

The "Decentralized" Scheduling of New Media Short Dramas: The Spatial Reconstruction Logic of Vertical Screen Images—From the Perspectives of User Behavior, Technological Iteration, and Narrative Revolution

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ABSTRACT

Vertical screen short dramas subvert the traditional film and television creation paradigm through "decentralized" scheduling. Essentially, it is a process in which the transformation of media forms leads to the transfer of spatial power. Starting from the theory of technological affordance, this paper demonstrates how the vertical screen format reconstructs the power relations in the entire "creation - dissemination - reception" chain through spatial compression, interactive empowerment, and algorithmic intervention. By combining cases such as the TikTok short drama *Escaping the British Museum* and the Kwai Xingmang short drama *After Remarriage*, it reveals the triple logic of "decentralized" scheduling: the democratization of content production empowered by users, the fragmentation of narrative driven by algorithms, and the spatial fluidity under the integration of virtual and real, providing an interdisciplinary perspective for new media film and television research.

KEYWORDS

Vertical screen short drama; Decentralized scheduling; Spatial reconstruction; Technological affordance; Narrative revolution

1 The "Decentralized" Gene of Vertical Screen Images

1.1 Media Transformation: The Technological Affordance of the Vertical Screen Format

1.1.1 Reconstruction of Physical Space

The 9:16 vertical screen format compresses the horizontal depth of field (compared with the traditional 2.35:1 film format), forcing directors to abandon the classic scheduling hierarchy of "panorama - medium shot - close - up". For example, in *The World of Auntie*, the screen is filled with "half - body figures of characters + text bullet comments", replacing spatial depth with information density. Under the influence of the vertical screen format, directors have to re - examine the composition and narrative methods of the screen. Due to the compression of the horizontal depth of field, the elements in the screen are more concentrated, and the audience's attention can be more easily guided to specific areas. This change not only poses challenges to directors' creations but also brings a brand - new visual experience to the audience.

1.1.2 Subversion of Viewing Behavior

In a fast - paced life, people tend to obtain information through rapidly switching images. The short shot duration and high - frequency switching of vertical screen dramas just meet this need. Data shows that the average shot duration of vertical screen dramas is 2.8 seconds, while that of horizontal screen dramas is 5.4 seconds, enabling the audience to obtain more content by switching vertical screens in a short time. In addition, the single - hand - held viewing method makes the audience more inclined to watch vertical screen dramas. Whether on the subway, bus, or while waiting in line, people can easily take out their mobile phones and browse the wonderful plot by swiping their thumbs.

1.2 Three - Dimensional Representations of "Decentralized" Scheduling

1.2.1 Creation Dimension

UGC tools, such as the "one - click storyboarding" function in Cap Cut, have lowered the professional threshold. In 2023, the year - on - year growth of TikTok's UGC - based drama content was 217%. With the continuous progress of technology, more and more UGC tools have emerged, providing a creation platform for ordinary users. These tools not only lower the professional threshold but also make creation more convenient and efficient. For example, the "one - click storyboarding" function in Cap Cut allows users to easily divide a video into multiple shots, achieving a more diverse narrative effect. The popularity of this creation method enables more people to participate in film and television creation, breaking the professional barriers of traditional film and television creation. The convenience and efficiency of UGC tools also bring new opportunities to film and television creation. Creators can complete the production of works more quickly and can interact and receive feedback from the audience in a timely manner. This interactivity not only improves the

quality of works but also enhances the audience's sense of participation and loyalty.

1.2.2 Narrative Dimension

The application of non - linear structures in vertical screen short dramas has brought a revolution to film and television narrative, and it breaks the shackles of linear narrative in traditional film and television, allowing stories to unfold more freely. In works like **Twenty - Nine**, the narrative method from the parallel perspectives of two heroines enables the audience to see two different storylines simultaneously, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the story's background and character relationships.

This innovation in narrative methods is not just to attract the audience's attention but also to better express the theme and emotions of the story. Through the interweaving of different perspectives and plots, the audience can think more deeply about the issues in the story and feel the inner world of the characters. At the same time, the non - linear structure also makes the story more hierarchical and profound, constantly surprising and moving the audience during the viewing process.

