

Knowledge Production and Dissemination Mechanisms of Academic Bars from the Perspective of Spatial Production

Yutong Zhang, Shanshan Zhao, Han Wang, Haiyi Yu, Qianqian Li*

School of Culture and Communication, Capital University of Economics and Business (CUEB), 100071, Beijing, China

*Corresponding author: Qianqian Li, liqianqian@cueb.edu.cn

Copyright: 2026 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY-NC 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited, and explicitly prohibiting its use for commercial purposes.

Abstract: “Academic bars” represent an emerging cultural spatial practice in China’s first-tier cities in recent years, closely integrating knowledge production with bar spaces. Through a period of operation and expansion, they have steadily matured. Relying on diverse operational models and distinctive features, different academic bars attract target audiences, fulfill their demand for “light communication spaces,” and have become new vehicles for knowledge production and dissemination. Drawing upon Henri Lefebvre’s theory of spatial production, this study takes academic bars as its research object and primarily employs participant observation and interview methods. Subsequently, it identifies areas for improvement in academic bars and, in light of China’s local context and mature socio-commercial mechanisms, proposes corresponding recommendations. These suggestions aim to facilitate the continuous alignment of academic bars with market demands and, together with numerous emerging “representational spaces” in the future, contribute to a thriving landscape of knowledge production and dissemination.

Keywords: Academic Bars; Theory of Spatial Production; Knowledge Production and Dissemination; Light Communication Space; Representational Space

Published: Jul 28, 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62177/chst.v3i3.1522>

1. Introduction

Within the current system of knowledge production and dissemination, the functional limitations of traditional communication spaces have become increasingly evident. As an emerging form of academic communication space, academic bars constitute a direct response to, and an innovative solution for, the long-standing challenges embedded in traditional academic communication systems.

First, university libraries and classrooms, as the primary academic communication spaces, are not neutral containers of knowledge. Rather, they are disciplinary spaces shaped by educational management objectives, encompassing seating arrangements, hierarchical evaluations, and surveillance mechanisms^[1]. Their spatial planning and management rules, to some extent, restrict free and spontaneous academic interaction.

Second, the phenomenon of “layered clustering” in knowledge dissemination constitutes another structural dilemma. With the continuous specialization of disciplinary systems, different academic fields have gradually developed their own disciplinary discourses and research paradigms. While such specialization enhances research depth, it also creates barriers to communication across disciplines^[2]. Traditional academic communication formats, such as academic conferences, due to

their relatively high participation costs and entry thresholds, further reinforce this tendency toward academic stratification, compounding their already limited audience coverage.

Moreover, there is a structural shortage of “light communication scenarios” within the current communicative ecology. Early-career scholars and student groups face a dual predicament: on the one hand, the pressure exerted by institutional power in formal academic settings; on the other hand, the insufficient functionality of informal leisure spaces for intellectual exchange. Existing cafés, milk tea shops, and similar venues are either too noisy or lack an appropriate academic atmosphere, making it difficult for them to support in-depth scholarly communication.

The innovative integration embodied in academic bars has, in part, alleviated these pain points and has become a newly prominent medium for knowledge interaction. This aligns with Henri Lefebvre’s definition of “representational space” within spatial production theory, namely spaces that are actively reshaped through users’ lived practices and imagination, and that carry potential for resistance and creativity. Such spaces emphasize subjective lived experience, symbolic environments, characteristics of power negotiation, and the dynamic production of space^[3].

From a theoretical perspective, existing academic research generally focuses on capital and power analyses within the framework of “representations of space,” while paying insufficient attention to everyday practices, symbolic creation, and forms of resistance within the framework of “representational space.” Academic bars therefore provide a vivid empirical case demonstrating how “representational space” is produced through users’ everyday practices.

In addition, academic bars highlight the creation of symbolic meaning, the construction of culture, and the interactive expression of user subjectivity, all of which can be incorporated into the core framework of cultural and meaning production within spatial production theory. In practical terms, compared with traditional teacher-centered classrooms, academic bars break away from the unidirectional “teacher speaks, students listen” model, making knowledge dissemination more egalitarian and highly interactive. Participants are not only listeners but also contributors to discussion and co-production of knowledge. This format helps enhance learner initiative and participation, while also making the process of knowledge dissemination more democratic. Through such a form, academic content can be understood and received by the public in a more accessible and approachable manner, thereby narrowing the distance between the academic community and the general public. The social impact of academic activities is thus expanded, enabling a positive cycle between knowledge production and social dissemination.

Furthermore, academic bars have also driven the reinvention of cultural space. They combine the bar space—originally serving functions of social drinking, leisure, and consumption—with academic lectures, knowledge sharing, and public discussion, allowing participants to engage with new knowledge, express their interests, and gain a sense of self-fulfillment in a relatively open and relaxed atmosphere^[4]. Thus, the academic bar is no longer merely a place of consumption, but a cultural space that can stimulate thinking and facilitate exchange.

