

## Post-print Version: Reflections on Television Development Under the Impact of New Media

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### Abstract

In recent years, the melancholic discourse of “TV is dying” has been gaining traction in both academic circles and the industry, strongly suggesting that the television industry is approaching its demise. However, reality has proven that television has not died; it remains the most influential medium today. First, television still holds significant advantages over the Internet and mobile phones in terms of content quality, as most phenomenon-level TV dramas and variety shows originate on television platforms. Second, the advertising revenue and sponsorship fees generated by television are also markedly higher than those of new media. Third, television, as the loyal “mouthpiece” of the Party and the state, has always served as the authoritative and primary channel for releasing major information—an advantage that no other media possesses. Although television has not been replaced by new media, its development space is being severely squeezed, with its audience base continuously eroding and viewership share declining. In response, this paper argues that the path for television to break through lies in three aspects: first, seizing opportunities to secure advantages in channels and content; second, embracing technology and prioritizing user experience; and third, identifying its own positioning to leverage its irreplaceable role as a “mouthpiece”.

### Full Text

#### 1. Is Television Dying?

Many domestic scholars believe that the internet may become television’s undertaker in the future, for the following reasons: First, television content can be easily accessed in cyberspace, and users can enjoy the convenience offered by the network in a more humanized manner. Second, the internet’s advantage of relaxed policy oversight is unattainable for television. This determines that online audiovisual content often has greater latitude and higher entertainment value, better aligning with the viewing demands of today’s younger generation.

Finally, as a medium, the internet represents a higher level of human technological achievement and is therefore superior to television as an old medium.

Henry Holtzman, Chief Knowledge Officer of MIT Media Lab, also predicts that television will “die,” though he believes mobile terminals such as smartphones will be the ultimate nemesis. His reasons are as follows: (1) Television and computers are becoming increasingly identical; (2) Programs have gradually transformed into user experiences, and operations can be completed without television; (3) Television stations will wither while video content flourishes, forcing television manufacturers to transform; (4) The rise of multi-screen interaction and social television will change television’s characteristics; and (5) Everyone will own their own “television,” which will be their mobile phone.

Clearly, the notion that television will “die” is a frightening metaphor that foreshadows the demise of television as a non-humanistic, one-way communication model and the end of its arrogant, user-insensitive production philosophy. This “I broadcast, you watch” mentality has long been deeply ingrained, disregarding the public’s subjective feelings and suppressing audiences’ individualized aesthetic needs, making such communication fundamentally non-humanistic. When the internet, with its massive audiovisual resources (most of which are freely accessible) and humanized communication methods, extends its benefits to audiences severely wounded by television, it is not difficult to understand why the masses are switching off their television sets and turning to the internet.

Contemporary television content production faces numerous dilemmas, primarily stemming from the constraints of content censorship and rectification mechanisms. In recent years, one problem in television drama production has been the singularity of subject matter and trite plotlines. Since 2000, following the continuous popularity of phenomenal works such as *Lurk*, *Waiting for Dawn*, and *Eighteen Years in the Enemy Camp*, major production and broadcasting institutions have rushed into spy drama production, blindly following trends to mass-produce various anti-Japanese “god dramas” and spy “thunder dramas” that constantly challenge audience patience. The same holds true for variety shows: due to policy restrictions on large-scale, high-impact content, major satellite television stations and content producers have all chosen to “cluster and roll around” in safe zones, resulting in the current serious problem of homogenization in television variety shows.

These policy restrictions have manifested in several ways. In late October 2011, the “Entertainment Restriction Order” was issued, including the 2011 document *SAPPRFT to Strengthen Management of Satellite TV Comprehensive Programs* and the 2013 document *Notice on Program Scheduling and Filing for Satellite TV Comprehensive Channels in 2014*, requiring local satellite stations to limit entertainment program broadcasts to no more than three times per week during prime time (17:00 to 22:00) starting in July 2011. On October 11, 2011, the “Advertisement Restriction Order” was introduced, establishing regulations on the timing, duration, and types of advertisements inserted in television dramas. On that day, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and

Television issued the *Notice on Further Strengthening the Management of Radio and Television Advertisement Broadcasting*, followed on November 28 by the *Supplementary Provisions to the Radio and Television Advertisement Broadcasting Management Measures*, which decided that from January 1, 2012, no advertisements could be inserted in any form during the broadcast of television drama episodes nationwide. The December 2011 “Broadcasting Restriction Order” stipulated that satellite stations could broadcast only two episodes of a drama during evening prime time (19:00 to 21:30), no more than three episodes of the same drama during evening hours (18:00 to 1:00 the next day), and no more than six episodes during daytime hours, with daily drama broadcasts not exceeding 45% of total programming. Additionally, each episode was limited to 46 minutes maximum and 30 minutes minimum to prevent “abnormal” broadcasting practices of combining or splitting episodes. Finally, on January 21, 2015, another “Broadcasting Restriction Order” specified that the volume of foreign dramas broadcast could not exceed 30% of domestic drama playback volume on websites.

## 2. Television Isn’t Dead: What Should It Do?

Within the rigid framework of institutional constraints, television content production is akin to dancing in chains, unable to unleash its full potential. Meanwhile, online dramas have seized the opportunity to launch large-scale works catering to young people’s tastes, such as *Go Princess Go*, *Ghost Stories*, *Yu Zui*, and *Addicted*, which have gained favor among “internet-native” audiences despite their rough production quality and lack of big-name directors or stars, precisely because they satisfy the entertainment needs and aesthetic expectations of “internet-native” users for daring, unconventional content.

