

Postprint: Analysis of the Current State and Imbalances in Digital Audiobook Media

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Abstract

In the new era, digital audiobooks underpinned by information technology and internet technology have developed rapidly, forming a complete and harmonious ecosystem. However, the lack of stability and ecological rules in current industry competition has created obstacles and constraints on the further development of the industry. Against this background, this paper primarily analyzes the current status of digital audiobook media and the reasons for its imbalance, hoping to provide references and insights for related fields in China.

Full Text

Abstract

In the new era, digital audiobooks—supported by information technology and internet technology—have developed rapidly, forming a complete and harmonious ecosystem. However, the lack of stability and ecological rules in current industry competition has hindered further development. This paper analyzes the current state of digital audiobook media and the causes of imbalance, aiming to provide references for relevant fields in China.

Keywords: Digital audiobooks; Media status; Imbalance analysis

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Introduction

With the vigorous development of audio technology, mobile terminals, and internet technology in China, the audiobook industry has made rapid progress and established a stable consumer base. Compared with traditional audio-visual products, digital audiobooks offer rich content, excellent user experience, and diverse resources, gradually gaining popularity among Chinese listeners and becoming a key component of the audiobook industry. Users can access digital

audiobooks through wearable devices, smartphones, tablets, and computers, enjoying advantages such as social listening, fragmentation, and personalization, which promote the flourishing development of China's cultural industry.

1.1 Media Ecological Environment

The political environment provides favorable support for digital audiobooks. Against the backdrop of China's policies to strengthen and improve the internet, television broadcasting networks, and telecommunications networks, the government has accelerated the construction and application of public services and modern technologies to achieve networking and digitization. As a key component of public cultural projects, digital audiobooks have received significant attention from relevant authorities. Additionally, major operators such as China Telecom, China Unicom, and China Mobile have been required to continuously reduce mobile data costs, facilitating convenient access to digital audiobooks and creating a positive political environment for market cultivation and industrial development.

The economic environment also fosters industry growth. During China's media transformation, numerous radio stations and publishers have actively expanded audiobook services, leveraging their advantages to increase social influence and attract investor and capital market attention. Platforms including Lizhi FM, Duoting FM, Qingting FM, and Himalaya FM have successively secured financing exceeding ten million US dollars. Culturally, China has a long tradition of listening to books, and with the rapid development of internet technology, the number of internet users continues to grow. Against the backdrop of smartphone proliferation, more netizens choose to listen to digital audiobooks, prompting the industry to rapidly develop and provide more personalized and diversified cultural resources to meet varied group demands. Technologically, the continuous improvement of audio technology and 4G networks has laid the foundation for users to listen anytime and anywhere, while the development of big data technology has enhanced precise and personalized recommendation services.

1.2 Media Ecological Competition

Content competition represents the primary battleground. To satisfy users' diversified cultural demands, major platforms primarily rely on two content production models: UGC (User-Generated Content) and PGC (Professionally-Generated Content). UGC consists of self-media individuals and grassroots hosts, while PGC comprises publishers, radio stations, and television stations. As one of China's largest audiobook platforms, Himalaya FM has organically integrated user-generated and professional content, ensuring quality while stimulating user initiative and participation.

Copyright competition constitutes another critical dimension. Although platforms like Himalaya FM and Kuting.com possess abundant content resources, securing these resources remains a key challenge for sustainable development.

To acquire more resources, audiobook producers have actively established partnerships with websites, broadcasters, and publishing institutions, signing copyright agreements to ensure content legitimacy. For instance, Himalaya FM has engaged in deep cooperation with Baidu, China Literature, Guomai Culture, Shanghai Translation Publishing House, and CITIC Publishing to obtain richer copyright resources. Meanwhile, as user demands diversify, copyright resource battles have intensified, driving up copyright values, with some platforms leveraging copyrights to attack competitors.

1.3 Media Ecological Symbiosis

Under China's "Internet Plus" strategy, audiobook platforms increasingly seek deep cooperation with hardware manufacturers, mobile phone makers, and web media to achieve complementary advantages and resource sharing. For example, Kuting.com has established partnerships with audio-visual agencies, mobile operators, radio stations, literary websites, and publishing institutions to expand its social influence and market share. Similarly, Kaola FM has actively cooperated with automotive brands such as Citroën, BMW, and Ford to launch Kaola-branded smart speakers.

