

Extract And Reconstruct: Research On the Content Of “Second Creation” Short Videos for Film Promotion

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Abstract. Short videos have surged in popularity, particularly on platforms like Douyin, Kuaishou, WeChat Channel, and Little Red Book in China. These brief yet engaging videos are extensively produced and consumed, making them a potent tool for promoting theatrical films. Among the various types of short videos, second-creation short videos—those that creatively reinterpret or remix original content—are particularly effective in driving platform users to theaters. This research focuses on these second-creation short videos used for film promotion. Through extensive viewing and creating these videos during an internship, the author observed notable deviations in meaning between the original films and their second-creation counterparts. To delve deeper, this study analyzes short videos related to “*The Boy and the Heron*”. Starting from the unique characteristics of second-creation short videos, the research identifies issues such as the narrowing of meaning that can occur in the adaptation process. By highlighting these problems, the study aims to offer insights into how audiences should interpret short videos in the context of film promotion. Finally, the research proposes recommendations for better alignment between original films and their promotional short videos, ensuring a more accurate representation of the cinematic works.

Keywords: Short videos; Film Promotion; Extract; Reconstruction.

1. Introduction

With the development of media and the popularization of mobile terminals, watching short videos has gradually become everyone’s daily activity. It’s almost a subconscious action to swipe the screen and glance over endless short videos on the phone for many people whenever and wherever. The short video is characterized by its short duration (mostly between 15 seconds and 1 minute) and attractive content, which combines high sensory impact and low technology thresholds [1]. A successful short video aims to capture audiences’ attention within a few seconds. In China, Douyin (TikTok in China), Kuaishou, and WeChat Channel are three most influential short video platforms. In this “short video era”, theatrical film producers try to promote films with the help of short videos in the process of distribution. After a film finalizes its release date, the film’s company will continuously release short videos on the platforms mentioned before until this film is eventually pulled from cinemas. This paper mainly applies the method of text analysis and chooses second-creation short videos released by film officials as analysis samples. The author tries to study how this kind of short videos deconstruct the original long-length film content to gain a good communication effect on short video platforms and discusses the meaning deviation in the process of reconstruction.

2. Short Videos for Film Promotion

2.1. Categories of Short Videos for Film Promotion

The main purpose of film promotion is to grab audiences’ attention and their time. In recent years, the short video has played a significant role in the entertainment market, and short video platforms have the most monthly active users. What has become a prominent problem during distribution is how to draw people to film theaters from streaming platforms. Therefore, film producers have to storm and capture the short video field to find a way to build a bridge between film theaters and mobile phones [2].

Short videos for film promotion can be divided into different categories, including trailers, clips, behind-the-scenes, character introductions, interviews, premiere videos, and music videos if categorized by content type.

As the short video grows, the derivative (or second creation) short video has turned into a popular creation form. “Derivation” or “secondary creation” means rearranging elements extracted from original works and turning them into a new structure, resulting in a different appearance and maybe a different meaning. Compared to other short video types, the derivative type gains a rather good, if not better, communication effect by extracting clips from original materials and reconstructing them with cool packaging and simple expressions [3]. It can be seen that the derivative short video makes up a large part of short videos published by film officials on Douyin. It successfully attracts many people to enter the theatre.

2.2. Characteristics of Short Videos for Film Promotion

From a marketing perspective, short videos for film promotion mainly “stimulate” people’s desire to watch a film from four dimensions. They are content, emotional expression, audio-visual language, and authenticity [4].

If a short video aims to gain a good communication effect, it has to abide by the principle of “flow”. It should manage to grab users’ attention within a few seconds.

Back to second-creation short videos that this research mainly focuses on, it contains two steps to create them, the first step is “extracting” and the second step is “reconstructing”. “Extracting” specifically means to extract a clip or clips from the original film, while reconstructing means to structure the materials in a new way.

