Research on the Advantages of Spreading Excellent Values in the New Media Era: A Case Study of the Web Mini-Series Escape from the British Museum

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Abstract. With the development of the new media era and the continuous maturation of internet technology, many new forms of media have emerged, with short videos arising in this context. Some high-quality short videos, focusing on promoting outstanding traditional values, have become hot topics in contemporary communication. These videos, with distinct characteristics of the times, have become one of the important ways for major media to undergo creative transformation. Therefore, this paper uses Escape from the British Museum as a case study to analyze the advantages of short video media communication on social media platforms in the context of new media, aiming to promote the high-quality development of short video media.

Keywords: new media era, short videos, excellent values, dissemination

1. Introduction

In 2017, the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council issued the Opinions on Implementing the Project of Inheriting and Developing Fine Traditional Chinese Culture. The Opinions emphasized the need to strengthen the promotion and education of traditional culture and implement a new media communication project for Chinese culture by leveraging multimedia resources, innovating methods of expression, and showcasing the charm of Chinese culture [1]. Following the release of Escape from the British Museum, numerous participants engaged by commenting on, sharing, and discussing related topics, reflecting a trend toward the revival of fine traditional values. In recent years, with the development of the new media era and the continued maturation of internet technology, a large number of self-media accounts have emerged on platforms like TikTok, Bilibili, and Weibo, using short videos to depict diverse lifestyles [2]. Based on the backdrop of the new media era, this paper analyzes the online popular mini-series Escape from the British Museum through the lens of short video media characteristics. It explores how contemporary short videos foster emotional and value co-creation among participants through the revival of fine traditional values, how the new forms of digital media enhance participants' audiovisual experiences during dissemination, and how interactive social engagement facilitates the rapid spread of short videos, empowering public opinion guidance.

2. Embodied Experience: The Revival of Fine Traditional Values

Xiao Jun, Deputy Director of the Media Development Research Center at Wuhan University, noted that "the contemporary significance of short videos in the dissemination of traditional culture is primarily reflected in three functions: awakening, activation, and recreation" [3]. The viral success of Escape from the British Museum highlights the emotional need for fine traditional culture among contemporary audiences, which has often been overlooked. It also demonstrates how young creators use short video media to guide public opinion, reshape the atmosphere of fine traditional culture, and rekindle recognition of traditional values.

Short video media, characterized by rapid dissemination and wide content coverage, serves as an effective medium for conveying traditional values [4][5]. The success of Escape from the British Museum provides an exemplary case of leveraging short videos to promote fine traditional Chinese culture. From the perspective of the three key functions of short videos in the dissemination of traditional culture, their role in spreading fine traditional values can be analyzed through three aspects:

2.1. Choice of Themes

Short videos can recreate and present traditional culture by carefully selecting themes that revive the gradually fading or unfamiliar memory of Chinese culture, integrating it into the daily practices of internet users, particularly young audiences. This reintroduces diverse expressions of fine traditional culture into the everyday communication of Chinese people [3][6]. Unlike conventional short videos that often focus on urban relationships, romantic comedy, or formulaic elements of "feel-good" dramas, Escape from the British Museum took a novel approach by using fine traditional Chinese culture as its creative foundation. The series drew inspiration from the hotly debated topic of stolen artifacts in the British Museum, weaving a narrative about a jade teapot that transforms into a spirit and returns home to deliver a family letter. This storyline focuses on the preservation and protection of cultural relics, emphasizing the plight of Chinese artifacts lost overseas.

Figure 1. Comparison of Escape from the British Museum with Contemporary Mini-Series Themes

Note: The three short dramas in the image are: Escape from the British Museum, You Will Eventually Become Famous, and All About Love and You.

