

## Research on the Consumption and Development of Film Spin-offs under the Fan Economy——Take Postprint

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### Abstract

Based on fan economy and transmedia storytelling theory, this paper takes “The Wandering Earth 2” as its research object and employs questionnaire surveys to examine the problems and insights in the current consumption and development process of film spin-offs. The survey finds that fans’ recognition and affection for spin-offs influence their purchase intention, while the fidelity and value proximity of movie spin-offs affect fans’ recognition and affection. Simultaneously, the study identifies various problems in the transformation process from film content to spin-offs, yielding the following insights: film content spin-offs should convey the core values of the original film, faithfully restore its imagery, be developed prior to the film’s planning stage, maximize promotional efforts to ensure unobstructed information and sales channels, and prioritize emotional connections with fans.

### Full Text

#### Preamble

#### Research on the Consumption and Development of Film Spin-offs under the Fan Economy—A Case Study of “The Wandering Earth 2”

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**Abstract:** Based on fan economy and transmedia storytelling theory, this paper examines “The Wandering Earth 2” as a case study, employing questionnaire surveys to investigate current issues and insights in the consumption and development of film spin-offs. The survey reveals that fans’ recognition and affection for spin-offs significantly influence their purchase intentions, while the degree

of restoration and value proximity of these spin-offs affect fans' recognition and love. Simultaneously, the study identifies multiple problems in the transformation from film content to spin-offs, yielding several key insights: film spin-offs should convey core cinematic values, faithfully restore film imagery, be developed during the film's planning stage, maximize publicity to ensure smooth information and sales channels, and prioritize emotional connection with fans.

**Keywords:** movie spin-offs, fan economy, transmedia storytelling, The Wandering Earth 2, industry chain

## 1 Introduction

The development of film spin-offs represents the integration of the film industry with tangible manufacturing, with transmedia storytelling serving as a crucial strategy for extending the industrial chain and enhancing value creation. During the 2023 Spring Festival film season, "The Wandering Earth 2" surpassed 4 billion yuan in box office revenue while simultaneously driving robust sales of movie spin-offs, including models of the mechanical dog Benben, artificial intelligence MOSS, doorframe robots, XCMG excavators, digital life USB drives, and other characters and items featured in the film.

According to data released by SCIFI Space, the official licensee of "The Wandering Earth 2," the crowdfunding campaign for this product series reached 117 million yuan within one month, with 510,000 participants, setting a new record for film and television content spin-off crowdfunding in China. However, on March 14, SCIFI Space released sample photos of the digital life USB drive that sparked controversy among fans. After comparing the materials and specifications of the released samples with those announced during the crowdfunding campaign, netizens accused the producers of "cutting corners" and demanded an official refund channel.

### 2.1 A Review of Research on Film Spin-offs

In the highly developed American film industry, spin-offs have become a major revenue source for film companies. American scholars Lubbers and Adams argue that as film production and marketing costs escalate, studios increasingly turn to spin-offs and promotional activities. Jason concurs that film spin-offs can serve as a creative and compelling form of risk mitigation. Regarding marketing, scholars Sangkil and Reo contend that the success of American film spin-offs depends on film characteristics and the market economic environment, suggesting that sales and revenue success can only be achieved when national culture aligns with the content of imported cultural products.

China's film spin-off industry remains in an exploratory stage, with domestic scholarship focusing primarily on spin-off value, development, and marketing. In "From Symbol to Simulation: An Exploration of the Value of Chinese Mythological Animation Film Spin-offs," Si Ruo and Zhao Lu argue that the value of

film spin-offs lies in simulacra—satisfying consumers’ cultural imagination and catering to their psychological needs to dissolve linear time and alleviate life anxiety. Pei Jingyu notes in “Analysis of the Industry Status and Development Model of Film Spin-offs in China” that to truly treat film spin-offs as an integral part of the film industry, spin-off design structure should be considered during early script creation, with marketing preparations made post-release—in essence, developing film spin-offs concurrently with the film itself. Ding Yaoyao defines film spin-offs as “licensed goods with film as the core” in “From Traffic Products to Spiritual Products: A Study on the Enhancement of the Core Competitiveness of Chinese Film Spin-offs,” viewing them as spiritual products attached to the film’s spiritual core that can be freely circulated and traded, functioning as global “film currency.” From this perspective, film spin-offs are products integrating the film and real industries, with their essential value residing in the spiritual core they contain.

