

Study on the Dissemination Logic and Cross-Cultural Strategies of Micro-Dramas

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Abstract:

Micro-Dramas, a growing form of online audio-visual content, have fostered a massive industrial market in China and are now extending their reach to global audiences. Therefore, this paper examines the development logic of the short-form drama market and its cross-cultural dissemination pathways. It traces the evolution of domestic short-form dramas from their emergence as differentiated short-video content to their current professionalized and high-quality production. And this study analyzes how market scale and platform architecture influence audience psychology, which in turn feeds back to shape platform structures. Focusing on overseas cultural adaptation efforts, it further considers platform ecosystem planning, while also emphasizing the need to address the key challenges encountered in this process. The results reveal that the global dissemination of short-form dramas depends on both commercial operation models and the capacity for cultural translation and localized management. These factors play a crucial role in the effectiveness of communication, hence enabling short-form dramas to achieve sustainable international reach. In the future, the core of their sustainable development lies in building a content system that balances cultural universality with regional specificity, thereby ensuring long-term market operation and audience recognition worldwide.

Keywords: Micro-Drama Market; Cross-Cultural Communication; Overseas Expansion Strategies; User Psychology; Cultural Adaptation

1. Introduction

As an emerging form of online audio-visual content, micro-dramas feature concise, fast-paced storytelling. In the context of evolving digital media and increasingly fragmented user attention, they have sparked

a transformation in content consumption in China, a change that is now spreading globally. Driven by mobile users' viewing preferences, micro-dramas deliver complete narrative arcs within a few minutes and attract large audiences through intense plots and highly concentrated "satisfying moments." The

Chinese short-form drama market has expanded rapidly, approaching explosive growth. In 2024, the market size reached 50.44 billion RMB, surpassing the domestic box office, and it is projected to exceed 100 billion RMB by 2027. The emergence of this novel content has revealed both commercial potential and cultural appeal, leading to increasingly fierce domestic competition and positioning overseas expansion as a key strategic avenue for growth [1]. Besides, the internationalization of short-form dramas is not a matter of simple model replication; it requires careful adjustments in cultural translation and dissemination strategies. At present, there is a lack of systematic research examining the industrial development, global distribution, and cross-cultural adaptation processes of micro-dramas. This paper elucidates the development logic of the Chinese micro-drama market and to examine the opportunities, strategies, and challenges emerging in its globalization. Through a combination of literature review and case analysis, this study examines the developmental logic and cross-cultural dissemination mechanisms of short-form dramas, providing insights into emerging cultural phenomena and pathways for cross-cultural communication.

2. Formation and Development of the Chinese micro-drama Market

2.1 Driving Factors Behind Market Explosion

The rapid rise of China's micro-drama market is far from accidental; it is the result of multiple interacting forces, including technological advancement, market conditions, capital investment, and user demand. And its development has followed a clear evolutionary trajectory, shifting from early stages of spontaneous growth to later phases characterized by refined and systematic operations. In essence, short-form drama content reflects a natural transition from user-generated content (UGC) to professionally generated content (PGC), signaling a broader trend toward professionalization and higher production quality. According to data from the China Netcasting Services Association, the number of short-form drama users in China reached 576 million in 2024, providing a vast audience base that underpins the market's continued expansion [2].

The rapid growth of the short-form drama market is anchored in a solid technological foundation and the continuous development of platform ecosystems. More specifically, the widespread rollout of 4G and 5G networks has significantly reduced data costs; the prevalence of mobile payment has streamlined small-sum transactions; and algorithmic recommendation systems ensure that con-

tent reaches target users efficiently. These factors form a closed-loop ecosystem that includes creation, distribution, consumption, and payment. Meanwhile, core platforms such as Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok) and Kuaishou continuously strengthen their content ecosystems, attracting many professional production institutions, which allows short-form content to evolve beyond its initial roughness. The core driver behind the ongoing development and transformation of the micro-drama market is the profound shift in user demand. In today's fast-paced, high-pressure society, audiences increasingly seek instant emotional relief during brief, fragmented moments of time. Micro-dramas cater to users' desire for quick and direct emotional feedback, offering a form of spiritual comfort akin to "electronic side dishes." Significant capital investment fosters industry maturity, which in turn drives market growth and stimulates economic development. The market's potential attracts capital inflows, promoting the completeness of the industrial chain and facilitating the construction of an industrialized production framework.

2.2 Platform Landscape and Operational Model

The Chinese micro-drama market has evolved into a fiercely competitive arena, largely dominated by short-video platforms, with long-video platforms also making active inroads. With their vast user base and robust commercial frameworks, short-video platforms like Douyin and Kuaishou dominate the market. They are deeply involved in the production and distribution of micro-dramas, including establishing dedicated sections for micro-dramas to strengthen the content ecosystem. On the other hand, long-video platforms such as Tencent Video leverage their strengths in content production and distribution to implement differentiated competition by offering "high-quality micro-dramas." These micro-dramas are typically well-produced, with slightly longer episode lengths.

The operational model of micro-dramas mainly includes three forms: platform-produced content, collaboration-based revenue sharing, and paid traffic promotion. Platform-produced micro-dramas serve as key ecosystem content, playing a unique role in enhancing user engagement and retention. The collaboration-based revenue-sharing model is designed to attract external production firms, with both parties sharing revenue based on broadcast performance, thus motivating producers to continuously improve content quality. Among these, the paid traffic-promotion model is the most noteworthy. In this model, producers drive traffic to their micro-dramas via in-feed advertisements, guiding users to a mini-program where

they can pay to unlock subsequent episodes. This “efficient monetization” business model is a key driver behind the rapid expansion of the micro-drama market. Currently, the competition is fierce, with more than 83,000 companies involved in the short-drama business nationwide, creating a highly competitive market with numerous contenders [3].

