

Scene · Symbol · Emotion: A Study of Interaction Rituals in Mobile Short Videos (Postprint)

Authors: Feng Beibei, Kaixiang Zhang

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Abstract

In the smart media era, the empowerment of technologies such as 5G, VR, and big data has reconfigured the dissemination pathways of short videos. Interactive communication and spatiotemporal reshaping have optimized consumer experiences, creating a scenario network better adapted to users. The deep cultivation of content and user stratification have constructed an interactive ritual chain between producers and audiences. Driven by technological traction, short video creators have shifted their perspective from content output to emotional exploration, encountering an inflection point from “speed competition” to “quality pursuit” in an increasingly saturated market. This paper will specifically analyze the construction path of the interactive ritual chain for mobile short videos from three dimensions—functional creation of scenarios, interactive dialogue of symbols, and expression and diffusion of emotions—to explore the underlying consumer logic.

Full Text

Preamble

Scene, Symbol, Emotion: A Study on the Interactive Rituals of Mobile Short Videos

Feng Beibei, Zhang Kaixiang

(School of Communication, East China Normal University, Shanghai 200241)

Abstract: In the era of intelligent media, technologies such as 5G, VR, and big data have empowered and reconstructed the communication pathways of short videos. Interactive communication and spatiotemporal reshaping have optimized consumption experiences, creating scenario networks better adapted to users. The deepening of content and stratification of users have constructed an interactive ritual chain between communicators and audiences. Driven by technology, short video creators have shifted their focus from content output

to emotional exploration, ushering in an inflection point from “competing for speed” to “pursuing quality” in an increasingly saturated market. This paper analyzes the construction path of the interactive ritual chain of mobile short videos from three dimensions: functional creation of scenarios, interactive dialogue of symbols, and emotional expression and diffusion, exploring the underlying consumption logic.

Keywords: intelligent media era; short video; interactive ritual; scenario; symbolic communication

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1. Harnessing Scenarios to Restructure Spatiotemporal Relations

The rise of media technology has created a new “window of opportunity” for scenarios. Meyrowitz integrated characteristics of media and face-to-face interpersonal communication to propose “media scenario theory,” while Robert Scoble and Shel Israel identified the “five forces of context” in *Age of Context*: big data, mobile devices, social media, sensors, and positioning systems [1]. If we take mobile short videos as the subject, these can be deconstructed into scenario traffic based on big data and positioning systems, scenario experience carried by mobile devices and sensors, and scenario socialization centered on social media. These elements collaborate with each other to jointly construct a network landscape between users and media.

1.1.1 Scenario Traffic

Scenario, also “situation,” represents a macro-level grasp of how things develop, requiring both profound insight into the present and an understanding of the path and patterns of “cause and effect.” User engagement with media is an active process, and only by thoroughly understanding audience motivations can their needs be met. Based on this principle, the shift from “large screens” to “small screens” and from “family viewing” to “personalized customization,” combined with the emergence of diverse platforms, “short, flat, and fast” communication models, and precision-based push notifications, has led to explosive growth in short video users. Features such as “recommendations” and “subscriptions” extract and integrate fragmented information to create personalized communication landscapes. Traffic attraction forms the foundation of scenario

construction and serves as an important dimension for scenario evaluation. Today, the essence of the traffic competition in the short video industry has become a competition over scenarios, which have gradually emerged as an acceleration engine for overtaking in the internet era.

1.1.2 Scenario Experience

The arrival of the 5G era has outlined a new media landscape, where interface-driven design eliminates the gap between virtual and reality, providing users with immersive consumption experiences. Unlike previous single, fixed scenarios, mobile media interaction has become a prominent feature of the short video era. The 加持 of VR, AR, 4K, and 8K technologies has also enabled the free combination and deep integration of realistic, holographic, and three-dimensional scenarios. Currently, there are two main paths for constructing realistic scenarios: one is to enhance the realism of virtual scenarios through VR technology, and the other is to augment the virtual sense of real scenarios through AR technology [2]. Regardless of the approach, both contribute to users' immersive experiences. Beyond technological upgrades, short videos also exhibit scenario-based and story-based characteristics in narrative style. By 切入 into story-based cases and embedding subjective perception into a mimetic environment, a smooth plot experience is completed, thereby forming an interactive ritual between users and media.

