longitudinal study, beginning with the first appearances of these podcasts in 2018 and extending over several years, would have been of great interest. However, since some podcasters were still actively engaged in podcast production at the time of data collection, I believe this reduced the margin of error associated with professionals and sources forgetting earlier events. In my data, I did not observe any significant differences between journalists reflecting on experiences several years old and those still involved in podcast creation on a daily basis at the time of the study. This tends to confirm the validity of a cross-sectional design, which was, in any case, the only appropriate choice, given that the research questions did not focus on changes in perceptions over time.

6.2 Semi-directive research interviews: justification for the data collection tool

As my research process is based on inductive reasoning, this section chronologically describes how certain methodological choices were made through selection and elimination. Only in this way can the choices be properly understood and justified.

Once I had defined my research topic, I had to determine how to collect the data necessary to address the research questions guiding this thesis. In a project proposal written in 2022, I had hoped to conduct a methodological triangulation of data collection tools, combining semi-directive interviews, observation (of the creation of podcast episodes), and content analysis of podcasts. These choices were made deductively, following methodological readings. Ultimately, however, this thesis relies primarily on the first of these tools, namely semi-directive interviews (with borrowings from other approaches to refine the method of data collection). This choice, like many others in this thesis, was made on the basis of inductive reasoning.

The research interview is a form of indirect observation in which the subject is addressed directly in order to obtain information necessary to answer the research question (Quivy & Van Campenhoudt, 2011, p. 150). It allows perceptions, interpretations, and experiences to emerge (Quivy & Van Campenhoudt, 2011, p. 170). More specifically, the method used in this research is the semi-directive interview—a technique that is neither entirely open-ended nor completely directed by the researcher. The interview is guided by an interview guide, which is not necessarily followed in order or to the letter, as the openness of the method allows the interviewee to guide the interaction to some extent. This is valuable because the topics raised spontaneously or given the most emphasis in responses are important findings for such research. The use of this tool is justified here by the depth, complexity, and nuance of the data it makes possible to collect. The questions at the heart of this thesis could not be answered solely by observing explicit practices. Instead, they required a deeper understanding of journalists' backgrounds, interactions, and subjective experiences. To this end, I recognize the importance of individuals as "sources of knowledge about their own experiences" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001, p. 4) and as active rather than passive "conduits for retrieving information" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001, cited in Warren, 2001, p. 83). Research interviews are often used when the aim is to "establish common patterns or themes between particular types of respondents" (Warren, 2001, p. 85).

For these reasons, I found it essential to begin my research with semi-directive interviews. How could I access the field for observation without first knowing the actors involved? And what would be the point of analyzing podcast episodes without knowing what to look for or what lay behind them? Conducting my first interviews led me to abandon observation and, to some extent, content analysis of the podcasts' episodes.

First, many of the podcasts included in this study were no longer in production at the time of my research, making observation impossible. Second, in discussions with the journalists producing slices-of-life podcasts, I realized that information gathering in face-to-face settings relied almost entirely on the privileged relationship of trust between journalist and sources—a relationship that would have been

completely disrupted by the presence of a researcher. Moreover, as detailed in paper 3, I understood that the interview itself (which I initially thought I could observe) represented only the visible tip of a much larger process. Prior to recording, journalists organized numerous meetings, phone calls, and exchanges with their sources, culminating in the formal interview. The presence of a researcher during these interactions was not feasible, as journalists were also required to guarantee the confidentiality of their sources.

For all these reasons, direct observation proved impossible. I still believe that such access would have been valuable, but this did not hinder my research for two main reasons. First, I quickly realized the richness of the data collected through interviews, only part of which is actually mobilized in this thesis. Moreover, the inductive orientation of my research allowed me to answer the research questions using interviews alone. Perceptions of interactions proved extremely rich, without the need to compare or verify them against observable actions—actions that would, in any case, not have been entirely natural in my presence, given the intimate one-on-one settings and the ethical issues involved.

Secondly, careful and active listening to the podcast episodes prior to preparing each interview led me to an essential realization: the final form of the productions provided very little relevant material for addressing my research questions. The episodes present continuous testimonies or very open conversations, which render invisible the journalistic work undertaken upstream. In other words, listening alone does not allow one to grasp the process of creation, nor the editorial, narrative, or relational choices that structure these productions. Worse still, it may even be misleading, giving the impression of "raw" or spontaneous speech, whereas in reality it results from substantial journalistic construction. It is precisely this "grey zone" of production work—escaping analysis of the finished product—that I chose to investigate through methods and theories of narrative elicitation using semi-structured interviews (see chapter 6.3)

6.3 Practice accounts and reconstruction: triangulation of methods for "tailor-made" data collection

Gubrium and Holstein (1997) caution researchers: "At first glance, the interview seems simple and self-evident. The interviewer coordinates a conversation aimed at obtaining desired information" (p. 3). In order to avoid falling into the trap of the obvious, this section details the theoretical choices that guided my data collection process. This part is essential, as I opted for a triangulation of methods (Flick, 2004), drawing selectively on certain theoretical currents in order to design a research framework precisely adapted to my field. More specifically, I made a deliberate decision to base my interview methodology on two existing approaches: the practice narrative approach (*récits de pratique*, Bertaux, 2016) and the newsmaking reconstruction process (Reich & Barnoy, 2020). This section aims to explicate these methods and to show how they enabled me to reach the degree of nuance and complexity required to address my research questions.

The use of practice narratives (Bertaux, 2016) allowed journalists and sources to recount their experiences in a narrative way that contextualized their practices, providing nuanced insights without removing them from the meaning attributed by participants (Bertaux, 2016). This approach is based on the idea that "identity is constructed through ways of being and doing" (Meunier & Lambotte, 2010, p. 233). The collect of *practice narratives* or *life narratives* through biographical or in-depth interviews, is often conducted with an evolving interview guide (see chapter 6.4.1). Participants are asked about what they do, how they do it, as well as the constraints, resources, choices, and turning points they encounter. As Bertaux (2016) notes, this constitutes a form of narrative interview in which the researcher invites a person to recount all or part of their lived experience. This differs from a written autobiography, which requires a comprehensive approach to an individual's whole life. According to Bertaux (2016), a life narrative exists as soon as a participant recounts a fragment of their lived experience.

Bertaux's approach, which he describes as *ethnosociological*, is distinctive in that the researcher collects multiple accounts focused on the same object of study (in this case, the production of slices-of-life podcasts). It is through the aggregation of

these various experiences that the phenomenon under investigation can be meaningfully analyzed. In a professional context, Bertaux (2016) emphasizes that the narrative approach enriches the study of a production sector by drawing on the life narratives of its actors. In this framework—and as is the case in this dissertation—the focus is on *practice narratives*.

Regarding the application of this theoretical approach in the field, Bertaux (2016) proposes several methodological guidelines, which have been incorporated into the data collection process for this study. In particular, the interviews conducted for this dissertation were designed and carried out as narrative interviews, typically structured in two parts, as suggested by Bertaux (2016). The first part, central to this approach, consists of encouraging the participant to tell their story. The researcher aims to give the participant control over the interview process—"speak little, listen a lot," as Bertaux (2016) summarizes (pp. 57–70). The interview guide—conceived as flexible rather than as a rigid questionnaire—can then be used at the end of this first part. The researcher refers to it in order to revisit topics that were not covered, asking for additional information and clarifications.

Thus, in the data collection for this dissertation, Bertaux's approach (2016) enables access to subjective experiences: what actors live through, their representations, and their internal logics. This proved particularly valuable in this study to avoid a naïve individualism by situating practices within broader frameworks (economic structures, social norms, power relations).

While most of the research interviews were designed as narrative, other theoretical contributions were nevertheless mobilized in order to refine my approach in light of the research questions guiding this dissertation. The main complement to Bertaux's theories was the newsmaking reconstruction (NMR) method (Reich & Barnoy, 2020), which consists of asking professionals to explain their working methods in detail, step by step by focusing on a single production or a small number of them. This is a more directive approach than the one proposed by Bertaux (2016), but one that I employed only in certain parts of the interviews and in a still relatively flexible manner.

Indeed, in order to respond precisely to this dissertation's research questions and to compensate for the impossibility of conducting field observation (as recommended by Bertaux's ethnosociological approach), it was necessary to gather complex and detailed knowledge about professional practices. However, in a purely narrative approach, certain details that may appear self-evident to professionals or to people who have participated as sources in a podcast tend to be overlooked. Furthermore, the methodology of the NMR directly addresses the challenges posed by the transformations of the media landscape in recent years.

Because Bertaux's approach was originally conceived for the study of broad sociological phenomena, it seemed essential from a methodological standpoint to combine it with an approach specifically designed for the study of journalism. This latter method aims to understand how "news" is produced retrospectively by analyzing and discussing with participants some of their recent work. It directly addresses one of the methodological challenges of this dissertation, as it allows researchers to "illuminate aspects that can neither be detected in their published output nor even observed in their actual conduct, such as the contribution of different sources, technologies, and news practices to their items, let alone more abstract and hidden practices such as the judgements and evaluations made on the way to publications" (Reich & Barnoy, 2020, p. 967).

The newsmaking reconstruction approach is firmly grounded in practice theory (see chapter 3), as it views the study of practices and processes involved in news production as essential to a comprehensive understanding of journalism (Reich & Barnoy, 2020). I therefore argue that NMR, combined with Bertaux's narrative approach, enables an even more complex realization of what Reich and Barnoy (2020) aim to achieve with their theory—namely, to demonstrate that "practices represent complex interrelations between micro-level activities and macro-level forces, norms and practical constraints" (pp. 967–968).

NMR is a methodological approach that can be either quantitative or qualitative. Unsurprisingly, this dissertation adopts a qualitative reconstruction, which seeks to

maximize participants' reflection and reasoning around a specific piece of work—sometimes one they have chosen themselves (see chapter 6.4.1).

Notably, the original contribution of this dissertation to this theoretical framework lies in the inclusion of the perspective of sources who participated in these podcasts, rather than focusing solely on the journalists' narratives and reconstructions. I therefore contend that they, too, are actors worthy of scholarly attention.

6.4 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DATA COLLECTION DESIGN

The first step in implementing the methodological choices outlined above was the development of an interview guide. Following an inductively inspired approach, these guides were slightly adjusted over the course of the interviews when weaknesses or shortcomings were identified. Two interview guides were created: one for journalists and one for sources. This decision was justified both by the distinct realities experienced during the production of slices-of-life podcasts and by the research questions, which sought to capture different dimensions from these two groups of participants.

6.4.1 RESEARCH INTERVIEWS GUIDE WITH JOURNALISTS

The interview guide used in the research interviews with journalists was structured around the three central themes of my research: (1) the podcast format, (2) journalistic practices and perceptions, and (3) relationships with sources. It concluded with a moment of free expression, giving the interviewee the opportunity to raise a topic that had not been addressed or to expand on a theme they felt had not been sufficiently explored. These themes and questions were developed (a) through preliminary readings that identified gaps in the research, points of tension, or particularly important themes; (b) on the basis of the thesis project's research questions; (c) in response to issues that emerged during the exploratory phase; and (d) inductively as the interviews progressed.

These themes did not always appear in the order initially planned. The semi-directive format allowed me to let journalists introduce these topics themselves, while

I used the guide primarily as a reminder to redirect the conversation toward my research interests when it strayed too far. Thus, the table below should be understood as a personal reminder of my research objectives and as a source of inspiration in case the interviewee's speech faltered. Under no circumstances were all of these questions asked exhaustively, nor were they asked exactly as formulated.

Table 6: Description of the interview guide for research interviews with the journalists group

General theme	**Questions examples**	**Underlying objectives**
Introduction	*Tell me about the episode that made the biggest impression on you. If nothing comes to mind, tell me about the last one you recorded.*	This initial general question was asked to all journalists interviewed, with the aim of implementing the NMR process and thus refocusing the discussion on one or two podcast episodes in order to detail the different stages of production. It also allowed the emergence of the first "clues" (Bertaux, 2005) that reflected the journalists' main concerns about their practice. This very open, unstructured, and free-form question further encouraged journalists to talk about their practices, which is precisely what Bertaux's approach seeks to achieve
The podcast medium	*How did you end up working with podcasts?*	These questions helped focus the conversation on research issues related to the podcast format and journalists' motivations (RQ1). They were intended to shed light on the specific characteristics of this medium, particularly in comparison with other journalistic productions, which often served as points of reference at this stage of the discussion.
	What does the podcast medium offer?	
	Tell me about your first experiences with podcasting. Did you have to adapt your approach? Did you have to (re)learn certain things?	
	Are there things you would like to do/implement but are unable to?	
	What role does voice play? What does this way of expressing oneself represent to you?	
Journalistic practices	*How is an episode made? The entire process, from the initial idea to making contact, editing, etc.*	These questions were intended to advance the NMR process by jointly analyzing the creation of an episode. Clarifications in the form of follow-up questions were requested for each stage, from

	What are people's reactions when you talk about your work? Those of your fellow journalists and those of people who are not journalists. Do these reactions reflect your reality?	ideation to final editing. This approach enabled the collection of data relevant to answering research questions related to journalistic practices (RQ4 and RQ5). Comparisons with more "traditional" journalistic practices further deepened my understanding of the specificities of the podcast medium and, in particular, of the practices associated with it.
	Do you feel that you have a different relationship with your sources than your colleagues working in other sections/media outlets?	
	Are there things you learned during your training that seem impossible or difficult to apply in the field?	
Relation with sources	*How do you find and then get in touch with your sources?*	These questions were intended to address research questions 4 and 5, in order to examine how relationships with sources are constructed and how—and if—they differ from other journalistic practices.
	Do you feel that you work differently than when you were at/in...?	
	On the contrary, how does this not change compared to your previous practices?	
	Do you ever receive feedback from the people you interview about their experience? What kind of feedback do you receive? Before or after the podcast is published?	
	Tell me about an episode that went particularly badly.	
Conclusion	*Is there anything else you would like to add? Anything that seems important to you but hasn't been mentioned?*	

It is noteworthy that none of the predefined themes or questions in this interview guide explicitly invited reflections on the perception of journalistic roles (RQ2 and RQ3). This dimension of the research therefore emerged in an almost purely inductive manner, without clear guidance provided to the journalists. Nevertheless, as will be shown, this theme surfaced consistently and strongly in each interview, with the NMR method and practice narratives revealing the underlying logics of their practices and their justification.

6.4.2 Research interviews guide with sources

Interviews with sources took place later in my fieldwork, after those with journalists. My inductive process led me to revisit certain elements, particularly in response to the difficulty some journalists had in recalling specific episodes or situations. Since the sources' testimonies had been given several months or even years before my research, the main adjustment I made to the structure of my interview guide was to include time during the interview to listen to the episode in which they had participated. This not only helped refresh the interviewees' memory when necessary but also allowed me to capture their spontaneous reactions to the final product.

Table 7: Description of the interview guide for research interviews with the sources group

General theme	Questions examples	Underlying objectives
Introduction	*Tell me about your experience sharing your story with… ?* *Was this the first time you publicly talked about…?*	As with the interviews conducted with journalists, these initial open-ended, narrative questions were designed to elicit extended narrative responses and to introduce a relatively familiar topic, enabling participants to focus on their own concerns rather than those of the research, thereby minimizing potential influence on their answers.
Listening to the podcast episode + Space for spontaneous reactions		
Process of speaking up	*Was it an easy experience for you to talk about…?* *Did the journalist help you tell your story? How?* *How did you come to agree to share your personal story?*	These questions had several objectives: (a) to gain a general understanding of how such moments were experienced by sources, since the literature provides very few insights on this subject; (b) to examine how journalistic practices were perceived from the sources' perspective and how these perceptions differed from those described by professionals (RQ4 and RQ5); and (c) to explore how sources perceived their own role and that of journalists in this process, as well as their respective room for maneuver (RQ2 and RQ3).
Relationship with the journalist	*How was your first contact with… ? Did you accept right away?* *What was your impression of journalists before this experience?* *How did you feel at the time of recording?* *Do you remember a time when you felt embarrassed or awkward?*	As indicated in the previous sections, this research combines an inductive approach with certain deductive elements. Among the latter, one research hypothesis that guided the creation of the interview guide was that slices-of-life podcasts might serve as a means of regaining the trust of sources, audiences, and groups sometimes marginalized in the media space. In this regard, the questions on this topic were designed both to investigate this hypothesis (even if it is not formalized as such in the research design) and to gain a deeper understanding of sources' knowledge, affinities, and opinions regarding journalistic work more generally.
Post-recording and post-diffusion	*How did you feel after listening to the episode for the first time?* *Did they offer you a preview before broadcast? If so, did you make any requests for changes?*	This thematic section of the interviews was derived directly from the literature. From my initial interviews with journalists, I had understood that they appeared to adopt a more horizontal interview method, seeking to integrate sources as actors rather than as subjects in the

	What feedback have you received from those around you? *Did you recognize yourself in the final result?*	creation of slices-of-life podcasts. However, the literature on forms of participatory journalism—although situated in a different register from the practices examined here, yet offering important insights—tends to emphasize that participation often struggles to take hold at certain stages of journalistic production, particularly during editing, when crucial journalistic decisions are made. I therefore sought, through these questions, to understand whether and how sources had been involved in the different stages of the creative process and, more broadly, how they perceived the final journalistic product. This line of questioning also drew from the literature showing that ordinary sources, when taken into account by journalists, tend to play only a minor role as illustrations, sometimes resulting in stereotypical portrayals of certain population groups.
Conclusion	*Is there anything else you would like to add?*	

6.4.3 THE CONDUCT OF RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

I began with interviews with journalists. At the end of 2022, I contacted my entire sample by email. A first wave of journalists was approached using the email addresses listed on their respective media websites or through connections facilitated by some of my colleagues. A second wave was contacted following the first research interviews through a snowball sampling method, i.e., via contacts provided by participants themselves.

At the beginning of each interview, I reiterated the guidelines for my research, carefully balancing the information that needed to be conveyed with what might risk overly influencing the results. I opted for a formulation along the following lines: *"My research focuses on the production of life-stories podcasts in French-speaking Switzerland. I am meeting with the journalists who produce them to discuss working methods and the relationship between journalists and sources in these formats, in particular."* I also emphasized that this was an open discussion, that they should

view it as such, and that my goal was to understand their point of view and what they considered important.

I also reiterated all relevant ethical points: the interviews would be recorded but solely for analysis purposes, not for broadcast. In my final work, all comments as well as the podcasts would be anonymized. I therefore obtained their consent once again, asking whether they had any questions or required further clarification, even though this had already been done during our initial contact by email or phone.

The location of the interviews was chosen by the journalists themselves; they sometimes took place in a separate room at their newsroom, in cafés, at their homes, and, on one occasion, in a meeting room at the university employing me. Each interview concluded with a few factual questions for informational purposes (e.g., the participant's age, number of years of experience, type of training). It was also at this point that I informed the journalists of my intention to incorporate their sources' perspectives into the thesis, and they suggested people I could approach.

In a second phase, I contacted the sources. They had first been approached by the journalist, who asked for their consent and then put me directly in touch with them. We subsequently arranged an appointment, again allowing them to choose the location where they felt most comfortable. I usually met them at their home or a café. The introductory and concluding remarks were the same as with journalists, with one exception: I sensed a certain "loyalty" among sources toward journalists, and my approach could, at first glance, be perceived as a form of monitoring. I therefore reminded them that my aim was not to determine whether journalists had done their work well or poorly, and that under no circumstances would the content of interviews be shared with them. My objective was simply to gather their experiences and perspectives and to better understand how such encounters unfolded from their point of view.

6.4.4 Challenges in implementation

In practice, and as is often the case, the research design—although carefully thought out and adapted to the field—posed some challenges that are worth noting.

The first is less a problem than an observation made during the fieldwork, namely the specific nature of interviewing communication professionals. Journalists are accustomed to asking questions rather than answering them, while also being communication specialists (Broustau et al., 2012). This reversal of roles can influence the data collection process (Bowd, 2004). Moreover, semi-directive interviews, as used in this thesis, are particularly close to journalistic practices. According to Bowd (2004), they share the same features of planning and the use of a list of questions, combined with flexibility and adaptability. In his analysis of the challenges of "interviewing the interviewers," Bowd (2004) identifies three possible reactions from professionals: (1) being comfortable with the process (accustomed to the rules and roles of an interview); (2) feeling uncomfortable (loss of control, fear of misrepresentation); or (3) appearing comfortable while seeking to control the interview (asking questions in return, giving "safe" answers).

In my practice, I generally observed comfort on the part of journalists. They were not reluctant to answer questions, seemed willing to provide detailed institutional and personal accounts, sometimes even sensitive ones, and generally understood very well what I expected—or what they thought I expected. They usually remained in their role without seeking to control the interview. Questions directed at me about my work and research results were reserved for informal moments before or after the recording. Some occasionally used control techniques, as described by Bowd (2004), for example by rephrasing questions to indicate that they did not find them clear. A surprising finding that contrasts with Bowd's results is that, even in a relatively small professional community such as that of French-speaking Switzerland (comparable to the Australian case he describes), journalists did not hesitate to be very critical of their organizations, of the profession more broadly, and even of colleagues, sometimes explicitly naming them. This may be related to my credibility as

a researcher (Bowd, 2004), itself reinforced by my dual role: I am both one of them, as a journalist (see chapter 6.5), and at the same time positioned as a researcher. This combination may have afforded me greater legitimacy, particularly since some professionals expressed reservations about academia being "disconnected" from their professional realities. Thus, journalists' experience with interviewing can be both an asset (ease, knowledge of codes) and a challenge (desire to control, cautious responses). Bowd (2004) emphasizes the importance for researchers to anticipate these dynamics and adapt their methods accordingly to maximize the richness and reliability of the data. My position struck a balance, I believe, thanks to my dual status: as a journalist (sharing their realities, appearing as a peer), but also as a young journalist unfamiliar with podcast production (thus positioning them as the experts, with knowledge to transmit to me).

From an analytical perspective, this position can also be understood through Plesner's (2011) proposal to shift the methodological focus away from the usual power dynamics in qualitative interviews—often framed as "studying up" (researching elites) or "studying down" (researching marginalized groups)—toward what she terms "studying sideways". Drawing on Nader (1974) and Hannerz (1998, 2002), Plesner (2011) applies the concept to contexts where researchers and journalists share language, codes, and references, blurring the boundaries between "expert" and "lay" vocabularies. This corresponds to my own case: as members of the same professional group, we share a "common discursive horizon" that facilitates exchange but also carries the risk of reducing the production of new knowledge (Plesner, 2011). In my interviews, some sequences indeed resembled egalitarian dialogues (Pearce & Pearce, 2004). Yet, as Plesner (2011) argues, what is most significant is not the absence of power but the co-production of meaning. Our shared knowledge, combined with my scientific interest and their professional interest, interacted in interviews as a form of co-production: I pursued in-depth understanding for scientific purposes, while they engaged in reflection likely aimed at improving professional practice. However, one risk of such dynamics, as Plesner (2011) notes, is that interviews may become overly "smooth," reinforcing shared assumptions and limiting the emergence of unexpected insights. This limitation

should be kept in mind when interpreting my findings. Moreover, as a researcher but also a journalist relatively close to my participants (see chapter 6.5), I experienced strong empathy for them, which at times made it more difficult to maintain analytical distance.

One strategy I implemented, suggested by Plesner (2011) to foster greater analytical distance, was to shift reflexivity away from self-centered methodological introspection toward "giving reflexivity to the actors" (Latour, 1988, 1999). In practice, this meant encouraging respondents to produce second-order analyses of their own practices. In line with my research questions, I therefore prioritized the interpretations developed by participants during interviews.

From a constructive perspective on the analysis of interview practices, my encounters with podcast sources also raised particular questions. Sources often repeated their stories, and with some I had to be far more directive, as they seemed less able to grasp what was expected in this setting. Unlike journalists, for whom podcasting is a regular part of their professional practice, for sources this moment was a single episode in their lives—even if important. As such, they were not deeply immersed in journalistic logics and sometimes displayed limited reflexivity on these issues. Moreover, not all sources attributed the same significance to their testimonial experience. For some, it was purely anecdotal, particularly when they spoke on ordinary, everyday subjects. For others, however, it represented a turning point in personal development or involved narrating extraordinary and/or traumatic experiences. In two cases, the interview framework was not clear to participants, who digressed considerably onto topics unrelated to my research; I eventually had to adopt a more directive approach in order to reorient the conversation.

Nevertheless, these experiences are meaningful and should not be dismissed as irrelevant to the findings. They highlight two important points: (1) my questions and research interests were largely journalist-centered and may not have sufficiently accounted for perspectives external to the profession; and (2) the concerns of sources in such contexts differ fundamentally from those of journalists and from the questions I had anticipated as a researcher.

