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Practice Mechanisms, Alienation Dilemmas, and Optimization Paths of Film Marketing Short Videos

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ABSTRACT
In the context of the rapid development of short-video media, film promotion has become deeply integrated with short-video platforms. Under the box-office-oriented logic of the film industry, the content of short-video promotion has increasingly produced phenomena such as false publicity and inconsistencies with the actual content of films. This situation may trigger negative word-of-mouth backlash from audiences, thereby undermining the promotional effectiveness of films. Taking the film "Bureau 749" as a point of entry, this paper adopts case analysis and in-depth interviews, combined with psychological theories such as expectation violation, to analyze the content types and practical mechanisms of film promotion on short-video platforms. It further explores the internal causes of word-of-mouth backlash and finally proposes optimization paths from the perspectives of publicity strategies and content production, with the aim of promoting the healthy development of the film promotion industry.

KEYWORDS
Film marketing; Short-video platforms; Expectation violation; "Bureau 749"

1 Introduction

The China Film Association and the Lighthouse Research Institute jointly released the "2024 Report on Trends in Changes of Chinese Film Audiences," which shows that short-video platforms have become an important channel through which audiences obtain film information, with more than 80% of viewers learning about films through such platforms [1]. Evidently, in the broader context of media convergence, short videos—characterized by fragmentation, strong interactivity, and low viewing thresholds—have become a core arena for the promotion and distribution of domestic films, providing a new pathway for improving the box office of Chinese commercial films. However, under the singular value orientation that prioritizes box office above all else, film marketing short videos have gradually fallen into the trap of traffic competition. In order to obtain algorithmic promotion from platforms, promotional short videos often deliberately exaggerate certain details of films that are inconsistent with their actual narrative core, or excessively market the production process and the celebrities involved, thereby raising audience expectations. Ultimately, this leads to the fermentation of negative word-of-mouth and even box-office backlash.

Existing research has already paid attention to the problems and market consequences related to film marketing short videos, but most studies remain at the level of superficial phenomenon analysis, with insufficient discussion of audience psychological mechanisms and the communication mechanisms of negative reviews. Considerable space therefore remains for further exploration. Moreover, most optimization strategies are concentrated at the macro level—such as policy regulation and publicity content management—without addressing the core contradiction between algorithms and traffic competition. From a communication studies perspective, this paper takes the film "Bureau 749" as a typical case study. Such an approach can enrich empirical research samples on the short-video promotion of domestic films, improve the theoretical framework of related research fields, and provide practical references for publicity teams to optimize promotional strategies and avoid the risks of word-of-mouth backlash, thus possessing both theoretical and practical significance.

2 Examining the Practical Mechanisms of Film Marketing Short Videos through the Promotional Practices of "Bureau 749"

Short video platforms, exemplified by Douyin (TikTok), have rapidly emerged as a new channel for film promotion due to their vast user base and efficient information dissemination capabilities. These platforms not only convey film-related information through vivid imagery and sound but also enhance viewers' sense of participation and belonging through interactive features and user-generated content. To a certain extent, short video promotion has transitioned from being merely an auxiliary tool to becoming one of the core strategies influencing a film's success or failure [2]. Short-video platforms (taking Douyin as an example) are fragmented video platforms that require concise content capable of presenting the core message within less than one minute. When considering the accessibility of the audiovisual language

in film marketing short videos, it is essential to leverage on-screen text to convey key information about the film and facilitate comprehension among potential audiences [3]. When searching topic tags such as "films" or "film promotion" on Douyin, most videos released by official film publicity accounts are within one minute. The platform's "short, fast, and direct" characteristics have facilitated the emergence of new forms of film promotion. Within such a limited time frame, however, it is difficult to clearly articulate the plot and core theme of a film. Consequently, most promotional content on short-video platforms focuses on highly interactive materials or content capable of generating emotional resonance among audiences, rather than relying on the film's own theme or storyline to retain viewers. These platform characteristics have given rise to a content production mechanism oriented toward attracting traffic, primarily through methods such as topic creation and celebrity attraction. In the early stage of promotion for the film "YOLO," for example, the videos released on its Douyin account focused mainly on Jia Ling's weight loss, using the topic of her losing one hundred jin as a promotional hook to introduce the film's core theme. The appearance of Jia Ling after losing weight also became a suspenseful point that was only revealed shortly before the film's release. Although such publicity seemed only loosely related to the film itself, it successfully attracted audience interest, gained millions of likes, and stimulated extensive discussion about the film, thereby becoming a successful case of short-video film promotion.

