

## Radio Mentions: An Analysis of Radio Personalities and Ethical Behavior

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Radio mentions (RM) are advertising messages read live by the presenters and coworkers of radio programs. However, this type of commercial is expressly forbidden by the code of ethics for journalists due to the conflict of interest and loss of transparency it can entail. This article analyzes the presence of RM by time slot and product category. It also studies the characteristics of RM, the involvement of presenters with the advertised product or brand, and the existence of separation lines between editorial and advertising contents. The research is based on the analysis of a sample from the 12 stations (full-service stations and music stations) with the highest audience shares in Spain. The results show a higher presence and involvement of program directors than of their coworkers and a general absence of sonic triggers to forewarn listeners of advertising.

*Keywords:* advertising, codes of conduct, endorsers, media policy, radio

Advertising is the main—and often only—source of funding for private radio stations. The advertising format with highest presence in the medium is the radio spot, a prerecorded message between 20 and 30 seconds long, “brief, repeatable and in no way related to the programming it is included in, so that its contents are transferable to any point of broadcast” (Perona Páez, 2007, p. 224). This type of advertisement is usually broadcast during a commercial break and is clearly separated from the programming so listeners can distinguish between advertising and editorial content. However, these breaks are often long and tend to use an unchanging information discourse style, which imitates that of radio journalism in which products from categories as diverse as finance and health are presented in the same manner (Perelló-Oliver & Muela-Molina, 2013), provoking in the listener a rather unfavorable attitude (Potter, 2009).

In contrast, *mentions*, defined as “advertisements live read by the presenters, team or coworkers of programs” (Infoadex, 2014, p. 299), are the second most common advertising format in Spanish radio after spots. In particular, in full-service radio stations, the relative weight of radio spots in relation to the totality of the programming is approximately 11% compared with 1% for mentions, whereas in music radio stations these percentages go down to 7% and 0.4%, respectively (AEA, 2017). However, the trend

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emerging from previous studies is that advertisers are increasingly relying on mentions rather than radio spots (Espinosa Mirabet & Vico Blanco, 2016, p. 238). According to Balsebre et al. (2006), this is partly because "it is the ideal format for many advertisers, who are convinced that the direct involvement of the presenter-celebrity with the advertising increases the notoriety and effectiveness of the advertising message" (p. 158). In this respect, this format has received little attention from the scientific community, which justifies our interest in researching it to add to the literature by studying two of its distinctive characteristics. First, as indicated in the definition, mentions are read by actual presenters who, as journalists and opinion leaders, have great influence on the audience. Second, this type of endorsement is embedded within the programming, usually with an absence of content separation lines or sonic triggers that would warn listeners of its commercial nature (Muela-Molina, Perelló-Oliver, & Hormigos-Ruiz, 2016).

While music radio aims to entertain, information radio demands a higher cognitive effort from listeners who need to understand and process the news items or comments to form a personal opinion. Advertisers take advantage of this active listening to broadcast advertising, since "the amount of attention paid to the program enhanced the attention paid to the commercials and recall of those commercials" (Moorman, Neijens, & Smit, 2005, p. 56). Thus, when advertising is embedded within the program as an additional item introduced by presenters, listeners reduce their capacity to activate their attention filters voluntarily (Nebenzahl & Jaffe, 1998)—that is, the commercial communication is unexpected and included within the information or news context. The message therefore feels like part of the programming and "advertisements were more effective in terms of memory when embedded in programs that were rated significantly more interesting" (Norris & Colman, 1996, p. 484).

In this regard, industry-supported research such as the study by Clear Channel Media ("CCM+E study," 2014) conducted together with the University of Southern California, confirms the efficiency of the presence and use of radio personalities, because listeners equate an on-air personality endorsement to a friend's recommendation and six of 10 listeners trust the opinions of radio hosts. More than half of the study's participants decided to trust brands, products, and services based on a recommendation from their favorite on-air personality. This type of endorser develops a powerful relationship with the audience because his or her familiarity and personal touch invites listeners to take the message to heart and to take action ("CCM+E study," 2014). Furthermore, another study by the University of Southern California shows that 51% of respondents considered buying or actually have purchased a product advertised during their favorite personality's show and 52% confirmed that their favorite personality influences their opinion (Radio Advertising Bureau, 2015). Nevertheless, although many professionals defend the active involvement of journalists in advertising and its effectiveness for advertisers and campaigns, critics respond that to blur the lines between advertising and journalism exploits consumers' trust in the media and deceives them outright by influencing their purchasing decisions by creating confusion between paid and unpaid content. For Erjavec and Kovačić (2010), the actual loser is the audience, which is not informed about these problematic and questionable practices, although basic journalistic values are also undermined by advertising revenue. In this way, some radio journalists have expressed their position against their own commercial collaborations (Muela-Molina, 2001). Additionally, Harro-Loit and Saks (2006) argue that nonacceptable promotional material is increasingly blurred as a result of media strategies used to ensure business survival and attract necessary advertising revenue. In contrast, the recently introduced term "native advertising," specific to digital media, refers to "content that bears a

similarity to the news, feature articles, product reviews, entertainment, and other material that surrounds it online" (FTC, 2015, para. 1).

