

Interaction and Risk: A Study on the “Communicative Figurations” Power of Short Videos in a Deeply Mediated Society

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Abstract. Based on the context of a deeply mediatized society, this paper examines how short videos reshape social communication and trigger potential risks from the perspective of three dimensions of "Communicative Figurations". The study finds that at the thematic framework dimension, the visual narrative logic of short videos promotes the transfer of power relations to the sensory level; at the actor network dimension, multiple nodes such as algorithms, users, and institutions form a new type of interactive network; at the communication practice dimension, embodied behaviors such as "checking-in" reconstruct individuals' spatial experience of the integration of virtuality and reality. The research indicates that while the "Communicative Figurations" of short videos expand connections, they also change the operational mechanism of social power. For instance, the priority of senses over rational cognition, the dissolution of public order dominated by algorithms, and the reshaping of reality perception through the integration of virtuality and reality all require dialectical examination.

Keywords: Deep Mediatization, Short Videos, Communicative Figurations, Digital and Intelligent Technologies

1. Introduction

In the new media ecology, short videos, with their low technical threshold, high interactivity, and strong sensory immersion, have reshaped the relationship between images and reality, shifting the communication logic from grasping the meaning of time to the immediate satisfaction of senses. Discourses such as "recording a better life" advocated by them not only discipline individuals' modes of expression but also make watching and displaying a daily norm, blurring the boundary between virtuality and reality. As Anthony Giddens put it, once a specific form of communication becomes a habit, it will be internalized into an ideological structure and participate in social reproduction. In this sense, short videos have transcended the category of general media phenomena and become a structural device that constructs a field of virtual-real integration. The embedded rule-making and resource allocation have affected individuals' agentic practices. Therefore, it is necessary to go beyond superficial features such as duration and form, and examine the changes in

the relationship between cognition and space triggered by short videos from the perspective of deep mediatization. In particular, the rapid development of AIGC technologies such as ChatGPT, Sora, and Gemini is promoting short video content production into an era of high fidelity and intelligence, which in turn further accelerates the process of a deeply mediatized society. Against this background, "Communicative Figurations" provide a key theoretical framework for interpreting the short video field. This paper will analyze the new types of communication and potential risks reshaped and triggered by short videos from three dimensions: thematic framework, actor network, and communication practice.

2. The proposal of "deep mediatization" and "Communicative Figurations"

2.1. From "mediatization" to "deep mediatization"

The concept of "mediatization" originates from the critical reflection on the relationship between media and society, with its core being to reveal how media logic gradually and institutionally reshapes the field of social action. Early studies mostly focused on the media's impact on specific fields such as politics and religion, regarding it as a tool external to the social structure. However, with the deep integration of algorithms, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things, the role of media has undergone a fundamental transformation. Based on this, Andreas Hepp proposed the concept of "deep mediatization", emphasizing that media are no longer merely a reflection of society, but have been fully embedded in the human survival framework through technical principles, becoming a fundamental force in social configuration [1]. Under the condition of "deep mediatization", human intentions and technology overlap, and its essence lies in the reconfiguration of social power by technical logic [2]. Through the accumulation of algorithm weights, traffic pool rules, and user behavior data, it reconstructs the distribution pattern of discourse power and subverts the monopoly of elite narratives in traditional media. At the same time, communication in "deep mediatization" is no longer a functional component of the social structure, but has become a basic element of the entire social structure; the network woven by communication is society itself [3]. At this time, media break away from a single constraint, and while reconstructing themselves under new technical principles, they infiltrate the human social survival framework in an all-time, all-angle manner.

As a typical carrier of "deep mediatization", short videos embody the panoramic penetration of technical configurations into social practices. Their algorithm recommendation mechanism not only optimizes content distribution but also changes the distribution mode of social attention through dataism, making the generation and consumption of public issues controlled by traffic rules rather than value rationality. For example, in government communication, short videos transform policy texts into situational audio-visual symbols, which not only improve communication efficiency but also reshape the grammatical structure of public dialogue. At this time, short videos are no longer tools external to society, but directly participate in the generation of social reality through embodied interaction, scenario interweaving, and time-space compression. The geographical boundary of the traditional urban-rural dual opposition has been blurred in the cross-temporal and cross-spatial connections of short videos. Rural creators convert local culture into circulable visual symbols through cameras, completing cultural grafting and spatial reproduction in the virtual field. These phenomena indicate that "deep mediatization" is not only a process of technological empowerment but also a process in which the social structure is regulated by technical logic. Short videos must be understood as an "infrastructure" inherent in social existence, rather than a neutral channel external to actors.

