

The Communication and Development of Cultural Variety Shows in the Context of New Media: A Case Study of "Readers ·Season Three"

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Abstract: The continuous upgrading of new media technology has propelled traditional media in China towards an innovative development path. Against the backdrop of the steady growth of new media, a large number of new cultural variety shows have emerged to adapt to the changing times. "Readers Season Three" is an outstanding representative of new cultural variety shows in the era of new media. The program adopts the format of "interview + reading" and introduces a special segment called "One Square Meter" on new media platforms. While the program has gained widespread attention, its excessive emphasis on entertainment has led to a lack of cultural depth. Insufficient innovation in the program's format has resulted in a serious problem of homogenization, and the failure to fully leverage the advantages of new media platforms during the broadcast process has constrained the program's dissemination effectiveness. It is evident that cultural variety shows in China still face issues such as a lack of cultural depth and outdated program formats. Therefore, based on the shortcomings of cultural variety shows in China, this paper proposes strategies to enhance the cultural depth of such programs, innovate program formats, and make optimal use of new media for dissemination, presenting prospects for the innovative development of cultural variety shows in China.

Keywords: new media, cultural variety shows, communication

1. Introduction

For many years, China's media communication has primarily relied on traditional forms such as print publications, radio, television, and telecommunications. In recent years, with the continuous development and progress of the national economy, there has been a transformation in the forms of media communication in China. In the era of constantly evolving digital and information technology, new media, using terminals such as computers, smartphones, and digital television, gradually replaced traditional media as the most popular forms of communication. Compared to traditional media, new media possesses characteristics such as strong interactivity, fast dissemination, wide reach, fragmentation, and personalized communication. In the process of cultural communication, new media has eliminated the boundaries of information access for people of different classes, ages, and cultural backgrounds, optimizing the dissemination effects of traditional culture.

In 2017, the cultural variety show "Readers" was born, adopting a format of "interview + reading" and creating program highlights by inviting celebrities from various sectors of society, garnering widespread attention across society. In 2021, "Readers Season Three" building on the success of the first two seasons, comprehensively upgraded the program in response to the current development trends of new media. While retaining the original content, the program utilized the dissemination methods of new media, transforming the program from unidirectional broadcasting to interactive engagement. "Readers · Season Three" maintained a focus on guest participants as in previous seasons and introduced the special segment "One Square Meter" allowing audiences of all ages and professions to participate, turning everyone into a "reader".

This paper, based on communication theory and relevant literature research, takes "Readers Season Three" as the research object. Through the study of the program's content and format, it analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of the upgraded "Readers" program. The paper concludes by outlining the future development direction of cultural variety shows in China, presenting prospects for the development of these shows in the era of new media.

2. Literature Review

In recent years, with the continuous development of digital technology, we have entered the era of new media, giving rise to a myriad of cultural variety show genres. The question of how cultural variety shows can innovate and sustain development has become a common concern in both academic and societal circles.

Cultural variety shows, leveraging the communicative advantages of new media, have developed various means of dissemination. Xu Huiwen analyzed the current status and characteristics of cultural television variety shows in the context of new media, proposing communication strategies. She suggests that platforms like "Douyin" and "Kuaishou", by broadcasting program segments across all apps, have expanded the avenues of cultural variety show dissemination, broadening the audience scope, allowing people overseas to learn about and watch cultural variety shows via the internet. She also pointed out the challenges faced by cultural variety shows in their early development, such as a limited audience due to the niche nature of early cultural variety shows.

Expanding the audience range of cultural variety shows is an inevitable challenge in the process of content innovation. Early cultural variety shows in China often had a narrow audience, mainly elite viewers. To broaden the audience of cultural variety shows, it is necessary to address the issue of varying cultural levels among the audience during the dissemination process, making the content accessible to the general public. Shen Mengmeng, analyzing cultural television variety shows from the perspective of media convergence, suggested that integrated communication can break down "cultural barriers". By combining the characteristics of "elite culture" and "popular culture" during the dissemination process, cultural television variety shows can enhance cultural content and deepen accessibility, expanding the audience range. Meng Gongzhiqian, through a questionnaire survey, identified shortcomings in current Chinese cultural variety shows, including a lack of exploration of cultural content, noticeable lack of innovation leading to homogenization, excessive advertising placements, and low market value. She proposed innovation paths for the format of cultural variety shows, including innovating content, optimizing production, innovating marketing strategies, and rational utilization of media advertising resources. Under such innovative models, China has introduced a series of successful innovative cultural variety shows, serving as references for the "success" of "Readers Season Three". Liu Chenlong analyzed the innovative development of cultural variety shows in the new media era using "China Poetry Conference" as an example. He believes that the success of "China Poetry Conference" in breaking away from cultural confines in the new media era is not only due to breaking down cultural barriers but also innovation in competition format, role

tasks and positioning, presentation forms, and technology. He emphasizes that "innovation" is a necessary condition for the development of cultural variety shows.

