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On the Communication Development of New Media Short Videos from an “Anti-Framework” Perspective: A Case Study of the Douyin Short Video App Postprint

Authors: Qi Xuelian, Jin Zhenjian

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Abstract

In the new media era characterized by complex and multifaceted information, short videos have emerged as a novel content delivery mechanism following text and audio, boasting staggering daily active user numbers and exhibiting features of mass participation, rapid dissemination, and content innovation. This article adopts frame theory as its analytical foundation, with Douyin short video App serving as the primary case study, to examine how short video communication content in the new media landscape challenges audience cognitive frameworks to achieve popular dissemination and viral marketing effects, and to explore the future developmental trajectory of short videos within this context.

Full Text

A Brief Discussion on the Communication Development of New Media Short Videos from an “Anti-Framework” Perspective—Taking Douyin Short Video App as an Example

Abstract: In the complex information landscape of the new media era, short videos have emerged as a novel content carrier following text and voice. With staggering daily active user numbers, short videos exhibit characteristics of mass participation, rapid dissemination, and innovative content. Grounded in framework theory and focusing on Douyin as the primary case study, this paper explores how short video content in the new media era challenges audience cognitive frameworks to achieve popular and viral propagation effects, and examines future development pathways for short videos against this backdrop.

Keywords: new media; short video; framework theory; Douyin App

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Authors: Qi Xuelian, Jin Zhenjian

On May 31, 2018, Mary Meeker, known as the “Queen of the Internet,” released her annual Internet Trends Report, highlighting the surging growth of online entertainment. Short video content had captured the market, with Douyin and Kuaishou emerging as industry frontrunners, each boasting over 100 million daily active users. Psychological research demonstrates that humans exhibit a “vividness bias” –information with strong visual salience more readily shapes their judgments. Video, with its superior visual impact compared to text and audio, leverages its brevity and fragmentation to disrupt established patterns of audience information consumption.

1. Douyin’ s Communication Model

Users record short videos through personal interfaces and submit them to the recommendation feed. Simultaneously, these videos become content for other users’ following areas, forming networked connections across different zones and substantially enhancing user interaction and stickiness. Douyin has also fostered viral propagation—for instance, the distinctive horn pattern (two long beeps, one short) used by Douyin enthusiasts to identify each other on the streets, and the rapid rise of Douyin “divine songs” like *Paper Short, Love Long*. Beyond this, Douyin organizes offline events, inviting nearly a hundred Douyin influencers to activities such as “Douyin in Chengdu” and “iDOU Night,” exploring a music social model of “online interaction, offline friendship” that has sparked a nationwide Douyin craze.

1.1 Communication Content: Fast-Food Consumption, Fragmented Absorption

In the new media era, while “content is king,” channel importance cannot be ignored. Driven by traffic and commercial interests, short, fast, and refined content has become the new video culture paradigm, accessible anytime and anywhere. Within limited time, people can only focus on what interests them most. The task of short video consumption is to elevate shallow sensory pleasure to peak experiences. Douyin’ s diverse, jumpy clips reveal story outlines while emphasizing emotionally charged artistic expression of climactic moments. Content spans campus life, life philosophy, and daily hacks—rich and varied, dramatically boosting user stickiness. As the saying goes, “One hour on Douyin, one morning in the real world.” These 15-second bursts of diverse elements firmly capture the audience’ s appetite for “fragmented absorption.”

1.2 Communication Structure: Networked Connections, Viral Propagation

New media short videos are increasingly moving toward customization, with content becoming more differentiated. In the information age, application platforms engage in frenzied marketing and explosive promotion, each with distinct characteristics. Douyin has naturally developed its own networked communication structure, with an interface divided into three sections: recommendation area, following area, and personal interface. The recommendation area pushes short videos through “algorithmic recommendation” plus “manual boosting,” allowing users to discover their interests through recommendations and followed accounts.

Bakhtin’s carnival theory aligns perfectly with Douyin’s mass participation: during carnival periods, people can release their instincts without regard to social hierarchies, forming a utopia of universal indulgence known as the “carnavalesque.” From a social psychology perspective, short video recording represents a process of communicating and interacting with others through technical media in specific contexts—video-based socialization founded on interactive relationships. In these videos, all our behaviors constitute self-performance and self-expression, eliminating the constraints of real-world identity and enabling transformation from grassroots to idol while fulfilling personal interaction needs, thereby creating a mass carnival-style interactive landscape. Douyin demonstrates strong vitality both for user content consumption and as a social carrier. In the long term, short video socialization represents a more favored interactive form for users.

1.3 Communication Effects: From Grassroots to Idol, Carnavalesque Scene

Douyin is a music creative short video app under Bytedance that provides extensive production materials for personal short videos through its “music + 15-second video” model, cultivating youth cool culture for young people. Employing a strong PGC+UGC operation model and relying on algorithmic recommendations, Douyin achieves perfect balance between centralization and decentralization, shaping sustained traffic flow and driving user participation. Its 15-second duration redefines the mobile short video paradigm with several distinctive features.

2. Framework Theory

The concept of “framework” was initially proposed by Bateson and later introduced to mass communication by Goffman. Framework refers to the cognitive structure through which people recognize and interpret the external objective world, representing the organization of real-life experiences. Cognitive frameworks enable individuals to locate, perceive, and understand numerous specific information pieces.

Audience framework comprises the interpretive rules that audience members use to contact and process communication information. It originates from existing emotional attitudes, behavioral orientations, and accumulated life experiences, guiding individuals in processing new information. The framework used to process information affects our cognitive structures, attitudes toward matters, and behavioral responses—an influence known as framework effect.