These practices breach the principle of journalistic independence (Joyella, 2014; "Should a journalist," 2014), since they may involve a conflict of interest, such as when a journalist has to report on the unethical behavior of a company while collaborating in its advertising campaign ("Julia Otero," 2014). In many cases, radio personalities are considered "relatable" and "authentic" by their audience and listeners remain loyal to the same personality for years ("CCM+E study," 2014). In fact, the Spanish regard radio as the most reliable source of information, followed by the press and television (Toharia, 2011). This trust translates into a loyal audience of 27,411,000 listeners, according to the Estudio General de Medios [General Media Study] (EGM; AIMC, 2016). In this context, radio personalities play a vital role as journalists and opinion leaders, and are responsible for the content and editorial policy of the programs they direct.

This article highlights the importance of studying the role of journalists and their responsibility toward the audience when endorsing mentions. Media responsibility and the meaning transfer model provide the theoretical framework for the general objective of the study, namely, to analyze the level of respect that presenters have for the principles included in the code of ethics of the sector, focusing on the following specific objectives: (1) Identify the sonic triggers that separate commercial contents from programming; (2) quantify the presence of on-air radio mentions (RM) and their characteristics; and (3) analyze the factors that underlay radio presenters' involvement with the message, product, and brand.

### **Ethical Framework and the Principle of Transparency**

The review of previous literature found no academic studies that empirically analyze the presence and use of RM and their characteristics as an advertising format voiced by journalists, despite their influence on public opinion as informers. This lack of previous work on which to base the present study makes it relevant to analyze the deontological framework that regulates the subject from an advertising and journalistic perspective.

The advertising self-regulatory system in Spain is managed by the Asociación para la Autorregulación de la Comunicación Comercial [Association for the Self-regulation of Commercial Communication] (hereafter Autocontrol), whose Code of Conduct, in Article 13 on the principle of authenticity, demands that "advertising will be identifiable as such whatever its form or medium used" (Autocontrol, 2011, p. 4), a very general requirement, not at all descriptive of how this basic principle is to be fulfilled. The Consolidated Code of Advertising and Marketing Communication Practice of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) describes in a similar way the principle of identification in Article 9: "Marketing communications should be clearly distinguishable as such, whatever their form and whatever the medium used" (ICC, 2011, p. 8). Additionally, in Article 23, the principle of responsibility falls on the media agent that hosts the advertising: "Publishers, media owners or contractors, who publish, transmit, deliver or distribute marketing communications, should exercise due care in the acceptance of them and their presentation to the public" (ICC, 2011, p. 14).

The deontological code for Spanish journalists establishes in Point 6 of its principles of procedure that, "in order to avoid misleading or confusing users, the journalist is obliged to make a formal and rigorous distinction between information and advertising" (FAPE, 2010, para. 41). Point 7 asserts that "the journalist will not accept, directly or indirectly, payments or rewards from third parties to promote, guide, influence or publish information or opinions of any nature" (para. 43). Fulfilling this last principle therefore entails journalists' refusal to recommend, give their opinion, or provide information on the characteristics of any product or service in exchange for economic compensation. The Code of Ethics of the American Society of Professional Journalists is more explicit and adds that to preserve journalistic independence and avoid conflicts of interest, journalists must deny favored treatment to advertisers, distinguish news from advertising, and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two (Society of Professional Journalists, 2014).

To ensure the protection of radio listeners in the United Kingdom, the rule of recognition of advertising of the Code of Broadcast Advertising specifically refers to the participation of journalists: "A person who currently and regularly reads the news on radio or television may voice radio advertisements but must not advertise products or services that are likely to be seen to compromise the impartiality of their news-reading role" (CAP, 2014, p. 13). In this context, the Ofcom Broadcasting Code incorporates the principle of transparency: "Listeners should know when material is broadcast in return for payment or other valuable consideration. Signaling is the means by which transparency is achieved" (Ofcom, 2013, p. 64).

