

Research on the Narrative Characteristics and Aesthetic Evolution of Micro-Series in Short-Video Platforms

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Abstract: With the development of digital media technology, short-video platforms such as Douyin and Kuaishou have, driven by algorithms and user co-creation mechanisms, given rise to micro-series characterized by short duration, high density, and intense plots. These micro-series not only promote the structural renewal of the film and television industry but also reflect the profound evolution of narrative and aesthetic logic in the context of digital media. By analyzing the media context, this study reveals the narrative characteristics of micro-series, including plot density, character labeling, subjective perspective, and temporal-spatial reconstruction. By exploring the aesthetic evolution, it identifies the crises faced by micro-series and calls for emphasizing innovation in narrative depth and cultural connotation while adapting to algorithmic logic. This research enriches the study of digital narrative aesthetics, provides a basis for creators, and contributes to the healthy development of the micro-series industry. In the future, it is necessary to balance commercial demands and cultural value.

Keywords: Short-Video; Narrative Features; Aesthetic Evolution

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Introduction

With the rapid development of digital media technology today, short-video platforms have become one of the most influential cultural communication carriers worldwide. Short-video platforms such as Douyin, Kuaishou, and Bilibili have built a brand-new video narrative and consumption system under the dual influence of algorithm-driven mechanisms and user co-creation. As the content forms of short videos diversify and the platform ecosystem expands, micro-series, a new type of cultural product, has emerged. Featuring short duration, high density, intense plots, and concentrated emotions, it has quickly become a key category in online audio-visual culture and shown explosive growth in terms of audience scale, content production, and dissemination speed. It is estimated that the market size of China's micro-series will reach 67.79 billion yuan in 2025, with the user scale exceeding 660 million, accounting for 68.4% of the total number of Internet users—this market size has surpassed that of the traditional film industry^[1].

The emergence of micro-series has not only brought structural updates to the form of the film and television industry but also reflected the profound evolution of narrative methods and aesthetic logic in the context of digital media. Traditional film and television works rely on complete temporal and spatial narrative structures, and promote the development of plots and emotions through the presentation of camera language and character relationships^[2]; micro-series, however, reconstruct narrative rhythm and audience experience under the constraints of fragmented time and algorithmic logic^[3]. Its production

mechanism, dissemination path, and aesthetic orientation have all changed against the background of media transformation: the narrative mode of micro-series presents the characteristics of high concentration and labeling, and the cultural logic and media logic it reflects indicate new social psychology and aesthetic changes.

This study aims to systematically analyze the narrative structure and aesthetic mechanism of micro-series on short-video platforms from a theoretical perspective, and reveal their generation logic and cultural implications. By examining the narrative characteristics of micro-series, we can understand how media technology and audience psychology jointly shape new story-telling methods; by deeply exploring the internal driving forces of aesthetic evolution, we can gain insight into the transformation process of contemporary culture from artistic logic to algorithmic logic. Theoretically, this research hopes to enrich the studies of narratology and aesthetics in the context of digital media, explore the variation and reorganization of traditional narrative paradigms in the new media environment, and provide a new analytical perspective for understanding “digital narrative”. Practically, this study can provide theoretical basis for micro-series creators regarding narrative innovation and aesthetic direction, promote the healthy development of the short-video cultural industry, and enhance the aesthetics of online audio-visual art.

1. Media Context of Short-Video Platforms and Micro-Series

1.1 Media Logic and Algorithmic Mechanism of Short-Video Platforms

As a new form of media, the core driving force of short-video platforms is algorithm recommendation, and their internal communication logic is essentially different from that of traditional mass media. Platforms continuously analyze data such as users' interest tendencies, duration of stay, and interactive behaviors through algorithm systems, and based on this, build a highly personalized information flow push mechanism. This algorithm operation mode not only improves the accuracy and efficiency of content distribution but also deeply reconstructs the basic logic of narrative generation. Under the discipline and guidance of algorithms, narrative activities are under strong time pressure and need to quickly arouse users' viewing interest within a very short time to serve the core indicators of the platform, such as retention rate and click-through rate. As a result, “high-density narrative” and “instant stimulation” have gradually become indispensable creative strategies in the content production process, and studies have pointed out that micro-series are essentially the practical product of “algorithmic narrative”^[4].

