

Original Paper

Mobile Terminals and the Production Shift of Media Culture

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Received: May 10, 2025

Accepted: July 12, 2025

Online Published: July 23, 2025

doi:10.22158/jecs.v9n3p40

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/jecs.v9n3p40>

Abstract

The evolution of the communication environment, cultural context, and industrial landscape has posed new challenges for media culture production. In response to the current chaos in mobile terminal-based media culture production—such as the homogenization of media products driven by capital control, the misguided orientation towards consumerist values, and the proliferation of aesthetic degradation manifested as an obsession with the grotesque—it is imperative to consider a production shift in media culture. This shift should focus on creating core values in media culture production, addressing the needs of diverse cultural groups, updating the discourse expression system, and guiding a return to Chinese cultural content production.

Keywords

mobile terminals, media product production, media literacy

1. Background of the Shift in Media Cultural Production

"The proliferation of increasingly sophisticated audiovisual cultural products and the refinement of virtual interactive technologies—emphasizing user-friendliness and engagement—have gradually ushered society into an era dominated by media culture." The three foundational mechanisms of media culture now face critical new challenges in the contemporary era. Transformations in the communication environment, cultural context, and industrialized markets have all exerted profound impacts on China's media cultural production.

1.1 Technological Empowerment: Evolution of the Communication Landscape

The maturation of technologies such as VR, AR, and H5 has diversified the forms and methods of media content expression, while their widespread adoption has extended into advertising, marketing, and other industries. For mobile terminals, advancements like H5, VR, cloud computing, and artificial intelligence have reshaped brand communication platforms, delivering a quantum leap in user experience.

Renowned media scholar and critic Neil Postman argued in *Amusing Ourselves to Death* that specific media forms inherently shape content preferences. In the new media environment, the solemnity and

ritualistic nature of traditional reading have diminished, with audiences increasingly rejecting rigid, didactic narratives in favor of lighthearted and engaging consumption. Harold Innis posited that "the advantages of a new medium herald the rise of a new civilization." The emergence and proliferation of diverse media technologies have accelerated the integration of mobile terminals into daily life, with each technological advancement altering communication dynamics. Building upon their inherent traits—strong companionship, social habits, and immersive experiences—mobile platforms now exhibit distinct tendencies toward visualization, lighthearted engagement, and interactivity. Information dissemination across mobile devices is evolving beyond mere "fragmentation" into "atomization," with cross-platform content overlapping and compounding.

However, while technology empowers communication, its rapid progress also brings unintended consequences. The explosive growth of information has negatively influenced media cultural production. Lowered technical barriers and production costs have flooded the market with hastily produced media content, leading to saturation, repetitive creativity, and subpar quality—ultimately degrading user experience. Technologies like H5 heavily rely on social networks for dissemination, yet diminishing returns on content-sharing have reduced audience exposure to media products.

1.2 Transformation of the Cultural Structure

Contemporary Chinese society exhibits a cultural landscape characterized by "a dominant mainstream coexisting with pluralistic subcultures"—an inevitable outcome of the interplay between marketization, economic globalization, and digitalization in late 20th-century China. Cultural pluralism represents historical progress, reflecting the diversification of lifestyles in the current era, and will remain a defining feature of social development for the foreseeable future.

Amid this dynamic interplay—where traditional and modern cultures compete, highbrow and popular cultures converge, dominant and subcultures share the stage, and local and foreign influences intermingle—multiculturalism has emerged as a powerful force. It simultaneously stimulates and satisfies diverse cultural demands while profoundly challenging the hegemony of mainstream culture.

New media empowerment and ideological construction have reshaped the relationship between Generation Z's youth subcultures and mainstream culture, manifesting an evolutionary trajectory: "Cultural conflict → Cultural distancing → Cultural interaction → Cultural integration." This process reflects both the current state and an inevitable trend in socio-cultural development.

