

The Marketing Strategies of Films on Douyin

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Abstract: Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, the film and television industry has continued to slump, with numerous theaters and film companies closing down. Instead, short videos have gained a large audience by integrating many online resources. At present, most of the academic discussion focuses on the concept, characteristics, and prospects of short video communication. However, research on the mode "short video + film publicity and distribution" is still relatively scarce. Compared to the previous roadshows, this new promotion mode combines cinema and short video platforms. Under the background of the transformation, this paper analyzes the marketing strategies of films on Douyin and the reasons for their success. The research methods used in this paper include case analysis and comparative analysis. It is found that Douyin's short videos have maximized the promotional effects of Chinese films in four aspects: emotional value, music market, celebrity effect, and trending topic effect, and the traffic matrix formed by the celebrity effect chain generates the most profit.

Keywords: short video, film marketing, communication strategy, film publicity and release, new media

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The growing popularity of short video platforms such as Douyin and Kuaishou has brought new vitality to the media industry and new possibilities and thoughts to the mode of film promotion. How to make potential film consumers choose to enter the cinemas under the stimulation of short videos of just a few minutes or even seconds? How to form a strong identification with the values and emotions conveyed by the films? These are increasingly important questions for film promoters to consider. In addition, using the effectiveness of Douyin to edit a large number of interesting videos, expose bloopers, and produce film music videos, has increasingly become a new modern means of publicity and has brought immeasurable benefits to film promotion.

Furthermore, the huge and intelligent database of Jitterbit has been able to recommend films to

users effectively and precisely [1]. The increasingly close relationship between the two allows short video content to reach audiences accurately, shortening the user decision chain and introducing flow to the box office. Moreover, the Internet platform is accurately based on big data statistics, and the data illustrate the effect of promotion, so that the intuitive presentation and tracking provide more basis for the future decision of the promoters. The importance of Douyin is obvious for modern film promotion, so the overall idea and strategy of its promotion need to be analyzed and illustrated based on specific cases.

1.2. Literature Review

Based on the technological and commercial opportunities in the 5G era, Chinese research shows that new media such as short videos have impacted the marketing model of traditional media to a certain extent [1]. By analyzing the characteristics of multi-directional interaction, diversity of ways, and real-time communication of films in short video platform marketing, current research has noticed that short video platforms bring more opportunities for film marketing [2]. In the face of difficulties like content homogeneity, scholars also put forward improvement suggestions such as helping film short video marketing to empower each other [3].

Based on Panel Vector Auto-regression Measurement model, some researchers pointed out that Internet has a positive correlation with the future sales of original films and sequels [4]. The American film industry started earlier and formed a complete system. Hollywood films effectively use big data and focus marketing. Don E. Schultz's book called *Integrated Marketing Communication* analyzes the definition, characteristics, methods, and levels of marketing communication. Marsha Orgeron, who wrote *Hollywood Ambition: Films of the Era of Celebrity* points out that Europe and America have a relatively scientific research system of marketing [5]. In conclusion, previous studies mostly used communication theory to combine communication, psychology, and relevant marketing studies [6]. However, there is little research on the new media marketing of Chinese films, which is the topic discussed in this paper.

1.3. Research Method

This paper is based on the survey of the *48th Statistical Report of China Internet Network Information Center* for reference [1]. Methodologically, it applies case studies, focusing on Douyin, Douban, and Weibo. Through the interpretation of specific cases, it explains the roles of short videos in the process of film publicity and distribution and proposes improvement methods.

2. Film Marketing Strategies

2.1. Emotional Value

As a product of the combination of art and commerce, the selling point of a film is not only its entertainment value but also the emotional value and core conveyed by the whole film through the story narrative, thus triggering the emotional resonance of the audience and guiding more consumers into the theater. Therefore, since the emergence of short videos, more and more film distributors have been using short videos to expand their promotional effects, while still having a strong film identity.

For example, the promotional video of the film *Hi, Mom* showed the director, Jia Ling's emotional outburst on Douyin. When she was filming the separation from her mother, she cried so much that it was difficult to continue filming [7]. In addition, there are many short videos about celebrities crying during the advance screening, and they were successively shown on Douyin, which attracted a lot of attention. It is obvious that Douyin relies on the "short" feature of short

videos to quickly attract consumers' attention through one or two details about the film, and it is difficult for consumers not to be moved by the touching mother-daughter relationship and choose to buy film tickets to enter the cinema.