This study employs in-depth interviews as a qualitative research method to obtain relevant information^[5]. To protect the personal information of interviewees and facilitate subsequent analysis and academic writing, all cases have been coded accordingly, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Interviewee Coding Table

Code	Role	Gender	Venue	Education	Disciplinary background	Current status	Lecture theme
F1	Founder	Male	Universe Living Room	*	*	*	*
F2	Founder	Male	Tipsy Everything	*	*	*	*
F3	Founder	Male	Yaowu Bookstore	*	*	*	*
F4	Founder	Male	Kongge Wine Talks	*	*	*	*
S1	Speaker	Male	*	*	Therapist at a tertiary hospital	*	Clinical sleep medicine

Code	Role	Gender	Venue	Education	Disciplinary background	Current status	Lecture theme
S2	Speaker	Male	*	*	Registered architect	*	Architecture
S3	Speaker	Male	*	*	University department chair	*	Literature
S4	Speaker	Male	*	*	Contracted author	*	Mysticism
S5	Speaker	Female	*	*	University professor	*	Law
A1	Audience	Male	*	BA	Economics	Working	Clinical sleep medicine / architecture
A2	Audience	Female	*	BA	Human resource management	Working	Architecture
A3	Audience	Female	*	MA candidate	Teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages	Student	Architecture
A4	Audience	Female	*	BA	Engineering	Student	Mysticism
A5	Audience	Female	*	BA	Humanities	Student	Mysticism
A6	Audience	Female	*	BA	Biotechnology	Student	Mysticism
A7	Audience	Female	*	BA	Chinese language and literature	Student	Mysticism
A8	Audience	Female	*	MA	Law	Working	Mysticism
A9	Audience	Female	*	BA	Chinese language and literature	Working	Literature
A10	Audience	Female	*	BA	Law	Working	Law
A11	Audience	Female	*	BA	Library management	Working	Law

Note. F= founder; S = speaker; A = attendee. Asterisks indicate information that was unavailable or not applicable.

2. User Participation Motivations in the Spatial Production of Academic Bars: A Demand-Driven Behavioral Starting Point

The active influx of participants into academic bars represents both a response to and a form of resistance against traditional knowledge supply models, revealing how specific groups autonomously construct new forms of knowledge exchange structures. It also reflects a collective process of cultural production among participants. Such participation behavior indicates that, beyond institutionalized learning and utilitarian workplace contexts, a hybrid knowledge consumption field grounded in interest, practice, emotion, and social interaction is emerging. Within this field, participant motivations constitute a multi-layered, differentiated, and dynamically interwoven system.

2.1 Interest Orientation: From Passive Reception to Active Knowledge Consumption

Interest is the most direct driving force guiding participants into academic bars^[4], marking a shift in the logic of knowledge dissemination from elite-driven supply oriented toward power structures to a demand-driven orientation grounded in the general public. In this process, participants are not isolated individuals but instead spontaneously form temporary learning communities through shared interests.

When traditional academic spaces primarily serve the rigid requirements of disciplinary systems rather than individual curiosity, personalized knowledge needs are often marginalized. A devotee of *Dream of the Red Chamber* stated: “I came to this academic bar specifically for this book... I also wanted to hear what unique insights these lecturers might have” (A10). Another participant attended due to “a strong academic interest in topics related to mysticism” (A6). Yet another participant joined because of “...and interest in the theme shared by Huang Gong” (A2).

These cases demonstrate that, through its operational principle of being “accessible, understandable to the general audience, broader in reach, and low-threshold” (F3), academic bars successfully provide space for niche and interdisciplinary knowledge. The manager of “Topsy Everything” noted: “The reason audiences pay to attend is interest-driven; the purpose is direct—acquisition” (F2). When knowledge shifts from a passive reception task to an actively chosen object of interest, its dissemination process undergoes a profound democratization.

2.2 Occupational Adaptation: Fragmented Learning Bridging Education and Practice

Beyond interest-driven participation, academic bars also function as a bridging mechanism connecting traditional education and professional practice, thereby meeting utilitarian learning demands. This motivation highlights the urgent demand for situational knowledge in modern workplaces, as well as the structural mismatch between current education systems—often fixed within single disciplines—and cross-sector application contexts.

Individuals from diverse occupational backgrounds converge in this space, forming a cross-disciplinary network for the exchange of practical knowledge. An intern teacher attended in response to curriculum reform requirements emphasizing technology-oriented and interdisciplinary teaching, stating that they “hope to broaden their horizons and knowledge base, and find inspiration for integrating Chinese language education with technology” (A2).

A primary school teacher, on the other hand, attended because “there are some deficiencies in the process of work, but it is difficult to calmly return to systematic learning of relevant knowledge; I hope to use this format to review and recall,” and further reflected that, through work experience, they developed “a unique and profound understanding of previously learned knowledge” (A9).

These behaviors indicate that academic bars, through their lightweight and situational knowledge delivery model, effectively bridge the gap between traditional professional education and complex real-world work environments.

2.3 Social Connection: Emotional and Existential Needs Beyond Social Stratification

Academic bars reconstruct the relationship between knowledge and individuals, as well as among individuals themselves. They represent both a form of resistance to traditional knowledge spaces and a site for constructing new forms of social connection. The social value of this space lies in its reconfiguration of group interaction patterns in knowledge exchange.