At the same time, high interactivity is another major characteristic of film promotional videos on short-video platforms. When audiences participate more deeply in the promotional process—especially younger viewers who enjoy immersive interactive content—their favorability toward and expectations for the film increase. The film "Upcoming Summer" adopted such a strategy during its early promotional stage to capture audience attention. Unlike traditional publicity approaches that create a single official account, the film established two character accounts for its protagonists. Through these accounts, the romantic and aspirational experiences of the two high-school characters were presented in an approachable manner. The DJ Zheng Yuxing account, operated by actor Wu Lei, quickly surpassed 500,000 followers. The "official announcement" video featuring Wu Lei and Zhang Zifeng triggered a surge of curiosity in the comment section, where audiences speculated whether it was merely promotional content or a genuine relationship announcement. Viewers seemed to become classmates of the characters in the story, participating in their lives through comments on these "personal" social accounts. Several viral role-play videos enabled the character accounts to surpass the official film account in follower numbers, opening a new path for short-video promotion—though in essence it remained a strategy aimed at increasing interactivity.

The film "Bureau 749" also adopted the above-mentioned approaches, releasing a total of 52 videos within the 15 days prior to its premiere. As a paratext derived from the source film [4], these videos can roughly be divided into four categories. The first category consists of edited highlights from the film, presenting intense scenes of monsters and super-powered weapons confronting each other in the form of short trailers. Selected clips deliver visual impact within a short time, creating a tense and thrilling atmosphere that can attract audiences who enjoy blockbuster spectacles. Another category focuses on behind-the-scenes footage featuring celebrities and the director. One promotional highlight of "Bureau 749" was director Lu Chuan, whose past experience working in a mysterious institution was used as a selling point to satisfy audiences' curiosity about such organizations. Multiple videos were also released showing director Lu Chuan explaining scenes on set and interacting humorously with actors such as Wang Junkai and Zheng Kai, thereby creating a sense of contrast. The third category centers on emotional resonance. During roadshow events, the director positioned the film as "an adventure dream dedicated to all young people," accurately targeting the main audience group of the National Day holiday season—young viewers. Various roadshow clips also highlighted the affectionate interaction between Zheng Kai and his wife, as well as actress Miao Miao's emotional tears at the event, allowing audiences to perceive the hardships involved in the film's production and distribution and further raising expectations. The final category includes interactive videos. Beyond regularly releasing posters and trailers, the promotional account created a special collection titled "Humanity Has Developed Less Than 1% of the 749 Bureau." The protagonist of this series is a young employee who has just joined the Bureau and guides audiences in exploring the truth behind the mysterious institution. The videos within this collection generally received more likes than traditional promotional short videos, it is evident that this creative approach, closely tied to the film's theme, has attracted significant engagement and interaction from users, thereby further expanding the film's promotional reach [5]. Under conditions of multidimensional and high-frequency updates on short-video platforms, related topics quickly surpassed one hundred million views, laying a foundation of audience awareness for the film's box-office performance after its release.

3 Alienation Dilemmas of Film Marketing Short Videos and the Manifestation of Word-of-Mouth Backlash in "Bureau 749"

While short-video promotion brings benefits to films, excessive pursuit of topic popularity and traffic also leads promotional content to deviate from the film itself. The misalignment between promotional content and the film's core

narrative results in a loss of audience trust and a betrayal and dissolution of the film's own creative content, which may ultimately lead to severe word-of-mouth backlash. As a case of misaligned short-video marketing, the film "Bureau 749" initially enjoyed positive publicity and ranked first at the National Day box office on its opening day with revenue of 167 million yuan. However, its evaluations declined sharply soon afterward, with ratings dropping below 5 within a few days of release. The final box office remained at 375 million yuan, failing to reach projected expectations. This phenomenon clearly demonstrates that the alienation of film marketing can result in the simultaneous collapse of both reputation and box office.