3. From Film to Second-creation Short Videos: Extract and Reconstruct

3.1. Case Selection

This research picks out *The Boy and the Heron* as the film sample to analyze. This film was directed by Miyazaki Hayao and released in theaters throughout the Chinese mainland during the Qingming Festival. The film producer released 216 short videos on Douyin overall during the propaganda period. Here’s why the author chooses *The Boy and the Heron*.

Up to April 3rd, 2024, according to the data Cateyepictures Pro published, here are the top five cinema films’ official Douyin ranked according to the number of total likes gained by short videos released (these five films all came out during the Qingming Festival), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Top five cinema films’ official Douyin ranked according to the number of total likes gained by short videos released

Name	Total Likes (Thousand)	Total Fans (Thousand)
<i>The Boy and the Heron</i>	20612	535
<i>Dwelling by the West Lake</i>	18070	217
<i>The Victims</i>	10722	116
<i>Super Villain</i>	2211	33
<i>Snow Leopard</i>	123	3441

It is obvious that *The Boy and the Heron*’s short videos for promotion have the best communication effect. What’s more, the final box scores of films released during the Qingming festival rank the same as the table above. *The Boy and the Heron* gained overall 791 million RNB in the lead in the Chinese mainland. Therefore, this film’s propaganda is of more reference value to analyze compared to the other four.

3.2. Case Description

The Boy and the Heron is a film with complex meaning. It contains many images and symbols from director Miyazaki Hayao's past films. Thus, this film can be seen as his summative work. It is perceived that there are noteworthy historical metaphors hidden in the spatial and temporal background Miyazaki Hayao set. In *The Boy and the Heron*, there are two worlds: the realistic world and the "Isekai" (another world). Symbols set in both worlds provide many possible meanings and further explanations. It can be agreed that this is a film that is difficult to explain, so how do short videos for promotion eliminate this kind of difficulty?

This research selects three derivative short videos posted in this film's official Douyin account with most likes to analyze. The first one is *Miyazaki Hayao, who always tells us with his works that there is something worth it in this world*, and this short video got 6.472 million likes. The second is *even if she knows the ending, she still chooses you, confirmedly*, and it got 1.059 million likes. The third one is *in the farewell work, Miyazaki Hayao draws himself as young Mahito and finally hugs his mother*, and this one owns 578 thousand likes. The first video begins with an image extracted from the documentary of Miyazaki Hayao, in which Miyazaki Hayao says, "I can't see the sunset if I were to die. It's so beautiful." This scene is followed by many sunset scenes from Miyazaki Hayao's films. The length of this video is 18 seconds. The second video narrates the ending of *The Boy and the Heron*. Lady Himi helps Mahito open the door to the real world, and she goes to another door by herself. This video uses captions and a piece of popular background music, and it's 21 seconds long. The third video is a montage mashing up clips of hugging scenes from Miyazaki Hayao's films. It's 22 seconds long.

3.3. Analysis on the Problem

A video can be generally divided into two parts: one is content, and the other is form. It is generally considered that narrative elements belong to the content part and audio-visual technical elements belong to the form part. Then, this paper will analyze these three short videos, mainly in terms of content.

3.3.1 The Narrowing of Meaning

It's easy to see that these short videos are all around 20 seconds long. Jinhua Dai, a famous Chinese scholar studying in film and literature, pointed out in an interview that "to make such short video effectual, to complete its story within so little time, the video has to make an assertion or finds a meaning that is commonly accepted [5]." "Assert" means stating clearly and firmly that something is true. If a person asserts something, it usually means he or she is extremely confident in his or her opinions and is responsible for them. However, the short video editor asserts an opinion in a short video mostly because of the time limitation, and there is no time for the video to state another possibility.

Among the selected cases, the second short video aims to make audiences empathize with the emotion of maternal love. It doesn't explain the cause and effect of the clip from the original film. Otherwise, it shows the scene in which the mother bids farewell to her son straightly and briefly and emphasizes the love topic with some captions and touching background music.

