

# Research On the Social Attributes and Marketing Strategies of Movies in The New Media Age

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**Abstract.** With the advent of new media, a movie is no longer just an artistic form of expression, but has become a medium to meet people's social needs. This article will explore the social attributes of movies in the context of new media, including the socialization of movie theaters, the societal value of movie topics, and the community aggregation of movie audiences. The article will analyze the impact of these phenomena on movie marketing strategies, and reflect on potential dangers and problems that may arise from these social attributes of movies, in order to provide guidance and ideas for the healthy development of the movie industry in the context of new media.

**Keywords:** New media marketing; Movie Industry; Social Currency; Emotional resonance.

## 1. Social Attributes of Movies in the Context of New Media

### 1.1. The Socialization of Movie Theaters

According to data from the "Lighthouse Professional Edition," as of December 2023, there are a total of 12,594 cinemas with 77,420 screens in China. Over the past eight years, the number of movie theaters and screens in China has shown a significant growth trend, with a slight impact due to the epidemic in 2020, but still remains on an overall upward trend. In the post-epidemic era, cinemas have become an important place for modern social interaction.

However, according to the survey data of China Film Data Information Network in 2021, 69.5% of moviegoers choose to go to the cinema for social reasons such as hanging out with friends, followed by dating and family activities. People's social needs for movies have gradually replaced their aesthetic and auditory needs. The enclosed and relatively private social environment of movie theaters can provide audiences with a unique social experience. People can watch movies together with their loved ones, family, friends or strangers, share their feelings and satisfy their social needs to maintain relationships and improve their emotions. Therefore, the socialization of movie theaters has become an indispensable feature of the social function of movie theaters.

### 1.2. The Societal Value of Movie Topics

The concept of "social currency" was proposed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, and Professor Jonah Berger of the Wharton School explained it in his book "Contagious," stating that social currency can help us gain more positive evaluations and good impressions from family, friends, and colleagues [1]. Chinese scholar Zhao Jun mentioned in the column of "Chinese Movie News" that people need to rely on relevant topics to certify themselves and find a circle that can transmit their credit when they enter the social state on their own initiative. Therefore, movies with topic relevance have become a tool for social interaction, which is the reason why movies are becoming more social.

Movies provide rich, real-time material for entertainment and social interaction after people have tea and dinner, and discussions on movie topics can trigger people's attention, thinking and heated discussions on related social topics. For example, the movie "No More Bets" released in the summer of 2023 made telecom fraud a social issue that people continued to discuss and pay attention to. When movie topics extend to social topics, they will trigger broader and more intense discussions among

the public and are more likely to play a role as socially relevant conversation topics in people's social processes.

"A way of life formed on the internet, called 'nodalization,' has comprehensively reconstructed people's lives. This way of life has the characteristics of 'spaceless,' 'identityless' and the subject, making the relationality between people in the network field mainly rely on certain social topics." [2] After new movies are released, people watch them and express their opinions and feelings on social media platforms. This becomes a topic of conversation in their social lives, which has become a normal social habit for many movie viewers. "After watching a movie, regardless of satisfaction with the film, on one hand, audiences hope to express or share their opinions and feelings through convenient online platforms. On the other hand, they also want to inform their family and friends about their perspective on the film, whether it is good or bad, and whether it is worth watching." [3] Platforms such as Douban, Weibo, and WeChat also provide places for the public to express their opinions and viewpoints freely, and posting movie reviews on social media has become a fixed way of watching movies for some moviegoers.

People express their opinions and discuss movies and socially relevant topics, openly display their understanding, knowledge, aesthetic tastes, and value orientations on relevant issues, and receive public likes, comments, reposts, or immediate affirmation and evaluation offline in the social process of this interaction. Therefore, movies have become an important social currency in people's social lives.

### **1.3. Community Aggregation of Movie Audiences**

The performance of movies in meeting people's social needs is multifaceted, with one notable feature being their ability to facilitate the spontaneous formation of small-scale communities among people with similar interests or aesthetic views. After watching a movie, viewers often publicly express their opinions and feelings about it on social media, attracting other viewers with similar sentiments or evaluations. Over time, as these viewers continue to engage in discussions about the movie, they gradually form an audience community centered around the movie, albeit with varying degrees of closeness.

