

# Characteristics and Reflections on Music Communication from the Perspective of Network Empowerment

**Yudi Zhang**

Shanghai University of Technology, Shanghai 200093, China

**Copyright:** © 2025 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

**Abstract:** In recent years, there have been some new characteristics in the dissemination of music in China under the new media environment. The negative effects of online empowerment, such as manipulation by interest groups, rampant materialism, lack of elite culture, ambiguous roles of gatekeepers, and group polarization, presented in this process, must be highly concerned and valued. In view of this, this article explores the characteristics and phenomena of music dissemination in the current new media era from the perspective of network empowerment, including power relations, power elements, and power games. It also attempts to propose corresponding countermeasures and suggestions for music dissemination regulation paths that meet the needs of the times from the perspectives of power regulation and power balance.

**Keywords:** Network empowerment; Music dissemination; Power; New media

**Online publication:** July 26, 2025

## 1. Introduction

Throughout the history of human music dissemination, we have found that every major scientific discovery and technological application has given rise to new information dissemination technologies, which have driven the music dissemination revolution and propelled human music dissemination activities towards newer, broader, more accessible, and easier to store levels; On the other hand, we also note that every major technological revolution will lead to changes in the attributes of power and the structure of social power. This change is also reflected in the dissemination of music.

## 2. The compatibility between music dissemination and social power relations

For a long time, power has been a professional term in political science, sociology, law, and other fields that focus on studying social phenomena. In general, people define power as the ability to control or influence others. The party holding power can dominate the other from top to bottom, so power is unidirectional.

So far, human society has undergone four changes in the form of media, namely oral media, print media, electronic media, and the current digital media. The dissemination of music is synchronized with every change in media form, and thus forms new power relationships. In the era of oral communication, people with extraordinary memory and good expression often have the right to speak; In the early era of text and written communication, a very small number

of people (such as priests, monks, etc.) had the opportunity to master this skill and have identity privileges... Modern printing technology facilitated the emergence of music score media, breaking the original mode of music communication such as “oral transmission” and “oral transmission”, and for the first time dissolving the social power relationships that were solidified in music relay communication, such as master disciple, father son, clan, church, etc. The emergence of record technology, Not only did it promote a more refined social division of labor in the music culture dissemination chain, but it also led to the emergence of a power relationship structure dominated by record companies, dominated by professionals, and mainly targeted by the new privileged class; Radio transmission technology and image transmission technology are a powerful technological revolution at the audio-visual level. With the continuous popularization of radios and televisions and their entry into people’s lives, mass communication has truly become synonymous with music transmission. Ordinary people now have the right to enjoy music (at a low price) and choose music (by changing channels and carrying machines with them). With the combination of computer and telecommunications technology, cyberspace has emerged, and information and network technology have changed the concept of time and space. New media represented by mobile phones have opened up a new era from mass communication to social communication. The new elements of communication drive the process of music dissemination itself to become an empowering process, constantly promoting changes in the communication system and social power relations.

### 3. The Transformation of Network Empowerment and Music Culture Communication Methods

If the early Internet music culture communication was just the relationship between people and music information, then in the current new media era, this kind of communication can be seen as the era of interpersonal relationships. In view of this, online empowerment essentially blurs the relationship between rights and power, and the leap between the two depends on how many people hold this power and how much force it can gather.

#### 3.1. The dissemination process of music is becoming a form of empowerment for media power

Currently, the functions of smartphones based on mobile internet have far exceeded the significance of traditional communication tools, and the tool attribute of media power has become a “super tool” feature, becoming a new type of communication tool and system. As a result, the process of dissemination is becoming a form of empowerment for media power. In summary, there are currently several forms of empowerment.

**Technological Empowerment: Pan Communication and Portable Revolution** “A new source of power is not money in the hands of a few, but information in the hands of the majority<sup>[1]</sup>.” Nesbitt’s early prophecy accurately captures the three major characteristics of information power, information empowerment, and power pluralism in the information society. When new media represented by smartphones are connected to the internet, theoretically it gives the public the opportunity to access almost all music information. This opportunity is a kind of technical correction of information asymmetry with the purpose of Internet freedom and equality. From the perspective of media empowerment theory, it is a kind of right care for the vulnerable groups that have been forgotten and rejected in the past music.

