

Combining Virtual Idols and Mainstream Media in the Context of Integrated Media —Taking the Case of Luo Tianyi for Example

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ABSTRACT

The fusion of two-dimensional and three-dimensional has been a hot topic in recent years. As the first phenomenal virtual singer in China, Luo Tianyi is also gradually becoming the new favourite of major mainstream media. Using Luo Tianyi as an example, this paper examines the degree to which virtual idols and mainstream media intersect. In the context of media convergence, this article uses a collection of relevant commentaries spanning nearly 5 years for analysis to discuss the audience's attitudes towards Luo Tianyi's arrival on the mainstream stage. After data integration and correlation analysis, this paper draws a conclusion that virtual idols have become a new favorite of mainstream media and a new form of Chinese cultural output. The audience is becoming more receptive to this cross-cultural combination.

Keywords: *Virtual idol, Luo Tianyi, Convergence, mainstream media, bilibili*

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of “media integration” is to make full use of media carriers to integrate different media, such as radio, television, and newspapers, which have commonalities and complementarities, in terms of manpower, content and publicity, to achieve a new media communication concept of “resource integration, content integration, propaganda integration and benefit integration”. Media integration has two main concepts: broad and narrow. In a broad sense, media integration mainly refers to the integration, aggregation, processing and combination of various media-related elements. Its mode of operation mainly includes organizational structure, strategic approach and an overall model.

At this stage, the development of new media is very active, while the scale of traditional media is showing a regressive trend and its market share is gradually declining. New media has entered people's lives and new media technology is influencing people's daily lives. Relying on the Internet for knowledge, news and entertainment is a very common phenomenon in people's daily lives and work. It can be said that the Internet has been widely used in various fields. Therefore, the internet plays an important role in people's social lives and is an

indispensable tool. According to relevant statistics, by the end of 2018, the number of people using the Internet in China had reached nearly 800 million[1].

With the explosion of the metaverse concept, the concept of virtual idols has once again become a hot topic of debate, and there are many studies on virtual idols, but it is difficult to get rid of the tag of entertainment. This paper focuses on the combination of virtual idols and mainstream media, using a sample survey to explore the process of virtual idols moving from the minority to the masses. This paper lays a certain foundation for the research on the future development of the combination of idol and mainstream media, and can also make society realize the concept and development degree of virtual idols from more levels and angles.

2. RELATED CONCEPTS

2.1. Virtual idols

Virtual idols were initially mainly referred to as virtual singers, but with the development of science and technology, the concept of virtual idols became more diversified. For example, virtual idols based on 3D computer graphics, virtual idols based on music software, etc. were included in the category of virtual idols. In the

latest third edition of the Dictionary of Animation, “virtual idol” is explained as “an artificially created avatar” created through computer graphics and other means. Virtual idols in this context are artificially created avatars that perform the activities of singers and print idols, mainly online or in other venues. The term “virtual idol” can be found to refer broadly to all kinds of popular avatars, including those created in film, television, animation, and written works. In a narrow sense, virtual icons are technically qualified and must be created using computer digital technology.

This paper focuses on the study of virtual idols in a narrow sense, i.e. the use of digital technology to create a fully fleshed out avatar in a digital environment. This essay focuses on virtual idols in a narrow sense, that is, those who perform on the internet or in real life with a fully virtual image based on specific digital technologies and have works (music, animation, film, television, live streaming, and so on) and fan support [2].

2.2. Mainstream media

The definition of mainstream media has not been largely unified, and different concepts about mainstream media can be derived from different perspectives. In fact, mainstream media should be a comprehensive concept that can be defined from a qualitative point of view, such as politics, authority, influence, etc., using high-level media and serious media. From a political perspective, the mainstream media is relatively inferior to non-mainstream media. Media above the provincial level that are influential, play a dominant role and can represent or sway public opinion are called mainstream media[3]. From an economic perspective: “the mainstream media is the high-level media that focuses on the mainstream issues of social development and becomes a source of information and ideas relied on by the mainstream people in society.” The media can be divided into mass media and mainstream media according to the way it attracts audiences[4].

