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The Communication Characteristics and Reconstruction of Discursive Power in Art Criticism in the Age of Social Media

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Abstract: In the age of social media, profound transformations have occurred in the communication characteristics and discursive power of art criticism. The subjects of communication have shifted from elite monopoly to pluralistic coexistence; content has turned from in-depth interpretation to fragmented expression; channels have achieved multi-platform integration; and the impact now breaks through insular circles to reach widespread public coverage. Discursive power has been reconstructed in terms of its subjects, content, operational mechanisms, and evaluation criteria. However, this reconstruction of communication and discursive power faces numerous challenges. This paper proposes optimization pathways, including enhancing communication quality, standardizing the discourse order, and improving support systems, to promote the healthy development of art criticism.

Keywords: Social media era; art criticism; communication characteristics; discursive power reconstruction

Introduction

In the current context of vigorous social media development, the field of art criticism is undergoing unprecedented transformations. The communication models and discursive power structures of traditional art criticism are gradually disintegrating under the impact of social media. New communication characteristics continue to emerge, and discursive power is being redistributed among diverse actors. Deeply investigating the communication characteristics and reconstruction of discursive power in art criticism during the social media era not only helps us grasp the development trends of art criticism but also provides theoretical support and practical guidance for its healthy development in the new era.

1. Communication Characteristics of Art Criticism in the Social Media Era

1.1 Communication Subjects: From Elite Monopoly to Pluralistic Coexistence

The field of traditional art criticism was long dominated by scholars, professional critics, and seasoned media professionals. Leveraging their specialized knowledge and authoritative media platforms, they formed an elite monopoly over critical discourse. The general public, lacking channels for expression and

professional endorsement, were often relegated to a passive recipient role. However, the proliferation of social media has fundamentally broken down this barrier, making it a reality for everyone to critique and voice their opinions. Professional critics still maintain influence through in-depth analysis, art practitioners offer unique insights from a creative perspective, and ordinary audiences can share their impressions through methods like bullet comments, short reviews, and image-text interpretations [1]. Official entities such as art museums and cultural institutions have also joined these platforms, building professional communication matrices. These diverse subjects no longer exist in isolation but have formed symbiotic relationships that complement each other's strengths, collectively enriching the ecological landscape of art criticism.

1.2 Communication Content: From In-depth Interpretation to Fragmented Expression

Traditional art criticism was often presented in the form of lengthy essays and special reports, emphasizing systematic interpretation of a work's aesthetic features, cultural connotations, and historical context, while pursuing logical integrity and theoretical depth. The communication characteristics of social media have spurred a shift towards fragmented expression in critical content. Influenced by information overload and scarce attention, critical content now tends to extract and express the core highlights, contentious points, or emotional resonances of a work. Forms such as 140-character micro-reviews, meme-based interpretations, and short video critiques have become mainstream, conveying viewpoints through concise, straightforward language or visual symbols. This fragmentation does not entirely abandon depth but creates a layered structure of "superficial expression" and "in-depth interpretation." Fast, bite-sized content attracts traffic and sparks attention, while professional long-form critiques continue to circulate within specific niches. Together, they constitute a multi-layered system of critical content.

1.3 Communication Channels: From Single Medium to Multi-Platform Integration

In the past, art criticism primarily relied on traditional media such as newspapers, professional journals, and television art programs. The communication channels were relatively singular, greatly limiting reach and

speed, and the influence of criticism was often confined to specific cultural circles. The social media era has given rise to an interconnected network of multiple platforms, each leveraging its unique attributes to fulfill differentiated communication functions. Weibo drives the diffusion of criticism through topic fermentation, becoming a source for art hotspots; WeChat public accounts support the systematic expression of professional criticism through long-form articles; platforms like Douyin and Bilibili transform abstract critiques into concrete audio-visual content through short videos and podcasts; Xiaohongshu connects art criticism with public consumption through its "review + recommendation" model. Information and traffic flow between these platforms, constructing a comprehensive, multi-dimensional channel for the dissemination of criticism.

1.4 Communication Effects: From Niche Influence to Widespread Coverage

Within the ecosystem of traditional art criticism, the limitations of communication channels acted like an invisible barrier, tightly confining the influence of art criticism to small circles composed of art practitioners, research scholars, and seasoned enthusiasts. These professional groups, relying on their in-depth research and long-term engagement with art, formed relatively closed and specialized spaces for exchange. Ordinary people, lacking access and professional knowledge, were often excluded, resulting in a clear disconnect between art criticism and public life [2]. However, the emergence of social media, with its powerful capacity for viral dissemination, has completely broken this deadlock. When an artwork enters the public eye through recommendations on social media platforms, ordinary users are no longer mere bystanders. Their comments and shares can create waves of secondary dissemination, allowing the influence of art criticism to ripple outward continuously. Simultaneously, the core viewpoints of professional critics permeate various circles through fragmented interpretations. From the nationwide craze for commenting on cultural relics sparked by the Palace Museum's cultural creative products, to the widespread online discussions triggered by contemporary art exhibitions, it is evident that art criticism has transcended professional boundaries. Whether highly educated groups or ordinary citizens,

all can actively participate in discussions, forming a powerful communicative synergy that truly integrates art criticism into public life.

