Creative Freedom and Self-Limitation of Streaming Media Platform

——Take Netflix Animation as an Example

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Abstract. This paper attempts to analyze the animation creation freedom and self-limitation of the streaming media platform Netflix from two aspects: data driven to creation freedom, and creation self-discipline to self restriction, and explore the innovative development of animation creation in the streaming media era. First, it analyzes how Netflix considers the needs of users, data-driven creative freedom, and experimental creative innovation; Then it analyzes cultural capital limitations and the limits of media expression, reflects on the disconnect between economic benefits and social benefits caused by cultural capital and media expression, and summarizes the contradictory identity between creative freedom and self-limitation of streaming media platforms and the inevitability of art marketization.

Keywords: Streaming Media Platform; Netflix Animation; Creative Freedom; Self-limitation

1   Introduction

Netflix, one of the world's leading entertainment service companies, was founded in 1997. After 25 years of development. In 2007, Netflix, which focuses on DVD mailing rental business, took a bold transformation step and invested heavily in launching streaming media services, providing all subscription members with the option to watch inventory content online. At present, it has more than 220 million paid subscription members in more than 190 countries. compared with animation production companies such as Disney, Sony, DreamWorks and Warner Bros., Netflix is more active in developing brand-new and even experimental original animation works, and pays more attention to exploring the overseas animation market. Since 2013, when Netflix launched its original animation series, it has continuously opened up new markets and worked with well-known animation IP companies to produce animation, taking animation as a new breakthrough of its streaming media platform.

With the advent of the streaming media era, content is still king. The streaming media platform has changed the communication form and presentation mode of animation works, and brought freedom and diversification to creators' creative content and forms. In recent years, Netflix's original animation has diversified types, large investment and accelerated self-made, which has had an epoch-making impact on the film and television production of the film and television animation industry, the audience's viewing experience, and the construction and distribution of software and hardware. In the context of the accelerated content update of the streaming media platforms and the booming film and television creation, the creative freedom and self-limitation of streaming media platforms have become topics worthy of discussion. This study takes Netflix animation as the research object to explore the innovative development of film and television animation art creation in the era of streaming media and the artistic limit of network free space. Why does Netflix animation series attract the attention of audiences all over the world? How does the streaming media platform form self restriction while providing creative freedom for creators? What is the relationship between creative freedom and self-limitation? In order to answer the above questions, this paper will focus on Netflix animation, a streaming media platform, and try to dig out the commonness and depth from individual cases. When the creation of streaming Animation series is excited, it is necessary to maintain a cautious and optimistic attitude.

2　From data-driven to creative freedom

2.1　Data driven creative freedom

In the information age, people are producing and updating a variety of data every day, and computer technology provides a new algorithm to study data mining. As media theorist Lev Manovich claimed in his book, movies have film language, and new media also has its own unique logic, that is, a series of conventions used by new media designers to organize data and create user experience. [1] For the problem of massive data mining, the suitable algorithms are mainly various collaborative filtering algorithms. In the research of collaborative filtering algorithm, one of the most popular data sets is the Netflix data set. The recommendation system uses the user's preference for objects known by the system to find potential objects of interest to users through information filtering and actively recommend them to users.[2]For example, if viewer a watched the animated series *Love, Death and Robot,* and viewers with similar viewing behavior as viewer a basically watched the animated series *Arcane*, the recommendation system has reason to recommend *Arcane* to viewer a, Regardless of the content and style of the two animation dramas.

Although Netflix started with DVD rental, its essence is a technology company born in Silicon Valley, and algorithm is the core technology of Netflix. In terms of collaborative filtering algorithm, few companies can compete with Netflix. In the information age, it is increasingly important to help users find valuable information from massive data. Being good at using data to inform your intuition is the core creative concept of Netflix. The chief content officer of Netflix will not be very interested

in the main plot, but the content officer is mainly interested in data - detailed data of viewing habits of all users of Netflix. Data shows that a considerable number of users are fans of director David finch's films. At the same time, the data also shows that a considerable number of users have watched science fiction movies. A series of data make the content officer believe that the idea of love, death and robots is completely feasible. At the same time, Netflix also believed that it had methods and channels to make accurate personalized positioning and marketing for the potential audience of love, death and robot.

