

The Rise of the New Auditory Culture: Personification Communication Strategies for Podcast Hosts

Tian Chuying

Hubei University, Wuhan, Hubei, China
18984876624@163.com

Abstract: *At a time when visual information is overwhelming and audiences are fatigued,, a new auditory culture is emerging, allowing individuals to rediscover the allure of sound. This paper briefly outlines the historical development of podcasting and its rise in China, while discussing the unique characteristics of podcasts, including accompaniment, knowledge, emotion, and privacy, as well as the needs as well as the needs the differences between various media and the pressures faced by individuals in a burnout-prone society. Based on the characteristics of podcasts and listener needs, the paper explores personality-based communication strategies employed by podcast hosts. It aims to summarize the role of the podcast host on the supply side of podcasting, highlighting how these hosts utilize personification strategies to create a sense of intimacy and companionship that resonates with their audience.*

Keywords: *Podcasts Oral, Communication, Personification Communication*

1. The New Ecology of Sound Media Digitization - Podcasts

China's access to the international Internet on April 20, 1994, which is known as "China's first year of the Internet". In 1998, China's portal site on the line for the outbreak of the period, in 1999, Sohu launched news and content channels, establishing the prototype for a comprehensive portal site, opened the Chinese Internet portal era. Due to the complexity of portal searches, the concept of a "push" technology was developed. In 1997, Netscape introduced RSS, a collaborative format for communication that delivers content subscribed to by users. The inception of podcasting was based on this technology.

1.1. Brief history of podcasting

The world's first blog emerged in 2003 when software programmer Dave Winer created an audio program using RSS technology on the blog of former New York Times anchor Christopher Lydon. In 2004, journalist Ben Hammersley at The Guardian (UK) coined the term this new type of program. The term is a contraction of the words and to audio files distributed via Internet technology. Podcasts utilize techniques such as easy information aggregation and can be downloaded and listened to online.[1]

At that time, due to technical constraints, the limited number of mobile devices, and restricted mobile Internet coverage, the process of downloading and listening to podcasts was cumbersome, preventing them from making a significant impact. However, with the advancement of mobile Internet technology, podcasting entered its in 2014. That year, Apple introduced a dedicated podcast client on its iPhones, allowing listeners to easily access a variety of shows online and simplifying the subscription process. Additionally, NPR launched the podcast a documentary-style series focused on real-life crime cases, which quickly became one of the top-rated programs on iTunes. Since then, there has been a surge in podcast platforms catering to small and medium-sized startups, independent producers, and large media companies.

Until today, data released by Edison PodcastMetrics indicates that in 2013, only 12 percent of Americans aged 12 and older reported having listened to a podcast in the past month. This figure has steeply climbed to 42 percent by 2023. Most of the most popular podcasts in the U.S. are produced by traditional media institutions, such as The New York Times, NBC News, and National Public Radio (NPR). In contrast, most podcast programs in China are produced by individuals, self-publishers, or native podcasting companies like JustPod.

1.2. The Rise of Chinese Podcasting

Compared to the United States, podcasting has only recently begun to demonstrate its potential in China. The earliest podcasts in China can be traced back to Sugar & Garlic Radio in 2004. In the initial years, some of the more influential podcast platforms included PopPod, TudouPod, ChinaPod, and Pineapple.com. However, due to a lack of program coordination and integration, uneven content quality, and insufficient awareness of copyright issues among producers, podcasts did not attract a significant audience during these early attempts.[2]

In 2011, Dragonfly FM became the first domestic network audio application in China. Beginning in 2014, platforms such as Himalaya and Lychee FM emerged, although the domestic definition of podcasts was still quite narrow, primarily encompassing audio content. While podcasts have a dedicated section on each platform, they are not the main focus of the platforms' overall positioning. A small universe of apps catering to Chinese-language podcast listeners launched in 2020. That same year, the number of listeners and programs surged, marking it as the podcasting in China. By 2021, the growth of Chinese-language podcasts had slowed compared to 2020; however, there was an increase in specialized, boutique, and more engaging podcasts.

Podcasts possess a distinctly decentralized nature, where the listener serves as both the anchor and the audience. Today's podcasts differ significantly from those of earlier years, which often featured personal anecdotes or music reprints. Now, professionals, media experts, and institutional players from various fields contribute their unique perspectives and exclusive insights. They create high-quality content by delving deeper into topics and engaging a targeted audience.