6.5 A FAMILIAR FIELD OF RESEARCH

Throughout the course of this thesis, I juggled two professional roles: one at the University of Neuchâtel, where I conducted my doctoral research, and the other at the local news radio station RTN in Neuchâtel, where I have been working as a journalist since 2020. As both a doctoral student and a journalist, my field of study was, to a certain extent, familiar to me. Although it has been established that "the relationship between the researcher and the researched cannot be predetermined based on 'objective' and a priori categories of insider/outsider" (Kusow, 2003, p. 597, cited in Bilgen & Fábos, 2024, p. 936), it is nevertheless essential to critically analyze my position within the field—for both transparency and methodological clarity—and to reflect on the "filters" shaping my perception of the research subject (Lahire, 2012).

It is important to emphasize that the media group employing me does not produce podcasts, and I have never personally been involved in the professional production of this format. Among the journalists I interviewed, only one was an acquaintance with whom I had worked directly, and even then outside the context of slices-of-life podcasts. The media landscape in French-speaking Switzerland forms a microcosm, which means I am often somewhat familiar with people in the field, even if I do not know them personally.

The reluctance to conduct research in familiar settings is frequently discussed by academics, often due to concerns about potential lack of distance and objectivity (Hanson, 1994). Hanson, however, proposes a more nuanced view based on her own doctoral experience in a hospital where she had previously worked two years earlier. In a reflective piece on this matter, she argues that researchers are never fully objective, and that good research in familiar environments is possible, provided the researcher is aware of and transparent about their biases (Hanson, 1994).

This is precisely the aim of this subchapter: to unpack and examine the ambivalence of my dual position as both a researcher and an active professional in the field I study. I begin by offering a transparent description of my position, enabling readers to better understand how I situate myself in this context. With the support

of relevant literature, I then explore what this position implies for my concrete research practice and how I have chosen to address it. Finally, I reflect on the broader impact of this positioning on the research findings, so that readers of this thesis can interpret the results with my situated perspective—and the nuances it introduces—in mind.

6.5.1 One foot in, one foot out

After studying journalism at university, I obtained a master's degree in journalism and communication, specializing in journalism, in 2021. This is the same program that several of my journalist interviewees had completed a few years before me. As mentioned in the introduction to this section, I have been working as a journalist since 2020 for the local news radio station RTN, which, like the other radio stations in this group (RJB, RFJ, GRRIF), does not produce native podcasts. In this sense, I am not active as a professional in the world of podcasting in French-speaking Switzerland, nor have I ever been. My proximity to the participants was expressed in several ways: we do the same job, some of us studied at the same institution, and there was not a significant age difference between us.

In practice, this similarity of profile manifested itself in several concrete ways during interviews, identified below:

- **Informal address:** The French language distinguishes more strongly than English between formal and informal ways of addressing people. In this research, informal address was systematically proposed by the journalists interviewed and accepted by me.
- **Common references:** A shared general knowledge of the French-speaking Swiss media landscape.
- **Shared acquaintances:** I knew some of their colleagues, and they knew some of mine, as well as certain employers and friends.
- **Common (past) places of work:** In three cases, we had worked in the same media outlet (though only once at the same time).

I did not share the same degree of closeness with sources as I did with journalists during the interviews. Four sources, with whom I shared a similar age, suggested using informal address, which I accepted. With the others, interviews were conducted in a more formal register, sometimes with a greater sense of distance. In general, however, familiarity and closeness played a more important role in my encounters with journalists than with sources.

6.5.2 Research practices and impact

Very early on, I realized that it would be both difficult and unnatural to distance myself at all costs from journalists by adopting an overly formal stance during interviews. I chose instead to embrace my subjective position as a researcher–journalist, being transparent with my interviewees and occasionally drawing on this dual role. I did so more often with journalists than with sources. I therefore had to find a balance between using this familiarity and, at other times, adopting a naïve stance to elicit richer data. I was careful always to ask journalists to explain their thoughts in detail, thereby avoiding the risk of allowing my own personal interpretations to take precedence. At the same time, it was sometimes useful to rely on my professional stance to show that I understood—to a certain extent—what they were feeling or trying to convey. Interestingly, in my interviews with sources, the fact that I was also a journalist, in addition to being a researcher, usually only came up at the very end. I felt it was preferable not to align myself too quickly with the professional group from which I was trying to obtain outside perspectives. In this way, I sought to maintain a more horizontal relationship with sources, or even to position myself as an ally when they wished to express critical views of journalism—which was generally the case.

It is difficult to say with certainty what impact my position as a journalist–researcher had on my study as a whole. The benefits of such a position can include greater acceptance in the field (Hanson, 1994), which was generally the case, although it remains unclear whether I would have been less well accepted without being a journalist. Hanson (1994) also argues that prior knowledge of the field can prevent certain misinterpretations caused by a lack of understanding of

professional practices or language. I believe this prior knowledge was indeed useful, as it allowed us to reach the core of the discussion more quickly during interviews, without having to revisit certain basic elements. Of course, prior knowledge can also be a pitfall if one forgets to ask participants for clarification, since media cultures can differ from one outlet to another, even within such a small linguistic region.

When analyzing my data, I also noticed that my proximity to the journalists reinforced my feelings of sympathy toward them. As a result, my initial interpretations were sometimes naïve, making it more difficult to move beyond a purely validating reading of their discourse. Maintaining analytical distance was therefore a constant exercise throughout this research, supported by external perspectives (my thesis supervisor, thesis committee, colleagues, etc.) and by the analytical process described below.

6.6 Coding and Analysis

The collection of practice narratives, as theorized by Bertaux (2016), is closely tied to a specific analytical framework and mode of presentation. In this thesis, however, I chose not to adopt Bertaux's analytical procedure in its entirety, for several reasons.

First, it is important to note that although my analytical approach does not follow Bertaux's framework strictly, it does not deviate from it completely either. As he suggests, the process of analysis began in parallel with the interviews rather than entirely a posteriori, as would typically be the case in a quantitative approach (Bertaux, 2016). The analysis also involved identifying patterns of coherence and rupture across interviews. Moreover, following Bertaux's (2016) recommendations, my aim was to make sense of the phenomena under study and provide analytically grounded descriptions (p. 108).

More broadly, the inductive strategy drawn from Charmaz (2001) and employed during the analytical phase (see chapter 6.6.1) resonates with Bertaux's view that observation, analysis, reflection, and writing should evolve iteratively and in

continuity. Where my approach departs more substantially from his is in rejecting the chronological reconstruction of practice narratives that he advocates (Bertaux, 2016).

This departure is justified by the need to align the analytical tools with my research questions. While the narrative approach proved essential during data collection (see chapter 6.3), chronological reconstruction was not the most suitable method for addressing my objectives, which focused less on linear trajectories than on identifying recurring themes, patterns of action, and relational dynamics across cases.

By employing thematic content analysis (Bardin, 2013) and inductive coding inspired by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2001), I was able to develop conceptual categories from the data, identify recurrent patterns in practices and representations, and build an analysis that was more directly aligned with my hypotheses and objectives. In this perspective, thematic analysis and inductive coding offered more appropriate tools to detect regularities, construct analytical categories, and develop a conceptual understanding of the observed practices beyond their chronological unfolding. The specific procedures and analytical steps adopted in this research are detailed in the following subchapter.

6.6.1 Data preparation and initial coding

For the purposes of analysis, each interview was transcribed using *Amberscript* transcription software. In addition to this initial draft produced by the platform, each transcript underwent a second "human" review to correct machine errors and to include non-verbal elements such as long silences, laughter, and so forth. It was also at this stage that all interviews were anonymized to protect participants for the remainder of the analysis, through the use of pseudonyms or descriptive qualifiers. For example, when a participant referred to their media outlet, the transcript indicated "name of media outlet"; when referring to a colleague, it read "name of colleague."

All 22 interviews were coded and analyzed inductively with *Atlas.ti*, allowing for a thematic content analysis of their transcriptions (Bardin, 2013). The process began

with *initial coding* (Charmaz, 2001), identifying preliminary codes directly from participants' words and in a relatively descriptive way (see appendix). According to Charmaz (2001), this constitutes the first analytical decisions, allowing to "discover participants' views rather than assume that researcher and participants share views and worlds" (p. 684).

6.6.2 Analysis process and focused coding

A second phase of coding, referred to as *focused coding* (Charmaz, 2001), was conducted after the initial stage. Temporally, this phase generally coincided with the analytical work undertaken for the writing of my scientific articles. During this stage, coding, analysis, and interpretation were interwoven in an iterative and reflexive process, largely guided by the demands of writing. In practice, I added subcategories to existing codes in both an inductive and deductive manner—drawing on the data itself as well as on the literature and my research questions. Certain codes were merged, while others, although they had emerged during interviews, were excluded from analysis when they did not contribute to answering the research questions, even if they remained in dialogue with the literature.

Theoretically, this work was situated within content analysis as defined by Bardin (2013), yet informed by an approach freely inspired by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2001). For Bardin (2013), content analysis constitutes a methodological framework for systematically and objectively analyzing communication. It is not a single technique but rather a "set of tools" adaptable to diverse forms of material (written, oral, visual, etc.), with the aim of generating inferences about messages, their senders, and their contexts. One of Bardin's key contributions is her conception of thematic analysis as the search for "nuclei of meaning," whose recurrence, absence, or organization may reveal structures of significance in the corpus. She emphasizes, however, that frequency alone cannot be equated with importance: repetition may be analytically relevant, but its meaning must always be interpreted in relation to context, sequences, and participants' perspectives. Overall, Bardin (2013) presents content analysis as a flexible yet rigorous method, positioned at the

intersection of qualitative and quantitative approaches, and capable of combining systematic categorization with interpretive depth.

Within this framework, the second phase of coding was guided by Charmaz's (2001) notion of *focused coding*, which synthesizes the most recurrent patterns and refines categories with the support of literature and the central dimensions of the research. This transition was iterative, requiring continuous movement between raw data and emerging categories to ensure both analytical rigor and fidelity to the complexity of discourse (Thomas, 2003). As Charmaz explains, "focused codes are more abstract, general, and, simultaneously, analytically incisive than many of the initial codes that they subsume" (Glaser, 1978, cited in Charmaz, 2001, p. 686). From an inductive perspective, it is during this second phase that the creation of analytical categories becomes most apparent: "Grounded theorists develop categories from their focused codes. Subsequently, they construct entire analytic frameworks by developing and integrating the categories" (Charmaz, 2001, p. 687).

In this study, I combined an inductive orientation, informed by Charmaz's (2001) grounded theory coding, with Bardin's (2013) thematic content analysis. This approach allowed categories to arise directly from participants' accounts while also relying on a systematic framework to organize and refine them. Far from being contradictory, the two perspectives complemented one another: inductive coding fostered attentiveness to the data, whereas thematic content analysis offered a structured lens through which to synthesize and interpret the material.

The results of this second phase of coding are specific to each research question—and thus to each article—and are presented in the results section of this thesis.

6.6.3 Use of numbers in a qualitative research

Although the analysis was primarily qualitative, quantitative indicators were occasionally mobilized as exploratory tools to identify potential regularities. As Bardin (2013) notes, thematic analysis seeks to identify "nuclei of meaning," whose presence or frequency may hold analytical value. However, frequency should not be interpreted automatically, since repetition does not in itself determine importance.

Figures in my results section were therefore not treated as proof but as complementary signals, examined in relation to contexts, sequences, and the meanings attributed by participants. In this sense, as Bardin (2013) emphasizes, qualitative analysis does not reject all forms of quantification, but integrates numerical measures as one among several indicators to guide and refine interpretation.

Bardin's perspective on quantification is not unique. For example, Sandelowski (2001) also deconstructs two widespread myths: that qualitative researchers "do not count" and "cannot count." Such assumptions perpetuate a mistaken and reductive view of qualitative research as strictly opposed to numbers. On the contrary, Sandelowski (2001) demonstrates that numbers are an integral part of qualitative inquiry and contribute to meaning-making. She identifies three uses of numbers in qualitative research that are taken up in this thesis:

- **Generating meaning**: counting allows researchers to identify regularities and discrepancies, discern patterns, and formulate working hypotheses. Quantification can illuminate certain phenomena, clarify data, and render visible patterns that might otherwise be difficult to perceive.
- **Documenting, verifying, and testing conclusions**: counting helps avoid common biases (such as overemphasizing striking narratives, overlooking contradictions, or "smoothing" the data). Numbers strengthen descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical validity by demonstrating that researchers have considered the entire dataset.
- **Re-presenting data and experiences**: numbers allow for the description of samples, the condensation of information, and the presentation of findings in a clear form (e.g., through tables, figures, or charts), while still preserving the narrative dimension of qualitative research.

At the same time, Sandelowski (2001) warns against problematic uses of numbers, which she calls "counting pitfalls":

- **Verbal counting**: using vague terms such as "many" or "a few" without precision.

- **Overcounting**: assigning excessive importance to numbers or counting what does not need to be counted.
- **Misleading counting**: presenting percentages or figures that misrepresent the data, especially with small samples.
- **Acontextual counting**: reporting numbers without sufficient context or drawing unfounded conclusions from them.

In conclusion, Sandelowski (2001) stresses that the ambition to move beyond numbers should not preclude their use. When employed carefully and contextually, numbers enrich qualitative analysis and contribute to findings that are both rigorous and evocative.

The quantification of codes thus served only as a starting point for highlighting potential patterns, while interpretation remained grounded in a qualitative reading attentive to contextual dynamics.

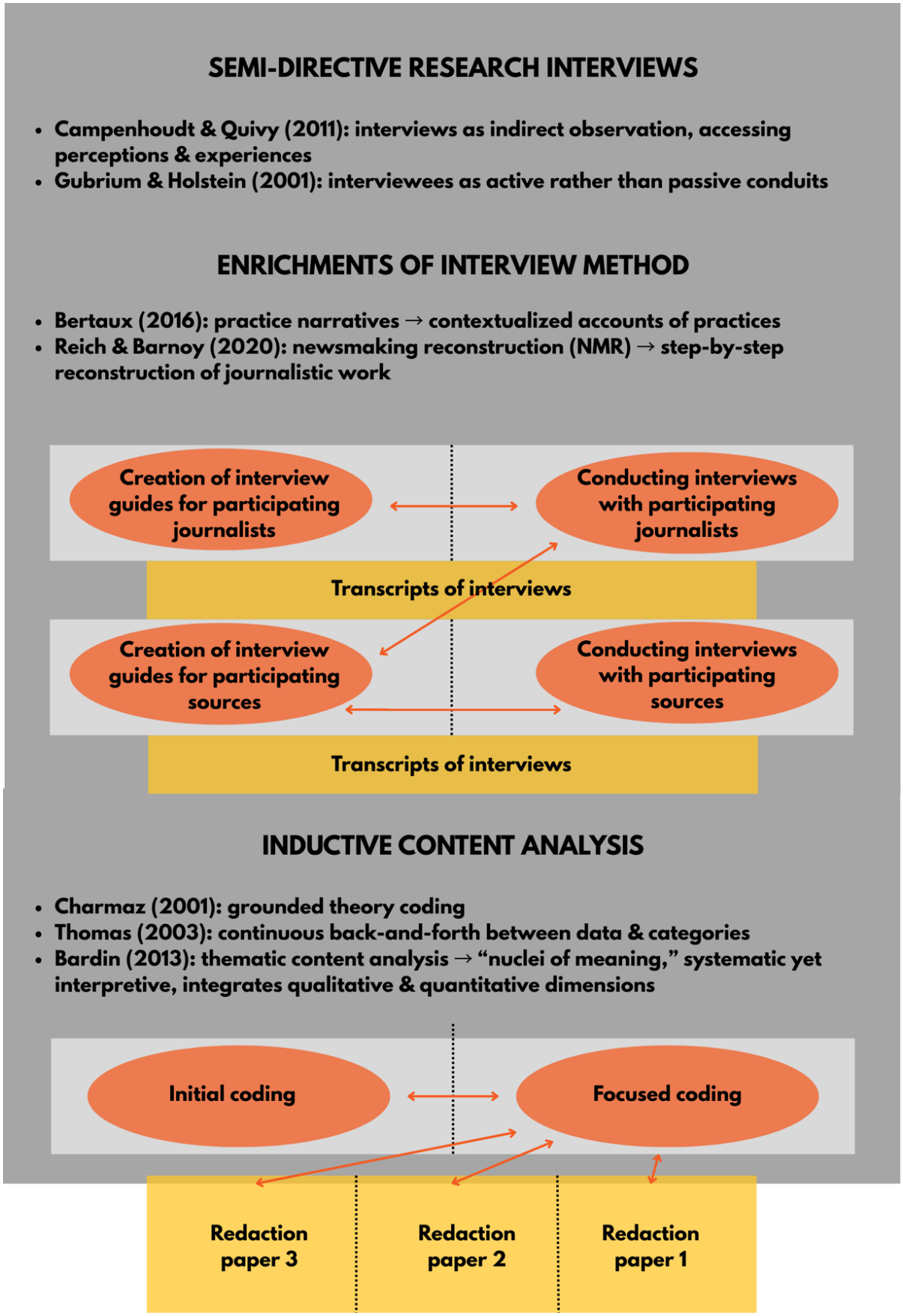

Figure 12: Summary of the research process and methodology (data gathering and analysis

7. NOTICE ON THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Writing a thesis in the age of generative artificial intelligence is a tricky thing to grasp. On the one hand, the number of tools available and their possibilities are dizzying, promising savings in time and accuracy. These are valuable allies in a project of this magnitude. But the question of how to use these tools ethically and scientifically rigorously has not yet been fully resolved and, honestly, sometimes seems impossible to resolve. I will not answer all these questions here, but I wanted to share, in a completely transparent manner, how artificial intelligence was used in this thesis and the reflections it raises. I will focus here on generative artificial intelligence, and not on other tools that are more commonly accepted today, such as word processing or interview transcription software, although these are mentioned in the sections where they are used.

The University of Neuchâtel, in its guidelines on the use of generative artificial intelligence, provides some advice on how to preserve the scientific integrity and originality of academic work. For the institution, plagiarism now also includes the reuse of texts generated by AI without mentioning their source (Université de Neuchâtel, 23.11.23). The use of generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT) must be clearly mentioned in any work, whether in a citation, paraphrase, or for spelling or grammar correction. An indirect contribution (such as a grammar check) must also be reported. Thus, the use of generative artificial intelligence is not prohibited, provided that it is done in a transparent and reflective manner.

In this thesis, no generative artificial intelligence was used for analysis or to create original content (such as papers, chapters, or other types of content). All the more so as these tools have significant limitations when it comes to qualitative research. I sometimes used tools such as *ChatGPT*, *JenniAI*, or *Paperpal* when I had trouble structuring a piece of text. I would use prompts such as “Can you help me better structure this paragraph without changing my references, wording, or style, and give me three different suggestions?” In these cases, my golden rule was always to refrain from copying and pasting. In other words, if the AI's suggestion seemed coherent, I would use it as inspiration in terms of structure to rework a paragraph

without using its suggestion as is, and, of course, I would double-check that my content, references, and statements were not incorrect. In these cases, for ethical reasons, I was always very careful not to insert large chunks of text or sensitive data, as the tools are not very transparent about how they use data.

The ChatGPT tool was also used as a support, for instance when I needed to create data tables and sought help with formatting them. In such cases, every step was carefully checked, and all data shared with the tool were always anonymised beforehand. ChatGPT also served as a source of inspiration for naming analytical categories. When I wanted to create a code, an analytical category, or a descriptive label for my data but could not find the appropriate wording, I used it as a kind of "reverse dictionary," asking it each time for at least three suggestions of terms that could help me label a category.

The greatest use of generative artificial intelligence has been for language issues. This thesis is written in English, which is not my native language. Artificial intelligence tools such as *Paperpal* (an AI designed specifically for research) helped me with grammar correction, but always by correcting pre-existing, original text, never by generating new content.

8. RESULTS – A THESIS IN THREE SCIENTIFIC PAPERS

Table 8: Summary table of the thesis papers

Paper	Research questions	Perspective(s)
1 - Motivations	RQ1: For what reasons, and in what contexts, do journalists in French-speaking Switzerland turn to slices-of-life podcast production?	Journalists
2 - Roles	RQ1: How do sources and journalists perceive journalistic roles in slices-of-life podcasts? RQ2: How are these roles discursively negotiated in relation to practice, institutional norms and sources?	Journalists and sources
3 - Practices	RQ1: How is the relationship between ordinary sources and journalists constructed in slices-of-life podcasts? RQ2: What impact does this relationship have on journalistic production?	Journalists and sources

8.1 Paper 1 – "Motivations"

"It's like creating a media within a media"

Slices-of-life podcasts as an individual journalistic strategic adaptation on the margins of traditional news media

Submitted to Digital Journalism in September 2025 – awaiting decision

Abstract

This paper examines the individual motivations of professional journalists in French-speaking Switzerland who produce "slices-of-life" podcasts—here understood as native digital audio formats centered on stories of ordinary people—within traditional media organizations. Based on 14 semi-directive interviews conducted between 2022 and 2023 with journalists, nine motivations were identified and grouped into three dimensions: personal (interest in sound, autonomy, creative fulfillment), structural (media routines, editorial blind spots, organizational openings), and contextual (economic pressure, professional fatigue, crisis of trust in journalism). The findings show that journalists use podcasting as both a coping strategy and space for innovation within established media outlets. Positioned at the margins of traditional newsrooms, slices-of-life podcasts allow narrative experimentation, detachment from the immediacy of current affairs, and engagement with underrepresented communities. Drawing on the concept of *boundary work* (Carlson, 2016), the article highlights how journalists discursively construct podcasts as marginal and emancipatory practices, simultaneously resisting and adapting to institutional constraints. Thus, podcasts function as "a media within the media," sustaining professional survival while renegotiating journalism's boundaries in the digital age.

8.1.1 Introduction

As podcasts became popular in the media landscape in the 2010s (Berry, 2015), various issues have come to the fore. Is it a new medium? How should this be defined? Is it more than just an adaptation of radio? On the one hand, podcasts are described as a continuation of radio (Lacey, 2009), on the other, as a digital medium with its own codes and specificities (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). In any case, there is something about podcasts that attracts audiences and journalists alike, whether it is its intimate (Lindgren, 2023), non-binding (Wilson, 2018), or narrative possibilities (McHugh, 2016). However, research has focused slightly more on user motivations (e.g., Chan-Olmsted & Wang, 2020; McClung & Johnson, 2010; Tobin & Guadagno, 2022) than on podcasters, and even less so on podcasters who are professional journalists, as is the case in this article.

To further clarify the particularities of this "hybrid and adaptive" medium (Cenni, 2023), especially in a little-studied European context, this paper proposes to study journalists in French-speaking Switzerland who have turned to the production of life stories podcasts, or slices-of-life podcasts, as I call them in this paper. These podcasts present an opportunity to explore evolving journalistic practices and their motivations in the digital age (Nee & Santana, 2021) as they offer a different perspective on journalism, focusing on everyday and human interest concerns in formats that differ from those offered by traditional media.

Lesaunier (2023) defines slices-of-life podcasts as formats that give a voice to ordinary people who talk about their job, their story, what happened to them, the day their life changed, and so on (p. 4). Here, ordinary people (or sources) are referred to as individuals who are unknown to the public and do not represent any organization (De Swert & Kuypers, 2020). In her survey of podcast offerings in France in 2022, Lesaunier (2023) shows that they represent 5% of the total podcast production in the country. Although this number may seem relatively small at first glance, they are not small-scale productions. By comparison, the most popular genre, cultural podcasts, accounts for 27% of the offerings, but no other podcast topics come close in terms of numbers. Outside this genre, sports podcasts account for 8% of

the offerings, general news podcasts 6%, and political podcasts 7%. These figures are not much more impressive than those for slices-of-life podcasts, which surpass science podcasts, for example (3% of the offering).

According to my observations, in French-speaking Switzerland, the first slices-of-life podcast emerged in 2018, the year in which podcasts in general made their appearance in newsrooms, both at the initiative of journalists and their superiors, who wanted to diversify their offerings. Journalists tackling these formats have been pioneers in integrating such content into editorial offerings, having to adapt their practices, sometimes with very little additional support and training. In concrete terms, their production differs from one another but generally results in fluid open interviews between journalists and ordinary sources, with very little journalistic presence in the published version, allowing the sources to express their subjective experiences in the process as well as in the coverage itself. The topics covered are varied and more or less (extra)ordinary, ranging from professional activities to traumatic experiences or romantic and sexual topics. These podcasts and the motivations of the journalists who created them are particularly interesting because, in all the media studied, journalists offering slices-of-life podcasts were among the first in their media outlets to produce podcasts and did not follow a trend that was already underway in the institution to renew their offerings. Thus, it is easy to imagine that implementing such a format required strong and specific motivations, especially when it fell outside the scope of "hard news", the genre generally valued by traditional media outlets (Sjøvaag, 2015). These formats often leaned toward the scope of "soft news" – human-interest or lifestyle-oriented sections (Sjøvaag, 2015)– a type of journalism traditionally undervalued in newsrooms, even when addressed in a classic, established format (Dubied, 2025; Hanusch, 2014). They also fall outside the "beat system," defined by Broadway (2010) as a system that prioritizes news coverage. A characteristic of "soft news," as defined by Neveu (2019), is that it is not directly related to current events but rather focuses on features such as portraits, slices of life, discussions of long- or medium-term behavioral changes, practical information, or consumer news. (p. 20).