From the perspective of business: for example, according to Professor Zhou Shenglin of the School of Journalism at Fudan University, the media must have three conditions to become mainstream media, i.e. a large circulation and viewership; a large advertising turnover; and great influence and authority. According to Professor Shao Zhizhe at the School of Journalism and Communication of Zhejiang University, the mainstream media is “relying on mainstream capital, facing mainstream audience, using mainstream expression to reflect mainstream ideas and mainstream lifestyle”, and enjoying a high reputation in society. Mainstream media are media that rely on mainstream capital, face mainstream audiences, use mainstream expressions, reflect mainstream ideas and mainstream lifestyles, and enjoy a high reputation in society[5].

In general terms, mainstream media refers to media with strong power, facing mainstream audience, leading social opinion and generating strong social influence. In China, mainstream media generally refers to party newspapers, party magazines, radio and television, etc., which are under the supervision of the competent press and propaganda departments.

The mainstream media in Western countries refers to the news media such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television that use their official language and reflect their mainstream culture, which is a reflection of the mass psychology of the subject nation in western countries and also partly expresses the government's intention. The mainstream media discussed in this article is the central and local radio and television stations.

3. THE CASE OF THE INTEGRATION OF VIRTUAL IDOLS WITH MAINSTREAM MEDIA

In 2012, China's first local phenomenon virtual idol, Luo Tianyi, was born, whose name implies “Chinese wind, summer rhythm, Luo Shui Tian Yi”. She was the first virtual singer to appear on major TV channels and mainstream media, including the Spring Festival Gala.

On February 2, 2016, Luo Tianyi made her TV debut at Hunan TV's Spring Festival Gala, singing “Hua'er Naji” with Yang Yuying, opening the door for Luo Tianyi's TV debut. On July 23 of the same year, Luo Tianyi's new image of VOCALOID4 appeared in the “Bilibili Macro Link” in holographic form and sang the song “66CCFF”. On October 15, Luo Tian Yi performed “Sun Quan the Emperor” with Circle 9 and Fu Xinbo. On December 31, 2016, Luo Tian Yi participated in the “2016 Hunan TV New Year's Eve Gala” and sang the songs “Ninety Nine and Eighty One” and “Light Chaser” together with Ma Ke. The performance triggered a frenzy of support from fans and widespread attention from the public, creating another climax in terms of ratings and topics. The live broadcast enhanced the multi-dimensional application of live scenes with the use of morphing technology, a technique that allows for the rapid drawing of characters and scenes with different camera angles and lighting conditions, achieving the effect of stunning scene switching[6].

In 2017, at the 2nd Made in China Day jointly organised by the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission and the National Defence Science and Technology Bureau, virtual singer Luo Tianyi collaborated with the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League to launch the Chinese-style song “Tian Xing Jian”, which uses the phrase “Tian Xing Jian, the gentleman will never cease to be strong” from Zhou Yi. This song not only expresses the national feelings of young people with impassioned lyrics, but

also perfectly matches the theme of “made in China day”, becoming one of the models of the deep integration of virtual idols and mainstream discourse[7]. On December 31, 2017, Jiangsu TV’s New Year’s Eve concert, Luo Tianyi and Zhou Hua Jian collaborated on “Let it go”, which recreated the classic scenes of the movie “Frozen”. The ice castle and ice bridge fragment, the magnificent stage effect made the audience marvel. To restore the costume settings and stage effects of many classic scenes in “strange fate of ice and snow”, Jiangsu Satellite TV’s top director, dance troupe and vsinger production team sparked new sparks after the collision. In addition to the commonly used diversified entertainment experience, multi-dimensional application of on-site scenes and multi position lighting shooting, this new year’s concert adopts real-time light and shadow following technology for the first time. This is also a daring attempt and technical challenge made by both director teams after extensive communication, testing, and verification[8].

In March of 2018, Luo Tianyi collaborated with Wang Peiyu on the CCTV variety show *Classic Flow*, in which Luo Tianyi performed an elegant water show that took traditional Chinese aesthetics to the extreme. In November of the same year, Luo Tianyi lit up the Bird’s Nest with a spectacular performance of Phoenix circling a circle before rushing to the stage during the opening performance of the Bird’s Nest National Style Extreme Night[9]. At Jiangsu TV’s New Year’s Eve Gala on December 31, 2018, a holographic projection of Luo Tianyi and Chinese singer Xue Zhiqian performed the song for the first time on television with a re-written version of the song “Dala Crash Bar”, originally sung by Chinese virtual songstress Luo Tianyi and Yan He, about the classic fairy tale of “The Brave and the Bold”.

