
AI translation · View original & related papers at
chinaxiv.org/items/chinaxiv-202307.00241

An Analysis of Short Drama Video Narration (Postprint)

Authors: LI Yingyue

Date: 2023-07-23T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

With the advent of the post-epidemic era, traditional cinemas and theater venues are seeing a resurgence while also facing the impact and competition from the incoming short video industry. In the contemporary fast-paced social rhythm, short videos with large conflicts, many reversals and dense plot information have attracted a large number of audiences. This study aims to make use of content analysis method to compare the popular film *The Wandering Earth 2* in early 2023 with popular short video works, and explore how short video plots are constructed by using reversal and conflict to attract audiences.

Full Text

Preamble

Narrative Analysis of Short Drama Videos

Li Yingyue

School of Management, Communication University of China, China

Corresponding Author E-mail: 1416689392@qq.com

Abstract: In the post-pandemic era, traditional cinemas and theater venues are experiencing a resurgence while simultaneously facing intense impact and competition from the burgeoning short video industry. Within contemporary society's fast-paced rhythm, short videos characterized by intense conflicts, numerous plot twists, and densely packed narrative information have attracted vast audiences. This study employs content analysis to compare the popular 2023 film *The Wandering Earth 2* with trending short video works, exploring how short video plots utilize reversal and conflict to construct stories and captivate audiences.

Keywords: post-pandemic era, content analysis, Douyin short video, plot

1 Introduction

In early 2023, following the conclusion of the COVID-19 pandemic, theaters and performance venues that had suffered severe losses began gradual recovery. However, reduced consumer spending has intensified competitive pressures within the entertainment industry. Against this pandemic backdrop, audience attention has progressively shifted from theaters to mobile devices. Many viewers have turned their focus toward short drama videos, catalyzing explosive growth in this sector. We observe that, unlike traditional cinematic narrative rhythms, short drama videos exhibit extremely rapid pacing, with plot conflicts and reversals so compelling that audiences become completely absorbed, often losing track of time. This phenomenon raises the research question: How are short video plots constructed to effectively utilize reversal and conflict to attract audiences?

2.1 Literature Review of Short Videos

The short video explosion has prompted extensive academic research from multiple perspectives. Australian scholar Su Chunmei, in “Contingency, Uncertainty and Short Video Creativity: An Analysis of China’s Screen Industry Based on Platformization,” examines serendipity, precarity, and short video creativity within China’s online screen industry, noting that Chinese creators have migrated from traditional streaming services to new creative forms of short video and live streaming. In “Assessing the Accuracy, User Engagement, and Subject Matter of Eating Disorder Content in Social Media Short Videos,” Columbia scholar Valer Mohammadi argues that social media functions as a community both for users promoting eating disorders as a lifestyle and those advocating recovery, analyzing content themes, information accuracy, user engagement, and interrelationships among these factors in a sample of eating disorder videos from a short video platform.

Domestic scholars Zhao Yuehua and Sheng Yuxin, in “Differences in User Interaction Behaviors of Short Video Platforms,” analyze variations in user interaction behaviors across platforms, noting that these differences reflect distinct needs and values among various social strata, and that platforms cultivate and reinforce their characteristics through constructed tone and positioning. Scholar Xin Aofeng, in “Analysis of Risks and Development Strategies for Sports Short Videos in the Context of Media Convergence—A Case Study of CBA League-Related Content on Douyin,” conducts a case study of sports short videos centered on China’s CBA League, discussing opportunities, challenges, and future development pathways presented by short-form sports video features within media convergence, aiming to inform new media reporting practices in sports communication. Scholar Tang Chenxin, in “Analysis of Content Production Characteristics and Narrative Logic of Short Video News,” examines the narrative logic and production features of short video news, noting that such content employs concise logic and popular narration to enhance communication efficiency. Scholar Fan Feiyan, in “Research on the Dissemination of Short Intangible Cul-

tural Heritage Videos Based on Narration of Life Scenes,” demonstrates that these videos utilize narrative spaces drawn from traditional life scenes, adopt diversified perspectives dominated by external narration with internal narration as supplement, and employ a “fast yet slow” narrative rhythm to strengthen identification with traditional culture.

However, despite these studies examining short video platforms, narrative methods, and perspectives, no comprehensive narrative analysis specifically targeting short drama videos has yet been conducted.

