

Jump Into the Rabbit Hole: a unique presence in Chinese podcasting

In March 2020, If Tech launched a podcast application called Xiaoyuzhou (Small Universe). Xiaoyuzhou is the preferred application for Chinese podcast listeners, with usage increasing year by year. In the past four years, Xiaoyuzhou has accumulated a large number of frequent users. The reach of Xiaoyuzhou users has now exceeded 750,000 (based on the subscribers to its top podcast *Stochastic Volatility*, data as of 6 April). Xiaoyuzhou relies on the RSS subscription function to provide Chinese podcast listeners with 'discovery', 'listening', and 'community' experiences. It also features a timeline comment function, allowing users to discover their favourite programmes and improve their sense of participation through community interaction. The timeline comment enables the listeners to comment on a topic or idea more specifically, stimulating discussion. Xiaoyuzhou successfully responded to the pain points of podcast users, by increasing the space for community interaction, expanding the communication space between listeners and creators, and making podcasting a powerful tool in China.

The operation team of Xiaoyuzhou releases a list at the end of each year, summarizing the ecological changes in podcast creation throughout the year. In 2023, 32,610 new podcast programmes and more than 300,000 single episodes were added to the app. This year, the content of Chinese podcasts has been greatly enriched, and more creators have innovated the form and content of podcasts. In 2023, Xiaoyuzhou launched the 'Content Topics' function, providing a display window for creators focused on in-depth content, including *Jump into the Rabbit Hole*.

Produced by the Shengdong Huobo Company (Sheng FM), *Jump into the Rabbit Hole* is a podcast that has garnered widespread attention in the Chinese podcasting sphere. Shengdong Huobo was established in March 2019 by its founders Xu Tao and Ding Jiao. Their slogan, 'Colliding with the World through Sound,' epitomizes the company's ethos. With a strong commercial background, they aim to narrate business stories through the medium of sound and explore various audio storytelling techniques. Over the

past four years, the company has been exploring its own business model. In addition to branded broadcasts and paid content, founder Xu Tao also hopes to integrate interviews, music, and sound effects to create immersive stories. *Jump into the Rabbit Hole* emerged as a result of these efforts.

This news podcast is an innovative piece of digital journalism for the era of convergent media. It can be categorized as in-depth reporting. Such programmes typically employ the subjective perspective of journalists or producers to delve deeper into stories by conducting interviews with the people involved in news events, to provide a vivid narrative of the events. This is achieved through extensive field recordings, on-site dialogues, and sound design to enhance the programme's informational content and emotional impact. Currently, academic research on digital journalism exhibits three key characteristics: 1) a primary focus on social media platforms, with less attention given to search engine platforms or mobile platforms provided by Android and Apple; 2) scholars primarily researching social media platforms in Global North; 3) a notable abundance of research on Twitter. Scholars have paid attention to the emotional involvement of radio, interpreting it in conjunction with fan cultures (Birdsall, 2023). However, there is a limited amount of research on podcasting, particularly those focused on audio news.

In-depth news podcast belongs to the genre of narrative podcasts. Narrative podcasts are typically divided into fiction and non-fiction categories with fictional podcasts including audio dramas or mockumentaries, while non-fiction podcasts can be audio features, audio documentaries, personalized narratives, oral histories, or audio guides. This article considers the in-depth news podcast *Jump into the Rabbit Hole* as a type of audience commodity (Davenport & Beck, 2001; Bate, 2023), where listening is a form of consumption. Different audio texts evoke various emotions in the audience, and the features of Xiaoyuzhou provide listeners with more public space, enabling them to express emotions, discuss viewpoints, and generate new traces, thus fostering emotional interaction and providing relevant feedback and references for the subsequent creative work of producers.