## 2.2 A Review of Research on Transmedia Storytelling

Henry Jenkins first proposed transmedia storytelling, defining it as a process where a work’s constituent elements are systematically dispersed across multiple media channels to create a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Kan Qian and Fu Wenya (2017) argue in “Research on Transmedia Narrative in the Context of Media Convergence: Starting from the Content Production of Audience Participation in Internet Intellectual Property Rights” that audience participation in content text production represents an innovation in current content production modes, which promotes the development of transmedia narrative. Zhu Guangming (2020) believes transmedia narrative has two paths: role-centered and story-centered, with current domestic research focusing primarily on the story-centered type. Shi Chang (2022) contends in “Symbiosis: Transmedia Narrative as a Method” that the premise of transmedia narrative is “symbiosis,” with the necessary condition for establishing the story world lying in the “scalability” of history, geography, characters, and other dimensions, with expansion methods including filling historical gaps, exploring unknown territories, and supplementing character experiences.

## 2.3 A Review of Research on the Fan Economy

Zhang Chang (2010) defined the “fan economy” as “taking emotional capital as the core, using the fan community as a marketing means to increase emotional capital, with consumers as the protagonists. Based on consumer emotions, companies leverage their power to achieve the goal of adding emotional capital to the brand and the icon.” Cai Qi (2015) believes that the fan economy surrounding media content has evolved from the traditional “text production-consumption” model to a “multi-dimensional model of IP development and operation.” In this new IP operation model, fans’ positions in the economic industry chain are being front-loaded and their status upgraded. Tu Junyi (2023) argues that in IP operation, what mobilizes the fan economy is the emotion attached to the fan

object, which prompts fans to migrate between different media products with media content.

Current scholarship both domestically and internationally affirms that film spin-offs hold significant meaning for the film industry, providing an important rationale for this study. This research selects “The Wandering Earth 2” as a typical case study, targeting audiences who enjoyed the film as research subjects. Questionnaires were distributed through a combination of online and offline channels, specifically via WeChat Moments, QQ Space, Weibo, Xiaohongshu, the Questionnaire Star Sample Library, and offline distribution.

The questionnaire comprises several sections, beginning with basic information confirmation, including gender, age, education, occupation, and income. The second section addresses dimension reduction statements for independent variables: the value core proximity of spin-offs and the restoration degree of content spin-offs. The value core of spin-offs is concretized into the solidarity, collectivism, responsibility, internationalism, and sci-fi optimism demonstrated in “The Wandering Earth 2.” The final section covers dimension reduction statements for the dependent variable: fans’ recognition and love for content spin-offs. The data collection, collation, and analysis process for this survey was completed on April 9, 2023.

### 3.4 Sample Descriptive Analysis

A total of 245 questionnaires were collected, of which 200 respondents had watched “The Wandering Earth 2,” 182 had paid attention to its spin-offs, and 139 had purchased spin-offs, yielding 139 valid questionnaires.

Descriptive analysis of respondents who watched the film reveals an average fan affection rating of 4.48 points, indicating relatively strong popularity among audiences. Analysis of respondents who did not pay attention to the spin-offs shows that the primary reason for lack of attention was “never heard of them,” while the main reason for not purchasing was “dislike.”

### 4.1 Correlation Analysis of “The Wandering Earth 2” Spin-offs Survey Data

The closer spin-offs align with a film’s core values, the more they trigger fan recognition. Pearson correlation analysis between spin-off recognition and spin-off-film value core proximity yields a correlation coefficient of  $r=0.478$ ,  $P<0.01$ , indicating significant positive correlation and supporting research hypothesis H1.

Similarly, higher restoration degree of spin-offs triggers greater fan recognition. Analysis of correlation between spin-off restoration degree and recognition reveals  $r=0.470$ ,  $P<0.01$ , showing significant positive correlation and supporting hypothesis H2.

