

The Research on the Preference of “Role Play” Acts in Audiobook upon Chinese Audiences

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Abstract. Nowadays, in the new media environment generated by science and technology such as digital technology, Internet technology, and mobile communication technology, the way people acquire information and knowledge presents diversified characteristics, and people's reading methods also have more choices. Sound, which serves as one of the most vital parts of the reading industry, also has been making progress in its development. And the behavior of listening to audiobooks has been fulfilled in people's lives. Although the previous related research does have essential contributions to studying the audiobook industry, they just introduce the audiobook market and some of the uses appear in people's lives. This literature does not address what interests people about audiobooks, and it does not fully address what makes audiobooks appealing. In this research, the authors want to explore the factors that influence audiobooks so that the authors can figure out how can the authors make audiobooks better for the listeners. The research topic is whether the element of “role play” acts on the most influential part in the audiobook industry. An e-questionnaire was designed to collect the data mainly about the users' preferences on three elements: the cast of the voice actors, the post-production, and the form of the audiobook. And the result shows that most of the young people may care about the form of the audiobook, especially liking the form of performing the stories like drama.

Keywords: Audiobook; Role play; Preferences.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, it has become a common scene to see that many people prefer to listen to audiobooks while they are on their way like walking, riding, or driving cars, waiting for transportation, and even before sleeping. The behavior of listening to audiobooks has been fulfilled in people's lives. According to data from iiMedia Research, the market size of China's audiobook industry in 2016 was 2.37 billion yuan. After three years of rapid development, it reached 6.36 billion yuan in 2019, with a sustained growth rate higher than 30 percent [1]. According to statistics, there are currently more than 500 listening network platforms in China, nearly 200 audio listening book apps, and some e-book reading software have added the "listening to books" function [2]. And with the development of technology and the fast-changed trend of entertainment, not only the content of the audiobook but also its form has been improved a lot. There are various types of books ranging from classic ones to web fiction and diverse form of expressing the stories.

The history of audiobooks can be traced back a hundred years when it was mainly provided to people who were blinded by poison gas and other reasons in World War I [3]. And now in the new media environment generated by science and technology such as digital technology, Internet technology, and mobile communication technology, the way people acquire information and knowledge presents diversified characteristics, and people's reading methods also have more choices. Sound, which serves as one of the most vital parts of the reading industry, also has been making progress in development that according to iiMedia Research data, among the most preferred reading

media of the surveyed users, e-books ranked first with their convenience, accounting for 41.8 percent, followed by audiobooks at 32.3 percent. It is believed that although users will give priority to e-books when they have subjective reading intentions, audiobooks also have the function of enabling users to passively read while relaxing for entertainment and passing time, and audiobooks have a role in promoting the improvement of residents' reading. For the platforms of the audiobook, according to the user selection distribution data of 2021H1 online audio platforms in China, Himalaya, with a high market share of 65.5 percent, is the most popular online audio platform, followed by Lychee, Dragonflight FM, and Kuwo Changtan, accounting for 39.5 percent, 35.8 percent, and 34.5 percent, respectively. In addition, 25.4 percent and 20.9 percent of users said they would use online audio platforms such as Penguin FM and Lazy Voice, respectively. It's interesting to find that among audiobook users, the proportion of males is 13.2 percent higher than that of females. In terms of age distribution, users aged 31-40 are the main force listening to audiobooks, accounting for 34.9 percent, followed by users aged 26-30, which can be concluded that the users of the audiobook are mainly young people. By investigating the content provided by the audiobook apps, it mainly obtains four main directions: "leisure and entertainment", "emotional comfort" and "interesting social interaction". And through data analysis, it is found that 45 percent of users use audiobooks for leisure and entertainment, ranking first in motivation. The second is to pass the time, recommend friends, and obtain information [4].

