

Analysis of Characteristics of New Media Film and Television Criticism in the Digital Media Context: Postprint

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Abstract

In the new media era, both the creative ecology and critical ecology of Chinese cinema have undergone significant transformations. The “zero threshold” access conditions have precipitated the marginalization of mainstream professional film criticism, while new media film criticism has been reconceptualized. Extensive participation by self-media entities in new media film criticism has precipitated the reconstruction of critical order and catalyzed the development of a new critical ecology. Within the new media environment, film criticism has experienced morphological transformation, with critical forms progressively evolving toward colloquialization, visualization, and fragmentation. This article proceeds from the transformation of critical context engendered by new media, and within the digital media context, examines the current developmental status and characteristics of new media film criticism in conjunction with an analysis of its social functional impact.

Full Text

An Analysis of the Characteristics of New Media Film and Television Criticism in the Digital Media Context

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Abstract: In the new media era, both the creative ecology and critical ecology of Chinese cinema have undergone significant transformations. The “zero threshold” for entry has marginalized mainstream professional film criticism, prompting a reconceptualization of new media film criticism. The extensive participation of self-media subjects has restructured the order of film criticism and catalyzed the development of a new critical ecology. In the new media environment, the morphology of film criticism has transformed, with critical

forms gradually evolving toward colloquialization, visualization, and fragmentation. This article examines the evolution of the critical context fostered by new media, and analyzes the current state and characteristics of new media film criticism within the digital media context, considering its social functional impacts.

Keywords: digital media; new media film and television; morphological transformation; social function

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1. The Arrival of the Intelligent Media Era and the Self-Innovation of Film and Television Criticism

As new media technologies mature, the era of intelligent media rises powerfully. Mobile internet has become the dominant mode of information transmission, with emerging media permeating public life in various forms to achieve comprehensive electronic media coverage. The media carriers of contemporary film and television criticism exhibit spatial virtuality, allowing critical subjects to freely express their opinions, thereby making the general public the core force driving the development of film and television criticism. Confronted with a complex, flexible, and ever-changing new media criticism environment, netizens should work collectively to promote the organic integration of traditional and new media film criticism, uphold critical standards, and foster a comprehensive, healthy public sphere for film and television criticism.

2. A Study on the Evolution of New Media Film and Television Criticism

With the vigorous development of online arts, the discourse system and expressive forms of film and television criticism in the intelligent media era have undergone multidimensional transformations. The traditional single-direction, linear communication model of film and television culture in conventional media fields has been upgraded, stimulating the reform and innovative vitality of criticism. The new media film and television criticism ecosystem has entered a golden age. Given that new media platforms have expanded new horizons and channels for film and television criticism, new media criticism has successively undergone discursive transformations, with multiple critical subjects engaging

in power contests over discourse, resulting in uneven criticism quality. Within the digital media context, film and television criticism has experienced various changes in strength and weakness, optimizing traditional stylistic forms and creating new qualitative characteristics in writing style, while the mass subject enjoys multi-directional and multi-polarized communication.

2.1 Shifts in the Critical Landscape

2.1.1 The Marginalization and Loss of Voice in Mainstream Professional Criticism Within the comprehensive media perspective of the intelligent media era, public aesthetic tastes have become alienated, and the film criticism industry system has entered a new stage of development. Traditional mainstream film criticism is in decline, with elite criticism failing to achieve organic integration with popular criticism and gradually retreating to a marginal position. Against the backdrop of a transforming social and civilizational context, the new media technology-supported netizen community has broadened its access to professional knowledge. Professional theoretical critics have lost their authoritative, unidirectional right to speak and can no longer monopolize the channels of critical expression, giving rise to a new generation of “universal” film criticism. Wang Yichuan, Dean of the Art School at Peking University, has proposed that we should construct a “dual film criticism combining aesthetics and culture”[1]. An analysis of the fundamental reasons for the decline of mainstream criticism reveals that traditional critics deliberately pile up academic jargon in their critical discourse, becoming trapped in a self-absorbed stream of consciousness that fails to gain recognition in the traffic-driven market. The public has spontaneously begun to resist and reject obscure theoretical reviews, causing the discursive power of film criticism experts and scholars to be submerged and forcing them out of their comfort zones to shift to new media positions. To address the loss of critical discourse resources, traditional film criticism workers should consciously narrow the distance between academic institutions and the general public, re-examine and investigate the popular, grassroots, and folk characteristics of new media film criticism in the digital media context, and awaken their own developmental vitality in this traffic era of both opportunities and challenges, thereby catalyzing the revival of literary and artistic criticism.

