

Study on Dance Communication Pathways: An Analysis Based on a Decentralized Communication Ecology

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Abstract

With the advancement of digital media technologies and the rise of social platforms, dance dissemination is undergoing a significant shift from centralized to decentralized models. This study, adopting a decentralized communication ecology perspective, examines the changing dynamics of dance dissemination in terms of communication agents, media structures, and interaction mechanisms.

Through case studies on platforms such as Douyin, Bilibili, and Xiaohongshu, the research identifies key trends including diversified agents, nonlinear dissemination pathways, and frequent audience interaction. The findings highlight both the positive impacts—such as improved dissemination efficiency, restructured power relations, and enhanced audience participation—and emerging challenges, including content homogenization, algorithmic bias, and fragmented expression.

The study concludes by emphasizing the need for a balanced approach between technological support and artistic expression, advocating for a more inclusive, collaborative, and sustainable communication ecosystem to foster the continued development and innovation of dance art.

Keywords: Dance Dissemination; Decentralisation; Communication Pathways

1. Introduction: The Context of

Transformation in Dance

Communication Pathways

As one of the oldest forms of human artistic expression, dance has, since its inception, been inseparably linked

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to specific spaces, temporalities, and corporeal interactions. Its modes of dissemination have long been constrained by both the physical nature of space and the limitations of media technologies. Traditionally, the transmission of dance relied on centralised channels such as theatre performances, festival rituals, academic instruction, and television broadcasting. These channels were typically dominated by specific institutions—such as dance companies, broadcasters, and performing arts academies—who held control over production and dissemination. Restricted by the lengthy cycles of rehearsal and production, limited performance schedules, and scarce dissemination resources, audiences had access to dance content through relatively fixed and one-directional routes. This created a clear power structure and a unidirectional aesthetic output between artistic producers and receivers.

Since the onset of the 21st century, the rapid development of digital technologies has triggered a profound shift in the media ecology. In particular, the rise of mobile internet and social media platforms has brought about a fundamental transformation in the pathways and logic of dance communication. The proliferation of short video platforms (e.g. Douyin), video communities (e.g. Bilibili), social media (e.g. Xiaohongshu), and livestreaming technologies has enabled dance content to break away from centralised institutions and channels, entering a more decentralised, highly interactive, and shorter-path

network ecology. Ordinary users can now easily produce, edit, and distribute dance videos via mobile devices. The boundary between dancers and audiences is increasingly blurred, with viewers becoming both creators and disseminators of content, thus giving rise to a multi-centred and self-organising dissemination model.

In this context, the notion of a “*decentralised communication ecology*” has become crucial for understanding the transformation of contemporary dance dissemination pathways. The concept of “decentralisation” originates from the fields of information technology and communication studies. As Yochai Benkler observed in *The Wealth of Networks*, networked systems facilitate a redistribution of power through “peer production”. Similarly, Manuel Castells, in *The Rise of the Network Society*, emphasises the non-centralised reconfiguration of power structures and the spatio-temporal rearrangement of global information flows within the network society.

When applied to dance dissemination, decentralisation implies that artistic expression is no longer confined to theatre-based performance. Instead, it is disseminated across multiple nodes—including short video platforms, social media, and online platforms—in a non-centralised manner. Dancers simultaneously assume the roles of creators and distributors, while audiences serve not only as receivers but also as responders. Algorithmic mechanisms now play a crucial role in shaping dissemination pathways.

This communication ecology is characterised by non-linear trajectories, real-time interactivity, and strong visual impact, dramatically reducing the distance and time between content creation and its dissemination, and significantly expanding both reach and influence.

At the same time, this ecology also impacts the structural forms and aesthetic values of dance. Faced with new media formats—particularly short videos that prioritise “fragmentation” and “intense visual stimuli”—dance content tends to restructure its artistic expression, which traditionally relies on complete works, into “high-energy excerpts” to align with algorithmic recommendation systems. Choreographers must now balance their creative intentions with platform feedback mechanisms (such as likes, completion rates, and real-time viewer comments), navigating the tension between narrative rhythm and audience receptivity. While this shift enables a more democratic and instantaneous dissemination of dance, it also raises critical reflections on the depth, cultural

substance, and aesthetic diversity of dance as an art form.

