

Analysis of the Trend and Causes of Plot Homogenization of Network Literature Works

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Abstract: *Internet literature is an important part of contemporary literature, which has had a profound impact on popular culture. However, with the rapid development and popularization of network literature, the phenomenon of plot homogenization has become increasingly obvious, which not only affects the reading experience of readers, but also restricts the long-term development of network literature. This paper analyzes the current phenomenon of plot homogenization in network literature from the development status quo of network literature, explores the cultural, market and technical reasons behind it, and puts forward corresponding countermeasures and suggestions, with a view to promoting the innovation and development of network literature.*

Keywords: *network literature, plot homogenization, development trend, reason analysis, innovation strategy*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and significance of the study

As a product of the digital era, network literature has become an important part of modern literature. It has attracted a large number of reader groups with its unique dissemination method, creation mode and reading experience, and has had an unignorable impact on contemporary culture. However, with the continuous expansion of the Internet literature market, while the number of works is surging, the phenomenon of homogenization of plots is becoming more and more serious. This trend not only weakens the artistic charm and depth of thought of network literature, but also limits the space for its innovative development. Therefore, exploring the phenomenon of plot homogenization in Internet literature has important theoretical and practical value, which helps to promote the healthy development of Internet literature and enrich modern cultural life.^[1]

1.2 Domestic and foreign research status

Reviewing the research literature on network literature at home and abroad, it can be found that scholars have noticed the problem of plot homogenization and made preliminary discussions on it. For example, some studies have pointed out that factors such as the creative environment, authorial factors and social and cultural background of network literature may have an impact on plot homogenization. However, the current in-depth research on this issue is still insufficient, lacking comprehensive and systematic analysis and targeted solution strategies. Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap, systematically analyze the performance of plot homogenization in online literature and its causes through text analysis, case studies and other methods, and put forward corresponding countermeasures and suggestions.

1.3 Research Content and Methods

This study will adopt text analysis, case study and other methods to systematically analyze the performance of network literature plot homogenization and its causes. Firstly, through collecting and organizing a large number of network literature works, text analysis is carried out to reveal the specific performance and characteristics of plot homogenization. Secondly, typical cases of works are selected for in-depth analysis to explore the causes and mechanisms of plot homogenization. Finally, combined with relevant theories and practical experience, targeted countermeasures and suggestions are put forward with a view to promoting the innovation and development of network literature.^[2]

2. Overview of the Development of Internet Literature

2.1 Origin and Evolution of Internet Literature

The origin of network literature can be traced back to the end of the 20th century, and with the rapid development of Internet technology, it has gradually become a new platform for literary creation and dissemination. Initially, Internet literature was mainly a digitized form of traditional literary works, but over time, the unique interactivity and immediacy of the Internet gave birth to a whole new form of literature. The rise of network literature is due to technological progress, creative freedom, reader participation and innovation in business models. Technological progress has provided the basis for the dissemination of Internet literature, while freedom of creation has enabled authors to escape the restrictions of traditional publishing and communicate directly with readers. Reader participation not only increases the interactivity of works, but also enables works to be adjusted according to readers' feedback. Innovations in business models, such as paid reading and reward mechanisms, have provided economic support for the continued development of Internet literature. Internet literature has developed from the initial BBS forums and personal websites to today's literary websites and social media platforms, forming a diverse ecology of creation and reading.^[3]

2.2 Main Types and Characteristics of Internet Literature

Internet literature covers a wide range of genres, including mystery, urban, history, science fiction and romance. These genres usually have distinctive features, such as metaphysical works often build a grand worldview or extend from real life, suspense works reflect the real face of modern life, historical works show historical characters and events through fictional plots, science fiction works explore future technology and alien life, and romance works are based on love stories. The characteristics of Internet literature include immediacy, interactivity, diversity and serialization. Immediacy means that works are updated quickly and readers can follow the latest chapters in real time. Interactivity is reflected in the frequent communication between authors and readers, and readers' feedback can directly affect the direction of the work. Diversity is reflected in the wide range of topics and styles to meet the needs of different reader groups. Serialization is another distinctive feature of Internet literature, where works are usually released in serial form, forming long-term reading expectations.^[4]

