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Investigating the factors influencing the popularity of the “Radio Rah” podcast among Iranian audiences

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ABSTRACT

The Persian podcast “Radio Rah”, hosted by Mojtaba Shakouri, has become a highly popular audio program among Iranian audiences, particularly the younger generation. It has consistently ranked among the top three in most polls conducted on the most beloved podcasts. This article, using the method of thematic analysis, evaluates the content of this podcast’s episodes in order to determine what types of themes are currently favored by the Iranian public. According to the findings, Radio Rah is a podcast aimed at encouraging listeners to think critically and seek ways to live better lives. It appears to carry the mission of helping its audience cope with the sufferings of life. In the podcast, Mojtaba Shakouri explores complex philosophical and psychological concepts in a simple and fluent language. He makes these ideas more tangible and accessible by incorporating literary stories, music, and scientific articles. The most frequently recurring themes in the podcast include the necessity of a realistic outlook on life, the importance of positive practical actions in times of crisis, encouragement of self-awareness and self-knowledge, critique of modernity and consumerist culture, and emphasis on spiritual and emotional growth in life. Furthermore, through a thematic analysis of listeners’ comments on the Castbox platform, it was revealed that emotional resonance with the content, admiration for the quality of production, and acknowledgment of the podcast’s psychological and cognitive impact are the main reasons behind its widespread popularity.

INTRODUCTION

Cyberspace, with its wide-ranging functionalities, has enabled the rise of new forms of media that are more responsive to contemporary lifestyles and audience expectations than traditional outlets. The internet empowers individuals to share their perspectives widely, with podcasts standing out as a clear example of this multiplicity of voices. As a communication medium, podcasting involves distributing audio-based digital content, allowing

users to upload and share recorded programs online (Boehlert, 2007). The word “podcasting” was first introduced in February 2004 by journalist Ben Hammersley in an article titled *Audible Revolution* published in *The Guardian* (Kowsari, 2008, p. 5).

In recent years, the podcast has become one of the most popular and widespread media formats — an auditory medium that eliminates temporal and spatial limitations, providing easy access to a wide

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range of content for listeners. The rapid growth in podcast consumption, especially among the younger and educated population, reflects a fundamental shift in media consumption patterns and introduces new forms of storytelling and meaning-making in the public sphere. Podcasts today function not only as media channels but also as platforms for reflecting existential, social, and cultural concerns of their audiences. This evolution underscores the growing necessity of cultivating analytical frameworks for interpreting content—not merely accessing it—as a foundation for meaningful engagement and informed media participation (Sakhaei, Soroori Sarabi, & Alinouri, 2024).

Their low production costs and widespread accessibility democratize both the creation and consumption of knowledge. Podcasts enable experts, educators, and underrepresented voices to publish content without the gatekeeping of traditional media institutions, thus fostering a rich plurality of perspectives (Samuel, 2025). However, this democratization narrative warrants scrutiny—much like uncritical enthusiasm for AI in education, where studies reveal systemic gaps between idealized access and actual readiness, with Iranian MBA programs demonstrating that technological adoption often exacerbates inequalities when ethical frameworks and faculty training lag behind (Rahmatian & Sharajsharifi, 2021).

One of the most robustly documented benefits of podcasts lies in educational settings. Budi Nugroho and colleagues (2024) conducted a quasi-experimental study with 120 students and found that those who used educational podcasts as supplementary material improved their conceptual understanding by approximately 20% compared to peers who relied solely on traditional instruction (Nugroho et al., 2024). These gains mirror organizational research demonstrating that education—when designed for engagement and accessibility—does not merely transmit knowledge but fosters the cognitive agility and self-efficacy needed to navigate both academic and professional complexity (Zamani et al., 2024). This adaptive capacity becomes particularly crucial in our rapidly evolving learning ecosystems, where educational tools must cultivate both technical mastery and meta-cognitive awareness (Hosseini et al., 2021). Similarly, qualitative research from Maher Palenque

(2016) and colleagues highlighted that instructor-created podcasts improve student engagement and comprehension, particularly for auditory learners, and can effectively complement written and visual course materials (Maher Palenque, 2016; Harris & Park, 2008). Additionally, when students generate their own podcast content, Spanish university researchers observed improvements in academic outcomes and classroom dynamics, revealing the pedagogical value of active, student-centered podcast production.

Beyond formal education, podcasts have become essential tools for continuing professional development and informal learning. A scoping review of scholarly podcasting in higher education concluded that such initiatives serve as economic, accessible platforms for disseminating research and connecting communities of practice (Persohn et al., 2024). These findings reflect a fundamental tension in digital learning—how to maintain educational rigor while embracing podcasting's inherent flexibility, a balance that continues to challenge even mature platforms (Khodabin et al., 2022). Listeners can engage with expert insights, case studies, and emerging findings while on-the-go, reinforcing knowledge retention and cultivating critical evaluation skills (Persohn et al., 2024).