2. The Logic of Discursive Power Reconstruction in Art Criticism in the Social Media Era

2.1 Reconstruction of Discursive Power Subjects: From "Professional Authority" to "Pluralistic Co-governance"

Discursive power in traditional art criticism was firmly held by professional authorities. Their viewpoints, backed by academic credentials and media advantages, became the standard for judgment, while the public lacked discursive power and passively accepted these assessments. Social media has deconstructed this monolithic authority model, promoting a transition towards pluralistic co-governance of discursive power. While professional critics still retain academic discursive power, they must now face public scrutiny and questioning. Emerging actors such as art bloggers and curators have risen by leveraging professional perspectives and communication skills, becoming bridges connecting the professional sphere with the public. The collective voice of ordinary audiences forms a powerful force of public opinion, and their focus on dimensions like social value and emotional resonance compels professional criticism to broaden its research perspectives. This shift does not signify the dissolution of authority but rather creates a co-governance structure where various subjects engage in dialogue and mutual restraint, leading to a more balanced distribution of discursive power.

2.2 Reconstruction of Discursive Power Content: From "Aesthetic Dominance" to "Plurality of Values"

Traditional art criticism centered on aesthetic interpretation, with critics focusing on the work's intrinsic elements such as composition, color, and technique, conducting analyses revolving around aesthetic value and artistic principles, thus forming a criticism system dominated by aesthetic judgment. In the social media era, critical content exhibits a characteristic plurality of values, where aesthetic interpretation is no longer the sole core. Audiences explore the work's ethnic symbols and historical connotations from the dimension of cultural identity,

pay attention to real-world issues reflected in the work from the perspective of social value, share personal feelings from the level of emotional experience, and even discuss the market potential of the work from a commercial value standpoint. This interweaving of diverse value orientations enriches art criticism, making its content more comprehensive and three-dimensional. It preserves the professional core of aesthetic analysis while expanding the social and emotional dimensions of criticism, thereby meeting the needs of different groups.

2.3 Reconstruction of Discursive Power Operation Mechanism: From "One-way Transmission" to "Interactive Dynamics"

Traditional art criticism operated through a unidirectional "authority dissemination-public reception" model. Critics delivered their perspectives via professional media channels, while audiences remained passive recipients with limited avenues for substantive feedback, creating a distinctly asymmetrical power dynamic. Social media has fundamentally transformed this operational logic by establishing an interactive, bidirectional communication environment. Upon publication of a critique, audiences can immediately respond through likes, comments, and shares, forming a continuous cycle of "publication-feedback-response-redissemination" [3]. Professional critics now frequently adapt their communicative approaches based on public reactions, while perspectives from general audiences can gain traction through social interaction, sometimes evolving into influential commentaries that even redirect professional critical discourse. This interaction represents more than mere opinion exchange; it constitutes a dynamic interplay where various stakeholders engage in conceptual negotiation around artistic works, generating new meanings through discursive encounters.

2.4 Reconstruction of Discursive Power Evaluation Criteria: From "Professional Endorsement" to "Pluralistic Validation"

Traditional art criticism maintained highly centralized evaluation criteria, primarily focusing on art historical context, aesthetic theory, and technical proficiency. The validation of critical value occurred almost exclusively through professional channels such as academic publications and peer recognition, resulting

in a relatively monolithic evaluation system. The social media era has witnessed a shift toward pluralistic validation, where professional endorsement no longer serves as the exclusive benchmark. Public reception now introduces crucial metrics including emotional resonance and relevance to daily life, with quantitative indicators like number of likes and shares, and level of engagement becoming tangible measures of critical influence. Simultaneously, the art market evaluates through commercial viability and collection potential, while cultural institutions prioritize cultural dissemination impact. These diverse evaluative dimensions complement one another, establishing a multidimensional assessment framework that integrates professional standards, public sentiment, market considerations, and cultural significance, thereby enabling more comprehensive value determination in art criticism.