In-depth analysis shows that the communication structure of short-video platforms continuously strengthens the characteristics of time fragmentation and the pleasure orientation of content. Users' viewing behaviors mostly occur in scattered time periods such as commuting, waiting, and intermittent breaks. Narrative texts need to actively adapt to this fragmented and fluid temporal-spatial situation, and rely on highly condensed plot progression, intensive conflict settings, and rapid emotional turns to achieve efficient capture and continuous maintenance of the audience's attention. In this process, algorithms are no longer just technical tools but have evolved into a new type of narrative intermediary. They deeply participate in every link of content from production to distribution, leading to the gradual replacement of narrative logic by communication logic, and artistic expression has to submit to the maximization of communication efficiency to a certain extent. In this way, the compactness of narrative rhythm and the intensity of emotional mobilization have increasingly become key dimensions for evaluating the value of works, and they have also invisibly reshaped the expression paradigm and acceptance habits of contemporary visual culture.

1.2 Definition and Development Stages of Micro-Series

Micro-series is a narrative form emerging in the short-video ecosystem, with both media and artistic attributes^[5]. It inherits the communication logic and aesthetic genes of short videos and has gradually formed its own unique content system and expression methods. Initially, micro-series were mainly user-created plot-based short videos, and later developed into content products with in-depth participation and systematic promotion by platforms. Their evolution path shows a clear trajectory from a folk original ecosystem to an industrialized production system. This transformation has not only promoted the development of content forms towards professionalism and scale but also reflected the maturity and further segmentation of the entire short-video industry in terms of content creation, distribution mechanisms, and commercial operations.

In terms of type construction, micro-series have gradually broken away from a single content model and formed a rich and

diverse theme pattern^[6]. Whether it is urban themes focusing on emotional expression and realistic observation, or genre creations relying on suspense structures and ancient-style images, they all reflect the continuous expansion of micro-series in the content dimension. Typification is not only a strategic choice made by producers in response to market segmentation and algorithm recommendation mechanisms but also an inevitable development stage of micro-series as a mature content form. Micro-series have also gradually formed a relatively stable paradigm in terms of narrative: short duration carries high-concentration plots, strong conflicts drive the narrative rhythm, and fast pace maintains audience stickiness—these common characteristics have shaped the unique aesthetic identity of micro-series and imperceptibly cultivated the audience's viewing habits and aesthetic expectations, forming a continuous positive feedback cycle between content production and audience feedback.

1.3 Changes in Audience and Viewing Psychology

The continuous evolution of the media environment has not only profoundly transformed the basic logic of content production but also reconstructed the audience's viewing habits and psychological expectations. In the new communication field of short videos, the audience has gradually transformed from relatively passive receivers in the traditional film and television era to active participants with a high degree of choice. They continuously feed back their preference information to the content end through interactive behaviors such as swiping, staying, liking, and commenting; the algorithm system adjusts the content distribution strategy based on this information, forming a “two-way adjustment” collusive relationship. In such a mechanism, the audience is no longer just the receiver of the narrative but also becomes an invisible participant in narrative communication and form shaping. The subjective boundary of the narrative has become increasingly blurred, and a high degree of dynamic adaptation has been presented between content and consumption.

In terms of audience psychology, micro-series usually rely on high-intensity emotional output and highly condensed conflict settings to quickly arouse the audience's emotional resonance, meeting their psychological needs for rapid release and instant satisfaction in fragmented time. Against the macro background of an accelerated society, the “short, flat, and fast” characteristics of micro-series enable them to efficiently “create” instant emotional release and psychological compensation for users^[7]. Based on this, an instant aesthetics centered on “pleasure first” has gradually been established, which is not only reflected in the external characteristics of content forms but also reflects the changes in the audience's attention structure and the acceleration of emotional rhythm in the digital context. The formation of this psychological mechanism is not only the result of the development of media technology but also a specific manifestation of the contemporary social and cultural mentality in the field of content consumption.