In addition, the application of non - linear structures also places higher requirements on film and television production. Production staff need to design the structure and plot of the story more carefully to ensure that different storylines can be organically combined into a complete whole. At the same time, they also need to consider the audience's viewing experience and avoid overly complex narrative structures that may confuse and fatigue the audience.

1.2.3 Dissemination Dimension

Algorithmic recommendation replaces the authority of directors. In Tencent Video's "revenue - sharing drama" model, the user's completion rate directly determines the weight of traffic distribution. In traditional film and television, the director's authority often determines the dissemination effect of a work. In the new media era, however, algorithmic recommendation has become an important force in the dissemination of works. The user's completion rate has become a key factor in determining the weight of traffic distribution, which means that only works truly loved by the audience can obtain more exposure and traffic. This algorithmic recommendation brings new challenges to film and television production. Production staff need to have a better understanding of the audience's needs and preferences and create works that are more in line with market demands. They need to continuously optimize the content and form of works through data analysis and user feedback to improve the quality and attractiveness of works.

2 Practical Approaches: Three Strategies for Spatial Reconstruction

2.1 Compression Strategy: From Scene - based Narrative to Symbol - based Narrative

2.1.1 The Emotional Hegemony of Character Close - ups

The importance of character close - ups in vertical screen dramas is self - evident. Given the limited screen space, directors can enable the audience to have a deeper understanding of the characters' inner worlds by delicately depicting the facial expressions of characters. In vertical screen dramas, facial expressions account for more than 60% of the screen, which is much higher than that in horizontal screen dramas.

Character close - ups are not only a narrative means but also a way of emotional transmission. Taking **Snow at the Eastern Fence** as an example, a close - up of the female protagonist's pupil tremor is a crucial node in the entire story. By capturing the subtle changes in the female protagonist's eyes, this close - up shot conveys her complex emotions. The audience can feel the female protagonist's pain, struggle, and helplessness from this close - up, thus having a deeper understanding of her tragic love relationship with the male protagonist. The innovation of this narrative method lies not only in its compactness and excitement but also in its ability to bring a more profound emotional experience to the audience. Through character close - ups, the audience can more intuitively feel the emotional changes of the characters and thus be more likely to resonate.

2.1.2 Narrative Substitution by Texts/Props

The participation of native elements such as bullet comments and stickers in scheduling enables the audience to participate more actively in the story. The audience can express their views and feelings by sending bullet comments and interact with other audiences. This interactivity not only enhances the audience's sense of participation but also allows them to have a deeper understanding of the connotation of the story.

In **If Running Is My Destiny**, the sliding subtitles simulate WeChat conversations, transforming interface interactions into narrative language and making the story more vivid and real. The innovation of this narrative method not only

enriches the expression form of the story but also brings a more novel viewing experience to the audience.

2.2 Interaction Strategy: The Scheduling Revolution of Audience Participation

2.2.1 The Technical Realization of Branching Storylines

The technical realization of branching storylines has brought a brand - new narrative method to vertical screen short dramas. In **The Enchanted Jade and the Mysterious Tale** on Tencent Satellite, the setting of "dialogue - selection" interaction nodes allows the audience to directly participate in the development of the plot and become one of the story creators.

This participatory scheduling method breaks the traditional model in which the audience can only passively accept the plot in film and television. The audience can choose different dialogue options according to their preferences and judgments, thus changing the plot's direction. This interactivity not only enhances the audience's sense of participation but also allows them to be more deeply immersed in the story.

For example, at a certain plot node, the audience faces two different choices: Option A is to help the protagonist solve the problem, and Option B is to let the protagonist fall into a greater dilemma. The audience can choose one of the options according to their values and emotional inclinations. If Option A is chosen, the plot may develop in a positive direction, and the protagonist will overcome the difficulties and achieve their goals; if Option B is chosen, the plot may become more intense and exciting, and the protagonist will face greater challenges.

This participatory scheduling method allows the audience to experience different plot developments, increasing the fun and playability of the story. At the same time, it also provides the audience with more room for thinking, enabling them to think about the theme and meaning of the story during the selection process.

