



Entertainment Supremacy: A Dialectical Case Study of Media Communication's Shift from Pluralism to Homogeneity

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Abstract. In the present day, cultural products present an remarkably rich landscape through social media promotion. However, the underlying logic of their success remains consistent within this ever-expanding cultural production. This paper examines the phenomenon of 'homogeneous essence beneath diverse appearances' in contemporary media communication through a dialectical lens. Drawing upon real-world case studies, it reveals how the logic of entertainment transforms formal diversity into repetitive content. Research indicates that while media platforms provide channels for multi-source cultural production, algorithmic logic and commercial pressures compel cultural products to adhere to a singular 'success template,' creating a paradox of 'replication rather than creation.' Drawing upon Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's theory of the 'culture industry' (Kulturindustrie) from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), alongside David Altman's 'media logic' theory and 'information cocoon' mechanism, this paper argues that this 'pseudo-pluralism' phenomenon not only fails to advance cultural innovation but instead weaves tighter information cocoons through diverse forms. This paper contends that identifying the operational mechanisms of entertainment hegemony is a prerequisite for breaking free from the homogenisation trap and achieving genuine cultural pluralism.

Keywords: Media Communication, Pluralism, Homogeneity, Entertainment Supremacy

1 Introduction

With the advancement of internet technology, media has been swept along by technological change, exhibiting a trend towards diversification. From traditional media to today's digital media, people appear to have access to more varied information sources and more diverse media formats. Moreover, individuals have transformed from mere recipients of information into its producers and disseminators. More theoretically speaking, today's decentralised communication networks permit diverse actors to participate in cultural production, dismantling the monopoly of traditional gatekeepers: channel barriers have been eliminated, creative thresholds lowered, and diverse cultural

expressions now circulate freely [1]. From this perspective, one might reasonably expect more open information flows and cultural products. Yet the reality presents a more complex picture: while the sources of cultural products grow increasingly diverse, their underlying logic and forms of expression become increasingly homogeneous. This tension between 'formal diversity' and 'essential isomorphism' constitutes the core issue of this paper.

Taking theatre performances as an example, today's performing arts market encompasses both productions staged on traditional stages and those housed in small theatres and immersive experiences within commercial buildings. The extreme diversification of presentation forms affords audiences greater choice. Yet this quantitative and formal expansion ultimately fails to elevate cultural products as a whole. The relentless replication of successful formulas has instead led cultural products into the trap of 'form prosperity and assembly-line production' – a phenomenon demonstrated by academia as early as 2012, yet showing no signs of improvement today [2].

This paper therefore focuses on the paradox of formal pluralism and substantive isomorphism. Through theoretical synthesis and dialectical analysis of specific cases, it dissects how entertainment hegemony leverages institutionalised media logic and algorithmic technology to transform superficial cultural diversity into substantive cultural homogenisation. It further explores the profound implications of this phenomenon for social cognition and the critical public sphere. This paper will first draw upon Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's theory of the 'culture industry' (Kulturindustrie) from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), while also referencing David Alted's 'media logic' theory and the 'information bubble' mechanism, to investigate the algorithmically woven entertainment hegemony of the present day.

2 Theoretical Framework and Key Concepts

2.1 Culture Industry

The theory of the 'culture industry' (Kulturindustrie) proposed by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) provides a fundamental critical perspective for understanding contemporary entertainment hegemony. They argued that capitalist mass culture is not genuinely 'mass-created', but rather industrially produced entertainment commodities, whose essential characteristic lies in the dialectical unity of standardisation and pseudo-individualisation [3].

In *Reconsidering the Culture Industry*, Adorno emphasised that the products of the culture industry 'are shaped to appear as if they possess personal characteristics, yet are in fact mass-produced according to fixed formulas'[3]. This mechanism of pseudo-individualisation creates the illusion of 'free choice' for consumers, when in reality all choices occur within a systemically predetermined framework. As Adorno observes: 'The entire operation of the culture industry lies in manufacturing and reinforcing this illusion—that consumers believe they are making unique choices when purchasing entertainment products, when in fact all options are variations on the same template' [4].