1.1.3 Scenario Socialization

The effective combination of mass communication and interpersonal communication has eliminated circle barriers, advancing short videos from text-based social interaction to video-based social interaction. Through precise distribution via big data and algorithms, and through interactive comments, likes, and forwards, users with the same interests are gathered into the same circle to form “cloud socialization,” which effectively compensates for the social shortcomings of virtual versus real interaction. Information exchange also alleviates the communication pain point of “information cocoons” to a certain extent. Unlike relatively stable social rules in real environments, people absorb environmental resources in short video-adapted scenarios and form secondary transmission among users through “fluid stickiness,” continuously expanding cluster scope. It can be said that socialization enhances fan stickiness in audio-visual scenarios, and the two are interdependent and jointly promote each other.

1.2.1 Restructuring Spatiotemporal Relations

McLuhan once stated that “the medium is the extension of man.” As a connection between virtual and reality, short video scenarios break traditional linear spatiotemporal concepts. Users control sensor-based switching between scenarios through finger swipes, achieving jumps and continuity in physical time and space within a certain period. In the era of “everything is media,” instant sharing of current scenarios through short video live streaming allows users in different

spatiotemporal contexts to share situations. To avoid the shortcomings of instantaneous communication, timely saving and sharing freeze time and space, enabling trans-spatiotemporal “dialogue.” During the COVID-19 pandemic, both journalists who went deep into Wuhan and citizens within the city used mobile videos to create a surrounding “Wuhan space,” allowing people across the nation to resonate at the same frequency. The “cloud supervision” of millions of netizens continuously extended the reaction chain of “physical presence,” and the “as-if-real” feeling brought by spatial scenarios and experiential situations forged a steel wall of unity against the epidemic.

1.2.2 Highlighting Service Value

From information acquisition to intelligent guidance, internet development has continuously deepened people’s life needs. The construction of scenarios in the short video industry has also been endowed with deeper value, as audience demand for service-oriented features has grown. Scenario-based service, as an innovative mindset, targets specific user groups, perceives users’ current scenarios through scenario technology, and provides precise services by capturing user demand trends [3]. Short videos trigger changes in audience perception through visual image impact, stimulate interest in the work’s theme, and subsequently enhance stickiness between scenarios and users. Additionally, the subject status of audiences is gradually improving. The updating of creative models such as UGC, PGC, and PUGC provides users with more participatory space, and personalized scenario creation drives the upgrading of short video experiential situations. Platforms such as Douyin and Kuaishou are actively conducting production practices of “short video + live broadcast,” combining online and offline production, reasonably setting situations based on user psychological expectations, and achieving transformation from functional value to experiential value.

1.2.3 Creating an Industrial Closed Loop

The segmented consumption of the commodity economy has driven the development of segmentation in the media industry. User behaviors such as liking, commenting, and collecting have subtly formed certain correlations, providing clear positioning of users’ lifestyles and interest areas and offering precise user group portraits for the market. Screen expansion has achieved an output method from point to surface, and multi-platform joint communication has become an irreversible trend. For the media market, when scenarios are embedded in mobile media, their economic value will gradually become prominent, and the resonance aroused by video content will also stimulate longing for embedded products. For example, Xi’an, a city that became popular in short videos, mostly used representative buildings as scenarios paired with familiar tunes to spread its city brand. E-commerce, which has developed alongside short videos, uses scenarios to shape a “sense of presence” in shopping, allowing consumers to indirectly obtain shopping experiences. This “spatiotemporal integration” becomes an en-

trance for product marketing, continuously extending the industrial chain and ultimately forming a profitable closed loop.

2. Constructing Symbols to Strengthen Interactive Dialogue

Symbols are the logical foundation of all communication phenomena and important carriers in communication activities. Short videos construct a visual feast for audiences through linguistic and non-linguistic symbols, allowing audiences to unconsciously complete dual consumption at both material and consciousness levels. Verbal communication fulfills intuitive expressive functions, while non-linguistic symbols alleviate the dilemma of “transmission without communication” to a certain extent. Through flexible communication methods using symbols, short videos allow “belonging” and “love” to spread, awakening people’s collective memory.

2.1.1 Sensory Linkage

McLuhan proposed that most media technologies have a certain “amplification” function, an effect that is particularly evident in the separation of perception [4]. If images are an extension of vision and radio an extension of hearing, then short videos link multiple mechanisms of human vision, hearing, and touch, decoding information into numerous symbols to obtain the “greatest common divisor” of communication. In recent reports on public health emergencies and natural disasters, traditional mainstream media restored the entire process of event development from a rational and objective perspective, while many on-site users used short videos to holographically outline event profiles through panoramic narrative modes and representative symbols. The injection of personal subjective emotions and the presentation of different perspectives have shown the full-cornered nature of events, allowing users to derive a “sense of presence” and “sense of reality” from constructed symbols.

