

Patterns and Advantages of Social Media Micro-video Dissemination (Postprint)

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of rapid social media development and the gradual popularization of mobile terminals, micro-video dissemination activities are becoming increasingly prevalent. Currently, domestic social media micro-video dissemination primarily operates through two main models: a multi-party interactive cooperation model involving micro-video application providers, third-party social platforms, and users; and a differentiated competition model adopted by micro-video application providers based on their platform advantages. Social media micro-video dissemination possesses the following advantages: participatory social communication that taps into audience excitement points, high alignment with the tempo of modern social life, the consumer-as-producer paradigm, and a combined communication approach of ‘word-of-mouth + content’.

Full Text

Patterns and Advantages of Micro-Video Communication on Social Media

Abstract: Against the backdrop of rapid social media development and increasing mobile device penetration, micro-video communication activities are flourishing. Currently, domestic social media micro-video communication operates primarily through two models: a multi-party interactive cooperation model involving micro-video application providers, third-party social platforms, and users; and a differentiated competition model adopted by micro-video application providers based on their platform advantages. Social media micro-video communication offers several key advantages: participatory social communication that triggers audience excitement points, high compatibility with modern social rhythms, the consumer-as-producer paradigm, and a combined “word-of-mouth + content” dissemination approach.

Keywords: social media micro-video; communication; model; advantages

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1. The Flourishing of Social Media Micro-Video Communication

Social media micro-video refers to short-form videos played on social media platforms. In its narrow sense, social media micro-video generally denotes original micro-videos and other entertaining short videos that users shoot and upload through micro-video applications (APPs). In its broad sense, social media micro-video encompasses video files lasting several seconds to several minutes on social media platforms, which may take the form of micro-video news, micro-video advertisements, or micro-films.

The development of social media has exerted extensive and profound influence on Chinese society. In 2016, global internet users reached 3 billion, with China accounting for 731 million [1]. According to the latest global digital statistics from Hootsuite, worldwide social media users have exceeded 3 billion, with Facebook's monthly active users reaching 2.06 billion after significant growth over the past four months [2]. As China's internet user population continues to grow, social media's impact on Chinese journalism and society will become increasingly widespread and profound, creating favorable conditions for the rapid development of social media micro-video communication.

Ordinary social media micro-video users can shoot and upload micro-videos up to 60 seconds through APPs, while VIP members face no such duration restrictions and can upload videos longer than 60 seconds. Compared with traditional long-video production and upload models, micro-video represents a significant breakthrough, offering more user-friendly and simpler operation. Traditional long-video production required recording through shooting equipment, transferring to other devices for editing, and finally uploading to internet platforms [3]. Today, social media micro-video production has evolved to the point where users only need to perform basic recording within the micro-video APP interface, and the software can conveniently process the video to achieve effects comparable to traditional long-video editing. Currently, micro-video applications on the market have achieved seamless integration with social networks, and the sharing function enables near-synchronization between shooting and uploading, allowing instant sharing to third-party social platforms such as Weibo and QQ with a single click.

Take the micro-video application "Miaopai" as an example. Ordinary users can download the Miaopai APP to shoot and upload micro-videos within 60 seconds, with their creations shareable across networks including Weibo, WeChat, and video websites. Additionally, organizations or influencers with large followings

who believe their content possesses superior dissemination effects can obtain VIP permissions on the Miaopai platform to upload micro-videos exceeding 60 seconds [4].

2. Models of Social Media Micro-Video Communication

China's social media micro-video communication market possesses enormous development potential. According to the "Micro-Video User Research Report" released by market research institution CSG in 2012, 82% of Chinese netizens already used online video, making it a crucial internet application second only to search engines, email, and online shopping. Among these users, 78.3% consumed long-form online video, while 53.2% used online micro-video [5]. Presently, two distinct models have emerged in the domestic social media micro-video communication domain.

2.1 Multi-Party Interactive Cooperation Model

The multi-party interactive cooperation model involving advertisers, micro-video application platforms, users, and third-party platforms represents a common operational pattern in current social media micro-video communication. The specific mechanism operates as follows: users provide original micro-video content, brand owners supply marketing funds to application providers, micro-video application providers offer content production tools, and third-party platforms (such as Sina Weibo) provide promotional channels, with each entity satisfying its respective needs. As shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]: Model 1: Multi-Party Interactive Cooperation Operation.

Using Miaopai's promotion as an example, its download volume and user activity increased substantially over the past year, primarily due to strong support from Weibo as the "behind-the-scenes driver" of Miaopai's marketing. To enhance its brand awareness, Miaopai established a strategic partnership with Sina Weibo, effectively leveraging Weibo's media advantages to amplify its promotional reach [6]. Weibo provides promotional channels for Miaopai, while Miaopai serves as Weibo's officially designated micro-video production tool, creating seamless integration in the micro-video domain and achieving mutual benefit.

