

Research on Innovative Paths of Drama Communication Modes in the New Media Environment

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Abstract: Characterized by openness, interactivity, and fragmentation, the new media environment brings unprecedented opportunities and challenges to dramatic art. Taking this as an entry point, this paper systematically compares traditional drama and online drama in terms of communication structure, reception modes, and aesthetic experience, and focuses on the specific application of virtual interactive technologies in short video drama. On this basis, drawing on new media and digital technologies, this paper attempts to construct a more systematic and integrated research platform for drama communication, so as to enrich the presentation forms and communication layers of drama content and improve its communication efficiency and aesthetic influence. Meanwhile, this paper addresses the existing problems in current drama communication, such as insufficient creativity and uneven content quality, analyzes their causes, and puts forward targeted countermeasures, hoping to promote the vitality of dramatic art in the digital age.

Keywords: New media; Drama; Digital technology; Traditional culture

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1. Introduction

With the development of new media, the integration of drama and short video has emerged as a new form for the communication of dramatic culture. Boasting fast transmission speed and strong interactivity, this new form opens up new possibilities and paths for the inheritance and development of dramatic art and facilitates the prosperity of dramatic culture^[1]. Major mainstream short video platforms include WeChat, Douyin, Kuaishou, Weibo, Bilibili, and others. According to the *2023 Intangible Cultural Heritage Data Report* released by Douyin in June 2023, there were an average of 19,000 livestreams of intangible cultural heritage on Douyin every day up to May 2023, with 13 intangibleculturalheritage programs going live every minute. Data from the report shows that reward income for quyi (folk vocal performing arts) rose by 102%.

Released in Chengdu on 15 April 2026, the *China Online AudioVisual Development Research Report (2025)* indicates that China had 1.099 billion online audiovisual users by December 2025, accounting for 98.4 % of all internet users. Online audiovisual content has further consolidated its status as China's largest internet application. The adoption of new media technologies for drama blurs the boundary between the real and virtual worlds. The integration of drama with other media and artistic expressions helps enhance audience interaction and participation, and improves the communication effect of dramatic culture.

2. Innovations in communication modes

2.1. Online livestreaming and ondemand viewing

Through online channels such as video platforms and social media, drama performances can be broadcast via realtime livestreaming or made available for ondemand viewing worldwide. Breaking the physical constraints of traditional theatres, such modes allow audiences to appreciate highquality drama performances without attending venues in person ^[2].

For online livestreaming cases: around the DragonBoat Festival in 2024, the Haifeng Baizi Opera Troupe took part in the “No. 1 Troupe” IntangibleCulturalHeritage Livestream Week initiated by Douyin. Together with seven other rare opera “No. 1 Troupes,” it livestreamed 70 classic operas over five consecutive days, attracting more than 64.2 million viewers. Through livestreaming, the troupe presented Baizi Opera, a lesserknown traditional opera, to audiences and won numerous opera fans across the country.

For ondemand viewing cases: starting from 13 June 2024, Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre launched its “Boundless Theatre,” making selected productions available for ondemand viewing. Five classic dramas, including *The Gadfly*, *The Scholar and the Executioner*, *Uncle Vanya*, *A Doll's House*, and *Shang Yang*, went online on Youku. After purchasing tickets, viewers could rewatch these productions within a seven-day time window. Such ondemand access brings great convenience to audiences, and many respondents noted that it enables people who cannot attend live performances to enjoy highquality dramas.

2.2. Virtual reality and augmentedreality technologies

Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) allow audiences to immerse themselves in drama performances for enhanced aesthetic experiences. For instance, by wearing VR devices, audiences can interact with actors in virtual environments and even alter plot development. Launched in October 2023 at Shanghai Film Studios, *New World: Feast of the Caged* features innovative performance modes, thoughtful user services, and integrated onlineoffline marketing campaigns, successfully reaching broader audiences. Within the new media context, the production disseminates performance information, behindthescenes footage, and audience reviews via social media applications, official websites, and other channels to raise visibility and build reputation. VR and AR technologies offer online viewing options for those unable to attend live shows, expanding audience coverage.