### **Theoretical Background and Research Questions**

#### ***Advertising and Radio Owners Responsibility***

The analysis of Polonsky and Hyman (2007) concludes that developing a bad social responsibility policy in media harms the image of advertisers in the long term, so that stakeholders demand responsible advertising consistent with social interests. Other approaches are based on the need to establish a specific legal framework that would regulate the media accountability policy in advertising. Van Cuilenburg and McQuail (2003), Reinard and Ortiz (2005), and Gibbons and Humphreys (2012) compare the diverse paradigms of media social responsibility policies in the United States and Europe, revealing that the American model is more sensitive regarding media accountability.

Some studies (Harrison & Woods, 2001; Potschka, 2012) focus on radio media to establish that in Europe, where self-regulation in advertising is traditionally important, the European Commission allows its different states to freely regulate these policies. A further line of investigation focuses on the need to establish a new ethical advertising model for media. In this regard, Lowe and Berg (2013) propose a model adapted to social requirements and public interest that would ensure the permanent accountability of media toward its different stakeholders, regardless of the legal obligations imposed by law. In the same line, Wilkins and Christians (2009) and Servaes and Tamayo (2013) contend that the requirements of ethical conduct in media advertising should elicit a critical discussion rather than try to control or manipulate opinion, as well as ensure that objectiveness is maintained to protect the audience's right to make personal value judgements.

To ensure compliance with the transparency principle, broadcasters are responsible for giving, at appropriate times, clear information within programming to inform listeners of commercial arrangements. Appropriate signaling has four aspects to consider: (1) wording, (2) positioning—signal at the outset of each instance of commercial material, (3) frequency—longer output requires signaling at appropriate intervals, and (4) identity—title of the third party must be stated on air (Ofcom, 2011). Finally, the Broadcast Code of Advertising Practice (BCAP) summarizes the rule of recognition of advertising as follows:

Advertisements must be obviously distinguishable from editorial content, especially if they use a situation, performance or style reminiscent of editorial content, to prevent the audience being confused between the two. The audience should quickly recognize the message as an advertisement. (CAP, 2014, p. 12)

There are four different ways of signaling the separation of advertisements from radio programming matter: word, sound effect, musical effect, and audio logo (Muela-Molina et al., 2016). These principles lead to the following question:

*RQ1: Are there signals of content separation at the beginning and end of RM?*

#### ***Radio Personalities and Celebrity Endorsements***

*Presence of RM.* Literature exploring celebrity endorsements has generally employed the source credibility model (Ohanian, 1990) to show that an expert or noncelebrity endorsement is more effective than an endorsement by a celebrity (Biswas, Biswas, & Das, 2006; Eisend & Langner, 2010; Gaiad & Rached, 2010). According to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), an independent agency of the U.S. government whose mission is to implement and ensure compliance with the law for the protection of competition and consumers, an endorsement is defined as any verbal statement from an individual or the name or seal of an organization “that consumers are likely to believe reflects the opinions, beliefs, findings, or experiences of a party other than the sponsoring advertiser, even if the views expressed by that party are identical to those of the sponsoring advertiser” (FTC, 2009, p. 53124). Alternatively, other works have been based on the meaning transfer model (Amos Holmes, & Strutton, 2008; Doss, 2011; Silvera & Austad, 2004; Sun, 2013), which argues that celebrities add value through the process of meaning transfer as opposed to anonymous models (or anonymous actors) because “celebrities deliver meanings of extra subtlety, depth, and power” (McCracken, 1989, p. 315). Although advertisers are ultimately responsible for their advertising, the FTC argues that “because celebrity endorsers are liable for what they say, not for the rest of the advertisement, their lack of control over the final version of a commercial does not warrant immunity” (FTC, 2009, p. 53128).

A radio personality may be defined as “any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good” (McCracken, 1989, p. 310). In the case of journalists, this refers to their trustworthiness as informers and to their influence on public opinion, transferred to the advertised product or brand. The intention of advertisers, therefore, is to convey this perceived trustworthiness and to create an image for the brand based on the person rather than on the product itself

(Kertz & Ohanian, 1992). Advertisers take advantage of radio professionals' credibility, opinion leadership, and audience trust and use them to advertise products and brands that, in many instances, the actual journalists have had no direct contact with. In a similar way, news personalities and sportscasters often attain celebrity status and are used to promote a product (Belch & Belch, 2013) although their presence in magazine advertising is very low, at barely 1%.