It's worth noting that in certain platforms or specific contexts, audience communities may exhibit higher degrees of closeness. For example, Weibo has a feature called "super topics" for movies, allowing viewers who love the same movie to gather in a specific topic page. Here, they can post discussions about various details of the movie as well as engage in creative derivative works based on the movie's content. The interactive nature of these "super topics" fosters closer community aggregation among audiences. Taking the movies "Creation of The God: Kingdom of Storms" and "One and Only," which were released in the summer of 2023, as an example, both have large and highly active viewer communities within Weibo's "super topics." Within the "super topics," viewers proudly refer to themselves as "fans," indulge in in-depth interpretation, active promotion, and continuous creation of secondary content related to the movies. The accumulated comments, likes, shares, private messages, and other interactions create deep emotional connections among the audience, fully satisfying their social desires on the internet. Douban, another popular platform, also provides movie groups, which offer viewers a more focused and in-depth space for communication. Each movie has its dedicated group, and groups are also categorized by movie genres, such as "horror movies" and "experimental movies," providing a gathering place for viewers who enjoy a specific genre, where they can recommend movies, share viewing experiences, and thereby form a close community of movie enthusiasts.

## **2. Marketing Strategies Based on Movie Social Attributes**

### **2.1. Transforming social hotspots into consumption guidance**

According to Michele Goda Haber, an attention economy theorist in the US, "Attention will replace money" [4]. Hotspots as the core energy field of audience attention can be used to multiple

times spread and strengthen the attention field by driving the herd mentality. Therefore, using social hotspots and transforming them into consumption guidance is an important means of movie marketing.

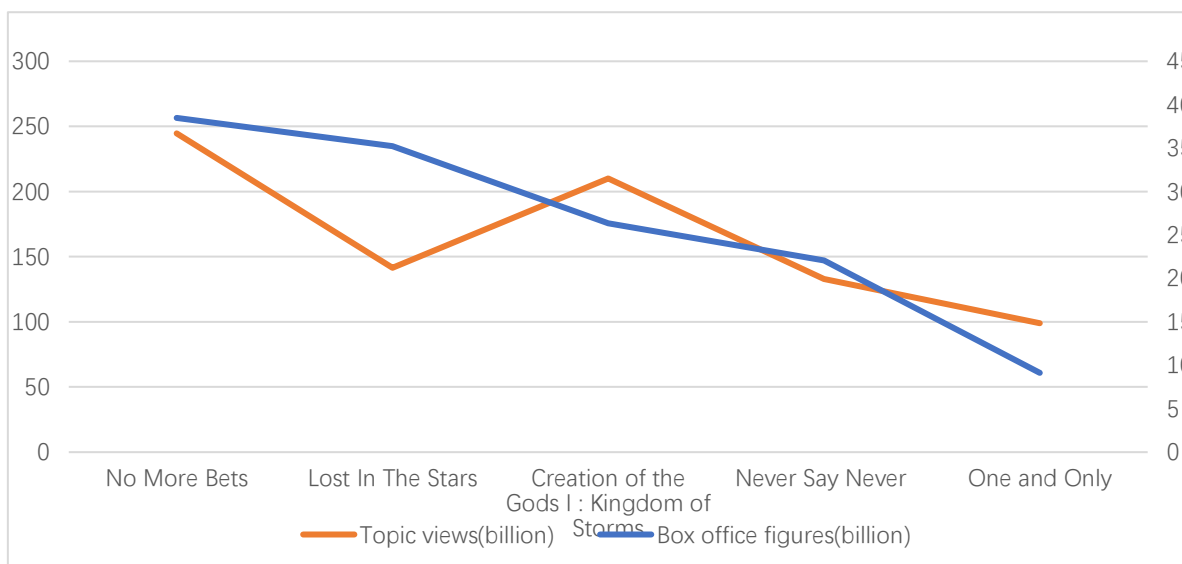
Taking the hit movie "Lost in the stars " in the 2023 Chinese summer box office as an example, the marketing theme accurately hit social hotspots such as "anti-love brain," "female mutual assistance," "fear of marriage," and "anti-fraud," combined with persuasive and interactive advertising copy. The movie was packaged as a sobering agent for women pursuing independence, arousing an emotional ripple among the female audience eager for self-awareness. Ultimately, the movie received over 25.6 billion reads on topic and 3.5 billion box office.

"Attention is not a purely independent psychological process, but the direction and concentration of various psychological activities. Among these psychological activities, emotion is the most cohesive factor" [5]. In movie promotion, using emotional marketing to enhance audience emotional involvement can improve the film's attractiveness and aesthetics driving force for the audience. In combination with imperative and persuasive advertising language, it helps to bridge the "last mile" from audience emotional acceptance to purchase behavior.

## 2.2. Using new media for precision marketing

The rapid development of the Internet and digital technology has not only changed the forms of media but also promoted the transformation of social information dissemination and content consumption. From movie posters to trailers to the prevalent short video marketing, new media platforms have driven the iterative update of movie promotion and gradually penetrated into the movie distribution and other links.

