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## Research on the Entertainment of Mobile Audio Platforms in Auditory Culture: A Case Study of Xiaoyuzhou (Postprint)

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**Date:** 2023-03-24T00:00:00+00:00

### Abstract

The podcast industry emerged in the United States in the early 2000s. After its introduction to China, it entered a relatively long cooling-off period until 2020, when it returned to public view with the launch of the Xiaoyuzhou Podcast app—a year also hailed as the inaugural year of podcasts. As the pace of life for young people accelerates, their corresponding entertainment demands increase accordingly. However, against this backdrop, Xiaoyuzhou has not prioritized the development of entertainment-oriented features such as social interaction or program activities in its product design. This paper will investigate the development of entertainment features in the Xiaoyuzhou app by integrating perspectives from auditory culture and the contemporary context.

### Full Text

#### Preamble

**Research on the Entertainment Functions of Mobile Audio Platforms in Auditory Culture: A Case Study of Xiaoyuzhou**  
(Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication, Beijing, 100000)

**Abstract:** The podcast industry emerged in the United States in the early 2000s, but after being introduced to China, it entered a prolonged cooling-off period until 2020, when the launch of the Xiaoyuzhou Podcast app brought it back into the public eye—a year that has been called the “inaugural year of Chinese podcasting.” As the pace of life accelerates for young people, their demand for entertainment likewise increases. Against this backdrop, however, Xiaoyuzhou has not prioritized entertainment-oriented features such as social interaction or program activities in its product design. This paper investigates the construction of entertainment functions in the Xiaoyuzhou app by integrating perspectives from auditory culture and the contemporary context.

**Keywords:** Auditory culture, Podcast, Xiaoyuzhou, Social interaction, Entertainment

## 1. Research Background

### 1.1 Introduction to Research Background

For a long time, the development and transformation of media technology have profoundly influenced communication patterns in human society while exerting significant impact on societal development as a whole. Throughout history, every successful new medium has enabled people to transcend spatial and temporal limitations, harness information through novel communication methods, continuously improve information transmission efficiency, and reconstruct relationships among the public and between the public and society, thereby driving the development of each era. With the emergence of media such as paper, photographs, films, and television, humanity entered a visually-centered era based on reading text and images, becoming increasingly reliant on vision for information acquisition. Although auditory media represented by radio also developed, the relatively slow pace of media technological advancement compressed the proportion of auditory sensation in human activities, leaving human information reception in a state of sensory imbalance.

The internet era ushered auditory communication into a new epoch. While new media mobile audio platforms have dealt a tremendous blow to traditional broadcasting, they have also enriched people's lifestyles and information reception patterns. According to data from iiMedia Research, China's online audio market reached 489 million users in 2019. In June 2019, the Cyberspace Administration of China, in coordination with relevant departments, launched a special rectification campaign targeting irregularities in online audio, resulting in the removal or shutdown of numerous platforms for violating relevant regulations. Analysts at iiMedia Research believe that this strong regulatory model will compel enterprises to improve content quality and steer the entire industry toward standardized, healthy development. In March 2020, Xiaoyuzhou launched as a Chinese podcast platform, attracting many users and creators with its clean UI interface and clear content categorization.

Against the backdrop of visual centralism, although a comprehensive auditory cultural turn has not yet arrived, auditory culture maintains a unique presence in communication studies, and the emergence of mobile audio platforms reveals the possibility of auditory culture's return in new media. Today, media technologies and their products such as mobile internet, 5G, Internet of Things, and wearable devices are quietly altering the sensory ratios people mobilize when confronting things, promoting a shift from vision-dominant to multi-sensory engagement. On June 6, 2020, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology issued 5G commercial licenses to major operators, marking China's official entry into the 5G commercial era. This media technology has leveled the differences in online transmission efficiency between image-text and audio-video content, providing

a favorable opportunity for the development of mobile audio platforms.