When traditional academic venues are perceived as “too serious and highly oppressive” (F1), academic bars aim to cultivate an atmosphere characterized by “inclusiveness, safety, and diversity,” as pursued by “Universe Living Room” (F1). This atmosphere attracts not only audiences but also speakers. One speaker noted that participants here “possess a certain level of knowledge and professionalism while also retaining a sense of everyday life; knowledge is only truly correct when it is connected to life” (S4).

Some speakers are motivated by “conducting material collection, engaging in interaction, and obtaining what is needed” (F3), while others participate “to practice delivery skills or to test whether their research outputs can resonate with people from different industries or professional positions” (F4).

In traditional academic settings, differences between professional and non-professional identities form an implicit oppressive structure. Academic bars loosen this structure through symbolic practices such as “drinking while attending lectures” (A6), as well as through managerial strategies where discussion is approached with a “respectful attitude and minimal intervention” (F1). This allows knowledge to descend from an elevated abstract realm back into everyday life, transforming it from a purely rational task into an experiential process that also accommodates emotional engagement.

As one participant stated, they can “enjoy the process of acquiring knowledge more” rather than “focusing entirely on taking notes” (A2). At the same time, academic bars also function as a lifestyle choice responding to urban residents’ deeper desire to break away from homogeneity and seek high-quality social interaction.

Some participants attend due to “first-time exposure and novelty” (A2), others because they are “curious about the format of academic bars and want to understand how academic and bar elements are combined” (A4), and still others because they are “bored with daily life and wish to seek novelty and change” (A8).

Behind these motivations lies a dual desire in increasingly fragmented modern society: on the one hand, an escape from standardized everyday life, where the hybrid form of “academic + bar” itself becomes a novel cultural experience^[6]; on the

other hand, a pursuit of non-utilitarian social connections based on shared interests rather than instrumental rationality.

3. User Participation Practices in the Spatial Production of Academic Bars: Differentiated Behavioral Expressions

As a hybrid space integrating academic exchange and leisure-based social interaction, academic bars exhibit weaker disciplinary regulation and more diversified functional orientations compared to traditional academic settings. This directly generates individualized and differentiated behavioral patterns among participants. The emergence of such differentiated behaviors is not only related to participants' individual motivations, but is also closely associated with the dimension of "spatial practice," whereby space materially enables specific activities. In this sense, differentiated behavior is the outcome of the interaction between individuals' expected needs and situational adaptation within a multifunctional and open spatial environment characteristic of academic bars.

3.1 Spatial Empowerment: Behavioral Autonomy under Weak Discipline and Multi-functionality

The spatial design of academic bars breaks through the rigid framework of traditional spaces. In terms of spatial layout, flexible combinations of tables and chairs replace fixed seating arrangements. In lighting design, localized illumination and soft lighting effects are employed to create an intimate communicative atmosphere. In terms of acoustic environment, moderate ambient noise and background music jointly provide a suitable soundscape for spontaneous discussion. At the same time, elements such as beverage services, distinctive decorative objects, and open bar counters are introduced, further enhancing the spatial heterogeneity. This systematic reconfiguration of physical elements distinguishes academic bars from spaces that emphasize discipline. "Traditional institutions such as schools and prisons often achieve the disciplinary transformation of individuals through the meticulous allocation, orchestration, and continuous surveillance of bodies in time and space, causing individuals to internalize uniform behavioral norms imperceptibly"^[1]. The spatial design of academic bars, however, precisely dismantles this disciplinary spatial power relation through physical arrangements such as removing fixed seating and opening up boundaries, thereby transforming the space into a container that supports free exchange and creating favorable material conditions for interdisciplinary academic interaction.

In addition, academic bars do not impose fixed seating arrangements, mandatory participation rules, or constraints on speech. Participants are not required to follow unified behavioral norms.

The multiple functions of academic bars—knowledge dissemination, leisure entertainment, and social connection—further intensify behavioral differentiation among individuals. Whether participants engage in focused participation or flexible involvement is essentially an individualized adaptation of spatial functions based on personal needs. Such differentiated choices do not weaken group cohesion; rather, they enhance inclusiveness and establish a more open foundation for subsequent collective interaction.

Some participants reported that they only learned about the event incidentally and attended as an impromptu post-meal leisure activity. Some participants attended due to academic themes and had clear knowledge acquisition needs, with their behavior oriented toward information retrieval. Others regarded the event as an extension of daily leisure activities and had certain expectations for social interaction, with knowledge exchange serving only as a supplementary component. For those whose purpose was leisure-based social interaction, participation tended to be more relaxed, and behaviors such as mobile phone usage and casual conversation naturally emerged as expressions of a relaxed state.

In some cases, participants leaving early or exiting at the very beginning of the event can be understood as a manifestation of the weak disciplinary constraints provided by academic bars. The spatial structure imposes limited restriction on individuals, allowing participants to adjust their engagement rhythm at any time according to their own conditions, without bearing the obligation of continuous presence typical in traditional academic settings.

