

A Study on Innovative Strategies for Online Micro-Short Dramas Under the Theory of Empathy-Driven Communication: Take "Escape from the British Museum" as an Example

Luohan Wang

New Channel-UIBE Qingdao A-level Centre, Qingdao, Shandong, 266000, China

ABSTRACT

This paper adopts an empathy-based communication theory perspective to focus on the innovative strategies of online micro-short dramas, selecting the phenomenon-level work "Escape from the British Museum" as a case study. First, it elucidates the core connotations, constituent elements, and communication mechanisms of empathy-based communication theory, clarifying the definition, characteristics, and relevance of online micro-short dramas to empathy-based communication. Through case analysis, it is found that "Escape from the British Museum" closely aligns its theme with the return of cultural heritage and patriotic sentiments. It employs first-person narration, fragmented storytelling, and suspense to enhance empathy guidance, uses anthropomorphic characterisation to establish emotional connections, and leverages social media and UGC creation to facilitate empathy diffusion, achieving significant communication effects. Based on this, this paper proposes innovative strategies for online micro-short dramas from four dimensions—content creation, dissemination channels, interactive modes, and brand building—aiming to provide theoretical references and practical guidance for enhancing the emotional communication effectiveness of online micro-short dramas and promoting the high-quality development of the industry.

KEYWORDS

Emotional communication; Online micro-short dramas; Innovative strategies; "Escape from the british museum"

1 Introduction

With the rapid development of internet technology and the deepening integration of media, online micro-short dramas have become a focal point in the media industry due to their concise time format, exquisite content expression, and swift information dissemination capabilities. They have also emerged as an important component of public cultural consumption. According to statistical data, the market share of online micro-short dramas has been steadily increasing in recent years, with a growing number of users and rising levels of dissemination and attention ^[1]. "Escape from the British Museum," a popular online micro-short drama, garnered widespread attention and active discussion upon its release. Through its innovative approach and emotionally resonant storytelling, it effectively tapped into viewers' emotions, achieving excellent empathetic communication outcomes. This not only demonstrates the powerful empathetic communication capabilities of online micro-short dramas but also provides a valuable case study for exploring the application of empathetic communication principles in the dissemination of such content.

2 Empathy communication theory and an overview of online micro-short dramas

2.1 Empathy-based communication theory

Empathy-based communication theory is a theory that posits emotions as a crucial component of the communication process. At its core, this theory asserts that through interactive communication, communicators and recipients achieve mutual understanding, transmission, and resonance of emotions. It represents a theoretical framework that places greater emphasis on the influence of emotional factors on communication outcomes compared to traditional communication studies ^[2].

The main components of empathy-based communication theory include the emotion expresser, emotional information, information channels, emotional recipients, and emotional responses. The emotion expresser transmits emotional information through specific channels to the emotional recipient, who then receives the information and generates corresponding emotional responses. These responses are fed back to the emotion expresser through a response system, forming a complete cycle of emotional expression ^[3].

The main operational mechanisms of empathy communication theory consist of three stages: emotional arousal, emotional transfer, and emotional resonance. First, in the emotional arousal stage, the information sender triggers the sensory experiences of the audience through certain materials or means, allowing the audience to initially experience

sensory emotions related to the information. Second, in the emotional transfer stage, the audience invests their sensory experiences and cognition into the information sent by the information sender, gaining a deeper understanding and perception of the emotions of the information sender. Finally, in the emotional resonance stage, the emotional experiences of the audience and the information sender achieve deep unity, generating strong emotional resonance and ultimately achieving good communication effects.

2.2 Definition and characteristics of online micro-short dramas

Online short dramas are dramatic works with a runtime of several minutes to over ten minutes, featuring a complete narrative structure and theme, and distributed via online platforms. They represent a new form of film and television art that integrates dramatic elements, cinematic qualities, and characteristics of online culture, adapting to the fast-paced lifestyle of modern society ^[4].

Online micro-short dramas have five main characteristics: First, they are of moderate length, suitable for users who have only short periods of time to watch; Second, they are concise in content, typically focusing on a single point or the outline of a small story, with a tight plot and no redundancy; Third, they offer diverse genres, including romance, mystery, comedy, and workplace dramas, catering to audiences of all interests. Fourth, leveraging the rapid dissemination capabilities of online platforms, they can reach a large audience in a short time and generate significant influence. Fifth, they feature strong interactivity, allowing users to express their thoughts through comment sections and engage in real-time communication with creators and other viewers, thereby participating in the dissemination and discussion of content ^[5].