This paper contends that the 'multi-source' cultural ecology of the digital age represents a contemporary extension of the cultural industry's logic. While the platform

economy claims to democratise cultural production, Adorno's critique remains pertinent: taking stage performances as an example, the 'differences' in theatre productions constitute superficial pseudo-individualisation, while their underlying structures (visual spectacles, emotional narratives, fragmented dissemination) adhere to a wholly standardised entertainment logic. The cultural industry's 'mass production' has transformed into 'viral replication' in the algorithmic era, yet the core mechanisms of standardisation and pseudo-individualisation remain unchanged. More significantly, Adorno observes that the cultural industry neutralises culture's critical potential through entertainment. When immersed in the emotional consumption of 'shock' and 'moved,' audiences lose their capacity to reflect upon the ideological attributes of cultural products.

2.2 Media Logic

David Altheide's theory of 'media logic' is key to understanding the operation of entertainment hegemony. Media logic is defined as 'a set of specific rules, styles, conventions and techniques governing how media select, process and present information' [5,6]. Its core elements include: a pursuit of visibility/dramatic effect (e.g. conflict, emotion, spectacle); a preference for personalisation/narrativization (particularly simplifying complex issues into individual stories); demands for conciseness/immediacy (aimed at accommodating fast-paced consumption); and the prioritisation of entertainment value [5].

The theory's profound insight lies in its assertion that media logic undergoes an 'institutionalisation' process. Initially confined to internal operational frameworks within media organisations, this logic gradually permeates society as media centrality grows. It is internalised and adopted across political, commercial, educational, and even cultural-artistic spheres, becoming a 'meta-logic' these domains must adhere to for media visibility and public attention [7]. Within this context, 'entertainment hegemony' epitomises this highly institutionalised media logic. Cultural producers—regardless of their initial seriousness or depth of intent—find themselves compelled to 'transcode' their expressions into formats compliant with media logic to survive within the attention economy: shorter, more intuitive, more emotionally charged, and more dramatic. Consequently, diverse cultural forms are subsumed under a single set of representational rules, where differences are smoothed over, depth is flattened, and critical engagement is supplanted by entertainment.

2.3 Information Cocoon

Cass Sunstein's concept of the 'information cocoon' describes how individuals or groups confine themselves within an information-enclosed space akin to a silkworm's cocoon due to selective information preferences [8]. In the algorithm-driven Web 2.0 era, this process has become automated, precision-engineered and normalised. Platform algorithms continuously profile users based on historical behavioural data (clicks, dwell time, likes, shares), predictively pushing similar content to maximise user engagement and platform stickiness [9, 10].

This mechanism forms a classic collusion with the institutionalised logic of entertainment media. Firstly, algorithms inherently favour recommending easily consumable content that triggers strong, immediate emotions (such as excitement, anger, or pleasure) – precisely the hallmark of entertainment-oriented material. Secondly, it creates a self-reinforcing feedback loop: user engagement with a particular form of entertainment-oriented culture prompts the algorithm to push more homogeneous content; users become immersed, further cementing their consumption habits and cognitive preferences; producers, seeking traffic, redouble efforts to create content aligning with these preference patterns. The result is that audiences become trapped within algorithmically woven 'cultural silos' of highly homogeneous content, while cultural production itself remains confined within limited, proven 'formulas for success'. It seems like that diverse and complex cultural expressions typically demand patient appreciation, though in practice they face systematic exclusion in dissemination and tend to be habitually overlooked in consumption. This transcends mere individual choice, as information isolation transforms from a psychological phenomenon into a technology-enabled systemic filtering mechanism. It then becomes a kind of technological barrier reinforcing entertainment hegemony and obstructing the circulation of cultural diversity.

