

# Research on the Development Strategy of Online Radio Drama under the Background of "Ear Economy"--Taking Himalaya FM as an Example

**Qin Xiaoman**

*School of Finance, Yunnan University of Finance and Economics, Kunming, China  
15522688769@163.com*

**Abstract:** *In order to promote the better development of web radio drama in the new era and fully explore its potential, the article takes Himalaya FM as a case study and analyses it in depth. While exploring the development of Himalaya FM, it is also possible to get a glimpse of the boom that radio drama has shown on the internet. Then, using SWOT theory, we make a more comprehensive and profound analysis of the current development situation of China's radio drama. By analysing its advantages, disadvantages, opportunities and threats, we can have a clear understanding of the opportunities and challenges of its development. Finally, according to the successful experience of Himalaya FM, and according to the current development of radio drama, some specific and practical suggestions for improvement will be put forward. To take advantage of the 'ear economy,' it is important to achieve sustainable, healthy, and high-quality development, providing a richer variety of audio-visual programs for the majority of viewers.*

**Keywords:** *Web radio drama; Himalaya FM; SWOT*

## 1. Introduction

In 1924, the BBC launched its first radio drama, *Dangerous*, and the advent of the internet age brought radio into people's lives. After more than a century, the rise of the "ear economy" has provided solid support for the rapid growth of web radio drama. To date, web radio drama has become an unstoppable trend, and has gradually formed its own unique characteristics of dissemination and mode of operation. Whether it's niche platforms like PC forums and posting bars in the early days, or modern mobile audio platforms like Cat's Ear FM and Himalaya FM, they have all gradually stepped into the path of commercialisation. This paper chooses Himalaya FM as the research object and provides an in-depth analysis of its future direction in the Internet field, hoping to provide valuable reference materials for Internet radio stations and other related industries.

## 2. An overview of the development of Himalaya FM

Founded in 2012 in Pudong, Shanghai, Himalaya FM has adopted a combination of professionally produced content (PGC) + professionally user-generated content (PUGC) + user-generated content (UGC), and has successfully constructed a comprehensive platform incorporating audiobooks, soundtracks, podcasts, and other types of audio<sup>[1]</sup>.

### 2.1. Himalaya FM Platform Positioning

Himalaya is different from platforms that focus primarily on secondary content, such as Cat Ear FM and Slowcast. Himalaya places more emphasis on the diversity of sources for its content, which not only covers all aspects of secondary genres, but also includes a wide range of areas such as personal growth, emotional life and business and finance. Using advanced technologies such as big data and cloud computing, Himalaya provides users with personalised pushes that match the platform's content based on the type and frequency of their interests, collections, likes and subscriptions when they first log in. This intelligent push mechanism not only significantly improves the user experience, but also further strengthens user stickiness. Himalayan FM uses the slogan "Spiritual food for every day" and clearly targets users of all ages. For children under the age of 12, the platform offers a comprehensive Head Start section that covers everything from learning materials to after-school life. Targeted content is also provided according to the different needs of young people. For the elderly, there is also a special

Himalayan large print version and covers a wide range of topics such as medical care, health and wellness, commentaries and theatre.

According to the latest data monitoring, Himalaya FM's monthly active users on mobile devices averaged 10,000 in 2021, a figure nearly 5,000 higher than the second-ranked Lychee FM. According to data released by Himalaya, in 2023, the number of albums listened to per person per year will reach 19, while the average number of audiobooks and radio dramas listened to is as high as 9.8.

## **2.2. Radio Drama Channel Content Outline**

Himalaya FM is a comprehensive audio platform covering comedy and commentary, humanities and national education, personal development, emotional life, business and finance, and radio drama, providing listeners with a diverse listening space. One of the popular sections is the Radio Drama section, which covers a wide range of styles and themes and is dedicated to allowing listeners to find the right type of radio drama for them.

At the same time, the platform puts outstanding works with high heat and good quality in eye-catching page locations for users to discover. This layout improves the user experience while highlighting popular works. Coupled with personalized filtering and push mechanisms, it can make good works directly to the public.

After selecting a radio drama, users can choose whether to listen to it or not based on a preliminary understanding of the content of the radio drama according to the synopsis, which not only improves the efficiency of the listener's choice, but also enhances the listener's autonomy and sense of participation.

## **3. SWOT analysis of web radio drama on Himalaya FM platform**

### **3.1. Advantage**

Internet fiction is a rich resource. Currently, most radio dramas are based on web novels and popular comics, which are secondary creations based on the original works. These cross-media works will attract a large number of fans of the original works, who will take the initiative to listen to and buy the adaptations, and have a natural advantage. Himalaya FM uses the characteristics of the platform to cooperate with Reading Group, CITIC Publishing Group and Shanghai Translation Publishing House, which has a large number of novel resources and good copyright protection.

