

Embodied Escape of Social Platform Users from the Meme Effect - An Example of Special Effects on Tiktok

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Abstract. With the continuous development of short video User Generated Content (UGC) mode, TikTok short video is one of the key topics of research today. Researchers have found that TikTok is a channel for self-expression, where users can perform episodic expressions and express their real feelings through such special effects. At the same time, this interactive dissemination of cultural symbols also builds users' cultural identity. However, there is a lack of uniform explanation for the relationship between the mass copying, pasting and dissemination of such videos and user psychology. Therefore, this paper analyzes the deeper reasons for the hot spread of this particular special effects category by categorizing the number of popular videos with "ultra-long watermelon" special effects in terms of the number of uses and texts, distributing questionnaires to investigate the users' use of the "five senses of everything" category of special effects, and analyzing the data by content analysis method and questionnaire survey method. Finally, it finds out that the "facial features filter" allows users to have highly masked digital doubles easily, and the tendency to use "facial features filter" type effects is enhanced by users' own physical and psychological characteristics and the properties of social media platforms under the fetish effect.

Keywords: Meme theory; TikTok; digital stand-in's short video; facial features filter.

1. Introduction

With the development of the Internet and new media platforms, especially since the outbreak of COVID-19, short video special effects, which are known for their peculiar and quirky nature, have become more and more popular on the TikTok. What's more, their status has gradually risen from simply assisting video expression to being an important video content.

The low production threshold and high dissemination power have turned TikTok special effects videos into a new traffic code, allowing many ordinary users to have "pop-up" videos. According to TikTok's first release of the "TikTok Special Effects Data Report", in the first half of 2021, the TikTok platform used special effects in an average of one out of every five contributed videos, and special effects have become a popular way of expression for users, thus reflecting a new path of phenomenal aesthetics [1]. The "Facial features filter" special effects of the past year, it is not difficult to find similar "the ultra-long watermelon"(changing a person's face into a long watermelon), "The potato with big eyes"(enlarge a person's eyes and turn their face into a potato) and other special effects that only show the eyes and mouth in the TikTok have gained a lot of attention and use.

To explore the deeper reasons behind these phenomena, existing theories could be used to explain and the spread of such special effects can be studied on the basis of meme theory. According to *The Meme Machine*, Susan Blackmore classifies two types of memes: Genetype, which is based on content replication, and Phenotype, which is based on form replication [2].

The article "Research on the Generation and Dissemination Mechanism of Internet Buzzwords in the Perspective of Meme Theory"[3], completed in 2019, introduced the Meme theory into the networked context, providing a new research idea for the association between the Internet and social culture but not considering its application in the new video conditions. While the article

"Exploration of the Cultural Dissemination of "Geng" (refers to jokes or slang) on Bilibili in the Perspective of Meme Theory", dated May 2022, further expands its conditions of validity [4]. It divided Meme in the Internet into strong meme that are widely spread and have competitive advantages over other meme and weak meme that are in their opposites, with the help of Darwinian evolutionary theory paradigm [5], and further discusses the attributes of "Geng" culture. The properties of strong meme are further discussed, but still mainly at the linguistic level.

As for the study of "props" and "special effects" in TikTok short videos, this paper introduces the concept of digital double for interpretation. A digital double is defined as a person or part of a person created or reconstructed by using computer-generated images and sounds to act as a stand-in. This digital double has the quality of "embodied escape"[6]. Li Jie, a scholar said that TikTok is a big stage for self-expression, and often only the five senses are revealed and the audience cannot recognize the original face, so users can use such special effects to realize the presentations of the plot and express their real feelings [7]. This is also a way for people to express their feelings and vent their stress. The users' experience is constantly renewed by a variety of special effects, which further enhances their stickiness. Lv Yuxiang and Zhang Yang said that TikTok has realized the interactive communication of cultural symbols by producing a large number of virtual symbolic interactive special effects and understood the role of cultural symbols in the construction of cultural identity played by TikTok from the perspective of symbolic interaction theory [8]. However, Wu Wenyong and Zhu Jinde also expressed their doubts and reflections on TikTok's special effects, saying that the explosion of TikTok's face special effects only lies in the content of special effects, but not in the extension of people becoming special effects, and when the wave of thousands of people using special effects dissipates, what remains in viewers' hearts is only the image of special effects, not the beauty of the presented personality [9].

Based on the above, this paper takes "escape embodied"[6] as the starting point and considers the "escape embodied"[6] feature of digital doubles as the core and guiding feature in the use of "facial features filter" on TikTok platform. In the context of the "meme effect" theory, this study also considers and explores the dissemination of this special effect form.