The closer spin-offs align with core film values, the more they trigger fan affection. Pearson correlation analysis between spin-off-film value core proximity and product liking shows  $r=0.483$ ,  $P<0.01$ , indicating significant positive correlation and supporting hypothesis H3.

Higher restoration degree of spin-offs also arouses greater fan affection. Analysis of correlation between content restoration and audience liking reveals  $r=0.395$ ,  $P<0.01$ , demonstrating significant positive correlation and supporting hypothesis H4.

Additionally, significant positive correlations exist between fan affection, recognition of spin-offs, and purchase intentions, supporting hypotheses H5 and H6.

This study concludes that fans' affection and recognition of spin-offs are essential elements for purchase intention of film content spin-offs, while spin-offs' proximity to film value core and restoration degree significantly affect fan affection and recognition. For "The Wandering Earth 2," spin-offs effectively convey the film's values of technical optimism and solidarity while achieving high restoration in imagery and materials, aligning with the film's iconic style and characteristics. This enhances fan affection and recognition, thereby significantly influencing purchase willingness.

## 4.2 Reason: The Quality of Viewing Experience Affects Audience Purchase Intentions

The film content spin-offs industry operates as a fan economy, mobilizing emotions attached to the film to facilitate fan migration from movies to spin-offs. Recognition and affection constitute important emotional dimensions; fans' recognition and love for the film migrate to spin-offs because these products contain the values and imagery conveyed by the film. At this point, fans purchase not merely a commodity but the film's core ideas embedded in the content spin-off and their own cinematic experience.

According to transmedia storytelling theory, film spin-offs provide consumers with an immersive experience. When film imagery enters the real world and people's daily lives, audiences can immerse themselves in the movie story through spin-offs. The official authorized spin-off crowdfunding for "The Wandering Earth 2" selected the film's most distinctive characters: artificial intelligence MOSS, digital life cards, and the dynamic omniterrain guardian system BEN-BEN, transferring audience affection for the film to the product. Simultaneously, restoration of imagery and materials enhances audience recognition, improving psychological value and setting a record of over 100 million yuan in crowdfunding within nine days.

### 4.3 Analysis of the Current Situation: Multiple Problems in the Transformation from Content to Spin-offs

First, spin-off development has not been integrated into the film's planning stage, publicity remains insufficient, and the spin-offs industry lacks maturity. Film spin-off development constitutes a link in the film industry chain, yet China's film industry currently fails to prioritize spin-off development, with revenue sources limited to theatrical box office and video platform streaming, leaving IP value far from fully realized. The survey found that the main reason for not paying attention to "The Wandering Earth 2" content spin-offs was "never heard of them," while reasons for not purchasing included not only "dislike" but also missing the crowdfunding period. The official authorized spin-off reached its 100,000 yuan crowdfunding target within one minute and exceeded 100 million yuan in nine days. To ensure timely product delivery, producers stopped crowdfunding early in February.

According to an exclusive interview with Liu Chang, an investment partner at Transwarp Manufacturing, conducted by The Beijing News, the earliest batch of crowdfunding deliveries occurred in June, with the final batch delivered in mid-November. These data signal positive developments for China's domestic film content spin-offs industry and the broader film industry. However, due to immature connections between licensing, production, and sales of domestic film spin-offs, and the absence of process frameworks regarding specific development quantities and timelines, "The Wandering Earth 2" spin-offs still lag behind the film's peak popularity period, leaving room for further market development.

Second, spin-offs lack strict quality control. On March 14, SCIFI Space, the official producer of "The Wandering Earth 2" content spin-offs, released sample photos of the "digital life card" USB drive, revealing that the aluminum alloy body announced during crowdfunding had been changed to zinc alloy, and the gray-black color had become gray-white. Fans commented that the sample exhibited a "strong sense of plastic" and that "the goods differ from confirmed samples," provoking consumer anger. Finally, under pressure from multiple parties, SCIFI Space announced it would revert to the materials and designs promised during crowdfunding and open a refund channel. Since actual crowdfunding results far exceeded targets, merchants prioritized timely delivery over image and material quality. However, the primary factor consumers consider when purchasing spin-offs is not practicality but appearance and embedded value, meaning arbitrary appearance changes and quality degradation reduce the psychological value consumers attribute to spin-offs.