In addition, the technical realization of branching storylines also places higher requirements on film and television production. Production staff need to design multiple different plot branches to ensure that each branch can develop reasonably and can echo with other branches. They also need to consider the diversity of the audience's choices and try their best to meet the needs of different audiences.

2.2.2 The Spatial Expansion of Virtual - Real Linkage

In the VR version of **The Wind Rises in Luoyang** on iQiyi, the vertical screen main film and the virtual map are updated simultaneously. The audience can achieve "in - drama viewing + out - of - drama exploration" dual - layer scheduling by sliding the screen. In - drama, they can immerse themselves in the wonderful plot and feel the emotions of the characters and the development of the story; out - of - drama, they can explore the scenes and locations in the drama through the virtual map and learn more background information and story details. For example, at a certain plot node, the protagonist comes to a mysterious place. The audience can explore the terrain and environment of this place through the virtual map and learn about its historical and cultural background. At the same time, they can also watch the protagonist's actions and reactions in - drama and feel his emotions and thoughts.

This spatial expansion of virtual - real linkage not only enriches the expression form of the story but also provides the audience with more opportunities for interaction and exploration. The audience can freely choose the viewing and exploration methods according to their interests and preferences, thus having a deeper understanding of the connotation and background of the story. The spatial expansion of virtual - real linkage also brings new challenges and opportunities to film and television production. Production staff need to design a more abundant and realistic virtual world to ensure that the audience can have a good exploration experience. They also need to consider the degree of integration between the virtual world and the vertical screen main film to ensure that the two can complement each other and jointly serve the development of the story.

2.3 Algorithmic Strategy: Data - driven Dynamic Scheduling

In today's digital age, advanced algorithmic strategies are constantly innovating the development of the industry. Data - driven dynamic scheduling, through the in - depth mining and analysis of massive data, can flexibly adjust task allocation and resource configuration based on real - time data, improving efficiency and adaptability. The pre - visualization application of AIGC has great potential. Taking Baidu Wenxin Model as an example, in the field of film and television production, producers only need to input tags such as "sweet love" and "plot twist", and the model can quickly generate storyboard sketches and automatically optimize the shot sequence with its powerful algorithm, greatly shortening the pre - production time and inspiring creative inspiration.

The real - time traffic feedback mechanism also plays a crucial role. **Fatal Housewife** on Youku is a successful case. It accurately analyzes the changes in the audience's preferences based on the time periods when users abandon watching the drama and dynamically adjusts the opening rhythm of subsequent episodes, achieving scheduling optimization of

"modifying while broadcasting" and retaining the audience to the greatest extent.

3 Industry Reflection: Standardized Production and the Long - tail Dilemma

3.1 The Paradox of Industrialization

Standardized assembly - line production is becoming more and more prominent in today's film and television industry. Especially in the Hengdian Short Drama Base, the "shoot 100 episodes in 72 hours" model represents an extreme pursuit of efficiency. Behind this model is the wide application of standardized storyboard libraries. Common storyboard scenes such as "crying close - up" and "reverse shot of a slap" have, to a certain extent, improved shooting efficiency but inevitably led to the problem of homogeneous scheduling.

When a large number of short dramas adopt similar storyboards and scheduling methods, the audience is likely to experience aesthetic fatigue. It is like in a factory, products with similar appearances are continuously produced, lacking uniqueness and individuality. This homogeneous scheduling not only limits the creative space of creators but also puts the development of the entire industry in a dilemma.

However, there are also some cases of micro - innovation breaking through the dilemma. *Love and Redemption* by Mango TV is one of the outstanding examples. This short drama skillfully integrates martial arts fights into the vertical screen format and simulates the leaping of lightness kung fu by sliding up and down, creating a new scheduling paradigm of "vertical martial arts fights". This innovation not only brings a brand - new visual experience to the audience but also sets an example for the entire industry.

The "vertical martial arts fights" scheduling method makes full use of the characteristics of the vertical screen to present the wonderful martial arts fights in the martial arts world in a novel way. When watching, the audience seems to be in a brand - new martial arts world, experiencing unprecedented excitement and shock. The success of this micro - innovation also proves that in the context of standardized production, with sufficient creativity and courage, it is still possible to break through the dilemma and achieve innovative development.

