

A Study on The Strategy Of "Social Media Loop" Of Chinese Commercial Films--Taking Chen Sicheng's Film as An Example

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Abstract. Today's Chinese film industry is thriving, and there are many commercial films that have achieved high box office. So how to stand out from the crowd and get high box office is a question to ponder. Therefore, this paper starts from the study of Chen Sicheng's commercial film's media marketing tactics to explore the media marketing strategy of Chinese commercial film constitutes the closed loop of media marketing. Such a study is significant, not only in terms of how it helps a high-grossing film come to life, but also in terms of the positive lessons such marketing strategies can have for other industries. Finally, this paper finds that the media marketing strategies for Chinese commercial films include, but are not limited to, localising the scripts with current hot topics, and providing a large amount of exposure before and after the release of the film, such as roadshows and appearances of the protagonists on variety shows, in order to attract traffic to the film. These media marketing strategies form a closed media marketing loop that positively impacts the box office of commercial films. But "excessive viral marketing and consumption of hot topics" can have a negative impact. Thus, according to this paper, the marketing of films should be done in a proper way.

Keywords: Chinese Film; Media Marketing; Commercial Films; Social Media Loop.

1. Introduction

Commercial cinema, as opposed to literary cinema, seeks primarily the market value of the box office and its derivatives, with the goal of consumer acceptance, and refers to films that are made to make a profit. At the same time, commercial films continue to incorporate a variety of elements to cater to the tastes of different types of audiences in order to maximise profitability. Throughout the history of commercial cinema in China, it started at the same time as China's film industry. Still in the silent film era, China had its own commercial film. The release of *The Orphan Saves the Ancestor* at the end of 1923 can be said to have confirmed the dual status of Chinese cinema as both art and enterprise. Between the 1920s and the early 1930s, the Chinese film market gradually saw the emergence of profit-oriented films, and even the formation of the first large-scale wave of commercial films in the history of Chinese cinema. In the 1990s, Chinese commercial films stood out and slowly went global, until today, they gradually have their own place in the world film market.

In the development of Chinese commercial films, there are many outstanding works that stand out, such as Zhang Yimou's *Ambush on Ten Fronts*, Hou Yong's *No Thieves Under Heaven*, and Tang Jili's *The Myth* and so on. A closer look at the reasons for these films' great box office numbers reveals the need for not only good scripts, but also media marketing in the pre-production as well as post-production stages of the film. Therefore, this paper starts from analysing Chen Sicheng's explosive commercial films to explore the closed loop of media marketing of Chinese commercial films.

Chen Sicheng, born in Shenyang in 1978, graduated from the Central Academy of Drama. Initially a rookie actor, he became well known to the audience for his role in the TV series *Soldier's Assault* in 2006 and was later nominated for the Best Actor Award at the 62nd Cannes Film Festival and the Outstanding Supporting Actor Award at the 3rd British Manx International Chinese Film Festival. In 2014, he won awards such as the MSN New Director Award and the Most Anticipated Director of the Year from LeTV for the film *Beijing Love Story*, which he wrote, directed and starred in, and has since ventured into the world of directing. Until today, Chen Sicheng has created a variety of

explosive films, such as the reasoning IP that he is bent on creating - the Detective Chinatown series, and the Manslaughter series have good box office figures. The box office figures for Detective Chinatown 1, 2 and 3 showed a gradual upward trend, at RMB 820 million, RMB 3.4 billion and RMB 4.52 billion respectively. Although its Douban rating is not high, and the public has mixed feelings about the film, it is undeniable that the film has achieved its goal of profitability. Leaving aside the artistry of the film, on the level of commerce, he has achieved the maximum value of a commercial film.

This is especially true of the recent film *Lost in the Stars*, written and produced by Chen Sicheng. According to the data of Cat's Eye Professional Edition, the total box office of the 2023 film *Dragon Boat Festival* has 909 million and *Lost in the Stars* has reached 507 million in the slot, becoming the box office champion of the 2023 *Dragon Boat Festival*. On the 12th day of the film's release, the cumulative box office of the film reached 2,385 crores. Such high grossing film will make one ponder how this is possible. Therefore, this paper starts from analysing the box office figures and Chen Sicheng's promotion for the film in the early and late stages, in order to specifically study the "closed media marketing loop" of such Chinese commercial films.