Podcasts also play a transformative role in public discourse and civic awareness. Samuel's (2025) cultural analysis emphasizes that podcasts are now central to participatory media, enabling decentralized and even hyperlocal conversation. This grassroots empowerment paradoxically demands new media literacies—the ability to critically evaluate content, interrogate biases, and ethically navigate both traditional and emerging digital spaces (Khodabin et al., 2024). They allow hosts and audiences to co-create narratives that shape political views, foster social engagement, and challenge mainstream journalism norms (Samuel, 2025). However, Samuel also cautions that this democratization carries risks: without traditional editorial oversight, podcasts may also propagate misinformation alongside credible content (Samuel, 2025).

In health and behavioral fields, podcasts function as powerful tools for public education. Studies reviewed health-related podcast interventions and found strong evidence that they can positively

influence physical and mental health behaviors among listeners. However, such interventions—like all technology-mediated solutions—risk oversimplifying complex psychological needs when divorced from structural support systems, revealing a tension between accessibility and holistic care (Rahmatian & Sharajsharifi, 2021). By providing accessible, ongoing informational support, podcasts bridge the gap between expert advice and real-world practice.

Underlying these multiple benefits is the unique convenience of podcasts: listeners can access content flexibly—during commutes, exercise, or chores—turning everyday routines into opportunities for informal learning and reflection (Meden, Radovan & Štefanc, 2024). It fosters lifelong learning, accommodates diverse lifestyles, and facilitates deeper engagement beyond the limitations of traditional lectures or news segments.

Among Persian-language podcasts, Radio Rah, hosted by Mojtaba Shakouri, has emerged as a cultural phenomenon in recent years, gaining a distinctive position. By focusing on themes such as meaning, suffering, self-knowledge, the philosophy of life, and inspiring narratives, this podcast has attracted a broad spectrum of Persian-speaking audiences. Based on statistics from streaming platforms, it is currently considered one of the most popular Persian-language podcasts.

This article seeks to analyze the content of the Radio Rah podcast using the method of thematic analysis in order to identify the themes it emphasizes and to what extent these themes reflect the needs, concerns, and interests of today's Persian-speaking audience. The central question of this study is: what themes in a podcast like Radio Rah have succeeded in capturing widespread audience attention, and why do listeners choose this particular program over the multitude of other podcasts in the fields of self-knowledge and psychology?

METHODOLOGY

In this study, ten episodes from the twenty-four-part Radio Rah podcast — those with the highest number of likes on the Castbox platform — were carefully listened to and transcribed in detail to enable precise analysis. The transcription process was conducted manually and with high accuracy to ensure that tone, key vocabulary, pauses, and verbal emphases were —

as much as possible — reflected in the final text. These transcriptions then served as the primary data for coding and thematic extraction.

Each episode was individually analyzed using the method of thematic analysis, and its themes and categories were systematically organized. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and discovering patterns within qualitative data (Holloway & Todres, 2033: 347). It is a process through which scattered and diverse data are transformed into rich and detailed information (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79). In other words, this method seeks to identify patterns within data (Mohammadpour, 1990: 66). The process of thematic analysis includes three main stages: (1) textual description and segmentation (descriptive coding), (2) interpretation and explanation of the text (interpretive coding), and (3) integration and synthesis through overarching themes.

In addition, to analyze audience perspectives, I also employed thematic analysis on the comments shared by listeners on the Castbox platform. The comments were examined to explore audience feedback on the podcast. Due to the large volume of comments, those with the highest number of likes from each episode were selected for analysis.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Uses and Gratifications Theory is considered one of the most effective frameworks for explaining audience behavior in relation to social media. Initially developed in the 1940s during research on the development of radio communication, this theory has since expanded into various domains. It is a sociological theory that actively explains the reasons behind individuals' media use and how they fulfill their needs. The theory assumes that individuals are aware of their needs and capable of making judgments about media content, and that they derive enjoyment from their chosen content (Efeindo, 2016).

The uses and gratifications approach shifts the focus from the communicator's intentions to the audience's motivations. It seeks to explain the reasons people use media and argues that social and psychological inclinations, along with individual motivations, influence users' choices of specific channels. The content consumed via these channels often leads to attitudinal and behavioral outcomes

(Ha et al., 2015). At its core, this theory holds that users seek out media to fulfill their emotional, psychological, and informational needs, and they experience satisfaction through this consumption (Gun & Lee, 2018). Findings also show that social media increases users' learning and provides a positive user experience (Hong et al., 2016). These platforms are also effective tools for delivering up-to-date knowledge and information (Omar et al., 2016).

