

Research on Risk Management and Control of Chinese Film and Television Drama Production—The Case of ‘Ruyi’s Royal Love in the Palace’

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Abstract. With the gradual enrichment of material life, people’s spiritual needs are becoming increasingly large, stimulating the development of TV dramas. The Chinese Intellectual Property (IP) film and television industry has recently been enlarging. However, some risks are hiding in this new hit. This thesis analyzes the case of ‘Ruyi’s Royal Love in the Palace’, a famous and typical palace fighting drama that invested a lot of money and eventually became mediocre. This study lists the main risks and corresponding reasons for this failure and separates them into script, finance, policy, and marketing, which includes the problems of the creative environment and producers’ processing methods. This essay puts different suggestions to the official department and producers in these four perspectives to improve the current situation. However, this passage has some limits due to the lack of more convincing and authentic data to get an accurate conclusion. But if recommendations can be implemented, it will greatly improve China’s film and television drama creation environment.

Keywords: Chinese TV Drama, Risk Management, Intellectual Property.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

In contemporary society, Internet technology of information transfer, which functions as the foundation of youth subculture growth, has been improving dramatically in China in the last decade, promoting the development of currently dynamic movies and TV series, especially the development of new Intellectual Property (IP) film and television industry [1]. The first huge successful Chinese costume fantasy IP case was Hua Qian Gu, which attracted various audiences and made a big fortune through TV series copyright and peripheral products, which started a new IP creation era in China. However, fierce competition in IP film and television caused by the influx of many producers has led to the failure of many films and television dramas, even those that were excessively invested.

While it is undeniable that IP creation has many advantages in making a film or a TV drama a new blockbuster, many risks are hiding in some inconspicuous areas during production. Although some risks are unobtrusive, they determine whether a film or TV drama could make a profit or go as smoothly as expected, which can play an important role in helping investors evaluate the availability and security of different IP projects. This subject aims to support investors and producers to avoid unnecessary loss and danger in different sections of film and TV series production, thus evidently facilitating the flourishing of IP creation and boosting healthy or positive competition rather than vicious or negative competition in meaningful areas among producing companies and filmmakers.

1.2. Literature Review

Li proposed that the priority of risk management is reasonable risk evaluation and risk response [2]. From his perspective, once risks are controllable, producers are supposed to take measures to avoid, transfer, reduce, or accept risks, such as industry environmental risk and project internal risk [2].

What’s more, He analyzed that many categories of TV drama production risks exist in the process of finishing a product, risks like policy risk, subject matter risk, market risk, production security risk,

and finance risk, and concluded some countermeasures against these risks, including safety management, creative works, and useful insurances, etc. [3].

Moreover, in specific management, Yang found that recent short videos concerning TV series popular among different mobile applications significantly reconstruct various communication elements in film and television dramas and improve customers' experience [4]. However, TV series in this form destroy the artistry of TV drama stories, over-interpret the plot, distort original content, and become the biggest inducement for digital copyright infringement, which in turn may cause adverse effects on producers' primary intention [4].

In addition, Zhang et al. built digital models. They calculated a variety of data by text mining technology to illustrate the current awful situation in script risk management that a great number of good or bad films and TV dramas fill in this field. Still, only a handful of scripts could stand out because of the current less comprehensive and complete pre-evaluation model of film and television scripts [5].

1.3. Research Gap

Generally, most scholars pay attention to the whole film and TV drama production overall frame and devise the appropriate method to reduce or avoid these risks. Other researchers also find some detailed problems hidden in these obvious phenomena and figure out precise measures or digital models to solve multiple kinds of problems that already exist. It is beyond expectation that almost none of those scholars' study emerging IP creation risk in Chinese film and TV drama, especially breaking down the IP creation structure and identifying risks in different parts of the IP industry rather than the traditional film and TV series industry.

1.4. Research framework

Based on already completed observation and analysis, this study will demonstrate in the following sequence to fill current gaps in the existing IP film and TV drama system.

First, this article will cite the case of a Chinese romantic costume drama, 'Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace', which was a typical failure during the Chinese IP creation heat to show exposed problems from this kind of TV drama. After that, this paper will utilize this case to classify each part of the risk present in the IP TV drama production process. Next, this thesis will not only distinguish considerable problems resulting from the process but also differentiate major factors that severely determine these troubles from minor factors to help producers improve work efficiency when facing similar dilemmas. In the end, valuable and explicit advice will be provided to encounter listed common risks and problems, thereby reducing potential threats and loss in making new IP films and TV dramas.

