



# Research on the Sense of Viewing Rituals of Online Film Festivals in the Post Epidemic Era

Jiuxiang Tian and Yang Li<sup>(✉)</sup>

School of Film, Television and Communication, Xiamen University of Technology, Xiamen, China

2017318133@qq.com

**Abstract.** In the era of new media, the form of the film festival itself affected by the epidemic is also in the process of gradual change. It is not only limited to commercial operations such as film trading and publicity, but also cultural consumption such as ceremonial screenings and awards, and constructs diversified ritual situations and ritual behaviors. As an interactive ceremony, the premise, ritual process, and ritual effect of the online film festival make the interactive ceremony of watching movies in the online film festival another public realm for fans who stay at home during the epidemic. Therefore, this paper aims to use the theoretical perspective of the interactive ritual chain to discuss a series of ritualistic behaviors in the special ritual field represented by online film festivals to reshape the sense of viewing ritual and establish the culture of film fans, which is of great significance for the development of future film festivals.

**Keywords:** online film festival · sense of ritual film festival · interactive ritual chains

## 1 Introduction

In summary, this paper aims to explore how online film festivals can reshape the lack of “movie-watching ritual sense” and practice a unique interactive ritual culture during the epidemic through media paradigms such as launching ceremonies, production ceremonies, and sharing ceremonies. By discussing the online film festival as a kind of interactive ceremony, we can glimpse how the new media technology has changed the external form, internal aesthetic and viewing form of film, film festival, etc., and by selecting typical cases of domestic and foreign film festivals in the past two years to spy on how online film festivals as a cultural ceremony have fulfilled the ritual needs of film fans in the post-epidemic era, which is of great significance for the rapid development and form of film industry research and film festival research.

## 2 First, the Media Premise: The Initiation of the Interactive Ceremony

According to Collins, interactive ritual consists of the following four elements: “1. Two or more people gathered in the same place, so that they can influence each other through

their physical presence, whether they pay special attention to each other. 2. Boundaries are set for outsiders, so participants know who is participating and who is excluded. 3. People focus their attention on a common object or activity and know each other by communicating that focus to each other. 4. People share a common emotion or emotional experience” [1]. In the post-epidemic era, the online film festival, as a kind of interactive ceremony for virtual communities such as fan groups in the online media era and the post-epidemic era, accurately meets the above four conditions. The online film festival has a wide audience, but when they choose the “online movie” viewing format, they show an interactive state of physical absence and mental presence; The main audience of the online film festival is the fan group, and there is a certain ceremony entry threshold for other viewing groups; Fan groups focus their attention on a common object and have the same focus during the online film festival viewing process; The fan community produces common emotions and shares emotional energy during the ritual participation.

## **2.1 The Body that is Digitized: Decentralized Repolymerization**

First, the participation of film fans in film festivals is essentially a process of dispersion to aggregation of the body. Collins argues that the process of participation in interactive rituals must be a group agglomeration of the physical body and an emotional resonance of the spiritual soul. The interactive ritual process of film fans participating in the online film festival shows that film fans can seek authentic ritual effects in the field of online media. However, the strength of the interactive ceremony effect depends on the restoration of the ritual situation of the online film festival for the offline film festival and the arrival of the ceremony effect. In the traditional media period, Corinth felt that in-person participation in live ceremonies was necessary. “Remote media programming can provide some shared attention and emotion that evokes a sense of aspiration, membership and respect, but only adequate physical aggregation can produce the strongest effect” [2]. However, in the era of online media, various emerging technologies are emerging, and the film festival itself will inevitably undergo a transformation to save itself when the global film industry stagnates during the epidemic. In the emerging media era, for VR (virtual reality) and AR (augmented reality) mainly characterized by immersive communication technology, digital and cyberized bodies can be directly projected on the body sensory system constructed by the human flesh in the form of reproducing the self, resulting in a restored and real body sensory experience [3]. The online film festival came into being under the influence of the real context and emerging virtual reality technology, as an interactive ceremony to meet the emotional and physical interaction needs of movie fans at home. However, everything such as body construction and language expression of the participants in the interactive ceremony is informatized and digitized, and it is still a question whether the ritual premise can meet the restored meaning of the ritual effect. But Collins also admits that “if the nervous system can directly and remotely produce a cascading effect, the effect is consistent with the presence of the person” [4]. Even though Corinth’s era could not predict the traditional form of emerging media such as online film festivals, it pointed out the answer to the problem in its discourse. If the online film festival can use the power of emerging media to enhance the nervous system link and long-distance transmission of film fans, the ceremonial effect will be the same as the ceremonial effect of the offline film festival. The recent hot concept of the metaverse