3 Case Analysis

The phenomenon within China's dance drama field can be a typical case. In 2021, China Oriental Performing Arts Group's production *The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting* drew inspiration from the famous Song Dynasty painting *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains*, creating a 'phenomenon-level' cultural product and introducing the term 'dance-poetry drama'. It became a benchmark for the contemporary expression of traditional culture. Three years later in 2024, the China Oriental Performing Arts Group launched *Yongle Weiyang*, drawing upon the historical construction of the Ming Dynasty's Forbidden City. Employing a highly similar creative approach, it entered the market and swiftly attracted widespread attention. On the surface, these represent two distinct cultural sources (painting and architecture) and two independent artistic creations. However, deeper analysis reveals they follow almost identical 'success formulas'—from thematic strategy and narrative structure to visual presentation and promotion methods, the latter clearly replicates the former's model. More significantly, the artistic directors of *Yongle Weiyang*, Zhou Liyia and Han Zhen, were the very same individuals behind *The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting*. This self-replication by the identical production team within the same institution further illuminates how media logic overrides artistic logic, reducing cultural production to a standardised assembly line.

The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting revisits the Northern Song Dynasty through the contemporary lens of the 'scroll-unfurlers', bearing witness to the young painter Wang Ximeng's creation of *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains*. This production precisely aligns with the core tenets of media logic: in its IP selection strategy, it leverages a top-tier traditional cultural symbol with broad recognition to lower audience accessibility barriers. As a masterpiece of the Chinese painting, *A Thousand Li of*

Rivers and Mountains possesses a widespread cultural recognition, providing audience with foundational understanding. Visually, the work creates the powerful points of recognition through its vivid colour imagery, the dancers' poses, and multimedia stage installations. The iconic "verdant waist" movement has become a classic gesture perfectly suited to short-form video dissemination. Emotionally, the narrative transforms historical creation into a contemporary story, while establishing an emotional stance for cultural heritage preservation. Within the star-making mechanism, the production propelled lead performers such as Meng Qingyang and Zhang Han into the public eye, transforming them from professional dancers into 'dance stars' with formidable audience appeal. The exponential growth of their social media followings became a pivotal driver for the work's sustained dissemination. Collectively, these elements formed a replicable 'success template' swiftly adopted by media logic.

Yongle Weiyang chronicles the construction of the Forbidden City and the fates of countless artisans and labourers involved in this monumental undertaking. Its narrative logic exhibits a high degree of systematic homogeneity with *The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting*. At the level of IP strategy, the series' selection of the Forbidden City—precursor to today's Palace Museum—holds greater audience appeal than *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains*. This reflects identical selection logic: choosing the most widely recognised symbols of traditional culture to mitigate the risk of potential obscurity. Visually, the production translates abstract cultural concepts into identifiable cultural symbols, employing traditional motifs like coffered ceilings to capture the audience's attention, resulting in visual symmetry rather than innovation. In its physical narrative, the production invents labour-based movements like the 'Artisan Dance' and 'Construction Dance,' emphasising bodily geometry and visual memorability rather than developing a distinctive choreographic vocabulary. Emotionally, it adheres to a 'temporal-spatial synchronisation' dramatic model, mirroring the heritage preservation theme of *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains*. Technologically, the production relies heavily on multimedia spectacles to compensate for narrative density, prioritising 'immersive experience' as its selling point. Most significantly, its star system directly enlists established celebrities, leveraging their existing fanbases to transform 'star-making through art' into 'celebrity-driven promotion' – achieving entertainment logic's complete permeation from content to individual.

From this, it is evident that this internal self-replication within the same theatre company more acutely highlights the tension between artistic autonomy and commercial logic. As a national-level institution, China Oriental Performing Arts Group possesses abundant resources that can be used to support genuine artistic exploration. However, it has chosen the safest path: replicating proven successful models. As evidenced above, the formal differences between these two works create an appearance of innovation, but their inherent homogeneity reveals the operational mechanisms of entertainment hegemony. This expansion in quantity and form cannot enhance the overall quality of cultural products. On the contrary, the mechanical replication of successful formulas traps cultural products within the cocoon of form-rich assembly-line production. As Adorno suggests, the culture industry employs a dialectic of standardisation and pseudo-individualisation, rendering cultural products formulaic, predictable, and devoid of genuine artistic value [3,4]. Yongle Weiyang adopted the proven formula of

The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting, precisely reflecting the process of 'standardisation' described by Adorno. More pointedly, this replication occurred within the same creative team, indicating that media logic has been deeply internalised as an instinctive creative impulse. This fundamentally reveals artistic judgement yielding to popularity, becoming an unquestioned 'rational choice'.