The subject matter is rich and carefully categorised. The radio drama channel on Himalaya FM can screen radio drama works, including romance, suspense, fairy tales, aerials, science fiction, martial arts, fantasy, urban, games and animation, literary masterpieces, and other 13 categories, covering all the categories that the audience may be interested in. When the user clicks on the topic or content of interest, the platform pushes the listener to select the same type of radio drama. This customized, personalized way not only meets the listener's preference but also invariably helps the low-profile works enhance the heat and exposure, providing a better opportunity to showcase the outstanding works that have yet to be discovered. This kind of customised and personalised approach not only meets the audience's preference, but also inadvertently helps to raise the popularity and exposure rate of low-profile works, and provides a better opportunity for outstanding works that have not yet been discovered to be displayed.

A team of professional anchors create fine radio dramas. Himalaya FM radio drama production is broadly divided into three kinds are: user-produced, team-produced, and exclusive production. Signed with famous voice-over artists such as Li Manchao of the Voice of China Broadcasting. In 2013, Li Manchao dubbed and produced the radio drama "The Third Love", which was warmly received by the audience and quickly reached more than ten million listeners after it was aired. In addition, CCTV has gathered dozens of national voice actors, which greatly enhances the professionalism and popularity of the radio drama. Produced by the Three Bodies Universe team, the radio drama "Three Bodies", based on its popular IP, featured narration by industry-renowned voice actor Wang Mingjun, a work that has been hailed as a capper, with a whopping 620 million broadcasts, and a subscription base of 2,596,000 subscribers; The programme "Will Enter the Wine", produced by Fu Nuan Culture Studio, has also been broadcast 140 million times. The high-quality radio drama, crafted by a renowned team and high-level voice actors, creates an experience as if the audience were there, at all levels of characterisation and scene-setting, while providing a rich emotional resonance for fans of the original books.

Developing "grassroots" professionals. Himalaya FM is not just a simple broadcasting platform; it

also has training programs such as Xibo Education. Many people in the community who have a keen interest in broadcasting and dubbing are encouraged to participate in these trainings, and experts in the industry are invited to give lectures, which provides a richer resource and accessibility to the trainees. Because the students chose to train with Xibo, they preferred to continue working on the Hippodrome platform, a platform that side-steps the expansion of its own exclusive voice-over talent. The radio drama "The Lady to be Married" produced by trained voice actors such as Hana no Hikari has also been broadcast 120 million times.

### 3.2. *Disadvantage*

Himalaya FM, as a leader in the audio platform market, has gradually discovered some urgent problems in the process of rapid development.

The uneven quality of radio dramas is particularly notable. When writing a script, the director, planner and scriptwriter are usually under the responsibility of one person. However, due to the scarcity of professional radio drama producers, there is a general lack of professionalism in scriptwriting, which often results in errors such as ambiguity and logical confusion. As an auditory-driven art form, the quality and popularity of radio dramas depend to a large extent on the quality of the scripts and voices, but unfortunately most of the broadcasting and acting talents graduating from professional colleges and universities have flowed into the performing arts industry, resulting in a comparatively scanty supply in the market of professional voice-over artists and actors for radio dramas. Although Himalaya FM has created a special training platform for this purpose, the standard is still varied. The poor quality of some scripts and the low professionalism of the voice actors, coupled with the weak vetting efforts of the censors, have resulted in the uneven quality of radio dramas flowing into the market.

In addition, there is a growing problem of homogenisation of content in radio dramas<sup>[2]</sup>. Network radio dramas are mainly adapted from novels, animation and other works of network literature, in network literature, delay, romance, fantasy, hollow, crossing and other subjects have been flooded, although the platform contracted to cooperate with Jinjiang Literature City, Changpei Literature, and other websites have occupied half of the content of network literature, but the content of homogenisation, type of repetition rate has risen sharply, for the embodiment of the spirit of the new era, the national culture, and other works but are very rare, leading to serious homogenisation of the content of radio dramas.

### 3.3. *Chances*

With the rise of the "ear economy", the Internet is no longer limited to traditional radio and online music, but is showing a diversified development trend. According to the 2024 China Podcast Commercialisation White Paper, the future podcast audience in China is expected to reach 120 million. This figure shows that the "ear economy" has great potential for development. Compared with the "eyeball economy", the "ear economy" is unique in that it relies entirely on the sense of hearing and basically does not rely on sight, making it highly practical and convenient in many areas. In today's fast-paced world, radio drama makes the most of "fragmented time", allowing viewers to rest their ears and learn by ear whenever and wherever they want, and providing a new way for the visually impaired to engage with the world. As a result, radio theatre is growing like never before and has a very wide range of prospects.