has inspired online film festivals, and some scholars have said that a key point for the metaverse to break through in the future lies in how to reproduce or restore the sensory systems of the human flesh, such as smell, taste, and touch, through online [5]. Therefore, in the future, when the fan group participates in the launching ceremony process of the online film festival, the cohesion and convergence of the body will gradually tend to be cyborg after experiencing the influence of new media technology, and the experience of its composition of the human body will also be realized one by one. In addition to enhancing the physical senses and immersive viewing experience of film fans, it also verifies that the flow and steering of the body of the film fan group in the online film festival venue are no longer limited by the real geographical space but form a kind of physical communication with “online communication” across time and space under the new media technology. For example, the South by Southwest Film Festival was forced to close in March 2020 due to the epidemic. But South by Southwest did not stop, instead partnering with Amazon, a well-known streaming platform, to launch the SXSW 2020 Film Festival Collection in the form of Prime Video, and the festival is preparing to show the cancelled “film festival films” for free within ten days. So, the audience can freely enter the Amazon viewing platform, enter the virtual theater by clicking on the screen, and become “virtual people” to carry out the wonderful journey of online movie watching [6]. The precondition for the participation of the fan group in the interactive ceremony is to transform the shape of the body, and the body that is also digitized also participates in the construction of the dynamic flow of the dispersed aggregation of the fan group to a certain extent, which makes one of the important conditions for the participation of the interactive ceremony of the online film festival complete.

## 2.2 Affective Situational Symbols: Confirmation and Release

During the participation in the online film festival, the identification and confirmation of the emotions of the fan group constitute an important energy of the interactive ceremony. Collins agrees that “rhythmic cooperation and emotional connection are essential components of interactive ritual; But mutual focus is also essential [7]. First, the purpose of the interactive ceremony of the online film festival is to create ritual situational symbols to stimulate the common attention, group unity, collective imagination and so on of the participants of the ceremony. As Collins puts it, “Collective concern enhances the expression of shared emotions; Shared emotions, in turn, further enhance collective activities and the feeling of mutual subjectivity” [8]. Emerging media technologies provide imaginative space and methods for the construction of ritual situations at online film festivals. During the online film festival viewing period, the media constructs the viewing ceremony situation, and at the same time recognizes and confirms the concentration of emotional energy of the participants in the ceremony through emotional situation symbols. “In IR theory, emotional energy is transmitted by symbols full of emotional situations...” [9]. Therefore, online media uses emotional situation symbols to build common attention, group unity, collective imagination, etc., and the same network media also promotes the construction of interactive ceremonies of online film festivals with the transmission of emotional energy. Most online film festivals usually use the power of online media to carry out all-round and comprehensive marketing and publicity at the beginning of their release, using posters, signed photos, film and