2.3 Market Status and Trends of Internet Literature

The current Internet literature market shows a trend of rapid growth, the market scale is expanding, and the user base continues to grow. The main reader groups of Internet literature are young people, especially students and young white-collar workers, who are highly receptive to new things and have a strong interest in Internet literature. In terms of business model, paid reading has become the mainstream, and business models such as copyright operation and derivatives development have gradually matured. In addition, the internationalization trend of online literature is becoming more and more obvious, and excellent works are beginning to receive the attention of international readers. In the future, the development of online literature may be driven by technological innovation, such as the application of artificial intelligence and virtual reality technology, which will bring new creation and reading experience to online literature. Content innovation will also become the key to attracting readers, and the creativity and uniqueness of original works will become more important. The strengthening of copyright protection and the fight against piracy will safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of authors and platforms. Meanwhile, cross-border cooperation between online literature and other cultural industries such as film, TV and games will become more frequent, forming a complete industry chain.^[5]

3. The Performance of Plot Homogenization in Internet Literary Works

3.1 Definition and Identification of Plot Homogenization

Plot homogenization refers to the phenomenon that different stories in online literary works show a high degree of similarity in terms of plot development, character setting and theme expression. This similarity may be manifested in the repetition of plots, set plot structures, similar character personalities and behavioral patterns, and so on. The conceptual definition of plot homogenization is of great significance to the in-depth analysis of the quality and innovation of network literature works.

In order to accurately identify plot homogenization, it needs to be analyzed from several angles. First of all, one can start from the developmental vein of the plot and observe whether there are similar starts, climaxes and endings. For example, in the common plot of the “Reverse Attack” in many network novels, the protagonist often starts from an ordinary or even weak character, gradually becomes powerful through various opportunities and efforts, and eventually overcomes the enemy and realizes the reverse attack of life. When this plot pattern is repeated in multiple works, there may be a problem of plot homogenization. Secondly, character setting is also an important aspect in identifying plot homogenization. If the characters in different works are too similar in terms of personality, ability, and background, it will easily lead to plot similarity. For example, common character types such as “high-cool male god” and “cute female lead” appear in many novels, and their behaviors and emotional development tend to follow similar patterns. In addition, similarities in thematic expression may also suggest plot homogenization. If multiple works revolve around the same themes, such as love, friendship, growth, revenge, etc., and lack innovation in the way the themes are expressed, then there may be a risk of plot homogenization.^[6]

3.2 Case Analysis of Plot Homogenization in Typical Works

Taking some popular network literature works as an example, the prevalence and specific performance of plot homogenization in network literature can be clearly seen. For example, in the field of metaphysical fiction, many works adopt a similar mode of upgrading and fighting monsters. The protagonist starts as a novice in the world of cultivation and gradually improves his or her strength by constantly challenging strong enemies and obtaining treasures and secret books. In the process, they usually encounter various strange encounters and valuable people to help them, and eventually become a party overlord. This plot pattern is repeated in a number of metaphysical novels, such as “Fighting the Vault of Heaven” and “Martial Arts Qiankun”.

In romance novels, the plot of “the domineering president falls in love with me” is also very common. The female protagonist is usually an ordinary girl who meets the cold and overbearing president by chance, and after a series of misunderstandings and twists and turns, the two fall in love and overcome all kinds of difficulties to finally be together. This kind of plot is reflected in many romance novels, although the specific details and characterization may be different, but the overall plot framework is very similar.

In addition, cross-country novels also have the problem of plot homogenization. The protagonists of many traveled novels are modern people who traveled to the ancient times and made a good living in the ancient times with their modern knowledge and skills. They may utilize modern science and technology, culture, business concepts, etc. to create miracles in ancient times, and at the same time, they may have various emotional entanglements with ancient princes, nobles and talented people. This plot pattern can be seen in a large number of crossover novels and lacks innovation.