Therefore, in this paper, the authors analyze the characteristics of "five senses of everything" special effects in terms of content and form based on the top 100 videos and contents of "five senses of everything" special effects hot list by content analysis method and questionnaire survey method. Based on the user data collected from the questionnaire, this paper analyzed users' opinions and characteristics of the "facial features filter" special effects. From the characteristics of the special effects that attract users and the individual characteristics of the audience, we discuss why the "five senses of everything" special effects have gained a lot of attention and use from the audience.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Content Analysis Method

In the first part, this paper uses the content analysis method. Firstly, this paper collected data on the use of "five senses of everything" special effects on TikTok platform and used the "fan factor effect" to describe and explain the phenomenon. Secondly, the authors analyzed the "special effect form" and "special effect video content". The concept of "five senses of everything" was further defined by analyzing the appearance of special effects to summarize the characteristics of the forms, such as high obscurity. Next, this paper analyzes the top 100 videos using these effects, classify their basic content, and summarize the characteristics of the videos in terms of text and style. The main purpose of this section is to analyze the special effects from their own perspective, and to analyze their own characteristics that can attract the audience's attention.

2.2. Questionnaire Method

The questionnaire was used to collect the basic information of users who are interested in the "five senses" special effects, their usage and attitude towards the "five senses" special effects, and their

deep psychological traits. The main purpose of this section is to analyze the reasons why users are attracted to the "five senses of everything" special effects from the perspective of basic information and internal characteristics of the audience through the questionnaire data.

3. Result

3.1. "Facial Features Filter" Special Effects Popular Video Content Analysis

According to data statistics, as of February 10, 2023, the data of the top five "facial features filter" on TikTok platform are shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Top Five "Facial Features Filter" Date Statistics

Special effects name	The number of use	Key features
Ultra-long watermelon	1479.17w	Long-strip; watermelon-shaped; Background and fixed to the scene; can twist with the characters
Special effects of soybean people	743.7w	Mainly with a long body of soybeans; to make different movements; located in different scenes
Watermelon-cat special effects	634.34w	A cat with watermelon skin ind; background and fixed to the scene; can twist with the characters
Little ghost special effects	402.72w	Pure white little ghost shape with a halo; background and fixed to the scene; can twist with the characters
Potato Man special effects	195.4w	Long-strip potato-shaped; background and fixed to the scene; can twist with the characters

It can be seen that the ultra-long watermelon bar is the most used "facial features filter" special effects, used by more than ten million, with a certain representative. In order to further analyze the content characteristics of the special effects videos of "facial features filter", this paper takes "ultra-long watermelon" as an example, selects 150 popular videos using the special effects of "ultra-long watermelon", and divides the videos into five categories, which are shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Categories of "Ultra-long watermelon"

Classification	Definition	Characteristic	Number of text
Drama and performance category	The creator uses facial features (special mouth and eyes) to perform the emotional changes of the characters in the specific plot when the video copy occurs	Perform; specific plot; close to life or play	N=47 (31.33%)
Test and judgment class	Creators according to the corresponding characteristics of their specific characteristic standards.	Appearance judgment; disease judgment; not scientific	N=38 (25.33%)
Self-mockery category	The creator makes an artistic mockery of his own situation or mental state.	Artistic sense enhances; emotions; self ridicule	N=28 (18.67%)
Daily sharing class	The creators mainly use subtitles for daily sharing, and the special effects are used to cover the face or enhance the artistic effect.	Daily sharing; facial occlusion	N=20 (13.33%)
Side display category	The creator indirectly shows himself or the object he wants to show.	Hidden show	N=17 (11.33%)

According to the video content, it can be found that the creator can express his inner feelings and emotions through "plot performance" and "self-mockery" to some extent. Also, there may be expectation for others' attention and recognition in "test determination" and "side display". In "daily sharing", users share and express more freely without concern.