3.2 Situational Matching Trigger: Behavioral Adjustment under Thematic Expectations

The degree of alignment between event themes and individual expectations is a key situational variable that triggers differentiated behavioral responses. Participant behavior is not entirely random but is closely related to the specific content of the situation. When the discussion topic aligns with participants' interests or knowledge gaps, individuals are more likely to

demonstrate focused engagement. However, when the actual topic significantly deviates from expectations or the delivered content fails to meet psychological anticipation, some participants may express disengagement through behaviors such as using mobile phones or leaving early; in extreme cases, they may exit the event entirely.

In an event themed around “mysticism,” interviewees indicated that there was a substantial gap between expectations and actual experience. One participant stated: “This time I felt somewhat confused. A bar should not be a purely rational setting, but once it is linked with ‘academia’ and ‘logic,’ it becomes difficult to fully express oneself freely. Ideally, academic bars should have no boundaries, should not be defined, and should discuss topics that are not yet concluded. However, in reality, due to event regulations, sensitive topics are difficult to address in public settings, and the sense of boundaries becomes increasingly strong” (A4, A5).

Behind this situational adaptation lies a decentered logic oriented toward user needs. The realization of spatial functions in academic bars depends on the bidirectional alignment between individuals and situational contexts. Differentiated behavior thus serves as an immediate feedback mechanism reflecting the degree of spatial fit, demonstrating the flexible responsiveness of “representational space” to individual needs.

4. Group Participation and Interaction in the Spatial Production of Academic Bars: A Multi-Linked Communicative Form

Within academic bars, two types of questioning formats are commonly observed: in-lecture questioning and post-lecture centralized questioning. This is not an arbitrary arrangement but is deeply associated with the thematic attributes of each event. Beyond these two forms, proactive communication with speakers and interaction among strangers within academic bars are jointly shaped by individual needs, social psychology, thematic characteristics, and spatial conditions. The core mechanism underlying these behaviors lies in the differences in communicative motivation, psychological cost, and perceived value, which together determine the level of communicative initiative. Under the influence of these multiple factors, each individual’s differentiated communicative choices generate diverse behavioral practices. The aggregation and interweaving of these individual practices form collective interaction, ultimately presenting a multi-linked communicative structure.

4.1 Theme Adaptation: Flexible Selection of Two Questioning Forms

One form is in-lecture questioning, which is suitable for low-pressure, experience-oriented thematic communication. The core characteristic of in-lecture questioning lies in the relatively lower degree of academic abstraction in the lecture content, which is typically aligned with life experience-oriented and emotionally resonant themes, such as the “Sleep” themed event organized by “Universe Living Room.” Sleep is a universal daily human experience, and audience questions are often spontaneously generated individual confusions. If postponed until after the lecture, such questions may be abandoned due to emotional cooling. Traditional academic lectures emphasize logical continuity, and mid-lecture questioning may interrupt the speaker’s train of thought. However, for experience-oriented themes such as sleep, strict logical closure is not required; instead, mid-lecture questioning can enhance collective resonance.

During the lecture, when the speaker discussed how to ensure healthy and high-quality sleep, an audience member raised a question mid-session: “I am often awakened by faint noise—how can I improve this situation?” This question immediately attracted the attention of surrounding participants. The speaker subsequently invited the audience to share their experiences of light sleep, thereby transforming the lecture from a one-way knowledge delivery into a collective experiential exchange.

The other form is post-lecture centralized questioning, which is suitable for highly logical and professionally oriented thematic communication. Its core logic is to first fully receive the lecture content and then engage in in-depth interaction. Content in professional-themed lectures is often structured as an interdependent knowledge chain; mid-lecture questioning may disrupt knowledge continuity and affect the audience’s comprehension of the overall system. Therefore, such lectures generally organize questions in a centralized manner after the session, following a logical sequence to ensure completeness of the presentation. Moreover, professional topics often involve specialized terminology, requiring audiences to fully receive and briefly digest information before formulating targeted questions. If questions are raised during the lecture, there is often insufficient contextual grounding, making in-depth discussion difficult.

Of course, many well-designed lectures deliberately integrate both questioning formats in a flexible manner. On the one hand, audiences are allowed to raise questions in real time regarding the speaker's viewpoints or cases when doubts arise, thereby enabling immediate responses from the speaker and reducing the temporal lag in information transmission, allowing confusion to be resolved instantly. On the other hand, a post-lecture centralized questioning session is also reserved, during which participants can further discuss the core themes, extended directions, or deeper personal questions after the full presentation of content. The combination of these two questioning modes balances the efficiency of real-time interaction with the coherence of overall knowledge delivery. At the same time, it grants participants autonomy in communicative choice, thereby promoting diversification in individual practices.

4.2 Value Differentiation: Motivational Differences in Two Types of Interaction Behaviors

At the end of each lecture, many participants engage in one-on-one in-depth communication with the speaker. This behavior, in which audience members actively communicate with the speaker after the lecture, is essentially a rational choice based on high perceived value offsetting communication costs. As authoritative transmitters of the lecture topic, speakers possess specialized knowledge, practical experience, or unique insights that are difficult to access in everyday social contexts, making them scarce resources for participants. During the lecture, after fully receiving the information, audiences can clearly identify their own knowledge gaps, and this strong informational demand directly drives active communication.