These cases of plot homogenization in typical works show that there is a more serious phenomenon of plot repetition and routinization in network literature, which not only affects the reading experience of readers, but also limits the development of network literature.

3.3 Types and Characteristics of Homogenized Episodes

There are several types of homogenized plots: first, the common type of upgrading flow. In many works of metaphysical fantasy and immortal literature, the protagonist usually starts from a state of low strength and improves his level and strength through constant cultivation, fighting, and obtaining strange encounters and treasures. In this process, there are often accompanied by a variety of challenges and enemies, and the protagonist can always rely on the tenacity of will and the protagonist's aura to overcome the difficulties time and time again, and realize the leap in strength. Second, the Mary Sue/Jack Sue genre. In this type of work, the protagonist usually has a perfect appearance, superior talent and charm, and can attract the love and admiration of the opposite sex wherever they go. At the same time, the protagonist can easily succeed in every aspect, with almost no real setbacks or failures. Third, the revenge genre. The protagonist often suffers great injustice or harm for various reasons, and then embarks on the road of revenge. In the process of revenge, the protagonist will continue to grow and become stronger, and eventually succeed in revenge and realize self-redemption.

Homogenized plots have significant features. First, the plot development is patterned. No matter which type of homogenized plot, there is a relatively fixed development vein and rhythm. For example,

in upgrading works, there must be a series of levels and challenges waiting for the protagonist to break through; Mary Sue/Jack Sue works, the protagonist's love and career is always smooth sailing; revenge works, the protagonist's road to revenge, although there are twists and turns, but ultimately will be successful. Secondly, characterization is flattened. In homogenized plots, characters often lack depth and complexity, and exist only to promote the plot. For example, the protagonist in upgraded works usually only has a single character trait such as bravery and perseverance; most of the characters in Mary Sue/Jack Sue works are perfect and lack of realism. Again, emotional expression is homogenized. Emotional expression in homogenized plots tends to be relatively single, lacking delicate and rich layers. For example, love is often portrayed as too idealized and simplistic, lacking real contradictions and conflicts. Finally, the thematic idea is shallow. Many works with homogenized plots tend to focus only on the excitement and entertainment of the plot, while ignoring the depth and connotation of the thematic ideas. Themes are often limited to personal growth, the beauty of love, the pleasure of revenge and other relatively superficial level, lack of thought and exploration of society, human nature and other deep-seated issues.

4. Analysis of Reasons for Plot Homogenization of Internet Literature Works

4.1 Influence of Creative Environment

4.1.1 Characteristics of network platform

The network platform plays a crucial role in today's network literature creation, and its characteristics have a profound impact on the creative mode of writers, which in turn leads to the emergence of the phenomenon of plot homogenization. First of all, the openness and low threshold of network platforms have led to a large number of creators pouring into the field of network literature. Although this has brought rich diversity to literary creation, it has also led to fierce competition. In order to stand out from the crowd, many authors often choose to imitate the models of those already successful works, which leads to the homogenization of the plot. For example, when a certain type of novel has gained high popularity and attention on online platforms, other authors will follow its plot structure, character setting and theme expression, with a view to attracting more readers.

Secondly, the commercialized operation mode of online platforms also has a significant impact on writers' creation. In order to maximize commercial interests, online platforms usually promote and recommend works according to readers' reading preferences and market demand. This makes authors have to consider the market demand when creating works, and thus tend to create works that meet the public taste. And the public taste often has a certain degree of convergence, which further aggravates the phenomenon of homogenization of plot. For example, some online platforms recommend works based on readers' clicks, favorites and comments, which makes authors, in order to get more exposure, have to cater to readers' preferences and create works with similar plots and styles.

In addition, the rapid updating and dissemination speed of online platforms also exerts pressure on writers' creations. In order to meet readers' demand for new works, authors often need to create a large number of works in a relatively short period of time. Under such circumstances, it is difficult for authors to have enough time and energy to carry out in-depth thinking and innovation, and they can only choose some relatively simple and routine plot patterns to create. For example, some network writers have to update thousands of words or even tens of thousands of words every day in order to maintain the updating speed of their works, which makes it difficult for them to carry out elaborate and innovative plot design, and they can only rely on some ready-made plot templates to carry out rapid creation.