According to this theory, individuals select media based on their specific needs and use it to satisfy personal, social, or psychological motivations and goals. The audience is considered an active agent who, with an awareness of their needs, seeks meaningful content.

Within the cultural context of Iran, the Radio Rah podcast—focusing on topics such as life philosophy, psychology, mythology, literature, and lived human experiences—has become a medium that audiences choose not merely for entertainment, but especially for reflection, self-discovery, meaning-making, and psychological relief. The uses and gratifications theory provides a valuable lens through which to interpret the thematic analysis of the podcast episodes, taking into account the motivations and functions of podcast consumption among Iranian listeners.

In other words, Radio Rah offers a space where listeners can create personal meaning from the narratives and analyses presented, and pursue psychological, cognitive, and social gratifications. Therefore, thematic analysis of this podcast's episodes must not only be grounded in the textual content but also interpreted in light of audience context and gratifications—as the uses and gratifications theory suggests.

FINDINGS

Each episode of the podcast was thematically analyzed separately, and descriptive and interpretive codes were categorized under main themes. In what follows, the data for each of the ten episodes are discussed in detail.

Based on the first episode of the podcast titled "Love", four main themes were identified, each consisting of interpretive and descriptive codes. These themes reveal that Mojtaba Shakouri's

narrative of love—unlike many conventional cultural and media portrayals—approaches the subject with realism, critical insight, and reflective depth. Below, each of these themes is examined in detail.

The first theme, "A Realistic Redefinition of Love", focuses on one of the dominant motifs in the episode: the attempt to redefine love beyond romanticized and idealized images. The podcast critiques overly optimistic and poetic notions of love, emphasizing that although love often begins with wonder, fantasy, and hope, it requires realism, understanding, and conscious effort to sustain it. As with other glamorized narratives, media portrayals that idealize emotional experience can obscure real-world risks and complexities—sometimes encouraging expectations or behaviors that have tangible and even dangerous consequences (Soroori Sarabi et al., 2020). This disconnect reflects a broader trend in digital culture, where enthusiasm for technological innovation often eclipses the development of deeper emotional and psychological literacies—exacerbating the gap between mediated ideals and lived experience (Khodabin et al., 2023). In this interpretation, love is not something that is simply found; rather, it must be built and nurtured. Furthermore, the podcast points out that many people mistakenly expect the initial excitement and emotional intensity to persist throughout the relationship—an expectation that often leads to disillusionment.

The second theme, "The Human Condition of Loneliness and the Need for Love", explores the existential role of love in human life. Here, love is presented as a response to the inherent loneliness of human existence. According to the podcast's narrative, human beings are fundamentally alone, and in their search for meaning and inner peace, they seek out an "extraordinary other" through whom they can re-experience a lost sense of unity—something akin to the bond experienced in the mother's womb. In this analysis, love is not merely a romantic phenomenon; it is connected to deep psychological and ontological needs.

The third theme, "The Importance of Practical Action in Relationships", addresses the necessity of responsibility and effort in romantic partnerships. The podcast praises everyday, down-to-earth forms of love built on commitment, hard work, and mutual understanding. It communicates that the longevity of

a relationship is not guaranteed by feelings alone. Rather, love requires ongoing effort, mindful confrontation with challenges, and responsible decision-making. Additionally, it stresses that before ending a relationship, all possible efforts should be made to preserve it—thus minimizing future regrets.

Table 1. Thematic Analysis of the Episode “Love”

Main Category (Overarching Theme)	Subcategory (Interpretive Coding)	Sub-subcategory (Descriptive Coding)
Realistic View of Love	Critique of the Romantic View of Love	Love as Something to Be Built; Inability of Love to Solve Fundamental Issues; Realistic Perspective After Union
The Innate Loneliness of Human Beings and Their Need for Love	Love as a Response to Human Loneliness	Human Beings as Inherently Lonely; The Search for an Extraordinary Other; Desire to Reexperience Prenatal Unity with the Mother
The Importance of Practical Actions in Life	The Role of Awareness and Effort in Relationships	Appreciation of Ordinary Love Based on Effort and Construction; Love Is Not Absolute Compatibility; Necessity of Exhausting All Efforts Before Considering Separation

In the next step, the second episode titled “The Magic of the Path” was analyzed. In this episode, Mojtaba Shakoori explores the concept of spiritual and human growth through the mythological model of the “Hero’s Journey.” Referring to Carl Gustav Jung’s theory of the seven archetypes of transformation, and drawing on the life of Rumi and the story of The Little Prince, he attempts to portray the path of inner growth through a spiritual narrative. Based on the analysis, the themes have been categorized into four main groups.