2. Characteristics of podcasts

According to a study by Pew Research, “the median length of the most popular YouTube videos is 2 minutes and 1 second, while the median length of the most watched TV news stories is even shorter: 41 seconds.” This brief duration is insufficient for providing an in-depth exploration of complex issues, leading to a proliferation of sensational headlines designed to capture attention across various media outlets. Podcasts may exist to break the explosion of visual information and visual exhaustion brought on by the age of images and short videos.

2.1. Multi-scenario accompaniment

Podcasts are now most commonly accessed through smartphone apps, a significant shift from the past when audio content had to be downloaded from a computer to an MP3 player or iPod. With a low barrier to entry and the availability of various smart devices for different life situations, listening to podcasts has become both easy and convenient.

In the era of short videos, viewers often engage with content for extended periods, leading to visual overload and eye fatigue. As a result, there is a growing desire for alternative methods of information consumption. Sound, as a versatile medium, has traditionally served as a supplementary element to visuals in short videos. It allows individuals to absorb information in a non-exclusive manner, enabling them to engage and disengage at their convenience while listening.

“In the context of a media development in which sound reinvents subjectivity, the highly scene-adaptive nature of audio content gives it pervasive power.”[3] The inherent characteristics of sound demonstrate that the auditory medium can be applied to various situations and time periods of life. Leisure moments, commuting, household chores, sports, and fitness activities provide opportunities for listeners to enjoy podcasts. It can be said that when their ears are free, listeners have the option to engage with podcasts.

2.2. In-depth content exploration

The average length of a TikTok short video ranges from 8 to 15 seconds, while most videos on Bilibili are under 5 minutes long. According to the 2024 Podcast Industry Report, podcast listeners are generally tolerant of program length but prefer episodes that last between 15 minutes and 2 hours. This flexibility allows creators more time, space, and confidence to convey comprehensive informational content. When creating short videos, it is essential to adhere to the principle of first three seconds of gold, presenting contrast, curiosity, and innovative content right from the start. While short videos

provide audiences with a visually novel experience, podcasts engage the sense of hearing, offering a sense of companionship and an opportunity for immersive reflection on various topics. Podcast platforms encompass a wide range of subjects, categorized into specific content areas, enabling listeners to seek out topics of interest and discover new content. Increasingly, podcast types. Hosts are pursuing differentiation within the same topic by approaching it from various angles, thereby providing listeners with a rich variety of content. Reason: Improved clarity, vocabulary, and technical accuracy while correcting grammatical and punctuation errors.

2.3. Sense of privacy in personal space

Listeners typically enjoy podcasts using headphones, which can be disconnected from the media player. This setup isolates them from ambient noise and creates a personal listening environment. In this space, the listener is temporarily removed from visual distractions and immersed in a rich auditory experience. Unlike audio-visual media, which is presented on a screen, the audio medium offers a more intimate personal space. It is within this environment that sound and emotion are intertwined, allowing the listener to have a deeper, more personal experience.

Oral communication is based on interpersonal communication scenarios, and it is also the main and most popular means of information dissemination for human beings to express their inner feelings and cultural roots. Podcasts serve as a digital form of spoken communication. Unlike traditional radio and broadcasting, podcasts offer a more casual expression, making the voice more authentic and intimate. They create a space for podcasters to meet the needs of their listeners better.

3. Audience needs

The development of Internet technology has broken the limitations of time and space in information dissemination, making it possible to magnify the scarcity of time and space indefinitely. Those dispersed, independent, and tiny individuals can liberate their personalities, find and gather in the circle of personalities, and form a culture that is different from the traditional society, and podcasting is such a “long-tail medium”. [4] Establishing the long tail involves creating a corresponding platform using the example of the small universe. Initially driven by the community's immediate interest in discussing the need for a podcast app, this platform was developed to cater to the original listeners. It provides a personal audio space for like-minded individuals, addressing various needs such as instrumental accompaniment, engaging niche information, and self-reflective emotional expression.

3.1. Instrumental accompaniment needs

The Podcast Industry Report 2024 reveals that 90% of listeners engage in other activities while listening to podcasts. There are specific content preferences that vary by scenario; for instance, during driving, most listeners favor technological and digital content, while at bedtime, they tend to choose relaxing and entertainment-oriented material, such as film and television variety shows, music, and emotional stories, among others. Listeners utilize podcast platforms as tools for companionship, entertainment, and leisure, often within a designated time frame or specific context, demonstrating a strong sense of purpose despite a more fragmented attention to the content. In an age of information overload, where tasks are abundant, people are increasingly accustomed to multitasking. The auditory medium allows listeners to listening to podcasts in a single context is becoming an increasingly popular choice.

