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The dilemma of TV News Commentary Programs: Based on the field theory, an empirical analysis of 400 issues of CCTV news 1+1

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CITATION

Shi MY, Li Y and Weng JL. The dilemma of TV News Commentary Programs: Based on the field theory, an empirical analysis of 400 issues of CCTV news 1+1. *Perspectives of Communication&Media*. 2025; 1(3): 94.

<https://doi.org/10.63808/pcm.v1i3.94>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 13 June 2025

Accepted: 21 July 2025

Available online: 14 October 2025

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the plight of China's TV News Commentary Programs in the current media environment, and makes an empirical analysis based on the field theory with 400 issues of CCTV's famous news commentary program "news 1+1" as the research object. Through the systematic sorting and coding of the program content, combined with Bourdieu's field theory and the content analysis method in quantitative research, the production mechanism, discourse strategy and social impact of the program are deeply investigated from the perspective of reporting, guest composition, comment theme and other dimensions. The results show that "news 1+1" is faced with the dual constraints of power discipline and reporting tendency in the political field, the balance problem of capital game and content independence in the economic field, and the risk of social emotional changes and audience emotional alienation in the social emotional field.

Keywords: television studies; television programs; identity; television education



1. Research origin: News 1+1 and TV news commentary in the Chinese Context

Since the 1980s, China's TV news commentary programs have evolved from the start-up phase to the all-media era. "News 1+1", launched in 2008, became a dark horse by analyzing policies and hot issues via live broadcast with a host and observer. As internet users preferred online platforms, it revised reporting styles in 2011-2012, even suspending broadcast in 2015. During COVID-19, it served as a communication hub, reviving hopes for the genre. After China lifted epidemic controls in 2023, does "News 1+1" still offer policy reference? What factors shape its post-epidemic commentary ecology?

2. Research Design

This paper uses the content analysis method of qualitative research, and focuses on the programs broadcast by news 1+1 from January 2023 to December 2024. According to the sequence of programs, 456 episodes will be broadcast from January 9, 2023 to November 11, 2024, including 17 episodes of "Olympic 1+1"; "Two sessions 1+1" issue 18; The earthquake in Jishi Shan County, Gansu Province, phase 3; There are 16 Chengdu Universiade and Asian Games, and 2 Expo observation sessions. The above content is themed to show the live reports of journalists, and does not involve a total of 56 sessions such as TV news reviews and TV link reviews. In order to ensure the accuracy of the research results, this paper will select 400 sessions of news 1+1 as the research object.

In the framework of analysis, this paper encodes and analyzes the samples from the perspective of reporting, the theme of comments and the composition of guests according to the content analysis method and the idea of TV news comments. On the basis of content analysis, this paper also uses the French Bourdieu's news field theory for reference to critically interpret the internal and external fields of the 400 issues of news 1+1 from 2023 to 2024, including the interaction and interaction of political, economic, social and emotional mechanisms.



On the theoretical level, Bourdieu believes that the news field is not an isolated existence, but a subsystem of the whole social system. It has its own rules, capital forms, interest relations and operation logic, but is subject to the broader social structure and power pattern. The news field he defines is a network of professional workers with similar professional practices, goals and competition rules. These workers form an independent knowledge field through the production, screening and dissemination of news information. The field has a relatively independent internal operation logic, which is not completely subject to external conditions, but different fields still maintain structural correspondence. The typical performance is that the hierarchical sequence in the cultural field is similar to the power distribution in the economic field (Chen & Li, 2024). Therefore, the field theory provides methods and reference for us to explore the development pulse of TV news commentary programs.

3. Research Findings

3.1. Reporting perspective: the dual effect of positive dominance and weakening of public opinion supervision

The paper classifies 400 programs into positive (59%), neutral (35%), negative (6%). Low negative proportion hinders issue exposure; high positive risks biased cognition. Neutral reports show conservatism, failing to fulfill media watchdog role.

3.2. Comment topic: multiple balance of reform and innovation, environmental governance and culture and education

The study codes 400 programs into 8 categories. Reform & innovation (26%) dominates, with environmental governance, culture-education-tourism together accounting for 34%, reflecting society's main contradiction of unbalanced development vs. better life needs.

In terms of cultural education and consumption, the people's demand for high-quality cultural education and material and spiritual consumption is constantly rising. They not only hope that their children will receive better education, but also have the need to enrich their spiritual and cultural life. However, there are still



problems of unbalanced and inadequate development in the field of culture and education, such as the gap between urban and rural education resources and the uneven quality of cultural products. In terms of tourism consumption, tourism has become an important way to meet people's spiritual and cultural needs and improve the quality of life. People's demand for tourism consumption continues to be strong, and they expect to obtain higher quality and personalized tourism experience. (for example, 20241007 "who is the new upstart in tourism during the National Day golden week?" 20240830 "how to build a team of high-quality professional teachers?" 20240423 "what is the change in China's nationwide reading?" 20231115 "first aid education, starting from dolls!")