1.2.1 The Rise of Youth Subculture

Overall, the development of youth subculture in China has undergone a transition from moderation to intensity, primarily characterized by rebellious psychology, sexualized expression, hedonistic consumerism, a pursuit of entertainment, and the search for meaningful identity. These manifestations often rely on the possession and use of specific objects, creating an organic unity between youth subculture and consumerist markets. Consumption has become an integral part of youth subculture, while subcultural styles themselves have turned into consumable products. Under the influence of youth subculture, media cultural production exhibits the following trends:

Fashion and Differentiation: Symbolic Expression. Subculture embodies traits such as "resistance," "subversion," and "innovation," emphasizing self-expression and strong self-awareness. It represents the interests of groups marginalized by mainstream culture. Media cultural production attracts youth attention by creating fashion and differentiation. However, as a form of "protest" and "rebellion," youth culture is continuously co-opted by mainstream culture during its development. With their vitality and innovative spirit, young people have become trendsetters, integrating more youth cultural elements into daily life.

Lighthearted Humor and the Prevalence of Parody. Parody, as a quintessential expression of online youth subculture, demonstrates anti-traditional, anti-rational tendencies and a pursuit of lighthearted entertainment—making it particularly suitable for advertising. For example, in Meituan's flash-sales ad during "Talk Show and Friends" Season 2, the classic "Jizhi Syrup" commercial was parodied: a cheetah was replaced by "Wang Da Dao" wearing a leopard-print bodysuit, shouting absurdly yet logically, "Your Meituan order has arrived!" By leveraging the show's popularity, the ad achieved brand recognition through meme culture, aligning with youth subcultural demands.

Diverse Innovations and Narrative Storytelling. Youth subcultural consumption is characterized by non-explanatory, casual, and recreational engagement. New media technologies have given rise to corresponding subcultural practices, where the inherent communicative biases of these platforms shape reading experiences into faster-paced, more relaxed, and diversified forms. In essence, new media not only influences the existence and dissemination of youth subcultural diversity but also affects the form and expressive function of subcultural texts.

1.2.2 Strengthening Cultural Confidence

Cultural confidence reflects a nation, a country, and a political party's full affirmation and active practice of their cultural values, along with steadfast belief in their culture's vitality.

With economic growth, China's cultural confidence has steadily strengthened. Chinese stories are capturing global attention, and fostering cultural confidence to provide enduring spiritual motivation for the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation has become a key mission in media cultural production. Traditional culture offers abundant resources for media production in the digital age, with its themes of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, familial bonds, social progress, and self-cultivation providing profound inspiration for realizing cultural value. In media production, integrating traditional culture with contemporary features and local context—through direct application, stylistic adaptation, symbolic processing, and atmospheric construction—facilitates its inheritance and dissemination.

1.3 Industrial Context

Driven by internet technology, the media industry has witnessed the emergence of new media forms and business models. Traditional media outlets actively pursue integration and transformation by optimizing organizational structures, diversifying content formats, enhancing dissemination methods, and expanding revenue streams to maintain their market presence. Meanwhile, internet platforms leverage technological and capital advantages to integrate with the real economy. The convergence of traditional media and

digital platforms propels China's media industry forward on a path of upholding core values while embracing innovation.

1.3.1 Production Ecology: Deepening Media Convergence

The media landscape continues to evolve, with the boundaries between traditional media and internet industries increasingly blurred. Media convergence has entered a deep-phase transition—progressing from technological and organizational integration to industrial restructuring and ultimately societal transformation. From a "core-periphery" perspective, mainstream media has accelerated convergence, while peripheral media has also quickened its pace, addressing the "last mile" of integration.

Traditional media further deepens convergence by shifting products and services entirely to mobile platforms while innovating in organizational and institutional frameworks. In content production, the principle of "Small Budget, Positive Energy, Grand Vision" has become a new benchmark, promoting rational and high-quality media production. Over the years, content creation has transitioned from UGC (User-Generated Content) to PGC (Professional-Generated Content) and OGC (Occupationally-Generated Content), with professionalized communication now central to media cultural production.

