

Investigating the Influence of Online Novel Creation on Plot-Based Short Video: A Study Based on TikTok Examples

Jiaqi Zhu^{1,a,*}, Anqi Chen¹, Xuao Yang¹

¹*School of Television Arts, Communication University of Zhejiang, Hangzhou, China*

a. gaakei1221@163.com

**corresponding creator*

Abstract: Born in the era of rapid internet technology development and riding the wave of "the era of fragmentation," short videos have emerged as a compelling form of media communication and audio-visual art, capturing the attention of audiences in China and globally. As a significant subtype of short videos, plot-based short videos are influenced not only by traditional audio-visual media but also by online novels, one of the products of the internet era. As a result, there has been a convergence between plot-based short videos and online novels. This trend highlights how the phenomenon of online novel creation is increasingly manifesting in the content of these videos. By examining examples within TikTok (specifically referring to the Chinese version in this paper), it becomes apparent that online novel creation can significantly drive the development of plot-based short videos. However, based on the current situation, it is evident that this convergence also poses several challenges, thereby requiring the development of innovative solutions.

Keywords: Short videos, Plot-based short videos, Online novels creation, TikTok

1. Introduction

As a form of audio-visual media rooted in online communication and targeting a vast number of netizens, online short videos inevitably embody characteristics such as popularity, youthfulness, and at times, toxicity, while retaining explicit elements of film and television art. Among the diverse genres within short videos, plot-based narratives stand out as one of the most abundant and attention-grabbing categories on short video platforms. In contrast to the elitism often associated with traditional literary and artistic works, those emerging in the Internet era tend to be more accessible and grounded. Popularity serves as a defining trait of online novel creation, which, to some extent, challenges the elitist notion of literary creation and extends the opportunity for ordinary individuals to become creators.[1] Similarly, short videos exhibit such characteristics, positioning both mediums as representatives of contemporary online literature and popular culture.

Online novel creation refers to the growing trend of drawing heavily from online novels in crafting the content narration, expressing main ideas, and creating genres within plot-based short videos. The online novels creation has evolved into an integral element in the development of plot-based short videos, shaping their narrative structure and thematic direction. Though delving into the phenomenon of online novel creation of plot short videos and basing on TikTok (specifically referring to the Chinese version in this paper) examples, this paper endeavors to address the issue of the development of short videos.

2. The Reasons for the Formation of the Phenomenon of Online Novel Creation

The evolution of the content of short videos on TikTok has followed a trajectory from personal presentation to opinion expression, and from simplicity to depth, aligning with the younger generation's increasing emphasis on self-expression. Originally conceived as a platform for short music videos, TikTok predominantly featured content centered around personal showcasing. However, as the platform has matured, there has been a noticeable shift towards a desire among the younger generation to express their opinions and ideas through a broader range of formats, moving beyond mere displays of appearance and talent. Indeed, short videos have gradually diversified into other categories such as lifestyle and educational content, utilizing language and non-fictional imagery to share personal experiences, emotional insights or disseminate knowledge to the audience.[2] The surge in popularity of plot-based short videos corresponds with the evolving preferences of young audiences. Beginning around 2018, there has been an unprecedented proliferation. Short video platforms have expedited the promotion and dissemination of such content. Leveraging the independent creative prowess of young users and we media, TikTok has become a hub for the production of diverse plot-based works encompassing genres like comedy, suspense, family dramas, workplace narratives, and beyond.[3] Subsequently, short videos evolved to prioritize narrative, as creators of plot-based content departed from the conventional idea of "sharing" prevalent in other categories. Instead, they utilized narrative structure, fictional imagery, and audiovisual techniques to construct engaging storylines.[4] This change in emphasis has prompted traditional video platforms to increasingly delve into the realm of short-form content creation.

There are two reasons why plot-based short videos often draw inspiration from online novels. Objectively, since most creators operate as we media, lacking access to rich copyrighted content from traditional video platforms, incorporating elements from online novels has become their primary option. Subjectively, online novels creation also aligns with audience preferences. In the Internet era, people have grown accustomed to fast-paced, fragmented reading habits. Characteristics inherent to online novels, such as chapterization (dividing content into short chapters to accommodate fragmented reading time) and swift engagement (establishing backgrounds and captivating audiences within short narratives), resonate with the dynamics of this era. By integrating these features, plot-based short videos have gradually adopted a series format and adhere to the "Golden Three Seconds" rule.[5] Secondly, the primary audience for short videos consists of individuals who have grown up in the internet era. Their earliest exposure to online literature typically begins with online novels. Since short videos emerged relatively late, incorporating elements from online novels into their narratives allows them to better catch the audience's interest by leveraging the familiarity and appeal of online novel storytelling.