Restricted by factors such as a non-professional production team and the limited scope of short videos, coupled with public stereotypes regarding short video topics, Escape from the British Museum initially faced skepticism, with some dismissing it as a "Mary Sue" or "idol drama." However, the series resonated deeply because of its bold attempt to expand the cultural inheritance themes within the popular short video medium, enriched with profound emotional elements of Chinese traditional values. In the series, the theme revolves around the protection of cultural heritage and the promotion of traditional culture. A jade teapot, depicted in the form of a young girl, expresses a longing to return home through anthropomorphic storytelling. Lines such as "Family, I've wandered outside for so long" and "I don't know how to find my way home" vividly portray the plight of relics lost overseas. This anthropomorphic narrative concretely reflects the situation of displaced cultural artifacts and provides a deep emotional connection for Chinese viewers, uniting their national and patriotic sentiments and evoking empathy.

On Bilibili, a top-rated comment under the third episode reads, "As long as the spirit remains unbroken, there will always be a way home," with over 150,000 likes. On TikTok, one comment in the series' discussion area states, "When the relic started speaking, I couldn't hold back my tears. Can we bring our artifacts home? They miss their home." This comment received nearly 30,000 likes. Evidently, the series' success in achieving viral popularity can largely be attributed to its thoughtful and impactful choice of theme.

2.2. Character Development and Plot Design

Short videos can revitalize the inherent vitality of traditional culture through character development and plot design, effectively conveying the values of "cultural confidence." By presenting characters and storylines connected to fine traditional values, they breathe new life into traditional culture, making it relevant in modern contexts [7].

In terms of character design, Escape from the British Museum features a male protagonist named Yong'an, whose name derives from the inscription "Guotai Yong'an" (National Prosperity and Eternal Peace) on a porcelain pillow housed in the British Museum. The female protagonist is the Chinese Twisted Branch Thin-tire Jade Pot that escapes from the museum. She carries the mission of cultural exchange, intending to "show the world that the art of Chinese jade carving is not lost but has reached new heights." Throughout the series, the jade teapot, personified as a young girl, remains steadfastly focused on her journey home, symbolizing her role in delivering "letters from home" on behalf of other displaced cultural relics. These characters are intricately tied to the traditional value of returning cultural relics to their homeland, prompting viewers to reflect on culture and history while fostering empathy and a deeper appreciation for preserving fine traditional culture.

Regarding plot design, Escape from the British Museum adheres to the narrative logic of short videos, progressing through sensory and entertaining storytelling elements. The first two episodes depict the encounter between the personified jade teapot and Zhang Yong'an, a Chinese journalist, incorporating popular short video elements like ancient aesthetics and romantic undertones to immediately capture the audience's attention and enhance the series' appeal. The third episode delves deeper into the story, portraying a "dialogue" across time and space between overseas and domestic cultural relics, framed around the jade teapot's return to China and her delivery of "letters from home." The plot follows the journey of the Chinese Twisted Branch Thin-tire Jade Pot escaping the British Museum, meeting a Chinese media professional abroad, and embarking on an adventurous journey back home. Overcoming numerous challenges, the jade teapot ultimately returns to China, where she reads letters from afar to cultural relics displayed in domestic museums. As the plot unfolds, viewers experience emotional resonance and renewed cultural confidence as they follow the teapot's homeward journey. This narrative approach effectively narrows the psychological gap between the audience and fine traditional values. Through vivid and engaging storytelling, viewers are more easily drawn in, acquiring knowledge about traditional values in an entertaining way. This method not only facilitates the inheritance of traditional values but also aligns with contemporary communication strategies, combining entertainment with emotional connection to encourage audiences to embrace and prioritize fine traditional values in their lives.

2.3. The Use of Cultural Symbols

Short videos can skillfully reference and replicate symbols of traditional culture, such as Tai Chi, opera, and tea, showcasing traditional art forms to convey the aesthetic value of traditional culture. The prerequisite for inheriting and innovating lies in fully understanding and deeply analyzing these elements. Functions such as recording craftsmanship and recreating cultural scenes in short videos are fragmentary yet pieced together to gradually reconstruct and reinterpret Chinese culture [8].