The operational mechanisms of social media platforms further reveal how algorithms construct diverse information bubbles. On social media platforms, content under tags such as 'dance drama' appears abundant. This superficial flourishing is often viewed as evidence of 'artistic accessibility' and 'traditional cultural revival'. In reality, the platform's recommendations trap users within specific 'success templates'. While users seem to broaden their content horizons, they remain locked in a repetitive cycle within a homogeneous consumption system. Algorithms continuously recommend similar content based on dwell time and interaction behaviour, creating a paradox where 'greater diversity deepens isolation', formally rich surfaces mask the singularity of cognitive pathways. This mechanism proves more insidious than the traditional information silos described by Sunstein, as users lack awareness of their confinement, instead actively deepening cognitive homogenisation under the illusion of exploration. In the algorithm-driven Web 2.0 era, this process has become automated, precise and routine. Platform algorithms continuously profile users based on historical behaviour data, predictively pushing similar content to maximise user engagement and platform stickiness [11].

4 Discussion

Recognising entertainment hegemony is the first step towards breaking its grip. The preceding analysis demonstrates that platforms do not utilise diverse forms to foster new thinking; rather, they employ such forms to weave ever-tighter information silos. This replication rather than creation is a hallmark symptom of entertainment hegemony. Indeed, innovative content may emerge within cultural production, yet under the relentless reinforcement of algorithms, audiences become ensnared by fixed 'viral hit' narratives. Innovative elements lacking algorithmic endorsement are weakened, facing a stark choice: either conform to algorithmic logic or be abandoned by media dissemination. The commercial nature of cultural products further drives them towards algorithmic validation, forming a closed loop of 'algorithm reinforcement—commercial convergence—innovation extinction'. Breaking this negative cycle first requires users to understand the mechanisms shaping their data profiles. Second, content creation must embrace value diversification, integrating qualitative humanistic dimensions like historical accuracy and artistic innovation, rather than defining success only by quantifiable metrics. Most crucially, critical media literacy must be cultivated to identify "pseudo-diversity." Only when creators break free from the cycle of self-replication and the audience develop genuine media literacy can cultural production truly return to artistic logic.

5 Conclusions

This paper uses case studies to reveal the dialectical core of cultural products being bound by media logic, a superficial diversity that is fundamentally homogenized. On the surface, social media platforms promote cultural diversity by embracing diverse participants and formats. However, in essence, entertainment hegemony converts formal diversity into repetitive content through algorithmic logic and commercial pressures, thereby constructing a pseudo-diversity ideology. Integrating pluralist theories, this paper constructs a critical framework to dissect the essence of contemporary platform culture. It exposes the nature of the 'algorithmic bubble' as a novel control mechanism: platforms weave tighter cognitive loops through diverse forms, luring users into illusions of choice while stripping them of genuine freedom. This analysis provides theoretical grounding for media literacy education, aiming to cultivate the public's critical capacity to discern 'pseudo-diversity'. It offers policymakers insights for re-examining the public nature of platform algorithms and furnishes cultural institutions with strategic grounds to resist homogenisation pressures stemming from entertainment hegemony.

However, this paper focuses on the specific art form of dance-poetry theatre, excluding other cultural production domains. Furthermore, the theoretical analysis emphasises critical deconstruction, with the exploration of alternative practical pathways requiring deeper investigation. Moreover, this study has not tracked the long-term market impact and audience feedback of Yongle Wei Yang.

Future research may continue examining variations in entertainment hegemony's operation across cultural domains, or trace the lifecycle and iterative mechanisms of 'successful templates'. In essence, identifying entertainment hegemony's operational mechanisms constitutes merely the first step. The true challenge lies in formulating and practising cultural production and dissemination modes that transcend algorithmic logic, ensuring diversity manifests not only formally but fundamentally.

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