

Research on the Impact of Social Media Marketing of Films on Consumer Behaviour

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Abstract: Before and at the early stage of a movie's release, a successful movie marketing strategy will have a great attraction and influence on the target audience. The trailer is a marketing tool used before the official release of a movie, and its main function is to market and publicize the movie to a general audience, as well as be an effective tool for the audience to understand the movie. And topic marketing is to position the content of the movie through emotional value, social topics, potential consumer experiences, and so on, to build consumer awareness of the movie. Effective marketing promotion can increase the conversion rate of the audience 'want to see' by influencing consumer decision-making behavior. Therefore, this paper explores the impact of two social media marketing methods (trailer marketing and topic marketing) on consumer decision-making behavior on Weibo and Douyin from the perspective of the audience's 'want to see' conversion rate. This will provide a useful reference for movie producers to carry out effective marketing promotions.

Keywords: Films, Social Media, Consumer Behaviour, Marketing.

1. Introduction

From the perspective of film promotion, the life cycle of a film is generally divided into four phases: the introduction period, the growth period, the maturity period and the decline period. Among them, the introduction period refers to the pre-release period of a film, in which marketers should use marketing tools to spread the film as widely as possible. Movie previews or trailers are the most widely used method of film advertising in the pre-release period. The growth period is the early stage of a film's wide release, where viewers are encouraged to discuss the film on social media platforms, and marketers need to promote topics related to the film in order to generate wider discussion about the film among more viewers [1].

China's film industry has grown steadily over the last decade, with exponential growth since 2012. Although film releases and promotions were severely impacted during the COVID-19 epidemic the Chinese film industry has continued to rebound with adjustments to epidemic prevention and control policies and promotional campaigns on social media platforms. In 2023, China continues to be the world's second-largest film market and is on a steady upward trend. Film box office grew 83% to approximately RMB 55 billion [2]. In addition, relying on the explosive spread of information brought about by online social media platforms, Weibo and Douyin, as two of the most popular social media platforms in China, are the main venues for the creation of film hotspots and the fermentation of topics [3]. The marketing of the film has formed a fixed process based on these two social media

platforms, and the film producer releases the trailer of the film through the accounts of Weibo and Douyin to attract the audience's attention. After the release of the film, the film producer creates a buzz by creating topics to attract the attention of the audience. In addition, usually before and during the early stages of a film's release, Chinese consumers and viewers will express their love for the movie through the movie "want to see" function on online ticketing platforms such as MaoYan [4]. The MaoYan platform collects data on the conversion rate of trailers and topics released by the producers with consumers' "want to see" behaviour to analyse the results of movie promotion. However, most of the existing literature ignores the study of marketing on consumers' "want to watch" behaviour, however, this aspect is the most effective way to reflect the effect of film marketing. Therefore, this paper analyse the conversion rate of want to watch of two films to explore the impact of trailer marketing and topic marketing on consumers' decision-making behaviour.

The aim of this paper is to explore the impact of two marketing tools, trailer marketing and talk marketing, on consumer 'want to watch' behaviour at the pre-release and early release stages of a film in a social media environment. Through studying two case, *You Only Live Once* and *Article 20*, this paper will fill in the research gaps, contribute to the study of the film market, and provide more effective strategies for the marketing of films on social media.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Chinese Films

The cultural industry serves as the soft power of the country, and film, as a part of the cultural industry, contributes to the dissemination of national culture. With the rapid development of the Internet and media technologies, online marketing has gradually become prominent in the cultural industry. This has changed the distribution and marketing of films as well as the role of the audience. By 2010, social media platform in China has become one of the main platforms for film marketing, and its acceptance and popularity have gradually increased [2]. Movies have strong entertainment and catalyze engaging discussion, which is compatible with social media with instantaneous and interactive characteristics, and audiences can use various social media platforms to obtain movie information [5]. Therefore, it is necessary to delve into the strategies of social media marketing specifically tailored for the promotion of films.

Chinese New Year is a festive occasion during which Chinese individuals gather with their families to celebrate and bond. Watching movies is a popular activity that brings people together during this time. As of 17 February 2024, the total box office of Chinese movies in the Spring Festival period exceeded RMB 8.016 billion (US\$1.11 billion). The highest grossing film is *You Only Live Once (YOLO)* and the lowest is *Article 20* [6]. This paper will explore the impact of two social media marketing approaches of these two films on consumer behaviour.