My research explores the motivations of individuals within the structural context of established media behind this transition by considering podcasts as an individual journalistic strategic adaptation within the broader media ecosystem, a fresh perspective compared to existing ones in research. This analysis explores how journalists leverage podcasting to navigate the evolving media landscape within the structure of traditional media and to escape some of its constraints. Indeed, as will be clarified in the methodology section, the journalists studied are employed by traditional and established media companies and devote only a small percentage of their time to creating podcasts alongside other more classic journalistic activities. The aim here is to understand why they nevertheless chose to develop this marginal, undervalued, and atypical activity within rigid structures that were not conducive to this type of journalism.

Therefore, this paper will determine the extent to which podcasting is conceptualized as a necessary divergence from the "always-on" culture of contemporary news (in particular that of the “beat system” (Broadway, 2010)), providing a space for more interpretive and narrative storytelling, and a different conception of “news value” (Mehendale & Gokhale, 2021). Research indicates that news podcasts facilitate a more personal and conversational approach to news (Nee & Santana, 2021) by focusing on everyday life topics, which may partially explain why journalists embrace this format. In other words, this format is closer to the daily guidance mission of journalism (Dubied, 2025; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016) than to that of “watchdog” (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014) – with all the difficulties of traditional (de)valuation of one in relation to the other.

Lindgren (2023) showed how podcasts diverge from radio, not being subject to certain time constraints, in particular, linked to the latter's broadcast mode, which also applies, by extension, to print media or television. Podcasting also offers attractive intimacy and emotional depth by allowing journalists and interviewees to engage in conversations that feel live and immediate (Lindgren, 2023) in process as well as in coverage, as is the case with slices-of-life podcasts.

With the aim of developing the knowledge already present in the literature, which is detailed in the following section, this research investigates the motivations expressed by journalists behind slices-of-life podcasts active in French-speaking Swiss media outlets. The results of this research indicate that slices-of-life podcasts are a space on the margins of existing news outlets, but also of traditional journalism, where professionals work to practice their craft outside certain constraints but from within existing structures. The motivations put forward by journalists interviewed in this research emerge from three dimension: personal, structural, and contextual. By revealing these motivations, the professionals are expressing their desire to renegotiate the representations and the very definition of journalism.

8.1.2 Literature review

8.1.2.1 Podcasting: a world of new(s) possibilities?

The literature on podcasting, particularly writings that have sought to explain the new possibilities offered by this medium, is the first step in exploring professionals' motivations for embracing this format. Podcasting distinguishes itself from radio with a more personalized, on-demand audio experience, encompassing a wide spectrum of productions, from amateur content to professional journalistic broadcasts (Novăceanu, 2020). Among these, scripted journalistic podcasts blend traditional reporting with contemporary storytelling techniques (Whipple et al., 2022), illustrating the medium's narrative potential.

The intimate nature of podcasting creates a space conducive to emotional connections, often through first-person accounts and personal narratives (Lindgren, 2021; Mehendale & Gokhale, 2021). This intimacy is a hallmark of slices-of-life that allows for deep listener immersion and fosters trust through conversational tones and serialized storytelling (Lindgren, 2021). As a result, podcasting not only expands journalism's reach but also redefines the journalist–audience relationship by humanizing both the storyteller and its sources (Nee & Santana, 2021).

This medium encourages journalists to experiment with narrative structures, integrate personal insights, and engage in in-depth reporting, which contrasts with the constraints of traditional news formats (Lindgren, 2021).

As journalism attempts to adapt to the pressures of digital transformation and shifting consumption patterns (Denisova, 2022), podcasting emerges as both a creative and strategic potential response. It offers new forms of truth-telling while preserving journalism's democratic functions (Esser & Neuberger, 2019). The on-demand nature of podcasts, easily accessible via smartphones, further supports this shift by enabling experimentation with form and rhythm—most notably through slow-form journalism that breaks from the relentless "always-on" news cycle (Mehendale & Gokhale, 2021).

While these affordances may be perceived as intrinsic motivations, few studies have specifically examined what drives journalists to embrace the podcast format at an individual level. Are the opportunities offered by the medium themselves a source of motivation or are other contextual factors at play? This question lies at the heart of this study.

Some studies offer insights into the motivations of independent podcasters, whose profiles differ from those of the journalists considered here, but provide valuable insights and grounds for comparison. Markman (2012), for example, identifies six motivational categories among independent podcasters: technological/media-related, content-based, interpersonal, personal, process-oriented, and financial. He notes that many were initially drawn to podcasting by the opportunity to "do radio on their own terms" (Markman, 2012, p. 560).

Other scholars highlight the dual origin of podcast development, either as an extension of online media or as an individual endeavor (Prokopović, 2021). The latter, often initiated directly by journalists, tends to be "a freer form of expression" and frequently gains strong audience traction. In the Czech context, Skalický (2023) identifies three main motivations among media outlets adopting podcasting: the desire to attract a younger audience, explore new forms of content presentation, and build trust.

Together, these studies suggest that the move toward podcasting cannot be solely attributed to the affordances of the medium. It is also shaped by journalists' professional aspirations, institutional contexts, and the need to reinvent their craft amid changing media ecosystems. Previous research has demonstrated that these criteria are inextricably linked (Cancela & Dubied, 2022). Thus, examining these intersecting factors is crucial for understanding the role of podcasting in the ongoing transformation of journalism.

Additionally, it is important to consider how journalists *discursively construct* the meaning and legitimacy of their turn to podcasting. As Carlson (2016) argues with the notion of *metajournalistic discourse*, professionals constantly define and justify what counts as journalism through public and semi-public statements. In this way, the motivations expressed by journalists are not only practical drivers, but also part of broader boundary work (Carlson, 2016) through which they legitimize podcasting as a professional practice.

8.1.2.2 Emergence of a format in a broader context of crisis and digital transformation

In this research, and in line with several recommendations found in the literature above, I postulate that the emergence of podcasts in the 2000s—particularly native slices-of-life formats— cannot be fully understood without considering the broader transformations journalism has undergone in the digital era. These transformations have challenged media outlets and journalists to redefine their responsibilities as they attempt to balance traditional standards with new hybrid approaches (Riordan, 2014). Consequently, scholars have widely analyzed the current blurring of professional boundaries within journalism (Negreira-Rey et al., 2023), highlighting the need to consider such contextual changes when examining why individuals and organizations are motivated to explore new formats.

The digital environment not only transforms production tools and distribution channels but also deeply affects the definition of journalism. Digital transformation blurs the boundaries of journalism and contributes to the emergence of alternative forms of journalism (Maares & Hanusch, 2018). These new forms are often studied

within alternative media structures (Medeiros & Badr, 2022) or outside established journalistic institutions (Örnebring & Möller, 2018). However, this phenomenon is not limited to the margins; it also occurs within traditional media outlets, where boundaries are redefined through the arrival of new actors and formats (Negreira-Rey et al., 2023). In this sense, these various observations provide an interesting contextual framework for the emergence of new digital formats in newsrooms, such as slices-of-life podcasts, which nevertheless deserve further investigations.

However, these innovations, whether narrative or technical, require what García-Ortega and García-Avilés (2023) describe as a media outlet's "capacity to overcome traditional production routines and experiment" (p. 620, ebook). This reflects the importance of ensuring dialogue between individual and structural dimensions. In this context, fundamental journalistic concepts such as "news value" are challenged. Harcup (2023) notes that the digital age reinforces long-standing tensions within journalism—between its social, economic, technological, and ideological dimensions. New logics of newsworthiness are emerging, shaped by metrics such as shareability, emotional impact, and virality (Harcup, 2023).

However, these digital transformations, whether seen as opportunities or threats, are unfolding in a broader context of crisis, one that must be considered in the analysis. In the region under study, French-speaking Switzerland, media concentration, and financial cutbacks have affected a very rich and diversified media landscape for years, leading to the closure of outlets, the end of print editions, and significant job losses (FÖG, 2024). Outside Switzerland, an increasing number of journalists choose to leave the profession (Charon & Pigeolat, 2021; Devillard & Saulnier, 2016). These systemic pressures have also been tied to the ongoing redefinition of news values, which must now be understood through the lens of crisis— challenging working conditions, intensified competition for attention, and increased dependence on audience metrics (Harcup, 2023).

Among the actors questioning dominant news values in the digital age "alternative and critical approaches to news selection (and construction) are frequently found in practice within the output of alternative media projects (Harcup, 2007, pp. 56–

59), and in theory within scholarship devoted to an understanding of what is sometimes labeled 'alternative journalism' (Atton & Hamilton, 2008; Atton & Wickenden, 2005; Harcup, 2013)" (O'Neill & Harcup, 2019 p. 215).

Alternative media do not merely critique the dominant logic of journalism in discourse; they actively experiment with alternative practices (Harcup, 2023, p. 906). Such media outlets reject traditional hierarchies of newsworthiness, foreground marginalized voices, and explore hybrid formats that blend journalism, opinions, narration, and activism. According to Harcup (2023), these initiatives can be categorized as historically alternative (e.g., pirate radio, activist press), new digital hybrid media, or hyperlocal and community-based outlets. They are also sites of experimentation with slower, more collaborative, solution-oriented, and even joyful formats. Even with limited reach, these initiatives hold strategic value: they demonstrate that other editorial choices are possible and help uncover the invisible logics that structure mainstream journalism (Harcup, 2023).

This research examines the motivations and contexts behind the creation of slices-of-life podcasts to shed light on what they reveal about attempts to innovate journalism at both the individual, structural and contextual levels. This field is particularly interesting because it offers a view of spaces where alternative forms of journalism are being experimented with, yet within established traditional news media. This perspective also resonates with studies of metajournalistic discourse (Carlson, 2016), which highlight how professionals' narratives about new formats are constitutive of journalism's transformation. By presenting podcasts as freer, more innovative, or more in touch with audiences, journalists are not merely describing practices but actively negotiating journalism's boundaries and legitimacy in a context of crisis.

Observing this moment of crisis for journalism from the margins of the profession provides valuable insights into its evolution, possibilities, and relevance (Negreira-Rey et al., 2023). This study seeks to understand how a profession in crisis is reinventing itself from within institutions by introducing formats that disrupt the

media's traditional offerings, and how journalists' individual motivations reflect emerging conceptions of their profession that they actively seek to put into practice.

8.1.3 METHODOLOGY

This study relies on data collected between 2022 and 2023 from 14 professional journalists producing slices-of-life podcasts in French-speaking Switzerland. To be considered as journalistic slices-of-life podcasts, I established four criteria based on content and form that all productions had to include, inspired (but adapted to my research) by Lesaunier's (2023) definition of slices-of-life podcast:

1. Be a native podcast, i.e. produced for digital broadcast and not a radio show rebroadcast on the internet. This choice is justified by the fact that this research aims to contribute to the understanding of podcasting as a digital medium with its own codes and specificities (Spinelli & Dann, 2019).
2. Be produced by a professional journalist, i.e. holding a press card in the country[9]. This criterion, which was not included in Lesaunier's definition, was added to create the sample for this research because the latter falls within the field of journalism studies and aims to examine the new developments and challenges that this medium brings to the profession.
3. The content had to be predominantly based on stories of ordinary people, which is a central criterion in terms of content in slices-of-life podcasts (Lesaunier, 2023).
4. The stories of ordinary people had to be presented as the heart of the podcast and not simply as illustrations.

This sampling process enabled me to identify 15 podcaster journalists who produced slices-of-life podcasts in French-speaking Switzerland between 2018 and 2021. In this study, 14 of the 15 journalists were examined. The journalists come from

[9] In Switzerland, to be recognized as a journalist, you must be registered in the professional media register. The press card, issued by the union *Impressum*, is the main official credential. To obtain it, you must provide proof of at least two years' experience as a journalist as your main occupation, i.e., you must devote at least 50% of your working time to this profession.

the audiovisual sector (7), print media (3), magazine sector (1), and radio sector (3). The vast majority are women, and to preserve the anonymity promised to respondents, all will be addressed as female in this paper. They were all between 28 and 43 years old at the time of the research. Only one of them works as an independent journalist, after a career in traditional media. The others were employed by Swiss media outlets at the time of my research and did not devote their main working time to podcast production. It should be noted that in Switzerland, there are generally fewer specialist journalists than elsewhere, given the small audience and, therefore, the small number of specialist media outlets, which tend to be located in neighboring countries that speak the same language.

For the sake of transparency and honesty, it is important to note that I am relatively familiar with this field being myself a professional journalist working in French-speaking Switzerland alongside my research activities.. I am not, however, working directly with my respondent and not implicated in the production of slices-of-life podcasts. I therefore had a kind of closeness with my respondents, which proved useful in this case, although it required transparency on my part and a degree of detachment during the analysis (Hanson, 1994).

My data collection methodology used semi-directive interviews with a narrative focus, mainly inspired by Bertaux's narratives of practice (2016), allowing respondents to retrospectively structure their experiences and give them meaning (Derèze, 2009). All interviews were then transcribed and analyzed through thematic content analysis using an inductive method, which falls within the scope of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I conducted a first, descriptive phase of “initial coding” (Charmaz, 2001) that enabled me to identify the moments when journalists talked about their motivations and the major themes that emerged from every in-depth interviews. This was followed by a second phase of “focused coding” “to sort, synthesize, and conceptualize large amounts of data” (Charmaz, 2001, p. 684). This process led to the emergence of nine categories of motivation that fell into three dimensions, as described below in the results.

8.1.4 Results

Analysis of the interviews, and more specifically, of the moments in the interviews when the journalists talked about how and why they ended up working in podcasting, enabled me to identify nine motivations expressed by journalists at the intersection of personal (the journalist's professional interests), structural (media outlet organization), and contextual (the state of journalism in Switzerland) dimensions. The interviews inspired by Bertaux's accounts of practices were precisely intended to bring out the construction of meaning by individuals without separating them from the structure and context in which they evolve. As a result, these influences must be considered in the analysis without separating the stated motivations from their context and structure, which, as I show in this article, sometimes emerge from it. Furthermore, it has already been shown in previous research that "various coping and reinvention strategies present in frustrating work contexts (...) are closely interrelated with professional identity and institutional norms" (Cancela & Dubied, 2022, p. 1071).

To understand how these three dimensions intertwine in my results, the following table describes the distribution of the nine motivations (which correspond to nine inductive codes of analysis) across the dimensions.

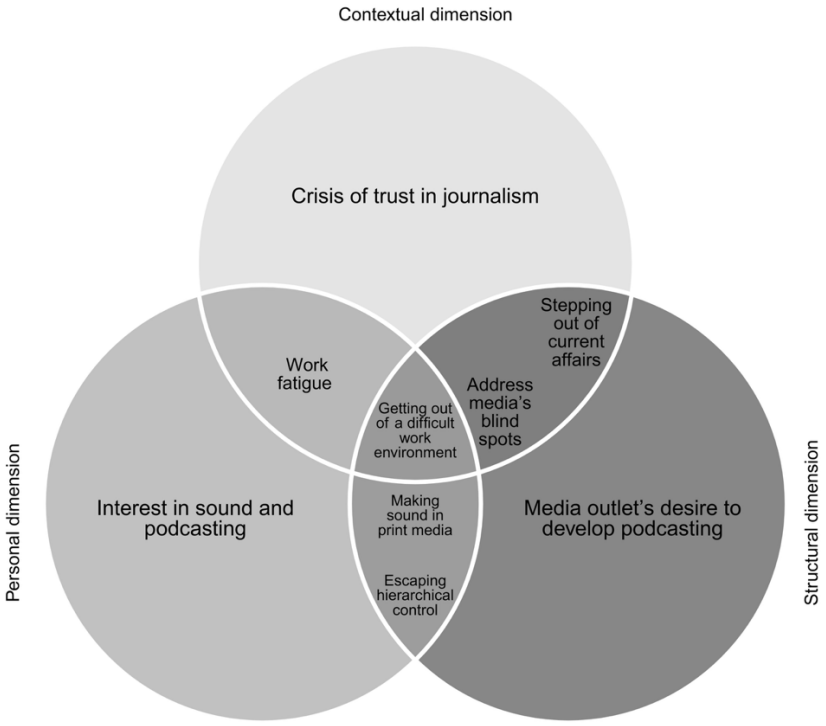

Figure 13: The motivations cited by journalists in their contextual, structural, and personal dimension

8.1.4.1 Seeking space for sound and autonomy

Three motivations expressed by journalists–interest in sound and podcasting, making sound in print media, and escaping hierarchical control–lie at the intersection of personal and structural dimensions (see figure 13).

One reason mentioned in all interviews with journalists was their personal interest in sound and podcasting. Journalists were inspired by the growing success of the format in the USA, then in France and Canada, where they could enjoy content in their mother tongue. All the journalists I met were first and foremost podcast consumers, adoring the format that had come to punctuate their weeks as an audience and dreaming of being able to create such a format:

> *I listened to a lot of podcasts (...) I said to myself: that's something I'd really like to do. (...) And to answer your question, this medium interested me first and foremost as a listener.*

However, before the arrival of podcasts, some journalists had a particular attachment to sound and radio, which they could not exercise in their own media (especially for print journalists) and for which they had no particular skills:

> *Clearly, podcasting allows me to work with sound and broadcast it even without working in radio. It's basic, but that's what it is.*

As was the case for non-journalists embarking on podcast creation, the accessibility of the medium from a practical and technological perspective enabled the journalist I met to make their foray into sound production. Thus, as with the independent podcasters studied by Markman (2012), podcasting was an opportunity for professionals studied to "do radio on their own terms" (Markman, 2012, p. 560).

Another motivation cited by journalists in the interviews is the desire for greater autonomy in their work. Journalists describe podcasts as a “less supervised” format than primetime broadcasts or print newspapers:

> *What else does this format allow? Well, the format, and I've never understood why, it's like “ah yes, but it's online so we can say other things and our bosses leave us alone.” We're much less watched than if we had... We're watched, but in a different way, but we're much less under scrutiny than if we had an 8 o'clock show. And then, I can't really explain it. (...) And the podcast, it allows you to say more things. And I can't explain it. I'm not sure it'll always be like that. I'm not sure it will stay that way. I'm not sure it's a privilege we'll keep for long. Maybe we'll get censored at some point.*

This relative absence of control is reflected more broadly in the discourse of professionals through a kind of disinterest in podcast production on the part of their colleagues and hierarchy. However, this lack of interest varies in intensity from one media outlet to another and even within the same media outlet. This situation appears ambivalent in the interviews, and tension emerges at these moments because it is perceived as favorable to journalists' autonomy (and therefore generally positive for their work); at the same time, journalists express a kind of suffering linked to this lack of interest and devaluation of their work, as if it were secondary and incidental to the media outlet. This tension is even stronger among journalists

whose podcasts have been very popular with the public. These individuals are torn between the positive feedback from their audience and the lack of interest shown by their colleagues and/or superiors in this type of format.

In concrete terms, this lack of hierarchical control is expressed below by an amused journalist who explains how she was surprised to see her media highlight to their public through their mobile app one of their new episodes dealing in great detail with a sexual topic that could be considered "extreme":

> *I don't think they're actually listening. (...) I was struck by this recent episode where they did a push, and I said to myself: but did they listen? It was one of the rawest we've ever done. And I thought: they've got a lot of guts to push this,... the guy,... there's really some words, pretty trashy and all, and I'm not sure if they'd listened, they would have done it. I said to myself: maybe that's good, frankly, I'd rather that than the other way around, that they listen and then censor us, you know.*

8.1.4.2 Seeking meaning and relief in times of crisis

At the intersection of the personal, structural, and contextual dimensions (see figure 13), podcasting appears to journalists as a reaction to work fatigue, the crisis of trust in journalism, and the desire to escape a difficult work environment. Several journalists say that they want to use their podcasts to regain the trust of audiences who have been disappointed or historically ignored by their media outlets. In interviews, the journalists I met showed themselves to be fully aware and concerned about the crisis of trust in journalism (FÖG, 2024). Most of them, confronted on a daily basis with disappointed audiences, wonder how to reconcile with these disappointed publics and reach out to new ones. "*Our audiences are collapsing, podcast audiences are taking off,*" sums up a journalist during an interview. Thus, the production of slices-of-life podcasts can be viewed as a response to a crisis of legitimacy and relevance in journalism.

Public trust, in the words of the journalists I met, is intrinsically linked to the trust of certain communities, which are historically invisible or disappointed by the way

journalists have treated them in the media. One of the people I met had the ambition, through her podcast (as is the case for others), to reach out to these people and give them a voice. However, the exercise proved tiring:

> *I felt like I was carrying the weight of journalists who had betrayed everyone's trust (...) My work was a bit of a mea culpa, which made me tired in the end, because we were really moving towards people who have absolutely no trust in the media.*

It is interesting to note that a motivation that one might have imagined, based on the literature (Skalický, 2023), emerging from media executives for strategic purposes appears strongly at the individual level among journalists, namely, the desire to use this medium to attract new audiences and regain their trust.

This motivation, driven by a contextual factor (the crisis of legitimacy that journalism experience), is also expressed at the structural and individual levels. In interviews, journalists say that they are searching for meaning in the face of a certain degree of professional fatigue and disinterest. Interviews revealed certain weariness and disagreement among some interviewees regarding the way they had been taught their profession and the way they were asked to practice it on a daily basis. They no longer find themselves in a journalism they consider elitist in its choice of sources, deplore a lack of interest in certain social justice issues, and some of them are simply bored in their day-to-day work. These findings are consistent with the literature that observes an increasingly difficult working environment for professionals (e.g., Charon & Pigeolat, 2021; Devillard & Saulnier, 2016; Harcup, 2023).

> *Journalist: It was my 2022 project that really saved my journalistic year. Yes, because I found it a very complicated year for a lot of things. And in fact, having this project is great.*
>
> *Researcher: Maybe you would have given up otherwise?*
>
> *Journalist: There were times when I went back and forth with it, I'm like... "what are we doing? Because the problem is, I have the impression that*

we're turning into a communications agency, advertising just about everyone (...) But I think so. There was a moment when I was. I really wasn't well.

In this sense, podcasting has become an escape for professionals who might have, and some did shortly after this research, simply left this profession that no longer motivated them.

Fatigue, internal tensions, and sometimes budget cuts have prompted several journalists to turn to this format, seen as a space for creative experimentation and professional breathing space. The economic context prompted some journalists to turn to this popular and relatively inexpensive medium (especially for radio stations that are already equipped with sound production equipment). One journalist explains how budget cuts affecting her core activities in her media made her turn to podcasting:

In our media, there were drastic economic cuts (...) I had to let go of people I liked working with, and then I had to come up with something else (...) All of a sudden, I had some time and I said to myself, it's now or never.

In this sense, slices-of-life podcasting emerges as a coping strategy in a strained professional environment. It has offered a way to reconnect with the core values that brought professional into journalism; it has been a creative refuge from a challenging economic context and a perceived drift of the profession toward communication logics. In this sense, the turn to podcasting reflects both resistance and adaptation, illustrating how journalists negotiate their agency in changing newsroom conditions.

8.1.4.3 Seeking institutional openings for innovation

Finally, at the intersection between contextual and structural dimension emerge three motivations that could be described as "editorial": address media's blind spot, stepping out of current affairs and media outlet's desire to develop podcasting. In some cases, journalists have benefited from media outlets that wanted to develop podcast offerings. This has sometimes taken the form of short training courses or

internal calls for projects. In the sample, seven journalists explained that they responded directly to calls for projects issued by their superiors, four said they had put pressure on the media outlet and actively contributed to implementing the format in their newsroom, and three were both very active in choosing to implement these formats and benefited from openness on the part of their superiors.

The motivation for innovation went beyond simply implementing the podcast format and was also found at the editorial level in the content of those podcasts. For example, journalists, in the research interviews, describe podcasting as an editorial space that extends beyond the immediate news and "beat system" (Broadway, 2010).

Indeed, podcasts allow journalists to break free of the constraints of the news hook. They could cover timeless topics, develop longer narratives, and explore stories that would not have found a place in daily or weekly formats. As a reminder, all journalists who took part in this research are professional journalists, who spend only part of their time creating podcasts. The rest of the time, they are active in the media employing them to produce more "traditional" journalistic productions specific to their medium, i.e. radio stories or print articles, subject to certain editorial constraints. The interviewees emphasized that they were confronted (outside of podcast production) with certain types of discourse when proposing topics such as "what's the news hook?". By this it is meant, "what justifies talking about this particular subject on our airwaves or in our pages today?" "Is there a current event that justifies covering this subject?" "Why couldn't it have been done yesterday or tomorrow?" Thus, podcasts are presented as enabling journalists to detach themselves from the obligatory anchoring of current events in daily or weekly media.