2.3 The relationship between empathy-driven communication and online micro-short dramas

Online micro-short dramas have an inherent connection with empathy-driven communication. First, online micro-short dramas provide an excellent medium for empathy-driven communication. These micro-short dramas feature vivid visual effects, complex plots, and uniquely characterised characters. This dynamic medium effectively conveys emotional information, providing a platform for eliciting emotional responses from audiences, which is advantageous for empathy-driven communication ^[6].

Second, empathy can effectively enhance the dissemination effects of online video dramas. By evoking emotional resonance among audiences, online video dramas enhance viewers' viewing experiences, increase their stickiness and loyalty, and enable content dissemination to reach broader audiences and achieve greater reputation. Additionally, audiences, driven by emotional resonance, will voluntarily participate in content dissemination and sharing, amplifying the influence of content dissemination.

3 Case analysis of empathy-driven communication in "escape from the british museum"

3.1 Basic introduction to "escape from the british museum"

"Escape from the British Museum" is a short web series centred on the theme of the return of cultural heritage. Created and directed by young content creators, the series' narrative revolves around the real-life story of the "Little Jade Vase," a Chinese artifact stolen and illegally trafficked overseas, which is eventually returned to its homeland after a arduous journey. This unique storyline has sparked widespread online discussion and engagement.

3.2 Theme selection and emotional resonance

This work revolves around the theme of cultural return, evoking strong emotional resonance. Cultural heritage represents the primary form of a nation's historical and cultural identity, carrying and conveying the collective memory and emotions of a people. As one of the world's oldest civilisations, China possesses a wealth of cultural relics, many of which are scattered across the globe, a source of deep regret for the Chinese people ^[7]. "Escape from the British Museum" uses the "small jade vase" as a focal point to express longing for one's hometown and the desire to return, evoking a sense of anticipation and strong emotional resonance among viewers.

3.3 Narrative strategies and empathy guidance

The narrative perspective of the work adopts the first-person viewpoint of the "small jade vase," allowing audiences to deeply and fully experience its inner world and emotions, thereby enhancing the audience's sense of immersion. It feels as though they are accompanying the "small jade vase" on its journey to escape from the British Museum, empathising with the hardships it endures.

The fragmented narrative structure satisfies the viewing experience of the audience. Each episode of the TV series is short, with independent yet interconnected plots, allowing viewers to watch at their convenience during fragmented

time slots without feeling exhausted from prolonged viewing. This maintains continuity in viewing while ensuring timely relevance, enabling rapid character development and plot progression while sustaining audience interest in the story ^[8].

3.4 Character development and emotional connection

The character of "Xiao Yuhu" is portrayed as an emotional, thinking human figure, making the character more relatable and easier for viewers to understand. By portraying "Xiao Yuhuo" as pure and kind, the audience feels the vitality of the cultural relics, thereby reducing the psychological distance between the audience and the relics. The audience begins to view the relics as emotional, thinking friends rather than cold, lifeless objects, thereby achieving a high level of identification and intimacy with the "Xiao Yuhuo" character.

The authenticity of emotional expression can enhance audience empathy ^[9]. When "Xiao Yuhuo" departs, emotions such as fear, loneliness, nostalgia, and resilience are portrayed authentically and effectively, allowing viewers to strongly sense the character's presence. As viewers witness "Xiao Yuhuo's" emotional expressions, they are prompted to reflect on their own emotions in similar situations, thereby fostering intense empathy [9].

3.5 Communication channels and empathy diffusion

The primary promotional channel for this work is social media, which enables rapid and widespread dissemination. For example, on popular social media platforms like Weibo, Douyin, and Kuaishou, numerous viewers have commented on, praised, and shared the content, quickly raising the social media buzz around the work to a high level. The high interactivity and efficient information transmission characteristics of social media provide an excellent environment for the work to quickly resonate with the public and spread information. After watching the content, audiences actively shared their opinions and feelings, creating a vibrant discussion atmosphere that naturally deepened and broadened the scope of public emotion dissemination.

