

The Impact of E-Commerce Platform Entry on the Narrative of Micro Short Drama

-- Taking Taobao's "Micro Short Drama + Consumption" Model as an Example

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Abstract: With mobile internet traffic growth plateauing, micro-series have emerged as a new content consumption trend characterized by their "short, fast, and engaging" nature. The entry of e-commerce platforms has reshaped the narrative logic and industrial ecosystem of micro-series. This study examines Taobao's "micro-series + consumption" model, analyzing its narrative structure, content production mechanisms, and user interaction patterns to explore the specific impacts of e-commerce platforms on micro-series narratives. The research reveals that platform involvement has endowed micro-series narratives with "consumption-oriented" features, enhancing commercial monetization capabilities while simultaneously exposing issues like compromised narrative integrity and content homogenization. Finally, the paper proposes a development path balancing narrative value and commercial objectives, offering insights for sustainable growth in the micro-series industry.

Keywords: E-commerce Platform; Micro Drama; Narrative; Taobao; Consumption Orientation.

1. Introduction

With the advancement of media technology and the rise of major platforms, web micro-series have emerged as a new format. Characterized by 1–10-minute episodes designed for bite-sized viewing, these content formats experienced rapid growth since 2020, with their market value surpassing 20 billion yuan in 2023, establishing themselves as a new growth engine in the content industry [1-2]. As platforms like TikTok and Kuaishou intensified their efforts, micro-series gradually adopted the traditional "content-driven traffic-monetization through advertising" model. However, starting from 2022, e-commerce giants including Taobao and JD.com entered the market with their "micro-series + consumption" approach, directly linking narrative content with product purchases. This shift propelled micro-series evolution from an "attention economy" to an "instant consumption economy".

As a flagship e-commerce platform, Taobao has pioneered a distinctive micro-series strategy. In 2023, it launched its "Taobao 2nd Floor" micro-series channel featuring hit productions like *Night Playground* and *Little Star*, where product links are seamlessly woven into storylines allowing users to purchase items directly while watching. This innovative model breaks down barriers between content and commerce, transforming storytelling into a catalyst for consumer engagement.

2. The Reshaping of Narrative Structure of Micro Dramas by E-Commerce Platforms

2.1. Narrative Closed Loop: From "Complete Plot" to "Consumption Transformation"

Traditional micro-series, despite their limited duration, still adhere to the classic narrative structure of "beginning-development-climax-conclusion" to captivate audiences

through cohesive storytelling. For instance, TikTok's micro-series *Wushuang* delivers character development and conflict resolution within 10 minutes through tightly-paced plot progression, with its core focus being "telling a compelling story".

The narrative loop of Taobao's micro-series focuses on "consumption conversion". Taking *Night Playground* as an example, each episode revolves around a sports product: The first act depicts the protagonist's struggles during exercise (like athlete's foot from running shoes), the second introduces the product through a friend's recommendation, the third showcases its effectiveness, and concludes with a "Click below to purchase" prompt. The core of this narrative isn't plot logic but the "problem-solution-consumption" conversion chain, where plot completeness gives way to smooth consumption guidance. This structure is known in the industry as "demand-awakening storytelling", which stimulates users' immediate desire to consume by highlighting scenario-based pain points.

2.2. Narrative Rhythm: Fragmentation and "Knot Point" Design

The traffic logic of e-commerce platforms demands that micro-series capture user attention within ultra-short durations, resulting in narrative rhythms characterized by "high density and intense stimulation". This phenomenon is closely tied to the public's "instant gratification" mentality in an accelerated social context--. Such demands amplify micro-series' pursuit of immediate effects, driving them to rely on rapid plot twists and fast-paced dramatic conflicts to create instant gratification. However, excessive focus on sensory stimulation may lead to public psychological fatigue, sensory overload, and emotional exhaustion [3-5]. Taobao micro-series typically embed an "information point" every 30 seconds, featuring product features, price discounts, and usage scenarios. These are reinforced through rapid editing

and subtitle emphasis. A prime example is the "cliffhanger" design--: synchronizing plot climaxes with product exposure. In **Little Star**, when a mother selects infant formula, the scene freezes on the packaging as she utters "No bloating after feeding", with a purchase link popping up. Combined with accentuated background music, this creates triple stimulation of "plot momentum + visual impact + shopping prompt". This rhythm design fully serves conversion objectives, compressing traditional narrative techniques like "negative space" and "preparation" into precise traffic conversion nodes.

