

From the Perspective of Media Convergence: The Integration and Reference of Network Drama to Other Audio-visual Art Forms

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Abstract: In recent years, the convergence of content and form between different media has become a significant trend. Online dramas, as an emerging media form based on streaming platforms, have developed rapidly since their inception, greatly impacting the market landscape of television dramas and films. Due to the inherent characteristics of streaming platforms, online dramas feature high market segmentation and expansive creative space. Many works have explored various content and form integrations, incorporating elements from other audiovisual art forms and reconstructing traditional television drama formats. Notably, the influences of films, short videos, and games on the shape of online dramas are most pronounced, demonstrating profound media convergence.

Keywords: Television Media, Streaming Platforms, Market Segmentation, Media Convergence.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, online dramas, accompanied by the reconstruction of mass entertainment models by streaming platforms, have gradually developed into a widely popular form of audiovisual art. Compared with traditional television dramas disseminated via television media, the format of online dramas has evolved along with the market segmentation of streaming platforms, borrowing and integrating aspects from other media, thus giving rise to a unique form of media convergence specific to online dramas. This paper, based on a comparison of the market segmentation of television dramas and online dramas, examines the favorable conditions for media convergence in online dramas. Through the study of three representative forms of multi-media convergence in online dramas—cinematic online dramas, short-video-style online dramas, and game-like online dramas—it aims to analyze how online dramas borrow from and integrate with other audiovisual art forms.

2. Comparison of Market Segmentation between Television Dramas and Online Dramas

Market segmentation theory, proposed by Wendell Smith in the last century, has undergone decades of extension and development, becoming widely applied in various markets, including the television and film drama market. Philip Kotler stated: “Markets can be segmented in different ways, and each segment can be described separately to facilitate the selection of target markets and product positioning. These segmented groups are what we call market segmentation” [1]. Due to differences

in the transmission capacity, dissemination methods, and audience reception between television media and online platforms, there are significant differences in the market segmentation of television dramas and online dramas.

The information dissemination capacity of television media is notably inferior to that of streaming platforms. This is attributed to its linear broadcast mode, where television dramas are aired sequentially according to a predetermined schedule, constrained by channel management. Viewers can typically only watch programs at specific times and on specific channels, with strict time limitations and sometimes even geographical restrictions [2].

Thus, in the era when television dramas could only be broadcast via television media, market segmentation was mostly limited to time slots such as “prime time” or “evening time,” and to genre classifications based on the age group of the audience, which were quite limited. Creating content with the broadest appeal possible became the choice of many creators.

In contrast, streaming platforms possess a highly efficient information dissemination capacity through their “real-time streaming” method, allowing viewers to watch content as soon as it is produced. This method avoids the drawbacks of linear broadcasting, enabling viewers to access both real-time and archived content at any time. Under copyright protection, viewers can watch freely anytime and anywhere. Additionally, using user profiles and recommendation algorithms, streaming platforms can personalize recommendations, gaining deep insights into and to some extent solidifying viewer preferences.

Due to the characteristics of streaming platforms, the content market of online dramas is more segmented. Not only does it expand the creative directions for creators, enabling more refined drama genres (such as light comedy, micro-suspense, etc.), but the structure of the content, production models, and broadcast formats of online dramas also vary significantly based on different segmented audiences [3]. This creates a broad and promising potential for online dramas to borrow from and integrate with other audiovisual art forms.

3. Forms of Media Convergence in Online Dramas

3.1. The Intersection of Online Dramas and Cinematic Language

For a long time, critics have widely criticized the mediocrity of the audiovisual language in television dramas. Based on the understanding that “television dramas are the art of dialogue,” traditional television dramas have tended to present audiovisual language in a relatively simplistic manner, primarily using static main shots, standard shots, and reverse shots. The camera angles are also relatively uniform, usually showing an objective point of view, and the use of dynamic shots is far less frequent than in conventional films.

In online dramas, the presentation of audiovisual language has significantly improved. Some high-quality online dramas even exhibit cinematic qualities. For instance, *The Longest Day in Chang’an* and *Why Try to Change Me Now* extensively employ complex, carefully designed long takes. The use of color and music in *The Long Season* is particularly outstanding, while the *Detective Chinatown* series effectively establishes a sense of suspense through creative and dynamic camera work [4].

In terms of narrative strategy, online dramas also show a distinct “cinematic” trend. Due to the uncertainty of viewing locations, it is difficult for television audiences to watch an entire series continuously. To ensure a satisfying viewing experience, dialogue often becomes the main narrative driver in television dramas, and the plot tends to be less tight. Online dramas, taking advantage of the characteristics of streaming platforms, avoid this limitation and therefore employ more cinematic narrative strategies. For example, *The Longest Day in Chang’an*, *The Bad Kids*, and *Ripe Town* reduce the number of episodes, allowing the entire series to revolve around a single, tightly developed storyline with a fast-paced narrative and strong logical coherence, providing an aesthetic experience

very similar to that of films. *The Long Season* and *Why Try to Change Me Now*, with their approximately one-hour episodes, achieve relatively complete narratives within each episode, presenting another form of “cinematic” narrative strategy in online dramas. Such extended narrative space is difficult for television media to accommodate.