**Group empowerment: The quasi social revolution in music dissemination**, also known as public empowerment, refers to group empowerment.

According to Foucault, ‘power’ only makes sense from the perspective of social relations. Following this theoretical path and observation perspective, we find that the new media era in which the online communication revolution is currently taking place is not only an “era of everyone”, but also an era of “relationships” and “interactions” where the concept of collective relationships is constantly strengthened and shaped.

**Self empowerment: The subjectivity revolution of grassroots self** empowerment is an awakening of individual “rights consciousness” in the information age, and a reflection of personal qualities and social connections that match the network age. It is a transformation from “I cannot” to “I can too”. In the new media environment, the forms of music

dissemination are becoming increasingly diverse, providing people with different spiritual experiences in both content and form. We provide a variety of music information content and self-presentation platforms in different forms for music enthusiasts at different levels, levels, and even in different appreciation scenarios and moods, to meet different aesthetic needs.

### 3.2. The uniqueness and contemporaneity of music culture dissemination in the new media environment

Relatively speaking, the timeliness and uniqueness of music dissemination are more prominent in the broad cultural dissemination. On the one hand, it maintains synchronization with the updates and iterations of communication technology and media in terms of technological means, while also retaining compatibility with traditional communication methods. The timeliness of music dissemination methods is generally reflected in the following aspects.

**Listening to music - participating in diverse music scenes and participatory music consumption has become a trend.** At the end of 2021, the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) released a global music market research report titled “Engaging with Music2021,” which involved 43000 participants from 21 countries/regions. From “Music Listening 2019” in 2019 to “Engaging with Music 2021” in 2021, the title of the report has changed from “listening to music” to “participating in music”, which fully conforms to the new trend of people participating in music consumption in various scenarios: currently, people can not only go to OK halls to sing to their heart’s content and enjoy music quietly at home, but more commonly, on various occasions such as fitness, work, leisure, etc. have become music scenes, and music consumption has shifted from content driven to scene driven. In the 2021 Q3 financial report released by Tencent Music and the latest data disclosed by NetEase Cloud Music, we also see a trend: Tencent Music’s payment rate has reached 11.2%, a year-on-year increase of 40%; The upcoming IPO of NetEase Cloud Music has a payment rate of 14.9%, a year-on-year increase of over 90%, and participatory music consumption has become a trend.<sup>[2]</sup>

**Popularization of entertainment short videos—driving music consumption, fast food consumption, and short video cultural consumption into the “jungle period”.** Short videos presented in the form of text, music, and video not only satisfy the creators’ desire to showcase themselves and achieve personalized expression, but also cater to the audience’s demand for fragmented fast food consumption. In recent years, they have become increasingly popular. According to the 53rd Statistical Report on the Development of the Internet in China, as of December 2023, the number of short video users in China has reached 1.053 billion, an increase of 41.45 million over December 2022, accounting for 96.4% of the total Internet users. Music is the soul of short videos. A survey shows that over 90% of respondents in China have used short videos, and 45% of their music listening is done through short videos. Correspondingly, the weekly listening time per capita in China rose from 17.7 hours two years ago to 22.9 hours, up nearly 30%<sup>[2]</sup>. However, at the same time, the improper use of participation rights has led to extreme entertainment tendencies such as vulgar content and parody in the field of short videos. Due to the lack of effective value orientation and common behavioral norms, the consumption of short video culture has entered a “jungle period” where money is omnipotent, blindly following, and selfish desires are paramount. The lack of direction indicates a cultural crisis that is undermining the foundation of music culture.

**‘Breaking through the Circle’ and ‘Breaking Through the Circle’— Revolutionary media integration has become the new normal, and the fusion and innovation of mainstream music culture and subcultures have entered a new era.** In recent years, the interconnectivity, integration, and even dislocation infiltration between mainstream media and various media platforms have become the new normal. The emergence of Bilibili across the year can be regarded as a successful case of the integration of emerging media and traditional media culture. In terms of mainstream media, they also proactively put aside their position, integrate advantageous resources, and actively connect with emerging media. They first build platforms and then integrate them to achieve the “breaking through” dissemination of mainstream values, reflecting the strong advantage of official media in presenting national will through new media and platforms.