3. Innovations in creation approaches

3.1. Digital scriptwriting and dramaturgical staging

A digital script is authored, edited, stored, and distributed via digital instruments including word-processing programs, screenwriting software, and AI-powered creative tools. Breaking the constraints of conventional

paperbased manuscripts, digital scripts facilitate convenient revision, seamless crossparty sharing, and visualized content preview.

Digital scripts realize their functions through three major technical applications. First, AI-assisted creation: by analyzing large volumes of existing script datasets, artificial intelligence can supply screenwriters with creative inspiration, plot suggestions, and even draft preliminary screenplays. Second, digital storage and collaborative sharing: saved as digital files, scripts can be transferred across different devices and support multiuser collaborative editing. Third, visual preview: digital tools visualize settings, character profiles, and action descriptions within scripts, helping screenwriters and directors grasp narrative frameworks more efficiently^[3].

Digital dramaturgical staging refers to the design and rehearsal of theatrical performances with digital technologies such as stagedesign software, VR, and AR. It expands the possibilities of stage presentation and creates more immersive, participatory experiences for audiences. Its core modules consist of the following components. To begin with, scene design: specialized software generates virtual theatrical environments with customized sets, lighting schemes, and acoustic layouts. Next, character movement choreography: animations and virtual character models enable precise choreography and pre-visualization of performers' gestures. Finally, specialeffect and interaction design: VR and AR technologies are deployed to produce spectacular visual effects and design interactive segments for audience participation.

3.2. Virtual actors

Virtual actors in new media theatre refer to computergenerated virtual characters with performing capabilities. They can interact with real actors on the theatre stage and jointly interpret the plot. *Groundless Rumours*, a theatrical work cocreated by German new media artist Tobias Gremmler and Chinese artist Tim Yip, presents audiences with a multimedia performance integrating traditional opera, video, dance and installation art. Motioncapture technology reconstructs real actors' movements and renders them onto virtual avatars, demonstrating the integration and collision between traditional Chinese opera and modern new media art.

Fusion, the world's first AI-enabled ballet, was staged at the Leipzig Theatre in Germany from May to July 2023. Artificial intelligence technology was adopted in the production's stage design, music composition, choreography, and creative conception. Artists generated renderings of stage settings with AIGC tools and choreographed dance sequences using motion data from live dance performances.

3.3. Multimedia integration

Drama productions in the new media era have added various forms of art, such as music, dance, video, animation, etc., to create multimedia-integrated works. These innovations expand the scope of expression and attract more people. A typical case is the AR-enhanced experimental Peking Opera short film "The True and False Monkey King." It combines digitally modeled virtual characters with real actor performances, uses Noitom motion capture technology to record the movements of the performers in real time, transmits this data to rendering engines and media servers, and achieves real-time interaction between the "True Monkey King" and the virtual "False Monkey King" on LED screens.

4. Innovations in performance forms

4.1. Immersive drama

Immersive Drama is a type of performance that fully immerses the audience in the world of the play. Digital technology has been used to create extremely realistic environments and moods for people to experience in the story. For instance, the immersive interactive game-based dance theatre production “Juliet, Please Take Your Seat!” recreates the ball scene in Romeo and Juliet. All the audience members will take turns playing Juliet and join in with the actors for this interactive dance show. Produce performance information, stills, and audience feedback on social media platforms to stimulate public discussion, and use short video platforms to spread highlights and attract young people ^[4].

The Yue Opera production *Daiyu Buries the Flowers* was selected from the top 10 cases of cultural-digital-innovation demonstration. With extended reality glasses, people can experience VR-enabled integration of virtual Yue Opera performances and physical stage installations, creating new viewing modes that bring the charm of Yue Opera closer to the audience. Utilize XR technology to present personalized digital cultural works and explore mixed reality narrative forms that combine reality and virtuality. It is a typical case of technological empowerment for drama and offers new types of theatre.

4.2. Interactive drama

Interactive drama can have the audience join in on the story. Digital technology has added new forms for people to participate in the performance, such as touch screens, mobile apps, etc., making them part of the story. *Madam Soong’s Missing Diamond Earring* is a typical case of interactive drama developed under the “Fufeng Take-off” project by the North China Performing Arts Group. In June 1944, Shanghai was chosen as the location for this work, and it tells the story of the missing diamond earring. The audience will serve as judges and, with the help of investigators, reconstruct the events by means of discussion and deduction.