2.2. From "Figurations" to "Communicative Figurations"

The concept of "Figurations" proposed by Norbert Elias aims to transcend the dualism between "agency" and "structure" in sociology [4]. "Figurations" emphasize that society is formed by a dynamic network composed of actors' interactions; it is neither a simple superposition of individual wills nor a forced constraint of external structures, but an interweaving of the two in the historical process [5]. However, Elias' theory was constructed in the pre-digital era and is difficult to fully respond to the new types of connection relations in a mediatized society. Based on this, Sharp and Hasebrink proposed "Communicative Figurations", placing media logic at the core, and pointing out that in a multi-media environment, actor networks construct a relational network with power implications through specific communication practices under the guidance of a common thematic framework [6]. "Communicative Figurations" reveal the power reconstruction mechanism in a mediatized society; power is no longer concentrated in a single subject, but scattered in the interactions between human actors, technical artifacts, and institutional frameworks. On the one hand, it activates public participation through the politics of visibility; on the other hand, it may lead to the fragmentation of public reason due to algorithmic circles. Therefore, "Communicative Figurations" have become a key paradigm for analyzing the relationship between media, society, and power, requiring researchers to go beyond the superficial analysis of communication content and examine how technical intermediaries reshape interactive networks and the underlying power order [7]. "Communicative Figurations" consist of three dimensions: thematic framework (e.g., pan-knowledge communication), actor network (e.g., platform algorithms), and communication practice (e.g., interactive challenges).

In the "Communicative Figurations" constituted by short videos, the thematic framework is not pre-given but dynamically constructed in the communication practices of actor networks. It delineates the meaning boundary and value orientation of specific issues, guiding the direction of symbolic reproduction and meaning negotiation. The composition of actor networks transcends the scope of traditional human subjects, and humans, algorithmic systems, and institutional media form a highly interdependent power network. The power among these actor networks is always in a volatile and unbalanced state, jointly shaping the path and effect of communication. Communication practice is an institutionalized algorithmic behavior formed under the joint action of the aforementioned actor networks and thematic framework; this is not only a technical operation but also a power practice that profoundly affects the distribution of visibility. Thus, the "Communicative Figurations" in the short video ecosystem are essentially a dynamic process in which technical logic, social relations, and power order are intertwined and continuously evolving, profoundly revealing the generation logic and power operation of interactive networks in a mediatized society.

3. Communication generated by short videos in a deeply mediatized society

3.1. A new power mechanism dominated by visual narrative logic

The visual narrative logic of short videos constitutes the core thematic framework guiding communication behaviors in a deeply mediatized society. It creates an immersive atmosphere with emotional internet slang, realizes "one-click video production" with template-based creation tools, and strengthens visual impact through fragmented narration of "golden five seconds". The vertical screen presentation further enhances the depth of content, forming a symbolic system highly consistent with the audience's psychology. This mechanism places individuals in a perceptual space constructed by images, weakens the logical cognitive advantage of traditional text, and promotes the

transfer of power relations to the visual level. The act of gazing itself becomes a power practice; only visualized content possesses cultural influence, which makes individuals scramble to convert their lives into flowable visual materials [8]. In this process, UGC and MGC have reconstructed the power distribution model in the flattened network woven by algorithms. The law of the replacement of communication forms pointed out by Marx manifests itself here: the authority of traditional professionally produced content is gradually diluted, replaced by a nodal power network activated based on micro-resources. Individuals compete for discourse power through the number of connections and interaction frequency, forming a new power center with KOLs as hubs. This power mechanism breaks through the traditional media order and generates a new communication structure.

3.2. Emotional connection in the interaction ritual chain

Short videos have constructed a new type of interaction ritual space through technical affordances, whose actor networks include heterogeneous nodes such as humans, algorithmic systems, and institutional media. Randall Collins' interaction ritual chain is manifested here in three role practices: creators perform life, viewers participate in interaction through likes and comments, and onlookers realize the mutual gaze between "me" and "I" [9]. These practices jointly constitute the ritual foundation of emotional connection. Firstly, through technical settings such as "shooting the same style", platforms transform hot topics into ritual scripts, endowing behaviors such as likes and comments with the function of ritualistic applause. The emotional energy generated by this interaction is converted into cultural capital unique to the circle, accelerating social distinction and emotional resonance among groups. Secondly, the focal length changes and sliding operations of mobile phone cameras form symbolic entry and exit, satisfying the audience's voyeuristic desires and sense of control while constructing a companionable life ritual. This real-time interaction converts private experiences into a public emotional experience like "electronic side dishes", strengthening the cohesion of virtual communities with algorithmic promotion and creating a flowing ritual field.