4.1.2 Reader Demand and Market Orientation

Market demand and readers' preference are important factors in shaping the content and style of Internet literature works. In today's network literature market, readers' demands are characterized by diversification, but at the same time, there is also a certain convergence. On the one hand, with the development of society and the improvement of people's living standard, readers put forward higher requirements for the quality and innovation of online literature works. They hope to see more works with depth and connotation, novel plots and full-bodied characters. On the other hand, since the audience group of Internet literature is mainly young people, their reading preferences often have certain commonalities. For example, they like those works with tense and exciting plots, full of suspense and adventurous elements; they like those works with romantic love and touching emotions; and they like those works that can fulfill their fantasies and dreams.

This convergence of readers' needs makes online literary works show certain similarity in content and style. In order to satisfy readers' needs, authors often choose to create works that meet the public taste. And the market orientation further aggravates this phenomenon. In the online literature market, commercial interests are an important driving force for the creation and dissemination of works. In order to obtain higher commercial returns, online literature platforms and publishers tend to select and promote works according to market demand. This makes authors have to consider the market demand when creating works, and thus tend to create those works with similar plots and styles. For example, when a certain type of novel gains high popularity and attention in the market, other authors will follow its plot structure, character setting and theme expression with a view to achieving success in the market.

4.2 Author Factors

4.2.1 Creative Motivation and Pressure

Internet writers face a variety of economic and psychological pressures, which have a profound impact on their creativity. In terms of economic pressure, online literary creation is often one of the main sources of income for authors. In order to make ends meet and obtain more financial rewards, authors need to constantly create and update their works. Under such circumstances, they tend to choose plot patterns that are relatively easy to create and popular in order to increase the production and hit rate of their works. For example, in order to get income as soon as possible, some Internet writers will choose to imitate those already successful works or adopt some set plot structures to meet readers' needs and market orientation.

In addition, psychological pressure is also an important factor affecting the creativity of Internet writers. In the field of online literature, the competition is very fierce, and authors need to face readers' evaluation and criticism constantly. If the hits and evaluations of their works are not high, authors will feel lost and frustrated, and may even doubt their own creative ability. In this case, authors tend to change their creative style and plot design in order to cater to readers' preferences, which leads to the homogenization of their works. For example, some authors will deliberately cater to readers' tastes in order to gain more favorable comments and attention, and create those works with similar plots and styles to meet readers' needs and expectations.

4.2.2 Writing skills and experience

The level of writing skills and experience of authors has a significant impact on the diversity of the content of their works. On the one hand, lack of writing skills may lead to authors' lack of innovation and depth in plot design, characterization and language expression. For example, some novice authors may, due to their lack of writing experience, tend to adopt some common routines and patterns in plot design, lacking novel creativity and unique perspectives. They may imitate the plot structure of other successful works or rely on some ready-made plot templates, thus leading to homogenization of their works.

On the other hand, the accumulation of experience may also cause authors to fall into a fixed mode of creation. Some experienced authors may form their own creative styles and habits in the long process of creation, thus lacking flexibility and diversity in plot design. They may reuse their familiar plot patterns and character settings to ensure the quality and stability of their works. For example, some well-known network writers may have similar plots and identical characters after creating several works, which is the solidification of their creative patterns due to the accumulation of experience.

4.3 Socio-cultural factors

4.3.1 Influence of popular culture

Pop culture elements are widely copied and imitated in network literature, which is an important reason for the homogenization of the plot. In today's society, the influence of popular culture is increasing, and it permeates all aspects of people's lives, including network literature creation. As a form of popular culture, network literature is often influenced by popular culture, absorbing and borrowing elements and themes from it. For example, popular themes and plot patterns in popular culture forms such as movies, TV dramas, anime and games are often borrowed and imitated by authors of Internet literature.

