

The Generation and Cultural Expression of Media Cultural Symbols in the Field of Mass Communication

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Abstract: At present, mass media are the first platforms that society uses to create, spread and communicate its thoughts and ideas. This paper will explore the reasons for the creation and spread of media cultural symbols in contemporary times. Based on semiotics and cultural studies, this paper investigates how media platforms express deep-seated values of society through easy-to-understand visual and textual signs. Examine how the logic of media and the political economy of symbols shape things, and show that these symbols are not produced in a vacuum. Research will also be conducted on how media culture represents contemporary identities, what dominant discourses it produces, and how these affect public consciousness in the age of heavy mediatization. Mapping the Transition from the old model of broadcasting to an interactive digital convergence, this paper studies changes in institutional producers and active audiences over time. In short, it believes that to understand the underlying ideas and values of the whole society today, we need to be able to interpret symbols in the media critically.

Keywords: Mass Communication; Media Cultural Symbols; Cultural Expression; Semiotics; Mediatization; Convergence Culture.

1. Introduction

Mass communication has changed the structure of society fundamentally and now serves as a kind of global public platform for people's knowledge. In the course of development, the creation and spread of information have gradually extended beyond the circulation of factual data. Modern media systems now serve as high-tech production bases for cultural values. At the bottom of this sense-making process is the media cultural symbol, a concentrated and powerful unit of communication that carries many values, ideologies and historical narratives of society. In many ways, there are such signs: iconic brand logos and famous movie scenes are frequently repeated; viral internet memes and political slogans are also common examples. They are the foundation of the vocabulary in current public life and silently set the rules for how people view themselves and their relationships with society.

The reasons for these symbols cannot be found in nature, and they are not necessarily objective representations of reality at a certain time. Rather, they are deliberately created objects that, under particular institutional circumstances, are intended to trigger specific emotional and cognitive responses. The field of mass communication provides the technology and a large number of ordinary people who can be affected by such symbols broadly. With the development of our society in the digital era, the quantity and speed of symbol diffusion have increased significantly. Therefore, the research on the sources, forms and contents of these media items is no longer purely academic but has become a demand of the times.

Systematically study the generation and cultural manifestation of media cultural symbols in the current era of mass communication. To explore how a symbol moves in time, what media producers first intend and how the public learns about it through media. Based on the introduction above, Section 2 will present the theoretical basis by examining the semiotic nature of media culture. Section 3 will examine the specific generation mechanisms and present deep-seated structural media logic and encoding practices.

Section 4 explores all kinds of cultural expressions and offers examples of symbols in the formation of identity and power relations. Finally, Section 5 briefly presents the contents and proposes a final thought on why symbol decoding will still be needed in a high-media era. In recent years, the spread of content creation tools has led to more diverse forms and complex situations of online dissemination. In the past few decades, the ability to spread cultural symbols widely has been concentrated in the hands of well-funded broadcast companies and state-owned enterprises. The old guard was still responsible for regulating all of them, controlling which pictures and stories were allowed to be released to the public. However, with the spread of mobile Internet technology and algorithm-driven social media platforms, the monopoly has become increasingly fragmented nowadays. Every person with a mobile phone now has the potential to add new cultural symbols to the world network. As a result of the above changes, the mass audience has been split into numerous small-scale digital communities that generate their own diverse and highly localised symbolic languages. Therefore, the field of mass communication is no longer a one-way channel for broadcast; rather, it is now a chaotic, multidirectional ecosystem highly competitive for symbols and subject to rapid cultural changes.

2. Theoretical Foundations of Media Semiotics

To explore the origin of symbols in media culture, one can first apply basic theories of semiotics and media ecology to this end. A structural study of signs shows that the meaning of a symbol is not inherent; rather, it is always established in relation to others through culture. Scholars have shown that in contemporary myth-making, the bourgeois society frequently employs media symbols to naturalise ideological constructs by making them appear as if they were inevitable and universal truths [2]. When a media platform shows a particular image of success or beauty, it is using a sophisticated semiotic operation to turn a highly subjective cultural desire into a seemingly objective norm for life.

The material properties of the mass communication medium also change in symbolic meaning. The medium of transmission for a symbol fundamentally determines the scale, speed and cognitive impact of the message; therefore, it is inseparable from the end result of the symbol [1]. A cultural symbol in the linear, logical form of printed text is entirely different from the same symbol presented in a fast, fragmented and emotional way on television or in digital videos. Technological mediation will always be subject to the physical limitations and affordances of communication tools in the generation of symbols.