According to John L. Sullivan's (2024) definition, podcasting is influenced by various factors, such as the technological aspects of audio production and distribution, the experiences of listeners, the social roles of podcast creators, and the growing presence of online platforms that facilitate connections between creators and listeners. The first season of *Jump into the Rabbit Hole* was launched in May 2022 with a special feature narrating how emerging phenomena, such as AI interviewers, the e-cigarette sales chain, post-2000 fortune tellers, and dating apps, are impacting on the lives of ordinary people. Fan Jiaxun (hereinafter referred to as Jiaxun), who has prior experience at Caixin Media, serves as the producer, host and reporter. The programme explores people's relationships with these emerging phenomena, providing a mix of real-time experiences and narratives. The production quality of *Jumping into the Rabbit Hole* is excellent, with Jiaxun utilizing comprehensive interview materials, engaging narrative techniques, unique perspectives on subject selection, and insightful analysis, presenting the states and thoughts of various social roles.

In the programme titles, a rhetorical question format is frequently utilized, typically containing a key word, such as *Overthrowing Online Games*, *One-Day Boyfriend*, and *Stock Trading*. These key words serve to generate intrigue and attract listeners by creating suspense and topicality.

From the perspective of experience and engagement of the listeners, *Jump into the Rabbit Hole* is distributed on several podcast platforms in China, including Apple Podcasts, Xiaoyuzhou, Himalaya FM and Spotify, but it performs best on Xiaoyuzhou. The programme has garnered over 40,000 user subscriptions, with the most popular episode receiving 23,000 listens and accumulating up to 715 comments (data as of March 18, 2024). Additionally, due to the functionality of Xiaoyuzhou, many listeners receive direct responses from Jiaxun. Comments from listeners also receive likes and replies from other listeners, a phenomenon seldom observed on other applications.

Audiences of *Jump into the Rabbit Hole* have expressed their feelings about this groundbreaking content on Xiaoyuzhou:

The new programme sounds a bit like the style of a documentary from a small perspective, and I really like it. (Chuan Lin Da Ye)

I've listened to several episodes in a row, the production is thoughtful, and the topic selection is also interesting. I've fallen into the rabbit hole. (Yyoo)

Thank you, Rabbit Hole, for doing what I thought traditional media should do. (PLMAY)

(The selected comments are excerpted from Xiaoyuzhou)

Jiaxun conducts interviews with scholars in relevant fields to introduce diverse theoretical viewpoints on the programme and offer a comprehensive analysis of the motivations underlying people's behaviours from the researchers' standpoint. The comment feature allows producers or guests to easily showcase the most recent updates and supplementary information related to the programme in the comment section. To improve audience engagement, the programme shares show notes and behind-the-scenes videos on its lively public platform before launching each episode. These materials provide the audience with insights into the production process. Additionally, the producers regularly organize live events where the audience is invited to participate as interviewees in the programme's creation. At the end of the first season, the production crew contacted over 80 listeners to create a supplementary episode titled "*Visions, Struggles, and 2400 Minutes of Phone Calls*". This approach offers listeners increased chances to understand the topics covered and the producers' approach, establishing a deeper emotional connection with the news.

On May 4, 2020, the Pulitzer Prize announced the addition of the Audio Reporting Award for the first time, with *The Out Crowd* receiving the award (Sattler, 2020). The establishment of this award signifies industry recognition for non-fiction narrative podcasts. It also indicates that the future news will shift from visual culture to an audio-visual balance. Podcasts in China mostly focus on interviews, so non-fiction narrative podcasts are considered a relatively

niche genre (Ding, 2023). In China, *Jump into the Rabbit Hole* represents a unique phenomenon, which is related to the way Chinese news media are qualified. Jiaxun said in an interview for Sheng FM, that the company Shengdong Huobo has not obtained the qualifications for news production and editing.¹ Therefore, strictly speaking, it cannot be recognized as a news podcast in China. However, the production team has consistently produced the programme in the format of news reporting. Listeners also perceive the form as innovative and distinctive:

It's really rare to find programmes in Chinese podcasts that conduct investigative reporting with such seriousness and dedication. The production quality is also very meticulous and excellent. Although there may be topics that one was not originally interested in or paying attention to, they become engaging through the format of the programme.