> *Researcher: What can you do with the podcast that you can't do any other way?*
>
> *Journalist: Take the time. I think it's... Yeah, I think we're in a continuous flow of information, especially in a daily newspaper, where we're always thinking "how can we bounce back on the news?". News that often won't be valid the day after tomorrow, and even though my media is a great newspaper that*

> *understands the fact that we're not always commenting on news minute by minute, the fact of being completely out of the news, as is the case for our podcast, allows me to... To be able to completely decorrelate the subjects we choose from what's going on in the world, with a few exceptions of course.*

This current event constraint bothers the journalists I met, as they feel that it contributes to the invisibility of certain subjects that exist outside these news events. The examples mentioned range from gender equality, which would only merit coverage on March 8th, international women's day, to talking about the daily life of a lumberjack, which could only exist if the latter won some kind of professional competition in the region covered by the local newspaper. One journalist, for example, clearly states that she came to work with the podcast medium "*in order to deal with media blind spots*".

This result seems to confirm and support the literature on podcasting, which presents it as a nonrestrictive and innovative medium in terms of both form and content (e.g. Lindgren, 2021), particularly regarding topics that are rarely or never discussed on the agenda. This point will be examined further in the discussion section.

8.1.5 Discussion

To discuss the results presented above, it is important to remember that journalists stated these motivations in interviews conducted several months or even years after the production of their podcasts. Thus, it is neither possible nor necessarily relevant to determine whether these motivations were fully anticipated or had emerged later. What matters is how journalists, through these narratives, make sense of their actions and, more broadly, what they reveal about the podcast medium. In this regard, interviews can be understood as a form of *metajournalistic discourse* (Carlson, 2016), that is, public or semi-public expressions through which actors evaluate journalistic practices, define boundaries, and justify legitimacy.

Seen through the lens of Carlson (2016) writing on boundary work, the characterization of podcasts as marginal yet emancipatory, freer but also undervalued,

exemplifies processes of definition making, boundary setting, and legitimization. Journalists engage in definition making when they describe podcasting as a "space apart" from daily routines; they perform boundary work when they contrast it with "real" journalism or with the immediacy of news cycles; and they contribute to legitimation when they present podcasts as a way to restore trust with audiences or reconnect with core professional values as they understand them. In this sense, their discourses do not merely reflect practices, but actively participate in the ongoing negotiation of journalism's cultural authority in a moment of crisis and transformation.

The results highlight how slices-of-life podcasts within traditional Swiss media organizations operates as a space on the margins within established media outlets, one that journalists themselves often describe as offering greater autonomy, editorial freedom, and renewed professional meaning. This marginal position can be explained by the combination of novelty, weak institutional control, and blurred professional boundaries.

The findings of this research confirm and nuance the literature that positions podcasting as a distinctive space for innovation within journalism. While previous studies have emphasized the affordances of the medium—its intimacy, narrative flexibility, and hybrid nature (Lindgren, 2021; Mehendale & Gokhale, 2021; Whipple et al., 2022)—this study shows how these affordances are articulated with the professional, structural, and contextual realities of journalists working inside traditional Swiss media outlets. The picture that emerges is one of podcasting as both a marginal space within institutions and a "media within the media", as a journalist state in a research interview, enabling journalists to negotiate autonomy, redefine news values, and cope with professional challenges.

Consistent with scholars that describe podcasting as a personalized and experimental audio format (Lindgren, 2021; Novăceanu, 2020), the journalists in this study perceived podcasts as editorially freer and less controlled than their daily productions. The results of this study indicate that this relative autonomy stems less from the intrinsic characteristics of the medium than from a lack of institutional expertise

and recognition. Indeed, analysis of the interviews allows me to conclude that the lack of control by management is understood by journalists as being linked to the fact that their hierarchy is overwhelmed by this emerging medium, in which they have no expertise, thus relegating expertise to journalists who work in this format:

> *I was the radio's first intimate podcast, and at the time, I was an ice-breaker. I had so many problems, nothing was ready, the structure wasn't ready, it was a complete mess.*

This observation can be discussed with broader reflections on how digital journalism is often considered "lesser journalism" (Negreira-Rey et al., 2023). In my interviews, journalists make the connection with the fact that as an emerging digital medium, podcasting faces the same a priori as some other forms of digital journalism in their early days of not being "journalism with a capital J":

> *But I think more generally, that's a web thing. The web is poorly considered anyway. Because it's not print. Oh no, that's obvious, that's obvious. (...) So doing something that has no place on the page, that's only on the website... That's it... I mean, if you haven't been on the site during the two hours it's been on the home page, the thing doesn't exist. (...) And then on top of that, I was in a bit of a bind. I was really extracted from the newsroom. All the editing, I couldn't do it in an open space, I was at home, I have a hierarchy that's actually absent. (...) But I really think there's something to be said for the lack of respect for digital journalism in general. (...) And podcasting we sometimes imagine it as people on a corner of a table, without editing, without anything, it's "unprofessional", so we also disconsider it, but differently.*

Thus, it would be a "softer", accessory type of journalism, on the margins of the "real" journalistic work offered by the media. The digital revolution and some of the formats that have emerged as a result have indeed contributed to a certain extent to blurring the boundaries of journalism or what is considered journalism (Negreira-Rey et al., 2023). Furthermore, these questions are part of ongoing discussions in journalism about hard news versus soft news and how one is valued over the other (Sjøvaag, 2015). This distinction is also evident in the field of lifestyle journalism, which, as I have shown, shares certain characteristics with slices-of-life podcasts,

and whose definition of news value clashes with other perceptions of the profession and what deserves to be put on the agenda (Dubied, 2025).

Consequently, journalists simultaneously embrace the space for emancipation and suffer from a lack of recognition, reflecting the ambivalence of formats located at the margins of daily news activities.

Podcasts also challenge and expand the definition of journalism within newsrooms, echoing Riordan's (2014) analysis of hybrid practices. In the findings, journalists highlight the possibility of detaching from the "beat system" and immediacy-driven news cycles, instead prioritizing stories based on narrative originality, personal testimony, or social blind spots. This aligns with Harcup's (2023) observations of alternative media practices that redefine news values and foreground marginalized voices. In other words, the "news value" at stake in podcasts is not defined by immediacy or event-centeredness, but by storytelling potential and community relevance. Podcasts within traditional outlets, therefore, reproduce dynamics more often studied in alternative or hybrid media (Harcup, 2023; Negreira-Rey et al., 2023), creating spaces that are institutionally inside yet editorially apart.

While many studies highlight the creative and democratic potential of podcasts (Esser & Neuberger, 2019) this study adds nuance by showing how podcasting also functions as a coping strategy in times of crisis. In a context of professional fatigue, financial cutbacks, and declining trust in journalism (Charon & Pigeolat, 2021; Devillard & Saulnier, 2016; FÖG, 2024), journalists use podcasting to reconnect with core values of journalism (as they understand them), reach disappointed publics, and find relief from strained work environments. This finding confirms Cancela and Dubied's (2022) observation that coping and reinvention strategies are intertwined with professional identity. In some cases, podcasts even prevented (or delayed) exits from the profession, illustrating how, beyond creative experimentation, podcasting operates as an existential resource for professionals questioning their role in a transforming media ecosystem.

Finally, this research highlights the dual position of podcasts as both marginal and innovative. Echoing García-Ortega and García-Avilés' (2023) notion of outlets'

capacity to “overcome traditional routines,” podcasting within traditional Swiss media is pioneered by individual journalists who become in-house experts (Whipple et al., 2022) and by a hierarchy willing to diverse its offering. While some initiatives benefited from institutional calls for projects, most required self-learning, improvisation, and personal investment, blurring the boundary between professional and personal commitment (which, as mentioned above, is difficult to differentiate). This pioneering status granted journalists editorial freedom but also reinforced the perception of podcasts as secondary experimental products. From this tension emerges a paradox: the marginality of podcasts creates the very conditions for innovation. They become laboratories where journalists negotiate new definitions of newsworthiness (Harcup, 2023), experiment with hybrid forms, and introduce alternative logics into established institutions.

Taken together, these findings support the view that podcasting cannot be explained solely by its affordances (Lindgren, 2021; Mehendale & Gokhale, 2021). Rather, it must be situated within the broader transformations of journalism in the digital era, where professional boundaries are blurred (Negreira-Rey et al., 2023), trust is eroded, and journalists are searching for meaning and new forms of relevance. By observing how podcasts emerge within traditional media, yet develop on their margins, this study shows how journalism is experimenting with alternative practices from within institutions. In this sense, podcasts function as “a media within the media”: tolerated exceptions that embody both the crisis and the reinvention of journalism.

8.1.6 Conclusion

This study aimed to understand the individual motivations expressed by journalists behind the production of slices-of-life podcasts in French-speaking Switzerland. Through an inductive analysis of semi-directive interviews with professional journalists who have turned to this medium, nine (multi)dimensional categories of motivations have been highlighted. It has been shown that these motivations are articulated in three dimensions. A first personal dimension helps to understand journalists' motivations linked to their professional interests. A second structural dimension

highlights motivations linked to the rules, practices, and organizations of the media outlet in which they work. Finally, the contextual dimension refers to motivations induced by a media landscape in crisis.

Beyond a shared passion for sound and narrative experimentation, podcasts emerge as a response to professional fatigue, economic pressures, and a broader crisis of trust in journalism. In journalists' discourse, producing slices-of-life podcasts has offered a coping strategy and a way to reconnect with the values that initially drew them to the profession. It has also been a creative refuge or reason for remaining in the profession. At the same time, podcasts are seen as editorially distinct spaces that allow journalists to step outside the immediacy of news cycles, address blind spots, and give voice to communities that they consider ignored by mainstream media. Situated at the margins of traditional media outlets, podcasts combine resistance and adaptation; they are simultaneously tools for professional survival and laboratories of innovation within established institutions.

This study contributes to journalism studies by showing how slices-of-life podcasts produced within traditional media are not only new formats, but also sites where professional identities and news values are renegotiated. The interviews analyzed here should be read not as transparent accounts of intention but as *metajournalistic discourses* (Carlson, 2016): retrospective meaning-making practices through which journalists define, justify, and legitimize their work. By framing podcasts as marginal and emancipatory, professionals highlight the tensions between recognition and autonomy, crisis, and reinvention, which characterize journalism in the digital age. In this sense, podcasts function less as a technological innovation than as discursive and practical laboratories, where journalists test alternative logics of journalism from within institutions. This dual role—both the coping mechanism and site of innovation—sheds light on how a profession under pressure redefines its boundaries and values and how it can become key to understanding journalism's future trajectories.

These results must be qualified by the inherent limitations of this study, which focuses solely on one type of podcast (slices-of-life) in a specific linguistic region

(French-speaking Switzerland). However, the study region and focus on one type of podcast are interesting to examine, as their size allowed for almost exhaustive access to the relevant population. Furthermore, it has been shown that the context of French-speaking Switzerland can be comparable to other Western and European contexts (Cancela et al., 2021 ; Hanitzsch et al., 2019), although it also includes particular national characteristics.

It would therefore be interesting for future research to compare these results with the motivations of journalists turning to other types of podcasts. One of the characteristics of slices-of-life podcasts is that they allow journalists to practice their profession without the constraints of current events. However, what about podcasts that deal with current events or topics considered "hard news"? It would be interesting to see the extent to which formats closer to traditionally valued media productions also contribute to questioning the renewal of the profession. Another point is that journalists have been shown to justify their desire to turn to this medium in order to cover topics that do not correspond to the "news value" as practiced in their media. This article focuses primarily on "soft news" topics, such as human-interest stories or topics related to lifestyle journalism. However, other topics also face difficulties in making it onto the media agenda due to the difficulty of linking them to a "news hook." This is the case, for example, with topics related to climate change, and it would therefore be interesting in future research to ask whether podcasts are a possible solution in this regard.

Finally, if this article has made it possible, through an analysis of journalists' discourses on their motivations, to suggest that podcasting should be considered an "alternative" and "marginal" space within established institutions, it would be interesting to pursue these questions in order to understand how this different perception of the profession is actually put into practice. Future research could focus more specifically on the working techniques of podcast journalists and examine how they differ, or do not differ, from other working routines and what impact this would have on the production of journalistic content.

8.2 PAPER 2 – "ROLES"

Journalists as social connectors?

Role perception and tensions in French-speaking Switzerland slices-of-life podcasts production

Article submitted to "Journalism" in July 2025 – awaiting for decision

Abstract

This paper explores journalistic role perceptions in life story podcasts (slices-of-life podcasts) in French-speaking Switzerland through qualitative interviews with 14 journalists and 8 sources. Using negotiative role theory and practice theory, this study examines how journalists perceive and negotiate their roles in this emerging format, allowing a micro analysis of roles often studied at the macro level. The findings reveal that journalists primarily see themselves as *connector* fostering social cohesion, *friend* providing support, and *truth searchers*, whereas sources emphasize journalists' friendly attributes. However, tensions emerge as journalists struggle to reconcile their roles with traditional journalistic norms and practices. This study highlights how slices-of-life podcasts serve as a space for adapting journalistic roles and practices in response to eroding public trust, while journalists simultaneously seek to maintain professional legitimacy. It contributes to understanding journalistic roles in everyday life journalism, through podcasts production.

8.2.1 Introduction

Public trust in traditional journalism is eroding (e.g., Riedl & Eberl, 2022; Van Dalen, 2019) and the relevance of the profession is being challenged (Amigo et al., 2023; Newman & Cherubini, 2025). The literature on journalism has largely focused on these observations but less on the ways in which this jeopardized profession has tried to reinvent itself and at what cost.

Sometimes, journalists clung to forms that are historically considered symbolically superior to all other forms of journalism to establish journalistic legitimacy and authority. This is the case, for example, with investigative journalism (Wuergler & Dubied, 2023).

However, at the opposite end of the spectrum, more intimate and subjective forms of journalism have developed concerning the practical day-to-day questions of the public. It seems that these formats, which are the essence of everyday life journalism, are eagerly sought after by audiences and are proving successful against the backdrop of widespread mistrust (Dubied, 2025; Hanusch, 2017). Everyday life journalism, such as lifestyle journalism, is an understudied area in journalism research, particularly regarding how journalists perceive their roles in this field (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016; Hanusch, 2017).

Among these formats, podcasts reached what has been called their golden age in 2015 (Berry, 2015), and with it, very intimate productions dedicated to the life stories of ordinary people and their daily concerns. Slices-of-life podcasts are the epitome of this, as they are generally long formats (up to one hour long), where the floor is given to an ordinary source to talk about an aspect of their life, their daily routine, the activity they practice, or the difficulties they face (Lesaunier, 2023). According to my observations, these podcasts are popular in French-speaking Switzerland, where they were the first type of podcast to appear in professional newsrooms around 2018. They are a form of journalism that runs counter to current media trends, favoring ever-shorter and more rapidly produced formats.

I argue that these forms of journalism are fields in which relatively new practices are being tested. However, these spaces are confronted with the practical realities of the field, the means and demands of editorial offices, and the reluctance linked to a more traditional perception of the journalistic profession. Indeed, the results of the *World of Journalism* study of 2016 provide some indication of how journalists generally perceive their roles in Switzerland. The tendency seems to be towards "traditional" roles: 82.8% of panel respondents identify with the role of being "a detached observer," 94.4% with "reporting things as they are" and 46.6% with "monitoring and scrutinizing political leaders" (World of Journalism, 2016). Roles closer to "softer" way of practicing journalism are more discreet but not not existent. 21.5% of journalists surveyed identify with "advocate for social change," 39.2% with "provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life," while almost 50.4% claim to endorse the role of "promote tolerance and cultural diversity" (World of Journalism, 2016).

In this article, I find that the confrontation between the perception of roles as supposedly practiced in podcast creation and the more traditional roles internalized by professionals leads to a certain amount of confusion among professionals involved in the production of slices-of-life podcasts, whose perceptions of their roles as professionals are explored through negotiative (Raemy & Vos, 2021) and practice-inspired theories (Witschge & Harbers, 2018). I compare these sometimes confused perceptions with those of the sources that provide the raw material for these podcasts: What do they think? Do they have the same perceptions as professionals in these formats and of the roles they believe journalists take on or should take on?

These observations are interesting to consider in the French-speaking swiss context, which has undergone drastic cuts in resources and staff over the past few years (fög, 2024). As a result, many professionals who feel out of step with current trends have begun to consider other ways of practicing their profession. This context is also interesting to study, as it has been shown to be comparable to the Northern European context (Cancela et al., 2021; Hanitzsch et al., 2011). This makes it possible to explore the crisis facing journalism in general and the ways in which professionals seek to respond to it and find new meaning in practice.

8.2.2 Literature review and theoretical framework

8.2.2.1 Journalistic roles in the domain of everyday life

Studies on journalistic roles have been used to understand the place and legitimacy of journalism in society when its identity is uncertain and the contours of its ideals are blurred (Hanitzsch & Örnebring, 2019). However, the study of journalists' roles in everyday life has often been overshadowed by the traditional focus on their relationship with politics and public affairs (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016). This lack of interest is also observed within the profession itself, which places little value on this type of practices (Amigo et al., 2023).

In recent years, a growing body of research has sought to address this gap by examining the practices, content, and distribution of lifestyle journalism, and the ways in which journalists perceive their roles in this domain (Dubied, 2025; Hanusch, 2017).

In the literature on journalistic roles in political contexts, scholars have identified (usually through quantitative methods) the ways in which journalists serve as *watchdogs*, *gatekeepers*, and *interpreters* of political events and processes (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016). In the domain of everyday life, journalists are more likely to provide help, advice, guidance, and information to their audiences (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016). In their article about journalistic roles in the domain of everyday life, Hanitzsch and Vos (2016) established several roles that will be used to analyze the discourses of sources and journalists involved in the creation of slices-of-life podcasts. In their work, journalistic roles in everyday life were expressed in three areas: consumption (journalists as *marketers*), identity (journalists as *friends*), and emotion (journalists as *mood managers*). Researchers have identified three other roles at the intersection of these three areas: *inspirator* (at the intersection of emotion and consumption), *service provider* (at the intersection of consumption and identity), and *connector* (between emotion and identity). Finally, at the crossroads of these three areas is the *guide* (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016).

Hanusch (2017) proposed a quantitative study to determine the predominant role conceptualizations among lifestyle journalists in Australia. Results show that *service providers, life coaches* and *inspiring entertainers* are common roles among journalists in the domain of everyday life (the panel includes various fields from fashion to personal finance to gardening). Another recurring role is that of *community advocates*. The latter seems to be "most closely associated with traditional journalistic ideals. The community advocate role encapsulates the desire to create communities of audiences and advocate for their own interests." (Hanusch, 2017, p. 206). The researcher insists on the important influence of different subgenres on the perception of roles, which is not uniform in all areas of everyday life (Hanusch, 2017).

These few writings, both theoretical and quantitative, give some indication of the differences in perception of journalistic roles in a "traditional" and generally emphasized conception of journalism (economic and political) versus a more "soft" and "subjective" conception of practices linked to everyday life. However, this has not been investigated at the individual level, as discussed in this paper.

8.2.2.2 Journalistic roles specific to podcast production

Although there is no extensive literature directly linking journalistic roles to podcasting, emerging research has explored podcasting as a journalistic medium and how this new format influences journalistic practices. First, the intimate nature of podcasts opens new avenues for understanding journalistic roles (Euritt, 2022). Research on podcast hosts highlights the importance of qualities, such as authenticity and relatability (Heiselberg & Have, 2023). This suggests a shift towards a more personal and relational approach to journalism, where trust and connection with the audience become paramount. This emphasis echoes the relational roles highlighted above, although they are expressed differently.

Lindgren (2021) examined intimacy and emotions in podcast journalism. While not explicitly about journalistic roles, it discusses how podcasting allows journalists to deviate from the traditional norms of objectivity and incorporate personal

experiences and emotions into their reporting (Lindgren, 2021). This can be seen as a shift in the performance of traditional roles or even the emergence of new roles. As for listener perceptions of the journalistic roles within podcasts, research has shown that audiences tend to value "traditional" roles of journalism and strongly agree with the statement that journalists should "Accurately portray the world" (Whipple et al., 2022). An interesting paradox seems to emerge between audience expectations and the roles envisaged by journalists. This is an avenue that I explore in this research through interviews with ordinary people involved in podcast creation.

8.2.2.3 Towards a negotiative and practical theory

There is a limit to the theory of journalistic roles, all the more so when interested in fields that are little known and are still under construction, as is the case in this work. While the gap between how roles are perceived and performed by professionals has often been addressed in the literature, we know relatively little about how journalists negotiate these differences at the individual level and how the sources envision it. This finding from the negotiative theory of roles (Raemy & Vos, 2021) invites us to fill this gap at the micro-level. Through in-depth research interviews, rather than the quantitative methods generally used in role research, it is possible to partially understand how journalists negotiate between their ideals and constraints of practice (Raemy & Vos, 2021), revealing tensions in their discourse. It is also possible to confront their discourses with the source's one about roles and their evolution to see how another potential gap subsists (or seems to resorb).

This interest in individual representations echoes practice theory (Witschge & Harbers, 2018), which has proven its value in the study of journalistic questions (Ahva, 2017). This theory allows me to go a step further than role theory by studying how journalism is shaped, reproduced, and reinvented through practice and dialogue attempts with the audience.

In this way, this research aims to contribute to the understanding of new practices, such as slices-of-life podcasts, by trying to understand how this medium reshapes

journalistic practices and redefines journalistic roles and their connections to everyday life concerns. Existing research suggests that podcasting offers a unique platform for journalists to connect with audiences and their everyday concerns in new and intimate ways, blurring traditional boundaries and prompting reflection on the evolving nature of journalistic roles in the digital age. These findings lead me to raise the following research questions to fill gaps in the literature:

RQ1: How do sources and journalists perceive journalistic roles in slices-of-life podcasts?

RQ2: How are these roles discursively negotiated in relation to practice, institutional norms and sources?

8.2.3 Methodology

The methodology section of this research paper examines a qualitative study conducted to explore journalistic role perceptions in slices-of-life podcasts, and how they are claimed to be put into practice in the field in French-speaking Switzerland. The study was based on 22 in-depth interviews with professional journalists producing slices-of-life podcasts in Switzerland and their sources (14 journalists and 8 sources). The following figure helps understand how slices-of-life podcasts were identified through considerations of form and content and integrated into the study sample.

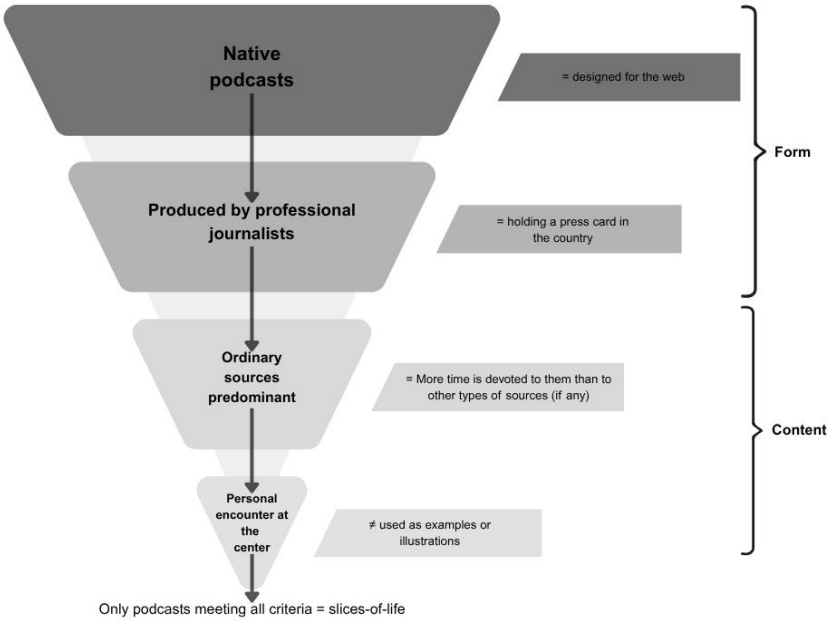

Figure 14: Podcasts sample selection criteria

The sample was nearly exhaustive for journalists, whose criteria in terms of media outlet organization and podcast themes are detailed in table 9. Journalists and sources were guaranteed anonymity to favor free speech. This is important in a context where research interviews revealed discourses that were sometimes critical of the organizations within which these productions were created. To this end, I decided to address each source and journalist as being feminine.