Along with the change of people's consumption concept, more and more consumers are beginning to accept and willing to pay for knowledge. This trend provides a favourable environment for the commercialisation of radio dramas, as well as a huge opportunity for radio dramas on platforms such as Himalaya FM. These platforms have attracted a large number of fans of the originals through in-house production or purchasing the rights, and have produced radio dramas in the form of serialised dramas for broadcast. With this innovative operating mechanism, the platform has successfully achieved cyclical renewals from consumers, further promoting the commercialisation of radio dramas<sup>[3]</sup>. The knowledge payment model not only provides consumers with a way to efficiently filter information, but also effectively incentivises content producers to produce more high-quality and valuable content, jointly promoting the prosperity and development of the "ear economy".

### 3.4. *Threats*

Although Himalaya FM is currently the largest audio platform in China, with a high degree of visibility, and its content covers audiobooks, radio dramas, comic books, emotional radio and other audio

areas, but because of this, it is slightly less specialised in the niche market of radio dramas than the cat's ear FM focusing on audiobooks, radio dramas, and other platforms. With its precise positioning and careful polishing of its radio drama works, Cats Ear FM has already gained a firm foothold in the radio drama industry. Himalaya FM if you ignore the development of their own specialisation may face the dilemma of "broad but not refined", and will not be able to compete with the best platforms in a particular field in the long term. More critically, the future may face a decline in listener stickiness and loyalty and a loss of resources for radio drama.

In today's world of diversified and personalised knowledge consumption, it is high-quality content that has a market and an audience, which raises the question of how to ensure diversity of content while increasing expertise and overall competitiveness in specific areas.

#### **4. Optimisation Strategies for Future Webcast Drama Development**

##### ***4.1. Content is king, strive for excellence***

Regardless of how the vehicle of communication changes and the way of operation evolves, the core position of content is always unshakeable. It is the cornerstone of engaging listeners, delivering value, and building emotional connections<sup>[4]</sup>. Therefore, it is important to create a sense of excellence in radio drama production. This means that from the creation stage of the script, we should focus on the depth and breadth of the story, and strive to make every plot stand up to scrutiny and every character vivid and three-dimensional. The interpretation by the actors is the soul of the radio drama. Through their voices, they delicately convey the emotions and personalities of the characters. Therefore, radio drama actors strive for excellence from selection and training to the final dubbing presentation, doing their best to portray the roles and achieve deep emotional resonance. Post-production is the key aspect that brings all the elements together and sublimates them. From the editing of the plot to the construction of the scene, to the design and use of sound effects, every detail needs to be polished and adjusted over and over again, in order to achieve the best auditory effect and make the listener feel as if they were there.

The production of radio dramas also requires an in-depth understanding of the needs and preferences of the audience, keeping up with the mainstream values of the current society, to ensure that the work has a sense of the times, but also touching the hearts of people. Only in this way can we produce both the depth of thought, rich in artistic flavour, and both appreciation of the value of the fine radio drama, so that listeners can enjoy the feast of hearing, but also get the nourishment of the soul and the enlightenment of the mind.

##### ***4.2. Using intelligent algorithms to create a "listening circle"***

In addition to using advanced audio processing technology, artificial intelligence algorithms and big data analysis to provide more scientific and technological guidance for the creation of radio dramas, we can also make clever use of intelligent algorithms to create a "listening circle"<sup>[5]</sup>.

In the age of social networks, the formation of new "tribes" is undoubtedly an effective means of stabilising groups. Radio drama producers can not only make use of the "listening circle" to exchange creative ideas and skills, learn from each other and make progress together, but also rely on the audience's "listening circle" to gain insight into the needs of the audience, and gain a deeper understanding of the audience's preferences and expectations, so as to produce radio drama works that are more in line with the voice of the audience. Radio Drama Works. At the same time, listeners can speak freely in the "Listening Circle", exchange listening experiences, recommend each other cold masterpieces, while they can also put forward constructive comments for the producer's reference in the "Listening Circle", which greatly enhances the sense of user participation and interactivity. The most important thing is that once the "listening circle" is formed, user stickiness and user activity will increase significantly. In the case of the Himalaya FM paid radio drama "Killing the Wolf", for example, fans spontaneously formed WeChat groups and QQ groups to discuss the plot in the group at any time, further promoting the development of the radio drama.