Short videos can ingeniously incorporate symbols from traditional culture as elements within their narratives. Such references not only help evoke emotional resonance among viewers but also seamlessly integrate traditional cultural elements into contemporary content, reshaping the atmosphere of fine traditional culture and redirecting public attention toward recognizing its value. For example, in Escape from the British Museum, the selection of the jade teapot as a cultural relic is inspired by the ancient Chinese poem, "When asked by friends in Luoyang, tell them my heart is as pure as ice in a jade pot." After the protagonist's return to China, the plot integrates traditional cultural symbols such as Tai Chi, Peking Opera, and the firework-like iron flower forging display. Additionally, on-site filming at the British Museum showcases iconic settings and priceless artifacts from the museum. Through concise dialogues and imagery aligned with the rhythm of short videos, the complex histories of cultural relics are presented in a way that allows viewers to intuitively perceive and understand traditional culture. These cultural symbols then become bridges of communication, successfully attracting younger audiences and revitalizing traditional culture in contemporary society. In this manner, short video platforms act as decoders of traditional culture, making its context more accessible and bridging the gap with younger users. This approach to cultural transmission aligns more closely with the preferences of modern youth, injecting new vitality into the preservation of traditional culture [9, 10].

In summary, short video media effectively convey traditional culture by balancing entertainment and dissemination, sparking interest and fostering understanding of traditional values among viewers. Escape from the British Museum builds its storyline and characters around the journey of displaced relics returning home, incorporating Chinese cultural features and traditional symbols as creative elements. Leveraging the medium of short videos, it provides an immersive and interactive experience for audiences, capturing the attention of younger generations and reigniting enthusiasm for the continuation and renewal of historical and cultural heritage.

3. Immersive Audio-Visual Experience: A New Form of Digital Media

Data released by the National Radio and Television Administration reveals that over 480 micro-short dramas were launched across various online platforms in China during the first half of this year, exceeding the total number for all of 2022. This equates to an

average of 2.7 new dramas released daily. The popularity of short dramas has even transformed Hengdian Film and Television Base into "Vertical Hengdian." A recent survey conducted by China Youth Daily·China Youth School Media among university students nationwide showed that, out of 1,645 valid responses from students across 145 universities, 86.20% of respondents had watched short dramas, with 17.14% watching them frequently [11]. The rapid development of short video media can be attributed to a deeper cultural shift from a language-centered culture to an image-centered one. As Heidegger phrased it, this is an "era of the world as image" [12].

3.1. From the Perspective of Short Video Audio-Visual Language

In the new media environment, embodied perception has become a prominent aesthetic approach, constructing new aesthetic experiences. Non-professional and young creators have infused short video audio-visual language with new characteristics. As a short video production, Escape from the British Museum employs high-definition, refined visuals and realistic sound effects to offer audiences a fresh sensory experience.

In terms of visual quality, the short video format led Escape from the British Museum to adopt high-definition materials from the outset. During post-production, appropriate color grading and optimization were applied to ensure visual clarity and vivid colors, aligning with short video viewing habits. The three seasons of Escape from the British Museum comprise 261 high-definition shots. While showcasing cultural relics from the British Museum, the high-definition imagery preserves intricate details of the artifacts, integrating the emotional theme of the jade teapot's return to its homeland with the museum's real-life exhibits. By disseminating short videos, the series also presents the public with the appearance of relics lost overseas.

The use of sound effects in short videos, represented by Escape from the British Museum, points to a shift in the aesthetic approach of current short video media. In today's fast-paced and fragmented media environment, music selection has become an immediate, sensory auditory pleasure. Escape from the British Museum effectively incorporates sound effects, such as music and environmental sounds, to enhance the video's atmosphere and emotional expression. At the same time, it extensively uses catchy, upbeat, simple melodies and viral TikTok tunes to engage the audience's emotions while providing strong sensory stimulation. For instance, during the scene where the two characters begin their journey back home, the ending theme song "Protagonist" from Battle Through the Heavens is used. Through the incorporation of music popular among young people today, the short video effectively adds musical elements that resonate with contemporary audiences, allowing traditional Chinese cultural values to return to the current cultural communication context in a fresh and confident way. [6, 13].