“Spiritual growth as an inner journey” is one of the key categories, in which this internal journey is described through seven stages: the Innocent Child, the Orphan, the Seeker, the Warrior, the Caregiver, the Innocent Adult, and finally the Magician. This evolutionary path is seen as a shared pattern among individuals who have made a meaningful impact on the world. Encountering suffering is considered the starting point of inner growth, with the Innocent Child representing an optimistic, dependent, and expectant view of life.

In the category “The necessity of a realistic view of life”, the emphasis is on facing life’s pain and challenges. It is argued that at the Orphan stage of

spiritual development, the individual becomes familiar with suffering and begins to ask fundamental questions about life.

Another key theme in this episode is “The necessity of practical action and responsibility”, which focuses on overcoming fears and taking active steps during the Seeker stage.

In the “Spiritual growth” category, drawing on Jung’s archetypes, the stages of human spiritual development are classified into a coherent process and conceptualized as a deep inner journey. Finally, in the theme of “Spiritual maturity”, the culmination of spiritual growth is seen as the transcendence of the self and the conscious act of self-sacrifice—a stage in which the soul reaches profound vitality and suffering is redefined.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis of the Episode “The Magic of the Path”

Main Category (Overarching Theme)	Subcategory (Interpretive Coding)	Sub-subcategory (Descriptive Coding)
A Realistic View of Life	Moving Beyond Childlike Optimism and Facing Reality	Facing suffering at the orphan stage and formation of fundamental questions
The Necessity of Practical Action and Responsibility	Transforming Awareness into Action	Battling fears, formation of conscious actions based on values
Spiritual Growth	Gradual Human Development Through Spiritual Stages	Human journey includes seven archetypes, beginning with the innocent child and ending with the magician
	Spiritual Growth as an Inner Journey	
Spiritual Maturity	Transcending the Self and Giving to the Other	Sacrifice as a chosen virtue; at the helper stage, the individual gives from what they have; at the innocent adult stage, the spirit reaches its peak vitality, meeting God and unity with existence
	Achieving a Spiritual Interpretation of Suffering and the World	

In episode three, titled “Introversion,” Shakouri primarily criticizes the modern world, which increasingly leads to the isolation of introverts and a decline in their productivity. This is a world where the skill of being eloquent is recognized as a criterion for success. Alongside these criticisms, the episode highlights the inner strengths and capabilities of introverts. This underscores a broader concern: when certain personality traits are misinterpreted or

unsupported—especially in formative years—they can lead to deeper patterns of alienation or maladaptive behavior, highlighting the importance of early psychological awareness (Jamali et al., 2022).

Table 3. Thematic Analysis of the Episode “Introversion”

Main Category (Overarching Theme)	Subcategory (Interpretive Coding)	Sub-subcategory (Descriptive Coding)
Critique of modernity	The superiority of extraverted values in the modern world	Isolation of introverts, wasting of introverts' talents, success criteria based on sociability, social rewards for self-presentation in society
The necessity of practical actions in relationships	The necessity of dialogue across the spectrum	Efforts for mutual understanding and finding a balance point, connecting with people on the opposite end of our spectrum
Self-awareness	Conscious management of individual traits	Intelligent utilization of introversion strengths, self-acceptance, and finding a path for personal flourishing

The fourth episode of the “Radio Rah” podcast, titled “Fear of Feeling,” explores one of the deepest sources of suffering for contemporary humans: the suppression of emotions. In this episode, the host approaches the topic from a psychotherapeutic perspective, discussing a concept called “fear of feeling,” where the human brain mistakenly interprets genuine emotions as dangerous and, instead of confronting them, uses defense mechanisms.

The central theme of this episode is “suppression of emotions as the root of psychological suffering,” where suppressed emotions transform into anxiety, depression, and shame, trapping the individual in a cycle of ongoing distress. This condition is especially intensified under the theme titled “critique of societal educational and upbringing systems,” which argues that these systems not only ignore the understanding and expression of emotions but directly use shame as a tool for control and discipline—an approach that, according to the host, has a paradoxical effect, producing anxious, suppressed individuals who are unable to face themselves.

The episode then introduces four psychological defense mechanisms: repression, displacement of feelings, reaction formation, and splitting—

mechanisms unconsciously employed to avoid painful emotions. Although these defenses may appear protective on the surface, in the long term, they increase psychological tension and reduce emotional well-being. This reflects a broader pattern in human systems: attempts to classify and regulate complex realities—whether emotional or behavioral—often sacrifice nuance and proportionality in favor of uniformity and control (Siahpour et al., 2024).