In addition, in traditional academic contexts, the hierarchical distinction between lecturers and audiences often generates an authority-induced psychological barrier, making participants afraid to ask questions or uncertain about how to ask questions, thereby significantly increasing psychological communication costs. Academic bars weaken such hierarchical distinctions through de-authorized spatial construction. Within a decentered atmosphere, speakers are repositioned as equal interlocutors rather than authoritative figures. Audience members do not need to worry about being ridiculed for unprofessional questions, nor are they constrained by rigid queue-based questioning procedures. This low psychological cost environment encourages participants to initiate communication more actively and even to shorten the social distance with speakers through everyday conversational styles, thereby activating communicative willingness.

As one participant stated: "I think this kind of setting is more relaxed. People can drink tea or alcohol in a relatively comfortable environment and chat casually. It allows more direct face-to-face communication with the lecturer" (A10).

In contrast, interaction among strangers involves relatively little spontaneous engagement. This is essentially an avoidance behavior resulting from low expected value and high psychological cost. The sociologist Granovetter points out that weak ties in interpersonal networks, although lacking the trust foundation and emotional investment characteristic of strong ties, are often able to cross existing social circles and connect otherwise isolated social networks, possessing informational bridging and resource-expanding value that strong ties do not have. However, this value relies on external guidance to be activated^[7]. Some academic bars, by proactively organizing communication among strangers, have effectively harnessed the value of weak ties. For example, "Topsy Everything" deliberately structures stranger interaction by defining discussion topics and organizing spatial divisions, guiding interaction in a way that transforms stranger communication from a high-cost, low-value avoidance behavior into a low-cost, valuable, and feasible interaction, thereby expanding the breadth of group communication.

However, in practice, strangers lack shared topics and interest-based ties, and thus communicative motivation remains weak. Participants often do not know what they can gain from interacting with strangers; there is neither clear knowledge demand nor strong social necessity. Compared with this, communication with speakers offers higher perceived value, leading participants to prefer investing their time in interactions with clearer motivations rather than initiating purposeless communication with strangers.

Moreover, most individuals experience social anxiety in the presence of strangers, such as fear of awkwardness or concern about having nothing to say. Whether participants choose to actively communicate with speakers or avoid interaction with strangers is ultimately a result of the multi-layered communicative ecology constructed by academic bars, within which individual differences are preserved rather than diminished or erased.

5. Reconstruction of Knowledge Production and Dissemination Mechanisms Led by User Participation in Spatial Production

Figure 1: Traditional model of knowledge production and dissemination.

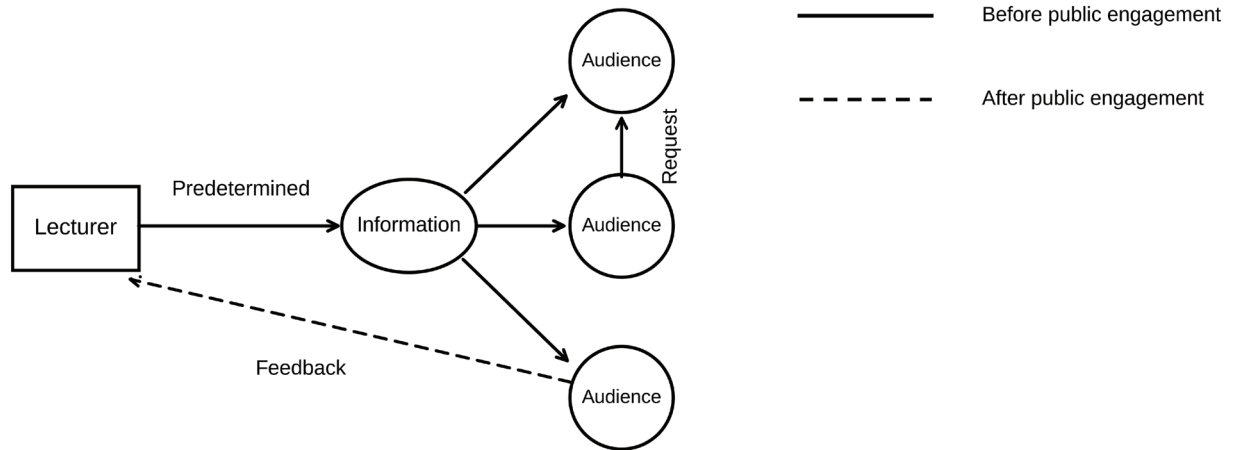
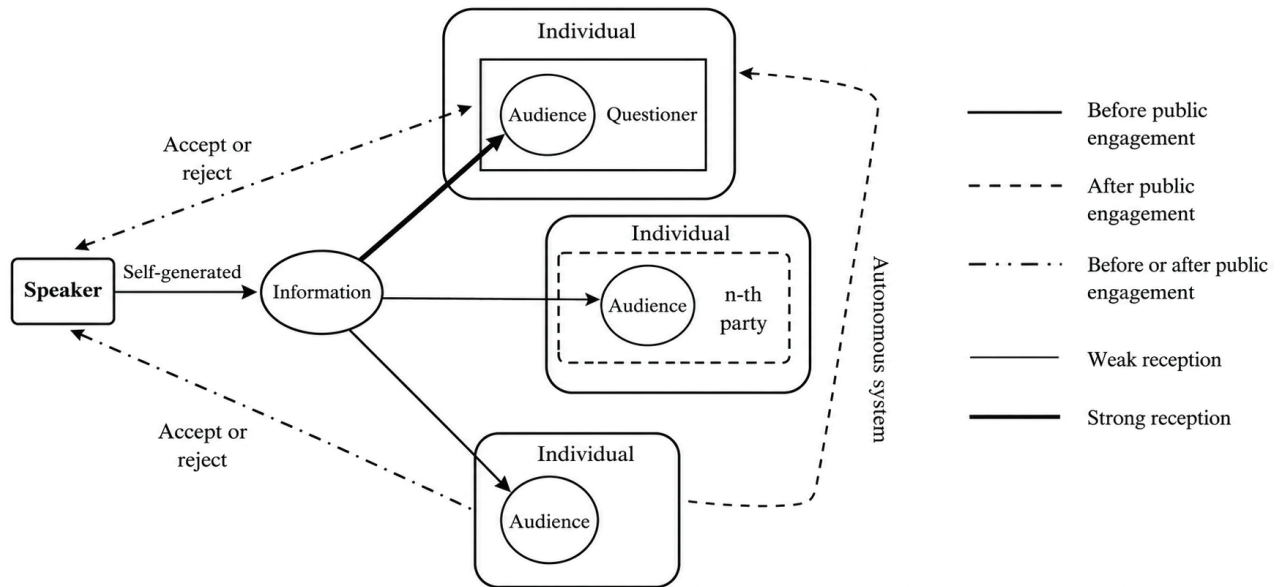


