

In China, podcasting is emerging from its niche

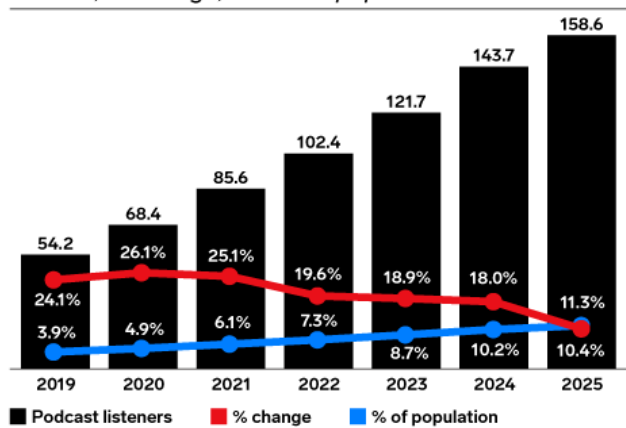
Article

From niche to emerging market status, podcasting is coming of age in China. The current low penetration is partially due to the industry's slow start and the abundance of competing digital audio options. During the past couple of years, however, adoption of podcast listening has been growing rapidly, driven by younger generations and investments from large internet players.

In 2021, podcast listeners in China will reach 85.6 million, ranking the country **second behind only the US** in our forecast across 17 markets. While the number is impressive, it is due to the country's sheer size and only represents 6.1% of the populace.

Podcast Listeners in China, 2019-2025

millions, % change, and % of population



Note: Internet users of any age who listen to a podcast via digital streaming or direct download on any device at least once per month
Source: Insider Intelligence, July 28, 2021

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The low penetration in China is not for a lack of interest in digital audio. Consumers in China have a swath of options in this regard—from ebooks, audio livestreaming, social audio to karaoke—that competes for ear time. Even so, it's undeniable China has a growing appetite for podcasts—which we define as any audio-first serialized episodes that can be accessed via digital streams or downloaded, including listening to podcasts via video platforms. Accordingly, we project growth in podcast listeners in the country will hit 25.1% this year—which will remain in double-digit growth at least until the end of our forecast period in 2025.

Tech companies in China, including some of the most established digital giants, are joining the emerging audio category, carving out a separate “podcast” sections. The music platform **Tencent Music and Entertainment**, for example, just started pushing “long-form content.” Other major players include **Ximalaya**, **Xiaoyuzhou FM** (also known as UFO Podcast), and **Lanren Changting**.

The flourishing industry is particularly attractive to China's younger generations. Marco Lai, the CEO of Lizhi—one of China's premier digital audio companies—and recently **launched** pure-play podcast app Lizhi Boke, said in a June interview with Insider Intelligence that the core podcast audience in China comprises younger demographics, especially those in their mid-20s and 30s, many of whom reside in first- and second-tier cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, or coastal cities, such as Hangzhou, Nanjing, and Guangdong. The streaming medium is also popular among college students.

Lai identified the ability of podcasts to invoke curiosity and emotions and portray the people's lives in an intimate setting as reasons why audiences are drawn to the medium. Popular content runs the gamut, from personal hobbies to life lessons, travel, and pet care.

China's podcast industry is still in its early stage, which has allowed room for new experimentations. Lizhi recently announced a **collaboration** with toys and collectible company Pop Mart to create a branded channel called "Pop Park," which focuses on pop culture. Lizhi has also been organizing offline events for listeners to meet podcast hosts.