Media symbols in capitalist consumer societies have also been changing economically at a rapid pace. Traditionally, the use value of objects has been gradually displaced by their sign value; that is, the prestige, status and social distinction associated with the symbol of the product have become important [5]. The media institution is responsible for producing the sign value. Through persistent advertising and cultural programmes, the sphere of mass communication has created a hyper-reality where the symbolic representation of an event or an object is more sociologically significant than the actual event or object itself. The above theoretical system can help us understand how media platforms have changed from being mere providers of information to powerful constructors of modern culture. In terms of the system of signs, one needs to consider both the carrier of the sign and what it represents simultaneously. A signifier is the material carrier of a sign that can be perceived by our senses, such as the specific pixels of a screen or the audible frequency of spoken words. At the same time, the signified is the abstract idea associated with a particular form. A good modern media production can arbitrarily link the two in an interesting way. Through continuous, repetitive association in the network of mass communication, media producers can securely link a completely artificial signifier with a profound psychological need, such as the human desire for social inclusion or existential security. After this binding process is successfully carried out for a large number of people, the resulting symbol will be considered highly legitimate. It is no longer regarded as an artificial product but has been absorbed into the culture of the people and is now part of daily life. This psychological internalisation is the end goal of media semiotics, and it has successfully merged commercial and political ideologies into the subconscious of the people.

3. The Generation Mechanism of Media Symbols

The actual generation of a media cultural symbol is a deliberate, highly organised process under the guidance of institutional aims and technological forms. At the beginning of this process is encoding, and media producers insert particular ideological messages, preferred readings, and cultural assumptions into the raw material of the media text [4]. Producers use the cultural resources they have collected to choose themes and visual metaphors that are appealing to the public, then present them in a way that meets the goals of the organisation, which are often commercial or political. The resulting symbol is a compact package of meaning that can be understood by people according to their previous knowledge.

The syntax and grammar of this encoding process are, in fact, determined by the media logic below. Media logic refers to the specific forms, pace, narrative system and organisation model of a particular medium that consequently require all transmitted information to meet structural requirements [3].

For example, the logic of current visual broadcasting demands high conflict, emotional extremes and a quick resolution. Therefore, the subtleties of the socio-political problems are inevitably lost, and they are reduced to simple binary cultural symbols suitable for the limited time of a broadcast.

Structural reductionism is at its worst when the relevant public issue is only mentioned vaguely in a general call for entertainment. With the spread of television and digital platforms in recent years, the concept of knowledge has been altered; now, cultural symbols need to be more entertaining to attract the attention of the public [6]. Educational, religious and political symbols are therefore systematically modified and generated to evoke immediate emotions rather than deep-seated critical thought. Thus, the generation mechanism of mass communication is in fact a filter that selects and shapes cultural raw materials into symbols in strict accordance with the commercial and structural logic of existing media technology. In addition, the application of advanced algorithmic sorting mechanisms has changed the production mode of contemporary media symbols. In the past, human editors and TV producers have used demographic data and intuition to determine which cultural symbols are likely to be popular with the general public. At present, all such processes have been handled by sophisticated machine-learning algorithms that continuously analyse large volumes of behaviour data. The algorithm continuously collects users' behaviour data, such as how long they stay on a page and whether they click, to determine what visual patterns and words are more appealing to people's emotions. Therefore, the symbols produced in the contemporary digital network are hyper-optimised artefacts that exploit innate human cognitive biases through algorithms. The speed and scale of the algorithm's generation process far exceed human comprehension; thus, cultural symbols are rapidly iterated, tested, and discarded based solely on their viral coefficients and engagement profitability. This deep-seated technological change will ensure that the leading cultural symbols of our times are those that can meet the demands of cold, mathematical logic in the digital attention economy.

4. Cultural Expression and Societal Impact

Generated media cultural symbols are then presented to the public and perform deep functions of cultural expression and social-political discussion. The above symbols are the main way that modern people express their sense of self and group membership. Media culture offers symbolic resources for self-fashioning and navigating life in the postmodern era, such as fashion, language systems, and behaviour patterns [8]. However, it is related to the distribution of power in a certain way. Language and cultural symbols are means of symbolic power used by the dominant groups in society to justify the social order and build cultural hegemony without force [7].

