

MULT90019 Research Report

**Hear Her,
Support Her,
Be With Her —**

**How Chinese feminist podcasts
curate content to meet the
needs of their audience**

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Introduction

With the advent of the digital age, podcasting has emerged as a new medium for producing and consuming audio content. To be specific, podcast refers to an online audio file derived from combining "iPod" (a portable media player introduced by Apple) and "broadcast" (Samuel-Azran et al., 2019). According to Bottomley's (2015) review of podcasting history, podcasts first appeared in 2000. Over the next five years, podcast transmission technology developed rapidly, leading to a proliferation of programmes and the medium's evolution from a niche communication medium format to a worldwide mainstream digital audio platform (Thomas, 2022).

According to Tsagkias et al. (2008), podcasting has three distinctive features that set it apart from traditional radio broadcasting: narrowcasting, reusability, and a low barrier to entry. Due to these qualities, Bird (2023) mentioned that podcasting is a democratic medium and an effective channel for marginalised groups and grassroots movements to express their views. In this context, feminist podcasting is gradually gaining attention from both scholars and the public.

Winter and Viana (2021) reviewed Spanish-language feminist podcasts from the past eight years and noted a growing trend -- more women are becoming the narrators of these programmes, which are gaining popularity in the marketplace. This content transcends geographical boundaries, resonates with women globally, and has received numerous international awards (Inmaculada & Rodríguez, 2023). Similarly, Yang (2022) observed that Chinese-language feminist podcasts have grown exponentially since

2020. According to the podcast database Listen Notes, by November 2021, there were 1,715 episodes discussing women and feminism, which highlighted the popularity of such programmes in China (Yang, 2022). However, as Inmaculada and Rodríguez (2023) point out, existing research has largely focused on feminist podcasts in English, Portuguese, and Spanish, with limited research on feminist podcasts in other cultural contexts.

Therefore, this study is grounded in the Chinese socio-cultural context and aims to explore the narrative strategies of Chinese feminist podcast content. Specifically, it employs content analysis to examine how the podcast *Echoes for Her* designs its content, including non-verbal elements such as text, the host's tone of voice, and background music. This research also analysed user-generated content in the comments section to bridge the gap between creators and listeners and provide insights into the needs and preferences of this niche market.

Background

This research used *Echoes for Her* (与妳同频) as the primary material for content analysis and strived to gain a comprehensive understanding of its structure and features.

Echoes for Her is an independent podcast affiliated with the non-profit organisation WE WOMEN and dedicated to empowering women through digital media. In addition, according to Drew (2017), this programme can be categorised as a chat show since it

typically features four female hosts who discuss a specific topic related to women’s experiences. Moreover, in order to enrich the discussion, the hosts also take turns in the lead role, thus facilitating a conversational style to ensure each participant has the opportunity to share her opinions.

Echoes for Her officially launched its first episode on August 12, 2024. Meanwhile, by October 21, the podcast had released six episodes covering topics from the Olympics to women's health. This audio content offers listeners fresh perspectives on the social issues facing women in China and also figures out underlying causes. Furthermore, since its launch, *Echoes for Her* has attracted 1,500 subscribers and accumulated over 8,000 plays. Hence, this research aims to explore this rapidly growing programme and provide practical insights for aspiring podcast producers on podcast content planning.

Table 1
Echoes for Her Programmes’ Synopsis

EPISODE	DESCRIPTION
EPISODE 1	In this episode, the hosts introduced the connection between the Paris 2024 Olympics and feminism; in addition, the programme highlighted 10 female athletes who are outstanding in the game and tell their stories of how they pursued their dreams.
EPISODE 2	The hosts address sexism in news coverage of the Paris Olympics, presenting and analysing a series of examples from posters, advertisements, and news articles with an academic

	lens.
EPISODE 3	This episode delved into the origins of WE WOMEN and <i>Echoes for Her</i> . Saffron, the team's founder, discussed the inspiration behind its creation and the significance of its name, while the other hosts shared their motivations for joining and reflected on the team's development.
EPISODE 4	This episode combined the performances and texts of female comedians in the Chinese comedy variety show <i>King of comedy</i> to explore the sexism that women experience in their daily lives. Additionally, the host expanded on the oppression of women in the Chinese Confucian tradition
EPISODE 5	In this episode, the hosts discussed various aspects of menstruation, from personal experiences to broader social issues like period poverty and menstrual stigma. They shared personal stories, including how they managed menstrual cramps and their reactions to their first periods. Additionally, the hosts talked some trivia related to menstruation such as the "menstrual tax" in China and global statistics on period poverty.
EPISODE 6	In this episode, Lesley, a guest from the film industry, joins the hosts of Frequency with You to discuss gender bias in filmmaking, with a particular focus on the challenges women perspective on film. As an independent film director, Lesley also shares how her experiences as a woman have shaped her creativity and what she has learned about her professional identity.

Aim

This study aims to understand how Chinese-language feminist podcast content engages and fulfills the needs and expectations of its audience. Specifically, it examines how *Echo for Her* creates emotional connections with its listeners and fosters a supportive community. In addition, a key component of this study involves a comparative analysis of each episode's structure and content to identify elements that resonate effectively. Meanwhile, this study also conducts a sentiment analysis of listener comments to assess their engagement and emotional responses.

With this in mind, the questions that this research hopes to answer are as follows:

RQ1: How can Chinese feminist podcasts design content to meet audience expectations?

RQ2: In what ways can Chinese feminist podcasts foster an emotional connection with listeners and cultivate a sense of community?

Literature Review

Chinese feminism podcast context: history, resistance and self-expression

Leung (2003) elaborated a retrospective study on the development of Chinese culture and the women's movement. She mentions that in the Chinese context, gender issues have been profoundly shaped by Confucian patriarchal values. To be specific, according to Davin (1975), in traditional society, women were expected to conform to social norms and *completely* obey male relatives, with limited autonomy and restricted inheritance rights. Moreover, from birth, a woman was considered to belong not to her natal family but to her future husband's family. Consequently, Wolf (1985) concludes that, in traditional China, the birth of a daughter was often viewed as a significant disappointment.

For centuries, the feudal system and Confucianism kept women on the margins of society, subjecting them to oppression and poverty. Johnson (1983) notes that China's first women's self-emancipation movement emerged after the Communist Party overthrew the feudal system. Hung (1989) expands on Johnson's argument and highlights that participants in this movement were primarily urban intellectual females who sought education, love, and personal liberation from patriarchal oppression. Despite the movement's historical significance, the Communist Party made few substantive efforts to advance women's liberation (Gilmartin, 1994). According to Li (1994), this occurred because the Communist Party under Mao Zedong used a new ethic to suppress traditional Confucian values, which aimed to mobilise women to join in the class struggle. For instance, the Mao era emphasised the total desexualisation of both

men and women and the “remaking” of women according to male standards (Li, 1994). As a result, women’s subjectivity remained unrecognised, with their inherent nature still fundamentally repressed and ignored.