Media institutions are fully mobilizing toward mobile platforms, refining their digital dissemination matrices, and reshaping production and distribution through advanced technologies. AI-driven distribution via big data has become mainstream, while cloud computing, AI, and AR advancements enable intelligent production. In business models, media enterprises are shifting from single to hybrid services to enhance user engagement. Beyond traditional ad revenue, knowledge monetization (e.g., paid subscriptions) has emerged as a viable income stream.

1.3.2 Production Forms: Collaborative Adaptation

The traditional industrial structure has fundamentally transformed, making digital transition inevitable. The media industry now operates in a data-driven, tech-powered paradigm with optimized structures. Traditional media consolidates through measures like merging publications or suspending print editions, focusing on core content while expanding digital platforms.

Internet-based aggregator platforms grow rapidly, attracting media conglomerates that diversify operations via cross-sector investments, leveraging capital and brand equity to expand across the content-entertainment value chain.

The media sector is undergoing profound changes due to AI disruption. Breakthroughs in generative AI and AGI (Artificial General Intelligence) are redefining content creation's foundational logic, propelling the industry from traditional models into an era of intelligent production. This shift extends beyond content generation, restructuring the entire media ecosystem. In the digital transformation wave, the internet domain exhibits technology convergence, where intersecting innovations spawn new business models. A tripartite synergy emerges: Technological innovation drives commercial evolution ; Commercial practices feed back into tech upgrades ; Institutional innovation safeguards both, fostering sustainable growth.

This transformation manifests in three dimensions: Content creation shifts from elite-dominated to mass-participatory; Information distribution evolves from manual curation to AI-assisted coordination; Consumer experience advances from passive reception to multidimensional interaction.

2. Current Chaos in Media Cultural Production

2.1 Capital Control Leads to Media Product Homogenization

The dominance of capital over the media cultural market is undeniable. In today's media landscape, capital has consciously positioned itself as an organizer and controller of culture, shaping the textual content and cultural forms accessible to audiences through selective investment in cultural production. The cross-industry, cross-format integration of media cultural production has become a prevailing trend, with capital leveraging news, film and television, commerce, and educational content to regulate the information consumed by audiences. In China's media cultural market, capital control has given rise to numerous issues.

The production process of Chinese media products has become homogenized due to the interplay between capital markets and political regulation. Driven by concerns over capital security and controllability, companies vie for the largest possible share of the mass market. While competition among monopolistic entities is fierce, innovation remains stifled, as these firms prefer to avoid the risks associated with creative ventures, opting instead for highly standardized and uniform products. Only when they lose market control and face mounting competitive pressure are they compelled to innovate, resorting to less standardized content to sell their products. This explains why, once a media product achieves success as a "hit," countless imitations inevitably follow.

The production of such homogenized content has led to diminished innovation capabilities among media organizations and a decline in audience experience, ultimately constraining the vitality of media cultural production. In the realm of film and television production, the adaptation of existing intellectual property (IP)—such as books and games with established fan bases—into screenplays has become commonplace. These adaptations often involve minimal creative reinterpretation, relying instead on pre-existing market appeal to ensure higher returns on investment. However, this practice has trapped China's film and television industry in the confines of "genre films" for an extended period, flooding the market with works characterized by simplistic plots, lowbrow humor, and exaggerated performances. Such products, being more profitable and attractive to capital, outcompete high-quality scripts and talented actors, resulting in a "bad money drives out good" scenario: audiences find little worth watching, while the market is saturated with subpar productions.

A parallel form of homogenization has emerged in the news and information market. The use of intelligent media technology has solidified audience reading preferences, prompting information providers to continuously supply similar content. This cycle narrows the scope of audience exposure, reinforcing information silos.