3.2. Interesting edge information needs

In a joint episode of the podcasts Pineapple Grease and Under the Ginkgo Tree one of the anchors mentioned that “podcasting is an extension of my reading.” More and more anchors are talking about their hobbies and deep roots, and more and more listeners are eager to listen to interest-related content and resonate and reflect on it in podcast platforms.

Network technology provides the necessary conditions for aggregating interest groups based on common interests and values. Based on the above mentioned, in the feature of podcast content that can be explored in depth, this platform is able to give a more complete, comprehensive and in-depth information content to the funfair community. Here can be divided into two kinds of extension, one for the backward extension of interest, that is, the listener is interested in a certain thing, in the podcast to

find related programs to listen to, in order to satisfy the listener to supplement the knowledge of the thing of interest. The other is the forward extension of interest, i.e., the listener is interested in a certain kind of thing, and after listening to the related kind of program, then search for the program to mention the specific thing of interest.

3.3. Self-reflexive emotional needs

From the age of oral communication to the age of written communication, the situation of “face-to-face” interpersonal communication has gradually changed to one in which communication activities can also be carried out using the written word, i.e., communication can be carried out without people being present. With the development of technology, the physical spatial and temporal distance of interpersonal communication has been shortened, and people have become progressively more distant from each other. In the age of digital intelligence, both AI anchor simulation language and Chat GPT and other anthropomorphic languages are pursuing the “human” form. Under the pressure of a weary society and the media ecology of human-computer coexistence, the audience attaches more importance to “human feelings”, “human nature” and “human voices”. [5] A desire to return to my true self in an authentic, warm sound.

The listener puts on the headset and enters the personal sound space to temporarily “escape” from the weary society, maps the self, reflects on the self, searches for the self in the anchor's “story”, and finally returns to the real world. Listening to the program, the listener recalls his/her own similar experiences or is brought into the story scenario, and participates in the self-reflective process by listening to the anchor's story, during which the listener builds an emotional bridge with the anchor. [6]

4. Podcast anchor personality communication strategy

Generative AI, in the age of digital intelligence, produces content quickly and efficiently, significantly impacting traditional content production methods and presenting challenges for media practitioners. At the moment, a number of media outlets around the world have launched AI anchors, and CCTV has also launched an AI full-process micro-skit. In the future, AI full-process participation will become the norm for programs whose main goal is to deliver information. Podcasts have established the charm of “sound into the heart” by virtue of their unique scenario advantages and meeting the unique emotional needs of listeners. Podcast anchor as a direct “communication” with the audience, to give listeners a more “humane” experience, as opposed to the AI anchor and AI-generated content more “cold” experience.

4.1. Authenticity, vibrancy, white space: allowing for imperfect expression

The rise of podcasting is closely related to the oral communication activities of human civilization. In ancient China, there was the saying of “oral transmission”, and the earliest acts of oratory also existed in the primitive period, such as the “Gan Oath” and “Tang Oath” in the “Shangshu”. [7] And sound socialization is also more in line with the nature of socialization, because the sound of the communication environment is more natural, which can meet the social needs, but also to maintain the mystery. Based on the above, the podcast anchor should express the most real ideas, and the audience should hear the most vivid voice. Anchor to ensure that the expression of the basis of clear, appropriate, without too much skill modification. Words can have no impact on the sense of listening to personal habits, the rhythm of the words in the program according to the anchor mood ebb and flow changes can be appropriate to leave white space to give the listener to recall, imagine the time and space.

There are various options for post-processing based on different program presentation styles. The first type of recording and post-processing is more rigorous, requiring a defined script and a fixed framework, typically within a shorter timeframe. An example of this is “Sound of Morning Coffee.” The second type of recording is more relaxed; while post-processing maintains a certain structure, the essence of the clip is prioritized. The main content still conveys a laid-back atmosphere, embracing the expression of “imperfections,” and concludes with a fixed summary, such as “TIANYU2FM - Talking about Unknown Fields.” The third type of recording and presentation is more cohesive, featuring on-site activities uploaded to the podcast platform. This format captures the essence of a genuine conversation, preserving the emotional tone of the voices as if the listener is truly participating in the event, exemplified by “Bridge to Wonderland.” Most podcasting platforms primarily support the latter two types of extended expressions.