In the final section, the episode calls the audience towards “living bravely and consciously,” emphasizing acceptance of emotions, self-awareness, and the courage to face oneself in solitude. This message resonates particularly in cultures where emotional authenticity competes with pervasive systems of external validation—a tension documented across psychological and cultural studies (Nosraty et al., 2020). From Shakouri’s perspective, the path to liberation from internal suffering lies not in suppression, but in recognizing, accepting, and reconstructing our relationship with authentic human emotions.

Table 4. Thematic Analysis of the Episode “Fear of Feelings”

Main Category (Overarching Theme)	Subcategory (Interpretive Coding)	Sub-subcategory (Descriptive Coding)
Suppression of emotions as the source of psychological suffering	Fear of emotions	Emergence of anxiety, depression, and shame; the brain’s misinterpretation of emotions as danger; repression; displacement of emotion; reaction formation; and reconstruction
	The real world is the world of the unspoken	
Critique of societal educational and upbringing systems	Inefficiency of the educational and upbringing system	Creating a sense of shame in humans as a tool for control and upbringing, resulting in anxious individuals in the pursuit of creating the “perfect” human
Living bravely and consciously	Acceptance of emotions instead of escaping from them	The necessity of self-awareness in solitude and loneliness; confronting fears

In the next episode titled “Banality,” the concept of boredom is examined as a psychological and existential condition in which a person experiences an inner restlessness, chronic aimlessness, and a lack of patience. This state is described as a “death within life”—a nameless stagnation where the individual

does not know what to do and suffers from an inability to direct themselves. The analysis of this episode begins with a fundamental category that defines and explains the nature of boredom. Here, boredom is introduced not merely as a momentary feeling but as an existential condition in which the individual becomes disconnected from meaning and life itself.

Next, the social and psychological roots of boredom are explored. The episode criticizes the educational system, identifying it as a major factor contributing to boredom among adolescents. This system leads to repetition and the rejection of meaning rather than nurturing growth. Additionally, the crisis of skills, monotony, and structural aimlessness are cited as influential factors in the development of this psychological state.

Another category highlights criticism of the modern world, arguing that in the face of this psychological void, modern humans often resort to superficial and immediate reliefs such as overeating, gambling, violence, or consumerism. These responses are not solutions but instead perpetuate and deepen the suffering because they silence the message of boredom rather than understanding its cause. This tension mirrors a broader structural problem in the digital age, where systems designed to optimize well-being—whether in business or education—often generate unforeseen vulnerabilities that deepen psychological disconnection (Soroori Sarabi et al., 2023).

The episode further explains the relationship between modern structures and boredom. The modern world is based on a “subject-object” (I–It) relationship in which objects and even humans acquire instrumental value. This relationship leads to the elimination of individuality in phenomena and severs the spiritual connection between humans and the surrounding world. In other words, humans experience “alienation.”

However, the hopeful aspect of the episode lies in a spiritual and intuitive perspective on boredom. Boredom can be an opportunity for insight, reflection, and returning to the self. Sometimes, within the boredom, a new encounter with oneself and the world can emerge. This requires pause, contemplation, and even intentional engagement with boredom. As the podcast expresses, we must deliberately exhaust our patience to create the space for seeing the world anew.

Finally, the episode concludes by calling for a reconstruction of everyday perspective and the necessity of practical actions to escape this condition. It suggests that the way to face banality is not through escape but by deepening simple lived experiences. Banality can become a gateway to meaning if, instead of fleeing from it, we enter into a dialogue with it and allow our true selves to emerge from within it.

Table 5. Thematic Analysis of the Episode “Burnout”

Main Category (Overarching Theme)	Subcategory (Interpretive Coding)	Sub-subcategory (Descriptive Coding)
Definition and Nature of Boredom	Boredom as a Gradual Death	Lack of Energy to Perform Tasks, Uncertainty About What Exactly to Do, Experiencing Fatigue and Death Within Life, Being Overpowered by Time
	Restlessness Aimlessness	
Social and Psychological Roots of Boredom	Halting Inner Exploration	Monotony, Lack of Purpose or Meaning, Crisis of Will, Disconnect Between Challenges and Skills
	Inefficiency and Weakness of the Educational System	Boring Design of the Educational System, Spending Twelve Years of a Teenager's Life in a Tedious Environment, Educational Monotony, Lack of Developmental Stimuli
Criticism of the Educational System	Predisposing Adolescents to Substance Abuse	
	Modern World Based on the “I–It” Relationship	Reduction of Others to Tools and Objects, Loss of Identity for Humans and Nature, Consumerism and Saturation of Choices as Roots of Many Life Boredoms
Criticism of Modernity	Criticism of Consumerism	
	Fostering a Fresh Perspective on Life	Voluntary Boredom, Boredom as an Opportunity for Insight, Moving from Surface to Depth, Deliberately Becoming Bored, Defamiliarization from the Familiar
The Necessity of Conscious Action	A Spiritual Approach to Boredom	

