

“Amusing Ourselves to Death”: A Study on the Problems and Governance Approaches of Short Video Pan-entertainment in the Information Age

Tian Qin

*School of Public Administration, Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics, Nanchang, China
bjqindatian@163.com*

Abstract. In the Information age, the exponential growth of Short video platforms has reshaped social information dissemination. However, the resulting Pan-entertainment phenomenon poses a significant challenge to the digital civilization ecosystem. Drawing on the dual perspectives of the Political economy of communication and cultural criticism theory, this paper systematically deconstructs the underlying logic of short video Pan-entertainment through a combination of systematic literature review and multiple case studies. The study finds that this phenomenon weakens the depth of public discourse through the mechanism of cognitive dimensionality reduction, exacerbates the symbolic alienation of cultural consumerism, and induces Nihilism in adolescents' values. To address this, this paper proposes a Three-dimensional collaborative governance framework involving "government-platform-creator" collaboration, offering a theoretical reference for building a digital public sphere that integrates Humanistic care and Technology for good. This study not only deepens the critical understanding of the Social consequences of media technology but also provides an interdisciplinary research path for the paradigm shift in digital ecosystem governance.

Keywords: Pan-entertainment, Short video, Governance approaches, Digital media

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of the Information age, Short video platforms such as Douyin, Xiaohongshu, and TikTok have rapidly emerged, becoming one of the most popular forms of Digital media globally. Statistics show that the number of active social media users worldwide has surpassed 5 billion, with the Short video sharing platform TikTok boasting 1.56 billion users. However, with the explosive growth of Short video content, the "Pan-entertainment" phenomenon is becoming increasingly prominent, manifesting in the over-entertainment of serious topics, the proliferation of low-quality content, and the distraction of user attention.

Neil Postman argued in his classic work *Amusing Ourselves to Death* that when entertainment becomes the primary mode of information dissemination, public discourse will inevitably be reduced to superficial sound bites, thereby weakening public attention to important social issues [1]. At the same time, adolescents, as the primary user group of Short videos, are highly susceptible to

the influence of this low-quality content as they form their values. Although Short video platforms provide convenient access to information, the Fragmentation and superficiality of their content can lead to excessive cognitive load and distraction for users, thereby affecting the development of their critical thinking skills.

In addition, the "Pan-entertainment" phenomenon on Short video platforms may also diminish public attention to significant social issues. For example, when facing complex and pressing issues such as climate change and social injustice, Short video platforms often lack space for in-depth discussion, instead offering lighthearted and humorous Short video content. This not only limits public understanding and engagement with these issues but may also lead to overall social neglect of key topics. Therefore, how to promote the production and dissemination of high-quality content while ensuring user freedom of choice is a critical issue that urgently needs to be addressed.

Through these methods, the research not only reveals the current situation and potential risks of Short video Pan-entertainment, but also provides empirical evidence for formulating sound and reasonable governance strategies, and promotes the construction of a healthy and well-regulated Digital media ecosystem. The research results will provide valuable reference for all sectors of society.

2. Literature review

With the rapid development of information technology, Short video platforms have become a key channel for young people to access information and entertainment. However, the "Pan-entertainment" phenomenon in Short video content is becoming increasingly prevalent, exerting a profound influence on the values, ideology, and spiritual lives of young people.

2.1. Problems of short video Pan-entertainment

Pan-entertainment content in short videos uses vulgarity and sensationalism as its selling points, leading some young people to develop Aesthetic misconceptions and disregard the fundamental distinctions between beauty and ugliness, good and evil. This distorted sense of aesthetics not only undermines the meaning of aesthetics itself but also weakens the values at the core of aesthetic evaluation [2]. The Frankfurt School argues that the exchange value of cultural products surpasses their use value, becoming the focus of capital's attention. The commodification of Short video has given rise to the profit-driven principle of "Traffic fetishism", where creators' fates are dictated by traffic, and artistic and aesthetic values are sacrificed for commercial gain [3].

The Pan-entertainment phenomenon diverts young people's ideological attention, impacting the dominance of mainstream ideology. Driven by the logic of capital, Short video content prioritizes commercial interests over artistic merit. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno posit that the Culture industry offers a dazzling array of cultural and entertainment products, immersing people in pleasure and encouraging escapism [4]. The Fragmentation inherent in short videos makes it difficult to present in-depth content. Highly stimulating video content emphasizes entertainment, sensory stimulation, and emotional appeal, rather than factual accuracy or logical reasoning, leading to a decline in critical thinking [4].

Erroneous ideologies exploit the internet's "Pan-entertainment" trend to exaggerate bizarre individual cases, attempting to skew the values of some young people [2]. In the breeding ground of the Internet "Pan-entertainment", various propositions and views that are inconsistent with core socialist values proliferate, attempting to deconstruct the values established by some young people based on overall understanding through isolated incidents [5].

