

How to Create Quality Content in the Short Video Era ——Post-Print from the Summary and Commendation Conference for “Creativity in Beijing—2016 Beijing Network Audio-Visual Program Innovation and Talent Excellence” Held in Beijing

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Abstract

Editor’s Note: On August 3, 2017, the “Creativity in Beijing—2016 Beijing Online Audiovisual Program Innovation and Talent Recognition” awards ceremony was held in Beijing. Initiated by the Beijing Federation of Literary and Art Circles, the event was organized by the Beijing Television Artists Association’s Online Audiovisual Program Service Industry Branch and the Capital Internet Association, and undertaken by Beijing Meifujia Media Technology Co., Ltd. Centered on the theme of “Telling China...

Full Text

Preamble

Editor’s Note: On August 3, 2017, the “Creativity in Beijing—2016 Beijing Online Audiovisual Program Innovation and Talent Recognition” awards ceremony was held in Beijing. Initiated by the Beijing Federation of Literary and Art Circles, the event was organized by the Beijing Television Artists Association’s Online Audiovisual Program Service Industry Branch and the Capital Internet Association, and undertaken by Beijing Meifujia Media Technology Co., Ltd. Centered on the theme of “Telling China’s Stories Well, Spreading Chinese Spirit,” the ceremony featured dedicated sessions on innovation and excellence, inviting academic and industry experts to deliver keynote speeches that offered in-depth analysis of industry trends. Through recognizing outstanding programs and individuals, the event celebrated Chinese narratives and promoted national spirit. A total of 62 works were honored, including the web series *With You*

and the web animation *Wu Geng Ji*, along with 30 creative professionals such as Yang Le, director of the web documentary *Family Inheritance*, and Zhou Jun, producer of *Great Shokunin*. What follows are summaries of selected expert presentations.

How to Create Quality Content in the Short Video Era: “Creativity in Beijing—2016 Beijing Online Audiovisual Program Innovation and Talent Recognition”

Award Ceremony Held in Beijing

By Our Editorial Department

The Path of Online Audiovisual Program Innovation: Genre Specialization, Professionalization, and Premium Quality

Genre Specialization represents a hallmark of Hollywood’s film industrialization, essentially a standardization system for artistic products that segments audience tastes into fine-grained categories. Films are produced according to specific genres and established requirements, exhibiting similar styles in thematic structure and even character archetypes—such as comedies, crime films, horror movies, and musicals. In today’s fiercely competitive film market, segmenting the market and creating targeted genre films based on audience demands has become an effective strategy for box office success. Hong Kong cinema has excelled in this regard, with familiar genres like police thrillers, horror films, and nonsensical comedies establishing clear formulas and producing iconic genre directors including John Woo, Tsui Hark, and Stephen Chow. Mainland Chinese cinema has recognized the box office appeal of genre films and has been actively exploring this approach, with film advertisements and online searches now explicitly labeling genre categories. Many directors have made notable attempts, particularly in thriller and fantasy films, achieving considerable success.

Online films and web dramas have emphasized genre from their inception, though early offerings were relatively monotonous, dominated by thrillers (including zombie films), slapstick comedies, and time-travel fantasies. By 2016, this landscape gradually diversified, with significant growth in youth films, comedies, and martial arts productions. In terms of viewership, 2016 web drama genres reached 16 billion views for thriller/suspense, 15.1 billion for urban life, 14.4 billion for detective 推理, 14.2 billion for fantasy, 5.5 billion for humor/comedy, 4.6 billion for youth campus, and 1.9 billion for military themes. In 2017, the six major platforms broadcast 269 series total, comprising 79 historical costume dramas, 98 modern romance, 12 military/historical, 4 espionage, and 3 family ethics productions. An analysis of exclusive content across major platforms reveals distinct preferences: iQiyi favors ancient legends, suspense, and urban life; Tencent focuses on humor, sci-fi, and military themes; and Youku emphasizes detective 推理, historical costume, and youth campus narratives. While

these categories are not static and statistics may vary, they demonstrate clear industry attention to genre specialization.

