



Children's Entertainment Communication Based on Content Analysis and Online Observation

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Abstract. In the internet era, children's entertainment has developed quickly. At the same time, problems such as inappropriate picture books and children entering adult online communities have received growing attention. This paper discusses the value orientation of children's entertainment products, the standards used to evaluate them, and children's real experiences in the digital environment. The research combines content analysis, online observation, semi-structured interviews, and secondary data analysis, including children's videos on Bilibili and parent posts on Xiaohongshu. The results show that online media content affects children's language use and social interaction. Parents mainly care about educational value, entertainment value, and safety when choosing entertainment products for children. The paper also finds that children's entertainment is influenced by both direct control and indirect guidance, which may limit children's independence online. This paper suggests that platforms should protect children while also giving them more space for communication, exploration, and self-expression.

Keywords: Childrens Entertainment Communication, Values; Content Analysis, Online Observation, Convergence Theory.

1 Introduction

Education has always been a field of particular concern for parents; in the internet era, children's entertainment has emerged as a significant force in this domain. Currently, children's participation in online communities has expanded in scope and frequency, with their language, behavior, and values increasingly shaped by the digital environment. Still, children's entertainment products suffer from issues such as homogenization and inadequate value guidance, and high-quality products are sometimes reported and removed due to parents' limited understanding. Meanwhile, existing social platforms and media lack dedicated interactive platforms for children, leaving them essentially "stumbling into" adult-oriented online communities and facing the risk of being expelled from the paradise of innocence [1]. The Disappearance of Childhood.

Studying these phenomena enables parents to better engage in their children's "digital childhood" development, provides a reference for content governance on children's entertainment platforms, and calls for the emergence of more high-quality children's entertainment products to foster a more child-friendly cyberspace in the new era.

This paper focuses on three core questions: First, who should be responsible for evaluating and reviewing the quality of children's entertainment products? Second, how exactly do social media influence children's language use, values, and social behaviors? Third, is it feasible to establish an online interactive space or entertainment platform specifically designed for children?

This paper will conduct empirical research by combining content analysis, web-based observation, semi-structured interviews and other methods of secondary data collection. Through coding analysis of the materials, thematic extraction and cross-verification, this paper systematically studies the value attributes of children's entertainment products, parents' evaluation criteria, and children's actual experiences in the digital space. This paper preliminarily addresses the above three research questions through empirical data, aiming to reveal the phenomenon of "dual discipline" in children's cultural and entertainment communication, explore the application of classical communication theories in the algorithmic era, and provide theoretical references as well as practical suggestions for building child-friendly digital spaces.

2 Literature Review

Gerbner and Gross put forward the idea of cultural assimilation in 1976. It holds that repeated exposure to television content can alter the way people view life, thereby forming a "media-cultivated audience", and this theory has been frequently applied to explain how violent media affects the values of this group in the age of television. Recently, domestic scholars have continuously focused on the effect of short videos on minors [2]. Research shows that short videos have become the main form of entertainment and leisure for young children, and algorithm-driven recommendations have created new patterns of Internet addiction. Zhuang Xinhao and Bu Xiting have pointed out problems with minors' modes on short-video platforms, including age-inappropriate content, homogenization, and a lack of user targeting [3]. According to the 2024 study, online herd behaviour and imitation among minors have also been identified, and exposure to the Internet may be linked to social anxiety and values confusion. The above results provide evidence that supports the idea of a "media content $\rightarrow$ children's values" pathway, and specifically indicate that although children's consumption of media in the algorithm era is passive, its form has only changed.

Most of the previous studies have focused on the media environment of the television era and assumed relatively stable content and passive audience reception. However, in the algorithm-driven Internet Age, children are exposed to very fragmented and personalised content that they can actively select by swiping on the screen. Du Tao pointed out that algorithm recommendations are shaping the minds of young people without good judgment [4]. Two-way Embodiment: Algorithmic Power and Resistance Practices in Adolescent Daily Life. Still, the explanatory power of acculturation theory in this new context remains inadequately explored, especially when algorithms simultaneously serve as both "recommenders" and "aculturizers." This paper looks at how acculturation theory applies to children's short-video consumption within the algorithmic era, proposing the concept of "fragmented acculturation" — where children are no

longer shaped by singular content systems but rather subtly influenced by algorithmically generated "content flows."

The Uses and Gratifications Theory was systematically proposed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch in 1973, emphasizing that audiences are active media users who select media content based on their own needs to achieve specific goals [5]. Recently, this theory has been widely applied in the field of short video research. Still, most existing studies assume that audience needs are clear and autonomous. For the special group of children, their "active choices" are often strongly influenced by external factors such as parental intervention and platform algorithmic guidance. Research by the Youth Media Literacy Branch of the China Education Association indicates that insufficient parental accompaniment, guidance, and regulation are the primary causes of childhood internet addiction. More engaging content formats like short videos and live streaming, combined with the targeted recommendations of algorithms, make children more susceptible to addiction. The distinction between "active" and "passive" engagement is highly blurred.

Current research has insufficient attention to the phenomenon of "guided gratification" in children media use, focusing instead on how short-video platforms collect childrens data through algorithms and discussing privacy risks [6].