First of all, Chen Sicheng has achieved the "sinking of all aspects", on the one hand, the "sinking of scripts", that is to say, the purchase of the original overseas film scripts and localization. On the other hand, the "sinking of the audience", that is to say, to comply with the aesthetics of the target group, and do not make the question of choice between pandering to the elegance and pandering to the vulgarity. Secondly, he has a great passion and precision for current affairs, and many film scripts are localised to capture the hot topics of the day, and the material is selected and taken in relation to the hotspots. For example, the topic of women's rights, such as domestic violence, is still hot in real life, and "*Lost in the Stars*" digs deeper into it. Real-life anxieties about class are bluntly depicted in *Lost in the Stars* in the classic tale of the simple rich girl and the dark underbelly guy. In addition to this, he has created a deduction IP exclusively for Chen Sicheng. This particular genre of suspense not only meets the needs of its target demographic, but its clever setting overseas also contributes to the scale of the film's creation, constantly enhancing the drama of the film's plot. In the film's post-promotion, the interview of the person involved in the Thai pregnant woman's cliff fall case after watching *Lost in the Stars* was retweeted several times, using hot topics to render the audience's emotions again and stirring up people's emotional resonance. The official account of the film on short video platforms such as Shaking Voice released from time to time the viewing reflections of the on-site viewing group, making use of the audience to achieve the secondary publicity effect of the film. Media marketing strategies such as these were key factors in the explosion of *Lost in the Stars*. From the beginning of the script design to the post-promotional stage, a closed media marketing loop has been formed.

2. Literature Review

In today's all-media era, many scholars have researched media marketing in the film and television industry, as the role of media marketing is becoming more and more significant in all walks of life. In their study, Zhang Jing and Yang Shuyuan point out that the marketing aspect is an extremely crucial part of the development process of today's film and television industry and enterprises. But today's traditional film and television industry marketing concepts and models still have certain problems and need to be improved. In this regard, two scholars put forward rectification suggestions, such as: event marketing, brand marketing, new media marketing, and constantly improving the efficiency of film posters and so on [1, 2]. In her research, Wu Jingqing takes the film "*Small Times*" as an example and proposes that today's society is in the Internet era and big data is everywhere, so if China's film and television industry wants to break through the bottleneck and gain long-term development, it must rely on the development of science and technology, and the two complement each other. The study also points out that a key factor in the box office success of a film is "media marketing". The first step is to use big data to analyse a large amount of user data and then tap into

the audience of the genre. Then according to the characteristics of the audience group to develop a film marketing plan, such as the use of Microblogging, Shaking Voice and other new media platforms to start interactive marketing. The star's own traffic is used to continuously stimulate the fan effect and generate positive interactions with fans and even passers-by. The traffic of network interaction will in turn continuously increase the exposure of the film, thus achieving the effect of multiple publicity. Therefore, Wu Jingqing's study emphasises that the Chinese film industry must also continue to optimise its own media marketing capabilities in order to take the path of sustainable development, and the promotion and distribution of "Small Times" is a good example of this [3]. Similarly, the profound impact that big data has had on the film and television industry is mentioned in the studies of Ling Zhang and Eirini Sifaki; Maria Papadopoulou [4,5]. Many scholars also focus on studying the important role of Microblogging in film marketing [6].

Chen Fachang's research also points out that the integration of online literature and film and television also fully draws on new media marketing. For example, the "fan economy" plays an extremely important role in this process. In the process of the integration of network literature and film and television, the fans are mainly divided into two major parts, namely, the original fans of the literary works and the fans who are inspired by the stars. The existence of both types of fans has contributed to the adaptation of literary works as well as to film and television. Specifically, the recognition of the work by the fans of the original work leads to the formation of a strong and resilient "clique". At the same time, literary works will give rise to derivative products such as peripheral products, and fans of the original works are undoubtedly one of the mainstays of this consumer group. Behaviours such as consuming the periphery in turn generate multiple promotions of the work, resulting in media marketing [7]. Times are evolving and today's society is an era of integrated media. In her study, Li Ziwei then pointed out the deepening influence of integrated media on Chinese film marketing. On the one hand, the media carrier of the collection of integrated media provides multi-faceted output channels for film promotion. On the other hand, it is more conducive to film and television in the era of integrated media to do a good job of big data statistics, so as to accurately locate the film's production and publicity [8]. In his study, Shengjie argued that film and television companies should reasonably analyse the characteristics of different marketing platforms and combine them with the company's positioning [9].

Some scholars have also studied the media marketing strategies of Chen Sicheng's commercial films. Liu Luoqi pointed out that Chen Sicheng, who acted as the screenwriter and producer of the film "Lost in the Stars", really did "sink the audience". The study highlights that Chen Sicheng analyses the audience of his films and understands the preferences of such audience, and then combines them with current hotspots to produce film scripts that are truly "interesting". At the same time, in the choice of actors, Chen Sicheng will choose actors who bring their own flow and are highly malleable. And then use the star's own traffic to trigger the "fan effect", so as to play a certain role in the media marketing of the film [10]. Similarly, He Hongyuan and Suo Yabin also pointed out in their study that the attempt of film series is one of the media marketing strategies of Chen Sicheng's commercial films, of which the classic representative is the "Detective Chinatown" series. Series of films will make the creative space of the film wider, and the IP value derived from the series of films is even more considerable [11, 12]. Yang Qing and Peng Kang also suggested in their study that Chen Sicheng is adept at creating inferential IPs and will pinpoint the market [13, 14].