2.2 *The Misguided Value Orientation of Consumerism*

Consumerism is defined as "a value system that pursues and glorifies excessive material possession or consumption as the ideal of a good life and ultimate purpose of existence, along with the behavioral practices driven by such values." Its fundamental characteristics include "an obsessive focus on material consumption itself as well as the symbolic meanings attached to it."

Media products influenced by consumerism present audiences with a glamorous yet illusory world, immersing them in unrealistic consumerist lifestyles. They propagate the notion that purchases can dispel life's gloom, that spending enables spiritual joy and freedom. Through carefully crafted advertising symbols, they create consumption idols that instruct audiences on how to consume. Under consumerism's sway, consumption has become both a manifesto for pursuing new lifestyles and a method for experimenting with novel life experiences. Beyond being fueled by innate human desires, consumerism is aggressively promoted through diverse advertising across media platforms.

With rapid advancements in information technology and rising living standards, commercial advertising—as the vanguard of consumption messages—plays an increasingly dominant role in social life, accelerating the liberalization of lifestyles and transformations in collective psychology. Particularly under the stimulation of desire-driven consumption, three problematic media consumption patterns have emerged in reality: Blind consumption amid economic development; Fashion-driven consumption under cultural permeation; Superficial consumption within the ocean of information.

At consumerism's behest, commodities are laden with idealized symbols. Advertisements and media content overtly guide "lifestyle" choices, relentlessly forging mental associations between products and life satisfaction—implying that: A good life stems not from health but from branded sportswear; Romantic fulfillment comes not from love but from holiday gifts like lipstick or handbags; Family bonds are measured not by quality time but by purchased health supplements. Thus, consumerism diverts attention from what truly merits appreciation, redirecting it toward using material consumption to satisfy emotional voids.

2.3 *The Aesthetics of Vulgarly in a Low-Taste Society*

The shifting relationship between audiences and media in the digital age has led media organizations to deliberately engineer agenda-setting through provocative content—whether absurd, vulgar, or grotesque—to capture attention. This phenomenon signifies how new media challenges traditional aesthetics, fostering societal overindulgence in "the spectacle of ugliness." Such spectacles function as carnivalesque rituals where ordinary participants derive satisfaction through comparative superiority over the ridiculed, akin to the release and pleasure of entertainment.

From a sociological perspective, media production equates to audience production. The distinction between modern and traditional societies lies in mass media replacing public square carnivals while preserving their celebratory essence. Contemporary media's ability to generate "square effects" (collective euphoria) hinges predominantly on manufacturing visceral pleasure. A media outlet's influence correlates directly with the scale and impact of its orchestrated mass catharsis. John Fiske

categorized media-induced pleasure into "transgressive pleasure" and "productive pleasure." The "spectacle of ugliness" precisely caters to transgressive pleasure, reflecting Chinese media culture's superficial entertainment and populist tendencies through ridiculed subjects. Their proximity to audience social status eliminates cognitive barriers, making such schadenfreude-laden content more digestible than intellectually demanding material.

The interplay between commercial imperatives, consumerism, and aesthetic degradation manifests as "anti-intellectualism within hyper-entertainment" in media production. Riding consumerism's wave, anti-intellectualism has eroded elite cultural authority under market forces. Metrics like ratings, clicks, and circulation now dominate cultural valuation, legitimizing reality shows, talent competitions, and formulaic dramas as primary cultural exports. This anti-elite, anti-traditional media culture aggressively displaces intellectual discourse.

Technological empowerment has plunged China's media cultural production into unchecked expansion, forging a distinct cultural consumption landscape. The constructivist cultural depth of traditional media has yielded to investor-curated "player preferences." Capital's hegemony has drifted media values toward homogenized, trivialized vulgarity under the tyranny of clickbait metrics, draining cultural vitality.

3. The Transformation of Media Cultural Production

Technological advancements have catalyzed a shift in media discourse, triggering corresponding transformations in media cultural production and markets. Under the logic of market forces, cultural phenomena proliferate with increasingly evident tendencies toward vulgarization and fragmentation. The development of media culture bears profound implications for the future of the nation and its people, necessitating proactive governance rather than laissez-faire approaches.