At the 2020 Bilibili New Year’s Eve Gala, Luo Tianyi and Fang Jinlong collaborated on “Jasmine Flower”, in which Luo Tianyi changed into four dreamy scenes of spring, summer, autumn, and winter, with exquisite special effects and clever AR applications, becoming the benchmark of AR performances.

In the live broadcast of the CCTV Spring Festival Gala 2021, Wang Yuan and Sister Moon made an appearance to perform the children’s song and dance “Listen to Me” in collaboration with virtual singer Luo Tianyi, cleverly combining ancient poetry with

ploughing cows and the virtues of hard work, saving and not wasting, and being thrifty in a beautiful and touching scenario for children. A combination of modern technology and classical Chinese aesthetics, Luo Tian Yi has brought secondary culture to the public in the form of the Spring Festival Gala[10].

On June 7, 2021, China Universal Television Network released the promotional song for the Sino-Russian Year of Science and Technology Innovation, “Departure to the Future”, performed by Luo Tianyi and Nana, a virtual Russian character born as a result of the Year of Innovation, whose image was created by the Russian technology company Malivar and whose synthesised vocals were provided with technology by KDDI[11].

For the 2022 Lantern Festival, Luo Tianyi and Liu Yuning performed the song “TIME TO SHINE” (Chinese translation: Shining Moment)[12], which was also one of the songs performed at the opening ceremony of the Beijing Winter Olympics Cultural Festival held on February 2, 2022 and was selected as the second Outstanding Music Composition of the Winter Olympics[13].

4. ANALYSIS OF THE AUDIENCE’S ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE COMBINATION OF LOTTE AND MAINSTREAM MEDIA

The Spring Festival Gala is a regular form of activity for the Chinese people during the Spring Festival and is a program of entertainment for all people and the most representative program in China. Therefore, the following is an extract of the commentary on the Spring Festival Gala.

4.1. Statistical chart on the change of audience’s attitudes towards Luo Tianyi on the stage of the Spring Festival Gala

Every year, 35 comments are chosen at random from Bilibili and Weibo, as well as 40 comments from other platforms (Tencent, YouTube, IQIYI, Tiktok), and the statistics of these 110 comments are analyzed. This study focuses on a selection of comments made on the stage.

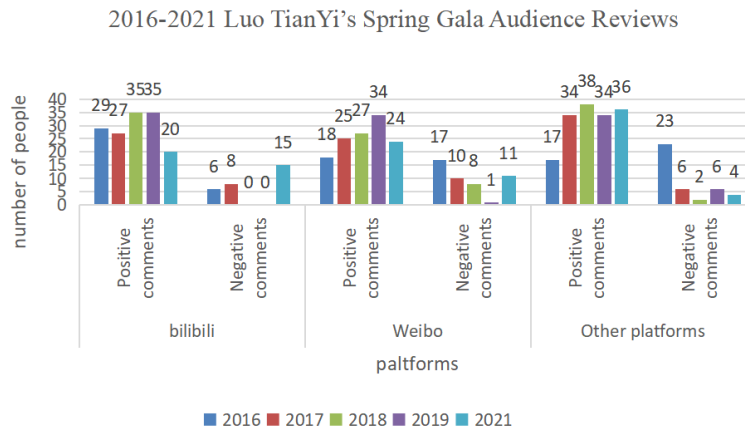


Figure 1 2016-2021 Luo TianYi's Spring Gala Audience Reviews

4.2. Specific categories on evaluation

According to the statistics, this paper can roughly divide the positive reviews into two categories: discussion about the stage; admiration for the performers. Bad reviews can be divided into: 1) dissatisfaction with the staging; 2) dissatisfaction with the performers; 3) dissatisfaction with the combination of Two-dimensional and The three dimensional model.

The 2016 Hunan Spring Festival Gala was Luo Tian Yi's television debut, of which 15 comments (23%) out of 64 positive comments praised the performers themselves, and 77% of the discussions about the performance site; the most negative comments focused on the discussions about the site, accounting for 71.7%, followed by dissatisfaction with two-dimensional and three -dimensional formats at 17.3%, and 10.8% for the performers themselves.

For the 2017 Hunan Spring Festival Gala, which was performed in conjunction with the famous Chinese singer Zhou Jianhua's English song "LET IT GO", a total of 86 positive reviews were sampled from various platforms, mainly focusing on discussions about the performance site, accounting for 66.3%, and 33.7% of compliments about the performers; a total of 24 bad reviews were sampled, accounting for 66.6% of discussions about the site, while the percentage of those who disliked the performers and this performance mode were each at 16.6%.