At present, the symbolic functions are also closely associated with the Internet and digital networks. The ability to design these networks and to decide which cultural symbols will achieve widespread recognition around the world and which will remain obscure constitutes a kind of power that is extremely important in recent years [10]. Cultural expressions from the top media enterprises generally aim to support the existing social order and promote passive consumerism through popular symbols. This development reflects the profound mediatisation of society; at this time, the

structure of media has begun to shape all other institutions in society, such as politics, religion, and the family, and even dictates their values through media-friendly symbols [11].

However, the cultural expression of media symbols is not also a one-sided imposition. With the emergence of participatory digital media, an era of convergence culture has arrived; at this time, top-down corporate media and bottom-up audience participation have started to meet unexpectedly [9]. Active audiences no longer passively decode symbols based on the intent of institutions; they actively appropriate, remixed and subverted these symbols. Through digital parody, fan fiction and viral counter-narratives, marginalized groups create their own forms of opposition in culture and challenge the dominant symbolic order. At present, due to the competition among institutional construction and grassroots subversion, new Chinese cultural works have achieved a dynamic and controversial nature. In addition, the spread of these media cultural symbols around the world has also driven the trend of globalisation in culture. As powerful and technologically advanced countries, they export highly capitalised media products to developing regions and, at the same time, spread their embedded symbolic systems. Due to the uneven flow of mass communication, there is often a problem of cultural imperialism; at the same time, local and native symbols are systematically replaced by polished and high-production-value symbols of global consumer capitalism. For example, traditional local definitions of beauty, success and the family structure are gradually being replaced by standardised, transnational media images originating from major global entertainment centres. Therefore, new societal problems have arisen as the people in these areas find it difficult to reconcile their own historical memory with the impact of globalised digital culture. Thus, the cultural expression of media symbols is no longer restricted to domestic affairs; instead, it has begun to vie for global cultural leadership by seeking to promote specific values, narratives, and aesthetic ideals in the integrated development of mankind in the future.

Therefore, the study of media cultural symbols should not be restricted to the level of textual interpretation. It should also investigate the institutional environment, platform algorithms and audience behaviours that affect the distribution of symbols and which ones are more widely used. A combination of semiotics and the structure of media can be used to examine the entire life cycle of a media symbol.

5. Conclusion

The creation and cultural manifestation of media cultural symbols in the field of mass communication are the basic ways in which modern society constructs its collective reality. As this analysis has shown, these symbols are not benign reflections of the world; rather, they are highly engineered artifacts created in a complex system of semiotic encoding, institutional media logic and commercial demands. The media is a potent system for constructing meaning that reduces the complexities of society into simple, emotionally evocative pictures and words for the public.

These symbols, once public property, are now used for various purposes by people. They provide a basic system for the development of individual identity and, at the same time, subtly carry symbols that deviate from the prevailing social norm. The widespread dissemination of contemporary culture

has been carried out through mass media, and now no institution in society is immune to the influence of these media symbols. With the development of digital interactivity and convergence culture, to some extent, the symbolic space has been democratised, and active audiences can now participate in the negotiation, remixing and resistance to top-down cultural narratives.

At the end of the 21st century, high levels of critical media literacy will be needed. The people need to be able to take apart all sorts of symbols that are everywhere in their daily life, and then understand how these symbols have been built, and who is in power. Actively query the cultural expressions disseminated by mass communication channels to cultivate a more diverse, fair and critically-aware world view among the people. The first step in taking back the initiative from all-encompassing media is to recognise that these media symbols are not real. With the ongoing changes in the technology era, virtual reality and artificial intelligence are gradually appearing in the fields of immersive technology and mass communication, and thus, the mechanisms of symbolic generation will undoubtedly become more subtle and difficult to spot. The above new media are expected to break down the division between the audience and digital text to some extent and create an entirely artificial symbolic world for people. Therefore, the demand for strong academic research in media ecology will only grow in the coming years. Collaboratively build a healthy environment of digital resilience among educational institutions, policymakers and civic groups to equip people with thinking tools for navigating the coming cognitive revolution safely. Only by repeatedly and deeply interpreting the cultural symbols around us can humanity hope to maintain intellectual freedom and protect the original diversity of human culture.

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