(The selected comments are excerpted from Apple Podcasts)

Emotional arousal in in-depth news podcasts

According to Jonathan H. Turner's (2000) emotion theory, there are two fundamental reasons for emotional arousal: expectation and reward or punishment. He believes that people always engage in interpersonal interactions with certain expectations. If the situation aligns with expectations, individuals generally experience happiness and comfort. Conversely, if the situation does not meet expected standards, individuals may experience negative emotions such as fear, anger, or sadness. When individuals perceive support for their actions from others, leading to positive reinforcement, they typically experience positive emotions. Conversely, when individuals perceive a lack of support for their actions, resulting in punishment, they experience one or more negative emotions. When experiencing rewards, individuals express positive emotions towards others as positive reinforcement. Randall Collins (2004) suggests that the arousal of positive emotions leading to pleasurable emotional responses becomes a reward, gradually increasing positive

¹ The interview is available at <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/hgIF8EkXiRldkNxKOqHJHg>

emotions. Conversation and body postures synchronize rhythmically, social cohesion strengthens, and when individuals are in a compound state of negative emotions such as anger, fear, or sadness, social connections may be disrupted, leading to division rather than unity. As negative emotions increase, individuals may also employ self-protective defence strategies, which can further decrease the cohesiveness of interpersonal interactions.

News podcast listeners may frequently experience intense and somber emotions, including negative feelings such as helplessness, anger, and a sense of bewilderment, particularly in response to the adversities faced by individuals in the stories. The second season of *Jump into the Rabbit Hole* covered the case of a missing high school student named Hu Xinyu. Over a hundred days after his disappearance, local authorities reported finding his body in the woods near the school. While cases of children and teenagers going missing are not uncommon in China, Hu's disappearance became one of the most discussed topics on the Chinese internet for several months. At the outset, no one could have anticipated that the name Hu Xinyu would stir such a significant online response. After the programme team turned its attention to this event, an investigation was initiated into why this particular case garnered such widespread attention on the internet. Many listeners have expressed their emotions in response to this incident:

I find the whole description very sad. Everyone is criticizing this and spreading that rumour in the name of helping him, but there is no understanding of him personally... (Jiang Mo)

I feel really sad, experiencing how the term 'human blood mantou' is written. Nobody pays attention to the individual, only personal interests are focused on. (Sun Sun Xian An)

The process was so oppressive, the absurd live broadcast was disgusting... I felt like crying after listening to it... (LING_7788)

Great series, at times it made my teeth itch, but towards the end, it was somewhat heartbreaking... (Aiyoma Ye)

(The selected comments are excerpted from Xiaoyuzhou)

Listener response indicates how the content of the story aroused emotions. Supporting elements of background sounds, the tone of the host's voice, and music, all contributed to the emotional impact of the story. Sound rich audio texts can facilitate emotional communication in a rich and vivid manner, with the key factor remaining the story itself. Whether the story is conveyed through sound, visuals, or text, the more captivating the narrative, the greater the audience's attention and engagement. Attention levels influence the extent and strength of emotional engagement, resulting in different levels of emotional arousal.

Emotional labour: collaboration between producers and interviewees

Jump into the Rabbit Hole attempts to guide listeners towards gaining new insights through objective reporting from multiple points of view. Extensive interviews are conducted to present each character's story as objectively and authentically as possible. Typically, the producers have a general direction for the topic, and interesting entry points are identified through corresponding interviews. According to Jiaxun, one of the requirements for selecting topics is that they should be suitable for storytelling through sound. Secondly, the aim is to bring something new, to explore untold stories, and thirdly, to provoke reflection. In the process of conducting interviews, the programme team invests significant emotional labour.