Through preliminary literature review, it is evident that communication scholars have approached mobile audio platforms merely as emerging communication media. Consequently, previous research has predominantly examined these platforms from perspectives such as new media communication and knowledge payment, often focusing on platforms like Ximalaya and Dedao. This study, grounded in the context of the auditory culture turn trend, examines the Xiaoyuzhou app platform as a carrier of auditory culture, offering certain innovative contributions.

## 1.2 Podcast Development Process

Apple was the earliest proponent of the podcast concept. The Chinese term “播客” (bōkè) corresponds to “Podcast” in Western countries—a portmanteau of “iPod” (Apple’s portable player) and “broadcast.” It is defined as “aggregated digital audio files published via the internet using RSS technology, available for users to subscribe to and automatically receive.”

From Adam Curry’s development of the first RSS-subscribable client “Podcatcher” in 2004 to the Jike team’s development of Xiaoyuzhou, China’s first RSS-based Chinese podcast app, in 2020, sixteen years have passed. During these sixteen years, the internet audio industry has diverged completely between China and the United States. In contrast to American podcasts, what has spread more widely in the Chinese market are “paid courses” and “audio novels.” The domestic podcast market has never achieved large-scale growth, and the general public’s understanding of the term “podcast” remains superficial. Of course, the podcast concept itself continues to develop and evolve with its environment. After the concept was introduced to China, the podcast as perceived by Chinese people has diverged from its American counterpart. Whether it is the view held by some Chinese that “podcasts are all internet audio except music,” or the belief held by others that “podcasts are host conversation/chit-chat content,” both deviate from the original concept of podcasting.

## 1.3 Xiaoyuzhou APP Overview and Problems

In 2020, the Jike team developed Xiaoyuzhou, China’s first RSS-based Chinese podcast app. Prior to this, Chinese podcast listeners mostly used Apple Podcast (the default app on iPhones) or professional Western podcast applications such as Spotify and Pocket Casts. Users struggled to find a space or field to exchange thoughts and reflections about podcasts. Even when such spaces existed, they focused on rating and reviewing entire shows, like Apple Podcast, without connecting podcasting to social interaction. By 2020, the Chinese podcast market already featured numerous high-quality, prolific programs. According to Listen Notes statistics, by May 2020, the number of Chinese-language podcasts had exceeded 10,000. However, due to the lack of platforms for sharing and recommendation, coupled with inefficient search channels, this high-quality content

often remained obscure[1].

In this environment, Xiaoyuzhou has adopted a relatively conservative approach to building its entertainment functions. It has not prioritized social features in its product design, and communication between podcast users can only be achieved through comments on podcasts, with no private messaging function available. Given that the overall podcast market is still in its infancy, although the platform strongly supports the construction of PGC, UGC, PUGC, and live content, the building of auditory content resources remains insufficient in the short term. Against the backdrop of rapid socio-economic development and increasing individual survival pressure, auditory entertainment and stress relief have become important sensory needs. The insufficient development of entertainment features will ultimately lead audiences to abandon auditory media when seeking entertainment and stress relief, resulting in user attrition.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Development of Auditory Culture Research

Research on auditory culture abroad has a long history. McLuhan's "media extension theory" posits that all media are extensions of human sensory organs: for instance, text and print media are extensions of vision, while radio is an extension of hearing. He also divided the evolution of human civilization into the "tribal age," "detrribalized age," and "retribalized age" based on communication forms in different eras. McLuhan argued that in tribal societies, people favored oral communication (relying heavily on hearing), with senses extending in multiple directions and achieving sensory balance. In the detrribalized age, due to the development of writing and printing technology, people shifted toward text-based (vision-heavy) communication. In the electronic communication era, media represented by radio and television facilitated humanity's return from eye to ear, ultimately achieving bidirectional communication in media auditory space[2].

Paul Levinson inherited, critiqued, and developed McLuhan's ideas, calling for greater attention to auditory media and auditory culture. He also proposed the "remedial media" theory, which suggests that each successive medium remedies and compensates for some previous medium, driving media to increasingly meet human needs through this mechanism. Levinson believed that auditory communication methods in the digital age have transcended spatiotemporal limitations, enriching the world of sound. He divided the sound space of the digital age into four types: hearing, radio, television, and cyberspace[3]. Dewey placed particular emphasis on the context of auditory communication, arguing that hearing facilitates smooth information transmission through participation and helps dissolve barriers between subject and object, whereas textual-visual communication constitutes "talking to oneself," exacerbating the stark separation between subject and object through detached, cold observation.

