

The Homogenization of Online Media Content has become a General Trend

--An Analysis of the Essence of Homogenization Communication Based on News Psychology

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Abstract

From the perspective of internet users, this paper analyzes the motivations behind the homogenization of online media content and its adverse social impacts, utilizing theories from news psychology and communication studies. The homogenization of online media content primarily manifests in three forms: replication (plagiarism of short video templates), clustering of themes ("rebirth revenge" type micro-dramas dominating the screen), and procedural narratives ("three-act" inspirational emotional articles). Through case studies, this paper proposes three countermeasures: breaking through the cocoon, stimulating innovation, and reshaping cognition.

Keywords

Content Homogenization; Online Media Repetition; Algorithmic Recommendation; Information Cocoon; News Psychology.

1. Manifestations and Hazards of Content Homogenization Chaos

1.1. Formal Replication : The Plot Unfolds in a Strikingly Consistent Manner, with Content Comparable to Assembly-line Products

Big data algorithms have given birth to "hit templates" that can be infinitely replicated. In the field of short videos, we have to admit that it takes much more time and effort to create an original video with content and viral points than to directly copy and paste a hit template.

Since 2019, the meme "post-2000s rectifying the workplace" has emerged and gone viral, continuing to ferment in the following years remaining a highly popular topic today. Taking short videos as an example, when type "post-2000s" on platforms such as TikTok and Xiaohongshu, the tag "rectifying the workplace" always appears right after. The videos often share similar patterns: after being unfairly treated by the superiors or senior colleagues, the post-2000s employee talks back or fights back at the boss, followed by sound effects of applause and cheers from other colleagues. The camera zooms in on the protagonist's facial expression, shakes slightly, and is accompanied by either passionate or comical background music. The production cost of such a video is minimal—requiring only two actors, less than ten-minute performance, and simple editing.

Similarly, the field of micro-dramas has become a major hotspot for "template-based" production. The formulaic title pattern "xx of xx" (such as *Transmigrated into the Book...* and *Reborn as...*) has itself become a traffic code, allowing audiences to predict the storyline simply from the title. However, this does not prevent such dramas from gaining huge amounts of clicks. The widespread use of AI paraphrasing tools has further blurred the boundary between originality and plagiarism, exacerbating the copyright dilemma. From a macro perspective, the content ecosystem of social media presents a trend of "centralized homogenization", where

seemingly diverse content is converging towards a few successful centers in terms of its core and pattern.

1.2. Themed Clustering: Creative Exhaustion and Aesthetic Fatigue

Once a certain theme is proven to be a traffic code, a large number of people will follow suit.

In the field of tourism communication: After the concept of “special forces-style tourism” went viral on TikTok, many cultural and tourism accounts across the country followed suit by posting highly similar “48-hour itinerary guides”. While this strategy caught the wave of popularity in the short term, it soon became tiresome due to the lack of deep exploration of local cultural heritage, reflecting a kind of creative laziness. By imitating and sharing such content, the young are essentially seeking social recognition and a sense of belonging within their circle.

In the field of online literature: It is not difficult to observe, regardless of whether one is an online literature enthusiast or not, that various online literature platforms are filled with a plethora of “hegemonic tycoons”. According to the *2023 China Online Literature Development Research Report*, the growing concentrated trend towards popular themes has also, to some extent, reduced the exposure of medium and small-sized themes. Faced with traffic pressure, creators intentionally choose more “safe” themes for their creations, which has also led to a serious homogenization phenomenon in the online literature content ecosystem. With the increasing trend of industrialized content production and driven by capital power, the content creation of online literature is prone to moving towards easily achievable “entertainment-for-pleasure”-style news and narratives, causing people’s cognition to remain superficial and intellectually passive.

1.3. Narrative Templarization: Emotional Mobilization by Imitating

Content producers use tailored methods to evoke emotions from their audience, essentially using clichéd techniques to satisfy general emotional needs.

In the field of emotional articles: For instance, when “the original family” is taken as the subject of writing, many articles will follow a three-act structure of “trauma exposure-betrayal-self-awakening”. Such a stereotypical narrative can evoke readers’ empathy in a short time, but it simplifies the complexity of the matter itself and can also lead to each individual’s experience being injected into a pattern and becoming a stereotypical concept.

In the field of news commentary: In some hot events, self-media often adopts a writing style of “brief attribution-inciting emotions-imposing moral judgment”. When discussing many social events, the media implicitly leads to the single framework of “gender opposition”, which is essentially formed by two opposing attitudes based on certain ideologies or value positions. But in fact, the media fails to face up to the multiple and systemic reasons that cause the social phenomenon, resulting in some irrational radicalization arguments in the public sphere, which in turn forms a “this-side versus that-side” type of polarisation in public space, even leading to two groups with different original viewpoints appearing increasingly alienated and opposed.

2. Analysis of Causes: What Drives Us to Keep Repeating the Same Cycle

2.1. Audience Psychology: Cognitive Comfort Zone and Emotional Needs

Cognitive inertia: From the perspective of news psychology, the human brain prefers low-energy and familiar materials. Homogenized content reduces people’s cognitive costs and brings them effortless pleasure. However, under the conditions of information overload, people are prone to news fatigue and turn to habitual behaviors to meet their information needs—preferring familiar content that has already existed in their brain database and brought effortless pleasure, resulting in the continuously narrowing process of their comfort zone. A

study points out that the level of openness in personality traits is significantly correlated with the degree of homogenization of news consumption.

Emotional compensation: Influenced by the internet celebrity effect, people tend to engage in imitation and check-in behaviors to gain higher recognition within their social circles. At the same time, they will also consume celebrity-related products and content to fulfill social and emotional values. Recently, we have seen an increasing presence of “hegemonic tycoons” and “sweet, submissive wives” in popular videos and novels, reflecting a psychological tendency for people to imagine themselves as supporting roles to their beloveds. Sometimes, we click, like, and bookmark just to satisfy some of our emotional needs, rather than seeking meaningful content.