2.2. Music Marketing

Douyin has an inherent advantage over other platforms in terms of its effectiveness in promoting the background music of films [8]. The climax of a certain song often becomes the hot song on Douyin in a certain period of time. The promotion song and theme song of a film can be promoted by this point, and the publicity of the song through Douyin can be used to promote the film itself, which has even become an important factor and a necessary link for many films to “break circle”. For example, the promotional music of the film *My Country, My Parents* called *As I Wish* sung by Faye Wong, has generated a lot of cover songs on Douyin, and it is this situation that made *My Country, My Parents* accumulate enough attention and anticipation before it was released. The lyrics of the song also express the deep and great love of fathers for their children, which gives consumers a certain grasp of the overall tone of the film in a short time, thus arousing their desire to consume. At the same time, the film's official account and the singer's personal account also released a combination of audio and songs related to the film, which efficiently helped the audience understand the core of the film's story and thus achieve emotional resonance.

2.3. Celebrity Effect

First of all, celebrities are the key to attracting online traffic by triggering discussion. The traditional way of film promotion is the roadshow activities of celebrities [9]. Although the main actors participate in this show, only those who are in the cinema have opportunities to interact with them. The live-streaming interaction on Douyin has undoubtedly broken this barrier, with online live chatting and sharing of interesting stories about the cast and crew, etc. These ways of creating topics and attracting flow are undoubtedly the unique advantages of the short video platforms, and the exposure of the film has been significantly enhanced. Some of the protagonists and actors will also release some interesting videos about the film during the period when the film is not yet released or hot, thus triggering people to follow. The public has increasingly become an indispensable part of film promotion.

For example, the promotion and distribution mode of *The White Storm 2 Drug Lords* on Douyin is a technology-oriented short video co-produced by Louis Koo, Andy Lau, and the director of the film, Qiu Litao. In this video, body movements are used to summon something, and the shooting sound is used as a counterpart to the background music beats. This video became popular and achieved up to 2.5 million likes. Similarly, during the release of the film *The Bravest*, the video titled *I'll Be When I Grow up* received 8,687,000 likes and nearly 100,000 comments. Short videos have effectively promoted many films due to their powerful communication effectiveness. Douyin has gathered many users with different interests, with a lot of followers. For example, beauty enthusiasts will release videos about corresponding film characters' imitation makeup, which promotes the films. There are also videos introducing shooting locations and giving cooking tutorials on the food which appears in films. Films and short videos cooperate together to gain traffic and further transform it into profit.

2.4. Trending Topic Effect

The film *A Story Sadder than Sadness* received a lot of praise from the audience, and its main focus was to attract Douyin users with its sensational narrative [10]. It became one of the hottest topics on Douyin, with 10.98 million views. There is no doubt that behind such popularity comes a huge

consumer base and box office economy. Douyin's intelligent and accurate pushing system informs every possible interested user.

At the same time, this also reflects another aspect of the problem. In the new media marketing of films, social media, mainly Weibo and WeChat, are the main focus. Opinion leaders play an important role in shaping public opinion [11]. "Water army" refers to a group of hired web writers who post specific content on the Internet. They are usually active on websites, forums, microblogs, and other social networking platforms. By pretending to be ordinary netizens or consumers, they can influence normal users by publishing, replying to, and spreading blog posts. Therefore, in new media marketing, "water army" is often used to create false reviews to influence more people. As a result, some producers will hire professional filmmakers to review a film on Douban, grading a film from 5 to 7 points. Some people will pay others to post positive film reviews on Weibo. Furthermore, some even give negative reviews to the films released in the same period, which deeply disturbs the fairness of the film market.

3. Analysis of Film Short Video Promotion

3.1. Basic Background Data

Christopher Lovelock's "services marketing" theory points out that service products, including films, make consumers buy them because they are invisible, and their quality is difficult to predict [2]. Therefore, the essence of their marketing should be information communication rather than pure sales promotion. Film marketing is the key of the film publicity industry chain, and the communication of product value of the film is also the focus of the whole marketing work, so the formulation of communication strategy is the top priority. Publicity and distribution teams rearrange the marketing content of films in a more creative and fragmented way to achieve groundbreaking communication effects and box office revenue [12]. The epidemic caused a sharp decrease in the number of offline activities. Douyin is currently the most competitive short video platform in China, and multiple factors have made it a mainstream position for film marketing [13].

