

An Analysis of the Production Mechanism of TV Stations' Serious Programs in the Era of Excessive Entertainment

Jie Li

School of Economics and Management
Communication University of China
Beijing, China

Abstract—Nowadays, TV programs generally present the phenomenon of excessive entertainment, which conveys too much entertainment information and forms a tendency of “generalization”. Even social education and news programs which have relatively serious themes are gradually produced in the form of drama and entertainment in order to meet the needs of audience. However, with the intensification of market competition, the style of TV program content has gradually decreased and tended to be vulgar and assimilated. In recent years, some serious TV programs have gained popularity among the audience, but there are still many problems. This paper takes Reading Time as an example to analyze the original production mechanism of serious programs, summarize the reasons for the change of the mechanism of serious programs, and put forward some suggestions for establishing flexible mechanisms from three aspects: the state, television stations and society.

Keywords—*extensive entertainment; serious programs; production mechanism*

I. INTRODUCTION

TV programs can be classified into different categories according to different classification criteria, such as program content, form, audience, etc. Although the classification of TV programs usually adopts two basic methods: the content-based “inside method” and the form-based “outer method”, it is still impossible to define the serious programs clearly on this basis. Serious programs can be considered to spread the content of high-quality culture and social melody in the form of TV programs to inspire and influence the thoughts and behaviors of the audience, such as news programs focusing on topics and comments, social and educational programs focusing on knowledge and services.

In general, serious programs are opposite to entertainment programs and have some commonalities. In terms of content, the themes of serious programs are mostly to publicize mainstream social values, codes of conduct and ethics, advocate mainstream culture and national culture, and focus on cultural accumulation. In the terms of form, the serious programs are mainly television interview programs, documentary programs, cultural programs. In the terms of

style, the serious programs are stable, serious and rigorous. The audiences are largely with a certain cultural literacy.

Since the content of serious programs requires their audiences to have certain cultural qualities, it indirectly leads to the relatively narrow scope of dissemination and popularization of serious programs among the public, which cannot be recognized by the public. This also makes it impossible for serious programs to obtain huge economic benefits through high ratings in the current market economy, which in turn restricts the development of serious programs.

II. THE VALUE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF SERIOUS PROGRAMS

At present, the extensive entertainment phenomenon in TV programs is very common. Various kinds of entertainment programs are emerging in an endless stream, which are filled with too many entertainment contents and show a trend of “generalization”. In order to obtain high ratings and market share, China Central Television and other provincial and municipal TV stations have invested a lot of manpower and financial resources in the production of entertainment programs. Even social education and news programs with relatively serious themes are gradually produced in the form of jokes, star participation and entertainment to meet the needs of the audience. The style of serious content in TV programs is expressed in the form of entertainment, which will inevitably affect the communication effect of values and core content conveyed by the programs. If the relationship between entertainment and seriousness cannot be accurately coordinated, the problem of vulgarization and convergence of TV programs will arise.

The reasons for the emergence of excessive entertainment tendency in TV programs can be roughly divided into three aspects: First, the characteristics of the TV media itself. As a medium for mass communication, television itself has the function of entertaining the public. The content of its TV programs must be popular. In “Amusing Ourselves to Death”, Postman pointed out that TV media has become the best carrier of pan-entertainment with its powerful entertainment features. Second, according to the

"use and gratifications approach", the audience watches TV programs to relax and obtain spiritual enjoyment. In the competition with new media such as the Internet, TV media can only achieve a place if they continue to produce entertainment programs to meet the needs of the audience and attract the attention of the public. Third, according to Wright's "Four Functions" theory, an important function of mass communication is to provide entertainment. Therefore, the TV media must have entertainment features.

With the gradual vulgarity of entertainment programs, serious programs appear to be more valuable and meaningful. Serious programs can not only ensure high-quality production, but also convey national culture and express the humanistic spirit. It not only pays attention to the spiritual life of the audience, but also focuses on the value of human nature. At the same time, serious programs can also play the role of social education and moral demonstration.

III. THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION MECHANISM AND TRADITION OF THE SERIOUS PROGRAMS IN CHINA

In 1996, CCTV launched the first reading program in China, "Reading Time," which set off a wave of reading programs. TV stations around the country have followed to produce similar programs, such as Shanghai TV's "Reading Gallery", Beijing TV's "Huaxia Shuyuan", and Hunan TV's "Love Night Book Pavilion". "Reading Time" invites a large number of well-known scholars, writers and critics at home and abroad to be interviewed as guests and interact with the host to broaden the reader's thinking. The program has attracted considerable attention with its unique form and high cultural content, and gradually has a relatively fixed audience group, which has a certain social impact.

With the launch of the last elimination warning system in the CCTV column, the ranking of "Reading Time" was in the last place and faces the threat of being eliminated. Later, "Reading Time" was changed to CCTV's science and technology channel. In order to improve the audience rating, the program adjusted the program form and the original broadcasting mode. In September 2004, "Reading Time" was replaced by the new column "Time" after several revisions.

There are many reasons for the cancellation of the "Reading Time" column. The objective reason is that the current society does not form a strong atmosphere of reading, and the audience of the program can only be limited to specific groups. The popularity of science and education channels is not high, and some fixed audiences are lost because they cannot watch "Reading Time". The subjective reason is that after the revision, the broadcast time of "Reading Time" was scheduled to broadcast on Saturday's prime time, while the entertainment program in the same period attracted a large number of audiences, and "Reading Time" could not compete with it for the audience. In addition, the production of the program did not timely locate and modify the program to meet the changing needs of the audience, and the promotion of the program was not strong. Like "Reading Time", the several reading sections which are mentioned above have also been stopped.

IV. REASONS FOR THE CHANGE OF SERIOUS PROGRAM MECHANISM

Nowadays, the original mechanism of serious program in TV stations has been damaged. More and more serious programs have begun to pursue innovation of form. And many new programs appear which choose different perspectives, use star elements and adopt the mode of reality show, such as news programs that choose the perspective of civilians to report people's livelihood as well as social and educational programs that use the method of storytelling to spread knowledge. However, many programs begin to select some gimmicky and vulgar subjects, play the stimulating pictures and even report some social problems excessive to express some certain ideas.

The change of the production mechanism of serious program has certain inevitability. It is the final result that the TV station complies with the development of media marketization. Television media not only has the obligation to provide information services to the public, but also has the right to obtain economic benefits through the production of television programs. Popular culture is more likely to attract the attention of different audiences and thus dominates the media market. Due to the seriousness and professionalism of its content, serious programs can only have a fixed audience and are in a disadvantaged position in the market competition. If serious programs want to gain a place in the media market, they must change themselves to adapt to the needs of the market.

V. SUGGESTIONS ON ESTABLISHING FLEXIBLE MECHANISMS

A. The Level of State

First, the relevant national departments should issue appropriate policies and regulations to manage the media market, regulate the production of TV stations, pay attention to the quality of program content, and encourage the production of serious programs. In the "Opinions on Further Strengthening the Program Management of TV Star Integrated Channels" issued by the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People's Republic of China in 2012, which is short for the "Entertainment Restriction Ordinance", it requires that the Satellite Television should increase the broadcasting volume of news programs, regulate and control the broadcasting of some types of programs, and set up moral construction columns at the same time. The publication of the "Entertainment Restriction Ordinance" prevents the excessive entertainment and vulgar tendency of some programs and promotes the positive development of TV screens.

Second, the government should set up a fund to subsidize serious programs and encourage their development. Serious programs are always in a disadvantaged position in the media market because of their content and other limitations, but they are an effective way to reflect the national morality and disseminate knowledge and culture. If serious programs are to be self-financing and operate their own development,

they will not work. Since 2004, China has vigorously promoted the animation industry. All provinces and cities have issued relevant supporting policies to promote the development of the animation industry. By analogy, if the state strengthens its support for serious programs, the economic effects and ratings will not be taken into account in the production of TV programs, which will inevitably promote its development.

Third, the government should also support the establishment of public television stations that are not for profit, make full use of national resources, consider and balance the needs of different audiences, and provide high-quality educational, art, and literary programs. Although local TV stations now have their own public channels, they are essentially different from public television stations in Western countries. China's public channel can be defined as the channels which are undertaken by provincial TV stations, produce a set of public programs for broadcasting in cities and countries under their jurisdiction, and reserve a certain period of time for TV stations of cities and countries to broadcast self-made news and special programs. It is different from the overseas public TV stations. The overseas public TV stations are new forms which are different from the state-owned and private TV channels. They refuse the commercial operation, care about public welfare, pay attention to vulnerable groups and minority groups. And its meaning lies in the recipients of the media (audience).