In the film, there is an intertextual relation between the realistic world and the "Isekai". Mahito (the leading character)'s mother, who dies from a fire disaster in the real world, becomes Lady Himi, who owns the fire magic in the "Isekai". At the end of the story, Mahito goes back to the real world, and Himi chooses to go to the past with the purpose of becoming Mahito's mother, even if it means losing her life in a fire disaster. This part is extracted and used in the second short video. It is certainly reasonable for this clip to be used as a key part embodying maternal love. However, this assertion may kill other possibilities and narrow the meaning of this part.

The second video tells audiences that Himi chooses to be Mahito's mother on her initiative in the risk of stepping into the cycle of tragedy, that fire disaster [6]. However, suppose it is viewed from the perspective of history, it can be understood in a different way. Some critics points out that Himi,

Mahito's mother, represents the past of Japan, which was defeated in a disaster similar to a fire explosion, while young Mahito represents the young generation of Japan. From the view of historical materialism, Lady Himi doesn't have any right to choose her life. She has to enter the door towards the past because that's where she belongs in a linear time. Her death, if interpreted as the surrender of Japan is inevitable, resulted from the movement of contradictions that this country faced then. A well-known proverb says, "There are a thousand Hamlets for a thousand men." But the short video is too short and brief to carry the meaning of "a thousand Hamlets", especially when it aims at attracting audiences' scarce attention. Therefore, it has to narrow the meaning and assert that it is the hamlet, not others.

3.3.2 New Generation of Meaning

The Boy and the Heron's director, Miyazaki Hayao, has long enjoyed a good reputation for his animated films. In film marketing, it is easy to come up with the idea of attracting audiences by sharing Miyazaki Hayao's past film elements to arouse their feelings. This is the first and the third short videos' purpose in our selected cases. Both videos extract scenes from Miyazaki Hayao's past films. The first video chooses the sunset scenes from his different films, and it splices them together. The third video chooses the hugging scenes and does the same. There is no cause and effect as well; both use these clips as fragments to construct a montage, forming stronger emotional expressions. In a way, it generates new meanings with montage within 20 or 30 seconds. They could be viewed as "found footage", which means the completed image materials are selected and relocated to surpass the original creative meaning and construct a new image production mode [7].

4. Suggestions

Professor Lan Peng pointed out that "short videos are not created by simply cutting the long videos into shorter pieces. Short video creators need to explore a new narrative mode characterized by forming a visual climax at the fastest pace and generating a highlight that can fix audiences' eyes fast on the screen" [8]. This insight highlights the necessity for short videos to capture attention quickly, even though leading to some deviation from the original content's meaning. Such discrepancies are understandable and forgivable, given that the primary objective of these videos in film distribution is to attract a broad audience and entice them into purchasing tickets, rather than providing a comprehensive film experience. Despite their commercial focus, short videos can strive for higher quality and impact. It is reasonable for creators to leverage Internet pop culture and integrate relevant elements to resonate with viewers. Breaking away from traditional video formats and embracing popularization can enhance their effectiveness. Even within the limited timeframe of 15 to 60 seconds, innovative and imaginative ideas can transform these brief clips into compelling promotional tools.

To improve the content of "second creation" short videos for film promotion, several recommendations can be made:

4.1. Innovative Storytelling

Creators should experiment with novel narrative techniques that maintain the essence of the film while capturing the audience's attention quickly [9]. This might include the use of cliffhangers, intriguing questions, or visually striking scenes that provoke curiosity. For instance, employing a non-linear storytelling approach or a rapid montage of key moments can create a sense of urgency and excitement, drawing viewers in.

4.2. Audience Engagement

Utilizing interactive elements or calls-to-action can enhance viewer engagement. Encouraging audiences to share, comment, or create their own interpretations can expand the reach and impact of the short video. For example, incorporating hashtags, challenges, or interactive polls related to the film can foster a sense of community and participation among viewers, making them more likely to spread the word.

