

# The Dissemination and Formation of the Values Contained in Mass Cultural Products

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**Abstract:** As the main form of social public cultural consumption, mass cultural products are taking an increasingly large proportion in social life. Under the joint action of media technology, policies and regulations, media situation, “people” and other factors, the values contained in mass cultural products can be widely disseminated, and gradually become the value cognition recognized by individuals, groups, society and nations. With the development of media technology and the increase of users' participation in information communication, mass cultural products and their values show obvious features of users' deconstruction in their production, promotion and consumption.

## 1. Introduction

The mass cultural product is a kind of commodity which aims to meet the psychological needs of the public, and its basic characteristics are entertainment, consumption and user participation. Generally, people are obsessed with the research of the production, promotion, consumption and the economic benefits brought by the mass cultural products, and the research on the social benefits of mass cultural products is mostly limited to cultural inheritance and innovation, while the dissemination of the values contained in mass cultural products is less concerned. The values originate from the cognition of value. From the perspective of the change of the subject of values, the forming process roughly includes several stages, such as the “subjective spirit” appearing as the individual spirit, the “objective spirit” existing as the social spirit, and the “absolute spirit” as the absolute meaning or the unity of the subject and object.<sup>1</sup> The subject of values is the “realistic people”. The values contained in mass cultural products can become the truth recognized by individuals, groups and even the whole society through communication, and the formation of truth needs a process. The contemporary society is one that is bound by media culture.<sup>2</sup> In the current media ecological environment, family environment, school environment, social environment and other social situations as well as individual thinking ability are deeply affected by the media context, and media communication activities to some extent dominate the formation process of individual and group values. According to the different scope of influence of values, the process of the dissemination and formation of the values contained in mass cultural products can be divided into four stages: germination, formation, maturity and development.

## 2. Stage in Germination: the Individual Values

External environmental factors play a vital role in the formation of individual values.<sup>3</sup> People use frameworks to identify and understand events,<sup>4</sup> and the frame life picture mostly comes from the mass cultural product. Individual values are generated in the consumption and experience of mass cultural products, which is also the main way of satisfying the users' spiritual needs. In the new media environment, individuals have to face a huge amount of information every day, and selection of information is based on individual needs. As personalized needs of users increase day by day, the unsuspecting values become the judgment standard when the individual makes the priority choice. Based on the cognition of the value of things, individuals will analyze and judge related things,

which is the germ of individual values. With the accumulation of practical activities and individual experience in judging the value of similar things, individuals will form their own “truth” and unified judgment standard on value cognition. Irrational factors such as emotion, emotion and desire are important opportunities for the formation of individual values. Emotion has the power to influence people's cognitive orientation and behavior intensity. It affects the users' value cognition and value practice, thus playing an imperceptible role in the formation of values.<sup>5</sup> Emotion emotions have the power to influence people's cognitive orientation and behavioral intensity. Desire is an important driving force for individuals to make efforts to achieve satisfaction. The change of desire is often accompanied by the change of value cognition. Therefore, the formation of individual values is derived from demand, inspired by emotion, empowered by desire, realized in practical activities of satisfying spiritual needs, and rooted in individual value cognition.

As the theory of reception aesthetics holds, only when readers understand its meaning, and even participate in the interpretation and reconstruction of its meaning, can a literary text really become a literary work.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, mass cultural products and their values are meaningless if they are not understood and accepted by users. Television products are first encoded and produced by the sender of the information, and the receiver decodes the information according to their own 'inventory knowledge', and then creates the meaning of the information.<sup>7</sup> Only when the users are interested in the product and can understand and even participate in the deconstruction and re-deconstruction of the product's meaning can the mass cultural product and its values have meaningful value, market value and social value. The main goal of the dissemination of values carried by mass cultural products is to be recognized by people. When the individual needs fit with the mass cultural products, the products will get attention. When a product resonates with an individual's emotion, the meaning and values implied by the product are more likely to be recognized by the individual. The process of realizing individual desire brought about by product experience or consumption is also the process of internalizing the deconstructive value into the evaluation standard of individual value. Therefore, the transformation of mass cultural product values into users' individual values requires the practice of solving multiple links, such as deconstructive creativity, users' needs and users' participation.