3.2. From the Perspective of Short Video Production Modes

In the digital age, the production methods of film and television art have become increasingly diverse, giving rise to new video production modes. Short video platforms offer a wide array of creative tools and special effects, enabling creators to present content in more vivid and engaging ways. Through various innovative techniques, short videos are better able to capture viewers' attention, enhancing the appeal and shareability of the content.

Firstly, the choice of composition and framing is a critical consideration in short video creation. Small-screen, vertical-format videos necessitate changes in composition. Compared to horizontal videos, vertical videos focus the audience's attention more effectively, making them ideal for highlighting individual subjects and compressing screen space [14]. Since most short videos primarily feature solo character shots, the depiction of character traits becomes a primary focus. Close-up shots are particularly effective in directly conveying emotions, allowing viewers to closely observe the expressions of characters and resonate with the emotions the creator seeks to express [10, 15].

In contrast, Escape from the British Museum employs horizontal framing, accommodating a greater amount of visual information. Unlike typical short videos that center primarily on a single character, this production emphasizes the relationship and interactions between the male and female leads. Horizontal framing better facilitates techniques such as character close-ups and shot/reverse shot movements, effectively advancing the narrative connection between the two characters. Moreover, during grand scenes such as military parades and iron firework displays following the jade teapot's return to China, horizontal framing allows for a more effective portrayal of large-scale events, helping viewers clearly grasp the video's focal points and themes while delivering a superior visual experience. Horizontal framing also emphasizes balance and symmetry in the imagery, capturing intricate details while keeping the protagonists prominently featured in the frame [16].

Close-ups capture partial views of the subjects, revealing intricate details. Combined with background music, they extend the spatial narrative beyond the screen, enhancing the story's depth and strengthening the connections between various elements. In Escape from the British Museum, close-up shots depict the protagonists' facial expressions, the intricate details of artifacts in the British Museum, and cultural activities such as sugar painting after the jade teapot's return to China. These close-ups vividly convey the characters' personas and the aesthetic appeal of traditional Chinese culture. Additionally, the production uses close framing with specific focal lengths to eliminate unnecessary elements in the frame, effectively highlighting the main subject. This approach compresses the distance between the subject and the background, creating a harmonious relationship between the two, resulting in an image that is both textured and atmospheric. This meticulous visual approach enables Escape from the British Museum to stand out among numerous vertical short videos with its refined and immersive storytelling.

承得住偷盗者的歉意

Figure 2. The Use of Horizontal Framing and Close-Ups in Escape from the British Museum

Regarding editing, the three episodes of Escape from the British Museum have a combined runtime of only 17 minutes. Due to time constraints, narrative depth is not the strength of short videos; instead, they prioritize capturing audience excitement in a short span and focus on emotional impact [14, 17]. Consequently, the production adopts a fast-paced editing style to enhance rhythm and tension. Various transition techniques, such as fade-ins, fade-outs, and sliding cuts, are used to ensure smoothness and continuity in the videos. For instance, in the final moments of the third episode, when the cultural relics collectively chant "Peace and Prosperity for the Nation," 58 shots are interspersed within 26 seconds. This rapid editing immerses the audience in the intense storyline and emotional experience of the characters. These innovative features of short video media enable Escape from the British Museum to better captivate viewers' attention. Through stunning visuals and seamless editing, the production allows the audience to engage deeply with the narrative and actively participate in the experience.

4. Interactive Social Media: Rapid Dissemination Empowering Public Opinion Guidance

As of September 18, 2023, Escape from the British Museum had surpassed 300 million views on TikTok and recorded approximately 8 million views per episode on Bilibili, frequently trending on Weibo's hot search list with hashtags like #Escape from The British Museum Details and #Escape from The British Museum Hidden Easter Eggs [18]. Spanning platforms from Bilibili to Little Red Book, TikTok to Weibo, the short video series achieved widespread popularity. The interactive features of these platforms played a significant role in the dissemination of Escape from the British Museum, not only amplifying its influence but also empowering public opinion guidance and enhancing the viewing experience.