Although the previous related research does have essential contributions on studying the audiobook industry, they just introduce the audiobook market and some of the uses appear in people's lives. This literature does not address what interests people about audiobooks, and it does not fully address what makes audiobooks appealing. The dissertation has researched and analyzed these aspects and has made a social study of the components of audiobooks that people may be interested in and the extent to which they are interested in them and has drawn conclusions. This provides the authors with a deeper understanding of audiobooks and how they are perceived by society. The data were also analyzed in relation to other factors to make the data more intuitive and easier to understand. In this research, the authors want to explore the factors that influence audiobooks so that the authors can figure out how can the authors make audiobooks better for the listeners. The research topic is whether the element of "role play" acts on the most influential part in the audiobook industry.

2. Literature Review

To start the project, the authors did some research on the previous studies related to the audiobook, which may roughly be divided into three parts: the definition of the audiobook, the method of studying the audiobook, and the elements that influence the development of the audiobook industry.

According to the study of Cai Xiang and Wang Rui, there is not an accurate explanation of the word "audiobook" since it has been defined variously in different studies. For example, Ci Hai defines "audiobook" as "a publication recorded on tape." And The Audiobook Association of America defines an audiobook as a sound recording product that contains no less than 51 percent of the text content, copied and packaged into cassette tapes, high-density compact discs, or simply digital files for sale, which is highly recognized. According to this, it is necessary to claim that in this study, the word "audiobook" refers to the sound recordings, using tapes, disks, mobile digital terminals, and other audio methods as carriers, which can be played and listened to by downloading, online or other methods [5].

When it comes to the method of studying the audiobook, in most of the studies the paper found, the researchers just treat the audiobook as a simple product, investigating its types, functions, target users, and how they liked it. However, a novel point of view was used to study the audiobook by applying the idea of "affordance". It analyzes the relationship between the reader/person as the subject of the action and the audio-reading media technology as the object of action in the ecological circle of the social environment, historical culture, and media environment with ecological affordance theory [6]. In the study of Wu Yao, she claimed that the affordance of the audiobook is generated in

the interaction between media technology and people and it may provide the possibilities of the users' behavior of potential reading, immerse in the scenes created by sound and the disconnection with the real world. It claims that the auditory cognition of the audio medium of audio reading is an embodied practice centered on the body, which tends to accommodate the body, liberate the body, and even mobilize the synesthesia experience of physical activities, and tends to be involved in the perceptual psychological process of holistic feeling. This study inspired the authors to apply the idea of "role play" in the research, considering it has a tighter relationship influencing the development of the audiobook while the "affordance" focuses more on having effects on the listeners.

There are several elements of the audiobook that have been studied like the hot IP from literature and the cast of voice actors. Radio dramas adapted from literary IP with high traffic are favored by young people. More than 80 percent of users prefer IP audio content. Due to the influence of the original works, the audio content derived from IP is more guaranteed in content quality and has a better fan base. Therefore, such radio dramas are easier to achieve success in the market [7]. And for fans who like certain celebrities and anchors with specific goals, Himalaya FM invites celebrities and stars from all walks of life to create a "fan economy", and the high-quality audio content of celebrities has become hot [8].

And according to what Wu claimed in his study, audiobooks have grown in a short period because of the increasing spiritual needs of young people [9]. With the premise of freeing up both eyes, audiobooks are able to provide a strong thematic and more diversified self-selection, which is also somehow stronger than the traditional radio stations and short video platforms can provide the audience with resources and situations but less limitation of demand. And the increasingly fast pace of life also has higher requirements for the convenience of entertainment, anytime, anywhere, whether the fragmented time after work and study can be used is also very important and obviously that audiobooks are able to meet these conditions.

Furthermore, in different situations, environments, and irregular moods, users can choose their resources to build their spiritual world, and the sound leaves more room for the listener's imagination and sense of immersion to meet the needs of the spiritual level and can also avoid the discord of some public environments and the negative emotions brought about by fear of social interaction. Not only does it prevent the emergence of bad emotions, but it also allows for the adjustment and reassurance of existing bad emotions because the content that interests people can be seen as a type of pressure releasing [10].

