

# Game and Collusion: Media Adaptation and Subjective Reconstruction of Intellectuals

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**Abstract**—After completing the media adaptation of speech communication, character and press communication, and electronic communication, intellectuals have found a new "grammar" in the media adaption process of digital communication represented by the network. This grammar breaks the iron law of the positive correlation between the degree of mediation and the loss of subjectivity, and reconstructs the subjectivity of intellectuals. Online intellectuals existing as a host in the Internet audio-video program are the product of this grammar. The structural competitive advantage of online intellectuals exhibited in the process of media adaptation is the key to its subjectivity reconstruction.

**Keywords**—intellectuals; media; subjectivity

## I. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between intellectuals and media has a long history. This group has never been separated from media. Intellectuals' establishment of their professional position and the link with non-professional object are precisely completed through media whether it is a medium in a broad sense or in a narrow sense. However, while intellectuals are better adaptable in modern media scenes, they also face the problem of "loss of subjectivity" proposed by Pierre Bourdieu. This subjectivity presents a zero-sum game relation with media power, and the phenomenon has also become the target of criticizing against intellectuals from academia. The Internet extends everywhere. The boundaries between people, things, and industries are gradually blurred. The arrival of the borderless era provides a new occasion for the discussion of the relationship between intellectuals and media. After completing the media adaptation of speech communication, character and press communication, and electronic communication, intellectuals have found a new "grammar" in the media adaption process of digital communication represented by the network. This grammar breaks the iron law of the positive correlation between the degree of mediation and the loss of subjectivity, reconstructs the subjectivity of intellectuals, and also get the previously presented zero-sum game relationship transformed into a new positive-sum game form realizing "win-win" between the degree of mediation and the reconstruction of subjectivity.

## II. MEDIA ADAPTATION LOGIC: GAME AND COLLUSION

In economics, the "collusion" phenomenon is based on the fact that producers in any given industry have incentives to achieve collusion, because a successful collusion agreement can not only increase consumer's payment price, but also improve producer's profit. And the reaching of any kind of "collusion" agree needs to meet the following requirements: first, the agreement must be confidential; second, enterprises in this industry must negotiate in terms of clauses of the agreement; third, once the agreement is reached, the price of the product rises, it is necessary to find a mechanism to control the members of Cartel (Cartel refers to an organization composed of a series of independent companies engaging in producing similar products, in order to increase product prices and control the production) to ensure that they comply with the clauses of the agreement. The elements of "collusion" in the field of mass communication are highly compatible with the situations described above. First of all, this "collusion" agreement is reached between intellectuals and media agency based on their respective appeal for interests, and the standards are "hidden"; second, both parties may put forward requirements for each other according to their respective professional positions and compromise with each other, in order to ultimately maximize the profit of cultural products; once again, the "media frequenter" in Bourdieu's saying is precisely the person who appears in the media as a "Cartel's member"; he has even more vividly pointed out that the TV department holds an address book, and its list will never change. If the TV program involves Russia, you can contact Mr./Mrs. X, and if the TV program involves Germany, you can contact Mr./Mrs. Y. Those media frequenters can always provide service, "provide cultural fast food, provide cultural foods that have been digested in advance, and provide pre-formed ideas." (Bourdieu, 2000: 30) Obviously, for content producers in the field of mass communication, whether they are intellectuals or media agencies involved in the production of media content, their motivation and benefits are both inherently consist with each other. For intellectuals, this kind of motivation and interests can be summarized as the superposition effect of knowledge communication, the wide recognition of professional position and the shaping of the image of "online

intellectuals"; the interests and motivation of media organizations are naturally clear.