4.1. Initial Phase: Video Upload Platforms (TikTok, Bilibili, Little Red Book)

The dissemination of short videos is closely tied to the algorithms of social media platforms. Firstly, these platforms inherently possess substantial traffic bases, supported by their extensive user communities, which lowers the barriers for creators to share their works and increases the likelihood of audiences encountering the content. Secondly, when a video garners significant shares on social platforms, the platform's algorithm may further recommend it to a broader audience, creating a positive feedback loop of dissemination.

This personalized recommendation mechanism enhances users' chances of discovering new content while boosting the exposure of related works. Escape from the British Museum draws its creative inspiration from the British Museum's artifact theft scandals, which led multiple nations to demand the return of their cultural heritage, aligning with domestic calls for the repatriation of overseas artifacts. During this period, users actively participated in discussions around "The British Museum," and short video platforms employed intelligent algorithms to recommend content based on users' interests and behaviors. As a result, the trailer for Escape from the British Museum attracted over 3 million views, showcasing the positive role of digital short video media in effective dissemination.

4.2. Second Phase: Social Interaction Platforms (WeChat Moments, Weibo, TikTok)

The concept of "bullet comments" (danmu), originating from Japan's Niconico website, allows users to flexibly determine the placement and duration of their comments [19]. In Escape from the British Museum, users utilized bullet comments to create a synchronized, interactive environment for engagement. For example, when the Jade Ewer corrected the journalist with "It's the Chinese Twisted Branch Thin-tire Jade Pot," bullet comments added, "She emphasizes the name because the British Museum's display cases only list cold inventory numbers," and "Many artifacts in the British Museum lack names." Similarly, when the Jade Ewer remarked at the journalist's home, "Such a large cabinet houses only two people," bullet comments supplemented, "She says this because a single cabinet in the British Museum holds many artifacts." The scrolling format mimics conversational pacing,

with comments posted around the same time appearing on the same interface. Vivid text and expressive emojis compensate for the absence of physical interaction. This approach not only enabled users to engage with the content but also facilitated its wider dissemination [20].

Figure 3. Audience Bullet Comment Interaction in Escape from the British Museum

In addition to user-video interaction, interactions among users themselves also play a key role, primarily through likes, comments, and follows. For instance, in the comment section of Escape from the British Museum, highly popular comments often appear at the top, representing viewers' collective opinions. One notable comment under the third episode reads, "The ending is particularly well-written. I especially appreciate that the two creators did not simply portray the artifacts as mere vessels or tools of adversity. They are not merely victims or objects of pity; even in exile overseas, they retain the resilience and character of Chinese civilization." This comment garnered nearly 160,000 likes. Similarly minded users congregate in the comment section, facilitating further interaction and resulting in deeper social engagement.

On the other hand, social sharing allows users to disseminate short videos to a broader network via personal social media accounts. When a user enjoys a short video, they can share it on platforms such as Weibo or WeChat Moments, reaching friends, family, and potentially a wider audience. This approach significantly expands the reach of the content. On TikTok, Escape from the British Museum achieved 2.768 million shares, illustrating how social sharing can bring immense exposure in a short period. This not only validates the content but also embodies user participation. Through sharing, short videos can rapidly gain traction and achieve widespread dissemination.

The comment section also serves as a direct communication channel between creators and their audience. Viewers can pose questions or offer suggestions, while creators can respond to feedback, fostering closer interaction. For example, the inspiration for Escape from the British Museum originated from a comment on a social platform earlier this year suggesting, "What if artifacts were anthropomorphized and allowed to escape the British Museum to return home for the New Year?" The creators, known as Jianbing Guozai, drew from this idea to craft the script, spending six months filming the short series in the UK. The interactive features of short-video platforms provide creators with valuable feedback, enabling them to better understand audience preferences and expectations, which helps refine and optimize their work for greater appeal and influence.