2. Analysis of Imbalances in Digital Audiobooks

2.1 Low Degree of Resource Content Development

In this new historical period, China has become a major global publishing power, playing a key role in promoting spiritual civilization construction, with countless online literary works and excellent print publications emerging continuously. However, only a tiny fraction has been adapted into digital audiobooks. The content resources of major Chinese digital audiobook platforms concentrate primarily on children's works, online literature, bestsellers, and classics, with insufficient development and considerable homogenization and redundancy. Furthermore, constrained by capital, technology, and resources, the quality of digital audiobooks varies significantly.

2.2 Serious Profit Model Imbalance

China's digital audiobook industry remains in its infancy, with market competition at a preliminary stage. Major platforms suffer from singular, unclear, and immature profit models and sales channels. Additionally, high copyright fees and production costs leave platforms in a "low-profit" state. Although digital audiobooks have gained recognition among young audiences, their paid subscription rate remains low compared to video content, with revenue primarily derived from content promotion, banner ads, and splash-screen advertising, failing to tap into potential consumer groups.

2.3 Insufficient Copyright Protection

In stark contrast to the rapid development of audiobooks, China's relevant copyright laws lag behind, and the industry lacks copyright awareness and rights protection consciousness, leading to frequent copyright disputes and piracy incidents. For example, Jinjiang Company sued Penguin FM for unauthorized broadcasting of a digital audiobook. Such phenomena proliferate in the audiobook market, with producers even fighting each other over copyrights, resulting in chaotic and non-standardized industry development.

3. Strategies for Achieving Ecological Balance in Digital Audiobooks

Western countries such as Germany, the United States, and the United Kingdom have gradually developed mature media systems through years of exploration. Digital audiobooks have just started in China, with insufficient industry standardization, requiring scientific ecological balance mechanisms to achieve equilibrium.

3.1 Prioritizing Experience and Content

As market competition intensifies, digital audiobook distributors and producers must scientifically categorize content resources into genres such as psychology, health, education, art, and literature based on their characteristics and strengths, providing targeted and personalized services for different groups to enhance listener loyalty. Simultaneously, they should promote anchor popularity and actively discover and cultivate grassroots hosts to improve production quality and deliver excellent listening experiences. Only by making experience and content the foundation of digital audiobook production can a healthier ecological chain be formed, continuously injecting new vitality into industry development.

3.2 Exploring New Sales and Profit Models

In the new era, as internet technology flourishes and audiobooks become increasingly popular among young audiences seeking knowledge and broader perspectives, digital audiobooks must continuously explore and innovate sales and profit models to increase industry revenue and social influence. First, platforms should develop customized and personalized content services to attract corporate and individual paid subscriptions, continuously update product content and structure, provide relevant hardware and software devices, integrate the digital audiobook industry chain, and enhance user satisfaction. Second, they should innovate sales channels by leveraging e-commerce, radio stations, web platforms, and mobile terminals to establish a comprehensive distribution system and strengthen publication sales tiers. Finally, publishers and producers should actively seek cross-border cooperation to break through traditional sales

model limitations, build well-known brands, and achieve sustainable development.

3.3 Strengthening Copyright Review and Protection

To create a positive market environment, relevant authorities must continuously improve copyright protection laws, strengthen legal frameworks, regulate digital audiobook transaction pricing, and prevent price gouging. They should intensify penalties for piracy and infringement and establish robust copyright protection and management mechanisms. Distributors and producers must adhere to the principle of “authorized broadcasting,” conduct strict copyright reviews—particularly for UGC content—and employ advanced encryption technologies to effectively protect exclusive rights and prevent illegal broadcasting.

Conclusion

In summary, against the backdrop of China’s spiritual civilization construction, digital audiobooks have gained widespread popularity due to their convenience and efficiency, with accelerating development speed and progress. To standardize industry development, relevant authorities, distributors, and producers must form industrial synergies and implement effective strategies to achieve virtuous cycles and ecological balance, contributing to the sustainable development of China’s cultural undertakings.

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