4.3. Dissemination of short dramas and clips

With the development of society and changes in people’s lives, many new types of short dramas have emerged, such as mini series, web dramas, and other forms of brief storytelling. The above forms reduce the barrier to entry and increase entertainment value and dissemination. Douyin accounts such as “English Short Drama Theatre” and “ReelBoost Short Dramas” post short video excerpts adapted from films and TV shows, and provide bilingual subtitles to help viewers learn about the stories and improve their English listening skills.

Several popular domestic short online dramas feature episodes of only a few minutes, characterized by short duration, rapid pacing, rich content, and diverse genres. Representative titles include *Escape from the British Museum*, *TwentyNine*, *Donglan Snow*, *Investor Takes Full Control*, *Romance of the Wind and Moon*, and *Provocation*. Many of these online dramas feature original, thoughtprovoking themes free from the constraints of conventional television formats, and receive positive audience feedback on actors’ performances.

5. Innovation of business models

5.1. Paid viewing and membership systems

Within the new media environment, paid viewing and membership systems have become prevalent business models, which are widely adopted for new media content such as online dramas and micro short dramas.

Services including paid access and membership subscriptions offered via online platforms can generate additional revenue streams for drama performances. Meanwhile, such services help attract greater audience attention and support for dramatic art.

For instance, *With You*, produced and exclusively released by iQIYI, adopts a “freepluspaid” viewing model. Users may watch the first two episodes free of charge on iQIYI, yet a paid membership is required to access the remaining episodes.

Furthermore, the “Short Drama Theatre” and “Micro Drama Theatre” launched by iQIYI in 2024 host a large volume of micro short dramas. These productions are available to members at no extra cost. Upon subscribing to an iQIYI membership, users gain access to hundreds of new dramas featured in the two theatre sections. Characterized by concise storytelling, high production quality, and easy shareability, micro short dramas have drawn massive audiences. Apart from iQIYI, other video platforms, including Tencent Video and Youku, have rolled out numerous online dramas supported by paid viewing and membership mechanisms. These platforms drive user payments through comparable strategies while delivering abundant exclusive content and premium services.

In the new media landscape, paid viewing and membership systems represent a key trend in the online drama industry. Under this model, video platforms can not only secure steady revenue, but also improve user stickiness and loyalty. It also motivates platforms to place higher priority on content quality and diversity so as to satisfy audiences’ growing viewing demands.

5.2. Crossborder cooperation and brand cobranding

Digital technologies enable crossborder collaboration between drama and other cultural industries. Joint initiatives with brands from film, gaming, fashion and other sectors can expand drama’s audience base and amplify brand influence.

In 2020, for example, BMW partnered with Meng Jinghui Theatre Studio to cocreate the experimental video *Echo*. Supervised by Meng Jinghui and directed by theatre director Liu Chang, this work brought together artists from visual arts, physical performance, animated imagery, sound art, spatial art, drama, and other disciplines, alongside performers with diverse professional backgrounds. This experimental production enhanced the artistic flair and avantgarde positioning of the new BMW 5Series and struck a chord with society’s backbone demographic. Through dramatic expression, BMW conducted indepth spiritual communication with audiences, encouraging them to remain resolute and courageous when confronting real-world challenges.

Seeking Plum Blossoms: Reencounter Consort Yu, an immersive cultural tourism drama which premiered at Tianjin Theatre Museum (Guangdong Guild Hall), was custom developed for the venue by the Administration Office of Tianjin Theatre Museum and Confucian Temple Museum. Based on the special atmosphere and cultural connotations of the guild hall’s classical opera stage, this work has incorporated elements from both traditional Chinese opera and musical theatre. It combines operatic body language and opera-style songs to explore the spiritual life and inner world of dream chasers through a time travel story. It combines the musical styles of Peking Opera, Kunqu Opera, and musical theatre to create a new work that is rich in Chinese culture and full of life.