Since its debut, "Readers" has garnered widespread attention, and its third season has continuously improved based on the characteristics of the first two seasons and other outstanding cultural variety shows. Regarding the program format of "Readers Season Three", Liu Liwei summarized its innovations, including "interview + reading + light analysis", the combination of celebrities and ordinary people, online and offline reading booths, audio-visual language, narrative structure, and value guidance. Such a program format allows the public to participate, integrating the show into people's lives and facilitating widespread dissemination among the general public. In addition, in the third season, "Readers" used new media's communication methods to introduce the special program "One Square Meter". Sun Xin studied and summarized the innovations of the special program compared to the first two seasons. She found that the combination of celebrities and ordinary people in the special program was a unique format. Furthermore, she observed that cultural variety shows increasingly tend to be close to and focus on the audience's lives, making these shows more modern and socially meaningful. The participation of ordinary people in special programs adds authenticity, breathing new life into the show in the era of new media. Regarding the content of the program dissemination in the third season of "Readers", Wang Xiaotong believes that the program, while spreading culture, shares outstanding Chinese culture and correct values with the public through reading. By spreading positive energy, societal values, and personal values, the program promotes the public's interest in reading and elevates the central theme of the program, disseminating excellent values.

In recent years, due to China's emphasis on the inheritance and promotion of Chinese culture, a large number of outstanding cultural variety shows have emerged. With the rise of new media, more and more television variety shows have also begun to change their traditional broadcast formats, absorbing the advantages of new media for program dissemination and production. "Readers Season Three" has successfully gained widespread attention in this context. The success and innovation of "Readers Season Three" provide new perspectives for the development of cultural variety shows, bearing profound significance for the development of these shows in the era of new media. However, the disadvantages of the program are also evident. In the fast-paced and efficient era of new media, the success of a variety show cannot escape its survival rule of "entertainment first", highlighting the program's shortcomings. Using "Readers Season Three" as an example, this paper further explores the problems inherent in the program itself and its dissemination process, presenting prospects for the innovation of cultural variety shows in the era of new media, and providing valuable insights for the development of such programs.

3. Program Disadvantages:

3.1. Lack of Cultural Depth in the Program

As a cultural variety show, "Readers Season Three" exhibits considerable entertainment value but lacks cultural depth. The third season maintains the format of the previous two seasons, featuring a combination of "interview + reading". While the program interviews guests from various professions, the "interview" segment, where the host interprets the guest's choice of reading material through their life experiences, dominates a significant portion of the program. Consequently, the actual "reading" segment with the guests is shortened. After the reading, the program provides a brief introduction to the literary works read by the guests. In promotional activities, emphasis is placed on promoting the guests themselves and previewing the life stories they will share on the show to attract viewers. While this successfully generates traffic, it lacks promotion of the literary works read on the program, limiting the cultural information absorbed by the audience.

3.2. Serious Program Homogenization

With the abundance of cultural variety shows, there is a growing trend of program homogenization, where many shows share similar formats. Currently popular cultural variety shows typically adopt either a competition format or a guest storytelling format, resulting in a uniformity of program styles.[1] As a talk-show-style cultural variety program, "Readers · Season Three" incorporates a "reading segment" into the traditional interview format. However, the innovation in program format is constrained, making it somewhat similar to other cultural variety shows that follow the "guest storytelling" format. The lack of fundamental innovation in program content and a lack of uniqueness make it susceptible to imitation.

3.3. Limited Program Dissemination: Failure to Leverage the Advantages of New Media

Compared to traditional one-way media such as television and print, online media provides audiences with a more extensive amount of information and offers cultural variety shows a broader production space. Variety shows can utilize various forms of dissemination to expand their reach and achieve multidirectional communication.[2] New media features characteristics such as fragmented dissemination and personalized customization. "Readers Season Three" primarily utilizes two new media dissemination methods: broadcasting special programs, "One Square Meter" on new media platforms and online platform previews and promotions. "One Square Meter" adopts a live broadcasting format on new media platforms, with an observation team composed of several hosts interacting with the participating audience during the live broadcast. However, this new media live broadcasting format overlooks the characteristics of fragmented and personalized dissemination. When people consume information through new media, they tend to absorb the most crucial content in a short period. The live broadcast format prevents the audience from quickly understanding the main content of the program and the parts that interest them the most, essentially continuing to watch the program through a different medium. The program fails to effectively leverage the characteristics of new media, weakening the advantages of fragmented and personalized dissemination.