2.2 Literature Review of Narrative Analysis

Since Todorov introduced narrative analysis theory in 1969, scholars worldwide have devoted considerable attention to it, yielding substantial research 成果. German scholar Santos, in “The Construction of Peace Building Narratives in Media Talk—Methodological Discussion,” analyzes methodological approaches by examining peacebuilding narrative structures in media discourse, offering detailed discussion of analytical frameworks for media narratives. In “Stories Side-by-Side: A Comparative Narrative Analysis of Stories About End-of-Life Care,” Canadian scholar Melo conducts a comparative narrative analysis of Tracy Moniz’s end-of-life care stories to inform health professional education, communication, and compassionate, personalized, participatory practice.

Chinese scholar Li Hezhen, in “Real Acting and Internal Reference Stitching—A Meta-film Narrative Analysis of *As Good as You Can Be*,” identifies internal reference and ontological consciousness within narrative structure, exploring reflexive meaning in narrative themes. Scholars Zhang Yize and Wu Xuan, in “Video Expression and Narrative Analysis of Sportsmanship—A Case Study of the Winter Olympics Documentary *Flying Over the Ice and Snow Line*,” analyze sportsmanship through narrative montage, interspersed interviews, and background music. In “The Aesthetics and Narrative Analysis of the Japanese Drama *Quartet*,” Gong Xiangda examines the drama’s aesthetics and narrative, analyzing its dramatic narrative strategy and suspense performance from narrative perspective, noting that *Quartet*’s use of multiple narrative perspective shifts, dramatic suspense, characterization through extended dialogue, and fractured thematic logic presentation holds high value for narrative strategy. Scholar Zhai Zhijiang, in “A Cloud Made of Rain in the Wind from the Perspective of Film Narratology,” analyzes this suspense crime film with realistic themes through narrative structure, perspective, and grammar, arguing that it reveals the drama’s social environment, deciphers story logic, focuses on characters’ inner emotional worlds, and explores human complexity.

2.3 Research Gap

In summary, existing studies have not conducted narrative perspective analysis specifically examining conflict and reversal in short drama videos. Therefore,

this paper employs content analysis and interview methods to analyze how short video plots utilize reversal and conflict to construct stories and attract audiences.

3.1.1 Hypothesis Development

Based on the identified research gap, this study proposes the following hypothesis: The greater the amount of information per unit time in a short video, the higher the degree of audience attention.

To test this hypothesis, this study adopts content analysis. First, we selected a representative sample from this media category, choosing the Douyin platform for its global influence. Douyin/TikTok downloads from Apple and Google's official app stores alone exceeded 2 billion in April 2022, with scholars estimating that nearly half of global internet users have downloaded the platform, ranking it among the world's top 10 most-downloaded applications and establishing its strong representativeness.

Second, we employed random sampling to analyze Douyin content released in early 2023 as the pandemic essentially concluded. Considering weekly temporal cycles, this study utilized constructed week sampling to better reflect overall patterns, selecting January 2023 content as the population and forming a constructed week with a six-day cycle to ensure balanced sampling distribution. This approach allows systematic summarization of reversal and conflict in Douyin short videos and their audience attraction capacity.

Third, following the principle of popularity-based representative sampling across different media, we selected creator Dong Yuxin's work released on January 6, 2023 (receiving 288,000 likes, duration: 1 minute 43 seconds) as the target video. For comparison, we examined Spring Festival films and selected *The Wandering Earth 2* based on box office rankings. According to the target video length, we selected the most-searched clip on video platforms (from 2:11:02 to 2:12:40) as the comparative object and developed a coding table.

3.1.3 Coding Table

Table 1 Coding Table: Number of Scenes, Number of Scene Shots, Number of Scene Lines, Number of Characters, Number of Plot Character Conflicts in Scenes, Twists in Scenes, Comparison Target Video

4.1 Information Density and Audience Attention

The fast-paced, multi-scene narration of short videos more effectively stimulates audience visual and psychological engagement. Our analysis reveals that *The Wandering Earth 2* averages 53.33 scene characters per segment, while Douyin short videos average only 2.40. The average number of scene shots in *The Wandering Earth 2* is 4.67, compared to 6.40 for Douyin videos. *The Wandering Earth 2* averages 3.89 scene lines versus 5.90 for Douyin videos. Scene character

conflicts average 0.56 in *The Wandering Earth 2* compared to 1.30 in Douyin videos, while plot reversals average 0.11 versus 1.30 respectively.