Award-winning online films and series at this ceremony succeeded precisely through effective genre execution. Campus youth dramas like *With You* and *Seventeen Years Old* and suspense/detective series like *Private Lawyer* deserve recognition. Particularly noteworthy are works that skillfully blend multiple genres, such as the online film *Highway No. 9*, which successfully combines road movie and comedy elements, and *The Mystic Nine* and *February Blooms*, which ingeniously integrate war, martial arts, fantasy, tomb-raiding, and traditional opera to enrich narrative expression.

Professionalization is essential for industrial development and quality improvement, marking industry maturity. The principle of “professionals handling professional tasks” applies equally to online films and web dramas as to traditional cinema and television—the only difference being the distribution platform, while artistic standards must remain consistent. Many key creative personnel now emerge from professional training institutions. When the concept of “online film” was first introduced in 2014, production often involved solo operations or non-professional teams. After several years of consolidation, production teams have become increasingly professional, elevating work quality. This professionalization is driven by three factors: first, regulatory requirements mandating that all online audiovisual content undergo review, with unified standards for online and offline content, demanding not only technical professionalism but also professional value orientation and content control; second, new platform regulations, as major video sites have implemented policies such as iQiyi’s two-stage filing system (planning filing and release filing, equivalent to production permits and distribution permits for theatrical films), while Tencent Video has published content cooperation standards and platforms like iQiyi, Tencent, and LeTV have clarified cooperation processes, gradually standardizing operations; and third, intensifying industry competition, with major platforms establishing their own film divisions including Penguin Pictures and LeTV Pictures, and Huace Film partnering with iQiyi to form iQiyi Film Production. The increasing volume of platform-exclusive and self-produced content clearly indicates a trend toward professional production.

Premium quality is the ultimate king. Through recent integration and development, online film and drama has shifted from quantitative expansion to qualitative improvement. This transformation is driven by three factors: first, rising national policy requirements, platform standards, and audience expectations demand higher quality for survival and growth; second, the industry has evolved from an attention economy to a content-driven era, shifting competition toward quality and substance, moving from sketch-based to plot-driven narratives with many productions focusing on story and character development; and third, to enhance brand value, major platforms have increased investment in self-produced content, with *The Mystic Nine* becoming the first self-produced series to exceed 10 billion views. Both last year’s *The Mystic Nine* and this

year's *The Legend of Condor Heroes* demonstrate that self-produced content is moving beyond crude, mass-produced fare toward premium quality. Fourth, premium content requires not only vision and compelling stories but also exquisite production values. In this rapidly evolving internet era, the concepts of old and new, traditional and innovative are relative, and the path of online audiovisual program innovation remains an ongoing journey.

Analyzing Inheritance and Innovation in Online Audiovisual Programs from a Creative Perspective

Gao Jin, Chief Content Officer, iQiyi

From the perspective of inheritance, we must adopt a developmental viewpoint—something we've learned since childhood. For such a rapidly changing industry, how do we inherit? The first step is to discard the dross and select the essential, continuously establishing new industry ecosystems and standards. This inheritance encompasses not only integrating excellent elements from traditional media and previous audiovisual content but also extends to broader cultural heritage. For instance, today's fashion industry—whether in jewelry or clothing design—incorporates architectural aesthetics, with traditional Chinese architecture beautifully integrated into contemporary Chinese fashion products showcased on international stages. This is my understanding of inheritance: preserving our national culture while integrating it into programming and establishing a complete industrial ecosystem. Any isolated product or work may attract temporary attention but cannot form a sustainable, complete commercial chain—we must ecologize and industrialize it.

Another aspect of inheritance is transmitting positive energy. As platform operators, creators, and organizers, we have an obligation and capability to broadcast and promote works from a positive energy perspective, even from the planning and creative stages. This has always been iQiyi's positioning. Only by continuously integrating positive values from the perspectives of media and creators can we cultivate a constructive content ecosystem.

Regarding innovation, from a planning perspective, all works begin with creativity and conceptualization. What should internet audiovisual programs emphasize at this stage? First, we must recognize our characteristics: small screens, rapid dissemination, and anytime viewing. These three features result in diminished viewing patience on small screens and effective utilization of fragmented time. Therefore, during planning, we must actively explore target audiences, project rationale, and expected outcomes, adopting user-centric perspectives with equal footing and inclusive vision.