2.2. Governance approaches

As Postman pointed that when public discourse is reduced to trivial chatter, and citizens become mere spectators while public matters turn into entertainment, the nation faces serious danger. Therefore, corresponding strategies must be formulated to address the harm that short video Pan-entertainment poses to the values of young people. Related departments should redefine the essence of entertainment, ensuring that it is neither divorced from aesthetics nor solely focused on it, allowing the public to recognize that entertainment is an activity that satisfies specific needs [6]. Entertainment should satisfy people's social needs while also catering to individual sensory needs, enabling people to experience the beauty of life in physical and mental pleasure, and to embrace new challenges with a fresh and invigorated attitude after relieving stress [7].

Concurrently, when shaping the essence of entertainment, relevant departments should not only rectify deviations and restore a wholesome and upright character to aesthetics but also incorporate elements such as optimism, inspiration, and resilience, constructing a diversified, positive, and uplifting new landscape of entertainment online [8]. As a new form of entertainment, short videos should focus on balancing these functions to promote the well-rounded development of young people. In summary, the short video Pan-entertainment phenomenon has had numerous negative impacts on young people's values, ideology, and spiritual well-being. Existing research has explored this issue from multiple dimensions, such as political economy, aesthetics, and ideology, and proposed corresponding Governance approaches. Future research should emphasize interdisciplinary collaboration, integrating perspectives from psychology, sociology, and other disciplines to deeply analyze the Short video Pan-entertainment phenomenon and its impact on young people, and propose more targeted and actionable governance strategies. Simultaneously, all sectors of society need to collaborate to foster a healthy online environment and guide young people in establishing sound values and aesthetics.

3. Case study

3.1. Negative impact of short videos on individual cognition and behavior patterns

This study reveals the profound impact of frequent short video viewing on personal cognition and behavior patterns through an in-depth interview with a moderately popular short video blogger. The student reported that, due to professional demands, her mobile phone is inundated with Short video content daily, and this constant stream of information has significantly altered her media consumption habits. Further analysis reveals that frequent browsing of short videos leads to attention deficits and a decline in deep thinking skills. The student mentioned that prolonged immersion in the fast-paced viewing of short videos makes it difficult for her to maintain sustained attention and demonstrates a clear difficulty with tasks requiring deep thinking. When reading academic texts or writing papers, she finds herself unable to focus on the content as she once did; her thoughts are easily interrupted, and she sometimes even feels anxious. She also pointed out that this habit of over-relying on short videos makes her lack the patience for in-depth analysis when facing complex problems, and she tends to opt for superficial solutions. This suggests that over-reliance on short videos as a source of information may inhibit an individual's ability to process complex information and engage in critical thinking.

3.2. The impact of malicious editing and the proliferation of false content on social values and minors

In February of this year, a video titled "Conflict at Four Girls Mountain Scenic Area" rapidly spread online, sparking widespread attention and discussion. The video depicted a group of tourists building snowmen with duck molds beside the scenic area's boardwalk when a young man with dyed yellow hair and heavy metal chains suddenly appeared, inexplicably kicking over the snowmen and arguing with the tourists. The comments section below the video quickly filled with accusations. However, as the situation unfolded, the truth gradually emerged: the man, concerned about public safety, had been trying to dissuade them from building snowmen on the boardwalk and only resorted to extreme measures after his attempts failed.

This incident highlights the prevalence of exaggerated and false content on Short video platforms. The video's initial editor maliciously edited the footage. This practice of sacrificing authenticity and fairness for the sake of traffic is commonplace in the current Short video ecosystem. It is worth noting that a deep-seated social psychological mechanism underlies this phenomenon: viewers are often more easily drawn to extreme and dramatic content, which further motivates producers to create and disseminate exaggerated and false content.

This kind of biased presentation of content has a profound negative impact on the values of minors. Over time, this can hinder minors from developing the ability to view matters objectively and rationally, potentially leading to distorted values. The initial "one-sided" barrage of public criticism demonstrates an irresponsible behavior to minors: arbitrarily accusing and vilifying others without understanding the full context. This undoubtedly sends them the wrong message, leading them to mistakenly believe they can freely express opinions in cyberspace without consequence. Some minors may emulate this behavior, making baseless accusations and attacking others online, perceiving it as a way to express themselves.

4. Discussion

4.1. Main problems caused by short video Pan-entertainment

The Fragmentation content design of Short video platforms makes it difficult for users to maintain focus on a single topic for extended periods. Studies indicate that frequent viewing of Short video significantly shortens users' attention spans, hindering in-depth learning or contemplation [9]. A study of college students revealed that those who spend over two hours daily on Short video platforms experience a marked decline in their ability to read long-form articles [10]. This phenomenon not only impacts individual learning efficiency but may also adversely affect long-term cognitive development.