With the advent of the digital age, women now have new spaces for expression and empowerment. Munro (2013) notes that the internet has given women the opportunity to publicly and globally call out and challenge sexism and misogyny. Similarly, Yang and Hu’s (2023) research in the Chinese context supports this view. They highlight how Weibo—China’s leading social media platform—and its hashtags provide a safe space for women to share emotions, express dissatisfaction, and voice anger. Additionally, this digital platform facilitates collective responses to injustices such as gender violence and workplace discrimination. However, Sun and Zhao (2021) illustrate that censorship mechanisms in Chinese social media have become more stringent under Xi Jinping’s regime (since 2012). For example, Weibo and its mother company, XinLang, were required to enhance algorithmic filtering mechanisms and expand keyword lists or hire more staff to manually remove controversial content (Xu et al., 2022; Yang, 2022). Nonetheless, these censored keyword fields retain non-normative discourses related to topics such as feminism and LGBTQI+ issues. Consequently, Chinese feminists have increasingly turned to podcasts as an alternative communication channel.

For feminists, podcast serves as an ideal participatory medium since it enhances democratic discourse by allowing private conversations that used to be excluded from institutional channels to be discussed and disseminated in the public sphere (Jarrett,

2009). Vrikki and Malik (2019) support Jarrett's view and add that podcasting has become a powerful tool for marginalised groups to socialise and share personal stories. The following are three key features of podcasts to amplify female voices.

Firstly, podcasts offer a more niche and personalised medium compared to traditional radio, which Wang and Tchernev (2012) describe as intimate because listeners can access content on-demand in a customised manner. Additionally, podcast creators can tailor content to align with the interests of their audience. Consequently, feminists need not worry about their programmes being attacked by misogynists, as those individuals are unlikely to engage with such content. Moreover, feminist producers can use podcasts to disseminate counter-mainstream narratives. For instance, Yang (2022) notes that the host of Phoenix Chats on Feminism advocates for female separatism and lesbianism. Thus, podcasts provide a valuable space for feminists to communicate.

Secondly, the asynchronous nature of podcast programmes offers new opportunities for feminists. Asynchronicity, as defined by Wendland (2024), allows users to consume podcast content regardless of time and place. Programme consumers can pause, rewind, and re-listen whenever necessary. This feature is particularly important for feminist podcasts since Chen (2021) notices that feminist podcast producers are often professionals in their fields, which necessitates the inclusion of some academic approaches in their content. Therefore, for audiences of such programmes, the asynchronous nature enables them to pause at any moment and reflect deeply, which facilitates thought-provoking insights during their listening experience.

Finally, podcasting is not just a platform for content output but also interaction and communication. Yeates (2018) notes that podcasting has become a participatory medium due to the evolution of Web 2.0 and Web 3.0, allowing listeners to interact with each other and with hosts around the programme's content. More significantly, according to Castaño and Hurtado (2022), this interactivity facilitates the formation of parasocial relationships between audiences and producers, which creates a deep emotional connection. Hence, this connection is vital for feminists, whose primary motivation for producing podcasts is to find like-minded individuals to unite and challenge societal injustices. However, this goal is not merely aspirational; Hoydis (2020) points out that feminist podcasts can evoke empathy in listeners when discussing the structural injustices women face. In these programme comments, listeners often share their experiences and offer each other support and encouragement. This, according to Hoydis (2020), not only fulfils the listeners' need for self-expression and validation but also contributes to the creation of a close, cohesive community.

Theoretical Frame: Use and Gratification Theory

This research employed the Uses and Gratification (U&G) theory to explore listeners' motivation and then provide insights for designing podcast content. This is because this theory is a well-established framework in media studies and has the potential to explain why and how individuals actively select specific media to meet their various needs (Katz et al., 1973). In addition, using the U&G theory, Katz et al. (1973) identify five

primary motives for media consumption: entertainment, information, personal identity, social integration, and escapism.

As the digital media ecosystem developed and matured, U&G theory has also been applied to new platforms, including the Internet (Newhagen & Rafaeli, 2006), social media (Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021), and blogs (Kaye, 2010). Meanwhile, in the field of podcasting, scholars have refined U&G theory to better address the increasingly diverse media consumption needs of audiences (Sundar & Limperos, 2013; Perks & Turner, 2018; Wang & Tchernev, 2012). Then, Perks et al. (2019) used a quantitative survey to systemically examine new items of gratification derived from studies that applied U&G theory to podcast programmes. They declared that podcasts have become a new way for individuals to connect with others and the world since this new form of content not only met the five basic needs but provided additional gratifications, such as edutainment, social engagement, multitasking, and storytelling (Perks et al., 2019).

In their study, Perks et al. (2019) follow previous scholars' definitions of new types of gratifications introduced by podcasting. For example, edutainment refers to podcast listeners' preference for gaining knowledge in an enjoyable way, which makes complex information easier to understand and remember (Perks et al., 2019). Secondly, Perks and Turner (2018) found through interviews that social engagement involves listeners perceiving their favourite hosts as friends and being willing to interact with them. Therefore, this engagement creates a closer connection with the hosts and further integrates listeners into the podcast community. Additionally, according to Wang and

Tchernev (2012), media multitasking refers that podcast audiences often derive satisfaction from listening to programmes while engaging in other activities. Lastly, Green and Brock (2000) first bring up the concept of story transportation. It refers to the immersive experience that podcast content can create for listeners. Through narrative content, audio quality, and atmosphere, listeners can become fully absorbed, even losing awareness of their surroundings (Green & Brock, 2000).

However, while U&G theory has significantly advanced the understanding of audience motivations for media use, some scholars have also demonstrated its limitations. For instance, Blumler (1979) was the first to question the assumptions of U&G theory. He argues that audiences are not entirely autonomous in their media choices, as content creators may also intentionally guide them through content design and structure. In addition, Morley (1992) supports Blumler's view and declares that media can subtly influence audience satisfaction by directing responses through the implicit conveyance of ideological messages.

Moreover, Ruggiero (2000) criticises U&G theory for overemphasising individual motivations while neglecting the impact of the social, cultural, and economic contexts in which audiences exist. This gap was addressed by feminist podcasting research. For example, Gurin et al. (1980) argue that a collectivist orientation is central to gender consciousness since listeners and content creators engage with women's issues and share a common goal of advocating for gender equality and social justice. In addition,

Yang's (2022) discourse analysis of Chinese women's podcasts also points out that listeners gain a sense of belonging by identifying with feminist programmes that affirm their alignment with the hosts. Furthermore, as podcasting remains relatively insulated from political censorship, Fox and Ebada (2022) claim that feminist podcasts provide a safe space for expression, allowing listeners to build a collective identity through their interactions.