According to our coding criteria, *The Wandering Earth 2*'s significantly higher average number of scene characters indicates that short videos predominantly utilize small-scale scenes focusing on relationships and conflicts among main characters. The film's substantially lower average scene shot count demonstrates that short videos prefer fast-paced, multi-scene narration during creation, which better stimulates audience visual and psychological responses, satisfies viewers' demand for pleasure within brief timeframes, and better accommodates contemporary lifestyles and habits. Douyin short videos' higher number of scene lines indicates dense dialogue and high information content, aligning with short videos' rapid pace. Short videos' significantly greater scene character conflicts and plot reversals reveal large plot fluctuations, numerous twists, and dense information that readily produces "surprising yet plausible" effects. In summary, compared with traditional films, Douyin short videos feature dense, substantial information content that satisfies current audience aesthetic needs and addresses psychological demands in the era of fragmented reading.

Therefore, the greater the information volume per unit time in short videos, the higher the audience attention they command.

4.2 Plot Conflicts and User Attention

Film and television plot conflicts can be broadly categorized into two types: contradictions between parties with shared goals versus inconsistent goals, and conflicts between individuals or within individuals themselves. This analysis uses the target video—creator Dong Yuxin's work released on January 6, 2023, with 288,000 likes—as a case study.

The 1-minute-43-second work tells the story of Dong Yuxin, a general nurse who finally cannot endure head nurse Li Guixiang's oppression, speaks harsh words, and bravely quits. Through continuous effort, she becomes hospital director, completing a status reversal with Li Guixiang—only to discover it was merely a dream. In the first 10 seconds, Dong Yuxin directly confronts Li Guixiang, with the junior nurse criticizing her "superior" and threatening "wait and see." In terms of conflict configuration, Dong Yuxin and Li Guixiang belong to the same identity group with shared goals (hospital promotion), but the two parties are unevenly matched, with the "villain"—head nurse Li Guixiang—clearly dominant, naturally arousing audience interest and curiosity about how the "weaker" Dong Yuxin will pursue her goal.

Between 11-27 seconds, the video depicts colleagues' reactions as Dong Yuxin prepares to leave, contrasting male colleagues' friendliness with female colleagues' acrimony to reflect Dong Yuxin's harsh, unpleasant work environment and create inter-character conflict. From 27-36 seconds, conflict is emphasized again through her father's incomprehension and refusal to accept her resignation. From 36-46 seconds, the creator uses rapid montage to quickly convey

Dong Yuxin's struggle and successful transformation: just ten seconds of footage narrates her ten-year journey, simply and clearly showing her "goal completion" process, satisfying audience needs for spiritual fulfillment and pressure release within fast-paced, high-pressure social life.

From 47 seconds to 1 minute 30 seconds, Dong Yuxin completes her counterattack: she successfully becomes hospital director and lives magnificently. With an attitude of "the magnanimous don't remember villains' wrongs," Dong Yuxin completes her "revenge" against domineering Li Guixiang with high profile. This segment pushes interpersonal conflict to its peak; the two hostile forces engage in a smokeless war due to their transformed status. Dong Yuxin visits Li Guixiang with a caring subordinate's tone—seemingly friendly but actually conducting a silent counterattack—while Li Guixiang's emotions shift from initial shock to panic to finally being moved to tears by Dong Yuxin's "understanding," a series of changes that viewers find deeply satisfying.

From 1:30-1:39, nurse Dong Yuxin, who accidentally fell asleep at her desk, is awakened by head nurse Li Guixiang, followed by humiliation and scolding. Dong Yuxin silently thinks, "Li Guixiang, you remember this—wait for the day Dong Yuxin succeeds," just as she fought back in her dream. Dong Yuxin's generous inner monologue is interrupted by Li Guixiang's sudden words, ending the drama. The final nine seconds complete three reversals while fully displaying Dong Yuxin's internal conflict between longing for turnaround and tolerating anger in reality.

This work's creator, Ren Zhida, is a medical worker with 2.54 million Douyin followers and 55.078 million likes. His work focuses on young nurse Dong Yuxin's hospital experiences and personal transformation. In this target video, the creator draws from real-life experiences, selecting deeds visible and perceptible to audiences in daily life—sometimes even personally experienced—which generates strong immersion and empathy, effectively attracting viewers.