3. The Expression of Online Novel Creation: in Terms of "Genre" and "Element"

In the creation process of plot-based short videos, the influence of online novel is primarily evident in two key aspects: "genre" and "element". Concerning "genre", it primarily involves creators drawing from various genres of online novels, with the most prevalent genres being romance and fantasy. On the other hand, "element" builds upon the foundation laid by "genre", predominantly characterized by the adoption of character settings and plot elements from online novels. creators utilize similar "symbols" and specific "labels" to depict characters and plotlines to the audience. Through the integration with online novel, plot-based short videos can effectively convey complex storylines and emotions in a simplified and captivating way.

3.1. Genre

The concept of "genre" is intricately linked to the commercialization of films and television dramas, emerging prominently during the classic Hollywood era and further proliferated in the era of highly industrialized television dramas production.[6] Likewise, short videos, sharing a common lineage with films and television dramas, also necessitate genres to facilitate their journey towards commercialization and industrialization. Compared to traditional films and television dramas genres, the genres found in online novels appear to be more compatible with short videos. This compatibility is a key reason why plot-based short videos often bear a closer resemblance to the narratives found in online novels.

Romance and fantasy stand out as the two most special genres within online novels. Genres of online novels lead to a clearer differentiation in genres for plot-based short videos. This specialization has given rise to creators who focus exclusively on niche areas within plot-based content, and has also encouraged those originally creating non-plot content to explore plot-based videos. For instance, in the genre of romance, we've seen numerous couple creators transition from sharing their daily lives to crafting short stories with a touch of fiction. The TikTok couple account "Yuexin and Zhiyang" have produced over ten short dramas based on this model, closely adhering to the conventions of online novels. Similarly, some creators opt for crafting single or a few episodes of fictional stories, like the early works of account "79NaoYeah". Today, plot-based short videos have become a significant segment of the short video landscape, drawing in a multitude of creators. To differentiate themselves in the crowded field, creators are increasingly delving into specific genres and moving towards more defined types of content. Interestingly, the impact of online novel genres on these short videos is somewhat ambiguous, making it challenging to pinpoint whether their influence stems more from traditional films and television dramas or from online narratives. The subsequent discussion will delve deeper into how online novels, in terms of genre, influence the creation of plot-based short videos.

3.2. Element

"Elements" manifest in two distinct facets: symbolic characters and labeled plots. Symbolic characters encapsulate certain archetypes or characteristics, rendering them immediately identifiable to audiences. On the other hand, labeled plots pertain to the narrative frameworks typical of specific genres. These plots are termed "labeled" because they adhere to recognizable patterns or motifs.

3.2.1. Symbolic Characters

Character symbols in online novels typically derive from the identities of characters, and these symbols also translate effectively into the realm of short videos. By visually presenting these character symbols through images, creators can swiftly establish character identities for their audience. For instance, elite characters like businessmen and lawyers are often depicted in tailored suits, exuding a serious and authoritative demeanor. Celebrity artists, on the other hand, are often clad in trendy and performance-oriented attire, exuding confidence and glamour. Students are commonly portrayed in school uniforms, baseball caps, and sneakers, accentuating their youthful energy. Moreover, subtle distinctions among characters can be conveyed through accessories such as jewelry or weapons.

Compared to traditional film and television dramas, plot-based short videos offer a more direct portrayal of characters, often swiftly capturing their main characteristics without delving into extensive character development. Characterization in short videos is primarily achieved through appearance, actions, and complementary traits such as clothing and makeup. This concise character design aims to quickly establish the character's personality and engage the audience effectively.

In plot-based short videos, character design typically relies on specific actions or plot scenarios to convey the character's traits, facilitating audience immersion. Some creators establish a consistent persona for their characters early on, developing a series of stories centered around this character. In some cases, entire accounts are crafted to revolve around a character. For instance, the TikTok account "Wake Up Lawyer Zhang" revolves around the character "Lawyer Zhang," with the character's persona and image serving as the focal point. From an external perspective, "Lawyer Zhang" embodies the archetype of a typical lawyer: impeccably dressed in suits and leather shoes, exuding professionalism. Additionally, the account has even incorporated a distinctive symbol for the character—a black umbrella. The combination of suits and umbrellas evokes the imagery of modern-day knights, further enhancing the character's identity.