In 2015, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television began tightening policies on the internet, explicitly requiring that content unsuitable for television broadcast would also be prohibited online, unifying policies and standards across platforms. This undoubtedly represents a strategic turning point for television. In subsequent market competition, television must combine its capital and content advantages to create higher-quality audiovisual resources and further expand its influence among audiences. Facts demonstrate that despite policy advantages for the internet, online platforms cannot compete with television in terms of economic benefits or market attention. Television possesses two major advantages over the internet: capital scale and content quality. Large investment is not only a guarantee of program quality but also a prerequisite for high output. Compared to the small-scale operations of online dramas with budgets of a few million to ten million RMB, television’s lavish spending of tens or even hundreds of millions represents a powerful guarantee for premium programs and quality content. As Yuan Chunjie, Deputy Director of Dragon TV Center and Director of Advertising Marketing, stated: “In recent years, new media have also produced some content, but in the current situation, large-scale production is still not commercially viable from a business model perspective,

because television production costs set a very high threshold.” In variety shows, for instance, as of November 2016, the program with the highest market ratings was *Running Man Season 4* on Hunan Satellite TV, while the program commanding the highest naming rights fee was *Extreme Challenge Season 2* on Dragon TV (800 million RMB). Therefore, future television development must focus on connecting capital scale with quality content to continuously create newer, more market-oriented premium content.

## 2.1 Seizing the Strategic Opportunity of “Unified Television-Internet Policies” to Strengthen Capital and Content

The elitist creative approach of traditional television—producing content behind closed doors without regard for user experience—can no longer adapt to the current media ecosystem and must fundamentally change. We now live in a cultural consumption era of “user supremacy,” where all market competitors must be consumer-centered and cater to public demand, and television is no exception. Internet big data enables the refined grasp of audience consumption information and prediction of future trends. Television must proactively leverage this advantage to broadly understand market demand, decipher consumers’ desires for cultural consumption, and strive for customized program production. Furthermore, content dissemination must emphasize segmented strategies. Segmentation means differentially transmitting different types and characteristics of content to terminal devices for different audiences, as differentiation is essential for precisely capturing the attention of more viewers.

## 2.2 Establishing a “User Supremacy” Production and Broadcasting Philosophy

The philosophy of “user supremacy” dictates that everything must be considered from the user’s perspective and serve the audience wholeheartedly. In the future, television must target young “internet-native” audiences and strive to cater to their reception habits and aesthetic tastes. Therefore, television should focus on two key aspects. First, actively expand dissemination channels. Television-internet integration is a major trend in current television content production. Programs such as *Running Man* on Hunan Satellite TV, *Full Speed Ahead* on Zhejiang Satellite TV, and *Extreme Challenge* on Dragon TV have all adopted this model, which enables high-quality television content to be disseminated in more humanized ways, completely shedding the stigma of one-way television broadcasting. Second, adopt new technologies to enhance user experience satisfaction. Consumers always pursue fresh, stimulating new experiences. From the history of mass media evolution, media with better experiential qualities consistently defeat their “elders” to become the new favorites of the era. For instance, television quickly overtook radio based on its visual advantages, followed by color television compensating for the lack of color in black-and-white television, and now online video has surpassed television in resource storage capacity and playback convenience. In the future, as mobile short videos, VR,

holographic projection, and other technologies enter the audiovisual content production and broadcasting field, they will inevitably cause new waves of disruption. Therefore, television must actively adopt new technological inventions to continuously improve audience satisfaction with content reception.

### 2.3 Actively Adopting New Technologies to Enhance User Experience

Regardless of how times change or technology develops, television professionals must always understand that television in China has been special since its inception, determined by the country's specific historical conditions and national circumstances. However, over time, many have been impacted by Western ideology, lost their direction, and even come to view the “mouthpiece” identity as a constraint on television development. This perception is extremely dangerous and mistaken. The author believes that becoming the “mouthpiece” of the Party and the people is television's fortune and its core competitive advantage. Whenever major domestic or international news events occur, television is always the primary dissemination channel. For example, during the 2008 Beijing Olympic torch global relay, the Sichuan earthquake disaster reporting, and the August 12, 2015 Tianjin explosions, most of the public received news through live television broadcasts. With its strong political integrity, controllable censorship and broadcasting mechanisms, and sophisticated transmission equipment and technology, television is the most trusted media for both the Party and the masses, possessing certain authority in information dissemination. Going forward, television must further clarify its “mouthpiece” identity, live up to the trust of the Party and the people, and ensure timely, accurate, and neutral dissemination of news. In entertainment content, it should highlight timeliness, ideological content, and progressiveness, implementing the principle of “literary and artistic development serving the masses” proposed by General Secretary Xi at the literary and art symposium.

## 3. Conclusion

In recent years, as emerging media such as the internet, mobile phones, and outdoor large screens have continuously ventured into audiovisual content production and dissemination, the market pressure on television has been increasing daily. Indeed, television's current influence is far less than before, but this is merely a matter of weakened advantages, not a life-or-death issue for the industry. As a mature form of entertainment art, television audiovisual content will inevitably evolve according to the times, changing its communication models, production concepts, and creative methods. However, no matter how the external forms change, they all serve the internal essence (audiovisual content). Therefore, as long as the public's aesthetic demand for film and television art remains and the communication needs between the Party and the people persist, television will not die. It will continue to develop by constantly adopting new technologies and innovating new forms.

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

*Source: ChinaXiv — Machine translation. Verify with original.*