### **3. Formative Period: the Group Values**

Group values are the result of the accumulation, convergence and development of individual values, and it is the necessary basis for the formation of social and national values. Group values are the unified abstract standard of value cognition of a social group. It is through providing individuals with multiple value options, guiding value orientation, and controlling value judgment that mass media can finally influence or even replace individuals to make value choices.<sup>8</sup> When the needs of the group increase, the values commonly recognized by the group members will become the evaluation criteria for the priority selection of demand satisfaction. Group emotion is an important opportunity for the unification of group values, while group desire is an important driving force for the formation of group values. Different from the formation of individual values, group values are consistent with the core concept of group organization. Group values are formed by the accumulation, superposition, selection, optimization and unification of individual values of group members. The accumulation process of group practice is also the process of individual value superposition, screening and optimization. In the process of unifying group values, opinion leaders and algorithm recommendations play an important guiding role. In the network virtual group, the virtual nature of group bond makes more members from different social positions can join it, which brings difficulties to the unity of group values in the virtual group. Therefore, although group values originate from the convergence of individual values, the key to the formation of group values is the selection and unification mechanism of values.

Virtual community operation and opinion leaders are the important components of the screening mechanism in the formation of group values. The promotion of mass cultural products is oriented to individual users, and individual acceptance and recognition is the basis for the formation of social groups. Because individual users come from different social positions, their interpretation of the

meaning and value cognition of mass cultural products are also different. Individual values based on users' cognition are expressed, spread and collided in the interaction of virtual communities. Through the content release and opinion presentation of opinion leaders, under the halo effect and the spiral effect of silence, with the help of accurate algorithm push and agenda setting, the recognized value cognition in virtual communities tend to be the same. At this point, the selection process for the values of individuals in the social group is completed. In the formation of group values, irrational factors such as emotion and desire from group members play an important role in promoting the generation of group empathy and group identity. At the same time, due to the deconstruction characteristics of mass cultural products and their values, the interaction process of group members is also a process of deconstruction and re-deconstruction of the products and their values. When a value cognition is recognized, internalized and externalized into corresponding behaviors by most members of a social group, this value becomes the value of the social group. Group values are gradually strengthened in group interaction practice. Therefore, the formation of group values is based on individual values, the mechanism of action is the selection of values brought by opinion leaders and virtual community operation, and the driving force is the interaction behavior between group members.

#### **4. Mature Period: the Social and National Values**

If the formation of individual values depends on the social situation and media situation that the individual is in, the formation of group values depends on the screening mechanism of social groups, and the formation of the values of the whole society and even the nation depends on the larger range of group screening, diachronic screening, policy screening and media screening process. With the help of media, the public “produces language and meaning, creates and interprets feelings, spreads information”<sup>9</sup>. Group screening is the communication and screening activity between social groups on the difference of their own group value cognition, the final result is to produce the value cognition recognized by most social groups. Diachronic screening, as the name suggests, is a time-validated value recognition screening. A group value cognition, tested by practice in different historical periods, is still applicable to the needs of the public and can promote social development, so it is easier to become a fixed value of a society or a nation. Policy selection refers to the tendency of relevant departments to advocate or popularize certain group values from the perspective of promoting the development of social civilization, so as to make the values become well-known value cognition in the whole society in a short time. Generally speaking, most policy screening and diachronic screening are synchronized, but policy screening is often closely related to the social and historical background of the time, while diachronic screening is realized by combining the social and historical background of different periods. Under the joint action of similar value cognition superposition of cultural and entertainment products, opinions of members of different groups, social events or emotional stimulation, guidance of opinion leaders, policy guidance and media agenda setting, different group values in media communication activities make the original multiple value cognition for something gradually unified.