Morning radio has the highest number of listeners and levels of advertising (AEA, 2017) and features the best-known and most prestigious presenters. Although advertising certain products, such as tobacco, is banned in this medium, other types, such as alcohol, food or health, and beauty products, have their own specific regulations regarding advertising content and format. This fact and the need to obtain information on the type of products more frequently advertised by radio personalities leads to the second research question:

*RQ2: What is the presence of RM by time slot and product/service category?*

The presence of radio personalities makes advertising more expensive because, as socially recognized opinion leaders, their inclusion in the message increases its efficiency. Silvera and Austad (2004) argue that "correspondent inferences about the endorser (i.e., increased beliefs that the endorser truly likes the advertised product) resulted in a more favorable attitude toward the endorsed product" (p. 1521) than toward the endorser. Additionally, Amos et al. (2008) add that when celebrities endorse a product, the qualities surrounding a particular celebrity will transfer to the company, brand, or product. When recommending the product, the presenter can address the audience as a spokesperson, a consumer, or in a journalistic style (Khatri, 2006; Seno & Lukas, 2007). In contrast, Priester and Petty (2003) argue that if a recipient "can be confident that an expert source will be willing to provide accurate information because of his or her high trustworthiness, they may forgo the effortful task of scrutinizing the message and, instead, unthinkingly accept the conclusion as valid" (p. 409), which is applicable to commercials and advertising information offered by journalists. Buchholz and Smith (1991) agree with this when highly involved consumers are exposed to radio commercials, so that it seems important to analyze whether the endorsements are voiced by the radio host or by another person participating in the program, such as a news commentator or coworker, leading to the following question:

*RQ3: Which type of mention and role of radio presenter is the most prevalent?*

*Involvement of Radio Presenters in Advertising.* For Keel and Natarajan (2012), "the perception of the endorser's involvement exerts more influence on consumers' attitudes and purchase intent than actual involvement" (p. 695). In this regard, one of the factors used to evaluate the level of involvement of the endorser with the advertised product, service, or brand is the subject used in the endorsement. For Balsebre et al. (2006), if the radio presenter "doesn't participate actively and personally in the mention, the format loses values and goes on to become something similar to a radio spot" (p. 159). Thus, the first-person pronoun / is also known as the "implied author" because the presenter reveals personal details about himself or herself. What the / says is assumed to be "true" (Stern, 1991, p. 16) because it is the revelation of a presenter who has no reason to lie. The third person, in contrast, is "an authoritative source [that] stems from both omniscience and impartiality (she or he knows everything, but is not

directly involved)" (Stern, 1991, p. 13). In general, a radio presenter is viewed as a truthful commentator who aspires to win the confidence of his or her audience and is a vehicle for informational appeals. The presenter's goal is to convey information about products or services rather than talk about himself or herself (Stern, 1991). Although the subject pronoun used in the advertising message is one of the main indicators of endorser involvement, the number of times the brand or product name is mentioned is also important. Additionally, petitioning listeners to act a certain way regarding the product is another way in which radio personalities become involved with the brand, finalizing the message in an imperative mode (McCracken, 1989; Seno & Lukas, 2007). This reality leads to the following question:

*RQ4: What is the involvement of radio presenters by subject used, number of times that a brand is mentioned and call to action?*

### **Methodology**

#### ***Sample***

The conception of this work requires quantitative research based on the content analysis of the advertising mentions included in the sample under study. Berelson (1952) sustains that "content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (p. 18). To this end, the sample was selected from national commercial radio stations with the highest audience shares according to data from the EGM, coinciding with the first months of the year (AIMC, 2016). The EGM is the quarterly study on media audience. The month chosen for obtaining the sample was June 2016 due to its higher investment according to Infoadex, the annual study on advertising investment.

Once the radio stations were identified, sample units were taken only from those stations that broadcast on a national level and in Spanish: Cadena Ser, Onda Cero y Cadena Cope (full-service stations); C40, Dial, Europa FM, C100, Rock FM, Kiss FM, Máxima FM, Radio Olé and M80 (music). The entire 24-hour programming of the 12 radio stations selected was recorded over four weeks, on three consecutive days, on an external storage device. Then, the recordings were analyzed for the registration and coding of variables using audio computer software, Sony Sound Forge Audio Studio 9.0.

To preserve the reliability of content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002), first, a single coder performed the active listening of the 288 hours of programming to detect and indicate all instances that included an advertising mention read by a journalist within the programming. The criterion used by the first coder to include or not a message in the sample was based on whether the mention was paid or unpaid. In this way, the main discriminating factor was the context in which the brand was mentioned: If it was part of the editorial content of a program, included in a news item, or a discursive element of an analysis on current affairs, then it was not considered a paid mention. In a second phase, two different coders analyzed in two successive rounds the body of the sample, which included 146 advertising mentions. This allowed the detection of errors and contradictions associated with the intersubjective perception of the researchers, and thus guaranteed the reliability of the codification process. The following variables were used.