Netflix has adopted a one-time broadcast strategy for *Arcane*, which has brought new entertainment choices to the audience, that is, more free viewing time and length. Netflix's business model based on member subscription and on-demand broadcast format also provide creative freedom for film writers in other aspects.[3] Under Netflix's one-time broadcast strategy of putting all of them on the shelves, for the writers, adding previously on the episode and creating suspense at the end of the episode can be removed. Screenwriters can concentrate on creating a 6-hour movie *Arcane*. At the same time, it also provides greater creative freedom for film creators. *Arcane* no longer follows the visual style of Disney animation and Pixar Animation. Directors can design audio-visual language according to their own creative requirements, and the visual style is more free and stylish. Because creators don't need to worry about the loss of viewers and the anger of advertisers caused by controversial pictures in the series, because Netflix provides on-demand streaming service, and viewers can choose other content if they don't like it. TV stations must try their best to meet the viewing needs of all viewers at a specific time. Netflix can also collect an extremely important data information of user preferences, and mainstream TV networks mostly understand the characteristics and preferences of viewers through Nielsen data and other questionnaires. There is almost no opportunity to understand the audience from the individual level, and even if they do, they can not be accurately pushed.

2.2   Experimental creative innovation

Netflix animation shows the transformation from a mass economy to a niche market of personalized services, which injects fresh blood into the film market and makes the film industry show a more diversified trend. Netflix animation aims to tell stories that no one has seen but everyone will remember. [4] Animation creation includes not only the misappropriation and mixing of different media, but also the transfer and reference of "form". This integration will inevitably lead to the changes of the form and aesthetic principles of animation drama. The process of animation creation, the content of the work and the form of expression are exploratory and experimental, and the animation works are enriched with various innovative "experiments". The practical creation innovation is mainly manifested in the innovation of content and form: it develops diversified animation types in content; In the form of expression, the creator uses a unique and personalized expression language to express the object, and the creative techniques are random and accidental.

With the vigorous development of streaming media platforms, viewers have taken back the control of broadcasting from the film and television industry. Now they can

promote cultural change from the bottom up, which in turn changes the dynamics of content production. When "binge-watch" became a new normal, TV series became a film that lasted for dozens of hours. Netflix's content production is also constantly meeting this demand of the audience, optimizing the expression and structure of the series to adapt to its own broadcast mode. More diverse types of content are maintained. Todd Yellin, an executive of Netflix, hired some writers to score the romantic, bloody and bizarre plots of the film, and even the moral standards of the characters. According to the scores, each film was decomposed into metadata. According to statistics, Netflix divides all films into 19 "umbrella genres", 400 "sub genres" and 76897 "micro genres". [5] These different types will be integrated into the algorithm to increase the diversity and personalization of recommended content.

Streaming media plays a role in Series like *Love, Death and Robots* that no traditional media can complete. For film artists who like innovation, the streaming media era provides more opportunities. Director David Finch once said: "I hope every story has its own length, so that the presentation of the story can achieve the greatest impact or the best entertainment effect." Each episode of the sci-fi animation series *Love, Death and Robot* is 5-15 minutes long. The first season has 18 episodes. It is divided into 18 creation teams, and has gathered top animation production teams from the United States, France, Canada, Hungary and South Korea. The creators are free of any restrictions and create according to their own preferences and styles. In addition to the diversification of types and themes, the animation series also alternates between 2D, 3D and 2D + live action shooting, so that audiences with different preferences can enjoy watching movies. Animation works themselves have their inherent freedom and reasonable exaggeration range.

The 2021 *Arcane* is adapted from the online game *League of Legends*. It tells the story in the utopian Piltover full of Steampunk breath and the chemical driven underground city Zu'an. The grand cosmology indicates that Netflix intends to create its own heroic universe. As the early developers of League of heroes online games, Kristen link and Alex Yi were not studio executives or experienced TV producers. As core members, they participated in building the universe of *League of Legends* in their early days. The fist game convinced Netflix to let developers lead the production of animation series, and finally proved to be effective. [6] The excellent picture style of the film should be attributed to the French fortiche animation studio, which has cooperated with fist for a long time, with the application of experimental cartoon rendering style, camera mapping technology, hand-painted 2D special effects and other technical means; The integration of different design styles such as French decorative art, Art Nouveau schools and Steampunk style creates a unique aesthetic style belonging to the twin cities world.

3   From self restriction to creative self-discipline

3.1   Limits of media expression

In the era of streaming media, film and television animation has gained more freedom of creation and communication, but the freedom of creation of streaming media animation is also limited, and freedom and limit always follow. Streaming media platform breaks the conventional form and convention of movies, and there is no lack of innovation, but at the same time, it also needs to grasp the creation limit, where freedom and limitation coexist. Animation content enriches the source of communication content, but the content and quality of animation provided by creators are uneven. Blindly catering to the audience's viewing habits and aesthetic tastes will inevitably affect the lack of ethics and morality of social members. Based on this, standardizing animation content has become the common responsibility of streaming media platforms, creators and viewers. Relying on social regulations, laws and other means is obviously not a long-term solution. The creative self-discipline of the platform and the aesthetic self-discipline of viewers should be the core to solve the problem. The reasonable expression of the audio-visual language of animation, the organic combination of creative freedom and self-restraint, can make animation creation have more freedom and broader space to play.