6. Reflections and suggestions on contemporary drama communication

6.1. Problems faced by dramatic art in the new media era

First, fragmented communication and diluted cultural inheritance. Short video platforms favor short, fragmented content. When drama spreads on these platforms, excerpts often take precedence over full-length works, and thus the integrity and narrative continuity of dramatic art are lost. Although short clips can grab people's attention quickly, they may lead to a shallow understanding of drama and reduce its cultural value. Fragmented Exposure fails to convey the cultural connotations, historical context, and artistic value of drama effectively. In the long run, it will lose the public's interest and create misunderstandings and prejudice.

Second, commercial promotional articles and compromised critical independence. In the new media ecosystem, enterprises, institutions, and self-media platforms have produced a large number of commercial promotional materials for products or services. Due to a lack of objectivity and independence, this content may mislead the public and harm the healthy development of the drama industry. Commercial promotion also erodes critical independence in drama criticism: some critics publish biased reviews for material gains and produce paid "redenvelope critiques," damaging the objectivity and credibility of drama criticism.

Third, lack of formal innovation and audience aesthetic fatigue. Although there have been changes due to digital technology, many theatre groups and artists have failed to adapt their thinking for new media applications. Some have merely transferred traditional drama content to digital platforms without adapting the format according to new media logic. A lack of new ideas will lead to boredom among the audience. People want something new now. If the drama production does not offer new ideas or excitement, people will lose interest ^[5].

New media-driven dramas are also subject to copyright infringement and lack cross-sectoral cooperation. With the convenience of digital technology, the problems listed above need to be solved by the industry for the healthy development of dramatic arts.

6.2. Suggestions for the future development of drama in new media contexts

First, strengthen content integration and in-depth exploration. Drama creators and new media platforms are encouraged to cooperate and produce all-encompassing, in-depth drama content. Long-form videos, documentaries, and lecture series can be used to present the integrity and cultural depth of dramatic art.

Second, protect the freedom and objectivity of criticism. Strengthen platform governance to curb fake promotions and commercial promotion posts. Build an open and fair system for criticism to promote free expression. At the same time, people will also promote public media literacy and rational thinking.

Third, promote formal innovation and diversification. Stimulate the creation of new forms and styles by introducing new media technology for drama writers. New technologies, such as Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR), can be used to create an immersive experience for the audience during a performance. At the same time, the creator needs to know what the public wants and adjust the style of the work according to changes in society and people's demands.

At the same time, relevant departments need to strengthen support for laws and regulations on copyright ownership and protection of dramatic works in the new media era. Technical tools will be used to increase the efficiency of copyright supervision and rights protection. At the same time, public awareness of copyright protection ought to be raised to jointly foster a sound copyright ecosystem. Educational initiatives should be launched to boost crossindustry cooperation and exchanges on dramatic culture among universities, government agencies, and communities. Joint events and codeveloped projects can be organized to facilitate

the dissemination and development of dramatic culture. Newmedia platforms can also serve as bridges for collaboration to realize resource sharing and complementary advantages.

To address problems arising from drama practice under new media technologies, efforts should be made across multiple dimensions including content integration, critical independence, formal innovation, copyright protection and crossindustry exchange, so as to collectively advance the sustained and healthy development of dramatic art in the new era.

7. Conclusion

With the development of new media technology in recent years, many new forms of information dissemination have emerged, and at the same time, new opportunities and problems for the spread and development of drama have arisen. Given the changes mentioned above, the drama industry has been developing new media and exploring various ways to communicate with the public effectively in recent years. However, there are still some problems with drama communication in the new media era, such as copyright infringement and inconsistent content quality. Therefore, in the course of innovation for communication methods, people should strengthen and improve relevant laws and regulations, enhance public awareness of copyright protection, etc. At the same time, people should focus on enhancing the quality of content to maintain its original charm and cultural connotations. In short, the development of new forms of drama communication in the era of new media is an inevitable result of social change.

By continuously exploring and experimenting, people can learn how to use new media technology more effectively for communication and the development of dramatic arts, making them accessible to more people around the world. In the future, with the continuous progress of technology and changes in people's lives, new forms of drama communication will continue to emerge and develop, bringing fresh vitality to the flourishing era of drama.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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