Above all, its user base is large, and the user's stickiness is strong. With more than 400 million daily active users, Douyin has a far higher market share than any other applications and is second only to social media giants WeChat and QQ in terms of user engagement. Second, Douyin's audience highly coincides with that of the film audience [14]. According to the 2021 Douyin *User Profile Report*, its users are between 19 and 30 years old, and Maoyan app 2021 *China Film Market Data Insight List* shows that about 80% of Chinese film audiences are under 25 years old, and the young group is the intersection of Douyin and cinemas [15]. Moreover, Douyin has built a perfect film and television content ecology and attached importance to building a fine matrix system of film and television marketing.

In the era of mobile Internet technology and intelligent media, McLuhan's theory that *media is the extension of human beings* has been comprehensively expanded. The public is used to accessing all kinds of content resources without leaving their homes, making use of fragmented time for social entertainment and fundamentally changing the way of information dissemination [16]. Due to their rich visual content expression, short videos and films have a natural connection. Compared with the traditional media and mass offline roadshows, short videos have superiority, and the algorithm of big data made them reach multiple layers of audiences accurately. However, audiences' attention is a scarce resource, when a large number of films participate in the competition for eyeballs. It is easy for them to get lost in the center of the traffic pool and fail to leave an impression on a certain film. Therefore, the information organization of film marketing must be concise and, thematic and accurately grasp the rhythm of communication.

3.2. The Effect of the Celebrity Chain

Based on strategy analysis of film marketing on Douyin, most of the film marketing is to stimulate audiences' emotions and create opinion leaders [17]. It invites big stars and related influencers to stimulate people to emulate their behavior. It has a more effective and immediate effect. It has a subtle influence on the audience's psychology, which mainly includes spreading through opportunity, spreading through events, and creating topics. Taking advantage of the opportunity to spread is one of the most common ways, and using the mouth of the star to release related information about the film during the publicity period will bring great exposure. In 2019, the marketing of the film *Silent Witness* used Zhang Jiahui's mandarin Chinese which has been a meme, "Zhazhahui", on the Internet, as a way of communication. It "entrained" the audience to achieve the purpose of film promotion. The film *Detective Chinatown 3* during the Spring Festival of 2021 launched a theater called "Tang Explores New Theatre" in which the main characters Chen Sicheng, Wang Baoqiang, and Liu Haoran performed with online celebrities. In this way, the plot clues were widely discussed and the audiences experienced detective roles. Relevant videos centered on film exceeded 7.5 billion views and became a hot topic more than 60 times. Eleven short videos have been viewed more than 140 million times. Due to the high recognition of the audience, the stars can attract media traffic, and it also reduces the difficulty of communication between the film and the audience, which is of great significance to film publicity.

Cooperative communication means that the publicity teams achieve the purpose of promoting the film by cooperating with other individuals and institutions [18]. The main forms include platform cooperation, traffic transmission, music cooperation and communication, and opinion leader communication. Douyin uses the algorithm to push the stream to realize the connection between films and audiences. If the content of a short video is not high quality and the number of likes is not high, it is easy to lose the audience. It is common in the industry to make short videos popular by buying traffic. "Dou+" is a marketing tool launched by Douyin. By purchasing this service, videos will appear in the recommendation stream on Douyin's homepage [19]. The amount of traffic depends on the amount of money, so the scale of film marketing through short videos usually depends on the amount of propaganda budget.

Typical examples of music-cooperative communication include the episodes *Decency* and *Say Goodbye* from the film *The Ex-File*, and *The Return of the Exes* and *Calorie* from *Hello, Mr. Billionaire*. Popular songs spread widely like viral, strengthening film communication effect on Douyin [20]. The cooperative communication between film and key opinion leader (KOL) is not outstanding in short video marketing, mainly in the aspect of selling film tickets through live streaming [21]. In addition, in 2021, Douyin cooperated with the account *Poison Tongue Film* to produce an introduction film and cooperated with Maoyan app to provide propaganda data monitoring, which also indirectly promoted the film marketing business.

4. Conclusion

As the most competitive short-video platform in China, Douyin has achieved the maximum effect of film promotion through a series of effective strategies. First, the emotional value and core of films can be easily conveyed to people through short videos to attract more viewers. Second, circulating film music can greatly increase the publicity of films. Moreover, interacting with social media events and involving celebrities and opinion leaders on short video platforms can also greatly promote the films. The limitation of this paper is that it only used case studies and comparative analysis, lacking certain survey data support. Further research can be conducted by using interviews and questionnaires. This study provides specific analysis for subsequent studies on the success of film distribution in short videos.

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