Second, the work depicts young nurse Dong Yuxin's transformation and counterattack, constituting a "cool drama" that provides spiritual satisfaction and encouragement to numerous newcomers who have experienced workplace injustice, catering to contemporary youth needs. Simultaneously, the work features intensive reversals and conflicts, clever and relaxed plot design, and length that follows social life rhythms, thereby earning widespread fan appreciation.

5 Summary and Reflection

Through content analysis, this study examined how Douyin short videos utilize reversal and conflict to construct stories and attract audiences in the post-pandemic era. The findings demonstrate that denser, more informative content—including dialogue, characters, scenes, shots, conflicts, and contradictions—correlates with higher audience attraction. This research highlights the importance of unit information density in short videos and reflects the short video industry's development trends in the post-COVID-19 era, while

providing direction for short video creator development and innovation in modern China's post-pandemic context.

However, this study also reveals the short video industry's heterogeneous nature and uneven work quality, which may lead to blind traffic pursuit, audience catering, and guidance that produces excessive entertainment's negative societal effects—issues warranting vigilance and reflection. As this study focused only on short videos and films during the first two months following the pandemic's conclusion, limitations exist regarding data diversity and universality. Future short video research should pay greater attention to plot and information content in popular works, expanding both theoretical investigation and practical application.

References

- [1] Li Hezhen. (2023). Real Acting and Internal Reference Stitching—An Analysis of Meta-film Narration in “Good Fortune”. *Cultural Industry* (07), 46-48. (in Chinese)
- [2] Fan Feiyan. (2023). Research on Dissemination of Short Videos of Cultural Heritage Based on Narration of Life Scenes. *Communication and Copyright* (04), 45-48. doi:10.16852/j.cnki.45-1390/g2.2023.04.005. (in Chinese)
- [3] Zhang Yize & Wu Xuan. (2023). The Spirit of the Image Expression and Narrative Analysis—Taking the Documentary “Flying Over the Ice and Snow Line” as an Example. *Northern Media Research* (01), 66-69. doi:10.19544/j.cnki.bmyj.2023.0006. (in Chinese)
- [4] Zhai Zhijiang. (2023). *A Cloud Made of Rain in the Wind* from the Perspective of Film Narratology. *Drama Home* (06), 149-151. (in Chinese)
- [5] Gong Xiangda. (2023). The Aesthetics and Narrative Analysis of the Japanese Drama “Quartet”. *Media Forum* (02), 80-82. (in Chinese)
- [6] Zhang Yize & Wu Xuan. (2023). The Spirit of the Image Expression and Narrative Analysis—Taking the Documentary “Flying Over the Ice and Snow Line” as an Example. *Northern Media Research* (01), 66-69. doi:10.19544/j.cnki.bmyj.2023.0006. (in Chinese)
- [7] Zhai Zhijiang. (2023). *A Cloud Made of Rain in the Wind* from the Perspective of Film Narratology. *Drama Home* (06), 149-151. (in Chinese)
- [8] Su Chunmeizi. (2023). Contingency, Precarity and Short-Video Creativity: Platformization Based Analysis of Chinese Online Screen Industry. *Television & New Media* (2). doi:10.1177/15274764221087994.
- [9] Melro Carolyn & Watling Chris. (2023). O.O.4.1—Stories Side-by-Side: A Comparative Narrative Analysis of Stories About End-of-Life Care: Presenter(s): Tracy Moniz, Mount Saint Vincent University, Canada. *Patient Education and Counseling* (S). doi:10.1016/J.PEC.2022.10.244.

[10] Lookingbill Valerie, Mohammadi Ehsan & Cai Yizhou. (2023). Assessment of Accuracy, User Engagement, and Themes of Eating Disorder Content in Social Media Short Videos. *JAMA Network Open* (4). doi:10.1001/JAMANETWORKOPEN.2023.8897.

[11] Xin'ao Feng. (2022). Analysis of the Risks and Development Strategies of Short Sports Videos in the Context of Fusion Media—Taking CBA League-Related Sports Short Videos as an Example. *Journal of Social Science and Humanities* (9). doi:10.53469/JSSH.2022.4(09).19.

[12] Santos Fabíola Ortiz dos. (2023). The Construction of Peacebuilding Narratives in ‘Media Talk’—A Methodological Discussion. *Journalism and Media* (1). doi:10.3390/JOURNALMEDIA4010023.

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

Source: ChinaXiv — Machine translation. Verify with original.