American scholar Emily Thompson, in her 2004 book *The Soundscape of Moder-*

*nity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933*, chronicles the history of modern American auditory culture in the early twentieth century. Beginning with the completion of Boston Symphony Hall in 1900 and concluding with Radio City Music Hall in New York at the end of 1932, the book examines sound shaping from an architectural perspective, narrating the unique characteristics of auditory commodities and forms emerging from the technological context of sound and electromagnetic signal conversion.

In China, Professor Wang Dun from Renmin University of China was among the first to pay attention to the issue of the “auditory turn,” publishing discourse-constructive papers on auditory research beginning in 2011. His series of articles introduced the starting points and current state of Western auditory culture research, actively exploring the knowledge coordinates of auditory culture, leading the construction of a discourse system for auditory culture research, and making outstanding contributions to building a Chinese-characteristic auditory culture research system. In 2015, China hosted its first academic symposium with “auditory” as its theme. The “Auditory Culture and Culture” national academic symposium organized by Jiangxi Normal University was landmark in significance, marking the formal emergence of a new theoretical hotspot. Liu Maosheng and Xiao Huirong (2016), as researchers in language and literature at Jiangxi Normal University, reviewed the “Auditory Culture and Culture” symposium. Participating scholars focused on the limitations of the image-reading era, deeply analyzed the significance of sound and hearing, and demonstrated the necessity and urgency of constructing a complete theoretical system for auditory culture research[4].

In November 2017, Nankai University hosted the first “International Symposium on Auditory Culture,” inviting numerous domestic and international scholars to discuss fundamental issues such as the theoretical connotations and extensions of auditory culture, theoretical construction methods and practices, and interdisciplinary relationships, bringing auditory culture research, the auditory culture turn, and auditory communication to the attention of an increasing number of scholars.

An important research branch of auditory culture within China’s cultural sphere is auditory literary narrative research. Fu Xiuyan has long been dedicated to narrative studies in literature and was among the first Chinese scholars to explore auditory narrative within the literary domain. He analyzed the Chinese auditory tradition, explained and summarized the expressive characteristics of ancient Chinese narrative under the influence of this tradition, and from a literary perspective argued that the rapid tilt of Chinese people’s sensory balance toward the visual end and the continuous loss of the ability to “understand emotion through sound” should be a cause for serious concern[5]. In her article “Research on the Return of Hearing in the Mobile Communication Era,” Guo Ying proposes, against the backdrop of human sensory imbalance, that hearing is being activated and awakened. She explores the possibilities and practical paths for the return of hearing in the mobile communication era, using

McLuhan's "media as environment" concept as a theoretical framework. Based on media ecology theory, she focuses on the concept of "hearing-involvement" and examines the auditory media environment from three dimensions: perceptual environment, symbolic environment, and social environment, emphasizing that an era of sensory-balanced "full-sensory experience" is approaching[6].

In terms of analyzing demand for auditory culture, Wang Yingzi (2018), in the article "Why Move Toward Auditory Culture," proposes that in today's era of visual information explosion, humans have an inherent and strong need for auditory sensation. The strong emotional evocation of hearing and the invention of headphones have gradually privatized public auditory space. The rational visual sense and the emotional auditory sense balance people's rational and emotional cognition, prompting reflection on the subjective status of hearing and sound.

From a research history perspective, Western scholarship in this field began slightly earlier than in China. Compared to the West, China's research history is shorter with fewer achievements, but with the emergence of domestic new media mobile audio platforms, attention to this field has been increasing in recent years. In terms of research emphasis, Western research focuses more on sound itself, attending to its socio-cultural and historical origins. China's current research stage remains primarily qualitative, and the theoretical paradigms for auditory culture research across various disciplines are still immature. Overall, auditory culture research remains in an exploratory stage. The era of visual-image centrality will not end in the short term, and consequently, current research is largely fragmented, with a complete theoretical system yet to be formed.