**Variables**

*Radio Station Format.* The two formats were (1) full-service stations and (2) music.

*Signaling.* The types of sonic triggers were identified based on two of the four rules described by Ofcom (2011): Wording and positioning have been operationalized by Muela-Molina et al. (2016) and termed *audio signal input separation* when preceding the mention and *audio signal output separation* when following the mention. Both include the following attributes: (1) absence; (2) wording—prerecorded message or live verbal warning from the presenter; (3) sound effect or music—nonmusical sound (generally very brief; e.g., time signals) or musical input (an extract from music or track, noncorporate); (4) audio logo—brand music and/or slogan, claim, and name of program and/or radio station.

*Time Slot.* Coinciding with the EGM classification, we have characterized this variable with the following attributes: (1) early morning (12 to 5:59 a.m.), (2) morning (6 to 11:59 a.m.), (3) midday (12 to 3:59 p.m.), (4) evening (4 to 7:59 p.m.), and (5) night (8 to 11:59 p.m.).

*Product Category.* This work has used the list of 22 products/services composed by Infoadex (2014), the annual study on advertising investment: (1) Food; (2) Cars; (3) Drinks; (4) Beauty and Hygiene; (5) Construction; (6) Culture, Education and Media; (7) Sports and Leisure; (8) Distribution and Restaurants; (9) Energy; (10) Office Equipment, Electronics/IT, and Retail; (11) Finance; (12) Home; (13) Industrial, Work Material, Agriculture; (14) Cleaning; (15) Personal Items; (16) Health; (17) Public and Private Services; (18) Tobacco; (19) Telecommunications and Internet; (20) Textile and Clothing; (21) Transportation, Travel, and Tourism; (22) Miscellaneous.

*Type of Mention.* Mentions can be explicit or copresentational (merely appearing with the product), and although the role of the radio presenter differs, all mentions are read live within the program. Thus, the attributes of this variable have been operationalized as follows:

1. *Introductory:* In a copresentational form, the radio presenter mentions only the brand as an introduction to another speaker who describes the product and executes the rest of the message.
2. *Descriptive:* In a copresentational form, the journalist takes the role of a spokesperson who refers to a brand or describes a product or offer using a descriptive message without or with low involvement.
3. *Testimonial:* In an explicit form, the presenter takes the role of consumer and communicates his or her knowledge based on experience to endorse the product, recommending its characteristics or benefits and sharing with the listener his or her positive consumer experience, with a high level of involvement.

*Role of Presenter.* Role is the level of responsibility within the program of the person who voices the advertisement. This variable has the following attributes:

1. *Director*: Due to his or her work, the director is a well-known journalist, responsible for running the program. As a public opinion leader, he or she has great influence on the audience and assumes the roles of editor, columnist, and commentator.
2. *Coworker*: Other journalists, commentators, or columnists collaborate as guests in certain fixed sections of the program.

*Subject of Mention*. Terms are (1) *I, we*; (2) *you*; (3) *he, she, they*.

*Frequency*. Frequency is the number of times that a brand is mentioned: (1) once, (2) twice, or (3) three times or more.

*Call to Action*. When the level of involvement with the endorsed product or brand is high, the journalist, as well as communicating the message, asks the audience to acquire or purchase the product, call for more information, or visit a Web page, among other imperatives. Therefore, this variable has two attributes: (1) absence or (2) presence.

## Results

The first general results show the presence of RM by type of radio station. Thus, 54.8% of analyzed RM have been broadcast in full-service radio stations, and the remaining 45.2% in music radio stations. Regarding the requirement of using sonic triggers to separate program and advertising contents and in response to RQ1, Table 1 gives results of their presence or absence, and information on the type of signal used just before and after a RM. In this respect, it is worth noting that the absence of sound indicators before the broadcast of a RM is high (73.3%), considering their inclusion is compulsory and should be planned for by journalists themselves or by whoever is responsible for the contents of the program. This absence dilutes the commercial content with the journalistic discourse of the program and makes it difficult for listeners to identify the advertising nature of the message.