2. Analysis of Narrative Characteristics of Micro-Series

2.1 “High-Density” and “Minimalist Narrative” of Plot Structure

The primary narrative characteristics of micro-series are the high density of plots and the minimalism of narrative. Within a limited duration, the narrative needs to quickly enter plot conflicts and achieve the transition of emotions through the shortest path. The narrative methods of traditional films and television, such as slow presentation and focus on detail description, are compressed here, and instead, a structural design with a tight rhythm and frequent turns is adopted. This minimalist narrative is not only a requirement in terms of duration but also the result of the joint action of algorithmic logic and the audience's attention economy. Micro-series build a “sense of continuity” in a fragmented time structure. Through unitized and serialized narrative strategies, creators shape each episode into an independent but interrelated plot unit, enabling the audience to form a stable narrative experience in the process of repeated viewing and full expectation. In this way, fragmentation is not a complete separation but a strategy to reorganize narrative coherence within a limited duration.

2.2 “Typification” and “Labeling” of Character Shaping

The typification of character shaping is a key feature of micro-series narrative. Due to the limitations of duration and the needs of communication, character images mostly present distinct labeling characteristics, so that the audience can complete the identification of characters in a very short time. Character types have become a convenient entry point for the narrative. Through the standardization of personality, identity, and emotional patterns, a highly recognizable symbolic system is built. This labeled shaping has dual meanings in terms of narrative function: on the one hand, it improves the efficiency of

information transmission and enables the audience to quickly enter the context; on the other hand, it invisibly reduces the complexity and multidimensionality of characters, forming a tendency of aesthetic flatness. However, from the perspective of cultural psychology, character labeling exactly reflects the resonance mechanism in popular culture. The audience projects their own emotions and desires into familiar character types, forming “symbolic identity”, which constitutes the social psychological basis for the popularity of micro-series.

2.3 Narrative Perspective and Participation Mechanism

Micro-series usually adopt the narrative methods of first-person perspective and short lens switching to enhance the audience's sense of immersion and involvement during viewing. Such “subjective lenses” and “close-range narrative” can not only maintain an intimate relationship between the audience and the story space visually but also build an on-site experience psychologically. The audience seems to become part of the narrative, experiencing the occurrence of the story and the flow of emotions. The unique bullet screen, comment, and secondary creation mechanisms of short-video platforms make the narrative process of micro-series present the characteristic of “co-narration”: the audience is no longer just passive viewers but continuously affects the reception and dissemination of the story through comments and interactions. Narrative thus becomes a multi-directional flow process, and the meaning of the text is constantly generated between production and reproduction.

2.4 Reconstruction of Time and Space

In a fragmented media environment, the narrative of micro-series in terms of time and space shows a very prominent reconstruction phenomenon. The originally linear time is interrupted and reorganized, and the narrative rhythm unfolds in an instantaneous form. The short-duration and fast-switching narrative mode of micro-series causes the story to build plot logic not through the continuous extension of time but through strong visual impact and emotional impact to achieve a sense of time compression. From the perspective of space, the boundary between reality and virtuality has become blurred. Multiple scenes on short-video platforms overlap with each other, making the virtual space a key part of the narrative. Space is no longer just the background of the story but has become a medium involved in the construction of narrative meaning. In this way, micro-series present the reconstruction characteristics of digital narrative in the dimensions of time and space.

3. Aesthetic Evolution of Micro-Series

3.1 From Traditional Narrative Aesthetics to “Algorithmic Aesthetics”

The aesthetic evolution of micro-series is first reflected in the direction of the transformation of aesthetic logic. Traditional narrative aesthetics emphasizes the integrity and expressive depth of artistic creation and attaches great importance to the balance between emotion and form; however, in short-video platforms dominated by algorithms, aesthetic standards are gradually replaced by data logic. Indicators such as click-through rate, completion rate, and interaction volume have become the basis for evaluating the value of works, and artistic logic is surrounded by traffic logic. This algorithmic aesthetics is oriented to user preferences and adjusts the creative direction through data feedback, forming a cycle of “data-content-feedback”. Aesthetic taste has become digitizable and quantifiable, and artistic evaluation has given way to algorithmic regulation. In this sense, the aesthetics of micro-series no longer belongs solely to creators but has become the result of the joint shaping of algorithms and the audience.