In the era of converged media, top-level design represents a form of enlightened governance rooted in collective identity. It counterbalances pure market logic through the national will for cultural development, establishing a new cultural framework within the context of "cultural confidence." Consequently, China's media cultural production must be strategically aligned with national objectives, embracing an open-minded perspective on transformation. By relaxing excessive regulations and fostering innovation to strengthen cultural confidence, the overarching goal is to transcend fragmented communication and achieve a reconstruction of aesthetic modernity.

3.1 Establishing Core Values in Media Cultural Production

Media culture is inherently dynamic, continuously generating new forms in response to technological and contextual changes. These emerging cultural expressions resist definition by traditional paradigms or singular value standards. Rapid economic growth and technological progress often preclude the necessary temporal conditions for cultural value sedimentation, resulting in media culture's inherent variability, volatility, and ephemerality—qualities that hinder the formation of stable cultural foundations. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's "liquid modernity" theory posits that fluidity characterizes contemporary society, where rapid transformations outpace the formation of settled habits and norms. This liquidity—

marked by an inability to maintain fixed forms or permanence—mirrors the essence of modern media culture. The digital age prioritizes short-term, instantaneous effects, epitomized by mantras like "time is money" and "speed is power."

While culture as a social barometer remains elusive, media cultural phenomena offer glimpses into underlying socioeconomic realities. Self-deprecating terms like "losers" (屌丝), "otaku" (肥宅), and "simp" (舔狗) reflect the spiritual anxieties of youth amid mounting societal pressures. The proliferation of "anime" (二次元), "street dance," and "rapper" subcultures in mainstream media signals the rising economic and social status of younger generations. These phenomena emerge as byproducts of instrumental rationality in social operations.

However, excessive and uncontrolled production of such cultural byproducts adversely impacts diversity. When audiences excessively indulge in media-derived "pleasure" as a utopian escape from life's pressures, significant risks arise. From a developmental perspective, the unchecked expansion of mass culture often undermines the vitality of elite culture.

Therefore, it is imperative to clarify the core value orientation of China's media cultural production. By adopting a long-term perspective and scientifically guiding the direction of cultural value production, we must actively cultivate a new paradigm of media culture with Chinese characteristics. This involves refining value production systems and establishing robust evaluation criteria to balance media culture's role as a social pressure valve with vigilance against its descent into lowbrow "bread and circuses" entertainment. Ultimately, the aim is to harmonize social utility with artistic merit in media cultural production.

3.2 Addressing the Needs of Diverse Cultural Groups

China's current socio-cultural landscape is characterized by a "dominant mainstream coexisting with pluralistic subcultures"—a historical progression reflecting the diversification of lifestyles that will persist as a societal norm. This cultural pluralism manifests in several ways: the erosion of monolithic cultural homogeneity, the prominence of cultural fragmentation, the equilibrium between traditional and contemporary cultures, the parallel rise of highbrow and popular cultures, the simultaneous presence of dominant and peripheral cultures, and the hybridization of local and foreign influences. Among these groups, youth have particularly benefited from new media technologies, gaining expansive platforms for expression. In internet-based digital spaces, vibrant youth subcultures flourish, engaging in alternative forms of self-expression and cultural production/consumption. Identifying and addressing the core concerns of these subcultures has become a critical imperative for targeted branding and market segmentation.

In reality, the intricate interplay between media cultural production and economic, political, and cultural forces inevitably yields diversified cultural values. China's media cultural production must embrace this reality by strengthening a value production system that fosters localized cultural diversity while harmonizing with global influences. As of February 2025, only *Avengers: Endgame* ranked among China's top-grossing films, with the top three—*Ne Zha* (animated mythology adaptation), *The Battle at*

Lake Changjin (military/patriotic), and Wolf Warrior 2 (action/patriotic)—showcasing themes promoting Chinese cultural heritage, native narratives, and innovative aesthetic reinterpretations. This demonstrates the domestic film industry's growing clarity in direction, signaling producers' reflective efforts toward more sustainable creative methodologies.