**Table 1. Signals of Content Separation.**

	Audio Signal Input Separation		Audio Signal Output Separation	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Absence	107	73.3	19	13.0
Verbal	35	24.0	23	15.8
Effect/Music	4	2.7	77	52.7
Audio Logo	0	.0	27	18.5
Total	146	100.0	146	100.0

Conversely, RM usually include sonic triggers at the end of broadcast so listeners were aware that the message was commercial and not part of the program. In fact, 52.7% of RM used sound effects or some type of musical input to warn listeners of the advertising nature of the message.

In response to RQ2, the data obtained from the sample under study confirm that 58.9% of the 146 RM analyzed are concentrated in the morning time slot (6 to 11:59 a.m.), followed by the midday and evening time slots with 14.4% and 12.3% of RM, respectively. Products and services belonging to the categories of office equipment, electronics/IT, and retail (17.8%) and finance (26.7%) are most frequently advertised in this format. Additionally, when crossing the variables type of product and role of presenter (Table 2), it is worth noting that highly sensitive products, such as those related to health, feature the director of the program.

In response to RQ3, and regarding the most prevalent role of radio presenter, Table 3 shows that 51.4% of RM are voiced by the director of the program, while 48.6% are voiced by coworkers. Furthermore, crossing these data with the type of RM indicates that the number of coworkers is high in introductory mentions (64.8%) whereas the presence of directors is predominant in descriptive mentions (76.5%). In comparison, the number of testimonial mentions in which the director or coworker describes their experience regarding the advertised product or service is very low (4.8%).

Regarding RQ4 and the way in which the director approaches the audience and advertising message, the data indicate that 92.5% of the 146 analyzed mentions use the third-person singular or plural which, as mentioned previously, implies an authoritative source that stems from both omniscience and impartiality and establishes a certain distance with the advertised product or service. Thus, Table 4 summarizes the existing relationships between the professional that reads the mention and the number of times that the brand is named. It is worth noting that, compared with coworkers, directors mention the brand more frequently.

Additionally, as shown in Table 5, 44% of RM that address the audience with an explicit request to purchase a product or service or contact the advertising company in any way, are voiced by program directors, whereas in the remaining 56%, coworkers make this request.

**Table 2. Role of Presenter and Product Category.**

	Director	Coworker	Total
	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency
	Horizontal %	Horizontal %	Horizontal %
Food	2	2	4
	50.0	50.0	100.0
Cars	3	0	3
	100.0	0	100.0
Drinks	10	1	11
	90.9	9.1	100.0
Beauty and Hygiene	0	1	1
	0	100.0	100.0
Culture, Education, Media	1	0	1
	100.0	0	100.0
Sport and Free time	4	3	7
	57.1	42.9	100.0
Office Equipment, Electronics/IT, and Retail	13	13	26
	50.0	50.0	100.0
Finance	14	25	39
	35.9	64.1	100.0
Home	1	8	9
	11.1	88.9	100.0
Health	6	4	10
	60.0	40.0	100.0
Public and Private Services	2	0	2
	100.0	0	100.0
Telecommunications and Internet	7	8	15
	46.7	53.3	100.0
Textile and Clothing	1	2	3
	33.3	66.7	100.0
Transport, Travel, and Tourism	9	4	13
	69.2	30.8	100.0

Miscellaneous	2	0	2
	100.0	0	100.0
Total	75	71	146
	51.4	48.6	100.0

Note.  $\chi^2(28, N = 146) = 107.187, p < .001$ .

**Table 3. Role of Presenter and Type of Mention.**

	Director	Coworker	Total
	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency
	Horizontal %	Horizontal %	Horizontal %
		Vertical %	Vertical %
Introductory	31	57	88
	35.2	64.8	100.0
	41.3	80.3	60.3
Descriptive	39	12	51
	76.5	23.5	100.0
	52.0	16.9	34.9
Testimonial	5	2	7
	71.4	28.6	100.0
	6.7	2.8	4.8
Total	75	71	146
	51.4	48.6	100.0
	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note.  $\chi^2(2, N = 146) = 23.169, p < .001$ .