television highlights, public account tweets and other situational symbols to awaken the long-sealed memories of movie fans, and urge fans to return to the film festival to identify and confirm and even vent the accumulated emotional energy. For example, “The Friday Film Club”, an online movie party exclusively for movie fans launched by British film director Carol Morley on Twitter, posted an online viewing link through her Twitter account until Friday night. Viewers can watch the movie for free at a specified time. And viewers can comment on Twitter or provide comments and feedback during post-screening communication sessions. And the theme of “Friday Film Club” will focus on “women’s films”, films directed by women or films starring or showing women in strong roles. As a result, “The Friday Film Club” also spent more than 4 months, or 20 Friday nights, “collectively” watch and discuss 20 films online without any commercial sponsorship and share each other’s experiences in subsequent interactions [10]. The common emotional energy distinguishes the difference between “you” and “me”, and in the ritual construction of the online film festival, through the mutual confirmation and identification of the common emotional energy, the fan group is quickly gathered and shaped the common focus until the emotional energy is produced and shared before and after the viewing ceremony. Different from other viewing modes that increasingly lack a sense of viewing ceremony, the interactive viewing ceremony of online film festivals under the influence of new media has become an important field for film fans to deeply participate in emotional interaction, confirm the identity of fans, and build the identity of fans. Compared with the movie-watching characteristics of cinema viewing, the online exhibition process of “fun community”, that is, the group of movie fans, has become a ritualized experience process in the era of online media.

### 3 Media Process: The Production of Interactive Rituals

Collins believes that when the components of interactive rituals promote each other and effectively synthesize and accumulate high-intensity mutual attention and emotional sharing, the feelings that participants will have, that is, the main results of interactive rituals: 1. Group unity. 2. The emotional energy of the individual. 3. Symbols that represent groups. 4. Sense of morality [11]. Under the influence of new media technology, online film festivals are a kind of production interactive ceremony, and its ritual participants, that is, the group of film fans, reap certain ceremonial effects in the interactive ceremony. However, a series of ritual effects of online film festivals, such as emotional energy, microscopic bodies, etc., rely on the emotional bets and identity investments accumulated in offline film festivals, and are restored or even enhanced in the viewing ceremony.

#### 3.1 The Construction and Reconstruction of Emotional Energy

First, the core problem that Collins’s interactive ritual chain theory aims to solve is the mechanism of interactive ritual. He argues that “the result of successfully establishing emotional harmony in interactive rituals is a sense of unity. The emotions that are elements of IR are short-lived, but the result is long-term emotions, a sense of attachment to the group gathered at this time [12]. Interactive rituals produce emotions or joy or sorrow, but the resulting sense of group solidarity is eternal. The process of participating in

an interactive ritual is a two-way flow of physical rhythm and emotional energy. Therefore, the interactive ceremony of watching movies at online film festivals has become a kind of collective venting and physical repression carnival ritual for certain subcultural groups, such as film fan groups, who share emotional energy in their ritual situations, produce group unity, and shape common symbols. The discourse symbol formation of the subcultural circle of the film fan group lies in the link and integration of the urban imprint and cultural connotation behind different film fans, and the process of generating emotional energy in the movie viewing interactive ceremony is also the process of continuous strengthening and recreation of the discourse power of the film fan group, and online film festival viewing has become a necessary ritual situation for interactive ceremonies. Moreover, according to Collins, real-world communities have only weak long-term solidarity. Even if the fan community has a common symbol, the ritual participation of community reality is short-lived and unsustainable. However, this does not apply to online subcultures. Since the participation of online subcultural groups in interactive rituals presupposes a common focus and a common emotional connection, the ritual process also requires ritual participants to produce and use emotional energy and common symbols. Joshua Meyrowitz argues that “shared and covert behavior makes any group glued into a collusive group... Shared experiences connect them, but at the same time separate them from others [13]. The important value of the interactive ritual chain of online film festivals is to find fans with the same focus as themselves in online media for these subcultural groups who are addicted to the ontology of watching movies and provide them with corresponding platforms to write personal words, carry out emotional interactions, and share the writing process. Through the online film festival fan group gathers, across the physical distance of time and space and a more far-reaching psychological distance, feel the microscopic rhythm and emotional energy of each other’s bodies, shape the interactive ritual of watching movies, and practice their own fan culture. For example, the first Peach Blossom Island Online Film Festival held by the well-known film critic Twenty-Two Island is an attempt to address the lack of sense of viewing ritual among film fans during the epidemic. However, it is limited by the copyright of the screening film source and the conditions of “synchronous viewing on the cloud” technology, and the sense of viewing ceremony of film fans is not well satisfied, so it should be regarded as a collective online team building of film fans [14]. From this point of view, the online film festival viewing space has become an optimistic attempt for people to pursue the special charm of watching movies in the era of “movies are dead” and has constructed an interactive ritual chain of online collective carnival. However, limited by online synchronous viewing technology, film copyright restrictions, and copying the viewing link settings of offline film festivals, the key to the further development of online film festivals in the future is how to create an online film festival body based on reality but facing the virtual, and finally feedback the reality of the virtual and real community.