Furthermore, although Perks et al. (2019) acknowledge the interactivity of podcasts, they do not explore in depth the causes and effects of this gratification. To address this gap, Castaño and Hurtado (2022) employ discourse analysis to analyse audience comments on the podcast *Estirando el Chile* and provide valuable insights about parasocial interaction. Castaño and Hurtado (2022) argue that parasocial interaction is a one-way yet seemingly reciprocal relationship initiated by either hosts or fans. Chen and Keng (2023) further state that parasocial interaction often occurs when media consumers project their feelings onto the podcast host, fostering a sense of connection and intimacy akin to real-life friendships. Compared with social interaction, which McClung and Johnson (2010) define as real-life interactions such as sharing podcast experiences with others, parasocial interaction is mediated but can companionship and trust between figures and their followers, thereby strengthening their connection to the media content and community.

Meanwhile, Castaño and Hurtado (2022) identified an intriguing phenomenon: they found that the primary satisfaction for podcast audiences stems from parasocial

interaction with producers. This challenges Chan-Olmsted and Wang's (2020) claim that entertainment is the strongest motivation for podcast listeners. Moreover, Inmaculada and Rodríguez (2023) also argue that the social connections fostered by podcasts are essential for listeners and provide not only emotional empathy but also a sense of community with the power to inspire action.

Significance and contributions of this research

In today's digital era, podcasting, as an emerging form of media, is reaching and influencing an expanding audience. In particular, podcasts have the potential to reshape public discourse, making them uniquely communicative and impactful on feminist and social issues. This research explored Chinese podcast content and offered valuable insights into how digital media in China constructs collective consciousness among listeners and contributes to a pluralistic public opinion environment.

From a practical perspective, as China's podcasting industry rapidly emerges, this study offers a useful framework to guide future podcast producers. It can help them design content more precisely to meet audience needs and enhance the appeal of their programs.

From a theoretical perspective, existing Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theories and podcasting studies have primarily focused on Western media and linguistic contexts. Thus, this study addressed this research gap and expanded the applicability of U&G theory to diverse cultural settings. Additionally, by employing content analysis, this research strived to understand the creative thinking and design frameworks of media

content producers, thereby addressing some of the theory's limitations. Furthermore, previous studies on feminist podcast audiences have also largely concentrated on elites, mainly consisting of highly educated, middle-class, or quasi-middle-class young women in first-tier cities (Yang, 2022). However, according to data, 70% of the "Echoes of Her" audience is under the age of 22, and more than half of the subscribers are from non-tier one cities in China. Thus, analysing this programme can address the gap in existing research on Chinese feminist podcasts by including a broader audience and encouraging a more comprehensive approach to feminist content dissemination.

Figure 1

Audience's Age Composition of Echoes of Her

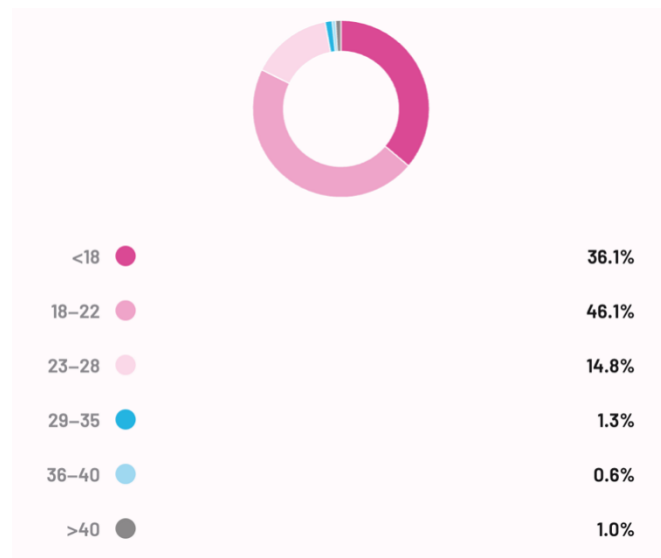


Figure 2

Geographical Distribution of Listeners of Echoes of Her



Methodology

This research analyses episodes of the programme *Echoes for Her* that were released before October 21, 2024, and uses qualitative content analysis to examine six audio episodes and 556 associated comments.

According to Given (2008), quantitative research involves drawing a large sample from a specific population and relies on statistical and mathematical calculations for data analysis, making findings generalisable to a broader population. However, this approach has its limitations. For example, Holstein and Gubrium (1995) argue that a quantitative approach can lead to biased findings by causing researchers to overlook the complexity of participants' experiences. Given the Chinese distinct socio-cultural characteristics and the complexity of feminism issues, qualitative content analysis was selected as the primary research methodology for this research. As Meena and João (2013) suggest, qualitative research allows researchers to explore social phenomena and delve into attitudes, beliefs, and sentiments, particularly in contexts of rapid cultural and social change. Therefore, this methodology enables an in-depth analysis of feminist podcast texts, providing a nuanced understanding of the emotions, perspectives, and cultural meanings embedded within them.

Furthermore, White and Marsh (2006) illustrate that qualitative content research also allows for adjustments to the coding scheme as the study progresses, enhancing both depth and quality. This feature seems more important in this research since the volume of listener comments tends to increase with airtime as well as listener sentiments may

shift over time. Therefore, the flexibility of content analysis allows the researcher to timely adjust the data and coding and provide a better understanding of the Chinese feminist podcast audience.

To reduce the researcher's potential subjectivity in qualitative research, this study applies Tsagkias et al. 's (2008) PodCred framework. This analytical framework categorises podcast content into four dimensions—podcast content, podcaster, podcast context, and technical execution—to explore how this media format fosters audience acceptance and trust in podcast content. Drawing on the backend data from the podcast publishing platform, the authors classify all programmes into three categories based on completion rates: high-rated, average-rated, and low-rated.

According to the platform Little Universe's definition, the completion rate represents the percentage of an episode that a user listens to relative to its total length. This metric directly reflects the extent to which listeners engage with a programme from start to finish, providing insights for creators on which content formats or topics are most effective at attracting and retaining listeners. For all currently released episodes of *Echoes for Her*, the average completion rate is 36.1%. Therefore, those episodes exceeding this average—namely, EP1, EP2, and EP4—are classified as high-rated. In addition, EP5 and EP6, with completion rates close to the average, are categorised as average-rated, while EP3 falls into the low-rated category.

Table 2

Data Set for Echoes for Her Episodes

Episode	Release Date	Plays	Play Complete Ratio	Comments	Length	Likes
EP6	21.10.2024	78	34.50%	31	74 mins	8
EP5	07.10.2024	471	35.50%	44	90 mins	25
EP4	26.09.2024	1281	40.40%	58	62 mins	41
EP3	13.09.2024	907	31.90%	93	37 mins	19
EP2	19.98.2024	1780	36.10%	112	74 mins	158
EP1	12.08.2024	3669	38.40%	218	45 mins	267

During the research process, the researcher first utilised NVivo to complete the open coding of podcast content and identified themes, concepts, and keywords relevant to the research questions. Subsequently, the researchers categorised all codes and conducted a horizontal comparison of similarities and differences within the same category across high-, medium-, and low-rated podcasts and assessed the nuanced content variations. Finally, a heat map was generated through a crosstab query to visualise the key nodes for greater clarity and ease of understanding.