2. Case Description

2.1. Background

After the success of 'The Legend of Zhen Huan', palace fighting dramas were unprecedentedly popular among audiences. 'Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace' was born when numerous same-genre dramas emerged.

"Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace" is a 2018 Qing Dynasty costume palace battle TV series. The time period of the plot ranges from the first year of Qianlong to the 30th year of the Qing Dynasty in China. It mainly tells the marriage process of Ulanara Ruyi and Qianlong, from falling in love to being lost and disillusioned.

2.2. Production Problems

However, when the news of the shooting came out, the original author was suspected of plagiarism, with strong evidence that he even plagiarized with the same typo and that this author was kicked out of Jin Jiang (a considerable scale of female network literature original base) for plagiarism [6].

Moreover, when ‘Ruyi’s Royal Love in the Palace’ started filming, rumors about the actor’s sky-high remuneration attracted the audiences’ attention and surprised them. Consequently, viewers had great expectations about this drama and wondered why it would cost so much. Besides, in the production section, the original plan of ‘Ruyi’s Royal Love in the Palace’ planned to shoot 64 episodes during a 6-month period, which shot 87 episodes and spent 3 more months [6]. It costs extra expenses and time compared with the initial plan.

2.3. Marketing Problems

Although previous problems were handled in various ways, the broadcasting platforms of this drama were still uncertain, which lasted for a half year. This event inevitably delayed the TV series’ originally announced air date. Coincidentally, a new palace fighting drama called ‘Story of Yanxi Palace’ went viral during the platform arguing time of ‘Ruyi’s Royal Love in the Palace’ and affected the expected reputation and revenue of ‘Ruyi’s Royal Love in the Palace’ to a certain extent. To the viewer’s disappointment, due to the inconsistent broadcast process between the online and cable network platforms, this drama was eventually broadcast online only, even though it cost a lot of time and energy to agree on broadcasting platforms.

Evidently, faced with pressure from producers, actors, platforms, and audience, the management team members of this drama were always wearing down the audience’s patience and expectation, which showed that they didn’t make the comprehensive schedule in case of any emergency and lacked necessary knowledge and efficiency in tackling with all of these problems.

3. Analysis on the Problem

3.1. Current Situation of ‘Ruyi’s Royal Love in the Palace’

According to the thesis, this TV drama’s failure involved script, finance, policy, and marketing risks [3].

First, the script was the core competitiveness of IP TV drama, through which it could engage the audience and promote this work. Nevertheless, this TV series’ plot has been criticized critically since it was broadcast. More seriously, this script was condemned by crowds of the audience for plagiarizing other people’s works, thus greatly reducing people’s favorability of this drama.

Certainly, while much money was invested in this drama, extra money and energy caused by increased filming time and additional filming episodes were out of control, which significantly exposed this drama to high financial risk because large amounts of money were expended on actors’ salaries.

Unfortunately, a large number of producers blindly followed the trend, and the emergence of many inferior palace fighting dramas brought many negative impacts on society. According to a report by Beijing Daily in 2019, large quantities of palace fighting dramas were removed from Chinese broadcast platforms, including ‘Ruyi’s Royal Love in the Palace’ [7]. Producers can’t predict that they would encounter such a huge policy risk change that this kind of TV series could be banned within a limited time span.

Relying on the fact that this drama had famous actors, ‘Ruyi’s Royal Love in the Palace’ management team confidently leveraged the actor’s popularity and friendship to advocate this big production. Nonetheless, earlier aired ‘Story of Yanxi Palace’ took advantage of this opportunity to beat ‘Ruyi’s Royal Love in the Palace’ in marketing because of a lot of overlap in the cast and more distinct characters built in the former drama. So, marketing risk played a decisive role in the competition of the same genre TV series between a high-budget one (‘Ruyi’s Royal Love in the Palace’) and a low-budget one (‘Story of Yanxi Palace’).

3.2. Risk Identified of ‘Ruyi’s Royal Love in the Palace’

In summary, this TV drama ignored or underestimated the following management risks.

In script risk, management team members did not examine or emphasize the original author's writing background and experiences, planting seeds of danger for this drama. The worst situation was that they knew his plagiarism but neglected or acquiesced to it and continued producing.

Regarding financial risk, team members may not exactly schedule the days that planned episodes should correspond to or encounter problems that are difficult to solve without contingency, postponing the pre-made shooting deadline and increasing additional expenses. Consequently, they even decided to adjust established episodes in order to quickly pass the review of the national department, unintentionally enlarging extra spending on post-production.