Table 9: Description of podcast sample (n=14)

Themes		**Organisation**		**Media**	
Trajectories	4	*Public service*	7	*Audiovisual*	7
Mental health	1				
Body	1	*Private*	4	*Printed press*	3
Daily practices	2				
Love life	3			*Magazine*	1
Activities	2	*Independent*	3	*Audio*	3
Violence	1				

In terms of sources, identification was arduous because many testified anonymously in podcast episodes or partially anonymously, making them unidentifiable from the outside. Therefore, I opted for respondent-driven sampling (RDS), a technique often preferred when approaching difficult subjects (Semaan, 2010). Journalists put me directly in touch with the sources they had identified beforehand, enabling them to decline or be connected to me by a person they trusted. However, I was careful to ensure that the sample was as diverse as possible, including several genres, social categories, podcasts represented, and themes addressed.

This study adopted a qualitative methodology to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives and experiences of practitioners and sources. The use of in-depth interviews allowed me to capture the nuanced and contextual nature of journalists' and sources' perceptions and practices (Mehendale & Gokhale, 2021), specifically through methodological triangulation at the crossroads between newsmaking reconstruction (NMR) (Reich & Barnoy, 2020) and Bertaux's (2016) narratives of practice. This method also makes it possible to combine two representations of journalistic roles, namely those of journalists and sources, in a limited but relatively unprecedented manner in this type of research. The interviews were designed to elicit information about the participants' perceptions, practices, and understanding of journalistic roles in the production of slices-of-life podcasts. The interviews lasted between one and two hours. Interviews with both sources and journalists were designed to allow respondents to guide part of the discussion. Initially, they were asked to identify salient episodes to refocus the NMR process on one or more specific examples. It should be noted that, as shown in figure 15, the interview guide evolved over the course of the interviews and, in some cases, following initial descriptive coding.

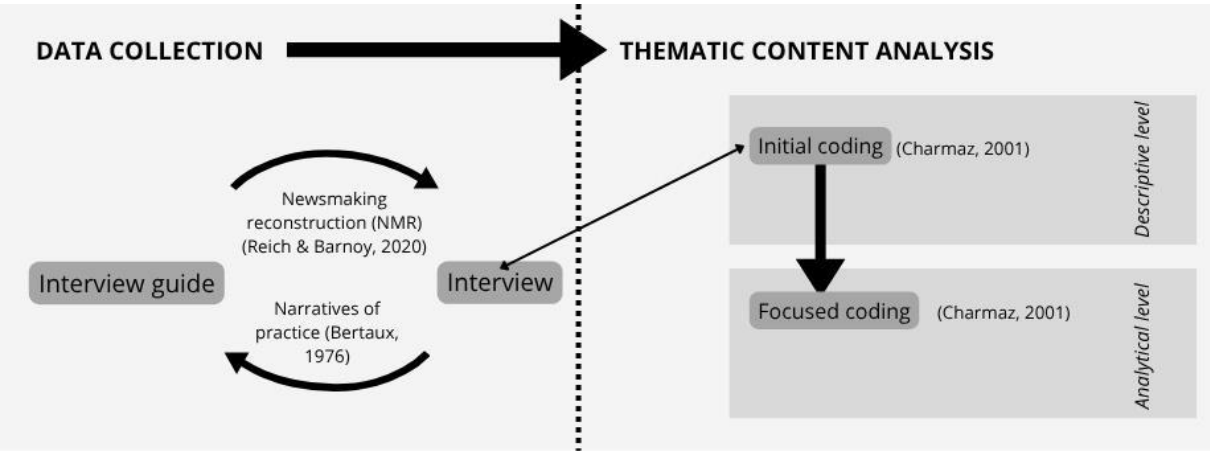

Figure 15: Description of the research process

All interviews were transcribed and analyzed by thematic content analysis using Atlas-ti qualitative analysis software. The analytical process was inspired by inductive theories, which allowed codes to emerge directly from interview materials. First, I identified all segments of the interviews that focused on journalists' perceived roles (this research also addressed other aspects of slices-of-life podcasting practice). Within these segments, I inductively coded various role-related markers (initial coding) and grouped them into seven meta-markers using the literature (focused coding) (Charmaz, 2001). The proportions presented in the article are based on the number of characters in the transcriptions devoted to each code, with the total number of characters in the segments devoted to role discourse as the base unit (=100%). I used the number of characters as the basis, allowing for more precise proportions than those based on codes recurrences, which includes segments of different sizes. As this is a qualitative research, these proportions are indicative and are intended to support the interpretation and analysis of the results.

8.2.4 Results and discussion

8.2.4.1 Journalistic roles' perception

The content analysis, whose full results are presented in figure 16, enables us to answer how journalists and their sources perceive journalistic roles, with the proportions obtained from the calculations detailed in the methodology section allowing us to focus on the analysis of the most prominent roles emerging from the interviews.

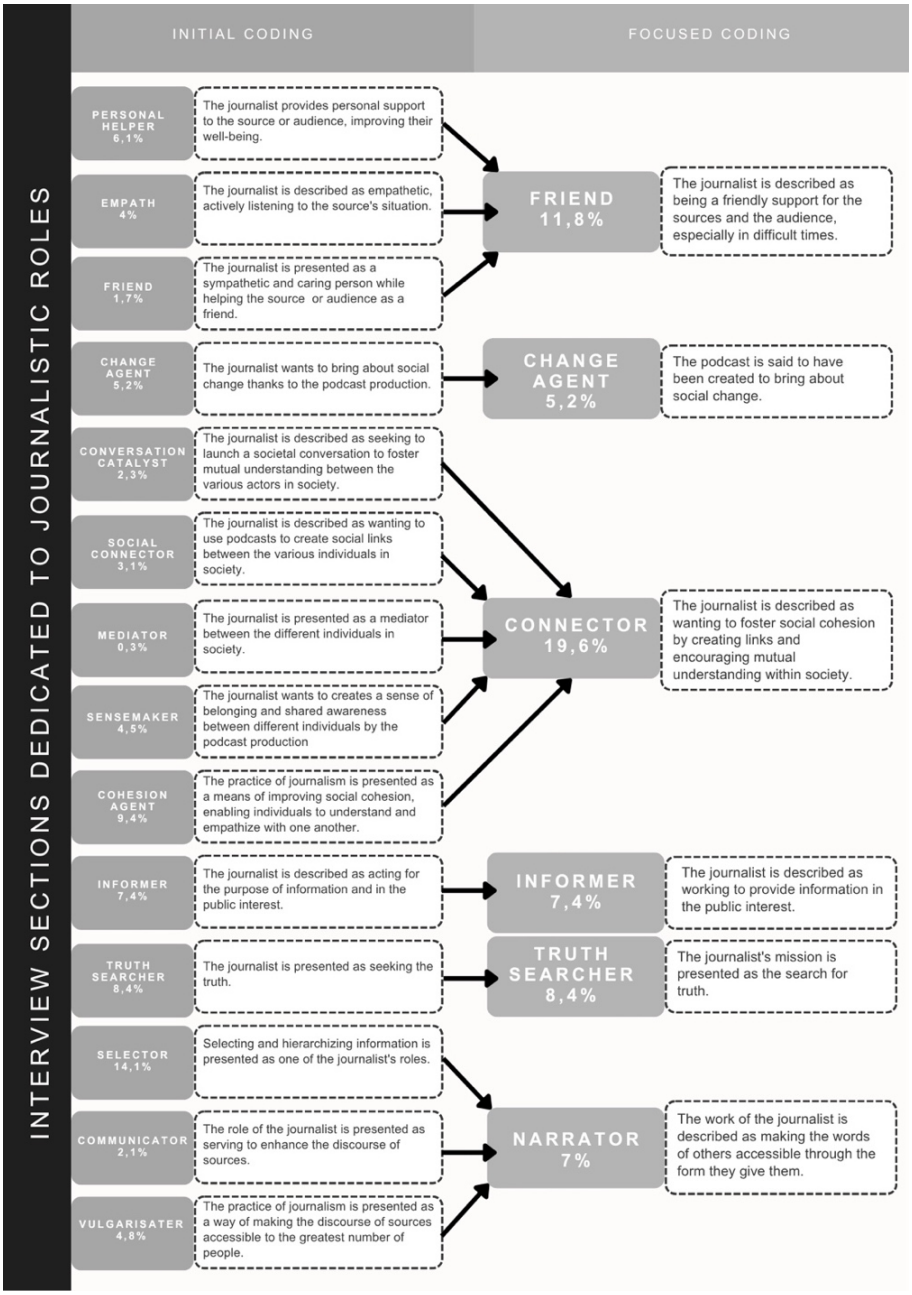

Figure 16: Results of the thematic content analysis

First, the role of *connector*, as theorized by Hanitzsch and Vos (2016), comes up most in discourse when journalistic roles are mentioned. The second is the role of *friend* (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016). The third is the *truth searcher*. Lower in the hierarchy based on proportion are roles such as the *change agent* or the *narrator*.

These results include interviews with journalists and sources (as detailed in the methodology section), but it is interesting to note that the notion of journalistic roles occupied an almost marginal place in interviews with sources (5% of the total segments on roles). This notion of journalistic roles, central to professional conceptions, does not appear to be of primary importance to their sources in this context. We will see below how the sources approached these questions in a somewhat roundabout way by describing their interactions with journalists, how they pictured journalists before this experience, and what differences they noticed between them and others. Their reflections remain focused on individual rather than collective considerations, which could potentially have been influenced by the conduct of the interview, which asked them to make explicit their individual experiences of telling their stories.

8.2.4.1.1 The Connector

Coming top, proportionally, in the content analysis, the role of the *connector* was the one that came up most often (19.6%) in the interview passages that addressed the question of journalists' roles. This role, theorized by Hanitzsch and Vos (2016) in their work on the perception of journalists' roles in everyday life as opposed to their journalistic practices in relation to politics and the economy, for example, makes journalistic practice explicit as enabling audience members to connect with each other and society.

In research interviews, the notion of contributing to coexistence emerged regularly with journalists, as clearly explained by a professional working on the subject of sexual violence in her podcast:

> *I think that being a journalist means acting on a political level in a somewhat noble sense in the sense of coexistence.*

Another journalist who produces a podcast describing several life paths, sometimes atypical, details this point and how she tries to achieve it:

> *Our podcast is about going beyond clichés and taboos in an exercise that for me is of public utility. And that's where it becomes more political. But I make no secret of the fact that, for me, everything is political. I often think that intolerance stems from the fact that we don't know each other, so we don't necessarily understand each other. For me, an episode of our podcast is an exercise of empathy, where for one hour you experience things through the situated point of view of someone telling you about their reality. And I think it's something that really helps coexistence.*

These notions of coexistence, of creating society by enabling conversations to take place and enabling members of that society to better understand one another, recur in all interviews with journalists and strongly echo the role of *connector* theorized by Hanitzsch and Vos (2016). The researchers describe this role as "connect(ing) the members of the audience to their communities, and to society in the broadest sense, by providing a sense of belonging, and by contributing to shared consciousness and identity." (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016, p. 159). A role that refers to the mission of "living together," which coexists with that of the fourth estate in texts reflecting the role of journalism in democracy (Hampton, 2009). In contrast to the findings presented in this article, this role is generally less frequently invoked by professionals compared to that of the fourth estate, which is embedded in professional mythologies (Neveu, 2019) particularly associated with investigative work (Wuergler & Dubied, 2023), as previously mentioned.

It is noteworthy that neither of the two roles discussed here, namely the fourth estate (associated with traditional professional mythologies) nor the *connector*, is invoked in the discourse of sources.

In the course of interviews with professionals, I noted that these concepts emerged when questions regarding their perception of their profession and their role as journalists were asked despite not explicitly mentioning these notions. Sometimes, these discourses appeared very early in the interviews, without a question directed towards the perception of roles, showing that their practice is strongly motivated

by this societal contribution, which once again contrasts sharply with what I analyze in the discourse of sources that need to be directed towards these issues in order to grasp them.

8.2.4.1.2 The Friend

Primarily, the codes derived from the discourse of the sources regarding the role of journalists emphasized attributes akin to those of *friends*. Beyond the professional mission of journalists, it was predominantly their personality traits that were underscored by the sources, who recalled individuals as being "caring," "charming," and "friendly." Notably, a source who recounted her personal experience in a slices-of-life podcast expressed that she did not perceive "the role" (as she phrased it) of the professional before her:

> *It was more like a discussion, like a discussion with a, with a friend (...) she [the journalist] was completely herself. I didn't feel at all like she was a journalist asking me questions. (...) You don't feel a role at all!*

Still in the Hanitzsch and Vos (2016) text on everyday journalism, the role of the *friend* is described as "a companion, and sometimes even therapist, the friend helps audience members navigate the difficult task of identity work and the complex world of social relationships (Rubin, 1981)." (p. 159). The figure of the *friend* signifies not only support, but also the capacity to assist others, including the audience, in navigating periods of adversity. This was confirmed on several occasions by sources in research interviews, who explained the importance of recording the podcast in their personal journey on issues of healing or acceptance. Some journalists seem to derive great satisfaction from this role:

> *When people come back and say: "I didn't think it was this nice to open up to someone, and it felt good to talk about it. And I'm going to send the episode to my mother, and then that'll put it back on the table", I feel like I'm serving a purpose. Because, really, sometimes I get the impression that we're a generation that wants to find meaning in what we do, and sometimes, talking about art exhibitions makes me feel really cool, but I tell myself: it's an exhibition and in six months it'll be over and people will move on to something else. While talking about subjects that touch and*

change lives... That's where I feel the most useful. What I tell myself: I've already helped this... and no, helping is a bit much to say, but I've helped tell one person's story, even just one! That's already great. And then, potentially, I've touched others and it's not even an ego thing, it's really saying to yourself: I've got the impression that this can help move something forward.

However, journalists explain that they are often confined to the role of psychologists by their sources, who seem, in part, to seek this in professionals. In their discourse, journalists try to distance themselves as much as possible from this role of therapist, as they do not wish their practice to have only individual, but also societal and collective resonance, as we can observe in the preceding point. Moreover, in interviews, journalists pointed out that they are not mental health professionals and do not always have the tools to take on this important responsibility.

Nonetheless, the tension between societal (collective) objectives, as represented by journalists, and individual objectives, as represented by sources, can be partially elucidated through an examination of interview contexts within the social sciences. The researcher, in this instance the journalist, assumes a dual role: as a researcher, akin to a "technician" tasked with collecting pertinent material (Blanchet et al., 1985), and as the recipient of the personal, intimate narrative, necessitating an empathetic, individual human relationship. Conversely, the source offers both prosaic knowledge intended for public dissemination and intimate disclosure (Blanchet et al., 1985). The reconciliation of these roles involves a continuous negotiation, serving the co-construction inherent in the interview process.

8.2.4.1.3 The Truth Searcher

In the Swiss code of ethics, which serves as a guiding framework for journalistic practice, the initial principle is titled 'search for the truth.' This represents the foremost obligation of the professionals in this field. Although the role of connector and friend come before in results, journalists make a link between the latter and the search for truth, claiming that they always work with this aim in mind, rather than with the aim of social change, for example (which comes last with a proportion of

5.2%). “It's about bearing witness to reality by trying to understand people,” summarized one journalist.

Although not expressed in the same way in the interviews with the sources, this dimension nevertheless occupies an important part of their discourse. Indeed, the sources insisted a great deal on their apprehension of seeing their discourse distorted. However, all the sources indicated in their interviews that, in this sense, journalists had done their job and assumed their role well, believing that the final rendering was very close to their reality and, therefore, to the truth as understood by them.

While the aim of this article is not to detail the journalistic practices of news professionals and the way they try to get closer to the truth, it is interesting to show that while journalists' perceptions of their roles are specific to their practice of collecting intimate accounts, they do not lose sight of the mission of the profession as it has been handed down to them and practiced in Switzerland. This is all the more interesting given that the journalists I met told me that some of their colleagues did not seem to consider their work to be “real” journalism. This was particularly obvious in an interview with a journalist who, in the context of her podcast, went looking for the subjective testimony of a person who considered herself to be a medium–a practice that is difficult to approach as a journalist in search of truth:

> *A colleague was very much opposed to journalists talking about these people (...) She said that giving the floor to a medium was like giving her publicity, like validating what she was doing when what she was doing was necessarily charlatanism. (...) As far as I'm concerned, as long as there are people who believe in them... For me, it's like doing a story about religion. I'm not religious, (...) but I'm capable of doing something about belief because it's something that touches people and as long as there are people who believe in it, for them, it exists, it's real.*

8.2.4.1.4 Intermediate conclusion

While the study of role perception has limitations, it allows one to begin to understand how professionals perceive their practice in this particular context, which is a space for questioning and redefining journalistic practice, although they also remain attached to the usual validity criteria. Aware of the crisis of confidence that journalism is currently going through, the professionals I met are looking for new ways of working and, therefore, new ways of perceiving their profession in general. At the same time, they produce a discourse on strategic legitimization for those who challenge their right to do so.

The literature indicates that roles are neither rigid nor external to any context. The fact that this research is based, in part, on practice, or at least on discourses of practice (thanks to the NMR process), enables me to observe how these roles are expressed in concrete terms in the field and if and what challenges emerge from it. In the second part of my results, I observed moments of tension and confusion in practice.

8.2.4.2 A singular perception, not without tensions

Analysis shows that the perception of journalists' roles is, in part, built in opposition and counter-legitimation to, and even contestation of, the traditional roles and norms of journalism. By contestation, I mean "the process by which a given journalistic practice challenges - or delegitimizes - the tacit consensus and, therefore, contributes to destabilization of hegemonic journalistic norms" (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017, p. 128). Normative role orientations are external to individuals and often guide their actions (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). In this study, these normative roles were challenged and journalistic roles and practices were constructed, in part, in opposition to them. Most normative roles relate to the proper functioning of democracy, and, as seen in the literature review, journalistic roles in the domain of everyday life are often conceived outside this single vision of journalism. The normative roles that have to do with surveillance, watchdog, etc. are therefore perceived by the journalists studied here as "descriptive" norms, i.e. what is perceived as being done by the greatest number, and this does not correspond to their "injunctive" norms, which are what

journalists consider desirable to do in the context of slices-of-life podcasts. Normative roles are strongly linked to ideals such as objectivity, detachment, and transparency (Raemy & Vos, 2021).

Most of the journalists I interviewed spent only part of their time producing slices-of-life podcasts. In one case, a journalist describes how she perceives her role outside podcast production using the example of a cultural journalism article that she could be asked to write and her role during podcast production:

> *When I talk to comedians, I'm much more... I put myself in a posture that's a bit more about ... how to put it ?... not questioning, but I think I'm more there to filter, to challenge, to say: "But what's interesting in your production!?" I want to find out what's interesting in it and I want to challenge them a bit more because they want to sell something (...) whereas for the podcast I know they [ed. the sources] don't expect anything from me other than to make them feel at ease and let them express themselves. So I think I'm much quieter, but at the same time attentive, but I'm more myself I think, with these people. (...) I have someone who could be a friend in front of me, and I just want us to be good. And that's something that has more to do with human quality, I think, than journalistic quality. (...) I'm more the human than the journalist in this moment, I think.*

This statement illustrates not only how the posture of journalists in podcasts is constructed in opposition to or negotiation of normative roles—which they themselves embrace in other contexts—but also the tension this engenders, even to the extent of questioning whether their methods can truly be considered journalistic.

A discursive and negotiative perspective on journalistic roles suggests that these roles are not predetermined and fixed; rather, they are dynamic structures subject to "discursive (re)creation, (re)interpretation, appropriation, and contestation" (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017, p. 121). This is what I observe in the discursive constructions of journalists' roles in slices-of-life podcast, which:

1. Challenges certain traditional norms of journalism
2. Appropriates and re-interprets certain concepts such as the search for truth in a way, this allows them to justify their practice of journalism

3. Re-creates new standards

Indeed, beyond their perception of roles, such as *connector* and *friend* described in the previous section, many "normative" and "traditional" qualifiers are used to describe their practice. Journalists describe certain roles such as source selection, subject selection, and defining the angle of their stories. Prosaic terms that echo the scientific concepts of agenda-setting, framing, and so on, notions that are quite common in the founding discourse of journalism. Thus, journalists are not in the realm of complete challenge and re-creation but rather in the appropriation and re-interpretation of certain norms. Negotiative role theory explains how journalists use and adapt institutional discourse to their own context. This is the case, for example, of the search for the truth, which is regularly mentioned as an important purpose but which is precisely claimed to be achievable through the specific practice of long, intimate, and non-directive interviews with sources.

However, in my research interviews, I found that journalists do not always manage to make sense of normative roles by adapting them to their own practices. This creates tension and doubts regarding the credibility of their practices:

> *I find that we're [ed. the podcast team] losing a little bit of..., I find that we're moving a little away from our job in the fact that we're not there to, to just stroke people. And I think that when someone says something incoherent, we should be able to point it out. And I think that maybe we weren't incisive enough.*

As suggested by the negotiative theory of roles, this tension manifested at the individual level during qualitative interviews. However, this theory argues that roles are "flexible and nuanced expressions" that negotiate on the institutional, organizational, and individual levels (Raemy & Vos, 2021).

If the analysis of discourse on practices at the individual level provides a better understanding of role perception, the organizational and institutional levels will enable me to understand how such practices are justified. In this study, I found that the community of journalists producing slices-of-life podcasts, although not formally organized, knew each other and exchanged information about their work. These

journalists seem to find validation and support in these practices by their colleagues working like them. The following quotation illustrates how collective and individual levels are articulated:

> *For me, it's the meaning of journalism [ed. mission of coexistence]; it's really that, in the sense of ..., of course, there are many other ways of doing journalism, but for me, as an individual, it's the meaning I find in it. I think it is really the mission. I really believe in the fact that there's a mission of coexistence that's hyper-important in journalism, and that yeah, there's a significant societal role in sharing these stories, and there are many, many of us doing that, it's not like I'm unique at all, but for me it's really what motivates me.*

The collective provides external validation of individual role perceptions. This collective validation is all the more important as it emerged from several interviews that, at the institutional level (i.e., the media and profession), some of the professionals interviewed felt little considered as podcast creators.

At the institutional level, these two factors play an important role. First, the institutional framework of the profession and media "dictates" normative roles. However, the media's lack of control and freedom given to podcast creators (which is sometimes perceived as a lack of interest) enables them to appropriate these normative roles and express themselves as they see fit.

8.2.5 Conclusion

This qualitative study, based on in-depth interviews with journalists and sources involved in the creation of slices-of-life podcasts in French-speaking Switzerland, revealed a perception of roles specific to this practice. The findings reveal that journalists primarily see themselves as *connectors* (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016) fostering social cohesion, *friends* (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016) providing support, and *truth searchers*. Others are emerging on a smaller scale, such as *change agent*, *informer* and *narrator*. However, tensions emerge as journalists struggle to reconcile these roles with traditional journalistic norms and practices.

The findings show how slices-of-life podcasts serve as a space for adapting and redefining journalistic roles in response to eroding public trust, while journalists simultaneously seek to maintain their professional legitimacy. This demonstrates the value of using negotiative role theory and practice theory to examine how journalists discursively construct and negotiate their roles at the individual, organizational, and institutional levels. This research provides a rare comparison of journalists' and sources' perceptions, revealing differences in how they view journalistic roles in this intimate format. Additionally, it offers insights into an understudied area of everyday life journalism through podcast production.

The issue of journalistic roles appears to be of minimal concern to ordinary sources, which are more focused on individual matters related to their personal narratives. The findings of this study, though limited, suggest that sources primarily seek professionals to assume the role of a supportive ally, aiding in their personal development, and exhibiting a benevolent demeanor, thereby facilitating the collection of truthful testimonies. Regrettably, the limited emphasis on these questions in my interviews precludes me from drawing definitive conclusions. However, it does propose potential directions for further research, aiming to shift away from an exclusively journalistic-centric perspective on these matters, particularly during a period of crisis for the profession.

These findings suggest that slices-of-life podcasts allow journalists to experiment with more relational and emotionally engaged roles. However, this creates tensions

with the traditional notions of journalistic detachment and objectivity. Further research could explore how these role perceptions translate into actual practices and content as well as audience perceptions.

Overall, this study contributes to our understanding of how journalistic roles evolve at the individual level, in response to new formats and changing audience expectations. It highlights the ongoing negotiation between traditional and emerging role conceptions, as journalists seek to redefine their societal purpose and professional identity in the digital age.

8.3 Paper 3 – "Practices"

"It was a two-person job"

Adapting journalistic practices for ordinary sources in slices-of-life podcasts

Published in journalism practice in November 2025 (Open Access)

Abstract

This paper examines how the relationship between journalists producing life story podcasts—or, slices-of-life podcasts—and ordinary sources is created, and its impact on journalistic practices. Based on 22 qualitative interviews with professional journalists (n=14) and sources (n=8) in French-speaking Switzerland, this research aims to build bridges between podcast studies and journalism studies. Results show that both parties place mutual trust at the heart of their interaction, and that, while this is often perceived as innate, it is, in fact, dynamically co-built through specific practices. The data reveals three components of trust: disclosure, proximity, and time. Furthermore, the relationship between journalists and sources confers an active role to sources in the podcast production, leading to a form of journalism that, without considering itself as such, borrows elements from participatory journalism in the horizontality of journalist-source relations and the way content is created. These practices lead to what is presented in interviews as a more faithful and nuanced representation of ordinary sources, compared to what is sometimes found in the literature.