In addition, this research employed sentiment analysis to examine the 556 collected comments in depth. According to Altrabsheh et al. (2013), this method belongs to Natural Language Processing (NLP), which enables researchers to identify and interpret the emotional orientation (positive, neutral, or negative) of texts. Thus, sentiment analysis is well-suited for this research to capture podcast audience attitudes and investigate key events that influence audience sentiment (Sun & Ni, 2018). Moreover, during the process of the sentiment analysis, this research used Xu et al.'s (2008) revised Chinese Sentiment Dictionary as a measure. This lexicon was tested by Wang and Yang (2021) and demonstrated high accuracy in both document-level and

sentence-level sentiment classification. Consequently, it enabled the researchers to interpret *Echoes for Her* listeners' emotions based on their comments. Finally, the researchers verified the code classifications in conjunction with contextual information to ensure the accuracy of the findings.

Results and Findings

The examination of the audio content and listener comments from the Chinese-language feminist podcast *Echoes for Her* has revealed a series of noteworthy findings. First and foremost, derived from qualitative content analysis, this research has identified key themes and sentiment patterns among the audience. Overall, the sentiment analysis indicated that an overwhelming majority of listeners (93%) held positive attitudes towards the podcast's content, reflecting substantial support and appreciation for the programme.

Table 3
Distribution of Emotion Word Count by Category

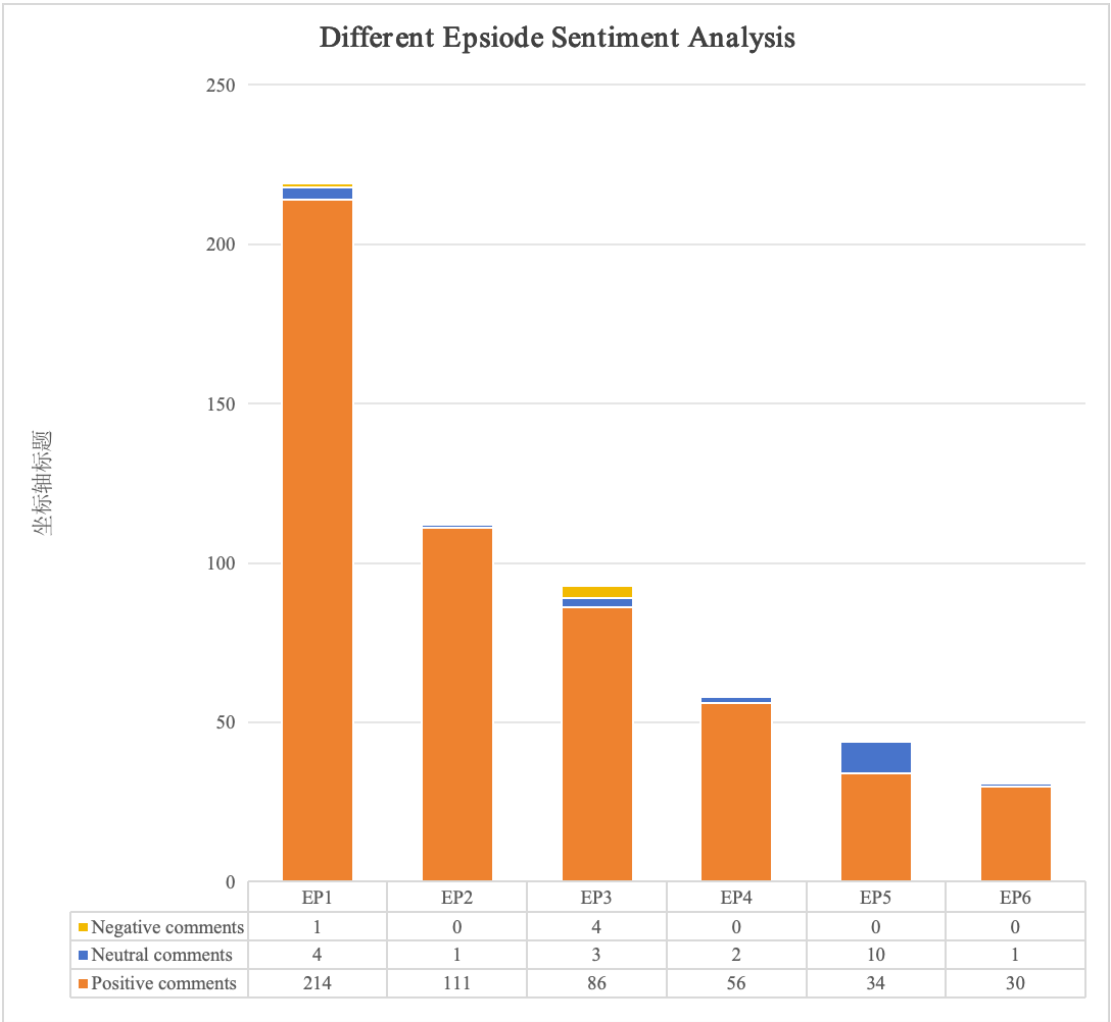
Sentiment Classification	Definition	Sentiment words	Counts/Proportion
Positive	Positive emotions reflect feelings of pleasure, exciting, or support	meaningful/glad/happy, great/moving/exciting	523 (93.53%)
Neutral	Neutral emotions are characterized by an absence of explicit positive or negative evaluation, often requiring a calm, detached, or neutral expression	Objective/suggestion	29 (5.22%)
Negative	Negative emotions, represent feelings of unhappiness, disappointment, or opposition	uncomfortable/disappointed/would prefer to see	5 (0.89%)

Specifically, positive comments accounted for at least 77% of responses in each episode. Among these, EP1, EP2, and EP4 had the highest proportion of positive comments, reaching 96%, suggesting that listeners favoured the style and content of these episodes since they resonated strongly with the audience on an emotional level. In addition, EP5

contained the largest number of neutral comments, primarily reflecting listeners’ personal experiences after engaging with the programme. Likewise, a portion of neutral comments also appeared in EP3, mostly offering suggestions for the programme. Finally, the highest concentration of negative comments was found in the third episode.

Figure 3

Listeners’ feelings about each episode



Meanwhile, these findings offer insight into the key events listeners highlighted when expressing their emotions, which underscores the complex interplay of factors that

shape audience engagement. In the following section, these events will be explored in depth alongside a content analysis of the podcast.