3.3. Embodied practice under the integration of virtuality and reality

The communication practice of short videos is manifested as a cyclic model of "content recommendation—on-site checking-in", with digital and intelligent technologies deeply intervening in individuals' perception of space. As an intermediate field integrating virtuality and reality, it reconstructs the time-space communication relationship, endowing physical places with superimposed symbolic meanings. After being inspired by media images in the virtual space, individuals complete embodied practices by storing checking-in traces in the cloud. This cross-field behavior not only seeks media presence but also aims to construct collective memory based on shared experiences. For example, TikTok's internet-famous scenic spots carry out symbolic reproduction of geographical space through augmented reality (AR) technology; individuals participate in meaning construction through specific shooting techniques, making "how to shoot" the key to acquiring cultural capital. This communication practice does not emerge out of nowhere but is a selective enhancement and reorganization of real scenes. In this process, short videos have transformed from information media into organizers of social relations. The mixed scenes they create are not only derived from the physical world but also derive new communication dimensions through symbolic reproduction, reflecting the reshaping of spatial experience.

4. Risks triggered by short videos in a deeply mediatized society

4.1. The squeezing of rational cognition by the priority of senses

As a dominant thematic framework, the visual narrative logic constructed by short videos operates on the core mechanism that sensory stimulation takes precedence over emotional expression. Through capturing attention in "golden seconds", template-based creation, and emotional internet slang, this framework compresses complex information into intuitive symbol flows, disciplining users' cognitive habits. The risk lies in that continuous dopamine stimulation constantly satisfies curiosity, and the deep cognitive space required for logical rationality is squeezed by intuition and sensibility. Pseudoscientific content and unverified rumors precisely achieve viral spread through such fragmented and high-emotion carriers, while content requiring in-depth cognition is difficult to effectively reach users in the same communication ecosystem [10]. Under this framework, the serious discussion of public issues is often replaced by the dramatic performance of private emotions and spectacular "facts". This not only blurs the boundary between public and private spheres, providing soil for media violence and media trial but also weakens the public's willingness and ability to engage with reality, making critical thinking give way to the "platform labor" logic of chasing traffic.

4.2. The dissolution of public order dominated by algorithms

The actor networks in the short video ecosystem have transcended traditional human subjects, expanding to include MCN agencies and Bot accounts. With data advantages and distribution power, algorithms have gradually become dominant "key actors" in practice. By analyzing users' historical behaviors to construct "platform portraits", they lead to the massive replication of similar content, resulting in an information environment characterized by low density and high homogeneity, with false information mixed in. This algorithm-dominated interaction model increases the risk of group polarization: users are more inclined to believe the popularity of issues rather than the truth of information, and are continuously labeled and circled in the information cocoons constructed by algorithms. At the same time, the power relationship between subjects has not achieved the ideal decentralized democracy; instead, it shows a trend of high concentration in technical systems. Based on stereotypes, algorithms produce explicit or implicit discrimination in content pushing, invisibly constructing and solidifying biased cultural circles, and restricting their diverse communication and circle-breaking dissemination.

4.3. The reshaping of reality perception by the integration of virtuality and reality

The communication practice of short videos has blurred the boundary between virtuality and reality with digital and intelligent technologies. Editing tools such as beauty filters, filters, and transitions make individuals' behaviors highly dependent on the "processing" and "symbolic reconstruction" of reality. In pursuit of the "circle-breaking effect", users often give priority to visual impact and emotional stimulation in recording behaviors, leading to the displacement of real life experiences by elaborately designed symbolic performances [11]. Some internet-famous scenic spots have been constructed as "checking-in" symbols that transcend their natural and humanistic values through shooting from specific angles and post-production. Users immerse themselves in "media phantasm" for spectacle consumption, but gradually weaken their trust in real society in the process. This not only reflects the powerful underlying consumption logic and capital orientation but also reflects the

dynamic power game. In the continuous role-playing and self-performance, users' cognitive models may shift from initial curiosity and creative exploration to later numbness and passive compliance, eventually becoming "one-dimensional men".

5. Conclusion

As an important manifestation of "Communicative Figurations", short videos have reshaped the form and logic of social communication in a deeply mediatized society. Through the new power mechanism dominated by visual narrative logic, emotional connection in the interaction ritual chain, and embodied practice under the integration of virtuality and reality, they dynamically change social connections and power relations. While generating new spatial experiences, this process also harbors structural risks such as the squeezing of rational cognition, the dissolution of public order, and the reshaping of reality perception. These findings not only confirm the explanatory power of "Communicative Figurations" for analyzing social changes in the deeply mediatized era of digital intelligence but also highlight the complexity of the interweaving of technical logic and social power. In the future, it is necessary to break through the single media perspective, carry out interdisciplinary dialogues, and especially pay attention to the reshaping of the communication ecosystem by the iteration of new technologies such as AIGC, so as to promote the balanced development of data ecological governance and media literacy education.

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