3.2.2. Labeled Plots

The brevity of plot-based short videos necessitates a rapid narrative pace, compelling plot twists, and intense dramatic conflicts to quickly captivate the audience's attention.[7] Online novels offer an ideal narrative format that fits this requirement. On online novel platforms, stories are often categorized using tags that describe various aspects of the narrative. For instance, fantasy novels may be labeled as "useless", "ordinary", or "genius" depending on the characteristics of the protagonist, while novels aimed at a female audience may be classified as "independent female" or "naive female". These labels not only frame the theme, setting, and main characters of the story but also dictate the story's trajectory, gradually establishing a familiar narrative pattern or routine that hints at the core conflicts to unfold.

Similarly, in plot-based short videos, audiences can quickly discern the story's general direction and identify their personal interests based on these labels. These labels encompass not only concrete descriptors but also abstract labels representing story conventions, often conveyed through copywriting or account attributes. This enables audiences to navigate and engage with the content more effectively, enhancing their overall viewing experience.

For instance, within the romance genre, various labels help distinguish between different narrative outcomes, such as "sweet ending" and "bad ending". Consider "Sanjin and Qiqi" and "A Cup of Americano", two TikTok accounts managed by the same team, which exemplify these distinct romantic themes. Under the "sweet love" label, the stories featured in "Sanjin and Qiqi" typically follow a pattern of "from conflict to reconciliation". On the other hand, "A Cup of Americano", categorized under "wrenching love", often revolves around themes of "from conflict to separation" or "nostalgia for a sweeter past".

The direct influence of "labels" on plot-based short videos is evident in the way story creation shifts focus. Rather than conceptualizing a narrative from start to finish, creators primarily focus on filling in content for various segments of the story within a predetermined framework, dictated by the labels and character settings.

4. The Disadvantages and Future Development of Online Novel Creation

Indeed, the emergence of online novels creation has undeniably eased the process for creators of plot-based short videos, allowing them to adopt commercial characteristics and establish an industrial production model akin to genre films. However, within the realm of online novel creation, issues such as similar content, entertainment-oriented themes, and subpar production quality have surfaced, posing challenges to the advancement of contemporary plot-based short videos. By addressing these concerns collectively, we can delineate a prospective developmental trajectory for this creative endeavor.

4.1. The Disadvantages of Online Novel Creation

Many Chinese scholars identify content homogenization as a significant issue within the realm of short videos. Behind each creator stands an MCN (Multi-Channel Network) company driven by profit motives. When a piece of content gains favor among users, the primary objective of MCN is to attract more audiences by producing more content that closely imitates the successful original.[8] This imitation gradually renders the content of plot-based short videos increasingly similar.

Simultaneously, this imitation phenomenon somewhat lowers the barrier for public creation, contributing to the prevalence of low-quality short videos. Unlike traditional film and television productions, many short video production teams often operate with limited funds and lack access to professional shooting equipment or expertise. Consequently, there are inherent deficiencies in both the preparatory stages and the utilization of editing and visual effects technologies. Additionally, this trend is influenced by the nature of online novel creation, which prioritizes storytelling over artistic presentation. It is also a trait shared by plot-based short videos.

Entertainment-oriented themes are also a significant issue shared by both short videos and online novels. For instance, certain plot-based short videos inadvertently perpetuate unhealthy perceptions of love derived from online novels, thereby reinforcing and disseminating the "feminized male ideal" within the videos.[9] Additionally, some storylines or content plots may stray from reality, often influenced by the "symbolic characters" prevalent in online novel creation. In recent years, the widely criticized problem of "misrepresentation of material conditions inconsistent with the character's background" has also surfaced in certain plot-based short videos.

4.2. Future Development of Online Novel Creation

In the absorption and reference of online novel creation, creators should emphasize retaining their unique characteristics while continuously innovating. They should also utilize various types, symbols and labels flexibly. Firstly, on the content front, creators should leverage the platform's advantages, enhance team collaboration for professional content production, innovate within their own style, and prioritize quality. It's important to avoid over-reliance on a single creator. Secondly, concerning the audience, creators should focus on understanding and meeting the audience's psychological needs. They should ensure alignment between the content of plot-based short videos and the audience's preferences, while enhancing audience engagement and appeal while maintaining quality. Thirdly, on the technical aspect, creators should integrate their unique characteristics with the benefits of internet platforms and new technological tools. They should explore new perspectives and methods of expression suitable for their content.

It's crucial to synergize efforts across these three aspects simultaneously. A prevalent strategy involves integrating traditional content that resonates with audiences with modern technology. This can include reimagining or combining works with traditional themes, collaborating with popular IPs (commonly found in online novels and games), and creating new themes infused with a sense of modern connectivity.