8.3.1 Introduction

Ordinary people have not always been the first choice of journalists when selecting sources for their work. The contribution of those people "who are presented in the news as 'unknown' to the general public and unaffiliated to any organization" (De Swert & Kuypers, 2020, p. 1039) and who speak on their own behalf (Deleu, 2006) remains relatively unexplored in the journalism studies literature. However, it appears that ordinary people—also referred to in research as common citizens (Peter & Zerback, 2020) or non-elites (Splendore, 2020)—are sometimes being made the primary voices in contemporary productions, such as podcasts. First, ordinary people have seized on this medium to create content on their own (Park, 2017), and second, successful journalistic productions take a keen interest in these sources. This interest lies in a different staging of ordinary voices, going beyond the simple, sometimes illustrative, testimonies that are commonplace in journalistic practices. Those productions have notably been embodied by the podcast *Transfert*, produced by Slate Podcasts in France and *This American Life*, *Strangers* or *Love + Radio* in the United States.

This type of format can be qualified as slices-of-life podcasts[10], according to the mapping of the French podcast landscape produced by Lesaunier (2023). Slices-of-life podcasts give a voice to ordinary people who talk about their job, their story, what happened to them, the day their life changed, and so on (Lesaunier, 2023, p. 4). What is distinctive about these formats is that they bring ordinary sources to the fore and thus enables the study of journalistic practices in relation to those sources (an issue that has been understudied in the literature). For example, *Love + Radio* is cited by Bottomley and Oneonta (2017) as one of the first podcasts to adopt this format in 2005, distributed via Radiotopia. The episodes, often lengthy (20 minutes to over an hour), give individuals a voice to tell their stories in all their complexity—often marginalized or transgressive experiences—without the production constraints, regulation, or time limits imposed by traditional radio.

[10] Free translation of the French term "tranches de vie".

In fact, those formats seem to implement what the social sciences point to as the ability of life story narratives to reveal and better understand overlooked realities from the point of view of the actors themselves (Becker, 1970). These formats are part of a particular narrative production in which an ordinary person, not a celebrity, expresses themselves at length, with little or no intervention from a narrator or journalist. Yet, these productions do not simply "give the floor" to ordinary people; they also rely on specific journalistic practices that frame, support, and sometimes transform these testimonies. Understanding how journalists collect, negotiate, and retransmit such life stories is therefore essential to grasping the dynamics and implications of this format.

The success of these podcasts is again illustrated by the example of *Transfert*, which, in 2022, according to the Alliance pour les chiffres de la presse et des médias (ACPM), was the most listened-to podcast in France. For its part, *This American Life* is established as a leading podcast (and radio show) in the United States, with episodes attracting more than 2 million listeners. This success seems to demonstrate that audiences are attracted to, and even in need of such a format, although scientific literature is lacking to clearly position this format as a popular phenomenon among public and producers, but this does not diminish its scientific interest, as this article seeks to demonstrate.

Slices-of-life podcasts call for further research to understand how this format challenge contemporary journalistic practices and seems to offer a kind of renewal — or at least adaptation — during a period of accumulating crises in the media world. This article will focus on the French-speaking part of Switzerland, which offers several advantages for studying these practices.

Firstly, the Swiss context is generally comparable to Northern European countries and the global North (Cancela et al., 2021), so the findings of this paper can contribute to advancing research into the arrival of podcasts and the renewal of journalistic practices in this geographical area. Secondly, podcast research has largely focused on North America, particularly the United States (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). Yet, the study of a small linguistic region—two million inhabitants—such as French-

speaking Switzerland can prove invaluable to gain access to journalists and sources active in slices-of-life productions.

Therefore, the present article focuses on the collaboration between ordinary people as sources and journalists in producing slices-of-life podcasts in French-speaking Switzerland. Behind the apparent simplicity of letting ordinary voices speak, slices-of-life podcasts involve complex journalistic practices—from building trust to negotiating representation—that shape how life stories are collected and shared. Investigating these practices is central to understanding what is at stake for journalism when ordinary people become primary sources. More precisely, this paper studies the relationship between journalists and ordinary sources in this way of creating information, both in terms of power dynamics, which appear to be relatively horizontal, and content production, which tends to be more co-constructed.

8.3.2 Literature review

8.3.2.1 Ordinary sources in journalism

In Western journalism, ordinary sources are consistently shown to be underrepresented compared to elites (Darras, 2017; De Keyser & Raeymaeckers, 2012; O'Donovan et al., 2022), a pattern explained by professional constraints of time, resources, credibility, and objectivity (Hickerson et al., 2011; Thomson et al., 2023; Van Leuven et al., 2014). Research highlights the active role of institutional and political actors as co-constructors of news (Francoeur, 2017), sometimes relegating journalists themselves to a passive role.

Even when included, ordinary sources often play limited roles, serving as exemplars (Lefevere et al., 2012) or vox pops (Beckers, 2017; Kleemans et al., 2017), rather than substantive contributors, sometimes resulting in stereotyped portrayals (Moorhead, 2024). Yet some traditions of journalism have centered ordinary lives from the outset, such as New Journalism (Wolfe, 1975), New New Journalism (Boynton, 2007), ethnographic journalism (Neveu, 2000), lifestyle journalism (Hanusch, 2014), intimate journalism (Harrington, 1997), and human-interest reporting (Hughes, 1940). These practices rely on immersion and relational depth, enabling new

insights (Boynton, 2007, p. 7) and challenging normative visions of journalism (Dubied, 2025). Similarly, Deleu's work on radio documentaries highlights "documentary speech," in which edited testimonies of ordinary individuals take center stage, echoing life-story methods in sociology (Deleu, 2000, p. 145).

Another specific field of journalism in which the relationship between journalists and ordinary sources is studied is participatory forms of journalism. In these cases, ordinary people have a deliberately active place in the journalistic creation process (Singer et al., 2011). There is a very broad spectrum of participation in the journalistic world, but when non-journalists are included in the process of creating information, several studies seem to show that this horizontality enables better representation of certain communities (Tsai et al., 2020) and provides a way of giving them a voice (Meyer & Speakman, 2019).

The use of ordinary people's testimonies in journalism raises specific ethical issues concerning verification. Similar dilemmas were noted by Ettema and Glasser (1998) in their study of investigative journalists' techniques when confronted with difficult-to-verify stories, particularly rape cases. Unlike "hard news," where verifiable facts are observable, intimate accounts rest on personal experience, challenging journalistic credibility and ethics: "reporters cannot always rely on the clear empirical test conditions and the socially sanctioned bureaucratic procedures that serve to maintain the credibility of daily hard news reporting, they cannot easily defend the truth of their reports with glib references to paradigmatic cases of hard fact" (Ettema & Glasser, 1998, p.136).

8.3.2.2 Podcast and ordinary sources

Podcasts have rapidly become more than a new medium, introducing innovations in fields including journalism (Berry, 2006; Lindgren, 2023; Nee & Santana, 2021). They offer greater freedom than traditional radio (Wilson, 2018), with longer formats enabling deeper and more intimate coverage of underrepresented topics (Euritt, 2022; Swiatek, 2018). Like radio, podcasting has been strongly associated with intimacy (Berg, 2021; Lindgren, 2023; McGregor, 2022; Spinelli & Dann, 2019; Swiatek, 2018), fostering authenticity and conversational tone (Euritt, 2022;

McGregor, 2022) and cultivating a close bond with listeners through voice and subject matter (Spinelli & Dann, 2019; Swiatek, 2018). This intimacy also opens space for ordinary sources to share experiences, reshaping journalist–source dynamics (Heiselberg & Have, 2023).

Yet the journalistic status of podcasts remains debated, given the lack of shared ethical standards across genres (Whipple et al., 2022, p. 41). Even when produced in newsrooms, podcasts are perceived as spaces for experimentation and departures from conventional norms such as objectivity (Lindgren, 2021; Nee & Santana, 2021; Whipple et al., 2022). The popularity of *Serial* reinforced expectations of journalistic qualities even in non-journalistic podcasts (Whipple et al., 2022, p. 43), but as the same authors note, "just because a podcast is categorized as nonfiction doesn't mean it's journalism—or even truth" (p. 44). This raises broader questions about the ethical boundaries of nonfiction podcasting.

While research on podcasts and ordinary sources is still limited, some studies emphasize their potential to amplify marginalized voices and alternative narratives (Barner, 2021; Bottomley, 2015; Donison & MacLennan, 2021; Dorsey, 2024; Gustafsson, 2023; Hoydis, 2020; Vrikki & Malik, 2019). This resonates with Deleu's (2000) work on radio documentaries but differs in that podcasts, as a distinct medium, escape certain constraints of radio, such as multitasking listening and live broadcasting (pp. 147–148), making them particularly suited for narrative formats.

Podcast production also illustrates the collaborative dimension of the medium. Rime et al. (2022) note that workflows often involve contributions from both journalists and ordinary participants, while Lee et al. (2022) highlight the blurring of boundaries between professionals and non-professionals in news podcasts. As Llinares et al. (2018,) argue, podcasting "taps into something fundamental about oral communication, argument, and the tension between subjective and objective knowledge amplified in the digital age" (p.2).

Nevertheless, these initial insights remain insufficient to fully grasp the dynamics between journalists and ordinary sources in podcast creation. This article therefore examines *slices-of-life* podcasts as a privileged site where ordinary sources

occupy central space, spend extended time with journalists, and often constitute the sole voices in the final production—an opportunity to explore how the affordances of podcasting confront and reshape journalistic principles and routines.

Slices-of-life podcasts also offer a valuable opportunity to incorporate sources' points of view into research on journalism sourcing practices. First, it has long been noted that there is a lack of literature on sources' perspectives (Schlesinger et al., 1992). Secondly, I assume that this will enable me to nuance journalists' perceptions of their practices by considering another point of view. Indeed, journalists' discourse in interviews should be considered as constructions of meaning, justifications or *metajournalistic discourse* (Carlson, 2016). While they are interesting to analyze in themselves, another point of view can provide perspective and distance from their strategic dimension. Finally, it should contribute to a more complex understanding of the use of ordinary sources in journalistic work.

These considerations and the identified gaps in the literature lead to the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** How is the relationship between journalists and ordinary sources (co-)built in slices-of-life podcasts?
- **RQ2:** What impact does this relationship have on journalistic practices and dynamics?

8.3.3 METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on native *slices-of-life* podcasts (Lesaunier, 2023) produced by professional journalists in French-speaking Switzerland between 2018 (when the first of its kind appeared in the region) and 2022 (starting point of the research). Internet searches and snowball sampling identified 15 podcasts meeting the following criteria: 1) native digital podcasts (not linear radio rebroadcasts), (2) produced by professional journalists holding a press card[11], (3) placing ordinary sources at the center of the narrative, and (4) privileging the encounter itself rather than using testimonies merely as illustrations. Fourteen of these productions were retained, as one journalist was unavailable.

The 15 podcasts identified align with Lesaunier's (2023) mapping of the French podcast landscape, where slices-of-life podcasts represent around 5% of total output—a proportion comparable to sports (8%), political (7%), or news podcasts (6%), and exceeding science (3%). As there is no scientific or official census of this genre in Switzerland, an exploratory census was conducted as part of this research in order to understand how this genre is positioned in the Swiss media landscape. Between 2018 and 2025, I identified 85 podcasts created by media institutions in Switzerland. Of these, 13.6% are slices-of-life podcasts. Alongside culture, it is the genre with the highest number of productions between 2018 and 2025 (n=16). However, the relevance of this niche lies less in volume than in its narrative project: foregrounding ordinary voices and thereby making visible journalistic practices that often remain "black boxes."

The podcasts studied last between 10 and 40 minutes per episode and place ordinary sources at the center (10 out of 14 podcasts do not use any other form of expertise). In this article, "podcast" refers to the global editorial project, whereas "podcast episode" refers to each unit making up the podcast.

[11] In Switzerland, to be recognized as a journalist, you must be registered in the professional media register. The press card, issued by the union *Impressum*, is the main official credential. To obtain it, you must provide proof of at least two years' experience as a journalist as your main occupation, i.e., you must devote at least 50% of your working time to this profession.

The 14 podcasts studied are the work of 14 journalists, anonymized in this article, along with their podcasts, which could otherwise too easily reveal their identity in this microcosm. Confidentiality was guaranteed to all participants to ensure maximum freedom of expression and to avoid any consequences, as our conversations sometimes led to critical views of the media ecosystem and professional practices. Access to these professionals was facilitated by the size of the linguistic region, which allowed introductions through third parties, as well as by the author's current position as a radio journalist in French-speaking Switzerland.

Eight ordinary sources who shared their stories in these podcasts participated in an interview. Respondent-driven sampling (RDS) was used because of the high sensitivity of some of the topics covered (Semaan, 2010). Journalists put me in touch with their sources to respect their confidentiality, ensure their consent, and establish contact through a known person. Access to these people proved more difficult, and the eight profiles interviewed came from six different podcasts.

With each participant (n=22), I conducted semi-directive interviews lasting one to two hours, combining Bertaux's narratives of practice (2016) with Newsmaking Reconstruction (NMR; Reich & Barnoy, 2020). Bertaux's approach encouraged respondents to narrate their practice and relational dynamics, while NMR provided a step-by-step reconstruction of the production process, especially journalist–source interactions. Taken together, the narrative framework offered an overarching account of meaning-making, while NMR grounded these accounts in detailed operational sequences, thereby capturing both broader representations and invisible practices not accessible in the final product. To reduce memory or desirability bias, discussions were anchored in one or two specific episodes, and parts of the interview were more structured than Bertaux's approach usually entails. Each interview began with an open question about the encounter or episode that had most marked the journalist, before moving to three transversal themes: (1) the specificity of the podcast format, (2) the production process, and (3) the relationship with ordinary sources. Interviews with ordinary participants followed a parallel structure, focusing on (1) the articulation of their testimony, (2) their perception of journalism

and the journalist relationship, and (3) their post-broadcast experience, with space left at the end for free expression.

All 22 interviews were coded and analyzed inductively with Atlas.ti, allowing for a thematic content analysis of their transcriptions (Bardin, 2013). The process began with "initial/open coding" (Charmaz, 2001), identifying preliminary codes directly from participants' words, followed by "focused coding" (Charmaz, 2001), which synthesized the most recurrent patterns and refined categories with the support of literature and the central dimensions of the research. This transition was iterative, involving constant back-and-forth between raw data and emerging categories to ensure both analytical rigor and fidelity to the diversity of discourse (Thomas, 2003). While the analysis remained qualitative, quantitative indicators were occasionally mobilized as exploratory tools to identify potential regularities. As Bardin (2013) notes, thematic analysis seeks "nuclei of meaning" whose frequency may hold analytical value, though repetition does not automatically imply importance. Figures were therefore treated not as proof but as complementary indicators, always interpreted in light of contexts, sequences, and participants' meanings. By combining an inductive approach inspired by Charmaz's grounded theory with Bardin's thematic content analysis, I sought to let categories emerge from the data while benefiting from a systematic framework for organizing and synthesizing them.

8.3.4 Results

The thematic content analysis of how the relationship between sources and journalists is (co-)built reveals that the notion of trust is one of the main elements used to characterize their interactions (= interactions are understood here as moments when sources and journalists interact in the context of production: telephone exchanges, face-to-face meetings, or recording sessions).
The first section describes how this is reflected in the data and what journalistic practices are associated with the notion of trust. Secondly, this relationship confers a special role to ordinary sources, who seem to be incorporated relatively actively in the production process, and thus to have some influence over the final journalistic output.

8.3.4.1 A relationship of mutual trust

Trust is at the heart of both journalists' and sources' discourses. The code "trust" appeared 129 times across interviews, representing 5% of the overall content and 9.2% when focusing only on descriptions of interactions. This includes the exception of a single interview in which the code "trust" does not appear at all.

Analysis suggests that this trust is often presented as total and innate. As one source put it: "I had 100% confidence; otherwise, I wouldn't have done it" (Source 4). For journalists, it translates into believing interviewees without explicit proof, justified as a "natural" or "instinctive" stance given that the intimate and subjective topics addressed cannot be verified through traditional fact-checking.

Initially, journalists justify in research interviews that assuming that the person in front of them is telling the truth enables them to go further in gathering testimony. This is mentioned here by a journalist who made a podcast on the theme of the female body:

> *So if you say to someone : "I believe you. (...) I know it's true." Then you can go further, simply because (...) You don't have to prove it. You know you're going to explore something that's on the order of subtlety (...) In fact, they [the sources] don't need to convince me.* – Journalist 5

On the theme of sexual violence, another journalist makes a similar conclusion, emphasizing the inherent nature of this trust:

> *You can't say to yourself that this person is lying to you, it doesn't make any sense. So yes, I believed the victims. That wasn't even a question I asked myself.* – Journalist 11

Journalists regularly justify this point of view and the absence of fact-checking on the grounds that it would be impossible to verify completely.

> *Well, it's a choice; there are things we can never verify. So, we assume that people are telling the truth, yes, but we can't verify it. Someone who claims to have been a victim of incest, for example, you can't prove it. But we don't think that just because you can't prove it doesn't mean that what people say doesn't deserve to be part of the public debate.* – Journalist 9

Anonymity probably also protects journalists from legal consequences, as people generally can't be identified, so no one is publicly exposed or confronted.

Aware that this discourse undermined basic journalistic considerations about the duty to seek the truth and verify information transmitted to the public, the journalists justified their practice by explaining that they had chosen ordinary sources for their subjective, personal input on life experiences. This is an editorial choice consciously made by professionals. However, journalists do not always feel that they are in total opposition to the original aims of the journalistic profession, believing that they too, through these intimate testimonies of ordinary sources, are in search of the truth.

> *The question of truth is... It's impossible to resolve, in fact. And this journalistic stance, which I understand, truth and the search for truth is one of the key values. But whose truth are we talking about? Yours? The one you're going to validate with theses that underpins your own statements? What truth are we talking about? (...) Maybe there are little negotiations. Me too, when I talk about myself, I negotiate things, I say that, I'm not going to say it like that...* - Journalist 14

Aware of this divergence from certain core values of their profession, in research interviews, journalists justify the place of these subjective testimonials by saying that it's part of the "contract" they have with their audiences, mentioning that this is explicitly presented as a subjective point of view in the podcasts episodes and is not intended to replace factual investigation.

Initially presented as absolute, further analyses nevertheless show a few exceptions to the trust expressed by participants. Sources told us of periods in the creation process when the bond of trust slightly erodes. This is the case in the pre- and post-publication times. While some sources have maintained a link with the journalists beyond that, two sources report not receiving post-recording information, such as no information about the date of publication or success of the episode. Most of the others did not mention such exchanges in interviews.

> *They explained the whole process to me that they were going to send all the material to their editor, that it could take some time, that it was going to be broadcast in the autumn. But they didn't have the date yet. (...) I didn't get any information at all when the episode was going to air. It was really by coincidence. I have a friend who suddenly shared on Instagram, "Listen to Sylvie*[12]." I hadn't even seen that it was out yet. It would have been nice to receive a little email.* – Source 4

[12] Alias used to anonymize the source.

That trust is the main characteristic used to qualify the journalist–source relationship was expected, particularly in the context of intimate testimonies. Yet its absolute and innate nature raises questions regarding journalistic practices. A second level of analysis, informed by NMR and narratives of practice, highlights that despite the absence of explicit fact-checking, several practices allow journalists and sources to establish trust and ensure mutual good faith. This nuances the idea of "blind" trust and shows instead a dynamic process structured around three interdependent components: disclosure, proximity, and time (see figure 17).

The table below summarizes the coding and analysis process, from initial coding of emerging themes to focused coding that grouped them into three categories of journalistic practices, highlighting how these practices actively contributed to building—rather than naturally producing—trust.

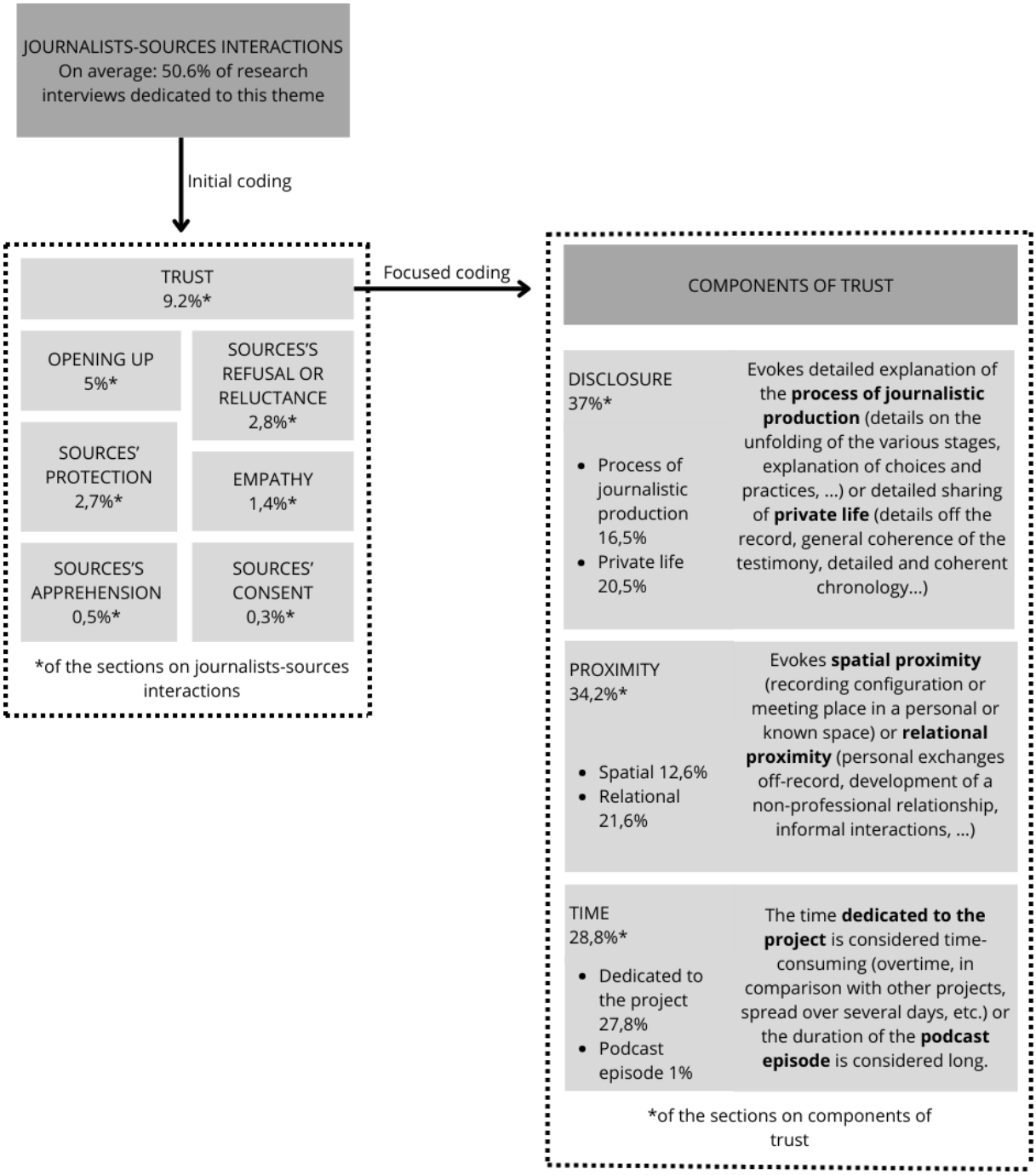

Figure 17: Codes structure and results of the thematic content analysis

8.3.4.2 Disclosure

First, as described by respondents in research interviews, disclosure is a factor of trust building. As we can see in the following example, a journalist working on sexual violence explains her work process to sources in both substantive and technical terms:

> *I was explaining and re-explaining the interview in broad outline: "Have things changed since last time? Things you [the source] absolutely want to say? Things you absolutely don't want to say? In any case, we agree that if you want to stop, we'll stop. If you don't want to answer, no problem. If you want to rephrase because you're feeling vague? No problem at all. On the other hand, I might not be able to look at you in the eye because I'll be looking at my recorder... I'll be wearing headphones; I'll be paying attention to the outside sound. So if all of a sudden there's an ambulance, I'm going to be I'm going to stop you and ask you to resume."* – Journalist 11

The process of journalistic production is described as being explained to such an extent that "*there was no room for surprises*," (Source 6) according to a source.