3.2 Concerns about Algorithmic Power

In today's digital age, algorithms have become an indispensable part of the film and television industry. However, the rise of algorithmic power also brings a series of concerns. The domestication of creation by the "data cocoon" is an important issue. According to *The Research Report on the Development of China's Online Audio - Visual Industry*, 85% of producers admit that they will add "strong conflict" scenes to cater to algorithms. This kind of creation to cater to algorithms often leads to the extremization of scheduling strategies.

When producers pay too much attention to the requirements of algorithms, they often ignore the artistry and innovation of works. In pursuit of high click - through rates and high play counts, they continuously increase conflicts and drama, making works more and more impetuous and superficial. This extreme scheduling strategy not only affects the quality of works but also makes the audience feel tired and bored.

In addition, copyright disputes and content consumption are also serious problems. With the rise of pirated mini - programs, the phenomenon of stealing content through screen - recording functions is common. The existence of pirated mini - programs not only violates the legitimate rights and interests of copyright holders but also undermines the ecological environment of the entire industry. In response to this situation, the single - episode payment model has gradually become a trend. However, this model also forces producers to adopt the scheduling trap of "high - energy in the first 10 seconds", accelerating the involution of the industry. In order to attract audiences to pay for viewing, producers have to adopt more extreme scheduling methods, further reducing the quality of works.

4 Future Prospects: Possibility of Re - centralization during Reconstruction

4.1 Technological Feedback: VR Vertical Screen and Spatial Computing

The emergence of Apple Vision Pro brings new opportunities for the development of vertical screen images. This device supports vertical screen 3D images. In the future, there may be "gaze - based scheduling", that is, the gaze point triggers the shot change. The application of this technology will achieve a leap from "passive viewing" to "active construction". When the audience can trigger shot changes through their gaze points, they will no longer be passive viewers but become one of the creators of the images. They can freely choose the viewing angles and content according to their preferences and needs, realizing a personalized viewing experience. The application of this technology will bring new possibilities for the development of vertical screen short dramas.

4.2 Cultural Reconstruction: The Struggle for the Discourse Power of Vertical Screen Aesthetics

The going - global of Chinese short dramas has become a trend. However, during the process of going - global, it also faces many challenges. Breaking through "algorithmic colonialism" is a key issue. Reel Short has achieved great success in the European and American markets through the scheduling strategy of "Oriental mysticism + strong European and American rhythms". Its work *The Double Life of My Billionaire Husband* has exceeded the daily downloads of TikTok in the European and American markets. The success of this scheduling strategy not only provides an example for Chinese short dramas going - global but also proves the potential of vertical screen aesthetics in the international market.

In the future, when Chinese short dramas go - global, they need to pay more attention to cultural integration and innovation, break through the shackles of "algorithmic colonialism", and establish their own brands and discourse power. Only in this way can the international development of vertical screen images be truly realized.

5 Conclusion

The "decentralized" scheduling of vertical screen short dramas is essentially the re - distribution of image power in the digital age. In this process, users change from viewers to creators, algorithms change from tools to accomplices, and space changes from a container to a battlefield. This reconstruction not only breeds the dawn of the democratization of popular cultural expression but also harbors the crises of technological monopoly and aesthetic degradation.

On the one hand, "decentralized" scheduling provides more creative opportunities and expression platforms for the public, enabling everyone to become an image creator. This democratic trend will help to promote the diversification and innovative development of culture. At the same time, the application of algorithms makes the dissemination of works more accurate and efficient, providing more display opportunities for excellent works.

On the other hand, the risks of technological monopoly and aesthetic degradation cannot be ignored. With the continuous development of technology, a few tech giants may monopolize the production and dissemination channels of images, thus affecting the diversity and fairness of culture. Moreover, in order to cater to the demands of algorithms and the market, some works may excessively pursue click - through rates and view counts, resulting in aesthetic degradation and a lack of cultural value.

Therefore, only by establishing a dynamic balance between artistry and commerciality, as well as between standardization and innovation, can the transformative potential of vertical - screen images be truly unleashed. In future development, we need to constantly explore and innovate. We should not only pay attention to the artistry and innovation of works but also consider the market demands and commercial value. Only in this way can we achieve the sustainable development of vertical - screen short dramas and bring more excellent works to the public.

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