3. Methodology

The reason why Himalaya was chosen was mainly that it is the most famous platform in China and is also the best-known audiobook platform around the world. If everyone is concerned and knows well about the platform, it is going to be easier while creating questions for the questionnaire. The way of research is the questionnaire, the authors designed an online survey using questionnaire star (A well-known platform in China for creating online surveys or conducting research). Convenience sampling and snowball sampling were used as the sampling methods. And the sample the paper collected is the people who listen to the audiobook apps. These are the questions in the questionnaire. Some demographic information was collected in the first two questions. From the third question, it is aimed to figure out how many degrees the respondents like audiobooks from their use frequency. From the fifth to the seventh, the three elements were asked in the way "whether you would pay attention to them" by providing five degrees from "pay no attention to it" to "pay very close attention to it". And at last, the respondents' preference for the form and the reasons why they like it were asked selected.

It was designed to open the access for the respondents to finish the survey for one week in order to collect valid questionnaires as many as possible. After seven days, a total of 154 responses were collected. So, the way how to judge whether a response is effective or not becomes an important question. The way the authors judge whether a response is effective or not is by looking at how long

it took for them to finish the whole questionnaire and whether they did finish the free response question the paper set since writing words is a much better way of expressing one's opinion in a more specific and measurable manner. Looking at the result of the survey, in order to measure whether a response is effective or not, research is done to make sure the way of measuring is specific and precise. A post on the website "elastic" presented a group of data. The data presented clearly shows that an effective response for a multiple-choice problem is sixty seconds. True & false problem as well as other problems that only contains two choices only requires 30 seconds to make an effective and useful answer. As for the short free response questions, usually, these types of questions can take up to sixty seconds to one hundred and twenty seconds to get an effective response. Better responses should be completing all questions, especially for the free response questions, people should answer at least three sentences starting from introducing their point, elaborating on it, and a summary.

4. Result

First, the first question shows general information about the gender of the audiobook population. From it, the authors can learn that 83.12 percent of audiobook listeners are female, while only 16.88 percent are male. The second question is the age distribution of people who use audiobooks. In this question, the authors set up four ranges, which are 5-16 years old, 17-28 years old, 29-50 years old, and 51 years old and above. The two age groups with the largest proportions were 17-28 and 29-50, accounting for 36.36 percent and 42.21 percent, respectively. 51 and older were relatively few, accounting for 18.83 percent of the total number of people surveyed, and 5-16 was the least, accounting for only 2.6 percent. The third question investigated the frequency of listening to audiobooks for all respondents, which was roughly divided into five levels. First, the largest number of people listened to audiobooks 2-3 times a month, accounting for 27.27 percent. Second, there was little difference between those who hardly listened to audiobooks and those who listened to audiobooks 2-3 times a week, accounting for 23.38 percent and 25.97 percent, respectively. The percentage of those who listened to it every day was relatively small, at 15.58 percent. And those who never listened were the least, at 7.79 percent.

As the authors can see from the data, in terms of platform choice, 67 percent of people chose Himalaya, which was followed by the Maoer. The number of people who choose Manbo and Lizhi is similar at only about 14 percent. Only 10.39 percent of people prefer choosing Wechat, and the figure for Lanren and Qingting were, relatively low, at about 4 percent and 7 percent respectively. In terms of the attention paid by audiobook dubbing crews, more than half of the audience are very concerned or somewhat concerned about that, and 24 percent are moderately concerned. Those who pay little attention and those who pay no attention are smaller, at 12 percent and 11 percent, respectively. In terms of the level of attention paid to audiobook post-production, nearly 30 percent of the audience were moderately concerned, more than half were very concerned or somewhat concerned, and 9 percent were not concerned about that at all. As seen from the data, in terms of platform choice, 67 percent of people chose Himalaya, which was followed by the Maoer. The number of people who choose Manbo and Lizhi is similar at only about 14 percent. Only 10.39 percent of people prefer choosing WeChat, and the figure for Lanren and Qingting were, relatively low, at about 4 percent and 7 percent respectively. In terms of the attention paid by audiobook dubbing crews, more than half of the audience are very concerned or somewhat concerned about that, and 24 percent are moderately concerned. Those who pay little attention and those who pay no attention are smaller, at 12 percent and 11 percent, respectively. In terms of the level of attention paid to audiobook post-production, nearly 30 percent of the audience were moderately concerned, more than half were very concerned or somewhat concerned, and 9 percent were not concerned about that at all.