*A. Media: Collusion Object in the Eyes of Intellectuals*

For intellectuals, the closeness to mass media fully depends on their personal attitude towards mass media. This kind of likes and dislikes is closely related to the innate nature and the acquired temperament, but not the richness of academic competence. Researcher Hu Pan once divided intellectuals into the following four categories based on the closeness of the relationship between intellectuals and television media: the first type of intellectuals only use the television media to communicate ideas and scientific research results, they only regard television as the same communication media as newspapers and magazines, and thus can abide by the academic character of intellectuals; utilizing the capacity of transforming knowledge, the second type of intellectuals often makes the certain field of knowledge to adapt to the needs of television programs; the third type is the so-called "media frequenters" and "fast-thinkers", they only borrow the title of scholar and their words and deeds are equal to kind of performance according to the needs of television programs; the fourth type of intellectuals often do not or rarely interact with media, and always live in the ivory tower, concentrating on academic works as always. (Hu Pan, 2007) In the eyes of Hu Pan, the academic qualities of the four types of intellectuals are apparent, and even imply the evaluation on the academic abilities of the various intellectuals. Needless to say, Hu Pan's point of view represents a large part of scholars' views on the so-called "television intellectuals". Scholar Chen Pingyuan once bluntly said, "To be a guest not an employee, to keep media at an arm's length, is the appropriate attitude for scholars to intervene in mass media." (Chen Pingyuan, 2002) It seems that only by maintaining a neither friendly nor aloof attitude can scholars abide by their academic characters to show the high purity of intellectuals. What's more, the example of "Mr. Qian Zhongshu's refusal to present on TV program" is frequently used as a proof of master's feature. Don't forget, the couple Qian Zhongshu and Yangjiang are naturally indifferent to fame or gain. When they were in the United Kingdom, "Qian and Yang had not too much contact with Yang Xianyi (the president of the Chinese Students Association of Oxford University) in Oxford. The only Chinese students who contacted with them relatively frequently were Yu Dazhen and Yu Dayin, but they just had afternoon tea together and exchanged something about study or living conditions." (Wu Xuezhao, 2008: 131) For Qian Zhongshu, taking part in TV program is tantamount to "going to the execution ground", and only "Bodleian" is his "freedom kingdom". Therefore, what we should do is admiring Qian and Yang who choosing "overcoming the default of time lonely", and what we should not do is randomly criticizing the intellectuals who do not choose that way. As Mr. Chen Lai said, "For humanities and social scientists, dispelling social care or public participation by virtue of professional work, and avoiding hard work of professional work by virtue of public writing are both worth warning." (Xu Jilin, 2003: 27) It can be seen that the two

actions both have the meaning and value of their existence and cannot be neglected.

*B. Intellectuals: Collusion Object in the Eyes of Media*

For media organizations, to choose what kind of intellectuals to enter the media also has its own logic which can be regularized and institutionalized through market acceptance. From the standpoint of media agency, the image of intellectuals who can achieve "collusion" has three distinctive characteristics. The three characteristics can be independent and respectively become the labels of a type of intellectuals. Of course, they can also cross with each other and coexist in a certain scholar, and this scholar will often become the "best partner" in the eyes of media agency. The three characteristics can be summarized as Professional Recognition, Front Stage performance and Degree of Compromise ("Fig. 1").

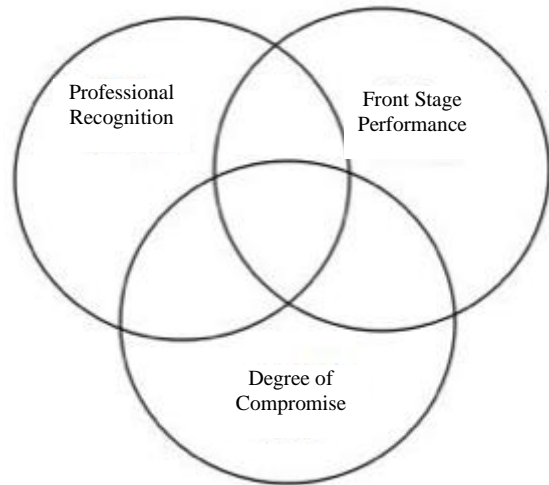


Fig. 1. Characteristics of intellectuals selected by media.

Professional Recognition refers to the sum of indicators such as the popularity, contribution rate and influence of intellectuals in their professional fields. This recognition can even be quantified and calculated. Front Stage Performance refers to the knowledge output ability of intellectuals in the mass media environment. This ability also considers the influencing factors such as language skill, public manner and personality charm. Degree of Compromise is the most complex, and is also the basis for realizing "collusion". It refers to the degree of effort that intellectuals can make on cognition, recognition, concession and transformation to maximize the benefits of media culture products. It can be understood from the two dimensions of "Understanding" and "Method". The so-called "Understanding" is the degree of cognition and recognition that intellectuals have on a series of communication behaviors of media agency, including the transmission of political opinions of the public power represented by media in macro sense, as well as the value output of media platform in meso sense, and the cognition and recognition realized by the communication effect of specific cultural product in micro sense; the so-called "Method" refers to the extent of ability that intellectuals can make mediation concession and transformation on the

original knowledge system. "Understanding" and "Method" are interrelated, and the former determines the latter and is the key that determines the extent that intellectuals can integrate into the media. The person who has all the three characteristics are naturally the intellectuals that the media agency hopes the most to cooperate with. Of course, such an ideal object may encounter rather than pray in a certain sense.