Secondly, in the process of watching online film festivals, reconstructing the sense of group unity, and reshaping the common cultural focus, that is, the culture of movie fans. Officially, due to the lack of a sense of ritual for film fans in the post-epidemic era, it has promoted the spiritual demand of film fans to watch a sense of ritual and ritualized carnival, to make up for and complete the dissatisfaction of the fan group

to produce and share common historical memories. Online film festival viewing is not the same as daily offline film festival viewing, and the subjectivity and interaction of fans have been significantly improved, which is reflected in the technological changes and cultural turns brought about by emerging media such as mobile phone networks. For example, the “Cannes on the Cloud” online film festival is an online film festival jointly curated by “Shumeng”<sup>1</sup>, the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art and the Bilibili website. Talking about the gradual escalation of online film festivals in recent years at the interactive ceremony between guests and audiences, he said: from the beginning of the post-screening communication and the viewing process, guests can only communicate with the audience offline voice and text communication, to guests can interact with the audience in the comment area or barrage area when watching the movie, and then fully realize the communication and interaction between guests and the audience during and after the movie [7]. Online film festival audiences can freely choose to turn the barrage on or off, and even share common emotional ripples through barrage exchanges, and build new emotional connections through repeated reinforcement. The ritual situation constructed by the online film festival with the help of online media can produce real physical interaction and emotional resonance, and is in a process of repeated mention, mutual reference, creation, and recreation, so the interactive ritual sense of film watching by fans can be reconstructed. The identity of fans was confirmed and identified during the online film festival viewing process, and on this basis, the fan culture was reshaped. The end of Lucas Hilderbran’s essay “Cinematic Promiscuity: Cinephilia after Videophilia” can be quoted: The current fan community has awakened from the professional, fanatical purist aesthetic and has begun to move away from a mere fascination with film texts and instead turn to many everyday practices, such as oral film history, Movie collection and movie sharing. Sometimes the fan group is obsessed with film, but at other times it is more about the physical collection and material sharing of the film, which is a unique contradiction between private indulgence and public display [15]. In the interactive ritual chain of the online film festival, the fan group jointly shapes the real emotional resonance, collective honor, and moral balance of the virtual community through the special social field of the “film festival” and emerging media. A series of ritual construction of online film festival viewing gives the film fan group a viewing experience beyond the general sense of watching movies, satisfies the lack of a sense of ritual in the post-epidemic era, and becomes a pilgrimage full of ritual for the film fan group.

### 3.2 Reduction and Enhancement of Physical Interactions

First, based on the sense of viewing ritual that has been destroyed, the online film festival aims to reconstruct the sense of viewing ritual by restoring interactive ceremonies. The second key to constructing a movie-watching interactive ritual lies in the restoration or even strengthening of the physical interaction of the participants in the ceremony. This is reflected in the fact that the ritual situations and ritual links constructed by the offline film festival include micro-interactions at the physical level of the participants in the ceremony. For example, when the audience is stimulated by a common emotional

---

<sup>1</sup> Shumei Technology is a professional online business risk control solution provider, providing technical support for this film festival.