Disclosure is even more important in the preparation phase of interviews, as it ensures the consent of the person testifying, considering that, unlike elite sources, ordinary sources are not necessarily familiar with journalistic practices. Here, a journalist explains the importance of being clear and precise about what is expected of the person given that the podcast she produces investigates issues she considers intimate and taboo, and that she expects sources to be prepared to go to great lengths in revealing their intimacy:

> *It's important to avoid not being clear in the initial contract. It's also more respectful, as they take the time to come to my home (...) and stay, I think, an hour and a half. If, afterwards, we realize that there's something that ... we haven't understood, it's not at all correct on our part.* – Journalist 10

Journalists aren't the only ones who have to be transparent in this interaction. Sources are also expected to be honest and consistent with journalists even if it is only off the record. The following quote comes from a research interview with a journalist who had initially suggested that she trusted her sources blindly, but then, to justify this, ended up telling me about a situation in which a source's lack of disclosure lead her to cancel the production:

> *There were parts of her life that didn't fit. So the first time I interviewed her, she was manipulating me, and I had the feeling that something wasn't quite right. I was missing bits... (...). And when I was editing, I was racking my brain; I couldn't get it right (...) No, that made no sense. It's like when you're trying to make a recipe and it's spaghetti and you don't have the spaghetti, you know? (...) So afterwards, I met her a second time and explained to her what was happening, and then she told me*

that, in fact, there were parts of her life that she absolutely didn't want to talk about, that it was too sensitive for her (...) that it was impossible for her to testify. – Journalist 5

Not having all the pieces of the puzzle, the journalist could not be sure of the source's honesty and chose not to broadcast her testimony.

8.3.4.3 Proximity

Proximity is expressed first and foremost by a spatial proximity that seems to be established, particularly in terms of the conditions under which these meetings take place. Only part of one studied podcast recording takes place in a recording studio situated in a newsroom. For the rest, journalists and sources report having met in cafés, at the journalist's home or at the source's home to discuss the episode and record it. This spatial proximity is an element that comes up spontaneously in every interview when describing the relationship of trust established between the two parties.

Proximity was not limited to the spatial conditions in which the meetings took place, but also the nature of the exchanges:

She [the journalist] also had to make the effort to expose herself a little, just a little. She also had to give something. I had to know (...). For example, if she was married, if she had children. Her life, in fact. - Source 5

As they mingled, this spatial and relational proximity regularly gave rise to moments of close exchange. The research interviews reveal that it's not uncommon for the two parties to share moments that go beyond formal journalistic exchanges, around a meal, a party or informal and personal discussions. These moments are described as essential in the research interviews to create and then maintain a relationship of trust, particularly with a goal of desacralizing the journalist-source interaction, which can be perceived as overly formal and intimidating, and therefore counterproductive when it comes to intimate matters. However, the occasions when this has led to genuine relationships that go beyond the professional sphere (such as friendships) appear to be rare.

8.3.4.4 Time

The third and last component of trust building identified in this research is time. Indeed, the time taken to produce these podcast episodes is described by professionals as considerably longer than for other journalistic formats, even more so against a context of general acceleration and cutbacks.

> *Yes, it's very time-consuming and very little-known. I mean, nobody around us really knows how long it takes to earn people's trust. And (...) I think that for a lot of people, it's like, "ah well yes, there's an episode every two weeks, and that's normal." And we are like, "You have no idea how long it takes to do all this!" Hmm, but uh... it's definitely worth taking the time. I don't think you can rush this, really. That's the heart of it. It's back to the heart of trust. But for me, it's... there's no way to compress this working time.* – Journalist 9

While the journalists I met generally have more time allocated per episode than they do for other journalistic work, the time they devote to producing their episodes always exceeds the time granted by their media. This translates either into unpaid overtime or an overflow on their other tasks, podcast production being rarely (only one case in the study) the professionals' main activity.

The time needed to build trust is not only the time shared together in the creation of the podcast episode, but also the length of the episode itself (as a reminder, from 10 to 40 minutes). According to the journalists, the latter enables them to offer a more faithful portrait of reality, or at least one that is closer to the information gathered during the time spent with the source.

Interestingly, the time component is much more prevalent among journalists than sources. More specifically, the length of time allocated to production was mentioned 107 times in the 14 interviews with journalists and only 18 times in the 8 interviews with sources. Some sources do not qualify the time spent with journalists as being long and sometimes even describe the whole process as very fast and short. I explain this partly by the fact that sources spend less time than professionals working on the podcast, as they are not involved in all the stages of production, but also by the fact that journalists make the comparison on the basis of organizational requirements and professional rules that are unknown to sources.

These three components explain how the relationship of trust between sources and journalists is created and maintained and show that while fact-checking is not explicit, or even sometimes conscious, journalistic practices nonetheless enable professionals to detect situations in which they would be faced with people seeking to lie or manipulate the truth. However, this does not diminish the ethical questions raised by these practices, which will be addressed in greater detail in the discussion.

8.3.4.5 Sources With a More Active Role

After examining how the journalist–source relationship is built, the second research question explored its impact on the production of slices-of-life podcasts. Results show that interactions based on disclosure, proximity, and time shape journalistic practices by granting sources a relatively active role. As one journalist put it: "It was a two-person job" (Journalist 2). Without amounting to explicit participation, indicators of empowerment emerge: journalists consistently describe sources as actors rather than subjects, while two concrete practices—open interview techniques and prepublication verification—give them agency over how their story is told. These adaptations reflect professionals' conscious decision to depart from certain practices taught in journalism schools and newsrooms to better fit the realities of slices-of-life podcasting.

Table 10: Participation indicator in research interviews

	Occurrences in research interviews	**Description**
Acknowledging the source as a contributor to podcast production	168 occurrences (52% of the sections about the active role of sources)	Explicit mention in interview that the ordinary source takes on an active role in the creation of the podcast and is seen as an actor in the production, rather than a subject on whom a podcast episode is created
Open interviews techniques	82 occurrences (25%)	Mention of open interview techniques that give sources the opportunity to direct their stories.
Pre-publication review	73 occurrences (23%)	The opportunity to listen to the podcast and make changes is given to the source before publication.

Interview techniques are described by both sources and journalists as being very open, giving a great deal of leverage to the source, who doesn't see his or her words firmly framed. However, the degree of openness varies between podcasts, some journalists pointing out that “it's not carte blanche” and others that “you really let people say things exactly the way they want to”. During the research interviews, several participants pointed out that the researchers’ questions closely resembled those formulated during the podcasts’ interviews. One journalist, for example, explains that the highlight of her podcast came when she stopped asking the questions she had prepared and instead asked her source what was important for her to talk about:

> *It's a good idea to leave room, in fact, to say nothing. “Is there anything we haven't mentioned? Do you want to talk about something?” And it just comes out. You have to try to direct as little as possible.* – Journalist 2

Results show that this seems to create space that softens the pressures inherent in interviewing and ensures the consent of sources who share their intimacy. Sources keep their free will during recording and do not exceed the limits they have set themselves. As this source explains:

> *And what I also liked was that we talked about things that, for me, would have been OK if everyone had known about them. There are certain things that happened in my childhood that I don't want to talk about at all. And then I talked about it with Céline* [the journalist], and then I said, "but that I don't want people to know." And then she said, "well OK, we're not going to say anything" (...) I didn't lie, but I didn't tell everything.* – Source 5

A second practice identified that gives the source an active role is that of pre-listening before publication. Eleven out of the 14 journalists interviewed systematically offered it, accepting any modifications requested by the source. In Swiss journalism, sources are allowed to review their quotes, i.e., the passages in which they are quoted word for word, as long as they request to do so. These quotes are usually sent with some contextual information (e.g., the preceding and following sentences). Research interviews reveal that this proofreading of quotes is almost systematic among print journalists and less so among radio journalists. The reality of their working routines and conditions rarely grant this level of influence to a source, as this journalist puts it:

> *In reality, everyone is the master of their own word. I don't think it's right that it's not common. It should always be an option. We don't do it because it bothers us and we don't have the time. That's why we don't offer it when we work for a regional radio station, for example.* – Journalist 4

But in the case of slices-of-life podcasts, it's a common practice and this is taken a step further by offering a complete preview:

> *I was proactive in offering to listen to the whole episode (...) we know that it's very demanding for us. Since I've been in this job, a lot of my colleagues have told me: "Don't do it! You absolutely shouldn't do that!" But in this case, in this context, with these people, the aim is for them to be completely OK with what appears (...) Sources can listen to everything, they can correct (...) and in the end there wasn't as much back and forth as that. But we were ready.* – Journalist 6

These adapted journalistic practices, considering sources as actors in the podcast, also seem to have an impact on representations. In research interviews, the representation of ordinary people in the podcast is described as more truthful, nuanced and far from stereotypes.

> *As far as I'm concerned, themes like poverty, homelessness and so on, I don't think you can do something good in an afternoon. There are tougher themes and I think that if you really want to do something good, you have to take the time to do it. And it's not in the context of breaking news that you're going to do something good. You have to do a long format.* – Journalist 7

Journalists confirm that these formats allow to distant themselves from certain stereotypical representations, as explained by this journalist who produced a podcast on the use of technology by young people, using them as a primary source of information:

> *We often hear that it's all bad and unhealthy (...) but in fact it wasn't all negative. The negative side came out of discussions with parents, whereas potentially there could also be quite interesting and positive uses. And so, in quotation marks, the benefits that could be derived from the use of smartphones by the main people concerned, which turned out to be largely the case.* – Journalist 8

These stereotyped visions may be their own preconceptions, or those conveyed in the media. One journalist, for example, was expecting to broach a painful subject when talking to a source about homosexuality in a specific line of work[13], but the fact that she had not framed the interview too tightly and used an open interview method enabled her to approach the subject with more nuance:

> *I have to admit that I went into this one with a few preconceived ideas (...) that when you're gay in this particular context, it might be terrible to come out, maybe there'll be drama, or you'll be disliked, you'll be singled out. (...) But what he [the source] says is that it was very positive. (...) It's a good thing we come across stories like that from time to time. (...) I did leave an interesting passage where he says it's still taboo, but when you talk about it, it's okay. I've struck a balance between those two things.* – Journalist 2

These observations are generally shared by the sources who, according to the results and in the cases studied, are satisfied with the representation made of

[13] Not mentioned in order to keep the podcast confidentiality.

themselves, which they consider to be faithful to reality. Only one case was reported in this research, in which the person had mixed feelings about her representation.

8.3.5 Discussion

To further interpret the results presented above, I now examine how they confirm, challenge, or deepen the perspectives presented in the literature review.

The first journalistic practice that distinguishes slices-of-life podcast production is the choice to use ordinary sources (either exclusively or as primary sources). As noted in the literature, this approach contrasts with traditional journalistic standards that favor institutional sources to guarantee reliability, credibility, and legitimacy (Hickerson et al., 2011; Thomson et al., 2023; Van Leuven et al., 2014). This core difference crystallizes the broader epistemological tension between subjectively grounded and objectively validated bases of knowledge highlighted by Llinares et al. (2018).

Another distinction, strongly emphasized by journalists is their interview technique, resembling semi-directive or open-ended interviewing, and sharing methodological affinities with qualitative research, where participants are considered "meaning makers" rather than vessels of information (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, cited in Warren, 2001). This echoes Deleu's (2000) observations on the proximity between radio documentaries and ethnographic or sociological methods. In this context, journalists do not report "hard facts" in the sense described by Ettema & Glasser (1998), but rather collect subjective accounts and individuals construction of meaning. Journalists' engagement with such sources revealed tensions with established practices and professional norms, particularly regarding the lack of verification of personal narratives, which challenges conventional notions of journalistic rigor.

Podcasting appears to redefine journalistic standards around objectivity by focusing on the experiential narratives of ordinary sources. Journalists explained that these methods enabled them to present a more complex and "true" picture of their interlocutors, thanks to the longer time frame of podcasts, which allows for a richer portrait of lived reality. This contrasts with the pressures of daily reporting, where short deadlines often lead to caricatured portrayals, especially of ordinary people (Kleemans et al., 2017; Moorhead, 2024). While this resonates with broader findings on the stereotypical use of ordinary sources (Beckers, 2017; Kleemans et al., 2015;

Lefevere et al., 2012; Moorhead, 2024), this tendency seems less prevalent in slices-of-life podcasts, although further studies are needed to confirm this.

These practices imply a relatively active view of sources and hint at a shift toward participation, albeit not fully realized. Recognizing the agency of ordinary sources reinforces the tension between subjective and objective speech: in slices-of-life podcasts, "truth" becomes blurred when journalism is about lived experience rather than factual events. As Deleu (2000) noted, this could be seen as bordering on activism, but it can also be read as a redefinition of expertise. Whereas elite sources traditionally provide factual authority (Hickerson et al., 2011; Thomson et al., 2023; Van Leuven et al., 2014), here expertise derives from lived experience. As Flichy (2014) recalls, drawing on Sennett (2010), "expert" can mean either specialist or someone made skilled by experience; in these podcasts, ordinary sources are treated as experts in the latter sense (p. 10). This shift in the concept of expertise in the case of slices-of-life podcasts—considering their discourse as constructions of meaning rather than objective facts—leads to a focus on work ethics centered on the relationship with sources rather than on factual and objective verification of the facts they present.

Finally, and in line with the two previous points, the results presented above on the importance of trust and its dynamic co-construction between sources and journalists suggest that trust is not simply a condition for journalistic achievement (here, the gathering of testimonies), but that it becomes inherent to journalistic production practices. Returning to the comparison between elite and ordinary experts: with experts in the elite sense of the term, trust is a condition for choosing a source (their credibility is verified, and this credibility inspires trust). With slices-of-life podcasts, however, trust becomes a journalistic process in its own right.

The various elements of this discussion represent avenues for dialogue and bridges between journalism and podcast studies. Some of the findings presented and discussed in this article are specific to the types of topics covered in the podcasts studied and are probably not generalizable to all podcast productions made by journalists (news podcasts, science podcasts, investigative podcasts, etc.). However, the discussion was intended to show how certain questions go far beyond the

specificities of the podcast medium when examined through the lens of journalism studies concepts and topics. Conversely, these same concepts and subjects of study that have been the subject of much debate in journalism studies (the notion of truth, relationships with sources, verification of information) take on a new dimension when examined in the context of the new digital formats represented by podcasts.

8.3.6 Conclusion

The data gathered in the empirical research show that the interaction between ordinary sources and journalists in the creation of slices-of-life podcasts is characterized by both parties to be based on mutual trust. Although the latter is described in absolute and innate terms, the research process based on narratives of practice (Bertaux, 2016) and news making reconstruction (Reich & Barnoy, 2020) shows that, it is dynamically built through specific practices. These practices also enable journalists to verify the veracity of the stories they are told despite explicit fact-checking.

Three interdependent factors, that contributed to trust building, were inductively identified in the interview data: proximity, disclosure and time. The first factor shows how spatial and personal proximity is used to create a trusting relationship between journalists and sources. The second is a detailed explanation of the journalistic production process by professionals to sources, and disclosure by sources about their history to journalists. The third component shows that production times are considered long compared with traditional working times in the profession.

Second, we have seen that this trust, created by a set of journalistic practices, has an impact on the creation process. Without explicit reference to participatory methods, sources are given a relatively active role, allowing them to partly influence the final rendering. These working methods seem to lead to a more horizontal relationship between journalists and sources and are perceived as enabling a more nuanced and realistic rendering of the realities experienced by the people testifying in these podcasts.

Although this research focuses on a single linguistic region, the results shed light on some overlooked areas of research. Podcast studies cover so much more than just

journalism studies, and the contributions of this format to journalism are still vast to investigate. I assume that this case study can serve as a basis for future reflections, which I suggest below.

First, if this relationship of mutual trust, made possible by transparent interactions, time and proximity, give rise to productions that go deep into the intimacy of ordinary people, this is not total or absolute. Indeed, the personal motivations of sources and the professional motivations of journalists set limits in order to achieve their own goals. This has been quickly addressed in the results presentation but should be further studied in future research.

Second, while it has been pointed out that these journalistic practices tend to run counter to current logic, they also stand in opposition to certain traditional perceptions of the role of journalists, as interviewee point out. Journalists' perception of their professional role in the creation of these intimate, narrative podcasts would thus probably be rich to investigate and put into perspective with the numerous research studies on the subject.

Moreover, only two of the three parties involved in podcasting have been studied here: journalists and sources. What's missing is the consideration of the audience. The data allows to draw conclusions for the first two, but give us no insight into how the public perceives this kind of content. If it seems to be appreciated by people who testified and had a poor perception of journalists and the media ecosystem, it would be interesting to investigate if this content is also appreciated (and for what reasons) by audiences who don't or no longer trust traditional journalism.

Finally, although these journalistic practices have often been presented as techniques for better representation of ordinary sources it's important to bear in mind that this doesn't make podcasts a miracle product, sometimes presented in literature as possessing “the advantages of the internet while expelling some of the pitfalls” (Llinares et al., 2018). Indeed, representational biases and the reproduction of social inequalities are also at play in podcasts (Llinares et al., 2018). To better address this problem, we need to take a closer look at the profile of ordinary sources represented in slices-of-life podcasts. It's likely that practical factors inherent to podcasts, such as availability, oral expression or contacts, come into play when

journalists are looking for sources. As a result, there are probably many people and communities still in journalism's blind spot.

9. Final discussion

The three preceding papers have addressed the research questions that guided this thesis:

1. For what reasons, and in what contexts, do journalists in French-speaking Switzerland turn to slices-of-life podcast production? (*Paper 1*)
2. How do sources and journalists perceive journalistic roles in slices-of-life podcasts? (*Paper 2*)
3. How are these roles discursively negotiated in relation to practice and institutional norms? (*Paper 2*)
4. How is the relationship between ordinary sources and journalists constructed in slices-of-life podcasts? (*Paper 3*)
5. What impact does this relationship have on journalistic production? (*Paper 3*)

First, the analysis showed that journalists' motivations for producing slices-of-life podcasts lie at the intersection of personal, structural, and contextual dimensions. Personally, podcasts provided creative freedom, the opportunity to work with sound, and greater autonomy. Structurally, limited editorial oversight created room for experimentation, but also generated feelings of devaluation. Contextually, podcasts were perceived as a response to multiple crises—declining trust, professional fatigue, and economic cuts—serving both as coping strategies and as a means of reconnecting with core journalistic values (as they are perceived by the participants). At the same time, podcasts offered an editorial space beyond news cycles and media blind spots, fostering innovation in both content and format. The first paper shows how journalists frame podcasting as marginal yet emancipatory: relatively undervalued by institutions but legitimized through boundary work (Carlson, 2016), collective validation, and audience figures. This paradoxical position—a "media within the media"—renders podcasts both a refuge and a laboratory, where journalists renegotiate professional identity, news values, and the definition of journalism itself (RQ1).

Second, in slices-of-life podcasts, journalists and sources perceive roles slightly differently. Journalists most often describe themselves as connectors, fostering empathy and coexistence, followed by the role of friend, marked by care and intimacy, and finally as truth-seekers, still tied to professional ideals. By contrast, sources rarely invoke formal journalistic roles, instead emphasizing journalists' friendliness and support. These perceptions reveal a space where traditional norms—such as objectivity, detachment, and watchdog functions—are reinterpreted, contested, or re-created. Journalists negotiate between normative roles and the demands of intimate, long-form storytelling, often experiencing tensions around professional legitimacy, yet finding collective validation among peers. Ultimately, these podcasts both challenge and adapt journalistic standards, suggesting a flexible and relational understanding of journalistic roles (RQ2+3).

Finally, in slices-of-life podcasts, the journalist–source relationship is largely defined by trust, which is not innate but actively co-constructed through three interdependent components: disclosure, proximity, and time. Although explicit fact-checking is absent, these practices help journalists detect inconsistencies while granting ordinary sources a relatively active role in production, notably through open interview techniques and pre-publication review. This approach, according to journalists and sources, fosters more nuanced representations of lived experience and challenges traditional journalistic norms centered on objectivity and elite expertise. Instead, expertise is grounded in personal experience, and journalistic ethics are reoriented toward the relational process of building trust—a situated but significant shift that bridges journalism and podcast studies (RQ4+5).

Taken together, these findings shed light on how slices-of-life podcasting operates as a marginal yet meaningful space within a journalism field marked by crisis. By examining journalists' motivations, role perceptions, and relationships with sources, the three articles collectively trace the construction, tensions, and negotiations that define this emergent practice and its place in the contemporary media ecosystem.

This final discussion is therefore structured into several parts, allowing for a broader interpretation of the findings and a response to the overarching question of this

thesis. In the first part, I will discuss the articulation of the three articles in greater detail. The aim is not only to address the central issue of the thesis but also to explore its implications for research. In the second part, I will reflect on the links between journalistic and social science techniques, in order to consider more broadly how truth-seeking methods in both disciplines can be considered through a co-constructive approach grounded in an epistemology attentive to the subjectivity of discourse.

Finally, this will allow me to focus on a specific issue that emerges from this work: the perception of "sources". By critically examining the use of this term in the thesis, I will argue that a more nuanced and active understanding of sources could renew both journalism studies and podcast research.

9.1 Analysis of emerging formats: a cross-reading of the three articles of this thesis

Interestingly, the order in which I decided to present my papers in this thesis is not the order in which they were written. In fact, I first wrote the paper on practices (paper 3), then the one on roles (paper 2), and finally the one on motivations (paper 1). I decided to mention this here because I believe it helps to understand how they are linked, the inductive approach of this thesis, and a scientific method that is firmly rooted in practice.

In my research process, I started with the practices of journalists in the treatment of ordinary people stories. Faced with the observation that the practical approaches of journalists, according to their discourse and that of their sources, were different from those used in other types of journalism (see paper 3)—closer to "hard news," to simplify reality somewhat here—I delved deeper into the perception of journalistic roles in order to gain a deeper understanding of their vision of this multifaceted profession. The study of perceptions of roles (see paper 2) showed that journalists' perception of their profession differs from the predominant roles described by journalists in French-speaking Switzerland. Podcast journalists seek instead to fulfill a "service" role for their audience, in a societal sense. Faced with these two initial findings, I was confronted with a missing dimension that was

essential to the analysis of these emerging practices: how to explain this separate, marginal space that seems free from certain constraints and principles that guide the work of journalists in the newsroom. It was this missing link that was clarified in the article on motivations (see paper 1).

Finally, I started “from the end” in this final manuscript to show how this separate space is constructed through motivations, roles, and practices. Taken together, I believe and hope that these papers will contribute to discussions in journalism studies about how journalists' discourse defines the profession in different contexts of production. However, the concepts proposed in journalism studies alone were not sufficient to explain the specificity of the formats studied in this thesis. This is why a bridge with podcast studies proved essential. In the following diagram (which serves both as a support and a summary for the discussion that follows), we can see how an emerging practice—that of slices-of-life podcasts—cannot be understood (at the individual level, based on the discourse of the actors) outside of contextual and structural elements. But it also cannot be fully analyzed without taking into account the three dimensions studied in this thesis, namely motivations, roles, and practices. The dialogue between these three dimensions gives rise to a proposed model for analyzing emerging journalistic practices.

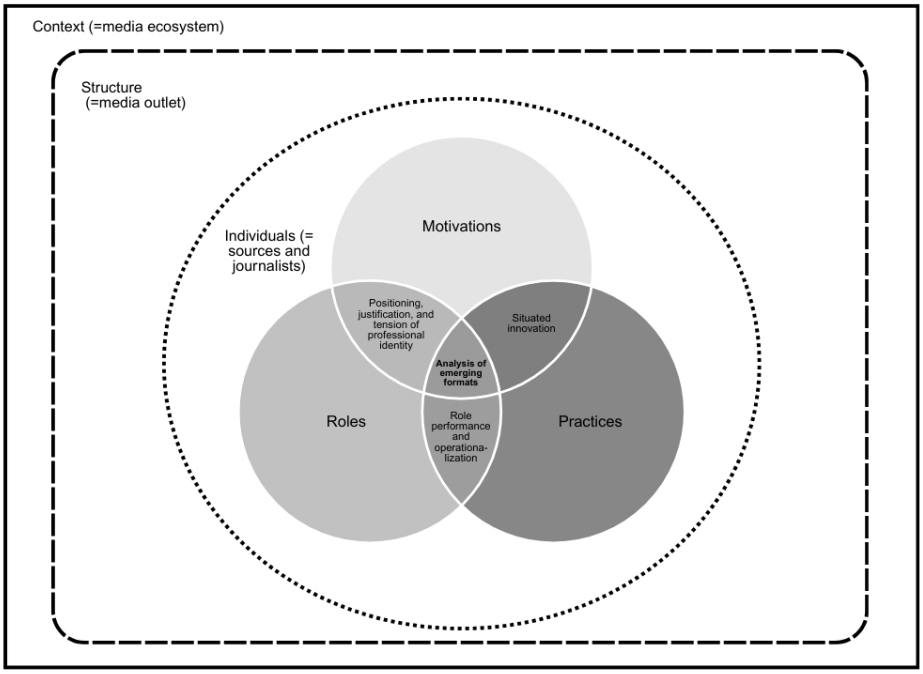

Figure 18: Motivations, roles, and practices: a cross-analysis

The cross-analysis of motivations (paper 1) and roles (paper 2) shows that slices-of-life podcasts are perceived both as refuges and as laboratories. This confirms earlier work emphasizing podcasting's intimacy, openness, and experimental quality (Lindgren, 2023; McHugh, 2016; Spinelli & Dann, 2019; Wilson, 2018), while adding nuance: experimentation in this field is not only technological or narrative, but also ethical and relational. This helps explain why journalists allow themselves to adopt roles such as connectors and friends, while developing practices specific to slices-of-life podcasting (paper 3). The reality that professionals encounter when working with intimate and subjective testimonies cannot be approached as any other journalistic subject and requires a reconfiguration of their professional role. The intersection of motivations and role perceptions thus provides a more layered understanding of both dimensions. Motivations are expressed through the ways journalists define their roles, which in turn sheds light on how they conceive of their profession and why podcasting is experienced as an opportunity. Taken together, these themes offer a nuanced perspective on how practitioners understand their activity and professional identity within this format. The study of motivations also contextualizes role perceptions, reminding us that they are embedded in personal, structural, and contextual conditions. The distinctiveness of podcasts therefore lies not

only in the intrinsic features of the medium—its intimacy, narrative affordances, and modes of distribution—but also in the contexts and structures that shape how journalists practice their craft. In this sense, the findings echo Ryfe's (2019) and Witschge and Deuze's (2020) call to study journalism as relational and context-dependent.