4. Prospects for Innovative Development of Cultural Variety Shows

4.1. Strengthening the Cultural Depth of Program Content

Innovations in the content of cultural variety shows should revolve around culture as the core and prioritize narrative, broadening the audience's perspectives and providing diverse thoughts and viewpoints.[3] This aims to make cultural variety shows adapt to current national policies, societal developments, and the needs of people's lives, addressing the issue of superficial content in programs. "Readers Season Three" has addressed the challenge of making cultural variety show content more accessible, breaking through the limitations of "cultural circles" and achieving a mass audience understanding of the program's content. However, the program's excessive focus on entertainment has diminished its cultural depth. In program content, the proportion of cultural content is particularly crucial. The content should be adjusted according to the target audience; for example, programs aimed at children should be easily understandable without being overly sophisticated, while programs for youth should be concise. To achieve innovation in the content of cultural variety shows, program creators should strike a balance between traditional culture and modern life, exploring treasures in traditional culture and innovating within it for creative content.

4.2. Rational Utilization of the Advantages of New Media for Dissemination

The communication advantages of new media lie in its fragmented and personalized characteristics during the dissemination process. With the widespread coverage of the Internet and the extensive use of smart devices, China has become the world's largest population of netizens, exceeding one billion, with over 10 billion active netizens behind smart clients. Under such a massive user base, the new media industry has experienced robust development. Correspondingly, television program production techniques, communication formats, and paths have become more diverse.[4] In the communication and promotion of programs, it is essential to effectively use the time before and after program broadcasting for promotion. Before the program airs, targeted program trailers should be released on all platforms to create anticipation among different audience groups, fully generating interest. After the program airs, taking advantage of the program's popularity, highlight reels should be edited for secondary dissemination. While using new media for communication, the role of traditional media should not be overlooked. General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized multiple times that "traditional media and emerging media are not a relationship of substitution but of iteration; it is not about who is primary and who is secondary but about mutual strengths; it is not about who is strong and who is weak but about complementary advantages." [5] Innovation in the communication methods of cultural variety shows involves not replacing traditional media with new media but integrating both, applying internet thinking to integrate traditional and new media, which has become a key approach for cultural programs to expand communication channels and enhance brand influence in the internet era.[6]

4.3. Innovation in Program Format

Firstly, innovation in the format of cultural variety shows can occur in areas such as the opening and closing segments, studio, and stage design. With the development of digital media technology, it is possible to use software such as Photoshop or 3D software to create news images, animated videos, and enhance the novelty of the opening segment. Additionally, virtual studio designs can be implemented.[7] "Readers Season Three" used digital media techniques to divide the studio into two spaces, separating the interview area and the performance area. A virtual library, constructed using virtual digital technology, was created for interviews, and the background on the large screens in the performance area could be changed according to different segments, creating a rich literary atmosphere. With the help of new media technology, problems such as frequent changes and renting of shooting locations can be addressed, saving program production costs. Backgrounds can be changed at any time based on program segments to create environments that suit the needs of the program, allowing program participants to immerse themselves in the program. Secondly, innovation in program format can also be reflected in the design of program segments. By qualitatively designing suitable program segments for the program type, competition-based programs can increase audience interaction by adding more competition elements, significantly enhancing the tension and interest of the competition.[8] Reading programs can enhance the diversity of program formats by inviting bands for live accompaniment, creating a tranquil live atmosphere for the audience. In the future, the focus of innovation in the format of cultural variety shows in China should be on these two points, making the program format more diverse.

5. Conclusion

"Readers Season Three" has gained widespread attention, its excessive emphasis on entertainment has led to a lack of cultural depth. Insufficient innovation in the program's format has resulted in a serious problem of homogenization, and the failure to fully leverage the advantages of new media platforms during the broadcast process has constrained the program's dissemination

effectiveness. based on the shortcomings of cultural variety shows in China, this paper proposes strategies to enhance the cultural depth of such programs, innovate program formats, and make optimal use of new media for dissemination, presenting prospects for the innovative development of cultural variety shows in China.

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