The above studies and theories help readers to understand some background information, from which it can be seen that although there are many scholars in this field of research, there are few articles that study the "closed-loop marketing" formed by the media marketing strategy of Chen Sicheng's commercial films. However, it is important to study the strategy of "closing the media marketing loop" for commercial films, not only in terms of creating a high-grossing commercial film, but also for the sustainability of other industries. Therefore, this paper will start from analysing Chen Sicheng's film to explore the strategy of "closed loop media marketing" for Chinese commercial films.

3. Methodology

The research methodology of this paper uses case studies as well as observation in qualitative research. Specifically, this article observes the official Shaking Voice accounts of some of the films on Shaking Voice, such as the film *Lost in the Stars*, directed and produced by Chen Sicheng. This official account now has a total of 1,972,000 followers and a total of 120 million likes. A closer look at the film's official account reveals that the account released its first Shake video on 2023.02.06 to announce the film's scheduling, and the video gained 28,000 likes and generated a lot of buzz among netizens as soon as it was sent out. As you can see, the film's pre-promotion played a role. And from before to after the film's release, the film's official Shaking Voice account was always active, one of the videos that received 850,000 likes was about actor Zhu Yilong's live material, so it's not hard to see that the star's own traffic was also attracting traffic to this film. All of these media marketing tools continued to draw the distance between the film and the audience between the tangible and the intangible, stirring up the desire of more viewers to watch the film and buy tickets for the film. In the process of adopting observation, all the film-related data observed in this paper are from the film's official account in Shaking Voice, Xiaohongshu or other multimedia platforms to ensure that all the data are authoritative and true.

4. Results

Through the study, this paper draws the result that some of the Chinese commercial films that have achieved better results cannot be separated from the closed loop of media marketing constituted by a series of media marketing tools. Specifically for the study of Chen Sicheng's commercial films, this paper finds through observation that one of Chen Sicheng's marketing strategies for commercial films is to "continuously increase exposure in the pre-promotional stage of the film." Specifically, in addition to the necessary poster publicity in the pre-promotional stage of the film, the main performers of the *Tang Detective* cast and crew all landed on Happy Camp, which increased the exposure of the film's main characters, and further increased the traffic based on the use of the star's own traffic, so that maximized its flow rate, and built-up momentum for the film's airing. A marketing strategy that this paper also finds through observation is "roadshow promotion around the country during the film's run." Specifically, Chen Sicheng had roadshows in Shenzhen, Changsha, and other places during the run of his film *Lost in the Stars*. During the roadshow, Ni Ni and Zhu Yilong, the main characters of the film, interacted with the audience after the screening to share the content of the film with their fans; they also had a Q&A session with some major media outlets as well as self-trafficked web celebrities to achieve the effect of promoting the film. In addition to this, the marketing strategies identified in this paper through observation include "Creating and promoting scripts that incorporate current hot topics." Chen has not only localised the film based on the introduction of the original overseas film script, but also combined it with current hot topics. For example, *lost in the Stars* combines the hottest topic of women's rights at the moment. In the film's post-promotion also achieved vertical publicity, that is, focusing on women's rights and interests, vertical users directly oriented to women, reverse marketing bromance.

5. Discussion

According to the findings of this paper, one of the media marketing strategies for Chinese commercial films is "increasing exposure in the pre-promotional stage of the film". In Chen's pre-promotional strategy for the film, this includes making promotional posters for the film, taking the film's protagonists to nationally recognised variety shows such as Happy Camp, opening the launch party, conducting roadshows and so on. It's not unreasonable to need to promote a film through multiple channels even before it's released. First of all, today's Chinese film market is thriving and there is no lack of good works in the film market, then how to stand out among the many films and become a dark horse, which will become an unavoidable problem. As long as this problem is solved,

that will enhance the core competitiveness of the film. The pre-publicity for many of Chen's films pays special attention to this. Secondly, today's society is in an all-media era, film publicity can make use of the different qualities of different medias to achieve the effect of multiple publicity. The right amount of exposure before a film's release has many benefits, the most immediate effect being a spike in the box office. Take the Chen Sicheng-produced *Lost in the Stars*, because of its pre-publicity, exposure for the film's broadcast to accumulate a lot of traffic, so once *Lost in the Stars* was released, its attendance rate for a period of time to take the first place steadily, just 12 days after the release of the cumulative box office reached 2.385 billion yuan. And Chen Sicheng, director and producer of the *Tang Detective* series of films is also in line with the "Matthew effect", the use of three films plot of the local link for the audience to create a unique *Tang Detective* universe, which for *Tang Detective* 4, 5 and even 6, 7 to lay the plot and flow of the foundation. The *Tang Detective* IP created by the *Tang Detective* film series also has its added value, which can generate co-operation with food, real estate and other industries to achieve the linkage of different industries, thus generating huge economic benefits and promoting the progress and development of society. Therefore, such media marketing strategies are not only crucial for the sustainability of China's film industry, but also have positive implications for other industries.