and cultural focus, the audience laughs, tears, applauds, and other physical interactions. However, in the process of watching movies at online film festivals, due to the differentiation of viewing platforms and even viewing venues, the sense of viewing experience is lost, and even in some online theaters, although the construction of offline cinema scenes is restored, the micro-interaction of body rhythm tends to be limited. This is mainly reflected in the ritual behavior of sending barrages before and after the viewing process, “At the moment of editing the barrage, participants will inevitably rub the past situational experience into the text, and each barrage engraved with the personal imprint of the viewer is embedded in an interactive ritual chain composed of many situational experiences...” [16]. Therefore, the current online film festival reflects the interaction of movie fans when watching movies by sending barrage, and the ritual interaction of future online film festivals will comprehensively use the sense of smell, Sensations, etc. satisfy the multiple senses of the fan experience. We can conclude that the online film festival is based on the real needs of people’s lives where the sense of viewing ritual is destroyed and is committed to restoring the physical interaction in the offline film festival due to the importance of the micro-interaction of the body rhythm of the offline film festival. Secondly, the micro-interaction of the physical rhythm of the online film festival is also constructed as a form of expression using barrage due to the influence of new media technologies. Therefore, the ritual act of sending barrage has become the convergence of barrage culture and fan culture in the online media environment. When all the physical senses of the fan group are simplified into the fingers and eyes of the flesh, this also makes the physical interaction of the movie group interaction ceremony of the movie group to a certain extent be critically strengthened, but the future online film festival will obtain a holographic digital body like the metaverse. On the other hand, the online film festival viewing and interaction ceremony creates a public sphere and ritual situation that the public can consciously express, and the fan group comes from all over the world and carries the imprint of each other’s cities, and the virtual reality field of the online film festival interacts with the ceremony, confirms the identity of the fans, and shapes the culture of the fans. The fan community participating in the online film festival is committed to maintaining the sense of viewing ceremony and strengthening the effect of interactive ceremony. In the past, cinema audiences were keen on the dark environment and chose to actively participate in the film screening process to maintain the sense of ritual in the viewing process. In the dark space of the theater, the audience’s eyes are focused on the movie screen, and the fans stitch together a subtle atmosphere in the interweaving of collective and self-emotions, and the cinema space becomes a necessary ritual situation for the interactive ritual chain. As Barthes mentions at the end of *Leaving the Cinema*, Barthes arrives at a “depraved” bodily experience: “It is always obsessed with not the image, but with what is beyond it: the texture of sound, the hall, the darkness, other bodies in the darkness, the light, the entrances and exits [17]. “However, the online film festival not only regards movie viewing as a social behavior, but also uses the focus of mutual attention and emotional connection of the fan group to shape the online film festival viewing behavior into an interactive online carnival ceremony.” On the one hand, for example, in the practice of “Heguanyun Cinema”<sup>2</sup>, “the cloud cinema

<sup>2</sup> Heguanyun Cinema is an online viewing platform launched by Heguan Image. Users can experience offline viewing online.

(mode) enhances the sense of context of regular video website reading by setting and polishing similar to offline theaters such as seat selection, ticket stubs, group photos, and guest explanations...” [18]. Once a movie fan who quits at “Heguanyun Cinema” will be deemed to have given up watching the movie, and the copyright protection ceremony of screen locking the screened film will be performed. On the other hand, the fan group has also developed its own barrage ceremony and maintained “barrage etiquette” at all times in the online film festival viewing space. For example, if any barrage that violates the norm appears, others can report it, block it, and delete it. Through the interactive ritual of “barrage”, people gain a sense of identity and moral belonging, from scattered individuals to unified groups with common cultural symbols, thus obtaining a long-term emotional energy supplement [19]. It is the empowerment of the maintenance of the ritual maintenance of the fan group, and the fans become the guardians of the interactive ceremony in the process of watching the movie, and strengthen the emotional energy of the fans, condense the collective sense of honor of the fans, and consolidate the discourse power system of the fan group.