3. Challenges in the Communication and Discursive Power Reconstruction of Art Criticism in the Social Media Era

3.1 Challenges at the Communication Level

While the communicative characteristics of social media bring convenience to art criticism, they also introduce numerous challenges. Fragmented communication leads to a loss of depth in critical content; numerous brief and superficial opinions lack logical support and theoretical foundation, easily guiding audiences toward one-sided understandings. Information overload submerges high-quality critiques, while vulgarized and entertainment-focused comments gain preferential dissemination due to their greater ability to attract attention, creating a scenario where "bad money drives out good." The rapid speed and wide reach of dissemination also allow erroneous critiques to spread quickly, whereas corrective information often lags, readily causing misunderstandings and negative impacts on artworks and creators. Furthermore, the algorithmic recommendation mechanisms on various platforms, being user-interest-oriented, can form "information cocoons," limiting the cross-group dissemination of criticism and hindering the collision of diverse viewpoints.

3.2 Challenges at the Discursive Power Level

The structure of pluralistic co-governance in discursive power also harbors numerous potential pitfalls. Some

actors, lacking professional competence and a sense of responsibility, publish polarized and emotional critiques, or even fabricate false information, to chase traffic, thereby disrupting the normal order of criticism. Professional discursive power becomes diluted; some in-depth, professional critiques reach limited audiences due to high barriers to dissemination, weakening the guiding role of professional art criticism. Conflicts between different discourse groups intensify; the emotional expressions of the public often stand in opposition to the rational analyses of professional criticism, making effective dialogue difficult and sometimes even triggering online disputes. The involvement of capital and platforms leads to new imbalances in discursive power. Some commercially driven marketing critiques, through artificial traffic inflation and sensational topic promotion, occupy dominant positions in public discourse, squeezing the space for genuine criticism and undermining the fairness of discursive power distribution.

4. Optimization Pathways and Development Recommendations

4.1 Enhancing Communication Quality: Building a Hierarchical Communication System

Improving the quality of art criticism communication requires establishing a system that balances depth and breadth. Professional critics should actively adapt to the communication environment by transforming in-depth content into publicly accessible formats, utilizing approaches such as "long-form articles + short videos" and "professional interpretation + case studies" to maintain both professionalism and readability. Platforms need to optimize their content recommendation algorithms by establishing criteria for selecting high-quality critiques. While catering to user interests, they should proactively promote professional and rational critical content to break down "information cocoons." Diverse stakeholders should be encouraged to participate in creating substantive content, supporting collaborations between art practitioners, academic scholars, and the public in critical activities, forming a content production model characterized by "professional guidance with public participation." Guidance for fragmented content should be strengthened, promoting the development of short-form critiques toward more logical and evidence-based

directions, thereby enhancing overall communication quality.

4.2 Regulating the Discourse Order: Establishing a Pluralistic and Collaborative Discursive Ecology

Standardizing the discourse order of art criticism requires building a pluralistic yet coordinated discursive ecology. Clear responsibility boundaries for different actors should be defined: professional critics must uphold academic integrity, public commentators need to enhance rational awareness, and platforms should assume responsibility for content review and management. Dialogue platforms connecting professionals and the public should be established through formats like online forums and roundtable discussions to facilitate rational exchange of different viewpoints and resolve discursive conflicts. A supervision mechanism for criticism should be implemented to address polarized and false comments appropriately while protecting legitimate freedom of expression [4]. Industry associations should play a leading role by developing professional standards for art criticism, guiding critical activities back to rational and professional tracks. This collaborative framework, characterized by "guidance from professional authority, rational public participation, and standardized platform management," ensures the orderly operation of discursive power within pluralistic co-governance.

4.3 Improving Support Systems: Strengthening Technical, Institutional, and Educational Safeguards

Enhancing the support system for art criticism development requires coordinated efforts across technology, institutions, and education. Technologically, utilize big data and artificial intelligence to optimize content review systems, improving the identification efficiency of false and vulgar comments, while developing analytical tools for assessing communication impact to provide data support for high-quality critiques. Institutionally, establish and improve regulations related to art criticism, clarifying the legal responsibilities of platforms and commentators, combating malicious comments and traffic manipulation, and ensuring the legality and fairness of critical activities. Educationally,

integrate art criticism into the national education system through school curricula and public cultural activities to enhance public artistic literacy and critical capacity, fostering a rational and professional critical consciousness. These three aspects should work in concert to provide solid support for the healthy development of art criticism.

Conclusion

The reconstruction of communication characteristics and discursive power in art criticism during the social media era is an inevitable outcome of contemporary development, presenting both new opportunities and numerous challenges. Confronting issues at the communication level—such as the lack of depth and information overload—as well as hidden dangers at the discursive power level—including pluralistic conflicts and capital interference—requires our proactive response. Through measures like enhancing communication quality, regulating the discourse order, and improving support systems, we can construct a healthy and orderly art criticism ecosystem. This will enable art criticism to better fulfill its role in guiding artistic development and enriching public spiritual life in the age of social media.

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