Figure 2: Model of knowledge production and dissemination in academic bars.



5.1 Content Diversity: From “Established Truths” to “Clash of Perspectives”

In traditional venues, knowledge dissemination primarily serves the fundamental requirements of national education or professional education systems for standardized knowledge transmission and the cultivation of qualified talent. Under such macro-level objectives, the content delivered is defined as verified and widely recognized truths. Lecturers and audiences are expected to complete a process of rational transformation from universal truths to individual cognition. As scholar Zhang Han puts it: “The audience is nothing but ‘potatoes’ in the classroom—they accept whatever the subject of knowledge dissemination transmits”^[8], thereby achieving standardized knowledge transmission and the construction of specific cognitive frameworks.

In contrast to the overarching objectives of traditional formats, the core focus of discussions in academic bars may include not only verified and widely accepted truths, but also controversial academic viewpoints currently existing within scholarly communities, and even speculative ideas that cannot be verified in the short term. As the manager of “Topsy Everything” stated: “What the lecturer presents are those findings based on his personal discoveries... and they are not sufficiently robust to serve as academic support. However, I believe that here there is no strict distinction between right and wrong. It is similar to Aristotle’s theory, which lasted for about 1,000 years until Newton came along and overturned it...” (F2). The manager

vividly uses the historical example of Newton overturning Aristotle to express that, in his view, academic bars do not operate under a strict binary of correctness and error, but rather constitute a space in which content is freely guided from the outset by the speaker.

5.2 Multi-Directional Dissemination: From “Hierarchical Radiation” to “Networked Weaving”

The requirements for achieving pedagogical objectives compel lecturers to complete both quantitative and qualitative tasks within strictly defined time constraints, making it difficult to provide extended or open-ended elaboration on any given question. This is reflected in common classroom expressions such as “We can discuss this after class; do not delay the schedule.” As a result, the dissemination pathway in traditional settings tends to exhibit a lecturer-centered hierarchical radiation structure, emphasizing disciplinary power and regulation.

In academic bars, however, lecturers and participants are able to engage in open-ended and exploratory discussions around a single topic, forming relational linkages that may be not only bidirectional but also multidirectional. As one speaker stated, “It is about the integration of ideas, perspectives, and various elements between me and the audience; after all, the lecture is not one-way, right?” (S4). This reveals that the speaker’s initial communicative intention already tends toward interaction rather than unidirectional transmission. The lecturer and the questioner form a bidirectional link, while the participation of third or even *n*th parties constitutes a multidirectional network, thereby producing a network-based dissemination path constructed among equal subjects.

For instance, the speaker of the “Sleep” session (S1), a clinical physician whose field is practice-oriented, conducted the event in a manner resembling a “clinical consultation.” He first provided a brief introduction to foundational knowledge about sleep, and then shifted to topics concerning real-life sleep problems. Subsequently, multiple participants engaged in discussions with the speaker regarding issues such as “insomnia” and “dreams.” However, the degree of bidirectional communication and multi-party discussion varies depending on thematic characteristics and the speaker’s stylistic preferences. For example, the event titled “Wang Yangming in Beijing—Growth and Breakthrough in Early Life” differed from the “Sleep” session. Its speaker, a university professor with a stronger orientation toward academic research, adopted a more lecture-centered format.