In the 1970s and 1980s, American sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild created the term emotional labour based on classical Marxism, Erving Goffman's imitation theory, and Freudian psychoanalysis. Hochschild defines emotional labour as the act of evoking or suppressing emotions while performing paid work (Hochschild, 2012). It is a distinct form of labour often accompanied by mental and physical exertion. The patterns of emotional labour mainly include surface acting and deep acting. Surface acting involves adjusting external behaviours such as facial expressions, tone, gestures, and body posture to meet job requirements, while deep acting involves adjusting emotions and inner feelings to fulfill job demands.

Research in journalism studies on emotion management has mostly focused on extreme situations, such as crisis reporting involving genocide, war, disasters, and major accidents, when the emotional influence on journalists is most noticeable (Richards & Rees, 2011). Journalism studies have shifted towards a more serious and explicit expression of emotions. The growing emphasis on the emotional effects of crisis reporting serves as a foundation for researching journalists' emotional labour (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020). Investigative journalism work also requires complex forms of emotional labour. Reporters must consistently coordinate responses while negotiating with those closely linked to the news and its background in order to acquire sensitive information. They offer support for victims of wrongdoing to address anger arising from ethical concerns. Some scholars use the term emotional camouflage to describe individuals attempting to hide their true feelings and manage their emotions to protect themselves by manipulating their non-verbal cues (Meltzer, 2010).

News production requires a substantial amount of emotional labour, which is frequently intangible. Journalists opt to integrate emotions into the stories they report, indicating emotional regulation. However, the journalistic demand for professional objectivity imposes a high sensitivity to the integration of emotions and the accurate expression of emotions in news narratives. Additionally, the power differentials present when journalists interact with news sources and the artificial social environment resulting from these differentials require careful negotiation, often taking the form of emotional labour. Emotions are challenging to capture in real-time and difficult to describe precisely, making it hard to consider emotional labour when determining workloads. Different types of journalism demand various forms of emotional labour, and reporters must continuously adjust their emotions to adapt to different forms of news content and media organizations. In the context of podcast production, where producers and journalists are often the same person and on-screen appearance requirements are not a consideration, it does not imply a reduction in emotional labour for the producer. Jiaxun emphasized the importance of controlling her emotions during interviews to complete tasks, advance the

investigation, and the need to occasionally protect her identity when interacting with interviewees of various backgrounds. Unlike audio dramas that allow for fiction and artistic creation, in-depth news podcasts integrate the subjective emotions of producers and interviewees. Jiaxun revealed in a behind-the-scenes interview that she had 'political depression'² at times during the production of Covid-19 programmes. For instance, she occasionally thought, 'Why do such occurrences go unchallenged? Could it happen to me, and what can I do to change the situation?' From this statement, Jiaxun needs to consistently regulate her emotions to uphold impartiality and neutrality during the production of *Jump into the Rabbit Hole*.

Jiaxun has made previous attempts at creating in-depth news podcasts before *Jump into the Rabbit Hole*. In 2019, she began creating the non-fiction narrative podcast series *Investigative Reporting Story Collection*. In 2021, she was the producer for *On the Record*³, The *On the Record* team recorded nearly 2000 minutes of interviews—exploring five high-profile criminal cases in China, with Jiaxun consistently striving to shape authentic character portrayals and story content through sound. The show received widespread acclaim from the audience and accumulated a substantial fan base in the Chinese podcast community. When questioned about feeling frightened during the production process of *On the Record* because of the case content, Jiaxun responded as follows:

I cannot deny that I am terrified. I feel more worried or apprehensive before going to interviews, especially when I can't reach anyone, and I have to rely on luck alone. Upon arriving at the scene and activating the recording device, I promptly immerse myself in my task without distraction.

(Excerpt from the behind-the-scenes revelations of *On the Record*)

² The terms "zhèngzhì yìyù" (政治抑郁) or "zhèngzhìxìng yìyù" (政治性抑郁) were first discussed in Chinese media around 2020, regarding politics outside of China. In February 2020, at the onset of the pandemic, a post at *The Paper* (澎湃) presented political depression as a health issue, citing Western material.