Policy against palace fighting dramas was a heavy blow to the secondary promotion of the TV series and the sales of peripheral products in the Chinese mainland, a risk that was hard to foresee and predict.

They failed to focus on and analyze strong and weak competitors in marketing. Team members were so confident in their cast groups' influence that they chose the wrong time and an inappropriate way to propagate their drama. They helped competitors play a better promotion role in attracting the audience. They also hesitated to make suitable agreements with broadcast platforms, thus lowering people's reputation for this drama and putting off the release time.

3.3. Reason Analysis of Risk

3.3.1 Reason analysis of script risk

Inattention to the original author's background and failure to scrutinize script sources could be directly attributed to inaction and greed by production companies.

The production team may assume that the IP creation of palace fighting dramas in China was completely a newly discovered area and that it's not a big problem to condone this kind of author since the original script was attractive and satisfactory. This behavior stemmed from bad habits developed in previous productions when society had no clear system and attitude towards plagiarism and when people's awareness of protecting their copyrights was weak.

More importantly, the production team reckoned that the small blemish of the author would not affect the benefits derived from this drama, which was made following the primary trend to have its moment.

3.3.2 Reason analysis of finance risk

As the experienced production team of such a large TV series, it turned out that extensive schedule delays occurred out of expectation during the shooting period.

According to common sense, this crew must have overlooked some important elements and lacked necessary contingency plans, especially about the IP creation process. Lack of experience in filming palace dramas and preparation for personnel coordination were to blame.

The reason for this risk is that aspiration for profit led to producers arbitrarily reducing the number of episodes of TV series in order to pass the examination as quickly as possible and broadcast on permitted platforms.

3.3.3 Reason analysis of policy risk

Policy risk was the most unexpected and influential in the TV series production. Since palace fighting dramas were newcomers to IP creation, ignoring the chance of new policy appearing was irrational.

Based on this policy change, it is not difficult to figure out why palace fighting dramas were kicked out of the mainstream in China. First, palace fighting dramas were mainly about the intrigue of women in the ancient palace who wanted to please the emperor. From this theme, the major female audience inevitably acquired some bad ideas to play tricks on people around them. It sought profit and status in real life as in TV dramas, seriously affecting the thinking of normal women in society and similarly restoring ancient palace life.

Furthermore, this genre of the palace always involved historical figures. Unfortunately, most authors of original scripts were ignorant about these famous figures or made up some nonexistent

historical events, which impressed the audience with wrong comprehension and memory of otherwise true images.

3.3.4 Reason analysis of marketing risk

Occupied with unexpected problems, team members neglecting to observe and investigate their competitors promoted and advertised this drama in traditional or familiar ways. They also wasted plenty of time on the decision of broadcast platforms because of their eagerness to sell more IP copyright fees.

Because of schedule delay, the original advantageous release time became a disadvantage in competing with others since release time usually determines whether it can satisfy the audience's spiritual emptiness, which was the source of a bad chain reaction.

4. Suggestion

4.1. Suggestion on Script Risk

4.1.1 Clarify the definition of plagiarism

According to the degree of plagiarism, plagiarism can be divided into low-level and high-level. Although it is easy to differentiate whether it is a kind of low-level plagiarism since this is a simple transfer of content, high-level plagiarism is extremely complicated to discriminate. Protecting its copyright takes the plaintiff much time and expense [8]. This also leads to rampant plagiarism in China due to undetailed regulations. So, this situation requires us to mobilize teams of experts to fine-tune existing regulations to clarify the definition of various plagiarism to reduce the costs of rights protection and encourage people to safeguard their interests.

For example, regulations can specify how many words or percent in a so-called citation script could be judged as plagiarism and narrow the scope of different levels of plagiarism.

4.1.2 Raise compensation standards for plagiarism

In many cases, although some people won the lawsuit to protect their copyright, they can obtain only a small amount relative to the amount gained from plagiarism. Consequently, regulations concerning plagiarism should carefully weigh the losses to those whose rights have been violated, including mental damages, reputation damages, and the potential opportunity to contract [8]. Only this standard can compensate the plaintiff's loss and reduce the desire to plagiarize.

4.1.3 Increase penalties for platforms listing plagiarized product

According to previous cases, only the production team was punished for plagiarism. To strengthen copyright protection, regulations should additionally incorporate spreading platforms into the penalty mechanism since they help plagiarized products gain more profits. If more platforms are involved in these cases, platforms will form a good supervisory role to producers and reduce the pressure and time on courts to hear similar cases, which greatly improves the efficiency of the trial of plagiarism cases.