To enhance the logical coherence and verifiability of this study, this paper adopts a methodology combining literature review with platform observation. On one hand, it systematically reviews existing theoretical work in the fields of digital media and dance communication to construct an analytical framework of the “decentralised communication ecology”. On the other hand, it selects dance video content from major platforms—such as Douyin, Bilibili, and Xiaohongshu—as observational samples, conducting a descriptive analysis from three dimensions: dissemination pathways, interactive mechanisms, and content characteristics. This research focuses more on identifying macro-level shifts and trends in the logic of dance dissemination within the evolving media environment, rather than engaging in quantitative analysis of specific data. The aim is to explore the routes of cultural transmission from multiple perspectives.

The table below presents the details of the observed sample from dance dissemination platforms.

Platform	Sample Size	Selection Criteria	Observation Period
Douyin	100 dance videos	Recommended by platform’s trending list; search keywords “dance” and “choreography”; filtered by views.	Jan–Feb 2025
Bilibili	60 dance videos	Focused on tags such as “dance” and “modern dance”; prioritised original content.	Jan–Feb 2025

Xiaohongshu	60 dance videos	Random selection of bloggers using tags like “daily sharing + dance”.	Jan–Feb 2025
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Therefore, in this emerging media ecology, examining the decentralised shift in dance dissemination pathways carries significant theoretical and practical implications. On one hand, it aids in understanding how dance as an art form is reproduced, disseminated, and reimagined in the digital era. On the other, it provides a foundation for constructing a more open, diverse, and inclusive ecology for dance communication. This paper adopts the framework of “decentralised communication ecology” to focus on structural changes, logical reconstruction, and ecological mechanisms in digital platform-based dance dissemination, aiming to explore the key features and future trends within this transformation.

2. The Structure and Characteristics of a Decentralised Communication Ecology

2.1 The Structure of a Decentralised Communication Ecology

A *decentralised communication ecology* does not imply a state of complete absence of centres, but rather refers to a dynamic, co-operative system of dissemination composed of multiple nodes, actors, and pathways. Within this ecology, the traditional model of information production and transmission—dominated by a single authoritative institution—is dismantled and

replaced by a new communication network shaped by the joint participation of platforms, users, algorithms, and content.

Firstly, in terms of the structure of communication agents, decentralised dissemination breaks away from the traditional one-way chain of dance communication—“choreographer → performer → media → audience”—and instead constructs a collaborative network of multiple roles, such as “dancer → user → platform → audience”. Empowered by short video platforms and social media, dancers can bypass intermediary institutions and directly produce and distribute content to audiences. Audiences, in turn, are no longer passive recipients but active participants and secondary disseminators. For instance, on Douyin, users may not only consume professional dance content, but also engage in mimicry, remixing, and creation of “secondary dance content”, resulting in a fission-like dissemination structure.

Secondly, platform mechanisms serve as key structural supports within the decentralised ecology. Emerging digital platforms such as Douyin, Bilibili, and Xiaohongshu not only provide space for content hosting and distribution but also act as algorithmic bridges between content supply and demand. These recommendation algorithms dynamically generate personalised content feeds based on variables such as

user browsing behaviour, interest preferences, and frequency of interaction. This algorithm-driven matching process dismantles the traditional editorial control logic of legacy media, enabling differentiated and non-linear dissemination pathways.

Moreover, the accessibility of technological tools is an indispensable pillar supporting the decentralised communication ecology. With the widespread use of smartphones, video editing apps, and livestreaming tools, anyone can become a content creator. This “democratisation of content productivity” has further decentralised the power structure of dance dissemination, forming a truly decentralised flow of information.

2.2 Characteristics of a Decentralised Communication Ecology

Based on the above components, the decentralised ecology of dance communication exhibits the following notable characteristics:

1. Diversity and equalisation of nodes:

Traditional dance dissemination is typically centralised around a few dominant nodes—such as national theatres, professional dance companies, and televised arts programming—resulting in a hierarchical, pyramid-shaped structure. In contrast, a decentralised ecology features widely dispersed nodes. Individual users, grassroots dancers, and dance enthusiast

communities can all serve as points of origin and core agents of dissemination. For example, on Bilibili, a large number of *UP zhu* (uploaders) produce dance analysis, reproduction tutorials, and video reviews, coexisting alongside content published by professional institutions with comparable influence.

2. Non-linear and high-mobility dissemination paths:

Decentralised dissemination disrupts the linear logic of “source → flow → end”. Its pathways tend to resemble networks or cycles. A dance video may circulate repeatedly across platforms, deconstructed and reinterpreted by different users, before being reintegrated into new dissemination flows. For instance, an original modern dance video gaining traction on Xiaohongshu may later be edited into a “choreographic technique analysis” on Bilibili, while simultaneously being used for challenge content on Douyin, resulting in multi-form, multi-directional dissemination of a single piece.