5.3 Participatory Initiative: From “Passive Requirement” to “Autonomous Will”

In traditional venues, communication among audience members or between audiences and lecturers is often externally required, typically occurring among familiar individuals or groups, and usually involving only a minority. As one interviewee stated, “There are relatively large-scale opportunities for knowledge input in daily life, such as district-level teaching and research activities, but opportunities for self-expression are very limited” (A3). This reflects the lack of interactive engagement in traditional formats. Moreover, “the phenomenon of communicator-centeredness is relatively severe”^[8], leaving the audience, as recipients, in an unequal position. Due to their lesser command of the established system of truth compared to the lecturer, listeners develop a timidity that prevents them from expressing their own views in public settings, “so that they can only follow step by step wherever the master leads”^[8]. As a result, one-way communication and minimal feedback emerge.

In academic bars, however, communication between participants and speakers is driven by autonomous will, and interaction occurs within the public domain. As participants noted, “In this informal and inclusive atmosphere, I feel more confident in expressing my opinions” (A7), and “When I saw everyone raising their hands to speak, I felt that was quite good” (A10).

As the manager of “Universe Living Room” explained, “Academic bars function as a bridge. People often feel embarrassed to communicate across professional and non-professional domains and tend to limit communication to those around them. Academic bars create a space that breaks these constraints” (F1). As stated, academic bars provide a safe and open field in which discourse does not require strong authoritative legitimacy. Because the content does not need to be highly authoritative and the relationship between speakers and participants is more equal, individuals are more willing and more courageous to express their views in public.

In addition, although relatively rare, instances of spontaneous post-event interaction among strangers further strengthen the significance of such activities and highlight the core role of practice-based communities. The temporal structure of academic bar events does not have strict boundaries as in traditional formats. After the main session, participants may communicate

with the speaker or engage in interaction with others. For example, in the “Architecture” event, after the main session ended, some participants gathered around speaker Huang Gong (S2) for discussion, while others interacted due to their shared interest in Huang Gong’s work.

5.4 Selectivity of Knowledge: From “Precise Transmission” to “Plural Interpretation”

In traditional settings, established truths are expected to be transmitted into the minds of all individuals and to be uniformly recognized, thereby contributing to the formation of a standardized and correct cognitive framework at the current stage^[8].

Academic bars, unlike traditional formats that emphasize precise transmission and acceptance of knowledge, open up an intellectual field that allows for plural interpretation and critical dialogue. Through continuous interaction, participants’ questions may be answered, or alternatively, new disagreements or further uncertainties may emerge.

Taking the “Sleep” session as an example again, in response to questions regarding insomnia, the speaker (S1) suggested avoiding daytime naps to ensure sufficient nighttime sleep. However, due to participants’ study and work conditions, this suggestion was not adopted; instead, they explained their constraints and continued to seek alternative solutions. The speaker merely expressed personal research-based viewpoints, which participants may resonate with, question, or even partially reject or disregard.

Such diverse interpretations do not dilute truth; rather, under the premise of respecting individual differences and contextual complexity, they liberate thought from the constraint of a single correct answer, allowing richer layers and possibilities to emerge through polyphonic dialogue.

6. Summary and Prospects

After examining participants’ proactive motivations, it was found that some respondents believed that “in the informal and inclusive atmosphere here, they feel more confident in expressing personal opinions” (A6), enjoying the sense of freedom in communication. However, they also explicitly stated that “introverted individuals may still be less likely to talk to strangers” (A6), and even pointed out that communication was “not sufficiently free, with a stronger expectation for roundtable-style interaction” (A4), clearly indicating that they did not experience a greater sense of openness in academic bars. The root of this divergence lies, on the one hand, in individual personality differences, and on the other hand, it reveals that some academic bar activities have not yet fully departed from the traditional “listening to lectures in a different place” model. As the manager of “Kongge Wine Talks” noted, “relevant regulatory norms have imposed requirements on the content of academic bars... and have clearly indicated that certain topics are not suitable for discussion” (F4), suggesting a potential tension between the free expression of knowledge and content compliance requirements.

Within the space, the meaning of behavior becomes ambiguous and permissive: some participants are enthusiastic about asking questions and pursue discussions persistently; some remain silent throughout, only drinking from their glasses; some come to seek answers; and some are simply “joining the crowd for fun” (F3). These behavioral postures—whether traditionally considered active or passive—appear to find their place and acceptance within this context. This form of acceptance itself provides an enabling atmosphere in which participants are allowed to be present in ways that suit them, thereby creating diverse practices. However, the other side of such laissez-faire openness inevitably involves coordination and regulation. Especially when the space attempts to support group-based knowledge exchange, controlling the rhythm becomes crucial. In the “Sleep” session, audience questions regarding “insomnia” became extremely intense, almost steering the entire session off its intended course. At this point, the role of the speaker becomes particularly delicate: they must both protect the enthusiasm of individual questioners and maintain the overall rhythm for the majority, preventing the lecture from devolving into an overly private and extended dialogue. An ideal form of academic bar interaction may therefore be a flexible collective dialogue, where a core structure ensures the overall direction of progression, while specific questions function as branches within the main line or are left for smaller post-lecture discussions. This requires the speaker to possess both the stability to control content and the sensitivity to respond in real time, neither rigidly adhering to a script and thus losing the fluidity of the bar environment, nor being diverted by individual voices and causing other participants to become passive listeners.