Taking the Douyin platform with 700 million monthly active users as an example, by collecting the topic playback data of the top five box office movies in the 2023 summer season on the Douyin platform, we can mine the correlation between the movie box office and its popularity on the Douyin platform. The specific data is shown in Figure 1:



**Figure 1.** The positive correlation between the movie box office and the popularity on the Douyin platform. Data source: Lighthouse

As shown in the figure above, there is a certain correlation between the movie box office and its discussion volume on the new media platform. To optimize marketing resource allocation, production companies should conduct precision marketing based on the characteristics and user profiles of different platforms. For example, on the Xiaohongshu platform where female users account for about 70%, food, makeup, fashion, fitness, and female issues can be combined with movie marketing to embed movie content into the existing cognitive structure of the user group, strengthen the stimulus intensity and depth of the film's information to the audience, further stimulate purchase impulse, and achieve precision marketing.

### 2.3. Creating Immersive Audiovisual and Social Dual Scenes

"Once aesthetic perception is formed, the aesthetic process naturally begins. Perception leads, images are formed, and then long-lasting attention is drawn, emotions are stimulated, imagination is triggered, and understanding is obtained." [6] Creating a good aesthetic perception can not only enhance the audience's aesthetic experience but also provide a good environment and feeling for the audience, enabling the film to bridge the word-of-mouth marketing link at the screening end. Unlike general life and work scenes, audiences often present a more relaxed posture while watching movies. The relaxed, calm, and accepting psychological state of the audience makes their perception more sensitive. Under the influence of the cinema environment, the intensity of audience perception is greatly enhanced, and the eruption of emotions becomes stronger. However, due to the existence of factors such as the screen and other audience members, the audience often has a dual-level perception, that is, they are in a state of superposition of the reality of their personal lives and the virtual and fictional world of the movie, which creates certain barriers for the audience to understand the movie content. Cinemas can use visual, auditory, and tactile senses to enhance the stimulation intensity for the audience. 4D movies utilize technology to weaken the barriers caused by the dual perception through the triple interaction of visuals, sounds, and touches, making the audience's emotional experience with the characters or the works even closer and thus generating emotional resonance.

In addition to the construction of audiovisual scenes, cinemas can also start with the social attributes of movies to create a more immersive social scene for the audience, enhancing their social experience in the cinema. Taking the movie "Shining For One Thing" as an example, the film selected the classic symbol of "first snowfall" from the series of works and created a "snowing cinema" during certain periods to create an immersive romantic viewing atmosphere. The meaning of "snowing cinema" is that after the movie is screened, artificial snowflakes will float in the cinema. Once launched, the "snowing cinema" was welcomed by numerous couples. The movie achieved over 600 million yuan in presales on its first day, becoming the highest-preselling Chinese movie in history, which demonstrates the attractive effect of an immersive cinema environment on the audience in a social setting.

## 3. The Problems Arising from the Social Attributes of Movies

### 3.1. Giving up and diluting the artistic value of movies

With the continuous emergence of the social attributes of contemporary Chinese movies, movies with topicality have become popular in the film market, achieving remarkable broadcasting effects. In order to meet the social and entertainment needs of the audience, the artistic value of movies has begun to give way to commercial value, transforming from an art form into a social medium and a tool for maintaining social relationships.

Looking at the box office data since 2014, movies with social and popular topics have always been in a leading position. The comedy movie "Hi, Mom!" released during the 2021 Spring Festival achieved a box office revenue of 5.313 billion yuan, ranking third in the total box office list. The anti-fraud film "No More Bets" released during the 2023 summer season achieved good results with a box office revenue of 3.748 billion yuan. Comedy films such as "Moon Man" and "Hello Mr. Billionaire" produced by Happy Mahua also achieved very eye-catching box office results. However, these movies do not have particularly outstanding artistic performance. They do not pay extra attention to the aesthetics, style, editing, and directorial techniques of movies, but prioritize the topicality and popularity of the movies in their creative considerations. Chinese scholar Wang Fuzhong explains this phenomenon as follows: "Because watching a movie is no longer about appreciating art and performance, it is about spending money to have something to talk about, as well as the romantic and social needs of young people using movies as a pretext." The good box office results of these movies are the result of the continuously increasing social needs of people and the continuously improving social attributes of movies.

Due to the commercial attributes of movies, movie creators prioritize box office revenue and online view counts as the main dimensions when considering movie creation. Therefore, driven by the operation of the movie market, using controversies or resonances sparked by topics in society has become a shortcut for movie creators to pursue high box office revenue and data. Movies that originally had serious and artistic qualities gradually turn into popular entertainment culture. As a result, movie content becomes shallow, homogeneous, and vulgar, and the sacredness of movies as an art form is continuously diluted.