This paper will reveal the complex interactions among self-needs, parental control, and algorithm recommendations in children media selection behaviors through interviews with children and their parents, as well as online observations.

The Agenda-Setting Theory was proposed by McCombs and Shaw in 1972. Its core premise is that media influence what the public "think" rather than "how they think" by highlighting specific issues in their reporting [7]. Recently, scholars have begun focusing on changes in agenda-setting driven by algorithms. Research on algorithm-driven short video news agenda-setting indicates that algorithm recommendations are gradually replacing the agenda-setting function of traditional mass media. Domestic scholars have also explored the evolution of agenda-setting theory in the algorithmic era. Children's understanding of algorithm recommendations has become highly sophisticated, enabling them to recognize the networked, emotional, and commercial characteristics of recommendation engines. These studies provide crucial insights into the mechanisms of agenda-setting in the algorithmic age.

Still, in the field of children's entertainment content, the multi-agent game theory of agenda-setting has not been systematically investigated. Particularly, whether the phenomenon of "parental reports leading to content removal" can be interpreted as a unique form of reverse agenda-setting remains largely unexplored in existing literature. Research on video-sharing platforms has revealed that children unconsciously adapt to algorithmic logic, such as repeating specific actions to gain likes [8]. Its recommendation logic also shapes the agenda visible to children. By analyzing parent discussion posts and several platform moderation cases, this paper discusses how children's entertainment agendas are formed online. Different groups affect this process in different ways. Platform algorithms influence what children often watch. Parents also try to guide online content. At the same time, children develop their own interests through viewing, commenting, and interaction.

Neil Postman argued that media technology weakened the boundary between children and adults. Television was one example of this change. In the digital era, the situation has become more obvious. Zeng Xin pointed out that minors today face problems such as low-quality online content and dependence on recommendation systems. The 2024 Report on Internet Use by Minors in China also shows that children are using the internet at younger ages [9]. Online imitation among peers is becoming more common as well. Some researchers believe this may affect children's emotions and values.

Most current studies focus more on policy issues or large social trends. Fewer studies examine children's entertainment communication as a complete process that includes production, dissemination, reception, and governance. Some studies mainly discuss legal protection and regulation. Research on children's own online experiences is still limited.

Based on these studies, this paper combines cultivation theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and agenda-setting theory. It also discusses a "dual discipline" framework that includes direct control and indirect influence. Through content analysis, online observation, and interviews, this paper explores children's entertainment communication in the algorithm era.

3 Research Design

This paper uses four methods: content analysis, online observation, semi-structured interviews, and secondary data analysis. These methods were combined to understand children's online behavior from different perspectives.

First, the author observed short-video platforms, comment sections under children's animations, and related discussions on Xiaohongshu. Some natural language and interaction behavior were recorded during observation.

Second, the study included short interviews with an 8-year-old child and his mother. The interviews focused on children's daily online activities, parental supervision, and opinions about "quality content." Third, the paper used secondary materials such as Report on Internet Use by Minors in China to understand broader trends in children's media use [1]. For sample selection, videos were mainly collected from Bilibili's children section. Five popular videos were selected for analysis. Parent discussion posts came from Xiaohongshu topics related to children's apps and entertainment products. Some child comments under the videos were also collected as examples. During coding, different materials were organized separately. Video materials focused on content style, values, and language features. Parent posts mainly focused on recommendation reasons and safety concerns. Interview materials focused more on children's preferences and parents' attitudes. After coding, repeated themes and common keywords were summarized. Representative examples were selected for discussion. Compared with traditional face-to-face interviews, online observation helped capture more natural expressions from children.

4 Research Result

4.1 Macro Trends in Children's Media Usage

Based on secondary data such as The Fifth National Survey on Minors Internet Usage (2023), this paper finds that children in China are using online media at younger ages [10]. Internet use among children has also become more common in recent years. In 2022, the number of underage internet users in China exceeded 193 million. The internet penetration rate reached 97.2%. Among primary school students, the rate was over 95%. Smart device use also continued to increase. These figures show that children are already an important group in the online environment. Because of this, online platforms may need to pay more attention to children's actual needs instead of simply treating them as younger versions of adult users.

4.2 The Impact of Media Content Values on Children's Language and Social Behavior

This section analyzed fifty child comments from five Bilibili children's videos. Interview materials were also used for support. The results show that themes such as competition and obedience appear frequently in popular children's videos. These values also appear in children's daily communication. Some children repeated words, expressions, or interaction styles from online videos during interviews and comment interactions. Among the five selected videos, four mainly focused on entertainment content. Fast-paced plots, exaggerated reactions, and repeated catchphrases appeared quite often. Some children also copied similar speaking styles in comment sections.

At the same time, only one is educational or science popularization content. In terms of linguistic features, both videos contained internet slang such as "YYDS" and "emoled," while one video featured adult-oriented expressions like "a workers day." More critically, these linguistic patterns were frequently imitated and reused by children in the comment sections. Among fifty child comments, the author observed that some children used fan community terms like "single recommendation" and "face-to-face" in their personal profiles, with some even using expressions clearly beyond their age group, such as "going to school like a bull or horse." At the same time, children exhibited spontaneous social interactions, such as tagging classmates or friends via "@" to watch the videos in the comments.