Of course, the proportion of national achievement reports with obvious propaganda color accounts for 8%, indicating that at this stage, "news 1+1" still bears the responsibility of transmitting mainstream values to a large extent. The formation of mainstream values is not only closely related to certain political forms, but also affected by the cultural thinking of the country. Under the combination of the two, a unique mainstream value of society (Hu, 2012).

3.3. Guest commentator: experts, scholars and politicians are dominant, and the news parties are not involved enough

In the news 1+1 program, the host Yansong Bai is not only a questioner and a tandem person, but also has a macro control over the genealogy of the program's views, makes a beneficial supplement and balance to the news opinions, gives the audience the thinking space around the topic selection, raises questions at each "joint point", and prevents the audience from falling into the case of Wang (2008). This study identified Yansong Bai's past journalists, hosts, commentators and other multiple identities as news program hosts, and investigated and coded the commenting guests of each program without assuming the role of comment.

The study codes 400 programs' online commenting guests into 4 categories. Experts/scholars account for 64%, politicians 30% in 2024, higher than 2023. Over-reliance on them makes the program too serious/professional, hard for ordinary viewers, with views limited by fixed fields, like Bin Dai and Yuanchun Liu's frequent comments.



At the same time, it is noteworthy that in the connection of news parties, the proportion in 2024 is small (5%) compared with that in 2023, with 12 people less. Of course, the connection comments of news parties in 2023 are only 17 people. The connection of the news parties can bring first-hand live information and real personal experience to the program. Reducing the connection will make the program lose these vivid elements to a certain extent, appear more abstract and theoretical, and affect the audience's interest and attention to the program. Although experts, scholars and politicians can provide professional analysis, news parties can often reveal some neglected details and problems from their own experience, and reducing their connections may lead to the program's mining of events is not deep and comprehensive enough, which limits the depth and breadth of the program's content.

In terms of the choice of well-known media people, the sample data from 2023 to 2024 appeared for 13 times, including 12 times involving extreme weather, connecting with the media forecasters of CCTV and the National Climate Center, and once connecting with the theme of "what does Pro Fujian and pro Taiwan mean for both sides of the Strait?" by Yueqian Lai, a Taiwan current affairs commentator. The low number of connections reflects that CCTV news commentary programs may have some limitations in talent training, and do not make full use of external resources to enrich and improve the training system of news commentators. A news commentator must first be a media person who can look at issues from the perspective of the media, take into account national interests and media positions, and set up a distinctive personalized banner of the media. An excellent news commentator can become the shaper of the soul of the media and the leader of the media banner through the way of 'voice' in the communication practice (Tang, 2009).

CCTV also has related problems in the training of news commentators. At present, the most common way for CCTV news commentators to appear is to connect with the anchor to make instant comments, which has a single function. Only Yansong Bai, Yang Yu and other commentators can gather interviews, hosts and comments. The single comment method makes commentators an individual, weakening the relationship between commentators and news, programs and audiences (Zhang, 2013).

4. Analysis of the dilemma of TV News Commentary Programs from the perspective of field theory



Field is a concept put forward by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, which refers to various fields or spaces in social life, such as political field, economic field, cultural field, etc. Each field has its specific rules, values and power structure, in which participants compete and interact in various forms. Through the way of quantitative data presentation, this paper focuses on the commonness and individuality of China's TV News Commentary Programs represented by "news 1+1" in the aspects of reporting tendency, comment theme, guest selection and so on. Field theory provides us with an effective framework for analyzing the environment of TV news commentary programs. Through the analysis of political, economic and social emotional fields, we can deeply understand the challenges faced by TV news commentary programs.

4.1. An analysis of the political field: the double restriction of power discipline and reporting tendency

Political field refers to the specific environment and function space of TV News Commentary Programs in political activities, power relations and public opinion. Bourdieu's concept of political field emphasizes the role of power and capital in the political field, as well as how various political actors compete and cooperate within it. In this field, political capital, social status, reputation and so on are the key resources for participants to compete. TV news commentary programs such as news 1+1 play the roles of information dissemination, public opinion guidance and power supervision.

The field theory holds that the news field is the secondary space of the political field, and emphasizes that news communication activities are always regulated by external power relations, showing the characteristics of "heteronomy" attached to political logic (Huang, 2023). Therefore, from the perspective of topic selection, China's TV news commentary programs are always influenced by political factors. TV news commentary programs are often more cautious in topic selection, and tend to choose topics that are less politically sensitive and will not cause controversy. This makes the program afraid to conduct in-depth analysis and comment when it involves some major political issues and sensitive topics. Especially when it comes to the reports of major revealing news reviews, some local departments may intervene in the



programs to restrict their reports and comments on certain issues, so as to maintain their own image and interests.