Pan-entertainment content is often presented in a simple, straightforward manner, lacking depth and room for critical thinking. Some historical events are spoofed in humorous videos, which not only diminishes their educational significance but may also mislead viewers. Furthermore, research suggests that excessive exposure to this type of superficial content may lead to a decline in individuals' critical thinking skills [11]. One study of adolescents found that students who frequently watched entertaining Short video performed significantly worse on logical reasoning tests than the control group [12]. This suggests that if content on Short video platforms lacks depth and critical analysis, it may hinder individuals' intellectual development and the formation of social responsibility.

Under the commercial logic of "traffic is king," some creators do not hesitate to publish exaggerated or even false content to garner attention. Some Short video attract user clicks by fabricating facts and exaggerating plots, even causing public panic. According to a Pew Research Center survey, approximately 64% of respondents reported having seen false information on social media [13]. Moreover, another study indicates that false information spreads much faster on Short video platforms than other types of content [14]. This phenomenon not only misleads the public but may also exacerbate social divisions and animosity.

Some content on Short video platforms contains vulgar, violent, or morally objectionable material, negatively impacting the development of minors' values. Studies indicate that adolescents who frequently encounter such content are more prone to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety [15]. Furthermore, the spread of some negative videos has led some minors to view depression, drug use, and self-harm as trendy, further exacerbating their psychological burdens [16]. A survey of middle school students revealed that approximately 40% of students reported having seen related content on Short video platforms and being affected by it to varying degrees [17].

4.2. Discussion of governance measures

As guardians of the public interest, governments need to formulate and refine relevant laws and regulations to strengthen the supervision of the Short video industry. Specific measures include, but are not limited to, establishing a dedicated agency responsible for supervising and managing Short video content to ensure its compliance with social moral norms and legal requirements. Drawing on successful international models, an independent regulatory agency similar to the US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) could be established, specifically responsible for reviewing and managing online content. Severe penalties should be imposed for publishing false or vulgar content, and exemplary cases should be publicly exposed to create a deterrent effect.

Short video platforms should assume social responsibility and actively fulfill their self-regulatory obligations. They must establish and improve content review mechanisms, utilizing artificial intelligence technology to enhance the identification rate of prohibited content, thereby curbing the dissemination of harmful information at its source.

For example, develop a content filtering system based on deep learning to automatically detect and block videos containing violence, pornography, or misinformation. Platforms can also establish dedicated editorial teams to manually review trending videos, ensuring the quality of recommended content.

As a vital part of the Short video ecosystem, content creators must enhance their sense of social responsibility and professional ethics. They must not only abide by laws and regulations but also consciously resist the production and dissemination of vulgar, violent, and other harmful content. Platforms can incentivize the production of high-quality content and foster a virtuous cycle by establishing creative funds, providing technical support, and other means.

Future research can explore multiple avenues to more comprehensively understand and address the challenges of Short video Pan-entertainment. Cross-cultural comparative studies can investigate the variations in the expression and governance of Short video Pan-entertainment across different cultural contexts. By comparatively analyzing the experiences of various countries in policymaking, platform management, and social education, valuable insights can be gained for developing more universal and adaptable governance strategies.

In addition, multi-stakeholder collaborative research should explore the division of roles and cooperation mechanisms among governments, platforms, and creators in the governance process.

5. Conclusion

This paper systematically reviews the literature and provides detailed case studies to comprehensively explore the causes, problems, and Governance approaches of Short video Pan-entertainment. The research findings indicate that the Short video Pan-entertainment phenomenon arises from a confluence of factors, including technological advancements, economic drivers, and cultural shifts. Its negative impacts extend beyond the decline in individual cognitive abilities and attention Fragmentation, profoundly affecting the formation of values among minors and the overall Digital media ecosystem of society. Effective governance necessitates a coordinated, multi-faceted approach.

While this paper has yielded valuable insights through theoretical and empirical analysis, certain limitations remain. The inclusion of personal perspectives to some extent may result in research conclusions that are not entirely comprehensive or are subject to subjective bias. To mitigate these limitations, future research could benefit from: employing large-scale empirical surveys to gather more diverse data, thereby validating and enriching the findings presented herein; and conducting cross-cultural comparative studies to examine the similarities and differences in Short video Pan-entertainment governance across various countries and regions, thus informing the development of more universally applicable governance strategies.

Given the continuous evolution of Digital media technology, the governance of Short video Pan-entertainment will remain a complex and ongoing challenge. Future research should prioritize technology governance, cross-cultural comparisons, and multi-stakeholder collaborative mechanisms, urging all sectors to collaboratively foster a healthy and sustainable digital media ecosystem.

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