Analysis of Mass Communication of Short Video Clips in Era of Convergence Media

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In the era of convergence media, short video clips, as a new form of mass communication, provide a new driving force for the upgrading and transformation of traditional media. Short videos are a product of the rapid development of visual culture in the Internet Plus era, which focuses on image communication and perceptual experience. In the all-media environment, the audience's perception ability has been extended as the news scene offers an intense sense of immersion. Short-form videos provide viewers with fresh narrative modes and new perspectives. In particular, H5, VR/AR, and other technologies have changed the short video pattern with a new expression of audio-visual language, thus greatly increasing the communication power and attraction. The growing popularity of short videos, known as the New King of All Media, results from the combination of technology and culture, such as big data, 5G, VR/AR, AI, block chain, and hologram. How to keep the competitiveness of short videos with an upsurge in content consumption in the era of 5G is a question we should ponder.

Keyword: short videos, media convergence, visual culture, 5G

Short Videos Wave: From Text to Image

Evolution of Media

It has been a long process since the mankind began to use symbols, words, languages, images, audio-video, and short videos. The media of each era have their own characteristics. The emergence of words has played a great role in human's information dissemination and social development. The printing press has broken the temporal and spatial restrictions of oral communication as the content of information can be recorded, thus extending the distance of media communication.

In today's world, the Internet is ubiquitous. The networks have always played a crucial role in the evolution of human civilization. In Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*, the fog is ubiquitous. To borrow from Dickens, it is the networks that are "up the river and down the river". "The alternative to networking is to fail, we read in the Harvard Business Review" (Ferguson, 2018, p. 10), wrote Niall Ferguson in his book *The Square and the Tower*. With the rapid development of Internet and wide application of digital technologies, fragmented reading on social media platforms with mobile devices has become prevalent.

Given the mobile fragmentation, the time for audiences to focus on information is becoming increasingly short. In the era of convergence media, the users have become the subject of communication. The sense of scene provided by traditional media, such as words, photos, and long videos, has been unable to meet the perceptual need of users. The news scene has an intense sense of immersion. Short videos have offered viewers

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fresh narrative modes and new perspectives, especially those created by H5, VR/AR, and other technologies, which bring a new expression of audio-visual language and greatly increase the communication power and attraction.

Current Situation of Short Videos

"The media themselves, not the content they carry, should be the focus of study" (p. 9), Marshall McLuhan's theory written in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964) has long been regarded as the standard of the Internet in the 21st century by the media, so that everyone feels "The medium is the message" is plausible (Zhen, 2018).

Short videos have certain social media characteristics, which moderately combine audiences' hearing and vision in the audio-visual mode. It can satisfy the users' fragmented reading habit.

With the popularity of mobile gadgets and the increase of Internet speed, the "short, flat, and fast" content has been favored by platforms, fans, and investors. The content of short videos has been integrated with fashion trends, skills sharing, entertainment and amusement, social hot spots, street interviews, public education, and tourism photos. With the development of mobile Internet, short videos have become the New King of Media because of its decentralization and ease of use.

The short video apps of live-streaming broadcast and short videos, such as TikTok, Kwai, Miaopai, Pear Video, and Xigua Video, have seen explosive growth in recent years. A short video is defined by Kwai as "57 seconds with vertical screen", which is the professional standard of short videos. At present, short videos on the platforms are usually five minutes, which is in line with the viewing habit of mobile device users.

As the 4G technology matures and mobile data rates are dropping, Kwai and TikTok have kept growing in popularity since 2018. TikTok said in January this year that the number of its daily active users reached 400 million and Kwai's daily active users were as high as 300 million. With the two phenomenal apps, the new media of Internet has officially entered the era of short videos.

Prevalence of Short Videos: All-Round Contemporary Visual Culture

From the perspective of culture, capital, and communication, we study the phenomenal development of short videos. As a brand new form of visual communication, short videos reflect the power of popular culture. Mass culture is the dismemberment of hegemony of elite culture, therefore culture has neither been pursued in high spirits, nor has it been a pursuit of power. Popular culture is mainly produced by the mass media and is also accompanied by the mass media. Short videos bring us the feeling of "seeing a different world and recording more possibilities for life". People use mobile phones because they think they are both easy to use and interesting (Survey on Youth Media, 2018). The short videos meet these two criteria exactly.

Popularity of Mobile Devices Gives Full Play to Visual Culture

According to French philosopher, theologian, and sociologist Jacques Ellul's (1964) Technological Society, "Technique is autonomous with respect to economics and politics.... Technique elicits and conditions social, political, and economic change" (p. 133). The 2G technology ushered in the Digital Age. However, due to the technological barriers such as bandwidth, speed of Internet, and mobile phone capacity, it was difficult to display short videos at that time.