## 4 Conclusions

In general, as a cultural ritual owner, online film festivals have many ritualized constructions, among which the sense of viewing ritual, as one of the important forms of online film festival viewing, has also undergone a process of construction, dissipation, and reconstruction. The moviegoers of the cinema have formed a fixed sense of viewing ritual for the environment, form, and content of the movie. However, the emergence of new media on the Internet has broken the traditional sense of viewing ritual, and the subjectivity of the moviegoing group has been improved, but the sense of viewing ritual has also disappeared. From another perspective, the online film festival has established a new sense of viewing ritual, which is reflected in the resonance of emotional energy at the same frequency and the convergence of group unity. As an emerging media form, online film festivals will surely bring new changes to traditional media forms such as film festivals, and the community communication of film fan groups relying on online film festivals will also take on a new form. The emergence and popularity of online film festivals can be regarded as an attempt to maximize the advantages of cinema viewing and streaming media viewing, ease the dissipation of the sense of viewing ritual, and make the sense of viewing ritual established based on the cinema environment be reconstructed. It is undeniable that the chain of interactive viewing rituals created by the online film festival has created a unique interactive ceremony and emotional resonance.

## References

1. Collins Randall. *Interactive Ritual Chains*. Beijing: Commercial Press.2017, P.79.
2. Collins Randall. *Interactive Ritual Chains*. Beijing: Commercial Press.2017, PP.95–96.
3. Han, S, Q. Research on body landscape and body communication in the new media era. Zhengzhou University.2019, P.32.
4. Collins Randall. *Interactive Ritual Chains*. Beijing: Commercial Press.2017, PP.100–101.



5. Yu, G, M. The evolutionary logic of future media: the iteration, reorganization and upgrading of “human connection”: from the “scene era” to the “metaverse” to the future of the “heart world”. *Journalism*,2021,10, P.58.
6. Liu, Y, Q. Online and offline film festivals, virtual and real communities. *Contemporary Film*,2021,11, P.30.
7. Collins Randall. *Interactive Ritual Chains*. Beijing: Commercial Press.2017, P.121.
8. Collins Randall. *Interactive Ritual Chains*. Beijing: Commercial Press.2017, PP.62–63.
9. Collins Randall. *Interactive Ritual Chains*. Beijing: Commercial Press.2017, P.158.
10. Liu, Y, Q. Online and offline film festivals, virtual and real communities. *Contemporary Film*,2021,11, P.29.
11. Collins Randall. *Interactive Ritual Chains*. Beijing: Commercial Press.2017, PP.80–81.
12. Collins Randall. *Interactive Ritual Chains*. Beijing: Commercial Press.2017, P.159.
13. Merowitz, J. *Vanishing Regions: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior*.Beijing: Tsinghua University Press.2002, P.50.
14. Duan, X, S&Wo, K, X. Current Situation, Ontology and Strategy——Based on the Observation of the Practice of “Cloud Movie” in China under the Background of the New Crown Pneumonia Epidemic.*Drama and Film and Television Review*,2020,5, P.73.
15. Hilderbrand, L. Cinematic Promiscuity: Cinephilia after Videophilia. *Framework The Journal of Cinema and Media*, Vol.50, No.1/2, SPRING & FALL2009. PP.214–217.
16. 17. Deng, X. Analysis of barrage video from the perspective of interactive ritual chain: A case study of Bilibili.*News*,2015,13, P.18.
17. Barthes, R. *The Rustle of Language*. Richard Howard (trans.). Berkeley&Los Angeles: University of California Press,1989, PP.347–349.
18. Yang, Y, J. Cloud Cinema: An Attempt to Onlineize Art Theaters. *Film and Television Production*.2020,4, P.25.
19. Zhuge, D, W. Analysis of barrage movies in the Internet era——Based on the perspective of interactive ritual chain. *Journalism*,2015,3, P.5.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