4. Questionnaire Results

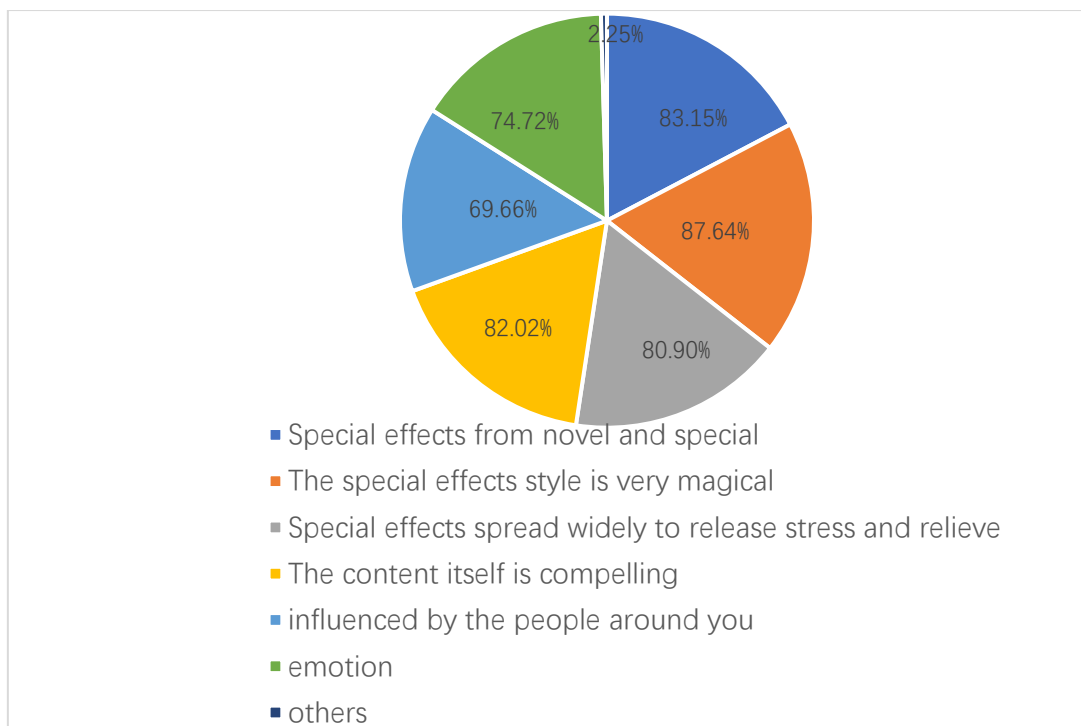


Fig. 1 The reasons of using facial features filter

Through the survey form of the questionnaire, it can be discovered that the main people who use such special effects are distributed between 18-25 years old, mainly young people, and there is no gender difference in the audience who use such special effects. Most people watch short videos for 1-3 hours. It is not exclusive to special effects such as "everything's five senses". Moreover, most people express their willingness to watch such special effects and think that such videos are very interesting. However, there are very few people who think that such videos do not have special and grandstanding.

The reasons for watching such special effects videos are mainly divided into the following categories: the special effects are novel and special, the style is interesting, the spread is wide, the video content is attractive, you can feel the release of stress, and you are influenced by friends and people around you. See the benefits and attractiveness of such special effects videos for viewers. Moreover, through a questionnaire survey, it was found that most people are willing to use such special effects videos to create and publish personal short video content. There are many reasons that affect people's use (Fig. 1), but the people who use such videos also have some psychological factor.

In terms of the usage rate of new media platforms, the average value almost reaches the dimension point of 4, which proves that most people often use new media platforms, such as social software and short video platforms. In daily life, the comment dimension is close to 4 for the degree of acceptance of exaggerated magic or niche things, which shows that everyone has a high degree of acceptance, and most people accept it. While in the collection of assessments of stress felt in daily life, the average latitude is around 2, which proves that there are many people who face stress in their lives and less than half of them use this special effect. In terms of the degree of inner expectation to gain the approval or resonance of others, it can be seen that the average value is 4, which proves that most of the people who use this kind of special effects hope to obtain the recognition and resonance of others.

5. Discussion

5.1. Popular Video Content Features

The 150 popular videos selected in this study using the special effect of “ultra-long watermelon” special effects show the following characteristics in terms of content:

5.1.1 Refining is easy to replicate

The communication content of this kind of special effects has a certain degree of personalization, and because the special effects block most individual characteristics, the individual differences of different people under the same special effects are subtle. At the same time, the overall content is simple to understand, direct and clear fixed pattern expression. When a kind of other copy or form on popular, a large number of interested users can easily through the same effects, copy and sound, and background music, click the "with" for their own remake, follow traffic hot spots, and then form a large number of similar homogeneity video across the network, let content radiation scope, form a new round of hot spots, remake. Therefore, the overall content presents the characteristics of refining and easy to replicate.

According to Charlie Dawkins' concept of memes in *The Selfish Gene* [10], the popular understanding of memes phenomenon is that communicators spread information by imitating and copying information. “Ultra-long watermelon” special effects are popular on TikTok platforms, with more than 10 million users so far. In the process of imitation and innovation, the special effects are constantly spread, and they break the circle quickly, and their transmission process is in line with the transmission process of "copying" and "mutation" of the basic meme theory. In addition, the characteristics of "refined and easy to replicate" and the reliance on the same form of narrative expression are constantly copied in indiscriminate imitation, and then produce variation, innovation and diffusion in content expression, thus accelerating the spread of this kind of special effects as phenotype memes.