2.1.2 The Development of Self-Media Catalyzing a New Critical Ecology According to the 47th “Statistical Report on Internet Development in China” released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) on February 3, 2021, as of December 2020, China’s internet user population reached 989 million, an increase of 85.4 million since March 2020, with internet penetration reaching 70.4% [2]. Alongside the comprehensive improvement in internet penetration, intelligent media has become the direct driving force shaping new forms of film criticism, and the development of self-media has subverted the framework of traditional criticism. New media film and television criticism, as a new cultural force born in response to the demands of the times, fully utilizes the many advantages of the internet to change the single text-based form of the

traditional criticism era. The development of self-media provides a large “main force” for the development of film criticism, further expanding the critical field. The “video + commentary” model of self-media criticism adds vitality to the development of film criticism. However, amidst the rapid wave of “explosive” development in self-media criticism, certain hidden concerns remain. To win favor in virtual spaces, self-media critical elaboration mechanisms excessively compete for traffic, with “kitsch” phenomena occurring frequently. Self-media film criticism information producers act as their own “gatekeepers,” and this role convergence leads to imperfect review mechanisms and uneven criticism quality.

2.1.3 The “Zero Threshold” Phenomenon in the Film Criticism Field

The arrival of the new technological revolution has rapidly triggered information technology development, leveraging the popularization of the internet to give rise to a civilian consciousness in criticism forms. Compared with the old era that relied on paper media, the information communication pattern centered on digital media has quickly attracted large audiences with its powerful advantages of openness, convenience, and efficiency. From the perspective of the intelligent media era, the participation arena for film and television criticism has broadened, the subjects of criticism have changed, and mass netizens have become a new cultural force in the criticism ecosystem. In this era where everyone is a medium, decentralized communication mechanisms have become increasingly prominent, and the personalized characteristics of critical discourse have become more pronounced. The network-empowered mass film and television criticism has generated multiple discursive interweavings and ideological collisions, with numerous complex interactive exchanges creating a hundred schools of thought in film criticism and fostering a new multidimensional and liberal cultural atmosphere. The “zero threshold” for film criticism has driven the further generalization of critical subjects, enabling film creators to narrow the distance between themselves and audiences through online platforms. The sensitive and meticulous authentic voices of film audiences, in turn, nourish and inform film creation for self-correction. This interactive information transmission objectively stimulates the creative initiative of mass criticism and broadens the growth space for film and television criticism.

2.2 The Morphological Transformation of Criticism: Diversification of Critical Forms

In the digital media context, new media film and television criticism has broken the critical pattern of traditional media, giving rise to diversified forms of criticism. The morphology of new media film criticism is currently undergoing expansion and evolution: standardized criticism is gradually becoming colloquial, textual criticism is gradually becoming visual, and summarizing criticism is gradually becoming fragmented. This diversification of critical paradigms provides more possibilities for the development of a new ecological film and television industry.