3. Deepened user engagement and co-creation:

This ecosystem places emphasis on user agency. Audiences do not merely “watch” but actively engage with the content lifecycle via likes, comments, reposts, and secondary creations. Some platforms have introduced mechanisms such as “duet”, “challenge”, and “hashtag topics” to encourage derivative creations based on existing content. These mechanisms promote

a shift from *dance as artwork* to *dance as discourse*, forming a co-creation loop among dance content, users, and algorithmic systems.

4. Algorithm-led distribution logic:

Algorithms act as an “invisible centre” within the decentralised ecology. Although dissemination nodes are no longer concentrated, platform algorithms control content visibility by collecting user data and predicting preference trends, thus shaping dissemination paths in subtle yet significant ways. In dance dissemination, videos with strong rhythm, visual impact, and emotional expressiveness are more likely to be categorised by algorithms as “high dissemination potential”, receiving preferential exposure. This algorithmic bias, in turn, influences the stylistic tendencies and narrative strategies of dance content production.

In summary, the decentralised communication ecology is not merely a new media environment for dance dissemination—it is also a manifestation of changing communication logic and cultural structures. It amplifies individual expression, dismantles traditional authoritative barriers, and reshapes dissemination pathways. At the same time, it presents new challenges for dance creation, audience reception, and arts education. Understanding the structure and characteristics of this ecology is essential for comprehensively examining the reconstruction of dance communication mechanisms in the digital era.

3. Analysis of Decentralised Forms in

Dance Dissemination Pathways

Under the influence of a decentralised communication ecology, the dissemination pathways of dance have undergone notable structural reconfiguration and media shifts. From the composition of dissemination agents to media channels, from information flows to audience engagement, dance is no longer confined to traditional centralised nodes such as theatres and television. Instead, it is disseminated through a collaborative diffusion process that involves multiple platforms, agents, and formats. This section analyses three core dimensions of decentralisation in dance dissemination: **diversification of agents**, **non-linearity of media**, and **deep audience interaction**, illustrated by specific platform cases that demonstrate how contemporary dance dissemination takes shape in this new ecology.

3.1 Diversification of Dissemination Agents

In a decentralised system, the agents involved in dance dissemination have evolved from a singular group of professional dancers, troupes, or institutions into a multi-level, multi-type collaborative network. This transition disrupts the monopoly of the “professional” identity in traditional dance dissemination, allowing ordinary users, enthusiasts, dance critics, and independent content creators to become key nodes in

the communication chain.

On platforms like **Douyin**, the origin of popular dance content often does not come from professional troupes but from internet-famous dancers or amateur performers. For example, the account “*XXX Dance Diary*” has attracted a large following through casual and humorous dance videos integrated into everyday life, offering interpretations of popular music with a distinctive style. Non-professional users also contribute to dissemination by mimicking, participating in challenges, or using duet functions, transitioning from passive viewers to secondary creators. This fosters a richly diverse dissemination network.

On **Bilibili**, *UP zhu* (uploaders) have become a vital force in promoting dance. Many uploaders in the platform’s dance section share dance tutorials, cultural commentaries, or choreographic reproductions. Their content not only communicates choreographic movement but also introduces the cultural context, stylistic differences, and artistic intentions behind the work. This layered content construction significantly broadens both the depth and scope of dance dissemination.

3.2 Non-Linearity of Media Channels

Digital platforms have disrupted the linear nature of traditional media structures. The flow of dance dissemination no longer follows the sequence of “dance troupe → media → audience”, but rather presents a

networked, non-linear structure characterised by “node → diffusion → recombination”. Any point in this network may serve as a new dissemination origin, greatly enhancing both the elasticity and regenerative capacity of dissemination.

Take **Xiaohongshu** as an example. Its community-based structure and tagging system encourage users to create content around specific dance styles or trends. Through hashtag challenges (e.g., #modern dance, #Gu-style), users can enter the dance dissemination network by searching for keywords or participating in themed events. Original videos are often deconstructed into sub-content such as movement tutorials, costume design, makeup styling, and set decoration. In doing so, they extend dance communication beyond visual narrative into multiple trajectories of content engagement. This breaks the traditional notion of dance as a “stage-bound whole”, instead supporting open-ended and fission-style dissemination.

Moreover, video platform recommendation algorithms contribute to this non-linearity by generating **non-chronological** content exposure. Users do not encounter dance works sequentially; rather, they are guided by algorithmic content relations. For instance, viewing a particular genre of music video may prompt the platform to recommend relevant dance content, initiating a new and unexpected viewing journey. This shift in logic constitutes a core distinction between digital dance dissemination and traditional

broadcast models.