For instance, the TikTok account "Zhu Tiexiong" employs advanced visual effects technology to blend traditional Chinese cultural values such as loyalty, filial piety, propriety, and righteousness with elements from traditional art forms like Beijing Opera and Sichuan Opera. By intertwining these with original plotlines set in real-world contexts, classic historical or artistic characters like the Monkey King, Erlang God and Zhao Zilong are brought to life in a contemporary setting.[10] Similarly, "Liu Yexi", one of the few virtual human accounts, embodies a strong sense of technological connectivity inherent in its character design. Its storyline incorporates elements from online fantasy novels such as ghosts, demons and aliens, while also tapping into popular concepts like the brain-computer

interface of the metaverse and parallel universes.[11] This fusion of diverse elements imbues the content with rich layers of meaning related to the internet.

5. Conclusion

It's important to note that the advancement of plot-based short videos is not solely attributed to online novels creation, but also to the significant influence of traditional films and television dramas. Online novel creation, as a phenomenon within the realm of plot-based short video creation, has emerged as a creative trend in the development of online culture and short videos. Exploring this creative phenomenon involves tracing the origins of patterns and elements in plot-based short videos and analyzing their specific manifestations. Additionally, it prompts deeper reflection on certain issues within online short videos. This creative approach stems from the younger generation, who have grown up in the internet era and have been subtly influenced by past online novels, leading them to engage in the creation of online short videos. The online novels creation not only facilitates creators but also meets the needs of ordinary users, thereby promoting the development of the short video.

However, while this creation approach brings benefits, it also faces challenges such as similar content, entertainment-oriented themes and low quality. These issues not only reflect the problems within the development process of the short video but also provide valuable insights for its healthy development. Creators must reflect on this phenomenon and refine their works by subtracting unnecessary elements from online novels. Moderation should be exercised when borrowing from online novels. In the future, creators of plot-based short videos should strive to enhance their literacy to improve the quality of their works. Platforms and regulatory bodies should strengthen supervision to gradually achieve high-quality development of short videos and online culture.

Acknowledgements

Appreciate to 2023 Communication University of Zhejiang College Student Innovation Fund (Project Number: 2023003) for the support of this paper.

References

- [1] Zhang, Y. L. (2022). *Typological Criticism of Constructing Online Novels*. *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (06), 107-114.
- [2] Fang, L. (2022). *Content Analysis of "Tiktok" Short Videos*. *Journalism & Media Studies* (12), 92-94.
- [3] Xiang, C. L. (2020). *The Current Situation, Shortcomings and Improvement Strategies of plot-based short videos*. *New Media Research* (06), 83-85.
- [4] You, D. (2022). *Storytelling of Short Videos and Miniaturization of Online Dramas: Reflection and Exploration on the Development of High Quality Online Short Dramas*. *China Television* (03), 75-82.
- [5] Zhong, J. W. (2020). *The "Golden Three Seconds" of Short Videos: How to Create Eye-catching Short Videos*. *Satellite TV & IP Multimedia* (05), 107-108.
- [6] Qian, J. (2022). *Rethinking on the Concept of Film and Television Genre from Multiple Theoretical Approaches*. *Journal of Chongqing University of Arts and Sciences(Social Sciences Edition)*(05), 39-47.
- [7] Tang, X. L., Liu X. (2022). *Research on the Spread of Plot-Based Short Video on Tiktok Platform from the Perspective of Landscape*. *Radio & TV Journal*(03), 135-137.
- [8] Li, C. Z. (2021). *The Development Status and Trend of Tiktok Plot-Based Short Video*. *Journal of News Research*(06), 93-94.
- [9] Peng, A. Y. (2021). *Neoliberal Feminism, Gender Relations, and a Feminized Male Ideal in China: a Critical Discourse Analysis of Mimeng's WeChat Posts*. *Feminist Media Studies*, 21(1), 115-131.
- [10] Diao, M. K., Xu, Y. Y. (2022). *Youth New Role Model | Chinese Style Expert Zhu Tiexiong: Filming Scene Dramas to Promote Traditional Chinese Drama Characters, 17 Videos Received Millions of Fans*. Retrieved from <https://new.qq.com/rain/a/20220615A0594P00>.
- [11] Gou, C. (2021). *Dialogue with "Liu Yexi" Creation Team Behind the Scenes: Pursuing the Philosophy and Humanity of "Metaverse" between Virtual and Reality*. Retrieved from <https://new.qq.com/rain/a/20211217A0BTGA00>.