2.2. Trailer Marketing

A trailer is a marketing tool used prior to the official release of a film and its main function is to market the film and promote it to a wide audience. A trailer is a persuasive artistic and promotional approach, usually one to three minutes in length, that showcases a film's subject matter, setting, style and plot in order to heighten the audience's anticipation [7]. It provides consumers with a free sample of the film being advertised and is an effective tool for viewers to learn about the film. With the development of the Internet, trailers have transformed from being shown on cinema and television platforms to being shown on social media platforms nowadays, and they are one of the most effective means of engaging the audience.

The evaluation of the marketing effect of the trailer is mainly done through two kinds of data, the broadcast volume and the conversion rate of wanting to watch, in order to analyse the communication

effect of the trailer and the effect of the consumer's awareness of the film. Usually, the higher the broadcast volume and conversion rate, the stronger the trailer's market exposure and the better the marketing effect. The timing of the trailer release is critical, as is the timing of the film's promotion on social media platforms. If the trailer is released quickly, the audience will lose interest, but if the campaign is released late, the distribution company will face the responsibility of shorter exposure to the audience [8]. Since most of the audience's decision-making behaviour for film viewing occurs close to the film's release date, the closer the trailer is released to the release date, the more effective the marketing will be. This paper will focus on the last trailer released before a film's release and explore its conversion rate on consumers' 'want to watch' behaviour.

Trailers have both positive and negative effects on viewers' decision-making behaviour. The time constraints of trailers mean that producers need to make sure that every frame contains an effective message, including shots, scenes, lines, subtitles, and music, all of which should have a clear communication purpose. A clear theme display can allow consumers to know whether it meets their viewing needs, a reasonable cast introduction can attract fan groups, and visual effects and exciting highlights can attract consumers' attention [9]. The availability of these conditions is key to the success of trailer marketing in influencing consumer behaviour. If the producer fails to introduce the film to the audience within a limited time frame, trailer marketing will fail and negatively impact consumers.

2.3. Topic Marketing

Topic marketing is frequently used by film producers as a tool. Social media serves as the primary platform for creating hotspots and fermenting topics, with Weibo and Douyin being the two main social media platforms [10]. Topic marketing is based on the positioning of the content of the film through emotional value, social issues and potential consumer experience to build consumer awareness of the film, and in social media, the content will be repeatedly pushed to the audience to achieve the dissemination of the film's information. Topic marketing takes the film as the topic, extends to more dimensions such as society, economy, emotion and education, and creates a feast of interaction between the film and the audience on the social media platform.

The film topic's publicity will have a great attraction and a significant impact on the target audience. At the early stage of a film's release, it is an effective marketing strategy to introduce hot topics in society, especially controversial topics. If the film topic attracts the attention of the audience, so that the film spreads from one circle to another and enters the hot topic area on social media platforms (e.g., Weibo and Douyin's Hot Topic List) [11]. The film can then gain access to more users and attract a large number of consumers to participate in the discussion, which is conducive to promoting emotional resonance with potential viewers and triggering in-depth thinking among viewers, thus increasing the heat of discussion and stimulating consumers to generate the behaviour of wanting to watch the film.

On the contrary, the topics selected by the producer that are less relevant to the film will have a negative impact on consumer decision-making behaviour [12]. Although the use of social media to create a topic matrix can attract a large audience for a film, it can be risky for the promotion of a film if the topics are low in relevance to the film and are deliberately created to garner attention. This can lead to negative publicity and trigger strong consumer opposition to the film.

3. Case Study

3.1. *You Only Live Once (YOLO)*

You Only Live Once (YOLO) is a Chinese comedy film released on February 10, 2024, starring Chinese actors Jia Ling and Lei Jiayin. As of February 17, the film has accumulated RMB 2.724 billion at the box office, making it the highest-grossing film of the 2024 Chinese New Year.