Therefore, the media agency may have collect the group of intellectuals that have high professional recognition and good front stage performance, but low degree of compromise, or those have good front stage performance, high degree of compromise but low professional recognition. And once they enter the vision of the media agency, it marks the beginning of its own mediation ("Fig. 2").

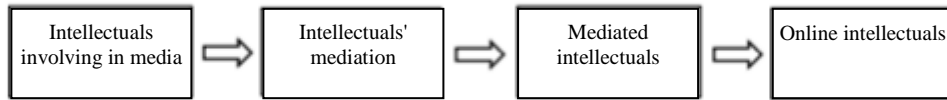


Fig. 2. Intellectuals' media adaptation process.

The tradition of getting intellectuals involved in media is consistent, but "mediation of intellectuals" is another matter. "Mediation" means that media thinking is gradually penetrated into the thinking system of intellectuals, and further changes their way of thinking and behavior in dealing with knowledge, and to a large extent becomes its academic survival mode in the media scene. When intellectuals become more involved in media and media changes from an attribute of tool to a subject, "mediated intellectuals" emerge. Mediated intellectuals become more and more comfortable in media scene; but at the same time, they also face the problem of "loss of subjectivity" proposed by Pierre Bourdieu. This subjectivity and media power present a zero-sum game relation. Even some scholars believe that "more and more public intellectuals are no longer a complete and vivid human existence, but become a 'media image' or 'identity symbol', becoming a materialized material for the media to fill the content of communication, and becoming a dependency for media to enhance the sense of authority." (Feng Ruogu, 2011) So, is the positive correlation between "mediation degree" and "loss of subjectivity" a kind of "fatalism"? In this paper, it is thought that this positive correlation is probably an iron law in the era of electronic communication represented by broadcasting and television, but this may not be the case in the digital communication era represented by the Internet.

"Vistopia" is an image plan launched by Imaginist in 2015. This is an extension from text to image. It reveals meaningful knowledge and ideas to the public, and uses literature and art to care for the spiritual life and public values of the times. Vistopia is a group image display of "online intellectuals". Liang Wendao, Chen Danqing, Yang Zhao, Jia Zhangke and others hope to build a community "belonging to reason, philosophy and ideals" through one and the other Internet cultural products such as "The Thousand and One Nights", "Part", "Breath", "Yunyou (云游)". This "imaginary community" becomes the password that the audience recognizes each other. It is a concept and value, and at the same time, it is also an aesthetic and interesting. At the end of 2013, Xu Zhiyuan and his team got an investment, making him the founder of "OWSpace" and also become the embarrassing questioner in the "Thirteen Interviews". But he neither cares nor cuts off those embarrassing scenes in the later period. In his view, they are the embarrassment of this era and the world. He never

intended to evade, which also made Xu Zhiyuan's image of online intellectuals being misunderstood more. Surely, it should be noted that online intellectuals are by no means only Mr. Liang, Mr. Chen, Mr. Xu and et al; at the same time, the concept of "online intellectuals" proposed in this paper is by no means ridicule. Going back to the question asked before, is the positive correlation between "mediation degree" and "loss of subjectivity" a kind of "fatalism"? It is not difficult to find that in the Internet age, online intellectuals not only have distinct media attributes, but also have strong personality and subjectivity. On the one hand, they maintain the tradition of systematic symbol training; on the other hand, they even show higher morality and stronger critical consciousness; more valuable, they give the audience a set of mutually recognized genes and passwords to complete the construction of an "imaginary community." All those kinds of things have gathered into "a circle of deep and dangerous moats".