It is worth noting that audiences may produce confrontational interpretations. In "The Wandering Earth 2," some fans noted that the character "Ma Zhao" resembles OCE's Seagull doll, prompting responses from other fans. As the film's popularity grew, "Ma Zhao Seagull" related content in online spin-off creations gradually increased, with fans producing numerous fan works. According to consumer choice theory, to compensate for each unit of reduced restoration

in official spin-offs, consumers require more fan works, creating a substitution effect. However, fan preferences and psychology also inspire official spin-offs; brand OCE seized this opportunity to collaborate and released the first official “Ma Zhao Seagull” image on April 12. As digitalization develops, fans’ preferences for beloved movie spin-offs are increasingly communicated to businesses via the internet, enabling merchants to adjust content spin-off development directions in real-time based on fan behavior.

#### 4.4 Implications for Increasing Fans’ Willingness to Purchase Spin-offs

Based on the investigation of “The Wandering Earth 2” spin-offs and analysis of current fan purchase intentions, the following insights emerge:

First, film spin-offs should convey the film’s core values. Each film possesses a unique value core, and spin-offs must align with these expressed values. By infusing spin-offs with plot and character design elements from the film, consumers can recall movie plots and associated feelings when viewing spin-off products, enhancing audience immersion and interaction. Simultaneously, using film values as the foundation can expand the story to some extent, exploring details that films cannot fully display and promoting construction of a more comprehensive cinematic world.

Second, film spin-offs should faithfully reflect film imagery. When purchasing spin-offs, consumers prioritize restoration degree over practicality. Therefore, the degree to which content spin-offs restore film imagery design is critically important and should be the primary focus in design development. During development, copyright holders and licensees must exercise strict control over restoration degree and quality, ensuring consistency in imagery, materials, and even stylistic characteristics with film content to mobilize fan emotions, enhance psychological value, and increase purchase willingness.

Third, film content spin-off development should be integrated into the film’s planning stage. Film creators should establish memorable points for audiences during planning, while planners should consciously consider the commercial potential of various story elements and deeply explore film story value. Spin-off products should be designed and developed purposefully and systematically according to film characteristics, with design, production, distribution, and other processes advanced to synchronize with the film, building a complete process framework that improves production efficiency, matches the peak popularity period before and after release, and maximizes spin-off value.

Fourth, maximize publicity and ensure smooth information and sales channels. In the new media era, film spin-off promotion can integrate multiple online and offline channels, synchronizing traditional film promotion methods such as posters, premieres, and roadshows with new media platforms like Weibo and Douyin short videos, while combining authorized “linkage” with other brands for cross-border marketing to create greater marketing momentum.

Fifth, prioritize emotional connection with fans. Fans are increasingly becoming true “prosumers,” not only consuming film spin-offs but also providing valuable, free feedback on market trends and preferences while directly participating in spin-off production. Therefore, the connection between fans and movie spin-offs is not unidirectional but involves constant interaction and collaboration. Fans should be encouraged to participate in and invest in spin-off product development, with continuous attention to fan preferences and emotional needs to guide consumption willingness and enhance deeper emotional connections between audiences and films through participation and sustained emotional satisfaction.

## 5 Summary and Reflection

This study employs questionnaire surveys from the perspectives of transmedia storytelling and fan economy to examine why “The Wandering Earth 2” content spin-offs achieved China’s highest record for film and television spin-off crowdfunding. The findings indicate that fans’ affection and recognition of spin-offs are essential elements of purchase intention, while the degree to which film content spin-offs align with film value connotation and restoration significantly affects fan affection and recognition.

In summary, future content spin-off development should focus on conveying film values, restoring film imagery, advancing the development process, ensuring smooth information and sales channels, and prioritizing emotional connection with fans, providing inspiration for China’s film spin-offs industry development. However, this study relies solely on questionnaire surveys from the audience perspective; research on content spin-off development must also consider licensing, research and development, channels, pricing, and other product aspects, integrating the film spin-offs industry into overall planning and improvement of the entire film industry.

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