3. The Shift of Micro-Drama Content Production Led by E-commerce Platforms

3.1. Content Themes: From "Pan-Entertainment" to "Life Service Scenario"

Traditional micro-series predominantly feature genres like suspense, romance, and fantasy, relying on intense plotlines to attract viewers. A prime example is Kuaishou's hit series "This Guy Is a Bit Cold," which sparked heated discussions through its time-travel storyline. In contrast, e-commerce platforms' micro-series tend to focus on "lifestyle service scenarios," centering on daily consumption patterns such as clothing, food, housing, and transportation. This approach proves more effective in driving conversions due to the stronger product relevance inherent in such content.

Taobao data reveals that among the top 10 most-watched micro-series on its platform in 2023, eight featured daily life scenarios including "home renovation," "office outfit styling," and "food preparation." The "Home Renovation Chronicles" series tackles specific household challenges (like kitchen storage issues and bathroom leaks) per episode, showcasing practical solutions through narrative storytelling while ultimately promoting products like storage containers and waterproof coatings. This content selection isn't entirely dictated by creative teams but rather guided by e-commerce platforms' traffic allocation strategies--. Notably, lifestyle content commands 30% higher recommendation weight than fantasy genres, as users tend to spend more time and achieve better conversion rates on such content.

3.2. Character Shaping: Functional and "Consumption Symbol" Attribute

Traditional micro-series emphasize character development through personality arcs and emotional resonance. For instance, the "Yu Hu" character in **Escape from the British Museum** conveys cultural sentiment through anthropomorphic design. In contrast, e-commerce platform micro-series feature more functionalized characters whose core purpose is to demonstrate product value rather than evoke emotions [4].

The protagonist "Xiao Tao" in **Newcomer's Guide** serves as a prime example: Though her character remains undefined, she takes on distinct roles across episodes - showcasing the capacity of a commuter bag, demonstrating the lasting effect of foundation makeup, and experiencing massage device functions. Her actions are entirely product-centric, transforming her into a human embodiment of commercial features. Notably, her identity labels are consistently tied to consumer symbols: "refined mom" for maternity products and "urban white-collar worker" for workplace fashion. By reinforcing users' social identity through these role-based

associations, the show effectively drives product consumption.

3.3. Creative logic: Data-driven "Reverse Customization"

E-commerce platforms possess massive consumer data, enabling them to steer the creative direction of micro-series and establish a "data-driven, reverse customization" production model. Big data provides technical support for transitioning from broad-spectrum marketing to precisely-targeted personalized matching strategies: By monitoring user behavior across platform-including website visits, specific page views, dwell time on pages, and purchase records-platforms can accurately identify consumer needs and then customize micro-series content accordingly [6].

For instance, during the summer of 2023, Taobao data revealed a 200% surge in searches for "outdoor camping" products. In response, the platform collaborated with creative teams to launch **The Campsite Rookie's Diary**. The show's storyline was meticulously crafted around user feedback highlighting common challenges like "tent setup difficulties" and "food preservation issues", with targeted product placements such as quick-deepening tents and portable refrigerators. This innovative approach transforms storytelling from subjective expression to visualized translation of consumer data, turning content creation into a process that precisely aligns with user needs.

4. Transfer of User Interaction and Narrative Power

4.1. Interactive Forms: from "Comment Feedback" to "Consumer Behavior Participation"

The user interaction of traditional micro short dramas is mainly based on comments, likes and retweets. Users express their opinions on the narrative through text, such as "the plot is too cruel" or "the ending reversal is wonderful". This kind of interaction is separated from content consumption and has limited influence on the narrative.

Taobao's Weishi Drama integrates user interactions with purchasing behavior, creating a closed-loop process of "watching → clicking → buying → reviewing". Actions like clicking product links, adding items to cart, and submitting reviews are all considered real-time feedback for the narrative. The platform analyzes this data to adjust plot priorities: If a lipstick appears in a scene but receives low click-through rates, the next episode might include a "color swiping" scenario; if users comment that prices are "too high," the storyline could incorporate "discount coupon distribution" elements. User consumption directly participates in narrative creation, serving as crucial input for adjusting storylines.