**Data/algorithms/metaverse and other technologies have become new elements of communicati—the**

**combination of music and technology innovation highlights the era's new gameplay, making intelligent control a long-term issue in the future.**

On October 24, 2023, Tencent Music Entertainment Group officially kicked off its third TechME Technology Week, which is a platform for communication between technical talents and music enthusiasts in the music industry. With the support of industry and market, the technological attributes of music are remarkable. Nowadays, from the simplest music listening and music recognition - human humming and music recognition - complex arrangement and tuning systems, etc., they are all supported by massive amounts of data and algorithms. As for AI intelligent editing (which can meet the creative needs of deep users), AI technology generating massive instrument scores (solving the problem of finding scores for instrumental music enthusiasts), etc., they are already commonplace... In addition, it is gratifying that audio algorithms, speech recognition, OCR recognition and other technologies are safeguarding music data security and protecting creators' copyrights from the perspective of the music industry. Not only that, but also the timely and seamless integration of new technologies and music dissemination has become a reality. For example, the metaverse has become a hot project for music to catch up with technology, and virtual performances are becoming increasingly frequent and common.

## **4. Abuse of Power, Regulation of Power, and Balance of Power**

Network empowerment and abuse of power are a contradictory pair. In the open, shared, participatory, and creative environment provided by new media, the crisis of spatial order and chaos such as infringement and monopoly in music dissemination have emerged.

### **4.1. Cultural risks of music dissemination in the new media environment**

**Control and manipulation of the head platform** At present, the pattern of the domestic music market has gradually become clear, forming a monopoly position of "one super" and "one strong" for Tencent music platforms and NetEase Cloud Music. Users have formed a serious dependence on the services they provide. In recent years, with the maturity and profitability of short video content and music live streaming services on top platforms such as Bilibili, their positioning, layout, and promotion in the content market have also formed new monopolies and manipulations. Dependence and control go hand in hand. Under the influence of technology and market temptation, the stronger the dominant players in channel discourse power, they not only determine the control of agenda setting power, but also influence the cultural value orientation in the process of music dissemination.

**The proliferation of materialism and the lack of elite culture** In recent years, under the erosion of commercial profits, the blind pursuit of so-called "click through rates", "traffic packages", "fan numbers" and riding on hot topics has led to the proliferation of crude and shoddy "talk songs". We should be alert to the fact that some so-called popular music, which seeks to attract attention and experiment on the edge of vulgarity, carries ideas such as mercantilism, materialism, and consumerism. Over time, it will become the dominant value system in society through the dissemination of new media. In this context, as an elite culture aimed at educating, guiding, and regulating the moral ethics, values, and behavioral norms of the general public, it is increasingly showing a trend towards commercialization. The shift from aesthetics to economy has led to a decline in the level of music appreciation and taste among the general public, posing unprecedented challenges to our traditional cultural spirit and values.

**Unclear gatekeepers and group polarization** The gatekeeper system represented by the review mechanism is the directional tool for traditional media communication. New media communication has revolutionized traditional media in terms of institutional mechanisms, and under the guidance of economic and entertainment supremacy, the role of gatekeepers has become blurred. Music is an emotional art, and emotions have a complex logic of occurrence and development. It is a part of cognitive psychology and a resource for social mobilization and integration. Simply viewing emotions as "irrational" is one-sided<sup>[3]</sup>. However, emotional sensitivity may lead to the phenomenon of "disorganized crowds" and "group polarization", which is worthy of our vigilance.

## 4.2. Power regulation and balance: multidimensional thinking based on China's national conditions

The freedom and autonomy of music dissemination space, and even the cultural security of the country, do not come from the absence of the government. According to empowerment theory and governance theory, the government is an important subject of power. In view of this, this article proposes suggestions and reflections on the current and future national governance paths (power regulation and power balance) from the perspective of government governance.