Three days before the film's release, Chinese social media platforms Weibo and Douyin released *YOLO*'s final trailer, lasting 2 minutes and 16 seconds. A powerful soundtrack from beginning to end accompanies the trailer, explaining the film's theme of 'losing weight' and capturing consumers' attention. The trailer received 153,000 views on the same day, and the conversion rate of viewers clicking on the trailer on Mao Yan to watch it was only 0.9%. According to research, trailers airing close to release have the best marketing results. However, *YOLO*'s final trailer did not reap that effect. Despite the trailer's limited length, the producers failed to capture consumers' attention within the given timeframe. The boxing content throughout the trailer caused aesthetic fatigue among viewers, and the boring plot made it difficult for consumers to make the decision to "want to watch".

The pre-release period's failure prompted the film's producers to adjust their marketing strategy on the day of release. On the first day of its release, the movie appeared on the 'hot topic list' on Chinese social media platforms Weibo and Douyin 75 times, which caused *YOLO*'s 'want to see' conversion rate to increase by 209% from the previous day. The producers focused on combining the film with hot topics in the society and pushed the film's information to the audience repeatedly in order to spread 'virally' among the audience. For example, '*YOLO* is the right film for women', '*YOLO*, not admitting defeat is winning', and 'Jia Ling wants the hot topic to be love yourself'. From this, it can be watched that the film producer combined the current social hotspots and put forward words like 'women', 'do not admit defeat', and 'love yourself' to attract consumers' interest in participating and promote the film, thus prompting consumers to make decisions.

3.2. *Article 20*

Article 20 is a Chinese comedy film released on February 10, 2024, starring Chinese actors Lei Jiayin, Ma Li, Zhao Liying, and Gao Ye. As of February 17, the film had accumulated RMB 1.342 billion at the box office, making it the lowest grossing film of the 2024 Chinese New Year.

Article 20 released the final trailer, which is 1 minute and 34 seconds long, on Weibo and Douyin 18 days before the film's release. The trailer primarily introduces the plot content of the film *Article 20*, with the tragic case's narrative leaving an impression in the minds of the audience. The trailer had only 25,000 plays, but the conversion rate for viewers wanting to watch it was as high as 9.6%. Furthermore, despite the trailer's release 18 days ahead of the film's official release, it successfully attracted a significant number of potential viewers. High-quality film-related content introductions within a limited time frame can provide consumers with an audio-visual first experience, laying a good foundation for viewers to go to the cinema to watch the film after its release.

Since *Article 20* had a high conversion rate by using trailer marketing before the official release of the film, the producer failed to pay attention to topic marketing on the first day of the film's release. The film received only 30 hot topic tags on the day of release, with 'Zhao Liying' being the most popular search term. The producers have focused their promotions on Zhao Liying because of her large fan base. The small number of topics made *Article 20* lag behind other films in terms of reach. In this case, the producers could have capitalized on the trailer marketing's potential audience to increase the film's buzz. However, the majority of the 30 trending topics centered around actress Zhao Liying, who played a minor role, and persistently promoted the tragic aspects of her character. Such topics were completely contrary to the film's positioning as a comedy film and less relevant to

the film's theme. The wrong choice of topics caused consumer dissatisfaction, resulting in the audience becoming more and more distant from the film, with only 18,000 new 'want to watch' viewers on the day of release.

4. Conclusion

It can be seen that *YOLO*'s trailer marketing failed to create a positive willingness among consumers to watch the film, and the topic marketing did a good job of pulling up consumers' interest in the film. However, the marketing effect of *Article 20* is the opposite. According to the data, the box office of *YOLO* far exceeded that of *Article 20*. As a result, topic marketing is more effective at expanding the scope of movie promotion than trailer marketing. This will make more viewers want to watch the movie, ultimately making the movie earn a high box office. If film producers can use social media to leverage both trailer marketing and topic marketing, it will be important for the film's promotion and dissemination. Pre-screening trailer marketing raises the audience's anticipation by using the limited length of the trailer to accurately introduce the film's theme, scenes, style, and plot, and supplementing it with music and special effects. Films make reasonable use of the 1-3-minute length of the trailer to maximise consumers' willingness to watch the film. If the content of the trailer is unimpressive, the pre-release marketing phase of the film has already lost the audience's interest. Subsequently, at the beginning of the film's release, the film caters to hot topics to attract new viewers and selects controversial topics of broad social significance to attract viewers to participate in the discussion, creating a circle-breaking effect and prompting consumers to generate a willingness to watch the film.

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