### III. SUBJECTIVITY RECONSTRUCTION: BIRTH OF ONLINE INTELLECTUALS

The "Moat" is an important concept in the investment philosophy of Warren Buffett. In his letter written to shareholders in 1993, he first proposed the concept of "moat": "In recent years, the global market shares of cola and Gillette razors are still increasing; their brand power, product characteristics and marketing capacity give them a huge competitive advantage, forming a moat around their economic fortress." (Huang Kai, 2014) On May 1, 1995, at Berkshire Hathaway Inc's annual meeting, Buffett further clarified the "Moat" as "A wonderful castle surrounded by a deep, dangerous moat. The owner of the castle is an honest and elegant person. The main source of strength of the castle is the genius brain of the owner. The moat permanently acts as an obstacle to the enemy trying to attack the castle; the owner of the castle makes gold, but not own all of the gold. To put it simply, what we like is large company with such a controlling position. The privileges of those companies are difficult to be replicated and have great or permanent ability of continuous operation." (Huang Kai, 2014) Mark Sellers further refined the moat theory. He believed that the moat is a "structural competitive advantage", namely even if the competitor knows your secret but still cannot imitate it, you will have a structural competitive advantage. So, what are

the structural competitive advantages of intellectuals, especially online intellectuals?

#### *A. Systematic Symbol Training and Knowledge Structure*

Lang Xianping, a scholar and economist, is a typical representative of "online intellectuals" in the field of economics. Although there are many other excellent financial program hosts in China, few of them are so like Lang Xianping that has enviable educational background and solid academic training. According to relevant data, Lang Xianping studied at the Economics Department of Tunghai University in Taiwan from 1974 to 1978. In 1986, he obtained a master's degree and a Ph.D. degree in finance from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania in just two and a half years which breaks the world record. He has taught at a number of prestigious universities, including Wharton School, Michigan State University, Ohio State University, New York University, and the University of Chicago. He is currently the highest academic (chief) professor at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Human beings are animals that create and use symbols, while intellectuals are people who use a particular symbolic system. Mr. Zheng Yefu is one of the earliest scholars involved in the study of intellectuals in China in the 1980s. In his book "The Study of Intellectuals", "intellectuals" is defined as "Intellectuals are the people who use symbolic system and 'general' concept and category, namely use a special 'language' in their social life and their work, communication and expression more frequently than most people in the society. This symbolic system can be text, or computer language or 'formula language' in natural sciences (such as mathematical language, physics language, and so on). Those people frequently use such symbols and general categories, firstly because they have this knowledge and ability, and also because of their long-term personal interests, professional learning and future professional requirements. Namely, they both have this kind of knowledge and ability and do use it frequently." (Zheng Yefu, 2004: 3) Obviously, intellectuals often use "symbols" to produce content and exchange opinions in the context of their professional fields. It is not intentional to build a high wall, but the symbol itself is the most accurate and efficient way of expression in the circulation process of information in the same circle and layer. Therefore, when it is not available to predict whether the audience also masters the symbol system, the intellectual group has a greater initiative to decide whether to use symbols for information communication and exchange or not.

Mr. Zheng Yefu once used the "historical event marking the major social change" as the dividing line to divide the modern and contemporary intellectuals in China into intergenerational divisions, namely the "old generation" of intellectuals, the "liberated generation" of intellectuals, the "Cultural Revolution" and "Going to the Countryside" generation of intellectuals and the "young generation" of intellectuals. He believed that university education before 1949 was more influenced by the British and American education system and attached importance to all-round basic education. Therefore, the knowledge structure of the old generation of intellectuals is broader, and among them, the

outstanding intellectuals can be ranked into the world's top scholars. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the colleges and universities being transformed and newly built for reason of implementing "Soviet styled" education route lack rich cultural atmosphere. Hence in this period, the education on the "liberated generation" of intellectuals paid more attention to imparting knowledge than cultivating their scientific spirit of suspicion and criticism. The "Cultural Revolution" and "Going to the Countryside" generation of intellectuals are special. They did not early enter into a profession or professional bondage, but be forced by fate to directly face the society and life more freely (here, the freedom only means that they are not subject to limitations of a profession), and more widely reach out to all aspects of the society. Therefore, it is by no accident that many writers and artists are from this generation of intellectuals; meanwhile in this process, this generation of intellectuals reconstructed their own knowledge system, early got rid of the shackles of thought, and thus did not lose personality. The "young generation" of intellectuals enjoy several times of material and spiritual support of predecessors, having strong self-awareness. Apparently, the generations of intellectuals all have a relatively complete general knowledge base and knowledge system, which is reflected in the characters of the intellectuals mentioned before. Among them, Chen Danqing is a typical intellectual of the "Cultural Revolution" and "Going to the Countryside" generation; Xu Zhiyuan also has strong characteristics of the "young generation" of intellectuals.