4.2. Narrative Power: The Game Between Platform, Creator and User

In traditional models, the narrative control of micro-series primarily rested with creators, while platforms merely served as distribution channels. The entry of e-commerce platforms has disrupted this balance: through traffic allocation and monetization mechanisms, these platforms now dictate narrative direction, reducing creators to "executors" while users indirectly influence storytelling through their consumption behaviors.

Taobao's "Merchandise Customized Drama" model epitomizes this phenomenon: Brand merchants pay to create micro-series that must highlight specific product features, severely restricting creators' creative freedom. For instance, a shampoo brand demanded the line "No oil for three days without washing your hair" in their drama, even when it contradicted plot logic. User consumption data becomes the platform's tool to balance merchant interests-- If customized dramas underperform in conversion rates, the platform may require merchants to adjust product placements, thereby affecting the narrative flow. This power struggle renders micro-series storytelling a product of multi-stakeholder balancing.

5. Narrative Dilemma and Way Out of Micro-Series under the Intervention of E-Commerce

5.1. Existing Dilemma: The Erosion of Narrative Value by Commercialization

5.1.1. Narrative Homogenization:

In pursuit of conversion efficiency, Taobao's micro-series dramas have extensively replicated the "pain point-product-purchase" template, resulting in cookie-cutter content. For instance, multiple skincare product micro-series follow the same plot pattern: "main character develops acne-uses product-skin improves," which easily causes viewer fatigue. While such content may generate short-term traffic revenue for accounts, it ultimately undermines healthy market competition over time. What was once constructive creative competition has degenerated into malicious plagiarism. Without quality content input, the industry itself risks losing its profitability vitality [2].

5.1.2. Narrative Suspension

Overemphasis on product functions and neglect of plot rationality. In a short TV drama of home appliances, the main character used a sweeping robot to remove "spilled coffee stains" in just 10 seconds, which was seriously inconsistent with the actual use scenario, and was ridiculed by users as "too fake".

5.1.3. Lack of Emotional Resonance:

Functionalized roles and utilitarian plots are difficult to arouse users' emotional identification. Data shows that the user rewatch rate of Taobao micro-series is only 15%, far lower than the average level of 30% of traditional micro-series, reflecting the lack of narrative appeal.

5.2. Development Path: Build a Symbiotic Mechanism of "Narrative Value and Commercial Value"

5.2.1. Narrative Evolution Through Scenarization:

Transitioning from "forced product placement" to "contextual resonance" by embedding products into authentic life scenarios. For instance, the TV show "Mom's Kitchen" naturally highlights the thermal insulation properties of clay pots by documenting mothers' daily soup-making routines using these cookware [7]. This approach not only preserves the authentic feel of everyday life but also achieves effective product promotion through relatable storytelling.

5.2.2. Data-Creation Balance:

The platform should grant creators creative autonomy,

using data as reference rather than the sole criterion. This approach can be inspired by Taobao's "Co-creation Initiative"--, where creators propose narrative frameworks and the platform provides optimization suggestions based on data analysis, rather than directly dictating storylines.

5.2.3. Emotional Consumption Guidance:

Enhancing Product Appeal Through Character Emotion Building. In the TV series "Old Street Grocery Store", the shopkeeper naturally introduces emotional value behind products by sharing neighborhood stories through vintage items, transforming "nostalgic consumption" into an extension of the narrative rather than a forced conversion objective.

6. Conclusion

The entry of e-commerce platforms has injected commercial vitality into micro-series, driving narrative shifts from "content-driven" to "consumption-driven" and bringing profound transformations in narrative structure, content production, and user interaction. The "micro-series + consumption" model represented by Taobao achieved efficient integration of content and commerce by reshaping narrative loops, strengthening data-driven approaches, and binding consumption behaviors. However, excessive commercialization has led to compromised narrative value.

The future development of micro-series requires striking a balance between narrative artistry and commercial viability, evolving from "short" to "refined" content to become a true competitive edge in user engagement. These demands leveraging e-commerce platforms' traffic and data advantages while preserving the emotional core and aesthetic value of storytelling. Only by making consumption a natural extension rather than an end goal for narratives can micro-series maintain enduring vitality amidst commercialization waves.

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