In people's broad framework cognition, government affairs and cultural heritage publicity generally carry an aura of seriousness, and the public holds a "cold and aloof" stereotype toward them. Audiences have developed a certain "recognition" of the official promotion models employed by governments and museums, constructing a cognitive "distinction" that is perceived as real. The government image presented by media tends to focus on relatively conservative, dominant aspects within ideology—a stereotyped representation. However, in the Douyin short video app, new forms have emerged in government affairs and cultural heritage publicity that challenge audiences' existing frameworks, presenting novel, anti-framework cognitive scenes.

3.1 Government Affairs Rush to Short Video Platforms

Framework influences how audiences think about, process, and store information, directing their attention to certain aspects of reality while ignoring others. Regarding the government's long-term formulaic reporting methods, audiences inevitably develop stereotypes that frame their subjective cognitive activities.

On May 30, 2018, the SASAC News Center joined the Douyin short video platform, releasing its first video. Within 12 hours, this 35-second short video exceeded 2 million views and garnered 150,000 likes. Set to the background music of *Sailor Moon*, the video showed Mao Yixiang resting his chin on his hand, pondering "Children's Day is coming, what gift should I give?" After a transformation, he instantly delivered a doll to a little girl, earning widespread praise from netizens. Additionally, official institutions such as the Hangzhou Public Security Bureau's "Safe Hangzhou" and the Beijing Public Security Bureau's Counter-terrorism and Special Police Corps "Beijing SWAT" have all rushed to establish presence on Douyin.

Short video platforms provide information channels for younger generations like post-90s and post-00s. Traditional official channels are redundant, serious, and heavy-handed. Short videos combine government affairs with current popular elements to publicize policies and transmit information, upgrading and enriching both content and form to enhance appeal, infectivity, and influence. Many government agencies and public security departments have shed their "cold and aloof" image through operations where "content belongs to government, expression belongs to internet," unlocking new poses and playing with new tricks alongside those magical background music tracks. This approach deconstructs audiences' framework cognition of obscure and stereotyped official information, narrowing the psychological distance between both parties and thereby ensuring

maximum communication effectiveness.

3.2 Cultural Heritage Promotion Enters Short Video Domain

Framework can be defined as a concentrated organizational approach that perceives specific matters through selection, emphasis, exclusion, and addition—choosing different facts or attributes to highlight. People’s impression of museums tends to be solemn, profound, and mysterious, requiring considerable cultural literacy and knowledge to achieve tacit spiritual connection. Little do they realize that times have quietly changed: in the new media era, diversified and vivid channels are the rigid demand. How to achieve organic unity between the public’s “cultural hunger” and museums’ “need to be needed” is an urgent cultural bottleneck to address.

The short video platform “Douyin,” brimming with fashion, technology, and passionate interactive elements, breaks existing framework cognition of cultural relics. The release of the first Cultural Relics Drama Conference exploded across social circles. In the video, Terracotta Warriors threw flirtatious glances, palace maid figurines showed off dance skills, while humorous lines like “Does the museum want to make us famous?” and “It’s time to show real skills!” paired with magical background music left audiences in stitches. Meanwhile, seven major domestic museums collectively launched the “Museum Douyin Creative Video Competition,” enabling traditional Chinese culture and museum culture to speak through short videos. Stiff cultural relic expressions became vivid, displayed historical figures began dancing, bringing audiences relaxed, lively, and refreshing spiritual experiences and cultural impact.

4.1 Content Ecosystem Driven

“Content is king” remains the foundation of the short video industry. Short video traffic conversion has always followed the basic principle of “content production—traffic harvesting—traffic conversion.” The era of universal video content production has arrived, with obvious vertical content tendencies that meet users’ differentiated demands while improving content specialization. To truly win the market and profit, insisting on content as king is non-negotiable. Platforms must increase high-quality video content like “creative cultural relics publicity,” discover, excavate, and enhance content value, cultivate innovative consciousness, and create boutique short videos.

4.2 Platform Technology Wins

The explosive emergence of short video platforms makes enhancing user stickiness through technology an effective strategy. Only by delivering brand-new user experiences and ensuring product “freshness” can platforms achieve long-term success. For example, Douyin’s face distortion special effects utilize artificial intelligence technology, including facial keypoint detection and virtual background replacement, thereby achieving highly satisfying user experiences

—a major breakthrough. Short videos must continuously update and develop technologies for one-stop shooting and uploading, intelligent special effects optimization, interactive community building, and enriched horizontal functional layouts to inject new vitality into the vertical chain of content production, distribution, and monetization.

4.3 Strengthen Gatekeeper Mechanism

Recent incidents such as “false advertising” and “forbidden videos involving minors” have sounded the alarm for the entire short video industry, making platform rectification imperative. Platforms must strictly review new media short video content and strengthen gatekeeping through necessary review mechanisms. Implement real-name registration for short video creators, improve user complaint mechanisms, and enable self-inspection, traceability, and feedback of illegal content to ensure proper platform self-purification capabilities.

New media short videos feature content fragmentation, audience broadening, and rapid dissemination. Douyin, as a 15-second music short video platform labeled as cool and creative, has gained “cultural heritage” and “historical weight” through creative video content. Official Douyin accounts have also narrowed the psychological distance between audiences and government, enhanced by attention-grabbing special effects.

Audience media behavior and technology integration drive and shape the development trajectory of the entire short video industry landscape. The new media short video industry must develop deeper understanding of social dynamics and evolving audience needs to grasp future video industry development. With short videos experiencing their highlight moments and giants competing fiercely, if Douyin wishes to remain a constant winner, it must present more high-quality and diverse content, build more novel and convenient platform channels, and strengthen content review gatekeeping mechanisms to maintain user activity and stickiness.

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(Author affiliation: Journalism Major, School of Media, Qufu Normal University, Jining City, Shandong Province)

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