5.1.2 Infectious

In the communication content of this kind of special effects, because it needs to use concise language to clearly express certain views or emotions, in the case of extreme refinement, there will often be highly representative and propagating comments or slogan. For example, "in the eyes of college students, showing a kind of clear stupidity", "three teeth of the baby melon" and "the baby melon old cucumber". At the same time, especially in the drama performance category, it is either life or dramatic expression, which covers the way and attitude towards things and events, has a more audience recognition basis. Therefore, on the basis of catchy and common cognition, the overall content has a strong appeal.

5.1.3 Multilayer expression connotation

In the communication content of this kind of special effects, the connotation that it really wants to express is actually not only something directly presented by the copy, but also has multiple layers of connotation. This feature is particularly evident in the presentation of the categories and self-mockery of the content. In this, the text content seems to be the content creation following the trend after "hearing", but it may contain the self-expression that the creator wants to gain recognition and the self-expression that wants to

5.1.4 Form characteristics

"Facial features filter" special effects through the background, face wide range of special effects, only the eyes and mouth, blurred the individual characteristics to the greatest extent. Through this decharacterization, the opposition between self and others, men and women are blurred, and it becomes a combined presentation of "digital" and "cyber". This format also allows the user to escape the cage of physical consumption, allowing the audience to focus more on the story or text they want to elaborate. At the same time, the anonymity of the special effect also makes users put down the

anxiety and tension brought by the exposure of "face" and identity to some extent, and realizes the digital "embodied escape". This effect also lowers the threshold for the release of the works, making it easier for users to change from "onlookers" to "users", and intensifying the emergence of the "meme phenomenon".

5.2. Reasons for Popularity

During the investigation, this paper found that this kind of special effect video has a wide range of dissemination, including the push mechanism in Tiktok, and most people can frequently view this kind of video, which shows love for this video. Among the people who watch this kind of special effects video, there are many reasons involved, mainly in several aspects: the novelty and fun of the special effects, the spreadability of the platform and friends, and the special effects meet their own spiritual needs, such as releasing stress aspect. And these various reasons have prompted more people to be attracted to watch such special effects. This also caused a series of chain reactions, and because of the promotion, more people were willing to use such special effects and imitate them.

Not only that, but when it comes to the reasons, the psychological characteristics of people who use such special effects cannot be ignored. People who use such special effects are often worried about the degree of exposure of such videos, and which might lead to privacy leaks and network attacks. Because only the facial features are exposed, it is impossible to accurately confirm the face of the person, so it can be more natural and worry-free. And reduce the pressure of the photographer to show up on the public platform, combined with the voice changer to protect the privacy of the photographer. Inwardly looking forward to gaining the approval or resonance of others, and occasionally people with self-deprecating and self-deprecating use it, which proves that in terms of the psychological characteristics of the people who use this special effect. In view of the survey findings in the questionnaire, it can be seen that the characters who are using this special effect, their characteristics are often introverted, unwilling to express publicly to the public, and do not want to expose personal psychological characteristics, but under this special effect, they can realize their desire in this regard to publish and realize own expressed content, which is in line with "embodied escape" specialty.

6. Conclusion

For the first time, under the background of China's national short video, this study focuses on the characteristics, usage and user psychology of the "facial features filter" special effects, and explains and analyzes the meme phenomenon of using "facial features filter" to achieve embodied escape in the current short video platform society. In addition, from the perspective of special effects characteristics and user characteristics, this paper tries to comprehensively analyze why the "facial features filter" special effects can get the attention and use of a large number of audiences.

This study found that the "facial features filter" special effects are highly occlusive, infectious and easy to copy, allowing users to easily have a highly masked digital surrogate. Moreover, due to the influence of various factors such as users' age, dependence on social media platforms, social needs and social pressure, users tend to "embodied escape" in the platform society, which is manifested in the use of "facial features filter" special effects to achieve safe self-expression, obtain social capital, obtain group resonance and relieve their own pressure.

Combined with the actual psychological survey of special effects users, this study aims to explore the influencing factors for a certain kind of special effects to get attention, which is different from other Chinese scholars' research on Internet cultural transmission under the meme theory, which is mostly a review paper or a general study on the value and problems of the concept of "special effects". By defining the form characteristics, classifying the content categories, concluding the special effects characteristics and exploring the audience psychology, we hope to better understand the deep reasons for the popular spread of this particular special effects category.

Finally, the sample size of the selected cases and questionnaires in this study is relatively small, and the characteristics of special effects and the psychological factors of users in using special effects should have more possibilities. In the future, the number of cases and samples can be expanded to facilitate in-depth research on this topic.

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