³ *On the Record* is the first non-fiction narrative podcast in Mainland China that covers real crime cases. It is produced by Caixin Media and was officially launched in March 2021.

Jiaxun's pre-interview anxiety demonstrates how she continually adapts her emotions to handle potential on-site situations and shifts into a work-oriented mindset once she is on-site.

The seemingly contradictory relationship between the public nature of podcasts and the privacy of emotions is notable. Discussions on public issues attract considerable public attention. Although a podcast may not perfectly emulate a Habermas salon, it provides a space where the public has the opportunity to contribute to the formation of discourse in a relatively cohesive manner. Podcasts can vividly portray intimate relationships and emotions simultaneously. Podcasts showcase the intimate and private emotions of interviewees and foster a sense of companionship between listeners and producers. This sense of intimacy is also reinforced by the podcast platform's community. In other words, the narration of intimate and personalized stories does not inherently conflict with the public sphere. Podcasts effectively bridge the gap between private emotions and public interests, creating an immersive listening experience for the audience through the use of sound.

In in-depth news podcasts, extensive investigative journalism and emotions related to privacy are involved. Interviewees' trust in the production team is crucial. Gaining this trust not only demonstrates media power but also shows the use of media power. Collaboration requires producers (journalists) and interviewees to regulate their emotions to effectively convey emotions.

Female perspectives: privacy of emotions

According to China's podcast platform VoiceFirst (2022), there are more female creators than male ones, with a gender ratio of 58:42. Within China's top platform-based podcast app, Himalaya, 64% of creators are female. Podcasts are becoming a prominent platform for women to express themselves, share their lives, and promote female empowerment. Podcasts provide female producers increased options and independence due to their inexpensive production costs and lightweight nature. Media organisations have been motivated to promote gender equality by increasing the number of female

professionals they hire. As a result, podcast themes are more focused on women's personal lives and development.

Jump into the Rabbit Hole's second season is now available online after a six-month hiatus. The producers have been considering ways to enhance the depth and complexity of the programme since the first season ended. The first episode of the second season, entitled 'Fantasy, Obsession, and Disillusionment About One-Day Boyfriends' was released in May 2023. The central character in this episode, 'Miss Rabbit.' is a young woman living in the real world, but her dating partner is a fantasy character from a game. In this episode where reality and virtuality intertwine, young women have different identities, including game players, paying employers, and commissioned instructors. A woman who spends money to hire another woman to portray the male character she likes from a romance game in the real world for a date, is usually referred to as a 'cos offline commission'. People who get paid called 'commissioned instructors', while those who pay for the service are called 'paying employers'. Jiaxun attempts to explore a dating simulation game designed for female audience. She investigates the complex, fragile, and lesser-known stories beneath romantic and ideal relationships. This genre of game is also known as an otome game, where players engage in sweet dates and interactions with the male protagonist through continuous card draws. This unique presentation of intimate relationships in urban life has sparked more discussions and reflections. Here, emotions, are a commodity that can be sold, and some individuals derive feelings of security and love from these aspirations in real life. The producer's analysis found that players hired for this game are predominantly women due to three primary factors. First, the primary audience of otome games is women. Furthermore, female commissioned instructors provide a greater sense of security as the employers who pay them are also women. Meetings resembling dates can diminish defensive barriers among women, facilitating the acceptance of caring or personal gestures from unfamiliar women. Thirdly, women's inherent emotional sensitivity and heightened empathy give them a natural edge as 'commissioned instructors'.

Listeners provided a variety of comments on this episode. Some utilised

terms such as 'impossible to imagine', 'hard to understand', 'shocked' and 'cognitive breakthrough' to describe the programme, while others exclaimed 'captivating to listen to', 'beautiful', 'a bit touching', and 'left me wanting more'.