2.1.2 Imagination Construction

Breaking traditional narrative modes, unexpected “reversals” that contradict audience psychological expectations have become important strategies for short videos to attract user attention. The repeated appearance of “narrative reversal” has formed a perceivable personified symbol, which users unconsciously label as “change” during reception, creating space for imagination and generating multi-level transmission [5]. For example, Douyin bloggers such as “Chenxiang Liudianban,” “Meiniye,” and “An Jin” all focus on drama-based scripts, constructing stable textual identities through dramatic plots, unconventional development trajectories, and vastly different results. Additionally, most short video bloggers use music symbols for direction. The sudden change in visual style and music provides audiences with psychological foreshadowing, subsequently forming textual expectations. Behind personified symbols lies a tacit

understanding with audience aesthetics and an exploration of alternative truths in life.

2.1.3 Identity Recognition

Media development has provided new venues for people's self-expression, and people are increasingly inclined toward the presentation of the "looking-glass self." The self-value presented through short videos will be continuously decoded by receivers and endowed with new meaning, subsequently becoming an identity symbol. In the process of accumulating fans, labeled identities will promote the continuity and consistency of creators' video content, ultimately forming strong communication power and achieving vertical communication. Based on this logic, along with the weakening of geographical relationships, users with similar identity symbols have gradually gathered to form circle culture. In later development, the unique cultural symbols of "insiders" will form strong radiating power, leading to broader development. The widely circulated "Guo language" on major video websites is a typical example of this phenomenon.

2.2.1 Self-Interaction

The arrival of a "decentralized" and "marginalized" era has broken the original one-way communication model, and the "virtual space" created by short videos has become a "dream factory" for many ordinary internet users. American sociologist George Herbert Mead believed that the self is a social structure and divided it into "I" and "me," while Professor Sun Huizhu also proposed the contradiction between "self" and "role" in *Social Performance Studies*. It is evident that the self is not a static system; it makes corresponding adjustments according to contextual changes. Short video users wear "behavioral masks" when shooting works, constantly interacting between objectification and inwardness. Users create private virtual spaces by recording life and lay the foundation for their social relationships through various role-shaping. Whether "beautifying" external images through camera functions or establishing "personas" to strengthen personality images, these are adjustments and modifications to their "me." The "comment" function set up by short videos allows viewers to freely express opinions, which also becomes a reference framework for publishers to evaluate themselves. This public opinion becomes the internal driving force for continuous "dialogue" between the "I" and "me," promoting the formation of social experience.

2.2.2 Community Rituals

The construction of interactive ritual chains on short video platforms is not the result of individual behavior but is derived from interpersonal interaction. Users are connected through symbolically meaningful behaviors on short video platforms, transmitting information through screen touches in virtual environments. Receivers can only complete a ritual interaction upon successful decoding. Although this behavior occurs in virtual space, the symbolic meaning transmitted

is real and concrete. In addition to common functions such as liking, forwarding, commenting, and collecting, more and more platforms have created features like “duet” and “video co-broadcasting.” Users can comprehensively consider whether to participate in “duets” based on the popularity of original video materials and interactive situations, leaving users considerable autonomous space. The 趣味性 of this 隔空 interactive 隔空 interaction boosts the “secondary transmission” of short videos, attracting more users to participate under the Matthew effect. Short video interactive rituals gather users with the same symbolic characteristics, and after mutual recognition, continuously enhance members’ sense of identity through symbolically meaningful behaviors, such as using “group language” and “group actions” to exclude outsiders, subsequently forming what Anderson called an “imagined community.”

3. Blending Emotions to Break Traditional Circles

The evolution of media has broken traditional communication patterns and, to a certain extent, changed audience reception methods. “Resilient communication,” characterized by wide radiation range and long circulation time, achieves efficient transmission due to its continuity and intuitiveness. However, to achieve a soft landing of thematic spirit, it is necessary to grasp the overall tone and emotional infiltration. Blending emotions on a rational basis and using approachable and perceptible “soft communication” as the main method has become the preferred choice for many media outlets.

3.1.1 Collectivism and National Sentiment

Currently, many traditional mainstream media have targeted the advantages of short videos—socialization, visuality, and personification—and have shifted to this territory. As of March 20, 2021, People’ s Daily, CCTV News, and Xinhua News Agency had gained 124.444 million, 114.532 million, and 38.269 million followers respectively on Douyin. After observing the official short video accounts of mainstream media, it can be found that the dissemination of patriotic sentiment has gradually become a “trend.” Taking the official Douyin account of “Xinwen Lianbo” as an example, among its 429 published works, four of the top five liked videos are related to national sentiment. In addition, images of police officers, doctors, and grassroots citizens frequently appear in short video frames. Whether great or ordinary, they are all writing the good stories of this era. This communication method combining macro-emotions with micro-narratives has shed the originally high-profile posture of traditional media, allowing simple and unadorned emotions to permeate every user’ s heart.