This article also observes that Chinese commercial films also conduct roadshows during the film's release. For example, Chen Sicheng's film *Lost in the Stars* had roadshows in Shenzhen, Changsha and other places. Roadshows can achieve good publicity effect without the following points. Firstly, the fans attracted by the "star aura" of the film's protagonists and the fans of the film's original script will form a huge "fan effect", which will add colour to the film's publicity and form a good publicity effect. Secondly, during the roadshow, the main characters Ni Ni and Zhu Yilong interacted with the media, and the press releases produced by the media later on will again promote the film. Finally, the roadshow will invite some netizens to come to the scene to watch the film. In the roadshow of the film *Lost in the Stars*, the internet personality "MO" was invited. It's not a coincidence that MO was invited to the roadshow for the film *Lost in the Stars*. MO's debut work was a make-up imitation (imitating Yeon Jin, the lead actress of *Dark Glory*, which was a hit drama at the time). After carefully observing the celebrity's videos after her appearance in the circle, all of them are in this style, and at this time, MO already has a certain amount of traffic base. So, the publicity team of *Lost in the Stars* seized this point and also invited MO to carry out Ni Ni imitation make-up, making use of MO's own traffic flow for diversion, which had a good publicity effect. Finally, the cast and crew's publicity team filmed the immediate viewing reactions of the audience and continuously placed them on multimedia platforms such as *Shaking Voice* and *Xiaohongshu* in order to achieve the effect of secondary publicity.

"Combining current hotspots for script creation and promotion" is also an important marketing strategy for Chen Sicheng's films with good box office figures. In terms of script selection, overseas film scripts are localised to be more in line with Chinese aesthetics. In terms of setting, Chen Sicheng wisely avoids the limitations of a crime deduction film, with all of his stories taking place overseas. This will allow more room for creative play in the film, making it easier to make a big effort in multiple areas to create a stronger visual impact and bring an exciting viewing experience to the audience. In the post-promotion of the film after its release, it is even combined with the current hotspots. For example, in the post-promotion of the film *Lost in the Stars*, the current hot topic of women's rights was used to reverse market bromance in order to arouse more women's emotional resonance, so that many women bought tickets and entered the cinema for this purpose.

As a result, the study finds that for a commercial film to be a box office hit, it is indispensable to have the necessary media marketing tools, which include, but are not limited to, the combination and localisation of the script with the current hotspots, the pre-promotional campaigns prior to the release of the film, and the roadshows conducted by the post-promotional campaigns. These necessary media marketing strategies form a closed media marketing loop that fuels the film's box office success.

However, in the course of research, this paper also finds that there are some problems with this kind of media marketing strategy. For example, will the "viral marketing" caused by multi-channel

marketing cause resentment among some consumers and thus produce negative effects? Do films such as *Lost in the Stars* deliberately use hot topics of women to consume women? In response to some of the problems arising from this type of marketing strategy, this paper argues that, whether it is "film marketing combined with hot topics" or "viral marketing" need to grasp the "degree", and this "degree" need to rely on the grasp of some market research to control.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we start from analysing and studying the media marketing methods of the commercial films produced and directed by Chen Sicheng, in order to study the strategy of "closed-loop media marketing" for Chinese commercial films. Upon previous research, it's found that the media marketing strategies of both Chen Sicheng and the Chinese film industry as a whole are more or less the same. These strategies include, but are not limited to, the polishing and localisation of the film script before shooting, the massive publicity before the release of the film in order to gain traffic, and the roadshow to increase the exposure of the film in the process of the release of the film. These media marketing tactics will continue from the time before the release of the film to a long period of time after the film has been broadcasted, which constitutes a "closed loop of media marketing". Each link in this closed loop is crucial. If the script is not localised and the main audience is still Chinese, even if there is a lot of publicity in the middle and late stages of the film, it will not necessarily strike an emotional chord with the audience, and the box office will naturally be affected. Similarly, massive publicity before the release of the film is essential. This approach will make full use of the fan effect in order to achieve adequate traffic to the film, which will lay the foundation for traffic to the upcoming film. Also, the various media marketing techniques used during the film's release should continue to work. This cascading approach to media marketing will step by step fuel traffic and continue to drive traffic to the film, and in the end, the most direct result achieved will be the film's box office figures. Of course, there are some problems that we should reflect on, such as the negative effects of excessive "viral marketing and consumption of hot topics". In view of the possible problems, this paper proposes to conduct sufficient market research to grasp the appropriate "degree".

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