2.2.1 The Colloquialization of Critical Discourse Style The production of critical discourse originates from the understanding and cognition of the output subject within their social context. In the infinitely expanding cyberspace, new forms of film and television criticism discourse have gradually drifted away from original normative models. The anonymity of netizen identities grants mass film criticism an unrestricted online space, and the life-oriented, emotional expression dominated by individual aesthetic thinking drives critical content back to its authentic nature, opening up new routes for creative stylistic development. As one scholar notes: “Internet language is a new linguistic fact and linguistic behavior that emerges on the basis of traditional language, representing supplementation and innovation” [3]. Audiences conduct liberalized, perceptual interpretations of film and television works, with pure and intuitive opinion expression replacing the rigid repetitiveness of traditional criticism, possessing specific reference value. However, the 冗杂无序 (chaotic and disorderly) colloquial discourse still mixes emotional venting expressions, and the proliferation of banalized and vulgarized criticism significantly hinders the generation of high-quality film criticism. The absence of core principles of artistic criticism substantially reduces the effectiveness of film criticism, deconstructing the discursive spatial order of criticism.

2.2.2 The Visualization of Critical Communication Paradigms In the digital media context, film and television criticism is undergoing a subversive transformation of communication paradigms within digital media. Relying on its prominent contemporary characteristics, new media film criticism has absorbed and produced visual image forms on the basis of traditional single text-based morphology, creating a new situation of film criticism with popular elements. The diverse and complex ecological styles of the emerging critical field essentially display a new relational system derived from the dual resonance of historical-cultural migration and scientific-technological innovation. The image symbols in criticism can organically visualize and concretize critical texts, breaking through communication circle barriers and expanding territory in the creative public square of criticism. Catalyzed by the blowout development of the short video industry, self-media producers create and publish textual commentary-style short videos on platforms like Douyin and Kuaishou, using their life-oriented, entertaining fast-food model for new content production and expressive shaping, comprehensively penetrating the mass critical space and gaining substantial attention.

2.2.3 The Fragmentation of Critical Text Types “Danmu” (bullet comments), originating from Japan’s Niconico animation, is a system for temporarily publishing comments [4]. Against the backdrop of the fragmentation trend in film criticism modes, China established its first danmu video website—AcFun—in 2007, initiating a participatory fragmented viewing culture. Due to the mandatory upper limit on danmu character count, the integrity of traditional long-form criticism is deconstructed, generating a new highly free structural

combination. The return of discursive power to the folk foundation has triggered a carnival in the new media film criticism square. Alongside the rise of fragmented reading and fast-food culture, concise, straightforward, and direct micro-criticism better aligns with the public's intrinsic cultural needs and emotional resonance in the digital media context. Although the simplification of critical discourse provides vast interpretive space for film and television works, certain problems also exist. Influenced by character limits and discursive modes, new media criticism suffers from a lack of systematic logic. Fragmented film and television criticism is mostly published after initial viewing, proceeding from a perceptual and personal perspective. Criticism production is delivered directly to the communication audience without careful deliberation, resulting in deficiencies in professionalism and value. Faced with the unprecedented prosperity of new media criticism, self-media platforms should accelerate the establishment of mechanisms to filter out inferior information, construct new evaluation systems, and focus on improving the quality of contemporary new media criticism.

3. An Analysis of the Social Functions of New Media Film Reviews

New media film and television has become the primary means of leisure and entertainment for contemporary netizens, and new media film reviews have consequently become an important reference for the general public before viewing. The emergence of new forms of criticism has eliminated the dominant position of traditional criticism, with subculture showing vigorous development momentum. Simultaneously, with rapid economic and social development, new media film reviews have quickly formed a “partnership” with the consumer economy, enhancing the marketing effectiveness of new media film and television works through integrated marketing models and achieving true win-win cooperation. In the new media environment, both the producers and disseminators of film reviews have changed. The rising consciousness among mass netizens to compete for discursive power on new media platforms has altered the mainstream mode of film criticism, causing structural adjustments in the new media film criticism field.