With the 4G technology of video transmission and popularization of smart phones, the mobile Internet has really entered a period of rapid development. According to the 45th Statistical Report on Internet Development

released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC, 2020), as of March 2020, China's online video users have reached 850 million, or 94.1 percent of all netizens, and the country had 773 million short video users, or 85.6 percent of all netizens.

Short videos are a typical visual culture, which is highlighting image and perceptual experience. The increasing popularity of short videos is the result of combination of technology and culture. When watching short videos, the users are enthralled by their visual impact and sensory enjoyment. So, short videos are growing very popular among the public.

Platforms such as TikTok encourage people to film their personal lives. Food, bookstores, landmark, and tourist attractions, as well as cafes and restaurants in some Chinese cities have become the hot spots for short video shooting, such as guesthouse in Zhejiang's Mogan Mountain, Hongya Cave in Chongqing, Caka Salt Late in Qinghai, and Erhai Lake in Yunnan, among others.

The short videos display a different scenery from our familiar places, and people living in different cities often view the sites from an interviewing and curious perspective. The cross-river cable cars and Chongqing's No. 1 Light Rail Line, which have been offering everyday transport service, have become iconic landmarks in netizens' eyes, bringing people with an experience of "living elsewhere" and piquing their curiosity to explore the outside world.

Taking popular short video platforms as an example, TikTok offers tools for users to shoot high-quality short-form videos easily and quickly. Kwai has become a platform for young people living in the small towns to display their lives. The Little Red Book focuses on lifestyle and 220 million young users share their clothing collections, beauty tutorials, travel strategies, and food evaluation. The platform, which enables the users to easily keep pace with the trends of fashion, touts playing the Little Red Book app as their own life attitude.

Miaopai invites online celebrities to film and share their personal lives, who are considered idols of many young people. Pear Video is a short news video app, launched by a professional team with media background and a group of Paike (or amateur cameramen) around the world. By providing excellent short videos, these short video apps attract viewers with quality visual culture products, which meet the needs of entertainment, fragmentation, and socialization of users in a relaxed, micro narrative way.

Full Integration of Image and Life

As a cultural phenomenon with user-generated content, the short videos have not only adapted to people's fast pace of life, but also dispelled their emptiness and loneliness in the modern society. Users have been shuttling in a "real world" pieced together by all kinds of visual symbols and sensory experience ranging from travel, food, and shopping to clothing, games, and fitness. With the visual symbols, we know about other people's life in pursuit of both the "poems and distant lands". The Society of the Spectacle envisioned by French filmmaker Guy Debord in 1967 has been realized by hundreds of millions of netizens in China.

The full integration of the image and life has led to a booming era of short videos. People's daily lives are recorded and displayed by the short videos. For instance, Li Ziqi, who has become an Internet sensation recently, has 9.21 million fans on YouTube and 3 million of fans on Facebook. The Vlogger from southwest China's Sichuan province posted videos online without English subtitles, in which she brewed peach blossom wine, dried persimmon cakes, and made cotton and batik clothes.

The idyllic life in Chinese countryside does not need to be explained and translated by language. Each video is watched by tens of millions of times on overseas social media platforms, which has reflected the

effects of intercultural communication. In particular, the high-definition picturesque videos make users feel calm and comfortable. Many foreign netizens are amazed by the beautiful Chinese farms shown in Li's videos.

Short Videos: How to Make Breakthrough in Age of 5G

Nowadays people are connected to the Internet with their handsets at the touch of fingers. When new technologies such as big data, 5G, AR/VR, AI, block chain, and hologram emerge, how to keep the competitiveness of short videos with the upsurge in content consumption in the era of 5G is a note-worthy question.

Content Should Always Be Top Priority

As China has became the second largest economy in the world, Internet technologies are flourishing and people's pace of life is accelerating. In order to relieve the stress of both life and work, netizens have developed a habit of shallow reading in the face of a massive amount of information. The expression of short videos, with the interaction on the platforms such as likes, comments, sharing, and forwarding, allows the users to express their feelings directly, and thus attracts a large number of loyal customers.

At present, due to the profitability of short video platforms driven by huge fan bases and interests, some short videos which simply underscore the spectacle of visions are superficial and vulgar. When the users are immersed in the visual wonder, the fragmented visual symbols beset them. The popularity of eating in front a webcam for live-streaming broadcast, or Mukbang, has prompted many people to follow suit and imitate an extremely popular Mukbang. That has made the short video production and broadcast bogged down in a quagmire of products with similar content.