On the one hand, the wide dissemination of popular culture makes some specific elements and

themes highly noticed and recognized in society. In order to attract readers' attention, network literature authors often choose these popular elements and themes for their creations. For example, when a popular movie or TV series is broadcast, related themes and plot patterns will quickly appear in Internet literature. This phenomenon of following the trend of creation leads to the homogenization of the plot of the works. On the other hand, the commercialized operation of popular culture also has an impact on the creation of network literature. In order to pursue the maximization of commercial interests, some network literature platforms and publishers tend to encourage authors to create works that are in line with popular culture trends. This makes authors have to consider the demands of the market when creating their works, thus tending to imitate and copy the elements and themes in popular culture.

4.3.2 The Absence and Return of Traditional Culture

The absence and gradual return of traditional culture in modern network literature has an important impact on plot innovation. At the early stage of the development of network literature, due to the influence of Western culture and popular culture, traditional culture is relatively little reflected in network literature works. The authors are more inclined to create those works with modern and fashionable sense, while neglecting the value and charm of traditional culture. This has led to the lack of depth and connotation in the plot design and theme expression of network literature works, and the phenomenon of homogenization of plots is easy to occur.

However, as people's awareness of and attention to traditional culture have increased, the status of traditional culture in network literature has gradually been enhanced. Some authors have begun to integrate traditional cultural elements into their works, creating network literature works with unique charm and value. For example, some online novels based on ancient history, myths and legends, martial arts culture and other subjects show rich plots and profound themes through the excavation and innovation of traditional culture. The return of traditional culture provides new ideas and materials for the plot innovation of network literature, which helps to break the plight of plot homogenization.

5. Strategies for Coping with Plot Homogenization of Internet Literature Works

5.1 Strengthening originality cultivation and protection mechanism

Strengthening the originality of online literature requires efforts in many aspects. In terms of copyright protection, a stricter copyright registration and rights defense system should be established. Relevant government departments should increase the crackdown on infringement and raise the cost of violating the law. Malicious plagiarism and piracy should be severely punished in accordance with the law and never be tolerated. At the same time, online literature platforms should also strengthen their own copyright management and establish effective monitoring mechanisms to detect and deal with infringing works in a timely manner. In terms of incentives, special original literary awards can be set up to give generous rewards to outstanding original works and authors, including prizes, honorary certificates, and publication opportunities. In addition, enterprises and social capital can be encouraged to invest in original online literature creation through tax incentives and other policies, so as to provide authors with better creative conditions and environment.

5.2 Enhance authors' quality and innovation ability

Improving authors' literary quality is an important foundation for breaking homogenization. Authors should constantly learn the theoretical knowledge of literature and improve their language expression ability and narrative skills. They can participate in literary training courses and seminars to communicate and learn from other authors and broaden their creative ideas. At the same time, authors should pay attention to cultivating their creative ability and dare to break through the traditional creative patterns and routines. They should dig deep into the materials in life, observe and think about problems from different angles, and create unique characters and storylines. In addition, authors should maintain sensitivity to new things, actively absorb new cultural elements and creative concepts, and constantly enrich their creative connotation.

5.3 Optimize the ecological environment of Internet literature

Policy guidance is crucial to creating a good ecological environment for Internet literature. The government should introduce relevant policies to encourage online literature platforms to increase support for original works and improve the quality of the platform's content. It can guide the platform

to actively discover and cultivate outstanding authors by setting up special support funds and giving tax concessions. At the same time, the government should also strengthen the supervision of the online literature market, regulate the market order, and crack down on undesirable competitive behavior. In terms of platform reform, online literature platforms should strengthen the content audit mechanism, strictly control the quality of works, and eliminate low-quality and homogenized works from going online. The platform can establish a rating system for authors, and give different treatment and support to authors according to their level of creativity and the quality of their works, so as to incentivize authors to improve the quality of their creations. In addition, the platform should also strengthen the interaction with readers, fully listen to readers' opinions and suggestions, and carry out content innovation and optimization according to readers' needs.