B. The Level of TV Stations

Nowadays, TV stations depend on the comparison of ratings to decide the future of programs, and give the right of choice to the market. The audience's preferences determine the content of the program. At the end of 2002, CCTV launched the final elimination system for ratings, and many programs with high-quality content were eliminated or revised because of low ratings. The final elimination system of ratings has its positive effect, which can optimize and integrate the resources of TV stations, urge the improvement of program quality to make it more in line with the needs of the audience. In summary, there are many drawbacks. This system makes many serious programs with connotation and value lose the motivation to continue producing because of the ratings. The production of TV programs is gradually becoming more and more entertaining, and the ratings become the only standard to measure TV programs.

The TV station should set up a new evaluation system that can balance all aspects of factors, and comprehensively measure the existence value of a program. In 2011, CCTV abolished the final elimination system of the column and launched a new comprehensive evaluation system. The evaluation indicators of the new TV column include "Guiding Power", "Influence", "Communication Power" and "Professionalism". The "Guiding Power" and "Influence" indicators are evaluated for the social effects of the columns. The "Communication Power" assesses the market effects of the column. And the "Professionalism" assesses the professional level of column production. This new evaluation system ensures that serious programs are not

eliminated because of low ratings, while encouraging the production and development of serious programs.

C. The Level of Social System

With the continuous development and improvement of the market economy, the cultural industry has been booming, such as the animation industry and the film industry. Correspondingly, the cultural industry also has many problems due to market competition and other factors. In order to attract the public, the content of cultural products on the market is vulgarized and the production techniques are shoddy. These problems require corresponding cultural management systems to regulate, but China's cultural management system is relatively lagging behind, unable to meet the needs of cultural industry development. The disappearance of serious programs is also related to the backwardness of the cultural management system. Without certain policy support, serious programs will not be able to occupy a certain share of market competition because of the limitations of the audience.

The scholars of Frankfurt School first proposed the concept of "cultural industry" and believed that the cultural industry was the mass culture. Its products are duplicated mass production with certain standards. The cultural industry not only makes the culture itself lack creativity and revolution, but also causes the public to obey and degenerate. With the development of the market economy, the TV industry has gradually become modeled. In order to obtain high ratings, TV programs have become homogenized. The same type of programs attracts the attention of the audience through different editing techniques and arrangements. The audience was also affected by the phenomenon of homogenization, lost the judgment on the content of the program, and blindly pursued these programs, which further led to the proliferation of these homogenized programs.

VI. CONCLUSION

In recent years, China has begun to build a "cultural power" as a long-term strategy, fully support the development of cultural industries, and focus on the development of a diverse culture. However, due to the influence of the market economy, the development of the cultural industry will have some drawbacks, such as the disappearance of serious TV programs. How to ensure the production of serious programs and make the public better access to public services? The government should issue relevant policies to support the development of non-profit programs on TV stations so that they do not have to cater to the audience for the pressure of survival. At the same time, public television stations can be established and developed to truly become a platform for all people to share social resources, and to ensure the serious content proportion of TV programs, such as the BBC television station and the PBS television station.

REFERENCES

- [1] Wang Suhua. "The basic classification of TV programs in China". Xinjiang Press, vol.4, 1997, pp 37-40.
- [2] Wang Yilin, "The rise and reflection of Chinese serious TV programs". Southern TV Journal, vol.6, 2017, pp 49-51.
- [3] Xiao Hong, Fang Wei, "The game of Internet-made variety shows between serious and entertainment". Journal of Journalism Research, vol.19, 2015, pp 180.
- [4] Su Le, "How serious TV programs attract people". Nanfeng Window, vol.26, 2011, pp 14.
- [5] Zhang Jun, "Lack of public interest in public channel". Renmin Network, 2007.
- [6] Jia Miaojing, CCTV column rating of "the last elimination system will be abolished by implementing the new system". Beijing Morning Post, 2011.