Article 2 further highlights tensions around legitimacy. Previous scholarship has underlined how the decline of objectivity as a central norm has led journalists to experiment with other foundations of legitimacy, such as transparency and trust (Carlson, 2017; Schudson, 2001). My findings confirm this shift, but also demonstrate that, in slices-of-life podcasts, trust with sources becomes a substitute—or even an alternative—to objectivity, especially when working with subjective testimonies. This adds complexity to the literature, which has often considered legitimacy primarily as an audience-facing issue: here, legitimacy is negotiated relationally, within the journalist–source encounter itself. This marginal space challenges the traditional forms of legitimacy journalists have historically built around fact-checking and verification; models ill-suited to subjective testimonies. Faced with this dilemma, practitioners reinvent a form of journalistic rigor, as confirmed in paper 3 (which extends the intuition of paper 1): experimentation is not confined to the audio format but extends to ethics and professional standards. To deepen the discussion around these questions of journalistic ethics, it is important to recall that in Western ethical codes, journalistic practice is often guided by three core values: the pursuit of truth, independence, and respect for individuals (Grevisse, 2016). In the case of slices-of-life podcasts, the principle of respect for individuals emerges as a central concern for journalists, who structure a significant part of their work around this value—perhaps even prioritizing it over the others. As Grevisse (2016) explains, respect for individuals also encompasses efforts to avoid producing discriminatory representations. This latter point appears as a central element in journalists' discourse, partly justifying their choice to use the slices-of-life podcast format as well as to engage in closer collaboration with their sources, with the aim of presenting the audience with a complex and nuanced representation of lived experiences.

Such “experimentation” in ethics and practice must be understood in relation to how journalists perceive their role in these contexts. Role theory (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016; Mellado, 2019) has shown that role conceptions are adaptive and context-dependent. My findings support this claim while also extending it: journalists not only adapt their roles to the slices-of-life format but foreground relational roles such as *friend* or *connector*, roles rarely highlighted in traditional typologies. In this space, they primarily define themselves as enabling connections—between audiences, and between individuals and society—and as friends, both to sources and to listeners. The role of truth-seeker does not disappear; rather, it supports these relational roles, even if occasional tensions arise. Truth-seeking, the foundational principle of journalism, is reframed as bearing witness to the truth through the lived experience of sources.

Taken together, the three articles demonstrate that slices-of-life podcasts are not merely a marginal format but a space in which journalism itself is being redefined—its identity, roles, norms, and values. This redefinition emerges from the bottom up, through everyday practices and relationships of trust and proximity, rather than through institutional directives. These results strongly resonate with scholarship suggesting that innovation often emerges from journalism’s peripheries (Atton & Hamilton, 2008; Witschge & Deuze, 2020), while also nuancing it: redefinition here is not only aesthetic or organizational, but deeply tied to professional identity and everyday negotiations with sources. More broadly, the cross-study of motivations, roles, and practices shows that renewal in journalism is driven not only by formats (in this case, slices-of-life podcasts) but also by context. This analytical model could therefore be applied to other emerging or marginal forms—such as narrative journalism, participatory journalism, or new social-media-based formats—in order to better understand the mechanisms at play in these spaces.

9.2 JOURNALISM AND SOCIAL SCIENCES: METHODS FOR ACCESSING THE TRUTH

Throughout this dissertation, and particularly during my encounters with journalists, the issue of data collection methods and approaches to accessing truth has unfolded in dialogue between journalistic and scientific techniques. As already mentioned, several journalists pointed out during research interviews that the way I conducted these conversations closely resembled their own techniques for gathering testimonies when producing slices-of-life podcasts. This observation echoes Deleu's analysis of radio documentaries, although he also reminds us that journalists are not ethnographers (Deleu, 2000). The dialogue between research methods in journalism and in the social sciences is not new. Similarities and differences have been consistently highlighted in the literature. Jean-Marie Charon (1996) notes that some journalists' trajectories are rooted in studies in the social sciences, and that journalism schools devote significant attention to these disciplines. Yet Charon (1996) also nuances this proximity, stressing differences in terms of available time, tools, and audiences. Park (1922, 1923) also distinguishes journalism as an immediate practice of describing reality from science as a sustained and systematic effort to understand it. However, it is also noteworthy that Park's (1923) distinction partly rests on the idea that journalism primarily reacts to events by signaling and disseminating them, whereas science does not aim at reaction but rather at understanding the underlying causes, structures, and regularities. The journalists examined in this dissertation are not social scientists, yet they position themselves more on the side of understanding than of reaction. This orientation brings them closer to certain methodological and epistemological challenges typically associated with the social sciences, as discussed below.

In this discussion, I wish indeed to shift the dialogue between social sciences and journalism slightly further. While the resemblance of certain working methods has been underlined, the findings of this dissertation reveal above all an inherent tension, shared both by journalists producing slices-of-life podcasts and by social scientists: the challenge of accessing subjective truth and knowledge in a context opposed to positivism, which assumes that an absolute and objective truth exists in

itself and can simply be collected. This is precisely the difficulty faced by the journalists under study, one that generates significant unease regarding the legitimacy of their work. Slices-of-life podcasts aim to make known the (necessarily subjective) realities of individuals who make up society, thereby challenging central journalistic methods such as verification of hard-facts and cross-checking of sources. As this thesis dissertation has shown, practitioners both value this form of work—seeing in it an expression of journalism's important social role—yet struggle to fully resolve the questions it raises about its journalistic status. These tensions place us at the heart of an old epistemological debate concerning subjective and objective knowledge, a debate that cuts across both journalism and the social sciences.

If we remain within a dichotomous framework between positivist and interpretivist epistemologies—whether in social sciences or journalism—the discussion cannot be pushed much further, and the debate appears insoluble. Yet this dissertation cannot be concluded without addressing the question of whether, given their limited verification and source cross-checking, the formats analyzed can genuinely claim journalistic rigor. In framing this work, I justified the use of the label "journalism" by referring to the professional status of the producers (holding press cards) and, in some cases, their employment as journalists within established media organizations. However, in a profession that is increasingly fragmented, this definition alone no longer suffices to determine what journalism is (Deuze, 2005). Moreover, in the podcasting field, identifying as "non-fiction" does not automatically situate a production within journalism and truth (Whipple et al., 2022).

When journalists engage with intimate subjects and foreground intimacy, opportunities (widely examined in this dissertation) but also risks emerge. In my interviews, when discussing working methods, one idea recurred frequently—though it has been somewhat underdeveloped in this dissertation. Journalists justified their practices (such as limited verification or lack of source cross-checking) by emphasizing that they were doing something distinctive. This introduces an interesting dimension: they do not consider their type of journalism to be superior or the only valid form. Rather, they see their practice as part of a whole. According to them, a newsroom should offer multiple types of content: investigative work, reporting of hard

facts, *and* subjective testimony. This perspective directly resonates with scholars who increasingly value methodological pluralism in knowledge production (Oreskes, 2019). Such pluralism offers a fertile path for rethinking journalistic rigor—not as synonymous with objectivity, but as a notion adaptable to different modes of narration. What becomes interesting to study, therefore, is the coexistence of journalistic methods, particularly by examining marginal and innovative approaches such as those explored in this dissertation. In the case of slices-of-life podcasts, where the primary material is the subjective testimony of ordinary individuals about their lived experiences, knowledge is justified through subjective grounding (lived experience, personal perspectives, narratives) rather than through objective validation (via research or expert voices).

In slices-of-life podcasts, journalistic rigor remains present, as evidenced by the length and complexity of their production compared to general news reporting. This rigor can be identified in: (1) the creation of mutual trust to ensure authentic speech; (2) the need to include the source's perspective in production in order to enhance reliability by aligning with lived experience, thereby granting sources a more active role in production; and (3) the adherence to baseline professional standards of rigor across all production mechanisms—image, sound, and fidelity to participants' words.

9.3 Moving beyond the dichotomy between sources and journalists

An important and distinctive feature of journalistic work in slices-of-life podcasts concerns professionals' perception of sources and their integration into the journalistic process (see chapter 3). In this context, collaboration and participation emerge as central mechanisms for accessing truth.

This raises a fundamental question: is the term *source* itself adequate? Throughout this thesis, I have referred to those who testify in podcasts as "ordinary sources." While the notion of "ordinary" has been problematized several times in the preceding chapters, I increasingly found the very term *source* to be restrictive for the

analyses and interpretations developed here. On the one hand, these individuals do provide information to journalists, justifying the term in a conventional sense. On the other hand, I argue that the concept is too reductive to capture the position they occupy in these productions.

The notion of a "source of information" is often bound to a logic of power that constrains the study of journalistic practice. As scholarship has long suggested, interactions between journalists and sources can be understood not only as power struggles but also as processes of cultural meaning-making (Berkowitz, 1997; Shoemaker & Reese, 2013). In journalism, the category of *source* usually implies multiplicity and reliability, judged by professional criteria. This explains why institutional and expert sources tend to be privileged: they are perceived as guaranteeing reliability, credibility, and legitimacy (Hickerson et al., 2011; Thomson et al., 2013; Van Leuven et al., 2014). In slices-of-life podcasts, however, ordinary individuals are not positioned as mere informants but as actors with a different kind of expertise—what Sennett (2010) and Flichy (2014) call *lived expertise*—while journalists bring professional expertise in narrating and shaping their testimonies, as this thesis has analyzed. Moreover, the journalists interviewed for this dissertation strongly convey the idea that the specific is universal, a dimension of the podcast medium highlighted by Llinares and colleagues (2018). More concretely, ordinary sources are not considered interesting merely for their individual realities. Journalists turn to them because their lived experiences serve to illuminate a reality that transcends the personal. It is for this reason that these voices can be understood, in this concluding discussion, as expert and substantive contributors, rather than mere examples or illustrations as they often appear in traditional news reporting (Kleemans et al., 2017; Lefevere et al., 2012). These stories matter journalistically precisely because they overflow their own boundaries, offering insight into a shared or at least contextually significant reality.

"Ordinary sources," as I have labeled them, therefore occupy a status that goes beyond that of a traditional source of information. Although the register is not explicitly participatory, their contribution is closer to that of actors or co-constructors

of meaning, knowledge, and truth. This is reflected in my interviews: journalists rarely described them as *sources* in the conventional sense.

Studying these ordinary participants allows us to push the conclusions of article 3 further. If they are actors in the construction of podcasts, then collaborative techniques—participation or co-construction—can be understood as methods of accessing truth (Détraz, 2021), in much the same way as traditional fact-checking, provided the context justifies it. In journalism, as in the social sciences, working with subjective experiences requires a collaborative approach that resembles the inductive notion of the "source of knowledge": one that privileges the person's lived experience and their interpretation of it (Anadón & Guillemette, 2006). From this interpretive perspective, knowledge becomes possible only through close collaboration between researchers and social actors (Anadón & Guillemette, 2006, p. 27)—or, in journalism, between professionals and those who share their experiences. Truth and knowledge thus emerge as joint achievements, constructed through dialogue and cooperation, and producing perspectives more complex than those generated exclusively from the researcher's standpoint or existing theories (Anadón & Guillemette, 2006, p. 27).

10. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This dissertation has examined the production of slices-of-life podcasts by professional journalists in French-speaking Switzerland, a format that foregrounds the voices of ordinary people and occupies a marginal yet significant position within the media ecosystem. The analysis has shown that these productions operate simultaneously as a refuge and as a laboratory: marginalized within newsrooms, they nevertheless provide journalists with a space for narrative experimentation, creative autonomy, and identity redefinition in a context marked by economic and legitimacy crises in journalism.

Theoretically, this research is situated at the intersection of journalism studies and podcast studies. Drawing on practice theory (Witschge & Harbers, 2018) and role perceptions (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017, 2018), it demonstrates how professional norms (objectivity, distance, the watchdog function) are simultaneously challenged, adapted, and reconfigured within an emerging media space. In doing so, it contributes to documenting a form of journalism that is experimental, situated, and relational, and that questions the boundaries of the profession.

Methodologically, the dissertation adopts an inductive qualitative approach inspired by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2001), enriched by newsmaking reconstruction (Reich & Barnoy, 2020) and narratives of practice (Bertaux, 2016). It relies on content analysis of semi-directive interviews conducted with both producing journalists and participating sources, systematically cross-referencing their perspectives. The choice of a limited field—French-speaking Switzerland—allowed in-depth access to all actors and provided insights into the complexity of professional negotiations within a transforming media microcosm.

Ultimately, this dissertation highlights the role of slices-of-life podcasts as sites of situated innovation, professional tensions, and the reconfiguration of journalistic norms. By examining this marginal format, it sheds light on contemporary transformations in journalism and suggests approaching the field not only through its dominant practices, but also through its experimental margins.

10.1 Generalization of results

The study of a specific context—French-speaking Switzerland—has revealed particular characteristics, while also suggesting avenues for broader generalization. Previous literature has shown that the Swiss context offers opportunities for extrapolation to other European and Western contexts (Cancela et al., 2021; Hanitzsch et al., 2019). In this sense, this dissertation can be understood as a more general contribution to knowledge on journalistic podcasting beyond Switzerland.

At the same time, the dissertation has demonstrated the specificities of a small linguistic region within Switzerland. Since context plays a crucial role in the analyses, any attempt at generalization must be undertaken with caution. The findings of this study should therefore be regarded as pointers for future research rather than as definitive conclusions. Moreover, given that professional cultures evolve significantly—and are often at the root of tensions—it is important to contextualize them carefully.

10.2 Limitations and lessons for future research

In this dissertation, and in line with the research questions that guided it, two main actors involved in the creation of slices-of-life podcasts have been studied: ordinary people sharing their testimonies, and journalists. However, future research would benefit from extending these inquiries to include additional actors such as audiences and newsroom hierarchies. This would make it possible to complete a more comprehensive analysis of these productions, by integrating perspectives from structural and contextual dimensions. Such an approach could investigate questions such as the extent of audience demand for these formats and whether journalists are meeting audience expectations. It could also provide a deeper understanding of the creation of this marginal space within newsrooms by incorporating the views of editorial hierarchies. In this dissertation, the methodological approach was deliberately practice-oriented, which justified the exclusion of these actors in order to address the guiding questions. Yet, incorporating them in future research would allow for a broader, more holistic study of the format.

In this thesis, and in light of the research questions that guided it, a qualitative approach was adopted. In a logic of methodological plurality, quantitative perspectives on the topic could in the future prove highly valuable, without replacing the depth and complexity offered by qualitative research. For example, in the podcasts studied, sources were often partially or fully anonymized, which prevented direct access. Relying on journalists sometimes worked well, but in other cases I received no responses. Many sources declined or did not reply, resulting in a sample of sources that is underrepresented compared to that of journalists—thus limiting conclusions related to this group. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, it would be necessary to conduct a dedicated study focusing on the profiles of sources who participate in this type of podcast, since such information is not readily available due to anonymity. This would help establish more clearly whether these formats truly provide opportunities to amplify marginalized voices—as suggested in some interviews and in the literature—or whether, as Swiatek (2018) cautions, podcasting, under the guise of a more democratic medium, also contributes to reproducing existing social inequalities. I consider this line of inquiry particularly important, given that scholarship on participatory forms of journalism has shown that participants in these seemingly more democratic and less elitist formats often tend to be individuals with relatively high levels of cultural and social capital (Mercier & Pignard-Cheynel, 2014). Moreover, the selection criteria established by journalists—and presented by them as inherent to the podcast medium, namely oral expressiveness and ease in telling one's story—are likely limiting factors in achieving a balanced representation of the population and reaching voices that are usually absent in traditional media.

10.3 THESIS CONTRIBUTIONS

This dissertation makes several contributions to ongoing debates in journalism studies and podcast studies.

- **To journalism studies**, it documents forms of experimental, relational, and marginal journalism that nevertheless generate new professional norms. By focusing on slices-of-life podcasts within established media institutions or created by professional journalists, the study highlights how practices situated at the margins of newsroom activity can act as laboratories for innovation and reconfiguration of journalistic identity.
- **To podcast studies**, it demonstrates that podcasting is not only a technical or sonic innovation but also an organizational, relational, and ethical one. Podcasts provide spaces for narrative experimentation, redefinitions of professional roles, and new forms of interaction between journalists and ordinary sources.
- **In normative terms**, the research illustrates a displacement of the center of gravity away from classical norms such as objectivity and distance, toward an ethics of relationality and co-construction. In doing so, it contributes to reframing how journalistic authority and legitimacy are negotiated in emerging media spaces.

Finally, this study advances the understanding of marginal forms of journalism *within* established media institutions, rather than exclusively in alternative structures (Medeiros & Badr, 2022) or entirely outside professional journalism (Örnebring & Möller, 2018). It thereby expands the scope of inquiry into how journalism evolves at its experimental edges, while still being embedded in institutional contexts.

10.4 Openings

By examining a marginal and particular form of journalism, this dissertation underscores the need for plurality in the study of journalistic genres, as well as the importance of maintaining a plurality of media practices within the professional field of journalism itself. The analysis of such forms is enriched by a cross-examination of motivations, roles, and practices as expressed in individual narratives, while also inviting future research that embraces a broader perspective by including all the actors involved in these productions.

Moreover, slices-of-life podcasts represent a promising terrain for inquiry across other fields of research, either outside or in dialogue with journalism and podcast studies. Certain dimensions of these productions fell beyond the theoretical scope of this dissertation and were thus left unexplored, yet they raise compelling scientific questions. One of them, which emerged early in my findings but remained outside the frame of this study, concerns the profiles of the journalists producing these formats. How can we explain that, at least in French-speaking Switzerland, an overwhelming majority of these professionals are women? A feminist or gender studies perspective would provide the appropriate framework to address this question with the nuance and complexity it requires, avoiding naturalizing assumptions and instead sharpening our understanding of how broader societal issues intersect with specific journalistic practices.

Finally, the discussion of collaborative methods of accessing knowledge and truth inevitably raises questions about my own research posture. While it has been shown that journalists draw upon methods from the social sciences in their fieldwork, what might researchers, in turn, learn from journalistic practices? What if journalism research were to extend its collaboration with practitioners by integrating them more directly into the research process itself? Such an approach, grounded in the belief that collaboration can yield more complex understandings of professional mechanisms, could represent a significant methodological contribution to journalism studies—particularly in a context as fragmented and crisis-ridden as the one we face today. Indeed, the legitimacy and economic crisis in

journalism, which has been the starting point of this thesis, might be tackled more productively through such common and collaborative efforts, by creating spaces in which scholars and journalists reflect together on the ways it can be understood and addressed.

11. TABLES AND FIGURES INDEX

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12. APPENDIX

Code book and occurrences (initial coding)

Code	Description	Occurrences in Initial Coding
(No) training	How the journalist trained (or did not) in the format.	8
(Search for) truth	Refers to the concept of truth or the search for truth.	70
Added value of ordinary accounts	Refers to the journalistic and informational added value of using "ordinary" sources.	32
Agency of the source	Refers to the active role of the source.	312
After the podcast	Refers to phases following the publication of the podcast.	7
Anonymity	Refers to whether or not anonymity was granted to sources in the podcast, and how it was implemented.	33
Apprehension of sources	Refers to sources' fears or concerns.	11
Blind spots	Refers to journalism's blind spots.	15
Choice of topics	Refers to how podcast topics or episodes are selected.	26
Complementarity of source profiles	When the journalist highlights the complementarity of several source profiles.	14
Consent	Addresses the question of consent to the publication of testimonies.	5
Creation process	When the journalist discusses the podcast creation process as a whole.	4
Editorial freedom	Refers to issues of editorial freedom in relation to the podcast.	9
Editorial project	The podcast's editorial project.	27
Editing	Refers to editing, the practice of editing, etc.	54
Empathy	Refers to feelings of empathy or the creation of empathy.	19
Ease of format	Refers to the accessibility, lightness, and ease of the podcast format (to produce and/or to listen to).	2
Expert sources and elites	When the journalist mentions expert sources, i.e., sources recognized for academic or professional knowledge. This also includes documentary sources: studies, surveys, etc.	39
Feedback	Refers to feedback from colleagues, management, the public, friends and family, and sources on the finished product.	142
Finished products	When the journalist describes characteristics of the final product, or what they wanted for the final product.	60

First contact	First contact between sources and journalists.	42
Generating public interest	When the journalist refers to the importance of, and/or strategies for, generating public interest and capturing attention.	13
Impact of the podcast	Refers to the potential impacts generated by the podcast or by the journalist's work on sources.	47
Injustice	An explicit feeling of injustice is addressed.	7
Interest in the podcast	Refers to or explains personal interest in the podcast medium.	26
Journalist–source interaction	Describes interactions between sources and journalists.	183
Journalist/human tension	When the journalist mentions a tension, opposition, or complementarity between their role as a journalist and as a "human being."	7
Media consumption	Refers to the media consumption of the interviewee.	12
Media experiences	Refers to media experiences outside the podcasts studied.	37
Motivations	Discusses motivations for creating or participating in the podcast.	105
Narration	Refers to the way stories are told.	4
Opinion on "traditional" journalism	When the journalist or source expresses an opinion on more traditional formats of journalism.	26
Oral expression	Refers to oral expression.	31
Ordinary sources	When the journalist refers to ordinary sources.	72
Perception of podcasts in newsrooms	When the journalist refers to the place and recognition (or lack thereof) of podcasts within their newsroom.	38
Perception of the "traditional" journalist	When the journalist or source expresses a perception of what a "traditional" journalist is.	34
Personal involvement	The journalist refers to a personal aspect, preference, or element of private life.	48
Podcast specificity	When the journalist explains what the podcast medium enabled them to do, and how this format differs.	107
Popularity of the podcast	Refers to the popularity of the podcast with audiences and/or within the profession beyond the journalist's newsroom.	16
Preconceptions and lack of knowledge	The journalist discusses her preconceptions and lack of knowledge about a given field.	15

Professional conduct and ethics	Refers to ethical and/or deontological questions or stances regarding journalistic practices.	37
Proximity	Refers to proximity between sources and journalists in their interactions.	153
Protection of sources	When the journalist refers to the duty or practice of protecting a source, whether through anonymity or other means of shielding them from potential harmful effects of the podcast.	28
Radio	Refers to a personal link, or not, with the radio medium, or offers a comparison between radio and podcast.	12
Recording	Refers to the recording stage.	32
Refusal or reluctance of sources	Refers to situations where sources refused to testify or expressed reservations about the final product.	34
Role and stance of the journalist	Refers to how the role and stance of journalists are perceived.	94
Selection of sources	How journalists searched for, found, and selected sources for their podcasts.	55
Societal questions	Expresses an opinion or observation on the functioning of society in general, or on the way the participant wishes to contribute to it.	33
Sound	When the sound component or sound recording is mentioned by the journalist.	8
Source profiles	When the journalist refers to the profiles of the sources encountered.	24
Specific practices	Set of practices described as specific to podcasting.	116
Time component	Refers to time—allocated to podcast creation or to episodes.	124
Transparency	When the journalist refers to their transparency toward sources, or when a practice of transparency is later identified by the researcher.	12
Trust	Addresses the issue of trust (between sources and journalists, or between audiences and journalists).	136
Understanding others	Refers to the idea that the podcast enables better understanding of unfamiliar realities.	17
Unraveling of speech	Identifies moments when a source opened up and agreed to testify.	68
Voice	When the component of “voice” is addressed.	32
Total		**2’882**