The most suitable approach for the theme of this episode is to narrate the story using audio. Using sound to narrate effectively ensures the confidentiality of the female respondents. Privacy is achieved by creating a sense of intimacy and emotional resonance through the voice, which enhances audience engagement. Unlike most other media reporting formats, podcasts do not reveal the interviewees' visual information, preserving their privacy appropriately through the narrative style. Therefore, the emotional labour required for expressing emotions in the audio format is slightly lower, as interviewees do not have to be overly concerned about their faces and potentially their personal lives being revealed. They refrain from being overly emotional in their performances to maintain their independence and honesty of expression in the pursuit of creating programme effects.

Formation of a new interaction ritual

Randall Collins introduced the Interaction Ritual Chains (IRC) theory in 2003. This theory views rituals as behaviours that express meaning through various symbols. Participants in these rituals share common focal points and emotions, and the core mechanism of rituals involves rhythmic and harmonious interactive processes (Collins, 2004). The IRC theory suggests that participants gather in a bounded space, engage in emotionally driven symbolic activities, and generate the emotional energy of collective identity. This idea is widely applied in sociological research, considering interaction (or rituals) as the source of social dynamics, where each individual's social image gradually forms through interactions with others. The IRC theory can be seen as a set of processes with causal connections and feedback loops. Emotion-driven interactions result in a series of rituals.

IRC theory offers a solid theoretical reference for understanding the emotional energy formed during the auditory communication process of in-

depth news podcasts. Podcast platforms provide a space for interpersonal communication, with features like commenting meeting various needs for interaction between listeners and producers, as well as amongst listeners. In-depth news podcast productions engage listeners in real stories, enabling them to accumulate, exchange, and release their emotions through interaction. From this perspective, the dissemination process fulfills the basic requirements of the Interaction Ritual Chains.

According to Collins' theory, the key components of a ritual are as follows:

1. Two or more people gather in the same place, enabling mutual influence through their physical presence, regardless of whether they consciously pay special attention to each other.
2. Boundaries are set for outsiders, so participants know who is involved and who is excluded.
3. People focus their attention on a common object or activity, mutually conveying the focus of attention to each other, and thereby understanding the shared focus.
4. People share common emotions or emotional experiences (Collins, 2004, 48).

The core feature determining the success or failure of a ritual is the degree of mutual attention and emotional entrainment. Physical gatherings are more likely to form interaction rituals, but can rituals be conducted through remote communication via the internet and smartphones? The author believes that remote communication can elicit a certain level of attention and emotional engagement, although the effects may be diminished. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when physical isolation in the spatial domain hindered physical gatherings. Leveraging remote communication through the internet or smartphones serves as a potent supplement to interaction rituals in situations where physical gatherings are not feasible.

Taking news podcasts as an example, the development of the internet and new media technologies have led to substantial changes in the organization and functioning mechanisms of rituals. On podcast platforms, although users are not physically face-to-face, their interactions still satisfy most of Collins' conditions for an 'interaction ritual'. For instance, they gather on the same

podcast platform, *Jump into the Rabbit Hole* allows listeners to perceive heightened or subdued emotions from the details of their conversations. Shared laughter and subtle emotional resonance both demonstrate emotional entrainment. Additionally, the content selection of in-depth news podcasts subdivides a large audience into groups with similar interests. They share their emotional experiences on the platform. Thus, comments on podcast platforms can be considered an 'interaction ritual' for the audience. The accumulated comments on the platform gradually form a 'ritual' that is interrelated over time, as listeners not only leave their own comments but also view those of other listeners. This 'interaction ritual' constitutes mutually connected 'rituals'. Distinguishing this from traditional interaction rituals, the author terms the interactions formed in virtual spaces, 'new interaction rituals.'