The alienation of film marketing short videos mainly manifests in three characteristics: false publicity, excessive utilitarian marketing logic, and partial presentation of core information. First, so-called "fraudulent promotion" of films has become the most prominent feature. In order to attract attention, promotional teams deliberately highlight elements such as special effects and celebrities when editing short-video trailers, raising audience expectations. Sometimes, when promoting a film's genre, they even construct misleading gimmicks to cater to audience preferences and platform recommendation mechanisms. As a result, viewers discover that their expectations are unfulfilled when watching the actual film. Second, although short-video platforms are not designed to present a film's full narrative but merely to attract audiences, many marketing materials pursue traffic and interactive popularity blindly, focusing only on creating trending topics with hundreds of millions of views while ignoring the film's own content and themes. This leads to ineffective information output, preventing audiences from understanding the film through promotional videos and causing misinterpretations of the film's content. Consequently, short videos degenerate into mere traffic tools and lose their informational function. Third, film publicity sometimes selectively emphasizes certain plot elements. In order to conform to the traffic logic of short-video platforms or target specific audience groups during particular release periods, publicity teams detach from the film's overall thematic expression and deliberately extract and infinitely magnify a single attractive element from the film, presenting it as the core promotional content while weakening or even avoiding the film's real genre essence. For instance, the film "Long Day's Journey into Night" was promoted as a romantic "New Year's Eve kiss" love story when it was released during the New Year holiday, whereas it was actually a slow-paced art film expressing regret. Such partial promotion of the kissing element led audiences to complain of "deceptive marketing" after viewing.

The marketing strategy of "Bureau 749" first focused on the celebrity actor Wang Junkai, editing high-energy clips of his action scenes to emphasize his visual appeal. Videos also featured interactions between him and the director on set, highlighting his dedication and professionalism. These short videos aimed to mobilize the large fan base of Wang Junkai, relying on fans' secondary dissemination and support campaigns to generate traffic amplification. In order to cater to the platform audience's preference for visual impact and exciting scenes, the film was positioned as a "hard science-fiction blockbuster," editing and scoring the limited science-fiction fight scenes in the film to convey an impression of a fast-paced narrative and advanced visual effects. Meanwhile, the promotion also extracted mysterious settings from the beginning of the film—such as the secretive Bureau 749 and unknown creatures—to create a sense of curiosity and attract the attention of short-video platform users.

Ultimately, this strategy produced strong negative feedback across different audience groups. Core science-fiction fans were disappointed by the film's failure to deliver authentic science-fiction elements, criticizing fragmented special effects, outdated technology, and even poorly executed compositing effects as widely circulated points of ridicule online. Celebrity fans expressed resistance because the screen time of their idol did not match the emphasis shown in promotional materials. Ordinary viewers directly criticized the film's narrative logic and viewing experience. The negative evaluations of these different audience groups formed a cumulative effect. Consequently, the short-video platform shifted from an initial promotional arena into the central platform for word-of-mouth backlash. Various satirical film-review edits, warning videos advising viewers to avoid the film, and comparison videos contrasting promotion with actual content quickly spread. Through the fragmented dissemination of short videos, negative word of mouth was amplified, further intensifying the decline of the film's box-office performance.

4 Internal Causes of the Alienation of Film Marketing Short Videos: Exploring Audience Psychology

The alienation dilemma in which film marketing short videos fall into content misalignment is not the result of a single factor. Rather, it is the combined outcome of traffic-oriented publicity logic and the structural characteristics of short-video content models that contradict audiences' psychological cognition patterns. Platform logic determines the modes of content production and dissemination for film promotion, while audience psychology serves as the core trigger for word-of-mouth backlash and ultimately determines the market feedback of marketing alienation.

Through in-depth interviews, this study found that different types of viewers formed high expectations after encountering the short-video promotion of "Bureau 749," expectations that did not correspond with the actual film. When these expectations were violated during viewing, negative emotions were immediately triggered and eventually

manifested as negative reviews on platforms. In terms of immediate psychological reactions after watching the film, different viewer groups showed distinctive characteristics, and the intensity of negative emotions was highly correlated with their expectations formed from promotional information. Science-fiction enthusiasts, who were attracted by short preview clips on Douyin, had already developed negative emotions by the second half of the film. Such emotions accumulated as the film progressed, leading them to feel disappointment and astonishment immediately after viewing. Interviewees noted that "the film is completely different from the hard science fiction promised in the promotion," and many audiences felt anger at being deceived. Wang Junkai's fan group, another major audience segment, initially experienced feelings of helplessness and disappointment, with some fans remarking that "all the highlight moments were already on Douyin," while the film itself contained few standout scenes for their idol. The large number of ensemble scenes made them feel their ticket purchase was not worthwhile. Meanwhile, ordinary viewers during the National Day holiday season commented that they had "wasted time watching a film that was not particularly engaging." They felt that the film's genre was ambiguous—it was neither truly science fiction nor adventure, nor did it evoke emotional resonance. From the psychological pathways leading them to post negative reviews, a common process can be summarized: short videos construct high expectations; viewers discover misaligned information during viewing; expectations collapse; negative emotions emerge after watching; and audiences then post negative reviews on social platforms, where platform algorithms further amplify their dissemination, forming a word-of-mouth backlash effect. Science-fiction fans, due to the strong promotional emphasis on the science-fiction genre, developed the highest expectations and therefore experienced the greatest degree of expectation violation, producing the strongest negative emotions and becoming the core group generating negative reviews. Celebrity fans tended to restrain their emotions slightly in order to protect the reputation of their idol, though they still felt disappointment. Ordinary viewers generally felt that the film was not worth the ticket price and thus contributed additional negative reviews on social platforms. The interaction of negative emotions among these groups ultimately resulted in a comprehensive collapse of the film's reputation.