4.2. Suggestion on Finance Risk

4.2.1 Adopt regular control methods

To solve the problem of time and money cost, regular inspection and analysis are necessary to evaluate the condition of the production process. Progress management of personnel and funds is fundamental in controlling project implementation time and actual completion to ensure that production will be finished on schedule. In this way, the production team can accurately estimate and clarify costs, construction schedules, resources, division of labor, and responsibilities in the project process [9]. To be specific, the table comparison method could be applied to production to help adjust the daily schedule, which compares original schedules with actual work schedules and completion progress and compares today's completion amount with the previous day's.

4.2.2 Adopt preventive control methods

Preventive control methods are common in cases of different categories of management. Preventive work can avoid cost overruns. When the problem does not occur, it will not cause harm. It can also effectively save the cost of remediating the problem [9]. For instance, the traditional method is insurance contracted with insurance agents that provide many kinds of insurance for health, safety, and even disasters. Being prepared for these risks will mostly reduce the cost of contingency fees.

4.3. Suggestion on Policy Risk

4.3.1 Guarantee the quality of the work

No matter how the policy changes, high-quality products can always stand out and improve audience reputation and market competitiveness. If producers want to cater to the demands of the Chinese market, they would better create a drama with a positive atmosphere to inspire people. Even if the worst policy happens, producers are able to choose to distribute their high-quality products in more international markets, like Disney+ and Netflix.

4.3.2 Strengthen policy research and analysis

China's TV drama policies mainly include market access, broadcast control, and business policies. Chinese TV drama policies are restrictive and lack guiding policies, by which management may directly rectify the market but hinder the self-regulation and screening of the market [10]. In addition, policy support for Chinese TV dramas to enter the international market is scarce, and unfair distribution of resources is common [10]. Both producers and policymakers need to consider and research proactive and effective policy methods for eliminating defects in the progress of the times.

4.4. Suggestion on Marketing Risk

4.4.1 Enrich marketing tools

With the development of the Internet, new media technology continues to innovate. TV drama marketing gradually uses new media with timely dissemination and strong interaction as marketing media, such as all media advertising, taking advantage of social hot spots to market TV series and meme marketing [11]. Marketing is supposed to utilize both online and offline advertisement and constantly attract the audience's attention to create hot spots.

4.4.2 Conduct thorough audience and competitive product research

Although often mentioned, research and analysis are usually incomplete due to the team's negligence and lack of awareness. Identifying the target audience has a decisive effect on formulating a reasonable promotion time and method, which helps save unnecessary or low-yield advertising costs. An old Chinese saying is, 'If you know yourself and your enemy, you can fight a hundred battles without danger'. This is also suitable for this field. By analyzing competitors' products, the marketing team can easily list their advantages over competitors and defeat opponents with these advantages.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Key Findings

Since IP creation was a precedent in Chinese TV dramas for great success, most producers wanted to follow the trend and make a profit in this field. However, a lot of cases, including 'Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace' have experienced varying degrees of failure. Based on the above, many risks and problems of this case are analyzed, like script, finance, policy, and marketing.

Plagiarism of script was caused by crews' indulgence and poor original environment for television dramas. This study recommends that regulations about plagiarism should clarify the definition, raise compensation standards, and introduce the platform as the second responsible party.

Finance risk is attributed to extensive schedule delay and arbitrary changes in episode number.

This project suggests that producers are supposed to adopt regular and preventive control methods to ensure the project's progress.

Palace fighting dramas' negative social impact and distortion of historical figures were to blame. So, the first thing is to guarantee the quality of the product in order to broadcast on international platforms no matter how policy changes. Additionally, producers need to strengthen policy research and analysis before learning policy features.

This essay ascribes marketing risk to wrong release time and incomplete competitors' research. It argues that the marketing team could use suitable and various platforms to advertise and conduct thorough audience and competitive product research.

5.2. Research Significance

This thesis extracts several main risks in the production process of a typical case and presents the causes of problems and solutions to these problems. It is helpful to remind producers of these common and dangerous risks and prepare for upcoming problems they may encounter. Besides, if all of these suggestions are strictly implemented, the creative environment of IP TV dramas will be greatly improved and provide strong support for any potential IP hit. This will inevitably establish a comprehensive system for investors to evaluate the feasibility and promote the standardization and internationalization of Chinese IP drama industries.

5.3. Limitation

In this essay, only one case is studied, which means that the risks and problems listed in the passage make it impossible to fully cover the situation's reality. There are also solutions not mentioned in this article for each risk raised. The biggest shortcoming is that the author does not have the power and access to obtain the most authentic data without any rumors and reason to the most convincing conclusion.

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