In terms of format, the shift in aspect ratio has also promoted this “cinematic” development. “Anamorphic widescreen and matted widescreen are common film formats. These formats, with their more abstract background blur and greater image detail, provide ample audiovisual application scenarios and are more conducive to enhancing the ‘cinematic feel’ of a drama” [5]. Limited by the format requirements of television sets, traditional television dramas have mostly adhered to international standards for standard-definition or high-definition television formats, using 4:3 or 16:9 aspect ratios. The near-square screens of televisions are not suitable for broadcasting widescreen content. Streaming platforms, however, are not constrained by these format limitations, allowing online dramas more freedom in aspect ratio selection. As a result, a series of works like *Burning Ice* and *Tientsin Mystic*, which use 2.35:1 or 1.85:1 aspect ratios, have emerged. Additionally, the increasing suitability of widescreen aspect ratios for the primary streaming terminal—the smartphone—has made the use of these formats in online dramas quite common. Consequently, the boundary between online dramas and films in terms of format has become blurred.

3.2. The Reproduction of Short Video Formats in Online Dramas

In recent years, the rapid growth of micro-short dramas in the online drama market has been remarkable. According to the research report on micro-short dramas [6], the market size of micro-short dramas in China reached 37.39 billion yuan in 2023, a year-on-year increase of 267.65%. This new type of series typically features short episode durations, distinct themes, and low production costs. Apart from the strong narrative and serialized elements unique to traditional dramas, micro-short dramas are almost a replication of short videos within the context of online dramas.

The content of micro-short dramas exhibits characteristics of short videos—fast-paced and emotionally charged. The research report notes: “The preferred viewing duration for micro-short dramas among Chinese internet users is mainly 3 to 5 minutes.” Through rapid editing and compact narrative structures, micro-short dramas deliver complete and compelling storylines in a limited timeframe. With creativity at their core, these short yet intense stories captivate audiences and better meet the fragmented viewing needs of modern viewers compared to long series with high time investment. Additionally, according to the report, popular themes for micro-short dramas include “God of War,” “underdog,” and “time-travel” genres, all of which are known for their intense emotional expression.

In terms of production, the creation cycle for micro-short dramas is relatively short. To save costs, many micro-short dramas are often shot in batches. Most micro-short dramas present rougher image quality, with simple camera work and composition limited by the vertical screen format, distinctly exhibiting “short-video characteristics.” On television media, such lower-quality, mass-produced dramas would struggle to pass strict broadcasting review systems.

3.3. The Application of Game Elements and Interactivity in Online Dramas

The convergence of online dramas and games is primarily reflected in the broadcasting format, where some online dramas shift from one-way broadcasting to organic interaction between viewers and the series [7]. In this interaction, viewers transform from passive spectators into active participants in the narrative. Through features provided by streaming platforms, viewers can make choices for characters, control their actions, and thereby alter the direction of the narrative.

This interactivity closely integrates such dramas with gaming media, almost meeting the definition of “Computer Role-Playing Games (CRPG)” [8]—where players assume fictional roles in games, simulating their lives and adventures to complete game levels or gain narrative experiences as the plot unfolds. Moreover, interactive dramas exhibit narrative elements that are closely aligned with the gaming market. For instance, *The Usual Suspects* mirrors puzzle-solving elements found in detective games, while *Boom! Boom!* and *Voice of Love* share gameplay and narrative strategies virtually identical to otome games. This demonstrates the deep integration between online dramas and video games.

However, despite this, interactive dramas and games cannot be entirely conflated. Compared to most games, the key distinction lies in the fact that the smallest unit of an interactive drama is still the shot, which means it continues to rely on audiovisual language for storytelling. This inherently limits the scope of interactivity, as viewers can only control the “actions” of characters rather than all aspects of their behavior. In the case of games like *The Invisible Guardian* and *Love Is All Around*, which also employ cinematic storytelling techniques [9], the boundaries between the two forms become highly blurred, with the primary distinction being the nature of the platforms they belong to.

4. Conclusion

In the course of its development, online dramas have borrowed and absorbed numerous characteristics from other audiovisual art forms. The convergence of cinema, short videos, and games with online dramas has expanded the boundaries of television series in terms of both content and form, offering creators a broader creative space and providing audiences with more diverse aesthetic experiences. It is worth noting that other media forms, such as animation, have also integrated with online dramas to some extent (as seen with the animation elements in *Elite Breakers*), though their impact remains limited and awaits further development and research.

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