3.3 Modernizing Discursive Expression Systems

Per the 55th Statistical Report on China's Internet Development (Dec 2024), internet penetration reached 78.6% (1.108 billion users). Younger demographics exhibit greater receptivity to novel content, driving multi-level dissemination through their adoption of cutting-edge mobile technologies. For these groups, culturally resonant discourse is prerequisite for engagement and viral propagation.

The discursive framework of media production encompasses both textual content and presentational forms. In content construction, it responds to fragmented reading habits endemic to new media, diverging sharply from traditional media experiences. During the 2022 Winter Olympics, youth coined viral monikers like "Emperor Bing Dwen Dwen" for the mascot and popularized terms such as "a Dwen Dwen shortage," fueling cross-platform trends. The 2023 "Zibo Barbecue" phenomenon saw netizens reframing the city's image through memes like "college commando tourism" and "holy trinity of grill kits," generating astronomical engagement. State media innovations like Xinhua's "AI Anchor Explains the Two Sessions" employed digital human technology to deliver policy explanations via short videos. These practices exemplify the rejuvenation of mainstream discourse through gamified interaction and visual storytelling.

3.4 Guiding the Return to Excellent Local Cultural Content Production

With the continuous enhancement of economic strength, cultural pride and self-esteem across society have also been steadily rising. The principal contradiction in society has evolved into the gap between the people's growing material and cultural needs and unbalanced, inadequate development—including the insufficient representation of national and ethnic culture in various media products. Media culture serves as a vital vehicle for transmitting cultural heritage, bearing the social responsibilities of disseminating outstanding culture, educating citizens, enriching public spiritual life, and guiding mainstream values.

"Cultural confidence encompasses confidence in a nation's cultural totality, including its media culture. In the era of deep convergence, media culture—as a dominant form of contemporary culture and an integral part of national culture—must inevitably be guided by mainstream values and ideology as a component of cultural development strategy." The power of cultural confidence is rooted in social life. Contemporary Chinese media culture is an organic component of socialist culture with Chinese characteristics. Just as the United States has Hollywood film culture, South Korea has K-drama culture, and Japan has anime culture, outstanding media culture serves as a carrier of a people's cultural confidence. Its construction must originate from China's native culture, fostering public understanding before cultivating genuine confidence. By producing and disseminating content rooted in China's

excellent traditional culture and contemporary media subcultures, we can establish a media cultural industry system with core competitiveness.

4. Conclusion

Changes in communication, culture, and market environments necessitate the reconstruction of the media cultural market. While media technology has diversified the forms of cultural production and dissemination, the true efficacy of media products lies in the depth of information transmission and cultural export. The novelty and pleasure derived from technological advancements are transient; from a long-term developmental perspective, China's media cultural market is undergoing transformation. Ironically, technological progress is driving media cultural production toward greater substantive depth.

Fund Project

1. This paper is a research outcome of the 2023 Anhui Business College Scientific Research Project "Research on Strategies of Short Videos in Enhancing City Image: A Case Study of Wuhu" (Project No.: 2023KYR08), and a outcome of the project "Innovative Research on the Dissemination of Intangible Cultural Heritage Short Videos from the Perspective of Cultural Memory" (Project No.: 2024KYR09).
2. This paper is supported by the Anhui Provincial Quality Engineering Project "Teaching Innovation Team for Online News and Communication Major" (Project No.: 2023cxttd150) and represents the phased achievements of the Anhui Philosophy and Social Science Planning Project "Research on the Cultivation and Practice of Socialist Core Values among College Students in the Context of Online Circle Groups" (Project No.: AHSKQ2022D017).

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