4 Innovative strategies for online micro-short dramas from an empathy-driven communication perspective

4.1 Content creation innovation strategies

As content creators, it is essential to observe social trends to align with the audience and select appropriate themes, such as family emotions, friendships, romantic relationships, national consciousness, or social responsibility. By deeply understanding and capturing these themes, creators can evoke emotional resonance among the audience.

Employ various narrative techniques to enhance perspective-switching. Beyond the simplest first-person narration and fragmented storytelling, use diverse perspectives, reverse chronology, flashbacks, and other narrative methods to enrich the plot structure. This allows audiences to interpret content and character emotions through multiple lenses, thereby increasing audience engagement and empathy ^[10].

Crafting distinct and three-dimensional character personalities is equally important. Characters should not be flat; instead, they should possess diverse traits and complex facets. Authors must delve into the inner thoughts and emotional changes of characters to make them appear sincere and credible. Through the creation of well-rounded character personalities, audiences can more authentically experience the characters' authenticity and tangibility.

4.2 Innovative strategies for communication channels

Selecting appropriate communicators and targeting the right audience is essential for ensuring efficient information transmission. Different online short videos have distinct content styles, and the corresponding transmission media also vary. Content creators should choose appropriate transmission media based on the characteristics and preferences of their target audience, such as Douyin and Kuaishou, which are popular among young people, or Bilibili, a short video platform with higher cultural content, to ensure that the content reaches the intended audience.

Build a cross-media promotional matrix to expand the scope of information dissemination ^[11]. Use different media platforms to repost online short videos, encouraging cross-platform traffic and mutual referral to create a cumulative dissemination effect. For example, start with a thematic teaser and interaction on Weibo, then release highlights or short clips on Douyin and Kuaishou, followed by in-depth analysis on Bilibili, and run the campaign across multiple platforms simultaneously to increase awareness and engagement.

4.3 Interactive mode innovation strategies

Involving the public in content production and sharing can enhance their enthusiasm and sense of belonging ^[12]. This can be achieved through essay competitions, story continuation contests, or inviting audiences to become main

characters, allowing them to fully integrate into the production process of internet micro-short dramas. Their produced content should be showcased and promoted extensively to stimulate their production enthusiasm and create a positive interactive space.

Establish an emotional exchange platform by creating dedicated fan communities and themed discussion forums on social media to provide fans with a platform to share their emotions and opinions. Creators can establish direct communication with fans, understand their needs and feelings, and refine and improve works based on their feedback, thereby strengthening the bond between fans and the works.

4.4 Brand building innovation strategies

Create an emotionally resonant IP image. An IP image with a unique personality, emotional depth, and the ability to evoke audience resonance is a vibrant brand image. Through continuous updates and promotion of the IP image, audiences can become emotionally connected to it, making it an emotional carrier.

Developing an IP derivative industry chain and strengthening IP goodwill can enhance IP brand premium value. This can be achieved by developing extended products such as stationery, toys, and clothing based on IP characters, integrating them into consumers' daily lives, or creating derivative games, animations, and films using IP elements to further enhance audience interaction with the IP, thereby increasing its stickiness and recognition.

5 Conclusion

This paper examines the case of "Escape from the British Museum" and applies empathy-based communication theory to analyse its innovative strategies from a communication strategy perspective. The analysis reveals that empathy-based communication significantly influences the dissemination process of online micro-short dramas, effectively enhancing their communication effectiveness and influence. The reasons for this are that "Escape from the British Museum" achieved good empathy-based communication results through precise selection of topics, unique storytelling methods, successful characterisation, and appropriate marketing channels, providing valuable lessons for the production and marketing of other online micro-short dramas.

From the perspective of empathy-driven communication, online micro-short dramas can be innovatively transformed in terms of content creation, communication channels, interactive methods, and IP development. This involves identifying emotionally resonant themes, employing diverse storytelling techniques, creating well-rounded and three-dimensional characters, optimising communication channels, establishing cross-platform collaborative communication matrices, encouraging audience participation in content co-creation, fostering an interactive environment for emotional expression, and developing emotionally compelling IPs to extend their industrial value chain. This approach aims to enhance the emotional communication capabilities of online micro-short dramas and contribute to the healthy development of the industry.

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