## 2.2 Development of Mobile Audio Platform Research

Currently, research findings in the mobile audio platform field are relatively abundant in China. In the article "Grasping the Pulse of Mobile Audio," Chen Xu divides the broad mobile audio market into three categories: audio apps created by social enterprises, audio apps created and corporately operated by traditional media, and audio apps created and operated by traditional media themselves. He proposes that the advantages of mobile audio include rebuilding user connections, precisely targeting audiences, possessing quality content, and deeply exploring fan economies. However, problems persist, including data inflation, content copyright disputes, and unclear profit models.

In their article "User Experience: A Study on the Communication Effects of Mobile Network Audio," Guo Guanghua and Yu Siqiao conducted a qualitative analysis of the mobile network audio communication process and its effects. They argue that mobile network audio, as an interactive communication platform, transforms the traditional listener identity into a user role. Users actively engage with the platform, completing content co-construction and emotional exchange through interaction, thereby obtaining new experiences and satisfaction. In the article "Innovation in the Construction of Broadcast New Media

Platforms Based on Auditory Communication,” Tian Yuan proposes that broadcast media, with auditory communication at its core, must seize the essential characteristic of “sound” and innovatively construct their new media platforms in the context of accelerated media convergence in the mobile internet era. Specifically, this includes: building a content-centered “audio” information supply platform; building a service-centered “sound-following” product experience platform; building an interaction-centered short-audio social sharing platform; and building a vehicle-terminal-centered intelligent audio tracking platform[7].

The primary reason for greater scholarly attention in China compared to the West is the emergence of mature mobile audio platforms represented by Ximalaya FM, which has drawn domestic scholars, particularly communication scholars, to this new media phenomenon. From the perspective of domestic research on mobile audio platforms, Chinese discussions have concentrated on the integration of old and new media, resulting in a relatively singular research perspective. Meanwhile, current quantitative analysis relies primarily on questionnaires that generally use descriptive questions without exploring deeper causes in conjunction with the entire market.

### 3. Research Content and Methods

#### 3.1 Research Content

This course paper takes auditory culture theory and the mobile audio platform Xiaoyuzhou as its research objects, examining the theoretical connotations of auditory culture and the construction of Xiaoyuzhou’s interactive platform, and proposes corresponding innovative strategies. According to requirements, the paper first briefly introduces the research background, problems, and objectives. The literature review section provides a theoretical synthesis of domestic and international literature on relevant concepts and development of auditory culture, organizes literature on the concepts, types, and construction innovations of mobile audio platforms, and summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of the aforementioned content. On this basis, through questionnaire surveys, the paper outlines the audience profile (demographic characteristics) of Xiaoyuzhou users, providing a reference for subsequent empirical research. It then constructs an overview of audience usage from three dimensions: usage needs, usage scenarios, and usage content. Additionally, using questionnaire surveys, the paper investigates audience perceptions of Xiaoyuzhou’s media image across four dimensions: content usefulness, interface usability, platform interactivity, and platform entertainment, completing an objective description through data analysis. Based on the extracted data, in-depth interviews are conducted to identify deficiencies in platform construction and propose development directions, combined with data analysis.

#### 3.2 Research Methods

This study will employ the following specific methods:

**Literature Research Method:** Reading domestic and international literature on auditory culture theory and mobile audio platforms, organizing and analyzing the current state of auditory culture research, and synthesizing theoretical perspectives from academic achievements on domestic mobile audio platforms to establish a theoretical foundation for the paper.

**In-depth Interview Method:** Combining demographic characteristics, the study constructs an overview of audience usage from three dimensions—usage needs, usage scenarios, and usage content—to establish a suitable interview sample pool. In-depth interviews are conducted on aspects such as media cognition, platform interaction needs and fulfillment, and platform entertainment needs and satisfaction levels, aiming to comprehensively understand how the Xiaoyuzhou app meets users' entertainment needs in an auditory environment.