In the next episode titled “Dreams of the World,” Shakouri depicts a psychological journey in which a person breaks away from the safe confines of everyday life to, through darkness and by confronting inner fears and anxieties, reach a new light and fresh insight. Although this journey is individual, it calls for a return to the community to complete the cycle of meaning. In a world where myths have been erased, this mythological narrative acts as a salvation path for modern humans—a

journey not to escape life, but to live it more deeply. This echoes a broader cultural dilemma in which technological acceleration surpasses our ability to respond ethically and emotionally—deepening the disconnection between rapid innovation and the enduring human need for meaning, responsibility, and inner coherence (Tomraee et al., 2022). Criticism of the modern world and the necessity of recognizing the path of life as a myth and modeling oneself after it are the main themes of this episode.

Table 6. Thematic Analysis of the Episode “World Dreams”

Main Category (Overarching Theme)	Subcategory (Interpretive Coding)	Sub-subcategory (Descriptive Coding)
Criticism of modernity	Encouragement of solitude by modernity	The loss of stories and myths in the modern world, the absence of space for imagination, and the increase of psychological disorders in modern life.
Understanding myth	Realizing the myth's life path	The three-stage path of mythic life: separation, initiation, return.
	Modeling the myth's life journey for all of us	The necessity of separation from everyday life, security, and previous beliefs; attaining new wisdom; and the need to return again to the fabric of life and help others.

In the episode “Letter to Father,” based on Jung’s teachings, the inner journey of a person begins with the “encounter with the shadow”; a journey without which advancing to the next stages of psychological growth is impossible. The shadow is not merely a source of evil but also a vast source of energy and potential, and only when we confront it can we be freed from living behind masks. Kafka’s experience in writing the letter to his father is not only a confession but an effort to see and live within the shadow; an effort that makes healing and transformation possible. This inner dynamic is mirrored in the systems we build. Without ethical reflection, even intelligent technologies risk becoming instruments of suppression rather than transformation (Sakhaei et al., 2024). This confrontation is a kind of return to the self—a painful but authentic return. The main categories of this episode are: understanding the shadow, taking action to face the shadow, and Shakouri’s consistent critical view that the educational system is one of the primary causes of shadow formation.

Table 7. Thematic Analysis of the Episode “Letter to Father”

Main Category (Overarching Theme)	Subcategory (Interpretive Coding)	Sub-subcategory (Descriptive Coding)
The concept of the shadow	The symbol of the unconscious part in Jung’s belief	The repressed part of existence, the lost part of existence, the suppression of abundant energy in the shadow
Criticism of the educational system	Similarity of shadows among people of the same generation	Generational experiences such as unquestioning obedience, prohibition of emotional expression, and generational repression, creating obedient humans
The necessity of practical action to confront the shadow	Meeting with the dark part of existence Kafka’s “Letter to His Father”	What is not shapes what is, achieving humility and modesty, freedom from the prison of the psyche

In the popular next episode titled “The Self,” the encounter with the Self and the necessity of consulting a therapist in case of significant psychological issues and traumas are the main themes. This therapeutic process gains urgency in contexts where dominant cultural narratives—often amplified through media and education systems—distort self-perception by privileging externally imposed values over authentic self-knowledge (Sabbar et al., 2023). In this episode, the inner journey from the ego to the Self is depicted as a path toward healing, awareness, and liberation from individual egoism. The narrative of Hallaj beautifully presents the mystical and psychological structure of the individuation process. The content is a blend of Jungian analytical psychology and Islamic mystical wisdom.

Table 8. Thematic Analysis of the Episode “Self”

Main Category (Overarching Theme)	Subcategory (Interpretive Coding)	Sub-subcategory (Descriptive Coding)
Encounter with the Self	Self-examination in solitude	The final stage of individuation, like Hallaj’s path in Islamic mysticism, is liberation from the false self and joining the deep layers of the psyche, connecting to a source beyond the ego
	Reconciliation with the whole of existence	
The importance of psychotherapy	The therapist’s effort to guide the person from the level of the ego to the unconscious	Connecting the individual to the neglected parts of their existence throughout therapy.