3.2 Strengthening of Emotional Logic and Sensory Pleasure

The aesthetic strategy of micro-series takes the strengthening of emotional logic and sensory stimulation as the core. Due to the short duration, the narrative mostly achieves aesthetic impact through emotional concentration and emotional outbursts. Strong emotional contrasts and rhythm changes form the source of the audience's pleasure experience. Narrative no longer pursues complex psychological portrayal but stimulates emotional responses through direct and intense sensory effects. This “pleasure-oriented aesthetics” presents the characteristics of emotional consumption in the digital media era. The audience's aesthetic needs tend to be instant satisfaction, and sensory experience has become a key basis for judging content value. Micro-series rely on simple forms and strong rhythms to build emotional templates adapted to the attention economy, such as touching, counterattack, and a sense of satisfaction. The standardization of these emotional templates has gradually made aesthetics stylized, but at the same time, it has also revealed the psychological structure of contemporary media culture.

3.3 Daily Aesthetics and Grassroots Creation

Another aesthetic turn presented by micro-series is reflected in the rise of daily aesthetics and the extensive participation of grassroots creation. The openness and low-threshold characteristics of short-video platforms have made ordinary individuals a group with creative potential. Scenes and experiences in daily life are transformed into narrative materials, forming the realistic basis of micro-series. The life-oriented expression and ordinary perspective together build a new aesthetic value, that is, the presentation of “the beauty of the ordinary” in the media. This decentralized production model has broken the elite structure of traditional film and television production and achieved the democratization of aesthetics. The boundary between creators and the audience has become blurred, and the aesthetic discourse has shifted from the professional system to popular culture. The popularity of micro-series reflects the diversification of cultural production on the one hand and shows the artistic possibilities of daily experience in digital media on the other hand.

3.4 Aesthetic Crisis and Innovation Space

With the rapid increase in the number of micro-series and the gradual solidification of models, they are also facing a crisis in terms of aesthetics. On the one hand, the existing tendency of homogenization and fast-food culture has led to aesthetic fatigue. Works tend to be repetitive in structure and emotion, lacking depth and innovation; on the other hand, the algorithm-oriented creative logic has increased the dependence on traffic, weakening the ideological and artistic nature of the content. Against this background, the innovation space of micro-series lies in breaking through the constraints of algorithms and reconstructing narrative depth and cultural connotation. By strengthening the theme implication, expanding the expression form, and reconstructing the aesthetic rhythm, the transition from “sensory pleasure” to “cultural thinking” can be achieved. Platforms should also transcend the single logic of “traffic first” and actively inject diversity into the content ecosystem through technical means^[8]. Only when creation returns to the exploration of human nature, emotions, and social reality can micro-series gain new vitality in the process of aesthetic evolution.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The rise of micro-series reflects the dual impact of media evolution and cultural turn. Its narrative structure presents the characteristics of fragmentation, labeling, and interaction: fragmentation reconstructs the expression of time and space, labeling simplifies the setting of characters and plots, and interaction makes the audience's participation a part of narrative construction. In terms of aesthetics, the aesthetic logic of micro-series has gradually transformed from traditional artistic aesthetics to pleasure-oriented aesthetics driven by algorithms and emotions. Aesthetic evaluation is no longer limited to artistic value itself but is closely linked to traffic dissemination and emotional resonance.

Theoretically, micro-series point out the reconstruction process of narrative mechanisms in the digital context and provide a new perspective for understanding the interactive relationship between algorithms, emotions, and aesthetics. It is not only an extension of the film and television form but also the result of the mutual shaping of media logic and the aesthetic system. Practically, micro-series creation should actively explore the depth and diversity of artistic expression while adapting to algorithms and user preferences. Creators should pursue the condensation of meaning within a limited duration and balance commercial demands and cultural value. The future development of micro-series requires continuous innovation in narrative structure, character portrayal, and emotional expression to form a digital narrative form with both artistic quality and ideological connotation.

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Conflict of Interests

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