**Questionnaire Survey Method:** The study investigates two aspects—audience perception of media image and media usage motivation—distributing questionnaires through a combination of snowball sampling and simple random sampling to objectively describe the media image perception profile.

## 4. Shortcomings of Xiaoyuzhou APP Development and Recommendations

### 4.1 Existing Shortcomings

#### 1. Lack of Interactive Entertainment Forms

Many audiences use mobile audio platforms for entertainment purposes, as evidenced by both their reasons for using Xiaoyuzhou and the podcast content they most frequently consume. Users demonstrate clear entertainment tendencies, even when they cannot directly use their phones, preferring “pan-entertainment chat-style” content. Many users express high dissatisfaction with the platform's interactive construction, particularly complaining about the inability to send private messages. Additionally, users cannot establish their own social circles on Xiaoyuzhou, perceiving it solely as a tool for auditory companionship, which makes it easily replaceable. Furthermore, the platform's interactive forms lack distinctive features, offering only conventional functions like commenting and liking, and falling short in building social interaction platforms for auditory communities. This deficiency in interactive entertainment construction will ultimately cause audiences to abandon auditory media when seeking entertainment and stress relief, leading to unstable user groups and even user attrition.

#### 2. Lack of Entertainment Programming and Activities

Based on current data regarding audience perceptions of Xiaoyuzhou's entertainment features, entertainment slightly outperforms interactivity, but overall satisfaction remains at a level of dissatisfaction or neutrality. Given the insufficient audience cognition of Xiaoyuzhou's entertainment features, and based on specific measurement items, audience perception of Xiaoyuzhou's entertainment derives more from the content itself, with less perception of entertainment value

from interactive forms or entertainment activities/programs. The external interaction and sharing interface design of auditory media has become conventional, lacking distinctive auditory media characteristics, and cross-platform auditory social entertainment has been weakened. Second, the platform's entertainment-themed activities are inadequate. Currently, various mobile audio platforms have proliferated theme-based activities represented by "Knowledge Festivals." Although such activities enhance audience participation to some extent and effectively fulfill platform positioning and content resource guidance, their entertainment attributes are significantly diminished in aspects such as theme design and promotional marketing.

### **3. Ambiguous Core Auditory Value**

Auditory culture remains in a stage of basic theoretical construction, with insufficient attention from communication scholars. The incomplete value system of auditory communication culture itself can lead to unclear core values in mobile audio platforms. Xiaoyuzhou APP also fails to demonstrate its contribution to the development and improvement of auditory culture. Based on usage scenario data, Xiaoyuzhou APP has not effectively promoted individual sensory balance. This is due to the fact that sound, as the main subject of auditory communication, has many undeniable weaknesses that require patience from audiences using audio platforms and can easily cause boredom and fatigue. When faced with similar entertainment needs, audiences often turn to large social platforms like Weibo that combine text, images, and video. The research also reveals problems such as an insufficient auditory content resource library, unremarkable brand program construction, and uninnovative functional interface design.

## **4.2 Recommendations for Future Development**

### **1. Strengthen Platform Interactive Function Construction**

Xiaoyuzhou APP can further build a healthy community that provides listeners with space for in-depth communication and interaction. According to official data released by Xiaoyuzhou APP, users wrote 5.2 million characters in comments within half a year of the application's launch. The author found that in comment sections of programs on hot topics, user comments can exceed 200 characters, with high enthusiasm for repeated commenting. Audio communication's role in promoting exchange lies not in short-term effects but in long-term, subtle influence[8]. To maintain long-term interaction and communication, podcast hosts need to pay greater attention to and understand listeners' needs and dynamics. In response to the bidirectional needs of podcast hosts and listeners, Chinese podcast platforms should provide more complete operational products and services to promote "long-term" and "deep" interaction between podcast listeners and hosts, among listeners themselves, and between listeners and the platform.