3.3 Transformation of Interaction Mechanisms and Deepened Engagement

A decentralised communication ecology not only restructures dissemination but also profoundly alters interaction mechanisms. Dance communication no longer ends with passive viewing; it now unfolds through a process of “interaction → feedback → participation → re-creation”, enabling content to evolve dynamically. Interaction has moved beyond simple access to become a central driver of the dissemination process.

On **Douyin**, the *duet* function allows users to perform alongside the original video, creating a structure of “co-performance”. Platform-driven *challenge mechanisms* invite users to participate using a unified piece of music or choreography, generating massive content aggregation. Real-time interactions via

comment sections and livestreams also enhance the sense of immediacy and community, fostering audience belonging and identity through participation.

On **Bilibili**, dance videos with educational elements often spark extensive *bullet comment* interaction. Viewers not only comment on aesthetic judgement but also offer real-time feedback on choreographic logic, music choices, and technical execution. This creates a co-watching, co-evaluating, and co-evolving structure in which dance dissemination shifts from closed artistic output to an open, negotiable creative process.

The three core dimensions of dance dissemination within a decentralised ecology exhibit clear signs of structural transformation. Table 1 summarises these dimensions, along with representative cases and their implications, offering a clearer understanding of changes in contemporary dissemination pathways.

Table 1: Core Dimensions and Manifestations of Decentralised Dance Dissemination

Core Dimension	Specific Manifestation	Platform / Example	Description & Impact
Diversified Dissemination Agents	From professional dancers to internet influencers, users, and independent creators	Douyin: “Aojita Ballet Stretch”, Bilibili: “Shan You Mu Xi Zhi” (UP)	Breaks professional monopoly, builds multi-tiered networks, encourages user transformation from viewer to creator
Non-linear Media Channels	Networked flow of node → diffusion → recombination; multidimensional content breakdown	Xiaohongshu hashtag challenges: “modern dance”	Disrupts linear progression, uses tagging and algorithmic logic to enable content fission and flexible dissemination
Deep Interaction	Duets, challenges, real-time	Douyin duet function	Interaction drives re-creation

Mechanisms	comments, live streaming		and dissemination, strengthens community and identity affiliation
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In conclusion, dance dissemination within a decentralised communication ecology has surpassed the limitations of traditional pathways, exhibiting a composite trend marked by diversified agents, non-linear media, and deepened interaction. This transformation not only provides dance with broader platforms and channels for visibility but also redefines its relationship with audiences, technologies, and society at large. In this highly participatory and rapidly evolving system, dance works no longer appear as finished products released once, but instead grow organically through continuous dissemination and re-creation.

4. Conclusion and Outlook

In summary, the decentralised shift in dance dissemination pathways represents a structural transformation driven by the combined forces of evolving media environments and technological advancement. A decentralised communication ecology not only dismantles the traditional dependence of dance dissemination on theatres and professional institutions, but also reshapes the interactions among dancers, audiences, and platforms. As a result, the

processes of dance production, circulation, and reception have entered a dynamic system characterised by multi-platform coexistence and multi-agent collaboration. Within this context, the forms of dance dissemination have become increasingly diverse, the mechanisms of interaction more open, and the dissemination pathways have evolved from linear chains into networked structures, constructing a new pattern of communication that is highly fluid and permeable.

To guide this trend towards a more sustainable and healthy trajectory, this study—based on observation and analysis of major platform samples—proposes the following practical recommendations:

- **At the platform level**, recommendation algorithms should be optimised, with the introduction of mechanisms to support artistic content, in order to enhance the visibility and longevity of high-quality dance works.
- **In terms of professional collaboration**, a dual-track model of “creation + dissemination” should be encouraged, improving the media adaptability of content producers such as universities and dance companies.
- **At the level of user engagement**, content

incentives and creative guidance should be implemented to stimulate the public's enthusiasm for dance creation.

• **Regarding technological integration**, new technologies such as AI and VR should be leveraged to promote innovation in media formats and enrich expressive dimensions in dance dissemination.

Therefore, the decentralised dissemination of dance is not merely a form of media adaptation in the face of digital transformation; rather, it constitutes a critical opportunity for the redefinition and expansion of dance as an art form in contemporary society. It offers a new framework for restructuring the modes of communication and provides a broader possibility for dance to be re-embedded within the socio-cultural and technological systems.

Future research on dance dissemination should further explore the mechanisms of interrelation among ecological elements, and investigate how, under the decentralised trend, dance can construct dissemination pathways that are richer in cultural depth, broader in social engagement, and more dynamic in technological integration.

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