In practice, when Weibo users wish to share personally recorded video content on their Weibo homepage, they use Meipai, Weibo's cooperative software. After recording through Meipai's application, one-click sharing directly posts to their Weibo homepage. With Weibo's massive user base promoting Meipai on users' homepages through implicit guided usage, a significant portion of users with video recording needs—such as beauty bloggers and food bloggers—have been successfully converted into Meipai's user community. Meipai's sharing functionality, in turn, enlivens video content on Weibo, while micro-video's intuitive and entertaining characteristics attract more users to record and share, enabling Weibo and Meipai to achieve mutual benefit through seamless connection and enhancing both follower counts and engagement levels.

In April 2015, during the vibrant spring season, Weibo and Miaopai launched the “Casual Shooting” campaign, using the hashtag #CasualShooting to encourage micro-video users to actively upload original content related to the activity, which garnered tens of millions of clicks and shares within just a few days. Simultaneously, leveraging its powerful social platform, Weibo invited celebrities and key opinion leaders (KOLs) to join through Miaopai’s “Cute Scene” activity, creating tremendous momentum through multi-party collaboration.

Advertisers, micro-video application platforms, third-party communication platforms, and users constitute an organic and unified social media micro-video communication system and value chain. They operate as independent market entities while simultaneously cooperating and promoting one another to collectively achieve their respective market values and effectiveness. Should any entity or link fail to perform its proper function, the dissemination effect of social media micro-video communication will be compromised [7]. For instance, without investment and sponsorship from advertisers and brand owners, micro-video applications would struggle to promote themselves in the market and would face survival challenges. Without cooperative promotion from third-party platforms like Weibo, micro-video application platforms would achieve minimal market share, with netizens knowing little about relevant video production tools, rendering usage rates negligible. If micro-video application platforms fail to enhance their functionalities to meet audience needs, users with video recording needs would seek alternatives when confronted with operational obstacles. Finally, without user habits and interest in video content sharing, software usage would not materialize.

2.2 Differentiated Competition Model Based on Platform Advantages

The operational model discussed above represents a three-dimensional approach requiring coordination among third-party platforms, users, micro-video application providers, and brand owners, characterized by strong openness and dependency. In the current social media micro-video communication market, a corresponding closed micro-video sharing model also exists—one where micro-video applications operate as independent marketing platforms for brand micro-video promotion. This model’s initial positioning aimed to create independent micro-video social platforms similar to QQ Space rather than relying excessively on third-party social platforms for promotional support.

With the rise and development of micro-video applications in China, numerous competing applications have entered the micro-video sharing market, leading to increasingly apparent homogenization of entertainment functions. To avoid this competitive red ocean, micro-video application providers have adopted differentiated competition strategies, creating distinctive micro-video application platforms to deliver unique entertainment experiences [8]. This marketing model emerged under the influence of the previously discussed model, possessing certain historical continuity. However, it remains in its initial development stage, with immature operational models and limited scale, as only a few micro-video

application operators are currently exploring this approach [9]. As shown in Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]: Model 2: Independent Operation of Micro-Video Application Platforms.

Using Xiaokaxiu, an early beneficiary of micro-video communication, as a case study for this model: Xiaokaxiu is a micro-video application with magical display functions. To avoid competitive homogenization, it developed a unique “lip-sync game” imitation show feature within its APP. This function allows users to imitate classic film and television scenes through micro-video lip-syncing. After recording, videos can be shared within Xiaokaxiu’s in-app social circle, with high-click videos potentially featured on the application’s homepage. This record-upload-share process satisfies users’ vanity-driven “actor” dreams while providing a sense of self-actualization [10].

During its initial launch phase, Xiaokaxiu first employed a celebrity endorsement strategy, leveraging star power to launch the “Lip-sync with Prizes” activity on its independently operated platform. Through celebrity-fan interaction, fans drove brand dissemination, rapidly enhancing Xiaokaxiu’s influence. Subsequently, during its product boom period, Xiaokaxiu utilized mass media to plan the “Lip-sync Film and Television” entertainment campaign, amplifying its voice. Later, on Hunan Satellite TV’s popular program “Day Day Up,” hosts simulated Xiaokaxiu’s lip-sync game on-site, driving audience participation, sparking interest, and stimulating viewers to download the Xiaokaxiu application after the show. This micro-video communication approach significantly enhanced Xiaokaxiu’s brand awareness and credibility through celebrity and mass media leverage.

3. Advantages of Social Media Micro-Video Communication

The proliferation of mobile devices, issuance of 4G licenses, and micro-video’s advantages—including diverse monetization methods, rich content, alignment with contemporary lifestyles, and low production costs—have injected strong momentum into the maturation of social media micro-video communication [11]. Social media micro-video communication possesses the following key advantages:

3.1 Participatory Social Communication Triggers Audience Excitement Points

Social media micro-video dissemination through platforms like Weibo and WeChat represents a marketing approach that audiences readily embrace. It stimulates audience interest points, triggers imitation of creative videos, and promotes effective interaction between marketing brands and audiences through active user participation, thereby shortening the cognitive distance to brands, saving marketing costs, avoiding repetitive marketing activities, and enhancing communication effectiveness. This approach not only increases user satisfaction with product experiences but also enriches product connotations

through autonomous user-driven dissemination, creating a win-win situation [12].