Next, for the element of "the form of the audiobook", the data shows that most of the respondents think it is not an important part of the audiobook since 33.77 percent of them choose the middle option between "paying no attention" and "paying very close attention" in the questionnaire. 29.22 percent of respondents show a lot of concern in this element who chose "paying very close attention" while

there are 22.73 percent of respondents chose “paying more attention”. The number of people who “pay few attention” and “pay no attention” is very similar, which are 6.49 percent and 7.79 percent respectively.

The follow-up question is asking the respondents to choose their preference of the form of the audiobook. According to the data, it seems that the form of narrating stories by a single storyteller and the form of performing the stories like drama share the likes of users, which have very near data that the former owns 34.42 percent, and the latter owns 35.06 percent. There is 22.73 percent of respondents prefer to listen to the audiobook narrated by several storytellers in each episode.

For the reason “why do you prefer this kind of form of listening to the audiobook”, almost 68 percent of respondents chose the option that “it lets me feel more immersive”, which is much higher than the second most chosen option that “it’s interesting”, with nearly 47 percent of respondents votes. Though it is a multiple-choice question, only 37 percent of respondents chose the option claiming that the audiobook made the original book's content simpler and clearer. And there is nearly 30 percent of the people thought the various form of the audiobook let the knowledge from the book easier to be understood and digested.

5. Discussion

When the authors analyzed the question "Do you pay attention to the audiobook lineup?", the paper found that more than half of the people pay attention to the audiobook lineup, and the same proportion of those who pay attention to it and those who pay attention to it are also the most numerous, occupying 25.97 percent respectively. The total number of people who do not pay attention and those who do not pay attention at all is only 24.03 percent, not even a quarter of the total number of people surveyed. This is in line with the authors' expectations. This is in line with the authors' expectations because the authors believe that the voice actors of audiobooks are an important factor in their development. The larger the percentage of people concerned the more this prediction proves to be correct.

However, when analyzing the data further and more carefully, the authors found that there are still some areas that need special attention because there is a big gap between the two largest groups in terms of attention to voice actors. 17-28 years old average about 3.86, while 29-50 years old average only 3.15, which means that 28-50 years old as a whole pay more attention to voice actors. Attention to voice actors will be significantly lower than for 17-28 years old. This shows that age has a big influence on this. Due to the age difference, the older people in their lives will pay more attention to the story content itself, and whether the story content is exciting will be the deciding factor in their choice of the audiobook. In contrast, younger people will be more concerned with the content of the story and will also be more demanding of the voice actors. They tend to think that interesting voices and voices they appreciate can add to the expressiveness of the audiobook, making it easier for them to immerse themselves in the audiobook program. This is how a good voice actor captures the interest of modern young people, thus increasing the effectiveness and appeal of the program. Likewise, good voice actors become well-known personalities, creating a buzz for other productions and for the platform itself.

It can be seen that the voice cast is a significant element that will get more and more attention. This is because the comparison of different age groups shows that young people (who will be the majority of the population in the future) are very concerned about the voice cast, and it is about to become a demand, and people will listen to more audiobooks for a good voice cast. With the quality of works at the same level, a better voice cast will bring more traffic and attention, and even the voice cast will compensate for the lack of presentation.

When it comes to post-production, the authors find that people aged 17 to 28 pay more attention than people aged 29 to 50. Among the 17 - to 28 years old audience, a third of them show very high attention to post-production, and 27 percent said they pay a lot of attention to that. Nearly a third of

viewers between the ages of 29 and 50 said they were moderately concerned about the post-production, and about 40 to 50 percent said they were relatively or very concerned about that.

Post-production includes sound effects (such as background sound, and ambient sound), voice processing of characters, and the pace of progress of each episode. Young (17-28) pay more attention to post-production because they pursue of the immersive experience feeling, in fragmented information across the Internet age of young people is more difficult to concentrate, they are harder to concentrate for a long time to read a single text, and audiobooks radio unit design and well-made effects can attract more young people's favorite. They are more concerned about content quality than older age groups (29-50), and production is less important to most. For example, some elderly people choose audiobooks just because they can free their eyes and take a more relaxed way to finish their reading.