4.3. Balancing Commercial and Artistic Values

While the primary goal is commercial, short videos should not completely forgo artistic integrity. Maintaining a balance between promotional content and artistic expression can make these videos more appealing and memorable [10]. This balance can be achieved by focusing on the unique visual and thematic elements of the film, ensuring that the promotional content reflects the film's artistic vision while still being accessible to a broad audience.

4.4. Utilizing Data and Feedback

Analyzing viewer data and feedback can provide insights into what works and what doesn't. Creators should be adaptive, refining their approaches based on audience reactions to optimize future content. Platforms like Douyin and Kuaishou offer robust analytics tools that can track viewer engagement, demographics, and preferences, allowing creators to tailor their content more effectively.

4.5. Highlighting Unique Selling Points

This study will focus on the unique aspects of the film that differentiate it from others. Whether it's a groundbreaking visual effect, a star performance, or a compelling storyline, emphasizing these points can pique viewer interest. Short videos should aim to showcase the film's distinctive qualities, providing a glimpse into what makes the film worth watching without revealing too much of the plot.

4.6. Embracing Internet Pop Culture

Integrating elements of Internet pop culture, such as memes, trends, and popular music, can make short videos more relatable and shareable. Creators should stay abreast of current online trends and incorporate them creatively into their content. This approach not only increases the video's appeal but also enhances its potential for virality.

4.7. Effective Use of Visual and Audio Elements

Given the limited time frame, it is crucial to maximize the impact of visual and audio elements. High-quality graphics, compelling soundtracks, and concise, impactful dialogues or voice-overs can significantly enhance the appeal of short videos. The goal is to create an immersive and engaging experience that captures the essence of the film within a few seconds.

4.8. Found Footage and User-Generated Content

As previously mentioned, the concept of "found footage" opens up more possibilities for creative content. Incorporating user-generated content or reimagining scenes from the film from different perspectives can add depth and variety to promotional videos. This approach not only diversifies the content but also builds a stronger connection with the audience by involving them in the promotional process.

By implementing these strategies, creators of second-creation short videos can enhance their effectiveness as promotional tools, ensuring they not only attract viewers but also convey a more accurate representation of the films they promote. This balance between commercial appeal and artistic integrity can lead to more successful and memorable film promotions, ultimately driving more audience members to the theaters.

5. Conclusion

Short videos have become an indispensable part of people's lives in the digital era. The scarcity of attention dictates that these videos must compress time to gain more hits. This efficiency, resulting from the compression of time, leads to the problem of meaning narrowing and a lack of depth. Despite these issues, short videos remain effective tools for film promotion, helping more people learn about films and attracting them to cinemas.

Short videos for film promotion depart from the original film's structure. By incorporating popular Internet vocabulary and creative reconstruction, these short videos engage audiences in a more direct and often more entertaining way. This approach generates new meanings, as previously mentioned, and these videos can be seen as branches and leaves growing from the root, the original film, shading more areas than the root itself.

"The map of fragmented digital videos appears to be broader when it unfolds than the map of traditional videos. The new media cultural landscape brought about by the long tail effect has already surpassed the original content landscape in terms of meaning." This observation highlights the expansive reach and influence of short videos in the current digital media environment.

The success of short videos in promoting films lies in their ability to adapt and innovate. They break free from traditional narrative constraints, offering snippets that are visually and emotionally compelling. This method of promotion is highly effective in today's fast-paced digital world, where viewers are inundated with content and have limited time to engage deeply with each piece. By quickly capturing attention and evoking curiosity, short videos can drive significant interest in films.

However, to maximize their potential, short video creators must address the inherent limitations. They should strive to balance commercial appeal with artistic integrity, ensuring that while the videos are engaging, they also accurately represent the essence of the films. Embracing Internet pop culture can make these videos more relatable and shareable, increasing their reach and impact.

In conclusion, while short videos inevitably narrow the meaning and depth of the original content, they are powerful promotional tools that can effectively attract audiences to theaters. By continually innovating and balancing different elements, creators can enhance the effectiveness of short videos, ensuring they contribute positively to the film's promotional strategy.

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