Group identity: Imitating “special forces-style tourism” and sharing it on social platforms is an act of seeking a sense of belonging within the community. The same logic applies to movies, TV series, and novels that the public watches. Since people around are watching or discussing them, individuals tend to watch them and thus enter a specific circle by consuming and discussing the same content, and avoid being marginalized by the group. This contradictory psychology of pursuing “uniqueness” in the context of “homogenization” is a prominent feature in the culture circle of modern youth [7].

2.2. Creator’s Psychology and Algorithm Mechanism

Imitating successful cases is more effective than stumbling upon new paths by chance: The cost of original trial and error is 20 times that of imitation. The iteration speed in the Internet era is rapid. Any lag in content, quality, or update speed can cause one to be swept away by the flood of information. On the beach of the new media era, to stand firm and keep up with the trend, imitating successful cases is much more efficient than stubbornly creating one’s own content. The production model of “completing 100 episodes” of short micro-dramas has become an attractive gimmick for attracting clicks and views, ushering in a large amount of traffic and profits despite the hollow content quality.

The more one struggles, the stronger the information cocoon becomes: Influenced by personal interests, people prefer to watch content they enjoy and avoid what they dislike. However, this mindset inherently narrows the information scope of the audience. At the same time, algorithms can also filter and push content by learning from popular content, that is, personalized recommendation algorithms, named by their character of meeting user interests, actually reinforce users’ preferences by continuously pushing homogeneous content, thus forming an “echo chamber” that solidifies people’s cognition, making it difficult to accept heterogeneous information [3]. Users who like “hegemonic drama” will have their information flow filled with similar content. The Cyberspace Administration of China pointed out in the relevant governance announcement that the problem of “interest reinforcement” caused by recommendation algorithms is the key point of content ecosystem governance [5], as it increasingly hinders users from breaking out of the information cocoons and accessing heterogeneous information.

3. Breaking the Homogenization of Information and Allowing Diverse Content to Flourish

3.1. Penetrating the Information Cocoon

Promote design diversity: Call to action for clear and healthy online ecosystem governance in 2024, platforms need to take the initiative to assume responsibility and make “content diversity” one of the core recommendation indicators. Based on the core recommendation indicators mentioned above, the platforms should create an experience of “heterogeneous content penetration”, that is, after users have been scrolling through the same category of homogenized

information for a long time, they will occasionally be interspersed and pushed other types of information into other fields, such as science popularization, art, etc., to help break the “information cocoon”. When designing such functions, it is important to consider whether the “news overload” will increase user fatigue in the early stages.

Establish an original content incentive system: Original content and content creators will also receive more traffic and have more opportunities to be presented to the public, which is also a good positive incentive mechanism. For example, some mainstream information platforms have launched a trial strategy of “original content traffic weighting”, that is, allocating 3 to 5 times the recommendation weight for original works compared to regular ones. This has led to an average increase of over 30% in the number of followers of high-quality creators, creating a virtuous cycle.

3.2. From “Follower” to “Innovator” -- Empowering Content Creators

Economic incentive for transformation: Provide certain economic support to creators who dare to innovate and release content with depth and ideas. For example, Tencent Video has launched an “Original Premium Sharing” model, where innovative micro-short dramas can receive a 50% revenue-sharing subsidy. This model has effectively stimulated the enthusiasm of creators.

Starting from humanistic warmth: Besides innovation and enriching content with novel ideas, we must not forget something that definitely exist in society--cultural warmth. Humanism is always the highlight of content. By making efforts and innovations in humanistic sentiments, not only the height of the content itself be elevated, but also a group of loyal and sticky users can be developed. For example, the *Weekly Financial Commentary* column of Wenzhou Business Daily allows citizens to vote on financial topics and interprets local economy in dialects, which has increased the user retention rate by 40%.

3.3. Reshaping Audience Perceptive: No Longer being a Pupa Trapped in a Cocoon

Leveraging technology to break the cocoon: Applying the “digital health” tools currently in use and academic research projects (such as the “Information Consumption Map” previously developed by Fudan University) to intuitively observe our content consumption structure, and then consciously pursue various balanced developments.

Collective creative practice: It can be achieved by calling on individuals to submit different works from multiple perspectives around a certain major theme, such as mobile phone photography contests, essay contests with specific topics, short video creation contests, etc. The annual National College Student Advertising Competition is a good example .

Proactive news practice: Support pragmatic reporting on *Questioning Sichuan Government Affairs*. This platform has continuously and efficiently addressed the demands of the public, rebuilt the public’s trust in the government. It has enabled more and more people to no longer pay attention to emotional and homogeneous negative information, as well as weakening the public’s reliance on homogeneous emotions in the daily services provided by *Questioning Sichuan Government Affairs*.

4. Conclusion

The essence of homogenization of online content lies in the chaos caused by an over-reliance on big data computation and human beings’ inherent laziness. To break through the information cocoons, efforts should be made from three aspects. Firstly, at the cognitive level of the audience, users can break out of their cocoons by searching for content beyond their interests. Secondly, at the creator level, relying excessively on template-based content production cannot be called creation, and blindly following the trends is not a long-term traffic code. Only content that is innovative and thoughtfully crafted can reflect the charm and ability

of the creator. Lastly, from the perspective of the platform, humanistic care should be injected into the cold algorithms, enriching the screening methods for homogenized content, and providing users and creators with a more reliable, authoritative, and caring communication platform.

When algorithms learn to recommend the unfamiliar, and clicks begin to reward innovation, we will reunite in unexpected landscapes.

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