Common Structure

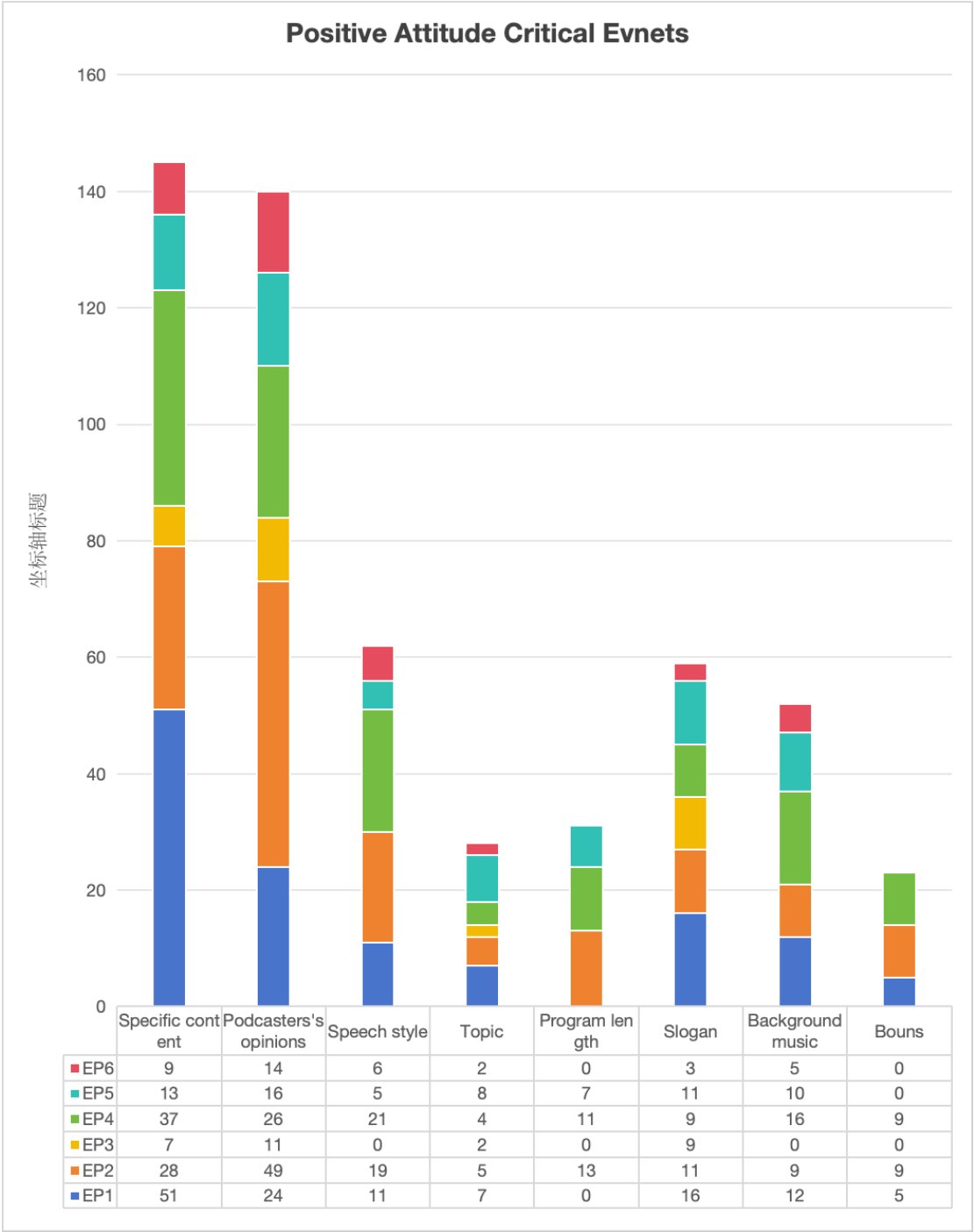
Table 4

Opening Structural Elements of Podcast Episodes in Echoes for Her

	EP1	EP2	EP3	EP4	EP5	EP6
Signature intro	√	√	√	√	√	√
Slogan	√	√	√	√	√	√
Podcasters' self-introduction	√	√	√	√	√	√
Preview		√		√	√	√
Episode topic	√	√	√	√	√	√
Introduce outline	√	√		√	√	
Transition music	√	√	√	√	√	

Firstly, in terms of the opening, content producers of *Echoes for Her* always begin with a signature intro—a 3-5 second audio clip featuring segments from the current episode, often including the podcaster's opinion or laughter. This helps engage listeners and encourage them to continue listening. Subsequently, it is followed by the programme slogan, marking the start of each episode's official content. Next, the podcasters provide self-introductions, a recap of the previous episode, a reminder of the current topic, and an outline of the programme. At the end of the opening, the post-editor typically includes a brief piece of music to transition smoothly into the main content. This structured opening offers listeners an easy transition into the main body of the show, a quick overview of the episode's focus, and an understanding of what will be discussed.

Figure 4
Distribution of Positive Attitude Critical Events Across Podcast Episodes



According to listeners' feedback, the fixed opening structure helps the podcast establish a strong and consistent brand image. For example, among comments expressing positive emotions, 43 pieces specifically highlighted the opening and repeated the

show's slogan. This behaviour suggests that listeners not only received the show's message but also developed a sense of recognition and familiarity with its tagline. Moreover, by echoing the programme's slogan, listeners fostered a deeper sense of connection and belonging to the podcast.

Table 5

Ending Structural Elements of Podcast Episodes in Echoes for Her

	EP1	EP2	EP3	EP4	EP5	EP6
Conclusion	√	√	√	√	√	
Lyrical expression	√	√	√	√	√	
Online Community	√	√	√	√	√	√
Encourage comments		√		√	√	√
Repeat Slogan		√		√	√	
Interactive with audience	√	√	√	√	√	
Bonus	√	√		√		

The structure at the end of each episode varies slightly. Except for the sixth episode, all episodes shared common elements, including a programme summary, lyrical expression, online community interaction, and audience engagement. The reason is that EP6 was a guest interview. Therefore, it was dialogue-based and lacked a tightly structured conclusion. Overall, the relatively consistent ending structure across episodes helps the audience review the programme's content and reinforces the main points. In the meantime, interactive elements, such as inviting listeners to leave

messages, help foster a sense of intimacy between the audience and the programme. Because it disrupts the one-way flow of information and encourages listeners to participate in discussions about the show's content. Moreover, as a feminist podcast focused on empowering women, this approach also motivated women to reflect on power inequalities within their life experiences.

In conjunction with completion rates, high-rated programmes featured a complete opening and closing structure. In fact, the integrity of the opening structure is particularly important, as it engages listeners from the outset and maintains their receptiveness to the content that follows. Concurrently, a consistent structure enhances the professionalism and credibility of the podcast, creating a lasting impression that makes listeners more receptive to the programme's message. Finally, bonus content received positive feedback from listeners in high-rated programmes, suggesting that these extras contribute to the uniqueness and entertainment value of the show, which fulfils audiences' entertainment needs. Especially, EP2 and EP4 discussed gender stereotypes in various contexts, making the content more serious and potentially evoking anger among listeners due to its relatability. As a result, ending with a humorous bonus serves as an effective way to lighten the atmosphere and help audiences calm down.

Podcast Content

This study used NVivo to process podcast audio content and employed a crosstab query to compare codes across different episodes. The following is a heat map of codes for

the podcast content category.