4.2. Individuality, niche, equality: creating content uniqueness

The program will present a sound space with variety and individuality due to the unique design and different funk preferences of the anchors. When facing the same topic, different anchors will differ in their angles of entry, areas of emphasis, and ways of narration due to their different ideas and areas of specialization, forming their own unique advantages. Anchors don't have to go with the flow; even unpopular niche topics actually have a life of their own.

“Listening” is a way of receiving information that meets the needs of a modern and efficient society, and it can be used in parallel with other life behaviors, providing great flexibility in the transmission of information. Podcasts are more information-dense in contrast to other audio, and anchors use their voices over a longer period of time to disseminate a sufficient amount of content and express real emotions. Based on the content of different programs that are rigorous, loose and active, we create an exclusive space for the audience, fostering an environment of equal and shared communication both within and beyond this space. In a conversational program, there is a main talker between the anchors, but within this space each anchor will articulate his or her own point of view, reaching consensus and exploring new knowledge within the time and space of the recording moment; The relationship between the anchor and the listener is one of equality, not preaching or ideological indoctrination, and both parties can also communicate with each other in the comments section or on other platforms.

4.3. Image, Vivid, IP: cross-platform communication for sustainability

Marshall McLuhan said, “No medium has meaning and existence in isolation, and any medium can only realize its meaning and value in interaction with other mediums.”[8] Listeners and hosts build emotional bridges through the comments section to share real-time feelings and utilize other social media platforms for communication. Hosts can establish listener groups to facilitate discussions on topics, recent concerns, and the latest episodes. Moreover, through exchanges of ideas, hosts can seek topic suggestions to improve and optimize their content. This approach fosters a strong connection between listeners and hosts, contributing to the sustainability and nurturing of the host's output.

Nowadays, there are more and more ordinary people who share some of their life observations and insights through podcasts, ranging from generating power for love to generating power for “I” (I stands for Influence and personal IP), who utilize podcasts to expand their own relationship networks or differentiate themselves from other platforms on the podcast platform. In the age of digital intelligence more and more anchors are utilizing AI tools to assist in efficient work, and need to be concerned about the listener experience while improving efficiency.

5. Conclusion

Anchors give voice to love on the podcast platform, making the voice more powerful, whether in the form of talkbacks and monologues, while preserving the voice in its rawest form. The anchor connects with listeners through their voice, and audiences often dedicate extended periods of attention to the anchor and their program because of his personal charisma. The anchor plans the positioning of the podcast show based on what he or she is good at and what makes him or her unique, and adjusts as he or she tries to position the direction and make a difference. The anchor needs to complete the continuous updating of the program with vivid and credible content, contribute value to the audience, get rid of the short-term mentality, and sincerely communicate with the audience so that “the sound enters the hearts and minds of the people, and the sound will never cease to live.”

References

- [1] Wang Ting. *Why the ear wakes up: the technological logic, emotional call and auditory community of podcast revival*[J]. *Modern Communication (Journal of Communication University of China)*,2024, 46(06): 113-120.
- [2] Cao Yan. *An Analysis of the Digital Survival of Podcasting*[J]. *Journalism*,2006(04):94-95.
- [3] Liu Fan, Guo Wenqing. *Renaissance of “Ear Economy”: The New “Sound” of Knowledge in Podcasting* [J]. *China Broadcasting*, 2022,(01):49-53.
- [4] Shi Rongrong. *Dancing on the Long Tail--A Discussion on the Operation Mechanism of Long Tail Theory*[J]. *Journalism*,2007,(05):129-130.
- [5] Yao Qiang, Xu Xueming. *Media Bias and Convergence: The Return and Reinforcement of Oral*

Communication Embodiment in the Age of Digital Intelligence[J]. *Media*,2024,(04):13-15.

[6] WEI Hai, KUANG Kai. *Intimacy and self-reflexivity: a study of online audio platform availability and digital literacy enhancement among urban and rural youth*[J]. *China Journal of Radio and Television*, 2024,(02):31-36.

[7] Du Yinghui. *In Search of "Audible China": Returning to the Historical Scene of Oral Communication in Modern China*[J]. *Media Watch*, 2024,(09):110-120.

[8] Marshall McLuhan. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*[J]. Beijing: Commercial Press. 2000