#### *B. Strong Sense of Morality and Critical Spirit*

Long living in symbolic world and immersing in the precise, harmonious and perfect symbolic world, intellectuals naturally would hope that the real world can be as beautiful as the symbolic and conceptual world. However, the gap between ideals and reality makes intellectuals dissatisfied and complaining in daily life, but the complaint of intellectuals often range from one person and one thing to social atmosphere, morality, and system; apparently, it is kind of "critical complaint". In Zheng Yefu's works, he studied the basic types of intellectuals and focused on discussing the basic characteristics of "critical intellectuals." He maintained that critical intellectuals attempt to transcend a symbolic system while becoming proficient in it, as well as synthesize the knowledge of each symbolic system to explore more general, universal and ultimate problems in life, society and nature. In the view of Zheng Yefu, critical intellectuals should have the following three basic characteristics, "First, not limiting their vision to a professional discipline, and closely concerning major issues and values in real society and some ultimate problems in nature and life; second, maintaining a critical attitude toward the status quo; third, the enthusiasm and critical attitude of this concern is based on a strong sense of moral responsibility." (Zheng Yefu, 2004: 14) It is true that from the perspective of human beings' historical experience, critical spirit and morality are usually inseparable. Those who dare to criticize the status quo and doubt the traditional concept on major issues such as social outlook, moral outlook and values often have some kind of extraordinary

moral power in their mind. And the sublimity of this moral sense can even be compared with the greatness of natural forces. It is no wonder that Kant would sigh like this, "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me." (Kant, 2003: 220)

In terms of the group image of online intellectuals, Gao Xiaosong talked about it in talk show that "famous school is to let the country believe the truth"; in Chen Danqing's "Part", when it comes to art professional examination in China, he still cannot agree with the current humanistic art education system; in the "Thirteen Interviews", Xu Zhiyuan' morality and critical spirit presented when talking with Cai Lan, Xi Chuan and et al about "what is the purpose to read books", "how to deal with the times" and the like topics is not inferior in any respect. The intensity even pushed him to the center of the whirlpool of public opinions.

### *C. Distinctive Personality and High Program Adaptation Degree*

Oxford University and the US Bureau of Labor Statistics jointly published data previously to prejudge the possibility that human work will be replaced by robots in 2035, saying that humans will lose more than 55% of jobs, and telemarketers, typists and accountants and the like occupations are listed in the "occupations most possible to be replaced", and artists, psychologists, teachers and the like occupations are listed in the "occupations most impossible to be replaced". Wherein, emotions, ethics, the game of human nature and other essential factors of people, and personality traits such as creativity, thinking ability, and aesthetic power are the decisive factors for judging whether the profession will be replaced by artificial intelligence. "Humanity" and "Personality" are also the key for host to stand in the wave of artificial intelligence revolution. Playing the role of host, online intellectuals inherit the individuality tradition of the intellectual group. This personality is the overall spiritual style and way of thinking formed by the group in the long-term historical course and the real environment, it is the sum of psychological characteristics and behavioral manner with certain tendency. This personality is mainly manifested in three aspects: strong suspicion and critical consciousness, independent spirit and the free thought, and multiple value orientations. As for the reason why intellectuals are called "intellectuals", in the author's view, critical spirit is the most important and valuable quality in their personality of intellectuals. In "The Analects of Confucius", Confucius described the three types of intellectuals respectively in the following sections: in the "The Analects of Confucius · Zilu (论语·子路)", "不得中行而与之, 必也狂狷乎! 狂者进取, 狷者有所不为也 (meaning: If you cannot make friends with those who can deal with things appropriately, you must make friends with madman and upright person as madman pursues social progress, and upright person can restrain himself.); in the "The Analects of Confucius · Yanghuo (论语·阳货)", "乡原, 德之贼也 (meaning: one who tries never to offend anybody is the thief of morality.)". In Confucius's view, "中行 (those who can deal with things appropriately)" is the most