Figure 5
Heat Map of Podcast Content Category

	EP1	EP2	EP3	EP4	EP5	EP6
Encyclopedia Information	22	13	1	9	24	1
Episode topic	8	5	2	5	7	0
Discussion/Opinions	13	38	12	45	18	47
Cite Resource	3	20	0	13	14	9
Testimonials	14	3	0	11	6	3
Recommendation	6	2	1	1	9	4
Relevant Material	6	0	0	1	0	2
Slip of the Tongue	1	0	1	3	6	3
Total	65	81	15	83	77	69

In general, high-rated episodes feature a diverse content structure. As shown in Figure 5, the audio content of EP1, EP2, and EP4 combines encyclopedia information, personal opinions, quotations, and testimonials simultaneously. This variety enables listeners not only to enjoy engaging discussions and unique perspectives but also to acquire new knowledge from informative messages, which enlighten them to do critical thinking and in-depth reflection. Additionally, the inclusion of testimonials plays a significant role. For example, in EP1, the podcast quotes American athlete Simone Biles from her documentary, presenting listeners with a portrait of a resilient and courageous

female athlete. Similarly, in EP4, a quote from a Chinese female comedian adds humor and entertainment value to the program.

As illustrated by the key events in Figure 4, the majority of listeners responded positively to the core content of the program. For example, listeners frequently quoted testimonials from the audio in the comments section and shared their initial reactions to these insights. Additionally, listeners also expressed a preference for data-driven information, indicating they favour rational debate in podcast content over emotionally charged commentary.

Furthermore, discussions and opinions constituted a significant portion of all programmes. Notably, despite having a relatively homogeneous structure, EP6 attracted audience attention due to its rich discussions and achieved a completion rate of 34.5%. Additionally, 140 positive comments from listeners endorsed the podcasters' opinions and expressed approval and support for their views. Therefore, it can be seen that 'Echoes for Her' fans have a high preference for personal, non-authoritative discussion content. Moreover, they prefer discussion-intensive programmes that inspire them and allow them to resonate with multi-dimensional viewpoints.

Podcaster

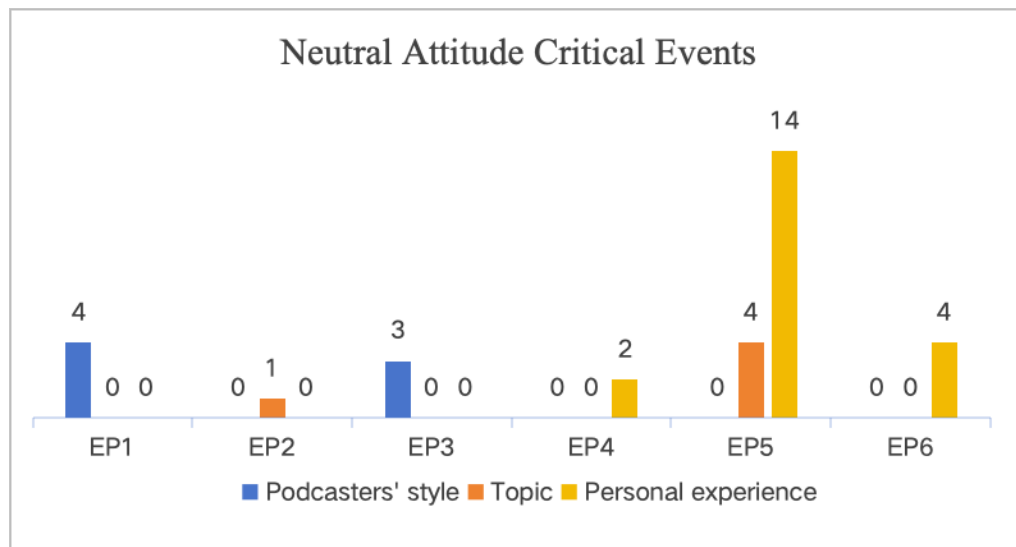
Figure 6
Heat Map of the Podcaster Category

	EP1	EP2	EP3	EP4	EP5	EP6
Personal Credential	0	2	3	4	0	8
<u>Podcaster self-introduction</u>	1	2	1	2	1	2
<u>Podcaster Affiliation</u>	0	1	0	0	0	3
Conversational style	4	21	15	29	25	44
Formal style	38	11	5	6	8	1
Use of humor	9	20	3	26	10	14
Use of irony	0	12	0	14	2	3
Use of Invective	0	2	0	4	0	0
<u>Podcasters' experience</u>	2	2	12	9	25	23
Presence of affect - angry	0	17	0	11	0	0
Presence of affect - excited	21	6	3	5	9	3
Total	76	96	42	109	80	101

From Figure 6, it can be seen that the common characteristics of high-rated programmes are the use of a conversational style, a humorous tone in storytelling, and strong emotional content. Firstly, most of the programmes choose to use a conversational style, while in EP1, the podcasters mainly employ a literary style to emphasise the athletes' perseverance in their careers. This approach resulted in mixed feedback. Some positive feedback was received from those listeners who appreciated the lyrical expression; however, four other listeners commented that this tone did not sound relaxed enough, as the anchors seemed to be reading the script rather than communicating. As Figure 7 demonstrates, this is the only aspect of the first episode that did not meet listener expectations.

Figure 7

Neutral Attitude Critical Events Across Podcast Episodes



However, listeners are not averse to written expression. On the contrary, they view this content as a highlight and often quote the hosts' lyrical phrases in the comments to show their appreciation. Therefore, in response to this feedback, the producers adjusted the show's style by retaining lyrical elements in the summary and closing segments. As the outcome of this approach, *Echoes for Her* received lots of positive feedback.

Second, the presence of podcasters' affection also influenced completion rates. The hosts of EP1, EP2, and EP4 conveyed distinct emotional tones in their delivery, ranging from anger to excitement. For example, in EP1, the hosts expressed admiration for how female athletes empower women, often incorporating praise for these athletes into their commentary. In contrast, both EP2 and EP4 focus on gender stereotypes in different contexts, and the anchors' emotive delivery of their views and experiences enables listeners to quickly immerse themselves in the story and empathise with it. However, both average-rated and low-rated programmes lacked a distinct emotional dimension,

which may lead to reduced listener engagement and incomplete consumption of the programme content.

Additionally, high-rated programmes also effectively use humour to enliven the atmosphere. For example, in both EP2 and EP4, elements of humour and invective were frequently incorporated, which allowed serious topics to be discussed in a relaxed manner. Moreover, this approach also enhances the programme's ability to address complex or sensitive topics, thereby enabling the audience to receive information in an enjoyable way. In addition, average-rated programmes also employed humour to some extent. This compensated for the programme's less attractive topic and resulted in a more satisfactory completion rate. Conversely, EP3 made little use of humour or other engaging elements, relying instead on a straightforward narration of the team formation process, which lacked appeal to listeners.

Moreover, it is notable that the most significant feature of average-rated programmes is the podcasters sharing a wealth of personal experiences. Especially in EP5, the creators candidly share about their first periods and even some of their dilemmas. In addition, they also discuss experiences related to menstrual shame and how they transformed their thinking. As for EP6, the guest shares many of her insights into the film industry, including discrimination against women and the significance of her own awards as a female director. As a result, these personal experiences not only make the hosts seem incredibly genuine but also introduce listeners to uncharted territory, thus gaining their trust and goodwill. That fact of audience feedback (Figure 7) shows that inspired by the

hosts, a total of 20 listeners also shared their own experiences in the comments. Furthermore, it is worth noting that such comments were more common in the feedback for EP5 and EP6. Hence, this indicates that the anchors' sharing of personal experiences brought them closer to the listeners and succeeded in constructing an open emotional space, making listeners willing to confide their own experiences to the anchors.