As a result, many high-quality post-production audiobooks are adapted from current popular titles that young people enjoy, leaving many classics unread. For audiobook producers, the cost of post-production will increase dramatically, because good post-production will occupy most of the young market, but many good classic works will miss the opportunity to be presented in audiobooks with good production.

The good news is that sophisticated post-production will make people more interested in reading (compared with boring paper reading), and the production company should also maintain a high standard of production, to bring people a better reading experience and arouse more people's interest in reading. The downside is that the post-production should not be so distracting that the content of the work will be obscured. Production companies should use post-production as a springboard to expose people to better works and bring classic works back to the public in a new way. At the same time, the quality and popularity of audiobook works will be greatly improved by adapting diverse works to attract more groups of other ages (especially those who have not yet been able to read or those who are not convenient to use their eyes), and by combining good post-production with excellent works.

When analyzing the collected data on the question "how many degrees do you pay attention to the form of the audiobook", the paper found that there is little difference between various forms that there is 33.77 percent of respondents chose the middle option between "pay no attention" and "pay very close attention" while 29.22 percent of them showed their high concerns about the form, which is against the expected result. And the ideal result is that the people who choose "pay very close attention" owns the highest rate, which may refer to the strong relationship between the form of the audiobook and its influence on the development of the audiobook industry.

The paper tried to figure out the reason why the analyzed data are far from the expectation and there are many two factors the authors found considered effects. Firstly, the lack of considering the influence age may have on the respondents' choices, choosing their preferred form of the audiobook, the paper didn't analyze the selection of the specific age group. It is supposed that various age groups may have different choosing preferences in the form of the audiobook they used to listen to. Secondly, the question the authors designed may be a little confusing for the interviewees since in the questionnaire, the authors didn't clearly explain the biggest difference between the three forms of the audiobook, so it may puzzle or mislead the respondents while making choices. It's the authors' default that all the people who do the survey are supposed to know the various forms of the audiobook very well.

In order to figure out how the specific age groups made their choices, the authors analyzed the data of the four age groups, the ages from 5 to 16, the ages from 17 to 28 years old, the ages from 29 to 50 years old, and the ages over 51 years old respectively. Comparing the average of the four age groups, it shows that younger people pay more attention than the elder ones, which needed to be mentioned that the higher the average score, the more attention would be paid. And when viewing the pie chart of each age group, it's much easier to see the difference in their preferences, owning the same conclusion, the younger users pay much more attention than the elder ones. For the unclear description of different forms of the audiobook designed in the questionnaire, it's necessary for the

authors to improve the statement, making it simpler and clearer, and some examples of each form are supposed to be provided in the questionnaire in order to eliminate the influence brought by the lapse of designing the questionnaire.

6. Conclusion

To have a brief conclusion, the paper aims to figure out whether “role play”, which refers to one of the forms of the audiobook, plays the most influential part in the development of the audiobook industry while the previous studies related to the audiobook only having superficial research, counting which types are welcomed by the users the most and the basic functions used by the listeners, instead of digging the reason why is it liked by people a lot behind it. By releasing the questionnaire on the internet, the research collected 154 responses finished by the respondents and it was clear to see that the element of “the form of the audiobook” does have an effect on influencing the preferences of the users of the audiobook apps and most of the respondents, especially the younger one, prefer the form of performing the stories like drama. And to analyze the data in a more concise way, it shows that the youth, especially the age group ranging from 17~28 years old pay much more attention to not only the form of the audiobook but also the cast of the voice actors and the post-production. In this way, it does have a contribution to plan to adjust and improve the audiobook industry in its future development as theoretical support. However, there are still some limitations in the study that the chosen sample and the method used in this research were convenient, which caused the collected data to not be common and convinced enough. Furthermore, the designed questions were not clear enough for the respondents to make their choices without any confusion. It’s believed that the result may be more convinced if the method of simple random sampling is used and the questions in the questionnaire are improved.

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