3.1.2 Humanistic Communication in Special Periods

In the face of emergencies, the all-weather and multi-level characteristics of short videos have shouldered the responsibility of communication. Unlike continuous and stable emotional expression, attention to people’ s “state emotions”

is more urgent during special periods. “State emotions” refer to a temporary and concentrated emotional reaction in a specific situation [6]. This emotional shift differs from “mood” and is a “stress-induced” emotional experience. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, fear of the epidemic and death gradually emerged. The short video industry actively grasped the direction of public opinion, and the establishment of “rumor-refuting” columns and timely information announcements effectively avoided “infodemics.” Home isolation cut off people’s physical distance but formed new encounter groups through media combination, thereby obtaining a sense of belonging. Some mainstream media reporters from CCTV News also went deep into Wuhan, using Vlogs to make people share a common destiny and emotional resonance. When communication is embedded with love and care, it bursts forth with powerful strength, driving the development of public opinion.

3.2.1 Disseminators of Advanced Culture

As a mass medium, the short video industry bears an indispensable responsibility in promoting the core of socialist culture. On the one hand, it is necessary to adhere to the correct direction of public opinion, and on the other hand, to transform thinking modes to capture users’ hearts with highly “internet-savvy” content creation. Only by advancing professionalism and artistry together can innovation be continuously achieved while maintaining integrity. Traditional mainstream media are the main force in disseminating advanced culture today. By leveraging the “parent” content of traditional television media and conducting secondary creation in short videos, they achieve platform-network linkage and resource integration, compensating for the shortcomings of single-platform communication. “Anchor’s Commentary” on Douyin has gained widespread praise upon launch, with anchors Kang Hui, Hai Xia, and Gang Qiang all becoming disseminators of advanced culture, telling Chinese stories to the world. The anchors have changed their previously “serious and unsmiling” posture, using down-to-earth jokes and popular internet slang to break barriers between communicators and audiences. For example, Gang Qiang used 18 “awesome” expressions to describe new-era strivers and 24 words to describe beautiful people and things, while Kang Hui frequently used internet slang such as “overbearing CEO.” The contrast in image and parallel professionalism constructs an interactive ritual chain between anchors and users, allowing cultural spirit to be inherited and developed through this “down-to-earth” communication method.

3.2.2 Embodiments of Traditional Culture

In mobile media, the “short, flat, and fast” characteristics of short videos better meet the communication needs of disseminators. In today’s media environment, short videos have not only become a new form of video imagery but also a representation of cultural innovation. The popularity of Li Ziqi and Ding Zhen on short video platforms has its realistic significance and historical logic. Taking Li Ziqi as an example, visual image impact combined with fresh background

music depicts idyllic pastoral life scenes like a paradise. The appearance of “Grandma” in the videos not only makes the narrative logic more story-like but also presents implicit family affection. The selection of common symbols avoids communication barriers caused by context to a certain extent and gives audiences more freedom in decoding space. From a historical dimension, activities such as silkworm raising, bean planting, and silk reeling that frequently appear in the videos reflect the cultural landscape of ancient China, while symbolic modern symbols such as high-speed rail also reflect technological development. The organic integration of simplicity and modernity, past and future, not only leaves infinite meaning space for Chinese people but also conveys rich propositions to the world.

Short videos, represented by Douyin and Kuaishou, have constructed a new communication landscape through their symbolic and social functions. Scenario traffic, scenario experience, and scenario socialization, as the basic elements of scenarios, have reshaped spatiotemporal relations. The absence of physical presence and virtual presence has endowed communication forms with infinite possibilities. During the communication process, changes in narrative methods and the assignment of symbolic meaning have achieved interactive dialogue between self and self, and self and others, gathering users with the same symbolic characteristics into the same circle. The strong moral sense burst forth by identity recognition is continuously strengthened in virtual space. The communication model blended with emotions has given information transmission a soft expression method, and the resonance at the same frequency in interactive communication has also allowed short videos to radiate new vitality and energy.

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Author Information: Feng Beibei (1997-), female, from Lianyungang, Jiangsu, master' s student, research direction: radio and television; Zhang Kaixiang (1995-), male, from Handan, Hebei, master' s student, research direction: radio and television.

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