Due to the innovation in production, the users' participation in promotion and the entertainment in consumption, the values of mass cultural products can easily become the values of individuals and some groups. Generally speaking, the object of deconstruction of mass cultural products is “classics”, which represents authority. Therefore, in the context of challenging authority, it is difficult for the values of mass cultural products to become the values recognized by the whole society or the whole nation in a short time. In addition, the deconstruction of classical in mass culture products emerge in an endless stream, so does the number of deconstructive values. It is even more difficult to stand out from the numerous deconstructive values under the premise of challenging the authority. However, in the dissemination of the values of mass cultural products, the deconstruction, which focuses on form innovation, reduces the conflict between deconstruction and classics by bringing sensory impact to users, thus making its implied values more acceptable. The deconstruction of traditional concepts based on the mainstream social or national values is often more in line with the spiritual needs of contemporary users. Taking the typical social events as the

opportunity to construct the values of mass cultural products, the social empathy effect brought by the typical social events can alleviate the resistance caused by the deconstruction. The advantages and disadvantages of the deconstructive values are reflected in its extensive deconstruction, which brings its novelty and attraction, but at the same time, it also brings constraints from the authority of “classics” for its dissemination. In the process of the values changing from group values to social or national values, it also needs to undergo a long time of practice test from different groups. The deconstructive values tested by practice gradually converge and unify in group communication and media communication, and gradually become the values abided by the whole society and the whole nation through the guiding guidance from social authority and stimulation from specific social events.

## **5. Development Period: the Deconstruction and Re-Deconstruction of Values**

In short, the development period of values is not only manifested as the externalization and solidification of values, but also as the adjustment and adaptation of values in the face of new challenges in practice. The priority choice and judgment that people make in social practice are the manifestation of the externalization of values, and the guidance of values simplifies people's decision-making when facing numerous information. The changes of media and social situation bring many challenges to the solidification of values. First of all, compared with the authority of information transmission in the traditional media era, in the new media era represented by the Internet, people often have “skeptical vigilance” in the face of media information. Secondly, while the solidified and mature values are constantly externalized in social practice, their applicability will also face challenges with the change of cultural ecology. Thirdly, when the subject and object of the values change, their guiding significance will also change, and the abstract values also need to make appropriate adjustments. Therefore, how to make adaptive adjustment according to the changes of social situation is an important issue to be faced in the development of any kind of values.

From the perspective of the development of values, the deconstructive values of the mass cultural product are important forms of the adjustment in the mature period. The values of mass cultural products are innovated by deconstructing “classics”. The root of value deconstruction is the change of social situation. According to the different social situations they experience, people re-deconstruct “classics” or “classical deconstruction”, and transform the solidified values with the forms of mass cultural products, deconstructed content works and opinions. When the deconstructive values break through the authoritative bondage of the values carried by the “classic” and become the values widely recognized and practiced, the development process of group values being upgraded to social or national values will be repeated again, and so on. The mass cultural product is an important carrier of deconstructive value, and its deconstruction attracts a lot of users' attention and participation for the values it carries. User's attention and participation are the externalization of values, and the way and content of user participation are also the important components of values' re-deconstruction. The re-deconstruction of value can effectively enhance its adaptability to social development practice. The development period of mass cultural product values is the re-deconstruction stage brought about by content product communication and users' participation, which is also the necessary guarantee for the sustainable development of mass cultural product values.

## **6. Epilogue**

The mass cultural products attract the attention and participation of the public by deconstructing the “classics”, and gradually complete the individualization, social or national diffusion of the deconstructive values in this process. When the values carried by a mass cultural product become socialized or nationalized values, it indicates that the deconstructive values have entered the mature period. However, with the change of social situation, the deconstructive values in the mature period are also faced with many challenges. The deconstruction of deconstructive values can promote themselves from the mature stage into a new stage of development, and a successful deconstruction

helps strengthen the adaptability of deconstructive values for social situation. Therefore, from the perspective of the dissemination and formation process of the values of mass cultural products, individual values, group values, and social or national values are gradually formed along with the gradual expansion of the scope of influence of values carried by mass cultural products. The adaptive deconstruction and re-deconstruction of values in the mature stage are the fundamental approaches to the values' self-improvement.

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