ideal personality state of intellectuals, but this near-perfect personality does not exist; the second best choice to pursue an ideal state of intellectuals is the highly critical "狂狷 (madman and upright person)". The "乡愿 (one who tries never to offend anybody)" is nothing but a "Yes Man" without morality and principle. Here, it should be noted that this high degree of critical consciousness comes from a systematic knowledge structure which is inseparable from the solid general education. This is essential difference between the "intellectual group" and the "host group" cultivated in the path of specialized education. Therefore, the systematic knowledge structure and high critical consciousness jointly form the distinct personality difference in the group of online intellectuals, and this distinctive personality reflected in content production is a strong subjectivity. The mutual confirmation relationship between "I" and "program" makes that the host image of online intellectuals in a program highly adaptive to the program; and the "exclusive sense" brought about by this adaptability creates extremely favorable conditions for the host to completely and efficiently achieve its communication effect and program intention. Taking Xu Zhiyuan and the "Thirteen Interviews" as an example: As the host of Tencent's innovative quasi-live interview program "Thirteen Interviews", Xu Zhiyuan's disgusting with the popular mood, business logic, and thinking inertia of current era, and his curiosity of the new motivation and mood to the rapidly-changing, of people's inner world jointly constitute the inner logic of his critical thinking, in which he can't deal with this era; all kinds of discomforts are finally converted into a prejudice. In this context, the program team abandoned the inertia position of neutral, objective, and unbiased, and instead led the audience to observe and understand the world in the dialogue with the thirteen "social figures" from the perspective of Xu Zhiyuan's prejudice. In each session of dialogue, Xu Zhiyuan always followed the interview trajectory of "presetting a prejudice — executing the prejudice — breaking the prejudice or proofing the prejudice". This pure subjectivity greatly released Xu Zhiyuan's personality in one by one "social experiments" and also makes the "Thirteen Interviews" bearing a strong brand of "Xu Zhiyuan".

### *D. "Imaginary Community"*

Till today, Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities: To Analyze Nationalism" published in 1983 is still an epoch-making, subversive work. This subversiveness means that it has changed people's inherent conviction of the nature of the so-called "nation" community and even the communities in all senses popular in today's society. However, no one can deny that fiction have begun since human beings had language. Human fictionalizes "tribes", "society", "state", "laws", etc. "Nationalism" is just one of many fictions made by human beings, and human's fiction is precisely what human's need. This need even exceeds human's basic needs for material and living. It is not difficult to find that the imagination of "community" under the experience of Benedict Anderson is bounded. Whether it is a country, a nation or a literature or art, geographical factor is one of the important factors that makes imagination having boundary.

The Internet extends everywhere, however, and a community may be imagined, connected, and constructed more freely in such a borderless era today. The "Vistopia" series of programs are precisely such an "imaginary community" as being constructed. As a video project launched by the publishing brand "Imaginist" affiliated to Guangxi Normal University Press, "Vistopia" has accumulated a large number of original audiences at the beginning of its establishment. As is well known, the publications of "Imaginist" mainly focus on the fields of literature, art, philosophy, etc., and have won the favor of intellectuals and literary youths. The "Vistopia" continues this user orientation and advocates making a deep exploration on ecological community of literary youths. By profiling the users, it is concluded that they are a groups of people: very interested in literature, art, aesthetics, etc., received good education, and having strong self-awareness, highly acceptable to new things, keen on interaction and sharing, willing to buy surrounding products. Further, the corresponding communication methods and profit channels are determined according to the characteristics of users. Taking the "The Thousand and One Nights" held by Liang Wendao as an example: before the beginning of every "night", he may answer the audience's questions from time to time. Of course, this kind of answer may not really play a role in explaining doubts, but this kind of emotion-based "private" exchange meeting may greatly deepen the sense of belonging of individuals in the community; moreover, "Vistopia" tries to satisfy the aesthetic critics of literary youths by virtue of stylized images; the pictures are created by professional visual team, giving people a impression of clear and beautiful and having the texture of film; the background music is created by the musician Zhang Yadong; the music and pictures are well integrated, complementing each other; "Indoor life festival" is a type of salons held by "Vistopia", applying "O2O" mode in the pan-cultural video program is beneficial to the consolidation of the community and circle, and expanding the imaginary space of community through real experience. In terms of the profit model, the "Imaginist" membership system created by the "Imaginist" is gaining profit momentum. But in retrospect, it should be noted that only the hosts, namely the online intellectuals, is the soul of this "imaginary community"; their value orientation largely absorbs and shapes the members of the community. And the stability of this value is the basis of the high loyalty of audience and the strong stickiness of users.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In the process of describing (constructing actually) the overall picture of the society, the intellectual group often faces the test of persistence or loss of subjectivity. This test has historical regularity and is related to the scene of the times. It is true that the subjectivity of intellectuals seems to be free from the constraints of traditional media power and reconstructed under the new media scene, but it is not sure whether this lost and regained subjectivity will face new test of "loss of subjectivity" under the circumstance of combination of capital and business logic.

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