In addition, as a platform, we need to constantly adjust and revise the artistic judgment angle of film art works, and the results of this correction will be reflected in the works, which is particularly important for artistic creation. The judgment system of the platform does not set a rigid frame for creation and enclose the works, but has infinite space and possibilities. It is a creation system under the command of the platform. It is free and limited, and it is an ability that needs to be mastered. For example, completely negating the previous film works at a certain stage, reconsidering all possibilities of artistic creation under a large creative system, and this restrictive ability to refuse repetition is the creative innovation and artistic creativity presented by the streaming media platform.

3.2   Alienation of cultural capital

Marxist philosophy holds that alienation is a social phenomenon in which people's material production and spiritual production and their products become alien forces, which in turn rule people. [7] From what Marx said about alienation and its subsequent deepening, the substantive alienation is that power, capital, media and machinery completely control people. As streaming media film and television dramas and variety shows are themselves new Internet art products generated by commercial cultural capital with the help of new media technology, cultural capital is the material basis and creative power of streaming media film and television works, and the creative freedom and control of cultural capital on streaming media are particularly prominent. On the one hand, streaming media film and television works bear the humanistic mission of leading artistry and ideology, and on the other hand, they bear the economic benefits of marketization and industrialization. On the one hand, streaming media

creation needs to persevere in artistic innovation and take responsibility for the inheritance and construction of national culture; The latter requires that streaming media film and television creation be related to commercial profits and market economy, bring benefits to creators and streaming media platforms, and contribute to economic development as a new industrial form. Netflix animation can take original content as its main product and form an industrialized "production play" integration mechanism. Cultural capital has given birth to a pan entertainment industry chain, including film and television animation, games, derivatives and so on, as well as a multi-domain symbiosis based on the Internet and mobile Internet. With IP as the core, it carries out cross domain and cross platform derivative fan economy. If it is not for the unremitting Industrial Exploration of cultural capital and the final finding of an innovative industrial model of streaming animation, there will be no global streaming platforms blooming everywhere.

However, when the film and television art in cyberspace is incorporated into the "commercial pattern", its freedom of creation has gone to its opposite, dissimilating from the motive force driving art to the commercial restriction of artistic innovation. The "profit seeking" nature of the cultural capital of streaming media platforms not only promotes the prosperity of film and television animation creation, but also brings about the contradiction between culture and art and the market economy, the disconnection between economic benefits and social benefits, and the gap between the number of creations and the quality of content, leading to entertainment supremacy, profit seeking, and neglect of social responsibility. The assistance of cultural capital has alienated into the fetters of artistic creation and innovation, and the data analysis of the audience has degenerated into completely catering to the audience, losing the positive role of film and television art works in leading cultural ideas.

4   Conclusion

The vitality and charm of Netflix animation lies in its creative innovation and freedom of creation. Returning to the freedom of creation in cyberspace, we also need to understand and grasp freedom from the process of rational awakening, human self-discipline and practice, and understand the relationship between freedom and necessity. We still need to grasp the artistic limit of cyberspace according to this, so that the purpose of technology and the creativity of art can be unified in the practice of streaming media art, The freedom and limitation of artistic creation, through practical integration, lead to the unity of Opposites.(Fig.1) The cross-border and regulation of streaming animation, the self-discipline and heteronomy of the platform, etc. all show the identity of the contradiction between creative freedom and self-restraint and the inevitability of film and television art marketization.
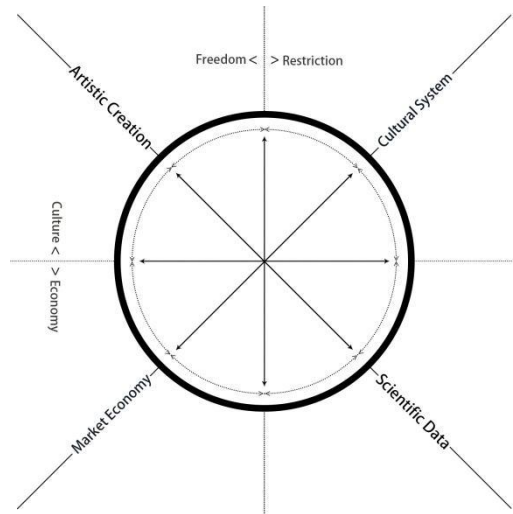
Fig. 1. The cycle mode of freedom and self restriction of streaming media video platform crea-
tion: The two-way cycle of culture and economy, freedom and restriction. (Self made by the
author)

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