Interactivity also manifests in the process of user-generated content (UGC). Audiences can participate in challenges or interactive activities, creating short videos that align with a specific theme. [21] Such UGC not only enhances user engagement with the platform but also injects diversity and creativity into the content. The vast scale of spontaneous creative behavior enriches the cultural meaning of short videos. [22] For example, viewers of Escape from the British Museum have shared their thoughts on social media, generating trending topics. On Bilibili, the series has inspired a range of derivative works related to artifacts, such as Amazing! Recreating Escape from the British Museum with PPT Animation?! and A High School Student Composes a Rap About Lost Artifacts!. This demonstrates the transformation of viewers into creators, enabling them to express their understanding of the series in diverse formats. On TikTok, the series leveraged hashtags such as "#Artifact Anthropomorphism," "#Museum Time Travel Cosplay," and "#Original Historical Style Project" to attract a large number of ordinary users to create themed short videos, expressing their appreciation for the series and their cultural sentiments. These hashtags have collectively garnered over 1.3 billion views, with 29,000 users participating in discussions, underscoring the unique significance of interactive social sharing in the dissemination of short-video media. The low production and dissemination thresholds of short videos make them accessible for public participation, allowing anyone to create and share on the go. In the new media era, where everyone can be a media outlet,

ordinary users combine their understanding of Escape from the British Museum with their personalized real-life experiences to produce new related content through secondary creations.
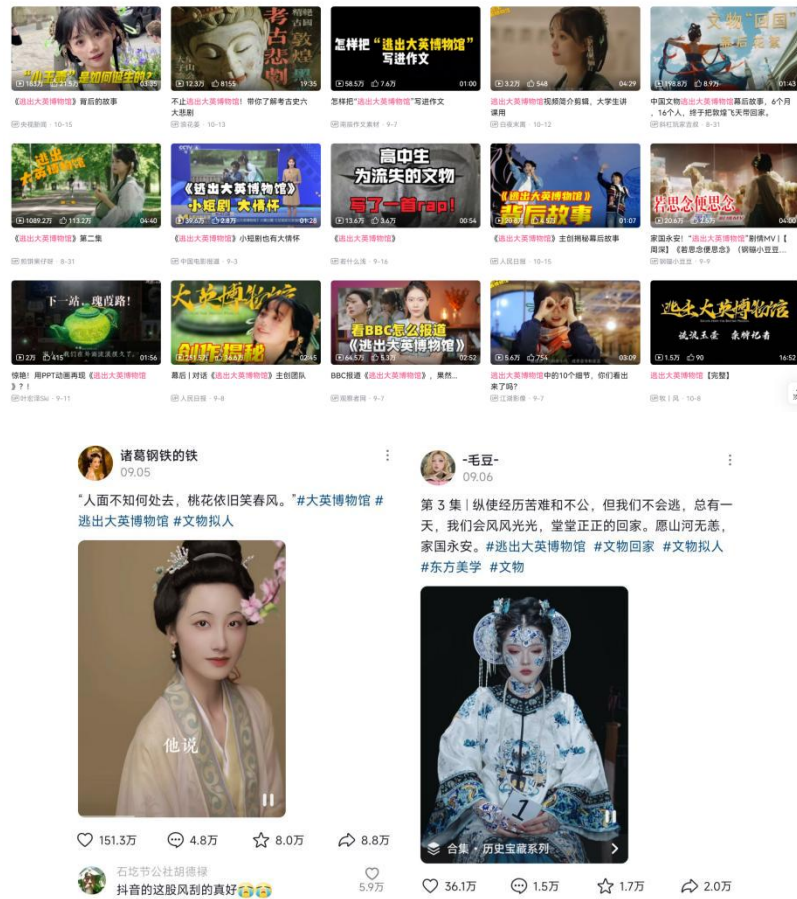

Figure 4. Derivative Works of Escape from the British Museum

Interactive social sharing has proven to be a powerful mechanism in short-video dissemination. Not only does it provide immediate audience feedback, but it also enables individual users' social behaviors to amplify content across broader networks, achieving swift and effective dissemination. In the new media era, the favorable timing for information dissemination has surpassed the spatial and temporal constraints of traditional media such as newspapers and radio. Each influential act of social sharing can become a catalyst for short-video dissemination. The rapid rise of Escape from the British Museum across major platforms within just a few months is inextricably linked to interactive social sharing. This phenomenon is not merely a means of dissemination but also a critical way to form user communities and spark interactions on social media platforms, driving the vigorous development of short-video media.

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