Some people, who seldom use TikTok such as the young generations born in the 1990s or in the 2000s, think the short videos carry little valuable information with too much "performance". The video clips can only bring people instant happiness. After a brief laughter, people gradually lose their ability of independent thinking after watching the videos with vulgar content.

Some short videos overly pursue "cool" sensual pleasure, which rarely bring aesthetic experience to the audience. In the long run, visual consumption will become a visual dilemma.

Cass R. Sunstein (2006), a professor of law at the Harvard University, proposed the concept of "information cocoons" as a metaphor in his book *Infotopia*. The audience only pays attention to the content they choose, so they lock themselves in the "'information cocoons,' … warm, friendly places where everyone shares our views … but major errors are the price of our comfort" (Sunstein, 2006, p. 9).

More and more people, who are indulged in the world of themselves, enjoy being onlookers or being in the limelight on the Internet. Therefore, it's imperative to optimize the short video industry.

Today, with the rapid development of the Internet economy, quality short videos still reflect their unique cultural taste. For example, founder of e-commerce giant Alibaba Group Jack Ma and Professor Chen Guo are two famed celebrities on the knowledge-based payment platforms. Professor Chen, who teaches philosophy of happiness lessons at the Fudan University in Shanghai, is one of the most popular online teachers in China.

Bi Xiaotian, a chemical engineering PhD candidate at the prestigious Tsinghua University, has about 1 million fans on Sina Weibo, a Chinese microblogging website, and TikTok with his video clips of whimsical inventions and humor. His short videos, which impart professional knowledge to users online, are usually scientific interpretations of common senses, as people are deluged with a huge amount of information.

Content should always be the top priority of media despite the changes of times. It's important for the short video industry to break the entertainment bottleneck, create high-quality products, and increase cultural taste.

Room for Short Video to Embody Mainstream Culture

As the 5G technology was launched in 2016 and put into commercial operation in 2019, the short videos have been displayed in a more refined, professional, and multi-dimensional mode of communication.

In the *Rise of the Network Society, the Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, Manuel Castells (1996), professor of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, said, "Our societies are increasingly structured around the bipolar opposition of the Net and the Self" (1996, p. 3).

Castells underlined the importance of technological infrastructure "since technology is society and society cannot be understood or represented without its technological tools" (1996, p. 5). In the era of "micro social interaction" with micro-electronic based technologies, short videos have become a new form of expression widely used by netizens.

Short videos are rich in visual and image content displayed on convenient and fast platforms. It is apparently much easier for overseas users to understand China by photos and videos. As of Feb. 21, 2020, Li Ziqi has more than 12 million fans on social media and she has posted more than 100 videos on overseas platforms, which are viewed by more than 1 billion times. Each video is commented by more than 10,000 netizens. Li has also attracted the attention of mainstream media. Her personal account, which tells fresh Chinese stories different from those of the official news outlets, has become a paradigm showcasing modern China.

A high-quality short video should possess six features, namely, newsworthy, interesting, high-definition picture, eye-catching title, visual rhythm, and multi-dimensional expression. A short video on Ergeng TV about a 73-year-old man, who fed more than 200 wolves in west China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, won the "Best Moment" short video award in 2018. The clip, which depicted how the old man protected injured wolves at his own wildlife protection station, showed that "the greatest kindness in the world is to do what you can" (Pear Video, 2018).

As the first Chinese-owned video-sharing app on the Western market, TikTok is loved by many teenagers in the United States and Britain. TikTok has made the complicated video production simple and easy, and users can "record", "edit", "beautify", and "share" videos on the platform with new technologies such as filters, 3D editing, and panoramic stickers, etc. Users can shoot and upload a video clip on TikTok by simply pressing a button, which has made the app so attractive and appealing.

Chinese people should make full use of the new overseas social media platform, and upload popular short videos on TikTok that display people's life in new China and new Beijing. The short-form videos and live-streaming broadcast will promote the convergence of media with culturally attractive video clips.

Conclusion

The ease of use and mass participation herald a promising future for the short video industry. TikTok is a different channel from Sina Weibo and the popular messaging app WeChat. With the increasingly fierce competition between content providers and the disappearance of user bases on the platforms, the homogenization of short videos is becoming a challenge. Therefore, platform operators need to focus on the

content creation, do user research, explore business models, and improve the supervisory mechanism so as to ensure the healthy development of platforms.

The short video industry should also face up to the competition and challenges. In the future, platform operators and all stakeholders should use new technologies to create short video text and expand the long-tail vertical content. Improving content viewing and cultural value will surely be the focus of future competition in the short video industry.

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