5.4 Introducing Multicultural Elements

Internet literature should actively absorb multicultural elements to enrich the connotation of the works and avoid plot similarities. Authors can study the cultural traditions, historical stories, myths and legends of different countries and regions in depth and draw inspiration from them to create works with unique cultural charms. For example, traditional Chinese culture can be combined with modern elements to create network literature with Chinese characteristics. At the same time, authors can also draw on the literary techniques and styles of other countries to broaden their creative horizons. Internet literature platforms should also actively promote works with multicultural characteristics to provide readers with richer reading choices. In addition, cultural exchange activities and international cooperation can be organized to promote the exchange and integration of different cultures and provide more inspiration and materials for the creation of online literature.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of the Study

Through in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of plot homogenization in network literature works, this study reveals its prevalence and seriousness in the current field of network literature. Plot homogenization is manifested in the high degree of similarity in plot development, character setting, theme expression, etc. Common types include upgrading flow, Mary Sue/Jack Sue, revenge type, etc., with the characteristics of patterned plot, flattened characters, singularized emotion, and shallow theme, etc. This phenomenon not only affects the reading experience of readers, but also makes readers feel that they have to read the novels in the same way. This phenomenon not only affects the reading experience of readers, makes readers prone to aesthetic fatigue, and reduces the attractiveness of the works, but also restricts the innovative development space of network literature and hinders the enhancement of its artistic value.

It is found that the homogenization of network literature plot originates from various factors. In terms of creative environment, the openness of network platforms, commercial operation mode and rapid updating requirements have prompted authors to imitate the successful mode and cater to public tastes in order to pursue commercial interests and adapt to the rules of platforms, thus leading to the homogenization of plots. The convergence of readers' demand and market orientation also makes authors tend to create similar works. Among the authors' own factors, economic and psychological pressure affects the motivation of creation, and some authors imitate the set plots in order to survive and gain recognition; the lack of writing skills or the solidification of experience also limits the innovation of plots. In terms of socio-cultural factors, the wide dissemination of popular culture and commercialized operation prompted authors to follow the trend of creation, and the lack of traditional culture in the early days of Internet literature also led to the lack of depth connotation of the works, although its return has brought new opportunities for plot innovation.

This study is of great value in that it systematically analyzes the manifestations and causes of plot homogenization in Internet literature, provides a theoretical basis for subsequent research, and offers a direction for solving the problem, which helps to promote the development of Internet literature in the direction of healthier and more innovative, and enhances its status and influence in contemporary culture.

6.2 Research Limitations and Prospects

The limitation of the study is that, despite the adoption of methods such as textual analysis and case studies, the number of Internet literature works analyzed is still relatively limited, which may not be able to fully cover the diversity of the entire field of Internet literature, leading to a certain one-sidedness in the analysis of the phenomenon of plot homogenization. In terms of exploring the causes, although various aspects such as the creative environment, authorial factors and social and cultural factors have been considered, the complex interactive relationship between various factors has not yet been fully explored in depth, and there may be other influential factors that have not been discovered or fully emphasized.

Looking forward to the future development of Internet literature, with the increasing awareness of intellectual property protection in society, the copyright protection system will be further improved, which will provide a stronger guarantee for the originality of Internet literature and prompt authors to pay more attention to innovation. The improvement of readers' aesthetic level will lead to changes in market demand, and the demand for high-quality and innovative works will increase, which will push authors to improve the quality of their creations and reduce the phenomenon of homogenization of plots. Technological development, such as artificial intelligence-assisted creation, is expected to provide authors with more creative inspirations and tools to help them break through the bottleneck of creation, but at the same time, it may also bring new challenges, such as how to avoid over-reliance on technology leading to creative convergence. Under the trend of cultural diversification and integration, online literature is expected to absorb more different cultural elements, enrich the themes and connotations of works, and form more diversified creative styles, so as to bring readers a richer reading experience, promote online literature to a broader space for development, and play a more important role in global cultural exchanges.

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