3.1 New Media Film Reviews as Constructors of Ideological Value Guidance

The emergence of “Weibo criticism,” “danmu criticism,” and “short video criticism” in new media film reviews has completely deconstructed the authority of traditional cultural elites, constructing a freer critical system through their own new attributes. High-quality film and television criticism can combine the overall trends of current social development to make valuable judgments and reflections on cultural phenomena appearing in film and television works. The essence of scientifically guided criticism lies not only in enhancing the social

value of criticism itself but also in leading the broad audience away from vulgar works of poor taste, optimizing the creative process and value orientation of film and television works. After receiving positive and timely feedback, film and television works consciously strengthen their own construction, promoting a virtuous cycle in the cultural criticism ecosystem. Through the optimization of the critical environment, the elevation of public aesthetics, and the improvement of film and television work quality, these three elements work in unison to promote the flourishing development of the film industry. As pointed out in the important speech delivered by General Secretary Xi Jinping at the Symposium on Literary and Art Work in 2014: “We must attach great importance to and effectively strengthen literary and art criticism work, using historical, people’s, artistic, and aesthetic viewpoints to evaluate and appreciate works, advocating truth-speaking and reason-giving, and constructing a healthy and orderly public discourse space for film and television” [5]. As a form of mass critical practice, new media film reviews should attach great importance to their value guidance function, avoid the noise and loss of control caused by excessive freedom, and strengthen the cultural appeal of the new era with Chinese characteristics.

3.2 The Integrated Development of Film Criticism and Consumer Economy

The vigorous development of the market economy has rapidly established a commodity value system that dominates social life, with the principle of commodity exchange penetrating the cultural domain to cater to popular interests. Readers of new criticism works are transformed into cultural consumers, while creators naturally become producers of cultural products. The market logic of production according to demand has powerfully influenced the creation of new media film reviews, allowing this literary conformism to find economically self-evident legitimacy. With the further integrated development of internet culture and consumer economy, the mediatization and capitalization characteristics of new media film reviews have become increasingly prominent. From the perspective of consumer economy, cultural products such as films and television shows adopt a compliant attitude toward popular aesthetic tastes, conducting film and television production oriented by audience consumption demands. Under the canopy of social culture, the production and creation of new media film and television criticism texts are filled with consumer economy elements, gradually becoming new types of cultural consumption commodities. Today, film criticism has become a key strategy for film and television publicity and marketing, stimulating audience aesthetic consumption agency and arousing their consumption desires while participating in the dissemination of film and television works. Driven directly by internet development, numerous scholars have expressed mixed and inconclusive opinions about new media film criticism integrated with consumer economy, and its social value remains debatable.

3.3 The Rise of Popular Culture Empowering Audience Discourse

Under the continuous impact of the rise of popular culture, the public has spontaneously narrowed the distance between film and television works and their own lives, no longer satisfied with passively receiving information but increasingly inclined to actively express personal opinions about film and television works and conduct discussions on internet platforms. With the rapid advancement of internet technology, the discursive power of film and television criticism has dispersed and 下移 (shifted downward), 脱离 (breaking away from) elite culture to form “decentralization.” Due to the rise of popular culture, mass netizens’ evaluation and appreciation of film and television works are no longer limited to “elegance.” To cater to popular tastes, the creation of film and television works has upgraded from pure “highbrow” to “highbrow-popular,” realizing their own aesthetic value only when appreciated by the masses. Simultaneously, with the arrival of the omnimedia era, all media openly transmit information to all mass netizens, with characteristics of wide coverage, high production speed, and fast transmission efficiency, profoundly influencing the cultural communication patterns of mass criticism. Since then, the public has activated self-empowerment mode, completing the expansion and transformation of the netizen role. The rapid growth of popular culture has a dual impact on the development of new media film and television criticism: new media brings new opportunities for Chinese film criticism while also presenting new challenges. In the myriad ideological and cultural communication positions, the popularization of communication subjects poses severe challenges to the security construction of online ideological public opinion, and new media film criticism is endowed with new meaning and revitalized.

In the digital media context, film and television criticism has entered an era of diversified development. Promoting the integrated development of popular grassroots criticism and mainstream academic criticism and fostering a favorable atmosphere for literary and artistic criticism is an urgent priority. While new media film and television criticism expands new forms of traditional criticism and opens discursive space, it has also triggered a series of problems that require immediate attention. Advancing the construction of the critical ecological environment still requires joint efforts from experts, scholars, self-media critics, and mass netizens.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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