A "listening circle" not only allows platforms to clarify operational goals, producers to clarify listener needs, and listeners to exchange episodes, but also, more importantly, enhances a sense of love and belonging.

#### **4.3. "Online + offline" model to increase publicity efforts**

When listeners listen to radio dramas through mobile audio platforms, they can also make use of platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, bilibili, and Jitterbug. By inviting radio drama CVs or celebrities with a fan base to personally participate in the voice of the radio drama, it undoubtedly adds more exposure and buzz to the radio drama. After the radio drama "Three Bodies" was launched on the Himalaya FM platform, the theme song "Sea of Dust" was sung by singer Mao Yiqi, who also promoted it on Weibo. The promotion received 508,000 likes on Weibo, while the theme song received more than 100,000 listener comments and 350,000 likes on QQ Music, which undoubtedly greatly increased the popularity of the radio drama in the market. The radio drama "Tian Guan Ci Fu" has accumulated 79,000 posts on Weibo since the establishment of the "Tian Guan Ci Fu Chinese Radio Drama" hypertext, and the number of daily check-ins continues to exceed 1,000. With the improvement of the function of WeChat small programme, Himalaya platform launched "Himalaya" small programme and public number, you can directly enter the Himalaya programme library through WeChat, which saves the user's mobile phone memory at the same time to further broaden the dissemination channels.

Prior to the release of the radio drama, a teaser will be released on bilibili to drive traffic. Exclusive videos and interviews will also be released to satisfy fans and attract more viewers. On short video platforms such as Jitterbug, the choice was made to make more people take up the challenge in interactive and game-like ways such as audio lip-synching, so that the sound of the radio drama could reach a wider audience in a more lively and interesting way. In addition, the variety show "The Voice" has not only promoted the popularity of dubbing culture, but also brought new opportunities to the radio drama market. During the broadcast of the programme, Himalaya FM not only set up a special area for "The Voice" in its APP, but also launched online activities such as "Dialect Dubbing Competition" and "The Voice in the Same Scene Challenge". Himalaya FM not only set up a "Voice in the Realm" zone in its APP, but also launched "Dialect Dubbing Contest" and "Same Scene in the Realm Challenge" online activities, which greatly boosted fans' enthusiasm and users' enthusiasm.

The strategy of combining offline activities with online warm-ups is widely used<sup>[6]</sup>. At the offline level, cross-border co-operation between radio dramas and brick-and-mortar shops has become a new way of publicity, and radio dramas such as "The Ancestor of the Magic Road", "Manta Virtual Boys", "Global High School Exam" and other radio dramas of Cat's Ear FM have been co-branded with convenience stores and milk tea shops, which not only satisfy the emotional value of the fans of the original IP, but also further boost the popularity of the radio dramas and the platform. In addition, Himalaya also organised the "Voice Actor Idol Audition" offline, which gathered many voice actor fans.

#### **4.4. Focusing on talent development and improving the radio theatre chain**

In today's era of increasingly discerning consumers seeking the ultimate in quality, the quality of a radio drama is directly related to its market acceptance and impact. It is particularly important to cultivate key creative talents such as actors and scriptwriters to form a high-performance team, and there is a need to continuously introduce and cultivate relevant talents to improve the chain of radio drama production. For example, the Himalaya FM platform launched the "Xibo Education Programme", which builds a bridge to the professional stage for radio drama enthusiasts in the community. Xibo Education not only focuses on discovering and cultivating potential new stars of creation, but also comprehensively improves the students' abilities in key aspects such as script writing, dubbing and interpretation, and post-production through systematic and professional training. In the end, they will form a high-quality radio drama production team, which will be able to implement their ideas when they have inspiration and creativity, and make the best radio drama in the shortest time.

### **5. Conclusions**

In the booming wave of "ear economy", the future of radio drama undoubtedly shows a vast and boundless blue ocean, full of infinite possibilities and opportunities. In the face of this golden age, major audio platforms should uphold the spirit of openness and cooperation, learn from each other's successful experience, and work together to form a benign competition and cooperation ecology. By sharing resources, exchanging technologies and discussing market trends, we will jointly promote the prosperity of the radio drama industry. With a focus on talent training, it is essential to always adhere to the principle that "content is king". This involves closely aligning with the audience's needs, understanding their preferences, and utilizing a variety of online and offline strategies for publicity and promotion to create

a closed-loop effect. It is necessary to find the right path for the development of radio drama, take advantage of the current favourable trends, combined with its own actual situation, to achieve innovative breakthroughs.

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