**Using “self media” and “short videos” to tell the story of China— making good use of “soft power” at the international level** At present, the dissemination of music culture under the leadership of new media has created a completely new social field, melting down traditional international and domestic boundaries and forming new types of international and social relations. Accurately grasping and utilizing the “soft power” of external strategy should be of utmost importance. In terms of external publicity, efforts can be made to fully utilize the discourse power of self-media in international cultural dissemination. Short self-media videos are published in the form of text, music, and video, reducing the barriers for international audiences to understand and appreciate Chinese culture. Chinese culture, such as history, architecture, tourism, cuisine, clothing, and everyday life, quickly spreads in the international community through beautiful music melodies and original images, and forms a certain social influence. The Chinese stories told by folk “micro forces” represented by self media can shape a good, approachable, and authentic image of China in the international community, and dissolve misunderstandings of China in the international community. In this regard, the government should adopt tolerance, support, and care for “citizen diplomacy” and “grassroots narratives”. Moderate guidance, timely correction, and allowing it to play a greater role.

**Encourage industry autonomy and collective management— adhere to the regulatory principle of combining self-discipline with the rule of law** With the development of technology, the popularization of applications, and the increase in social participation, various platforms have gradually formed a series of new rules and mechanisms in the process of music dissemination. This function and mechanism have their rationality and legitimacy. It is a powerful supplement to the current and future lag in relevant national legislation and the suddenness of government crackdown actions. At the same time, it is also an affirmation and effective attempt to recognize the specific role of self-regulatory mechanisms in the new media environment. Based on the characteristics of the network, external control factors can be used to promote the self-discipline mechanism of the network, cultivate more benign “antibodies” from within, and reduce and resist the occurrence and spread of side effects. This can be seen as a supplement to effective regulation. But self-discipline mechanisms are not omnipotent. Online self-discipline requires government supervision and legal support, and the ways, means, degree, and fields of government intervention are a constantly emerging issue. Attention should be paid to cultivating and leveraging the role of industry associations, and encouraging industry autonomy and collective management should be an effective approach.

**Creating a Clear Environment for Music Communication with Advantageous Resources—Accurately Utilizing ‘Communication is Power’** In the political and public opinion scene, music is a charge to enhance identity recognition and inspire public emotions. In the current field of new media music culture dissemination, the government’s advantage at home cannot be lost. This power should be reflected not only in rigid strikes and sanctions, but also in flexible “catering” and “guidance” aspects. On the one hand, the government should put down its posture and actively cater to the pace of new media, becoming an active user of new technologies; On the other hand, the government should make good use of its high-end advantageous resources and guide the public to improve their appreciation of classic music and high art. In recent years, the government has injected a clean stream into the music dissemination environment in our country, which is worthy of persistence and promotion.

## 5. Conclusion

Over the past decade, we have witnessed and experienced the surprises and pleasures brought to our daily work and life by new technologies and media such as 4G/5G, big data, cloud storage, and smart devices. The combination of music and

technology innovation allows us to fully enjoy the endless charm of music culture. Today, as new technologies such as data, algorithms, and metaverse continue to become new elements of communication, it not only expands the connotation and extension of communication theory, but also promotes the transformation of communication systems and changes in social power relations. The future is unpredictable, but the decentralization of power and increasing participation of people will inevitably make the social dissemination of music simpler and more complex. New gameplay requires new rules, and seeking a balance between freedom and regulation, openness and control should be a long-term issue for the future.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

## References

- [1] Hanno Hart Critical Study of Communication Studies. Translated by He Daokuan Beijing: Peking University Press, 2008:3 Preface to Gao Bingzhong and Yang Boxu
- [2] Lu X, 2021, How has the business model of the music industry evolved from content driven to scene driven?. [https://k.sina.com.cn/article\\_6236057337\\_173b2aef900100zue1.html](https://k.sina.com.cn/article_6236057337_173b2aef900100zue1.html), 2021-12-02/2024-07-09
- [3] Zhang A, 2022, The shaping and construction of national image by self media in external propaganda. *Frontiers of Foreign Social Sciences*, (02): 10.

### **Publisher's note**

*Whioce Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.*