**Table 4. Role of Presenter and Frequency.**

	Director	Coworker	Total
	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency
	Horizontal %	Horizontal %	Horizontal %
		Horizontal %	Horizontal %
Once	6	11	17
	35.3	64.7	100.0
Twice	21	12	33
	63.6	36.4	100.0
Three times or more	48	48	96
	50.0	50.0	100.0
Total	75	71	146

	Director	Coworker	Total
	Frequency Horizontal %	Frequency Horizontal %	Frequency Horizontal %
Once	6 35.3	11 64.7	17 100.0
Twice	21 63.6	12 36.4	33 100.0
Three times or more	48 50.0	48 50.0	96 100.0
Total	75 51.4	71 48.6	146 100.0

Note.  $\chi^2(2, N = 146) = 3,818, p < .148.$

**Table 5. Role of Presenter and Call to Action.**

	Director	Coworker	Total
	Frequency Horizontal %	Frequency Horizontal %	Frequency Horizontal %
Absence	24 80.0	6 20.0	30 100.0
Presence	51 44.0	65 56.0	116 100.0
Total	75 51.4	71 48.6	146 100.0

Note.  $\chi^2(1, N = 146) = 12,389, p < .001.$

### Conclusions and Discussion

The participation of information professionals in commercial strategies based on advertising mentions is an area of scientific interest that has received little attention. In fact, we found no previous academic research on this subject. In this regard, our investigation provides a new line of research into the field of communication in general and radio in particular, by focusing on personalities of recognized prestige and social influence who collaborate in advertising campaigns (Kertz & Ohanian, 1992; McCracken, 1989). The main objective of our study has been to analyze the participation of journalists as celebrity endorsers in RM and their involvement with the message, product, and brand, even when the code of ethics of the sector does not allow this practice. This ethical limitation stems from the potential conflict of interest and loss of impartiality that may arise (Joyella, 2014; "Should a journalist," 2014), and also from the influence these personalities have as public opinion leaders, well-known to society.

The results show that the presence of RM is significant in programs that have the highest audience shares and feature well-known presenters, usually in the morning time slot. It is particularly striking that some RM illicitly advertise restricted products, such as high-alcohol drinks, a practice banned by law. The study also confirms the collaboration of some journalists, considered opinion leaders, who promote highly sensitive products related to health or finance. These findings require a specific, more in-depth future analysis.

Another relevant result is the absence of content separation signals to warn listeners of the advertising nature of the following message, even when the actual program director or his or her coworker reads the message. These separation signals are vital to protect listener rights, as established in the codes of conduct of the sector and existing regulations. The absence of these sound indicators is significant at the beginning of the studied mentions (73.3%) and radio presenters warn the audience of incoming advertising only in 24% of cases. RM are embedded within the programming and live read, and therefore presenters (directors or coworkers) become ultimately responsible for the broadcast of this type of persuasive message.

Moreover, the results reflect that program directors show a higher involvement with the advertised product or brand when compared with their coworkers. Thus, although testimonial mentions—which imply sharing personal experiences to recommend the product—are not very frequent, directors have a prevalent presence (75.6%) in RM of the descriptive type.

Additionally, it is again directors who more frequently mention the brand of the RM (in 69 cases it was mentioned twice or three times or more), whereas coworkers do so in 60 of the 146 mentions analyzed. In this regard, the results show that the majority of RM included in the sample used the third-person singular or plural. This use implies that presenters want to distance themselves from the product or service and from the role of consumer. However, directors also frequently appeal to the audience to act a certain way in favor of the advertiser, for example, asking listeners to call an information number, visit a Web page, or actually try the product.

### ***Implications***

Although advertisers are ultimately responsible for the content of their messages, only journalists can decide whether to accept or not the additional payment derived from their advertising collaborations. In light of the results obtained, it can be argued that radio presenters and coworkers tend to be less than rigorous in the implementation of the ethical principles included in their code of conduct. Therefore, legitimate journalists must not endorse products and should never be used as RM sources. In this respect, the Code of Ethics of the American Society of Professional Journalists—more explicit than the Spanish code—establishes that to preserve journalistic independence and avoid conflicts of interest, journalists must deny favored treatment to advertisers, distinguish news from advertising, and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two (Society of Professional Journalists, 2014), in the understanding that this type of unethical behavior can affect the credibility of media and of journalists themselves. It would therefore

seem relevant for the Association of Spanish Journalists to take more effective and coercive measures to promote the prevention of this unethical, and in some cases illicit, practice.

Conversely, only radio owners can ensure that program producers signal the broadcast of RM in all instances. That is, broadcasters are solely responsible for giving, at appropriate times, clear information within programming to inform listeners of commercial arrangements. Media owners should strictly comply with the legislation that regulates the obligatory separation of contents as well as respect the principle of transparency (Erjavec & Kovačić, 2010; ICC, 2011), warning listeners of the nature of the different content. Ignoring this requirement for content separation has a negative effect on the audience and can lead to loss of credibility in the source of information, that is, in radio as a form of media and in radio presenters and journalists. The main problem is that "the control mechanisms of legislation, the Code of Ethics and the idea of good journalistic practice are either being ignored or misused" (Harro-Loit & Saks, 2006, p. 321). Furthermore, radio owners should not offer advertisers the use of journalists, whether radio hosts or their coworkers, as advertising vehicles. The pressure exercised by some advertisers regarding media funding must be satisfied via alternative formats that are more efficient, creative, and cost-effective, to avoid compromising the ethical standards of media professionals.