The 2014 Ice Bucket Challenge that trended on Weibo serves as an illustrative example. Originating in the United States before spreading to China's internet community, the challenge required participants to film a micro-video of themselves being doused with ice water and then nominate the next participant. Nominees faced two choices: accept the challenge within 24 hours or donate \$100 to combat ALS. Soon, numerous internet celebrities and industry leaders participated, generating a surge of ice-water dousing micro-videos across the internet [13]. Although the Ice Bucket Challenge aimed at public welfare, it generated massive traffic within a short period. Initiated by prominent figures and subsequently joined by ordinary citizens, the challenge attracted numerous onlookers and dominated trending topics for days. This phenomenon effectively captured netizens' interest points through multiple factors, causing Ice Bucket Challenge micro-videos to spread virally and become a popular trend.

3.2 High Compatibility with Modern Social Rhythms

In today's rapidly developing mobile internet era, micro-videos' short, refined, and fast characteristics align with modern people's habits of using fragmented time for consumption [14]. Moreover, by integrating sound, text, images, hyperlinks, and other multimedia forms, micro-videos deliver greater information impact and visual dimensionality in information dissemination, accommodating contemporary fast-paced lifestyles and reducing reading pressure. Due to duration differences, micro-videos and long-videos command different viewing times. Micro-videos typically last from several seconds to a few minutes, generally around several tens of seconds, enabling modern people to receive diverse content covering entertainment gossip, makeup tutorials, classic sports clips, and comedy sketches within brief periods [15]. Long-videos such as television and films, conversely, are mostly consumed during weekends and holidays. Micro-video has become the primary method and channel for mainstream social groups to receive diverse information, with daily conversation content increasingly derived from rich information streams absorbed in short periods rather than from prolonged text reading or life observation.

Using WeChat as an example: WeChat's text, voice, and video communication has largely replaced SMS functionality, with its instant messaging characteristics enabling barrier-free information transmission. WeChat's official account function satisfies users' subscription needs for relevant information. Once subscribed, these accounts maintain relatively frequent updates, with content typically limited in length and readable within a few minutes or even shorter periods. Readers receive information from account operators within brief timeframes, which is promptly and effectively memorized by the public and subsequently transformed into daily conversation content.

3.3 Consumer-as-Producer

The consumer-as-producer paradigm represents the core characteristic of social media micro-video communication. In the mobile social era, traditional marketing structures are transforming, giving rise to new massive groups. The participation of internet celebrities, online influencers, and ordinary users has injected fresh vitality into video dissemination and transformed traditional video marketing formats. Video marketing channels have gradually transitioned from traditional media such as television, newspapers, radio, and magazines to internet social media, while video communication subjects have shifted from public figures to ordinary internet users. Every internet user can serve as a subject of social media communication, with each netizen functioning as a video content producer. User-generated content has gained importance among brand owners, providing users with opportunities for participation and performance while simultaneously driving brand dissemination [16]. For instance, Sina's official homepage features various interesting trending topics daily, with numerous user-uploaded entertaining micro-videos among these hot topics.

The internet celebrity Papi Jiang exemplifies this phenomenon. In 2016, Papi Jiang became one of the year's most discussed topics, earning the title of "top internet celebrity of 2016." Her rise began with a self-produced and uploaded spoof video that triggered widespread laughter through her use of Chinese-English code-switching and comedic application of Taiwanese and Northeastern Chinese accents, generating massive shares [17]. Subsequently, Papi Jiang produced a series of comedic videos covering diverse themes, with video specials broadcast by major video websites eliciting tremendous response. In March 2016, Papi Jiang secured 12 million RMB in financing from ZhenFund, Luogic Talkshow, Light Source Capital, and Star Map Capital, with an estimated valuation of approximately 120 million RMB [17]. Papi Jiang's overnight transformation from ordinary netizen to celebrity broadcaster illustrates the enormous development potential of social media micro-video communication.

3.4 "Word-of-Mouth + Content" Combined Dissemination Approach

Social media micro-video communication employs a "word-of-mouth + content" combined approach that generates excellent dissemination effects. When a micro-video spreads across social platforms, compelling content may trigger likes, comments, and shares. Humans exhibit herd mentality—videos with high like and share counts continuously attract more users to view the content and engage with comments. This "word-of-mouth + content" characteristic enables high-quality and creative videos to quickly become central topics of discussion, potentially developing into social hotspots with celebrity shares and media coverage, thereby significantly enhancing communication effectiveness [18].

The renowned travel website Airbnb provides an illustrative case. Similar to Disney's approach, Airbnb initiates campaigns to stimulate customers to actively participate in micro-video shooting and sharing. However, Airbnb innovates fur-

ther by launching the “Different Journey, Different Mood” campaign, aligning with its travel characteristics and encouraging users to share their global travel experiences. The company screens for creative and touching micro-videos, ultimately editing numerous user-generated micro-videos into a film. Upon release, this video film instantly attracted massive browsing, forwarding, and sharing among netizens [19]. As like counts increased and positive comments accumulated, a “word-of-mouth marketing” effect gradually formed.

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

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