The next episode, titled “Arthur,” focuses on the life and psyche of Schopenhauer, examining the role of deep childhood wounds and their impact on his philosophical and existential outlook. The death of his father, chronic loneliness, and hatred toward his mother caused Schopenhauer to disconnect from the anima—the part of the psyche responsible for emotional connection with the world and the self. As a result, he became a pessimistic and isolated philosopher who despised women and saw himself as the center of the universe. In this narrative, the ego acts like a wall that silences the inner child. Where the delicate and wounded inner voice should be heard, the swollen ego leaves no room for expression.

The episode provides a psychological and existential critique of Schopenhauer’s life, revealing his hidden psychological layers through Jungian theory (anima, ego, inner child). Ultimately, the podcast offers healing strategies: mindful attention to the inner child, rebuilding the internal nurturing relationship, replacing the critical voice with a kind one, and accepting the limits of human knowledge of truth.

This episode makes us aware that Schopenhauer’s pessimism and philosophical bitterness stemmed not just from his thinking but from his wounded psyche. The ultimate aim of this insight is to encourage re-examination of our intellectual and psychological lives from the perspective of the unconscious and the necessity of self-exploration to achieve a more balanced life.

Table 9. Thematic Analysis of the Episode “Arthur”

Main Category (Overarching Theme)	Subcategory (Interpretive Coding)	Sub-subcategory (Descriptive Coding)
Understanding the Ego	Ego or False Self	An inflated ego prevents a person from hearing their inner, vulnerable voice and traps them in a self-centered cycle. Schopenhauer could not hear the voice of his inner child because his ego did not allow the voice of pain and emotional needs to be acknowledged
Understanding the Anima	the Feminine Energy Within	Schopenhauer’s estrangement from the anima within himself stemmed from a mother complex. Spending time with the inner child, approaching the world with childlike curiosity, writing letters to the inner child, and engaging in activities we once loved in childhood are all ways to reconnect with that lost part of the self.
	The Necessity of “Mothering” One’s Inner Child	

The final episode chosen for thematic analysis is “The Old Man and the Sea.” This episode, through the metaphor of Hemingway’s old man, paints a portrait of the modern human being—one who keeps fighting despite constant failure. His battle is not so much external as it is internal: a struggle against despair, aimlessness, childhood fears, and the image of the self imposed by systems of upbringing. At the heart of this struggle, the concept of “waiting” takes on a philosophical dimension—a form of confrontation with oneself. When there is nothing left to lose, a certain kind of light emerges in the darkness. In the end, the episode conveys an elevated message: if you don’t lose yourself, you won’t truly find yourself. Liberation and connection with existence only become possible in that very moment when the “self” has been surrendered in a noble struggle.

Table 10. Thematic Analysis of the Episode “The Old Man and the Sea”

Main Category (Overarching Theme)	Subcategory (Interpretive Coding)	Sub-subcategory (Descriptive Coding)
The concept of waiting	Enduring the passage of time	Waiting is a test of a person’s resilience in the moment and a confrontation with the self. The old man in Hemingway’s story recalls himself in the heart of his waiting.
	Liberation from ego and self-centeredness	With every failure, a person’s ego loosens its grip. It brings the understanding that you are not the center of the world, a confrontation with the self, and the realization that all of us are imperfect in our own ways. Not running from failure—this is key. The old man’s moment of defeat is the very moment of his connection with the sea.
Acceptance of life’s failures	Acceptance of the reality of existence	

Table 11. Thematic Analysis of Radio Rah Audience Comments on the Castbox App

Main Category (Overarching Theme)	Subcategory (Interpretive Coding)	Sub-subcategory (Descriptive Coding)
Deep emotional experience and empathy with the content	Emotional reactions and empathy	I cried, I calmed down, I found healing, it was soothing, I felt better, and so on...
Appreciation of content quality	Appreciation of content structure	It was pleasant, comprehensive, and beautiful; it created the best moments of my day. Your voice is very impactful, Mr. Shakouri's voice is soothing, no one affects me like you do, and so on...
	Appreciation of Mojtaba Shakouri's narration style	
Psychological and cognitive impact	Learning	You solved my biggest problem with this episode, it was the most helpful for me, equivalent to hundreds of informative books. Every time I listen, I discover something new. Why hasn't any psychologist told me these things? I wish everyone would listen, and so on...
	Therapeutic effect	

In the thematic analysis of the comments on this podcast in the Castbox app, without encountering a single negative comment, the themes were categorized into three main groups.

In the first category, deep emotional experience and empathy with the content, we observe the profound impact of the podcast on its audience, as if the podcast acts as a psychological refuge, providing listeners the opportunity to express and experience suppressed emotions.