### **2. Strengthen Platform Entertainment Function Construction**

From the perspective of audience demand, the continuously lowering threshold for entertainment and the breaking of spatiotemporal constraints on entertain-

ment have fueled the growth of mass pan-entertainment demand, providing a solid audience foundation for pan-entertainment commercialization. From the perspective of old-new media integration, various types of cultural products can be integrated and presented across multiple platforms in diverse forms within the internet environment, constructing a complete new ecosystem of celebrity IP. Currently, all types of mobile audio platforms should combine pan-entertainment strategies to construct an entertainment ecosystem layout of “premium IP + healthy live streaming + creative activities.” They should focus on integrating quality IP resources and, based on their own platform characteristics, develop various entertainment content such as novels, animation, film and television, and games, continuously consolidating and expanding IP value to form an auditory entertainment ecosystem centered on premium IP.

### 3. Strengthen Platform Auditory Media Attributes

McLuhan’s media extension theory mentions the important role of media in individual sensory usage. He predicted that the electronic media era would usher in a return of hearing. In the new media era of mobile communication, mobile audio platforms, as mobile media appealing to the auditory sense, utilize internet technology and mobile devices to enable auditory information acquisition to break through temporal and spatial limitations, allowing content to be listened to anytime and anywhere, thereby activating people’s auditory environment. To ensure that mobile audio platforms play an important role in individual sensory balance, efforts should be made from both the sound subject and platform construction levels. First, mobile audio platforms should be encouraged to introduce key autonomous sound production technologies. In the future, combining high-tech technologies such as 5G and VR can enhance the presence of sound, improve the immersive experience of audience auditory acquisition, and counteract problems such as thin information and monotonous forms in sound subjects.

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## Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

Hello, for the needs of my thesis research, I hope to understand your usage of the Xiaoyuzhou APP through your responses. Your opinions are very important to me, and any personal information involved in the questionnaire will be kept strictly confidential. Thank you!

### Part I: Demographic Characteristics

1. Your age:
  - Under 20
  - 21-30
  - 31-40
  - 41-50
  - Over 45
2. Your gender:
  - Male
  - Female
  - Other
3. Your education level:
  - Below college
  - College or undergraduate
  - Graduate or above
4. Your occupation:
  - Student
  - Employed with fixed job
  - Freelancer

### Part II: Xiaoyuzhou APP Usage Profile

5. Have you used the Xiaoyuzhou APP?
  - No (skip to end)
  - Yes



The Xiaoyuzhou APP interface is simple and clear  
Strongly agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Strongly disagree

14. Platform Interactivity

Xiaoyuzhou APP has many social interaction forms  
Strongly agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Strongly disagree

I have some social dependence on Xiaoyuzhou APP  
Strongly agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Strongly disagree

15. Platform Entertainment

Xiaoyuzhou APP has many interesting entertainment programs and activities  
Strongly agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Strongly disagree

Xiaoyuzhou APP has many interesting interaction forms (different from ordinary like/comment/share)  
Strongly agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Strongly disagree

16. Would you recommend Xiaoyuzhou APP to others?

- Very willing, would recommend to everyone
- Would share if asked
- Neutral
- Would not actively mention

## Appendix B: In-Depth Interview Questions

### Interview Purpose

Through in-depth interviews with Xiaoyuzhou APP users, this study aims to explore problems in the construction of Xiaoyuzhou APP's entertainment and interactivity features.

### Interview Questions

#### Part I: Demographic Characteristics and Usage Behavior

1. May I ask your age, gender, education level, and place of residence in the past three years?
2. What is your daily usage frequency and duration of the Xiaoyuzhou APP?
3. In what scenarios do you choose to use the Xiaoyuzhou APP?
4. What type of content do you generally listen to?

#### Part II: Media Image Perception

5. **[Key]** What are your needs when using the Xiaoyuzhou APP? Are these needs met? Please elaborate specifically.
6. Compared to audiovisual apps like Douyin, why do you choose Xiaoyuzhou APP as a way to relax and entertain yourself?
7. In your opinion, what is the most lacking aspect of the Xiaoyuzhou APP currently? You may share creative ideas; please elaborate.

**Interview Method: Semi-structured interview**

**Interview Duration: 15-25 minutes**

*Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.*

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