From a production innovation standpoint, we should learn from traditional television in topic selection, filming techniques, and post-production editing while leveraging the internet's advantages in flexibility, timeliness, and interactivity. Only through continuous innovation based on traditional foundations can we

create complete works. Equally important is technological innovation—the perfect integration of creativity, editing, and technology will enable breakthroughs and development for online audiovisual programs.

In marketing innovation, quality content seeks market recognition in both reputation and commercial value. We are exploring new advertising methods in popular IPs, including new mobile-centric approaches.

We hope to work alongside industry peers with innovative thinking and developmental perspectives to achieve content excellence.

Web Variety Shows in the Era of Fragmented Entertainment

Zhou Jun, General Manager of Variety Show Production Center, Alibaba Culture & Entertainment Group (Youku)

Contemporary content has become a new consumption portal. With the development of mobile video tools, social platforms, and payment systems on mobile devices, everything becomes possible—we can consume within content, acquire brand identity through consumption, purchase various derivatives at any time, and even enable quality content to become a commercial portal independent of platforms.

Looking ahead, all consumer categories are content, and all entertainment preferences of young people are program formats. As demographic and traffic dividends reach bottlenecks, converting e-commerce users, gaming users, and social media users into video audiences may represent the future blue ocean of traffic. Therefore, program creation requires exploring more formats. In the future, all products will be services, all services will provide content, and all essential consumption can become new models.

The content market has entered an era of fragmentation and fast-moving consumer patterns, with audience attention fragmented across multiple platforms. Internet users now actively search for desired content across different platforms, even on social media and short video platforms.

Over the past year, we have observed five major dividends disappearing in the internet industry, particularly in the variety show sector. First, the **demographic dividend** has vanished, as platforms have entered an era of deeply cultivating existing user bases. Second, the **traffic dividend** has disappeared—whereas platforms once commanded strong user stickiness, users now go wherever content resides. Third, the **model dividend** has faded; large-scale variety shows featuring A-list celebrities and high production costs no longer guarantee high click rates, as users increasingly refuse to pay for production costs alone. Fourth, the **experience dividend** has disappeared, as numerous television professionals have entered the market to produce content for online platforms, yet television experience cannot be directly replicated in the online environment due to

fundamental differences in platform attributes and content tonality. These five disappearing dividends represent prominent market trends we observe this year.

New models and fresh content insights have become scarce commodities. Where does valuable content lie? In this fragmented, fast-moving consumer era, novel program formats and cultural categories that have never been seen before are advantageous for capturing user attention immediately. Regardless of scale, novelty attracts greater focus. Currently, we have entered a fast-paced, high-pressure period where comedy and light entertainment have become essential needs for young users.

Entertainment fragmentation with upward values—*Great Shokunin* is an excellent short documentary on Youku that demonstrates how brief yet powerful short videos conveying craftsman spirit and positive energy quickly captured the attention of post-95 and even post-00 generations. Last year, *Masters in the Forbidden City* became popular on Bilibili, where the Four Great Classical Novels dominate among young users. Why? Because this generation of youth actively seeks content aligned with their values—they are not passive recipients of knowledge and values but active seekers of their worldview, making them unprecedentedly values-driven. Consequently, core socialist values have become a key metric for capturing young audiences.

In the fragmented, fast-moving consumer era, content has transformed into a new consumption portal. With integrated video, social, and payment tools on mobile devices, all possibilities emerge—enabling consumption within content, acquiring brand identity through consumption, purchasing derivatives, and even allowing quality content itself to become a commercial portal independent of platforms. In the future, all product categories will be content, all youth-preferred entertainment methods will be program formats, and when demographic and traffic dividends reach bottlenecks, converting users from e-commerce, gaming, and social media may represent the future traffic blue ocean. Therefore, program creation requires exploring more formats. Ultimately, all products will be services, all services will provide content, and all essential consumption can become new models.

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

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