Additionally, an interesting finding is that apart from EP6, there were few references to the hosts' professional backgrounds in the other programmes. Even in EP6, only the guest, Lesley, demonstrated her credentials in filmmaking and her affiliation with the media industry. However, this lack of personal disclosure did not affect the listeners' acceptance of the programme content. This suggests that listeners valued genuine dialogue and meaningful content that truly related to female issues rather than formal credentials.

Context

Figure 8
Heat Map of the Podcast Context Category

	EP1	EP2	EP3	EP4	EP5	EP6
Podcaster address listeners directly	2	3	4	2	6	6
Podcaster respond to comments	0	2	1	3	0	0
Refer to current events	13	8	0	6	0	0
Refer to online community	1	1	1	1	1	0
Total	16	15	6	12	7	6

According to Tsagkias et al. (2008), context refers to the interaction between a podcast program and its external environment, including listeners, sponsors, advertisers, and others. Since *Echoes for Her* is an independent podcast, this research only retained relevant codes and themes.

Firstly, when comparing all categories of programmes, it becomes evident that high-rated programmes contain more interactions and are related to current real-world issues. Specifically, EP1 and EP2 use the Olympics as a starting point, which is a globally influential event, while EP4 discusses a recent popular talk show that is current in the Chinese media platforms. However, as for average-rated and low-rated programmes, they did not address any current realities, which may cause a segment of listeners not interested in the audio content. Therefore, connecting to current events can help *Echoes for Her* increase the programme's relevance in the social context, thereby satisfying audiences' need to discuss real societal problems. Moreover, in the neutral comments (Figure 7), five listeners provided their suggestions for the programme, which invariably were related to current events at the time.

In addition, the heat map also reveals that almost every episode engages in direct dialogue with the audience. For example, each episode concludes with the phrase *See you next time* which increases audience anticipation and fosters loyalty. Notably, in EP2, EP3, and EP4, the podcasters responded to previous comments. This interaction showcases mutual communication between Echoes for Her’s creators and fans, which fosters a community environment of trust and support.

Technique Execution

The PodCred frame categorises technical execution into production, packaging, and distribution (Tsagkias et al., 2008). In the case of *Echoes for Her*, each episode is published on the same platform (Little Universe) with completed show notes. As shown in Table 6, the podcast includes a comprehensive description, a timeline to track content, and easily searchable tags.

Table 6
Distribution of Metadata Elements in Each Episode

Episode	Title	Description	Logo	Cite source	Timeline	Tags
EP1	√	√	√	√	√	√
EP2	√	√	√	√	√	√
EP3	√	√	√	√	√	√
EP4	√	√	√	√	√	√
EP5	√	√	√	√	√	√
EP6	√	√	√	√	√	√

In addition, since some aspects of production have been analysed previously, this section focuses on the technique elements that have not yet been discussed.

Figure 9

Heat Map of the Podcast Technique Execution Category

	EP1	EP2	EP3	EP4	EP5	EP6
Background music	13	5	3	4	5	3
Sound effect	9	3	1	3	2	1
Editing effects	8	6	3	4	3	1
Total	31	15	8	12	11	6

From Figure 9, it appears that high-rated programmes invest more effort into post-production. Firstly, all programmes contain background music at appropriate times. Most often, background music would appear in the opening and closing segments, especially when the hosts were making lyrical expressions. The advantage of this is that background music can effectively enhance the immersion of the programme and increase the impact of the content. Additionally, background music also serves as a virtual highlight that breaks up the monotony of a long vocal narrative and emphasises particular points that the hosts are making. Especially among the critical events of positive sentiment (figure 4), 52 comments expressed fondness for the soundtrack. Moreover, in EP4, when the hosts discussed the female perspective in comedy performance, the editor added a segment of Naomi Scott's "Speechless". This not only reinforced the content but also emphasised that more women are resorting to different forms of expressing their stories. Thus, the addition of the soundtrack adds emotional depth to the content while further reinforcing the show's themes of female

empowerment and independence.

Additionally, there are significant differences in the use of sound effects and editing across different categories of programmes. High-rated programmes frequently incorporate sound effects, which make the content more vivid and attract listeners' attention. Particularly, EP1 predominately consisted of encyclopedia information; therefore, sound effects served as a reminder to mention to the audience some trivia. Moreover, editing effects, such as fading in and out, contribute to making these programmes tighter and smoother and providing a better listening experience for the audience. In contrast, low-rated programmes lack these elements, resulting in a monotonous overall presentation that fails to engage listeners.

Discussion

The Primary Motivation for Listening to Feminist Podcasts: Edutainment

Findings on the textual structure of *Echoes for Her* indicate that listeners of this programme prefer content that is both informative and entertaining, aligning with the desire for "edutainment" as described by Perks et al. (2019). Specifically, data on content composition show that listeners favour episodes featuring encyclopedia information, expert citations, rigorous data, podcast objectives, and celebrity endorsements. This observation is consistent with Yang's (2022) findings, which suggest that audiences expect feminist podcasters to address social issues with academic depth and a critical perspective, thereby avoiding superficial mobilisation and slogan-driven content.

In addition, Martínez-López et al. (2016) mention that podcasts initially emerged as platforms for accessible information dissemination. Moreover, this medium is mostly dominated by professionals within particular industries at the beginning, known for the unique insights they share. Therefore, as Mills et al. (2014) suggest, listening to podcasts is a form of informal and self-directed learning. This implies that content producers should prioritise the listener's need for information over entertainment, thereby carefully thinking about how to provide listeners with more critically informed content (Wang & Lin, 2024). This concern seems to be more urgent and significant in feminist podcast production. As Liu (2020) notes, in China, feminist topics and content are often dismissed as overreactions or overly emotional. This criticism not only

prevents women's issues from receiving proper attention but also subjects feminists and their content to insults and abuse from netizens. Therefore, to counter these unfounded accusations, Chinese feminist podcast producers should focus on delivering professional insights and in-depth analyses. This approach might include using theoretical frameworks such as feminist theory and gender studies (Richardson & Green, 2018) or presenting reliable data from academic reports. By incorporating credible information, as *Echoes for Her* does, feminist podcasts can combat negative stereotypes and encourage the continued spread of feminist discourse within the Chinese media landscape.