In the second category, appreciation of the podcast's quality, listeners praised aesthetic aspects such as the narrator's voice, storytelling, and the coherence of the content. Frequent use of words like "pleasant," "calming," and "extraordinary" suggests that the audience perceives the podcast not merely as educational or psychological content but as an aesthetic and artistic experience.

In the third category, psychological and cognitive impact, comments indicate that the Radio Rah podcast serves as a source for awareness, psychological healing, and personal growth, demonstrating its success in identity reconstruction,

increasing personal insight, and even filling gaps in the mental health system.

Overall, the audience feedback shows that this podcast functions beyond a simple audio medium; it has become a space for deep learning, experiencing suppressed emotions, and deriving meaning for Iranian listeners. The podcast's popularity stems not only from its scientific content but also from its empathetic tone, calm narration, and unique psychological experience.

CONCLUSION

Radio Rah offers a coherent and profound portrayal of the psychological and spiritual concerns of contemporary humans. In this podcast, concepts such as love, personal growth, spiritual development, individual identity, and our relationship with emotions are examined not superficially or rhetorically, but through analytical, narrative-based approaches grounded in psychological and mystical sources. What emerges from the thematic analysis of these episodes is a conscious effort to reinterpret the experience of living in the modern world—a world in which the audience faces crises of meaning, loneliness, misunderstandings in human relationships, and inner conflicts between desires and realities. This world is influenced by modernity, consumerism, and a disregard for the transcendent human spirit. Similarly, across various sectors, including health and consumer industries, artificial intelligence has been shown to reshape human experiences, raise ethical questions, and invite critical reflection on the interplay between technological innovation, personal identity, and well-being (Toosi et al., 2024).

In the first episode, the issue of love and failure in romantic relationships is presented not merely as an emotional crisis but as a manifestation of a structural misunderstanding of the concept of love. The podcast critiques romanticized and exaggerated views of love, emphasizing responsibility, realism, and the effort to build relationships—explaining why many listeners find it a mirror of their lived experience. The second episode outlines the spiritual growth path of humans in seven archetypal stages, drawing on mystical and psychoanalytic texts, inviting listeners to gradually know themselves and overcome fears and attachments. This metaphorical language combining

Eastern wisdom and Western psychology is a key strength that fosters broad empathy with the podcast's content. In parallel, even contemporary educational institutions are being compelled to reflect on the purpose of development and leadership in the age of artificial intelligence. As seen in higher education as well, artificial intelligence is reorienting traditional disciplines like management toward technologically driven models of leadership and identity, prompting reflection on how innovation intersects with humanistic purpose and existential direction (Rahmatian & Sharajsharifi, 2022).

The third episode focuses on introversion and critiques the dominant extroverted modern culture, inviting listeners to reconsider the criteria for success, sociability, and personality valuation. It reinterprets social space particularly from the viewpoint of the psychological minority of introverts and offers ways for mutual understanding and balance.

The fourth episode unveils the mechanisms behind emotional repression and the roots of anxiety and hidden shame, emphasizing the importance of courageous living and confronting authentic human emotions. This episode addresses one of the key psychological knots of contemporary humans: how culture, upbringing, and internal fears cause us to distance ourselves from our true selves.

The fifth episode proposes that the way out of mundanity lies in reconciliation with boredom, deliberate engagement with it, and renewed attention to the "small things" and ordinary around us. Meaningful living begins when even repetitive affairs are viewed with fresh eyes and questioning perspectives.

The sixth episode stresses the importance of myths and ancient stories in human life—narratives that historically helped humans cope with suffering, crisis, separation, fear, and death. In the modern world, with myths and imagination eliminated, humans become isolated and face psychological and existential crises. To escape meaninglessness and crisis, modern humans need to return to the world of stories and myths. This cultural longing reflects a deeper concern: as intelligent technologies accelerate, they often outpace our moral and existential readiness—threatening to widen the gap between innovation and inner coherence (Tomraee et al., 2024). Myths are not merely cultural memories but psychological maps of personal transformation; listening to them may offer a way to

overcome loneliness and the meaninglessness of today's world.

The seventh episode explores the concept of the shadow in human psyche—the dark and repressed parts of our personality often ignored due to family, educational, and social systems. Facing the shadow can enhance inner ethics and psychological strength. Kafka's letter to his father exemplifies this confrontation with emotional wounds, facilitating psychological healing.

The eighth episode examines the third stage of individuation: encounter with the self. The human psyche comprises three layers: ego (conscious self), personal unconscious, and collective unconscious. At this stage, the individual confronts the deeper layers of the psyche, particularly the collective unconscious, which contains archetypes shared across humanity. The "self" emerges as the central archetype representing wholeness and the integration of opposites.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of Interest declared by the author(s).

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