This “sense of proportion” involves, at a deeper level, the developmental logic of academic bars within the Chinese context. One participant noted that “ideally, academic bars should have no boundaries... perhaps academic bars should be more

‘underground’” (A4), suggesting the possibility of engaging with unresolved or slightly sensitive topics. However, on the other hand, there is also a sober recognition: “it is difficult for this to take shape in China because there is no such cultural soil” (S2). This indicates that the freedom cultivated by academic bars is, in essence, a freedom within regulatory boundaries. It does not occur in a vacuum, but is “organized around a specific application context”^[2], embedded within concrete urban cultures, regulatory frameworks, and commercial logics. Collective activities in China have their own inherent inertia, characterized by an implicit preference for order and safety. Therefore, the development of academic bars must operate within existing compliance frameworks, creating a relatively relaxed yet controlled form of contingency. Their freedom is not the freedom to overturn rules, but rather the freedom to expand expressive forms and extend the reach of knowledge within permitted boundaries.

Beyond academic bars, current forms of knowledge production and dissemination have already flourished across diverse physical spaces, taking on rich and varied forms. From art-based rural revitalization rooted in local cultural transformation, to urban renewal projects embedded with collective memory, to a wide range of specific practices, these spatial forms differ significantly in appearance yet share a core characteristic: they are all spaces constructed through participants’ lived experience and collective interaction, embodying resistance to singular implicit power structures. In terms of future “representational spaces,” it is possible to focus on cultivating “community-based in-depth salons,” transforming them from loose gatherings into stable institutional micro-nodes jointly governed by community scholars and local residents on an equal basis, with multi-stakeholder collaboration. This would break the traditional one-way transmission model from experts to audiences and explicitly recognize and activate the subjectivity of community residents as holders of local knowledge and transmitters of lived experience. Residents not only participate as learners, but can also become core sharers and interpreters in their areas of expertise. “This involves the participation of diverse actors, with more varied intellectual and social needs, whose knowledge comes from a broader range of backgrounds”^[2], thereby resisting unitary power discipline and enabling the community to reproduce itself through the practices and interactions of multiple agents.

Second, it is also possible to systematically construct interdisciplinary integrated classrooms and learning communities by designing top-level curricular frameworks beyond disciplinary boundaries, introducing encouraging cross-disciplinary foundational courses and workshops. These courses can be organized around comprehensive thematic issues, allowing students to first develop basic interdisciplinary literacy in terms of knowledge structure and cognitive language. Only through such structured shared learning experiences can students from different disciplinary backgrounds establish mutual understanding, shared discursive foundations, and necessary cognitive prerequisites, thereby laying the groundwork for deeper collaboration based on trust. On this basis, interdisciplinary workshops centered on real-world problems can be established to break disciplinary boundaries, allowing students to independently create physical, material, and experiential interaction spaces within a certain scope. In this way, the path from shared learning to shared creation is opened up, enabling the campus to transform from a traditional space of disciplinary separation into a birthplace where cutting-edge interdisciplinary thinking is continuously cultivated and validated, “allowing knowledge to be created within a broader, cross-disciplinary social and economic context”^[2].

“Representational space,” with its characteristics of lived experience, interactive creation, and resistance to singular power structures, will continue to reshape the landscape of knowledge production and dissemination. When every individual becomes a potential holder, interpreter, and co-builder of knowledge, a profound democratization of cognition emerges. This is not merely an evolution of spatial form, but a signal of a more resilient, innovative, and dynamic social ecosystem—one that is continuously growing at the intersections of equality and openness.

Funding

No

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Reference

- [1] Foucault M (2019). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Liu B and Yang Y, trans. 5th ed. Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company.
- [2] Gibbons M, Limoges C, Nowotny H, et al. (2011). *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies*. Chen H, Shen W, et al., trans. Beijing: Peking University Press.
- [3] Henri Lefebvre (2021). *The Production of Space*. Liu H, et al., trans. Beijing: The Commercial Press.
- [4] Huang S, Zang Y and Li R (2025). Authentic experience and self-construction: Youth participation in “academic bars.” *China Youth Study*, (2), 78-86. <http://dianda.cqvip.com/Qikan/Article/Detail?id=7200242654>.
- [5] Feng X (2022). *Social Research Methods*. 6th ed. Beijing: China Renmin University Press.
- [6] Chen J and Xie X (2025). Spatial paradox of capital and knowledge: Duality in academic bars. *Journal of Zhejiang Sci-Tech University*, 54(6), 692-698. [https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1673-3851\(s\).2025.06.006](https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1673-3851(s).2025.06.006).
- [7] Granovetter M S (1973). The Strength of Weak Ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), 1360-1380. <https://doi.org/10.1086/225469>.
- [8] Zhang H (2020). Media convergence and the “classroom revolution.” *Education Media Research*, (5), 77-82. <https://read.cnki.net/web/Journal/Article/JYCM202005026.html>.