The government and bodies involved should cooperate toward guaranteeing the protection of the audience against this type of irresponsible commercial practice (Petty & Andrews, 2008). However, although the administration occasionally takes formal legal action against hidden advertising in television, the radio medium is not often taken into consideration.

#### ***Limitations***

The limitations of our work concern difficulties in the elaboration of a statistically representative RM sample and the challenge of operationalizing original variables. The fact that RM have a lower presence than advertising spots must be taken into account. This implies that the procedure to define the RM context from which to extract a representative sample is more complex, since it is not really feasible to record the entire programming of the studied radio stations during, for example, a whole year. In any case, although the representativeness of the sample is guaranteed, future research should increase the elements that integrate the sample to develop a more advanced statistical analysis that passes relevant significance tests. Furthermore, the challenge of designing new variables for the study of RM also demands a time perspective to evaluate and reorganize, if the case may be, the elements that provide their content to better outline the object of study.

#### ***Future Research***

In conclusion, the results of our work in the field of journalistic ethics and media social responsibility provide a starting point for future studies that may answer certain questions that have emerged during its development. Thus, for example, it would be interesting to learn more about the relationship between radio journalists—and journalists from other types of media, especially television—and advertising, their predisposition to collaborate in commercial campaigns, or the conditions imposed by their superiors; this study would require a more in-depth quantitative and qualitative analysis. It would also

be relevant to research the effects that these collaborations have on the audience in terms of perception (Buchholz & Smith, 1991; Khatri, 2006; Priester & Petty, 2003; Seno & Lukas, 2007)—that is, whether an opinion leader influences the audience, and to what extent, when he or she becomes involved with a brand, and the differences perceived when the presenter voices RM in the first or third person, as a consumer or as an informer, in an explicit or copresentational form (Keel & Nataraajan, 2012; Stern, 1991).

RM could be considered masked marketing practices (Petty & Andrews, 2008) within hidden or covert advertising in which radio personalities play a special role. Nevertheless, over the last few years there has been an important increase in the use of mentions in television (Bandler, 2005) so that it would be interesting to carry out a comparative study on the presence and use of mentions in both types of media. Comparative studies between countries could also be conducted to determine whether the results obtained in this work are specific to Spanish radio or can be found elsewhere. Sports programs and broadcasts of sports events integrate mentions and testimonials within the information discourse as another form of content. Sports commentators often become passionate and excited in their descriptions of the best moves of a football match, even more so when a goal is scored, and take advantage to celebrate live with a certain product, sharing the experience with a committed and dedicated audience.

Given the role that journalists play in RM and their influence on the public as opinion leaders, it would also be relevant to analyze the relationship between mention content and the truthfulness of the message endorsed; in other words, the potential deception. The principle of truthfulness should guide all forms of advertising, but especially advertising that uses endorsers as a tool to increase the effectiveness and persuasiveness of the message. It would also be important to determine the level of involvement of journalists with the text of RM—whether they can make decisions about the content of the message and whether they demand that advertisers guarantee or substantiate what they have to say about the product or service. It would also be appropriate to undertake an analysis of RM discourse to gain insight into advertising messages that imitate news items.

Moreover, it would be relevant to analyze the knowledge of media owners and managers regarding the ethical codes—and even legislation—required for any communication activity. It would also be important to study the assessment process of advertising, prior to its broadcast, to ensure the protection of listeners. Other aspects, such as the pressure exercised by advertisers, how the participation of journalists is managed, the pricing criteria for RM, and how this relates to the professional status of the presenter, are also lines of future research that have room for development—without forgetting the key role that self-regulatory bodies play regarding these practices in the area of advertising and public administration.

A further line of research could approach the subject from the perspective of listeners, analyzing their attitude toward RM and their reactions, and their perception of radio journalists and how they feel about their advertising collaborations. It would also be of special interest to undertake an experimental study on their ability to distinguish and identify RM from other programming contents. Finally, as the Code of Ethics for journalists includes basic principles that are common throughout the world (CAP, 2014; FAPE, 2010; Ofcom, 2013; Society of Professional Journalists, 2014) and universal, it would be interesting to conduct cross-cultural studies to learn more about these issues in other countries and conduct comparative research.

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