The child interview further corroborates the aforementioned observations. During the interview, eight-year-old Xiao A explicitly stated: "I enjoy watching those funny videos where people say YYDS; I've learned to say it too, and all my classmates do the same." This statement directly shows that children are consciously absorbing and expressing the media content they encounter, and the content presented by short videos and other online media is shaping their social language and behavioral patterns.

4.3 Parents' Criteria for Evaluating Children's Social Media Use

This part of the study looks at ten parent discussion posts on Xiaohongshu and interview materials from parents. The results show that parents mainly care about three things when choosing entertainment products for children: educational value, entertainment value, and safety. Educational value appeared most often in the posts. Many parents

mentioned ideas such as “learning while playing,” “improving concentration,” and “helping children gain knowledge.” Entertainment value was also important. Some parents believed interesting stories and funny content could help children relax. Safety was another common concern. Several parents mentioned that they preferred apps without too many advertisements or pop-up links. Parents were also worried about problems related to online entertainment. Addiction, vulgar content, and hidden charges were discussed many times. In comments about “good content,” parents often used words such as “positive,” “meaningful,” and “helpful for thinking.” One parent wrote on Xiaohongshu that her child liked watching meaningless comedy videos. She felt those videos were not useful, but the more she tried to stop him, the more interested he became. This example shows that parents often face difficulties when trying to balance education and children's interests. The interview with Xiao A's mother shows a similar situation. She said that she first checks whether an app has too many ads. Then she considers whether the app can provide some educational value. She also said she usually avoids purely entertainment-based apps because she worries they may influence children negatively. These examples show that parents do not judge children's media use from only one perspective. They hope children can stay safe online, but they also want entertainment products to provide learning value.

5 Discussion

The findings of this paper can be connected with several classical communication theories. At the same time, the current online environment also shows some new characteristics.

First, cultivation theory is still useful in the algorithm era. The study shows that children often imitate expressions, slang, and behavior they see in online videos. Some children also repeat online language in daily communication. This means media content still affects children's thinking and behavior. However, the situation today is different from the television era. In the past, audiences mainly received stable media content from television programs. Now children watch short videos through recommendation systems. The content changes quickly, and children can continuously swipe for new videos. Because of this, children are influenced by many fragmented pieces of information instead of one stable media environment. This paper therefore suggests that cultivation in the algorithm era is more fragmented. Algorithms repeatedly push similar content to children, and children are gradually influenced during this process. Second, Uses and Gratifications Theory becomes more complicated when applied to children. Children do make active choices online. They select videos they enjoy and interact in comment sections. But their behavior is also strongly affected by algorithms and parents. Some parents have reduced their children's screen time or blocked specific apps, for instance. At the same time, the recommendation system will continue to recommend popular content for children. Therefore, it is difficult to distinguish clearly between “active choice” and “passive influence”; children's behaviour online is often the result of multiple factors, such as their own interests, parental guidance and platform recommendations.

Thirdly, the agency of agenda-setting in children's entertainment communication is no longer limited to one side. Traditional Agenda-Setting Theory mainly focused on the impact of mass media. Platforms, parents and children are all affecting the flow of online discussions in different ways now.

Platforms decide which content children are more likely to see via recommendation systems. Parents can also have the videos and online comments uploaded by the platform reported. Children are also participating themselves. They post comments, share videos and talk to friends online. They are used to make topics for discussion.

Based on the above analysis, this paper presents a "dual-discipline" scenario of children's online life. On the one hand, it has direct operation. Parental supervision, youth modes, time limits and content review systems are all included. At the same time, there is an indirect effect. Algorithms continue to recommend some values, behaviours and consumption habits for children.

The above two kinds of influence often occur simultaneously. Although the children are somewhat independent online, many of their choices are still influenced indirectly. Some "child-friendly" modes have focused too much on limitations and paid less attention to the social and emotional needs of children.

Generally speaking, this paper does not restrict future children's entertainment platforms to only the goal of protection. Provide children with sufficient space for communication, exploration and self-expression as well. Parents should avoid only regulating. Greater interaction between parents and children can help improve the children's online behaviour.

6 Conclusion

Content analysis, online observation, interviews and secondary data analysis are used in this paper to study children's entertainment communication in the digital age. Based on the above data, more and more young children are using online media at a younger age. Online videos have changed the language habits and social behaviour of children. Parents generally focus on the educational value, entertainment features and safety of entertainment products for children.

The paper also proposes adjusting the classical communication theories in the algorithm era. Children are exposed to media content and recommendation systems in their daily lives through various means. At the same time, children can choose and talk about online materials independently to some extent.

The dual-discipline idea in this paper is that children's online lives are influenced by both direct control and indirect algorithmic effects. Therefore, the children's entertainment platform should aim to achieve a balance of protection and independence, rather than focusing solely on restrictions.

This study may offer some references for platform governance and media education of parents. Future research will expand the scale of the sample and investigate children's comprehension of algorithms in more depth.

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