The same is true in the expression of views. On the one hand, TV news commentary programs need to follow certain political principles and positions, which may limit the expression of their views. When commenting on political events and policies, the program often needs to consider factors such as political correctness and social stability, and cannot criticize or question too sharply. On the other hand, in the political field, there are also problems that the relevant laws and systems are not perfect, which makes it impossible to clarify the subject of responsibility. Media institutions, algorithms, writing robots and other actors participate in news production at different levels, and traditional journalists are no longer the main subject of responsibility. Part of the media bodies and media organizations used the excuses of “technology is innocent” and “algorithm has no values” to shift the responsibility to technology (Liu, 2020).

4.2. Economic field analysis: the tension between capital game and content independence

Under the framework of Bourdieu’s field theory, the economic field is an arena intertwined with capital, interests and rules, where various organizations and individuals compete to achieve their goals. After the socialist market economy system, the dual attributes of the news media have been structurally confirmed: not only maintaining the public attributes of ideological institutions, but also following the market rules to implement enterprise operation. The mutual embeddedness between economic capital and news production is increasing, which is especially reflected in the evolution of media operations from the traditional secondary sales of content to the competition for attention resources centered on traffic aggregation. This capitalization transformation not only reconstructs the operating rules of the communication field, but also forms a deep mutual relationship between media institutions and audience groups (Chen, 2024). The TV news review program “news 1+1” plays a special role in the economic field. They should not only meet the needs of the audience, but also deal with various challenges from economic pressure, market competition, advertisers and policy regulation.

News 1+1 and other TV news commentary programs face tensions between advertising revenue and content independence, as advertisers' preferences may influence topic selection and reporting angles. Pursuing economic benefits may lead to prioritizing hot and entertaining topics over depth. Government policies and media regulations, like content review and advertising limits, ensure compliance but may restrict innovation and delay production. Fierce competition from emerging media and talent mobility also challenges traditional TV programs, as they must compete for attention and retain skilled staff amid fixed systems and limited promotion channels.

4.3. Analysis of social emotional field: social emotional changes and audience emotional alienation

The cultural field in TV News Commentary Programs contains rich cultural elements, such as language, values, traditional customs, art forms and so on. These cultural elements often carry specific social emotions. They are the emotional crystallization of a social group in the long-term historical development process. For example, in the news program covering traditional festivals (20230119 "Spring Festival travel, safety first" 20230120 train to "New Year's Eve!" 20231228 "how do you cross the new year on New Year's Day this year?") by emphasizing safety, tourism, trains and other elements, it conveys people's beautiful feelings of family reunion, happiness and harmony, as well as their love and inheritance of traditional culture.

Social emotional field refers to people's common emotional resonance and response system, which includes the public's emotional response to social hot events, value orientation and collective memory. In this field, TV news commentary programs play an important role. Through agenda setting, information selection and expression, they can profoundly affect the emotional state and psychological feelings of the public. In the field of social emotion, individual emotional experience is very important. However, news 1+1 program overemphasizes the macro social problems and events and ignores individual feelings and experiences in these problems and events. In particular, the parties to the online news account for only 5% of the total number of sample programs. When reporting some controversial events, if we only analyze and comment from the perspective of one party, and ignore the views and interests of the parties to the news, the credibility of the program will be affected.

In terms of emotional resonance, TV News Commentary Programs lack consideration of the audience's emotional needs in content selection. It pays too much attention to the objectivity and professionalism of news events, and ignores the emotional resonance of the audience. For example, when reporting some major disaster events, they only stay on the process and results of the events, without digging into the human nature stories and emotional conflicts behind the events, which makes it difficult for the audience to have a profound emotional resonance (such as “Pingjiang, Hunan, record breaking flood disaster!” 20240611 “2024, the first round of high temperature weather in the North!” 20240123 “grade 7.1 land in Wushi County, Xinjiang”) (Wang, 2020).

5. Conclusion

At the same time, in the social emotional field, the program triggers emotional polarization, emotional resonance, audience interaction and other issues, affecting social psychology and public cognition. Through the understanding and reflection of these challenges, we can understand the subtle position and far-reaching significance of TV News Commentary Programs in the Chinese media ecology. With the continuous development of new media and the changing needs of audiences, TV news commentary programs must be constantly innovated and developed to meet the needs of the times (Gong et al., 2018).

Author contributions: Conceptualization, MS, YL and JW; methodology, MS; software, YL; validation, MS, YL and JW; formal analysis, JW; investigation, YL; resources, MS; data curation, JW; writing—original draft preparation, YL; writing—review and editing, MS; visualization, JW; supervision, MS; project administration, YL; funding acquisition, JW. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

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