In 2018, there were 100 positive reviews, with 74 discussions about the set (74%) and 26% about the actors themselves; ten bad reviews, mainly focused on the set (60%), 30% dissatisfaction with the actors, and only 10% dissatisfaction with the mixed mode of two-dimensional and The three dimensional.

In 2019, the positive reviews are again at a record high, with 103 positive reviews out of 110 samples sought across the network, accounting for 93.6%, which is also the highest rate of positive reviews for Luo Tian

Yi's appearance at the Spring Festival Gala in all years. The main discussion is still focused on the discussion of the performance site, accounting for 67.9%, and the performance staff accounted for 32.1%. Among the 7 bad reviews, dissatisfaction with the performance staff accounted for 4, 57.1%, dissatisfaction with the site accounted for 42.9%, and two-dimensional and three-dimensional disapproval for the first time, the percentage of dissatisfaction dropped to 0%.

In 2021, Luo Tian Yi took the stage at the CCTV Spring Spring Festival Gala, but this time there were only 80 positive reviews, with 51.2% and 49.8% of discussions about the performance site and the performers, not a big difference; of the 30 negative reviews, 66.7% were about the site, 23.3% about the performers, and the percentage of dissatisfaction with two-dimensional and three -dimensional mixed formats accounted for 10% of the reviews.

4.3. Data analysis

In terms of data, except for 2021, the positive feedback from viewers from 2016 to 2019 has been on the rise. While the percentage of comments against the combination of two-dimensional and three-dimensional has been decreasing year by year.

The audience's positive comments were mainly due to the choreography and technical effects of the stage, but also to the support of the fans for their idols. Recently, with the mastery of AR technology and the frequent appearance of virtual idols in the public eye through major video platforms and commercial endorsements etc. recently, the audience has become more receptive to the fusion of the two-dimensional and three-dimensional.

The reason for the dislike of Luo Tianyi's appearance at the Spring Festival Gala in 2021 is mainly due to the performance repertoire and live effects. Luo Tianyi's appearance at the Spring Festival Gala in 18 and 19 had already received 0 negative reviews on Bilibili, a platform with a high concentration of two-dimensional.

But in 2021, the negative review rate has risen to 42.8%, compared to previous years. According to the reviews collected, there are three main reasons for this. Firstly, because Luo Tianyi's performance at the Spring Festival Gala was a children's song "Listen to Me", and many netizens were disgusted by the traditional concept of "two-dimensional=children". Secondly, there were two guests (Wang Yuan and Moon Sister) performing with her. The footage of Luo Tian Yi was very small and passed by, causing dissatisfaction among Luo Tian Yi's fans. Thirdly, because of the live effects, many people said that the interaction was not in place, the performance was not coordinated, and Luo Tian Yi was reduced to a "backdrop".

5. DISCUSSION

Whether two-dimensional art should go to the masses or not has been a topic of debate from 2016 to now. From the first appearance on TV in 2016, to the Spring Festival Gala in 2021, to singing for the Winter Olympics in 2022, virtual songstresses are indeed gradually coming into the public eye. Unfortunately, there was no way to use hologram technology because of the limitations of the Spring Festival Gala stage. From 2016 to now, the main technology used by Luo Tian Yi is AR, or augmented reality technology, and neither the audience nor the singers on stage can see Luo Tian Yi in real life. In the past 16 years, the comments section was still full of questions about what a virtual idol was and what it was not. By 2021, when Luo Tian Yi appeared on the CCTV Spring Festival Gala, most people in the comments section were already aware of Luo Tian Yi. The integration of virtual idols into mainstream media must rely on the advancement of technology. Simultaneously, two-dimensional media should be given more attention and exposure, while mainstream media should break free from traditional constraints in order to have more room for development.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper uses a sample analysis method to analyse the case of virtual idols combined with mainstream media. Based on the data analysis, it can be concluded that virtual idols have become the new favourite of the mainstream media and a new form of Chinese cultural output, which also reflects the increasing importance of the demands of the younger generation in the mainstream media and the increasing acceptance of this form of media integration by the audience. There are some limitations. Firstly, the selection and categorization of the reviews in this paper are subjective. Secondly, the reasons for the differences between the platforms are not discussed. In the future, more samples can be collected for more detailed classification and more objective analysis.

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