5 Optimization Paths for Film Marketing Short Videos under the Dual Orientation of Box Office and Reputation

From the perspective of audience psychology, the core of optimizing film marketing short videos is not simply to harvest traffic and attention. Instead, it should focus on reducing expectation violations, aligning with audiences' cognitive patterns, and constructing emotional resonance. This requires abandoning a purely utilitarian publicity logic and ensuring that short-video promotional content corresponds with the film's narrative core rather than deviating from it. In-depth interviews reveal that audiences' immediate emotional responses after watching a film determine whether they will post negative reviews. If the anger of science-fiction fans, the disappointment of celebrity fans, and the confusion of ordinary viewers are not addressed promptly, they can rapidly transform into negative evaluations that spread virally through social media. Therefore, film marketing short videos should move beyond a single logic that focuses solely on pre-release promotion and extend into the stage of post-viewing emotional interaction. Establishing an immediate feedback mechanism can help alleviate negative emotions in a timely manner and interrupt the chain of negative review dissemination at its origin. For example, promotional teams can collect doubts raised in comment sections within the first few days after the film's release and produce response videos addressing the emotions of different audience groups instead of avoiding them. For celebrity fans disappointed by the limited screen time of their idol, videos interpreting the character's narrative arc could be released so that audiences can appreciate the character's value rather than focusing solely on screen time. At the same time, discussion sections can be created in comment areas of short-video platforms to invite directors, film critics, and audiences to engage in interactive Q&A sessions, thereby addressing ordinary viewers' confusion about the plot. Sincere interaction and feedback can help soothe audiences' negative emotions.

Short video platforms also serve as core platforms for the dissemination of audience word-of-mouth. To a large extent, the evaluations made by audiences are not merely comments on the film's content, but also often serve as an outlet for expressing their psychological feelings. Therefore, negative reviews become a channel for viewers to express negative emotions such as anger and helplessness, which arise from being attracted by misleading elements. Consequently, the optimization of film marketing short videos should focus more on resonating with the audience's psychological points of interest, rather than superficially pursuing traffic dissemination. For example, regarding the core theme of youth and growth in *Bureau 749*, relevant topics could be posted on platforms to encourage viewers to share their own experiences in conjunction with the film's content, thereby generating authentic emotional resonance. This type of secondary communication, based on emotional resonance, can deepen the audience's identification with the film's theme and foster positive word-of-mouth.

On the other hand, the film industry must also reject the erroneous development path of "commerce above all else"—that is, to oppose the misguided attitudes, thinking, and ideologies that prioritize economic interests at the expense of cultural responsibility [6]. It should unearth the film's authentic shining points and disseminate them precisely through short videos, rather than mechanically applying existing promotional templates prevalent in the market. These shining points, such as the film's cinematographic language, the actors' interpretation of the characters, and localized emotional expressions, while not necessarily being traffic-attracting highlights, allow the audience to perceive the creative sincerity of the film, thereby generating positive evaluations. Promoters can deconstruct and disseminate these shining points through short videos, enabling the audience to see the film's true creative standard, rather than being misled by a few one-sided elements and misinterpreting the film.

6 Conclusion

This study takes Bureau 749 as a typical case, combining case analysis and in-depth interviews to explore the practical mechanisms, alienation dilemmas, and underlying causes of short videos in film marketing. It also proposes optimization strategies from the perspective of user psychology. The research finds that current short videos in film marketing are caught in an alienation dilemma characterized by fragmented core information and a disconnect between content and the film's essence, ultimately leading to audience expectation violations and backlash in word-of-mouth. Through in-depth interviews with different types of viewers, the study identifies the common psychological pathways behind negative audience reviews and clarifies that viewers' immediate post-viewing emotions and layered psychological needs are critical factors influencing word-of-mouth trends.

Film promotion on short video platforms should not merely aim to attract traffic but rather achieve alignment between promotional content, the film's core, and audience psychology. Future developments in film marketing short videos must prioritize audience psychology and abandon utilitarian traffic-driven thinking to ensure the sustainable development of film promotion.

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