However, providing rigorous data and academic knowledge does not mean that the host should adopt a didactic tone when producing podcast content. In contrast, it is more productive to use humour and engaging narrative techniques since this tone can enhance the effectiveness and appeal of information delivery. This finding aligns with Dai and Wang's (2023) research result, which indicate that entertainment increases listeners' attention to content, thereby fostering greater interest in political topics such as gender. As Berry (2016) and Swiatek (2018) observe, podcasts are uniquely consumed in an up-close and personal manner, which makes them an intimate medium. Consequently, overly serious expressions may undermine the emotional connection between the programme and the listener. In addition, Hamilton and Barber (2022) emphasise that enjoyable content is more likely to be a reliable source for audiences. Thus, future feminist content producers need to utilise storytelling techniques to keep listeners' attention, thereby expanding the reach of political issues and increasing audience

engagement with such events. However, creators should be aware that entertainment is only a means of processing content (Dai & Wang, 2023). Therefore, as publishers of information, podcasters still need to carefully balance the ratio of rigorous to entertaining content while ensuring the authenticity of the information to avoid negatively impacting users and the communication environment.

Furthermore, a consistent narrative structure is also important in podcasting. The findings of this research indicate that listeners prefer programmes with a complete opening structure, which consists of a slogan, a recap of the previous episode, and an introduction to the key topic and outline. This format allows listeners to anticipate and look forward to the programme, thus increasing their engagement and satisfaction (Thomas, 2022). Moreover, providing a consistent content structure in each episode deepens listeners' impressions and builds a strong brand image. For example, most listeners of *Echoes for Her* remember the programme's slogan and recognise the creative team's efforts to empower women. As a result, this supports Wendland's (2024) argument that a consistent content structure helps to attract and retain a listener base.

Voices And Emotions Ashape Intimate Communities

According to Kozinets (1999), a community refers to a group of people who share common interests and goals. Hence, these individuals share values and social spaces and establish emotional connections that transcend geographical boundaries. Further, McMillan and Chavis (1986) defined a sense of community as comprising belonging, mutual influence, need fulfilment, and shared emotional connections. Building on these definitions and the results of

the content analysis, this research suggests that *Echoes for Her* resonates with listeners and fosters a sense of community through the podcaster's style and the wise use of music.

Firstly, as Ding (2023) mentions in his research on documentary podcasts, the aural experience can shape an isolated and intimate space, thus bringing the listener closer. In the high-rated programmes of *Echoes for Her*, the producers have included multiple pieces of background music. This not only allows the listener to pay special attention to what the podcaster is discussing at the time but also triggers the listener's thoughts and reflections. Furthermore, Linare (2020) describes podcasts as “theatre for the ears” and suggests that, even without visual information, listeners can construct imagery based on the intertextuality of particular audio content. For instance, listeners of EP4 could envision a female figure brave enough to break her chains, as the anchor's narration, combined with the background music *Speechless*, stimulates the listener's imagination. This implies that podcast producers should not only consider textual content but also carefully select suitable music and sound effects, as these non-verbal elements play a vital role in creating an atmosphere (Ding, 2023). This sense of atmosphere can deepen listener immersion and evoke emotional resonance. Moreover, as Perks and Turner (2018) note, when listeners resonate with content, they experience a heightened sense of intimacy and community with the host and are more likely to view the podcast creator as a like-minded friend.

Second, hosts can foster a sense of community by adopting a conversational approach in their shows. Because this narrative style allows listeners to feel they can participate in the hosts' discussions (Perks & Turner, 2018), which alleviates feelings of isolation

and creates a sense of belonging (Wang et al., 2002). Additionally, during the conversation, anchors can consciously share their personal experiences or openly express their affection. This is because Rosaen and Dibble (2016) emphasise that when mediated characters share their private experience or engage in other forms of self-disclosure, they can create a sense of listeners having a strong connection with them. As for *Echoes for Her*, it just utilises this approach to blur the boundaries between virtual and real social interaction, which enables listeners to perceive the hosts as real and trustworthy friends. Moreover, as women, listeners can also see themselves in this intimate content. Therefore, self-disclosure not only reduces their uncertainty (Perks & Turner, 2018) but also allows the female audience to recognise the podcast team's efforts toward women's development, thus enhancing a sense of shared identity and mutual support (Martínez-López et al., 2016). Through this approach, *Echoes for Her* conveys to its audience that a woman is inherently diverse: she can be sweet and soft, as well as brave and tenacious. Furthermore, its feminist podcast producers give a powerful claim that being a good woman does not mean being "just like a man", which inspired many young Chinese women to start thinking about female subjectivity and resist marginalisation.

Lastly, the development of podcast distribution platforms facilitates listener interaction and fosters parasocial relationships. *Echoes for Her* is primarily distributed on the platform Little Universe (Xiaoyuzhou), which is much different from Apple Podcasts and Spotify. This application allows audiences to express their thoughts by posting comments directly under the programmes (Wang, 2023). Additionally, listeners can mark specific timestamps to react

precisely to certain events that resonate with them or to express dissent. Therefore, with the technological advancements, podcast audiences are no longer the “silent public” (Wang & Lin, 2024) but an active community that participates in the co-creation of the program. For example, the production team of *Echoes for Her* not only interacts with listeners at the end of each episode by inviting feedback but also enhances the podcast’s content based on listener comments. This attentiveness exemplifies the parasocial interactions discussed by Castaño and Hurtado (2022) and extends it to build a feminist community co-created with all females. Within this community, listeners and producers share a unified identity and participate in cultural practices together. Furthermore, given the misogynistic atmosphere in China’s current digital media environment (Huang, 2022), *Echoes for Her* promotes women’s self-empowerment in a relatively gentle way by fostering a collective identity that integrates new feminist perspectives into a harmonious society. Thus, future feminist podcast producers might consider planning content based on personal experiences and emotions to cultivate an emotional connection and sense of community with their listeners.

Limitation, Conclusion and Future Research

This research provides a comprehensive examination of *Echoes for Her*, focusing on how its content design, dialogue style, and interactions meet audience needs and foster a sense of community and collective identity. However, as with all academic research, this study also has certain limitations. Firstly, this research is limited to *Echoes for Her*'s content on a single podcast platform, thereby not capturing the full range of audience interactions and community engagement that may occur on other digital platforms, such as Weibo, WeChat, and Little Red Book. These external platforms are also rich in podcast-fans interactions and may reveal complementary or contrasting dynamics to those observed on the primary platform.

Secondly, this study employs content analysis as its methodology, which may lead to findings influenced by the researcher's subjectivity and potentially result in the underrepresentation or overemphasis of certain aspects. Additionally, feminism in China encompasses a wide range of experiences shaped by intersecting factors such as age, socioeconomic background, education, geographical identity, and sexual orientation (Wang & Driscoll, 2019). However, this study selected time-specific listener feedback from an audience with a relatively homogenous background. Consequently, the findings may not be generalisable to other feminist media studies in China.

To this day, podcasting has become a popular medium for recognising and engaging with current public issues (Bird, 2023). This indicates that the podosphere still holds

significant academic potential. Therefore, future research could extend the findings of this research by adopting a longitudinal approach to capture changes in podcast audience engagement over time and across platforms. Additionally, scholars might consider using qualitative surveys or in-depth interviews to explore how podcasts meet listeners' specific emotional and social needs, thereby deepening the understanding of podcasts as tools for community building and identity formation.

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