### **3.2. Negative reinforcement of audience feedback and creative orientation**

With the development of new media, movie audiences have gained significant power in movie creation and criticism, ushering in an era where the "audience is king." As recipients of movies, audiences naturally have preconceptions and inevitable misinterpretations due to their psychological structure, where the audience's aesthetic experiences and orientation will influence how they interpret movies and cause unavoidable misunderstandings. When the audience's pre-established structures encounter the structure of the work, it creates an aesthetic gap. The existence of the gap places the audience in a position to choose between transforming their existing psychological structures or abandoning their interpretations, leading to positive or negative feedback. If the creators follow the negative feedback of the audience, blindly pursuing the alignment between creative intentions and audience preferences in order to achieve high box office revenue and popularity, this could reduce the gap while sacrificing the audience's aesthetic excitement and even causing aesthetic fatigue, leading to a vicious cycle of feedback relationships.

As Neil Postman mentioned in "Amusing Ourselves to Death," "Television has changed the content and meaning of public discourse, politics, religion, education, sport, and every other domain of public interest, and has transformed them into a form of entertainment, which has become the culture of our time, and in turn, has become our reason of being ... quietly and without violence." [8] With the booming development of digital media technology, even though television media is gradually declining, the new emerging media continues the culture of television media, and the entertainment-to-death social trend is gradually on the rise. "Art not only has the function of aesthetic entertainment but also has the function of aesthetic education." [9] However, some movie creators are influenced by the social attributes of entertainment-based social media, causing turbulence within the industry. They produce films with poor visual language and content and gain high box office revenue by pleasing the audience or catering to their psychological needs for entertainment. By blindly pursuing high popularity and box office revenue while sacrificing the artistic value of films and their ability to reflect serious topics and examine social values, they not only have failed to take on social responsibility in terms of improving public aesthetics but also make the film industry enter a vicious cycle of declining aesthetic quality.

### **3.3. The backlash of marketing dividends and hidden worries in creation**

Effective movie marketing can increase the spread and acceleration of revenue conversion under the stimulation of social media. The promotion of movies on emerging media platforms has the characteristics of low cost, high frequency, and high efficiency. In comparison to the high cost of movie production and unpredictable box office results, increasing marketing leverage has become an effective measure to reduce movie investment risks and to achieve cost reduction and efficiency improvement. Overemphasizing marketing and enjoying its dividends while neglecting the creative content of the movie will inevitably face the backlash of results.

For example, the movie "Long Day's Journey into Night," which premiered on December 31, 2018, strategically placed the screening times so that it would end just around the beginning of the New Year, creating a concept of "kissing in the New Year." The movie had an opening day box office income of 262 million yuan but dropped sharply to 11.41 million yuan on its second day out. By January 2, it had plummeted to only 1.96 million yuan. The high revenue on the opening day shows

the success of the movie's marketing, while the drastic drop came mostly from the poor quality of the movie and the backlash of the marketing dividends.

The short-term benefits brought by movie marketing are only the "calling card" to open up the movie market and cannot hide the fact that the works have low quality. Abandoning the workmanship in the creation of movies for the sake of marketing dividends, placing the focus of movie production on showmanship and promotion, will destroy the order of the film market and damage the audience's need for aesthetic appreciation and cultural judgment.

#### 4. Summary

In the era of new media, the social attributes of films have been highlighted like never before. Cinema socialization provides a platform for people to share movie-watching experiences with family, friends, and strangers, meeting their needs for socializing and strengthening relationships. Films as a social currency for topics make them a topic of social conversation and entertainment after dinner, while also sparking people's attention and reflection on related social issues. In addition, the social aggregation of movie audiences also reflects the performance of movies in meeting people's social needs, enabling people with similar interests or aesthetic views to form small-scale communities automatically. Therefore, based on the social attributes of films, strategies such as converting social hotspots into consumption promotion, using new media for precise marketing, and constructing immersive and highly interactive audio-visual scenes can be adopted in movie marketing.

However, the socialization of films has also brought some negative impacts, such as the decline and erosion of film artistry, negative reinforcement between audience feedback and creative orientation, and the backlash of marketing dividends and hidden worries in creation. Therefore, when using the social attributes of films for marketing, it is necessary to balance the pros and cons and pay attention to both the artistic quality of movies and the aesthetic needs of the audience, avoiding excessive marketing. Film creators also need to take the initiative to assume the responsibility of driving the industry's development when creating, not just catering to the audience and focusing only on the social attributes of movies while neglecting artistry. The audience's eyes are sharp, and substandard works are bound to be counterproductive, only those that are high-quality and conscientiously produced can receive true praise and withstand the test of time.

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