In the analysis of interaction rituals, Collins (2004,108) emphasizes the concept of emotional energy. He regards emotional energy as a central component and outcome of interaction rituals. In this context, emotion does not refer to specific emotions in the conventional sense but rather to long-term stable social emotions. He points out that emotional energy is similar to the psychological concept of 'drive'. During the process of interaction rituals, emotional energy serves as a significant driving force but possesses a distinctive social orientation. People can enhance positive emotions through participation in interaction rituals, giving rise to a shared focal point and a collective emotion, thereby forming emotional resonance within the group.

According to Collins' theory, emotional energy can be measured through various types of verbal or non-verbal phenomena, including sound as a measurement tool (Collins, 2004,136). The study of conversational styles, such as speech rhythm, intonation, and the confidence or indifference expressed in speech, can be employed to measure emotional energy. The author categorizes the emotional energy of in-depth news podcasts into three types. Firstly, the celebrity effect generates emotional energy; celebrities often bring more resources to the market of interaction rituals, including past conversational memories, language styles, specialized knowledge, or expertise as cultural capital. This implies that celebrities may contribute more emotional

energy to interaction rituals, whether they are producers or guests on the programme. Secondly, the storyline generates emotional energy; as listeners engage with the storylines in podcasts like *Jump into the Rabbit Hole*, a connection is established with the characters in the programme, who come from different positions in the market of interaction rituals with distinct symbolic capital and emotional energy. In the process of interaction, the listeners' original symbolic capital and emotions are transformed, as they bring the capital gained from listening to one in-depth news podcast into the interaction ritual of the next one. Thirdly, sound editing generates emotional energy; during the editing process, producers meticulously edit their language, involving considerable time, effort, and technical skills, which are essential resources for conducting interaction rituals. Jiaxun captivates the audience in the opening scene of the first season with a smoking sequence. The clip features additional sound effects like inhaling and exhaling to increase realism. White mist surrounds his fringe, then music begins. In depicting scenes involving vaping, Jiaxun intentionally augmented the auditory effect of vapor diffusion upon ignition of the e-cigarette, thereby enhancing the audience's conceptualization of vaping. Jiaxun begins to explain the principles of e-cigarettes, increasing the audience's curiosity and providing background information on the interviewee. Music enhances the emotional energy of the audience, increasing their enthusiasm to keep listening.

Conclusion

News production often involves a significant degree of emotional labour. Producers and interviewees inevitably invest a considerable amount of emotional labour in the creative process to captivate the audience, while these emotional efforts are usually hidden from view. The author argues that emotions need to be constructed, particularly in discussions of sensitive topics. The construction of emotions is a collusion between producers and interviewees, and the author emphasizes the significance of this collaborative behavior in emotion construction. They also propose the existence of an unequal power relationship between producers and interviewees. Specifically

regarding sound, the emotional aspects of a story require sound design to better engage listeners with similar emotional structures and facilitate the formation of emotional resonance.

Overall, in-depth news podcasts predominantly employ a subjective perspective, emotional interaction, and a sense of presence and immersion, eliciting emotional resonance from the audience and deepening their understanding of news events. The author considers listening to such works as a form of interaction ritual, using this to elucidate the construction process of podcast emotions on the podcast platform and the changes in emotional energy. The study indicates that the audience considers listening to this type of content as a form of interaction ritual in social engagement. Listening to programmes and interacting in virtual communities simultaneously satisfy their cognitive and emotional needs. Podcasts provide a mediated means of interpersonal communication and emotional expression, while the shared virtual presence in the community fosters audience identity construction, creating a 'comfort zone.' It is crucial to note that the operation of the community and the identity symbols of group members influence the formation of interaction rituals. Additionally, the inability to find a sense of belonging and identification may hinder the realization of interaction rituals. The author considers the traces left by the audience on the platform as a form of emotional interaction pattern, categorizing it into inward interaction between listeners and the textual content of the work, and outward interaction between listeners and the platform. Especially in the context of community-based dissemination, both types of emotional interactions may occur in the audience's listening experience.

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