2.3 Content Characteristics and Audience Response

Micro-dramas have developed a distinctive content style, characterized by fast-paced narratives, rapid story progression, and tightly packed plots. They forgo the extended exposition typical of traditional films and TV shows, choosing instead to present the central conflict right from the outset. By frequently incorporating plot twists and suspense, micro-dramas quickly capture the audience’s attention [4]. The themes of the content are highly focused on emotional value and “pleasure-driven” narratives, such as revenge and other similar genres, aiming to provide audiences with quick and direct emotional relief, triggering dopamine-like responses. In terms of genre, micro-dramas are highly categorized, with romance and suspense genres forming the core structure. Romance-themed content accounts for over 40%, while suspense-themed content makes up around 30%.

The audience has responded enthusiastically to this type of content. Through actions such as clicking, binge-watching, and paying to unlock episodes, viewers have confirmed the effectiveness of this high-efficiency content model. The comment sections have become the primary spaces for viewers to express their emotions and discuss the plot. Captivating series inspire audiences to create derivative works, further expanding the reach and market impact of the drama. However, it is worth mentioning that there are also critical voices among audience feedback, questioning the vulgarity, clichéd nature, and one-dimensional values in some micro-dramas [5]. Such criticism has forced the industry to reconsider the depth and diversity of content while pursuing commercial gains.

3. Domestic Audience Demands and Consumption Psychology

3.1 Entertainment and Emotional Fulfillment

The rapid rise of micro-dramas in China fundamentally lies in their precise capture and response to the deep-seated psychological needs of contemporary audiences. In today’s fast-paced world, micro-dramas provide affordable, efficient entertainment and emotional balance. This format makes the most of audiences’ fragmented time, using in-

tense plots to quickly shift emotional states and regulate them effectively. The 2025 Micro-Drama User Behavior Insights Report reveals that about 60% of viewers are willing to pay for high-quality micro-dramas, indicating a clear willingness to pay for the emotional value content provides. Micro-dramas often use intense storytelling strategies, such as revenge and class ascension, creating a symbolic psychological space that detaches from reality for viewers [6]. By identifying with the protagonist, viewers quickly experience pleasure and a sense of accomplishment, thereby leading to psychological compensation. This mechanism allows audiences to escape feelings of powerlessness and cognitive load in daily life during short viewing sessions. This instant emotional feedback can be seen as a way to relieve stress in the digital age. With their fast pace and strong plot development, micro-dramas continuously attract audience attention, leading them into a highly focused “flow” state. This helps reduce modern anxiety and offers a fast, reliable way to regulate emotions, providing instant relief.

3.2 Social Interaction and Cultural Identity

The consumption of micro-dramas is linked to more than just entertainment, relating to social needs and cultural identity. It helps build social capital, particularly in young audiences. Pursuant to the 2025 Micro-Drama User Behavior Insights Report, over 60% of core users are young people aged 18 to 35, with women accounting for around 55%. This group is predominantly composed of internet natives who are highly engaged in social media. In this context, micro-dramas have become an important topic resource for group interactions. Shared viewing and discussions about plotlines create a shared meaning space among peers, while comments and shares about key plot points further expand the depth and breadth of social interactions [7]. At the level of cultural identity, despite artistic plot devices, the core narratives of micro-dramas still reflect social realities. Existing studies show that common themes in micro-dramas, like marriage and love issues, the predicament of class mobility, and successful narratives, resonate with the structural anxiety and collective imagination existing in today’s society, evoking cultural resonance among specific audiences [8].

Moreover, the audience structure of micro-dramas is also showing a trend of in-depth expansion. In addition to young people, middle-aged and elderly viewers, as well as users from lower-tier markets, are becoming new growth forces. micro-drama content developed for the “silver-haired group” and “rural themes” to some extent responds to the psychological needs of these groups in terms of identity and community belonging, further solidi-

fyng micro-dramas' social foundation as a popular cultural practice.

3.3 Participation and Interactive Behavior

The strong interactivity of micro-dramas significantly enhances user engagement and platform stickiness. In contrast to the traditional one-way communication model of films and television, micro-dramas allow users to express preferences and engage interactively, with feedback potentially influencing the storyline. This mechanism aligns with Henry Jenkins' "participatory culture" theory, where users, aided by platform algorithms, actively shape content meaning through actions such as clicking, commenting, and sharing. And this cultivates a collaborative content ecosystem between creators and users [9].

In this mechanism, users transition from passive receivers to active participants. Their ongoing content engagement not only enhances viewing immersion but also effectively boosts emotional attachment and loyalty to the platform. Meanwhile, user interaction preferences and behavioral data directly influence content creation. Producers, by continuously monitoring user feedback on tight narratives and intense plot structures, adjust content strategies in real time to accurately align with users' emotional rhythms, hence maintaining their willingness to pay and engagement. This process reflects the audience agency emphasized in the "Uses and Gratifications" theory and illustrates the dynamic content optimization mechanism formed in the short-drama industry, driven by interactive logic [10].

4. Global Expansion Strategies and Challenges of Micro-Dramas

4.1 Market Opportunities and Platform Ecosystem

The fierce competition and rising regulatory scrutiny in the domestic micro-drama market are prompting producers and distributors to explore international opportunities for additional growth. The global expansion of micro-dramas has entered a rapid growth phase, marked by continuous volume increases, which in turn enhance their influence in overseas markets. In 2024, Chinese micro-dramas achieved impressive global reach, surpassing 10 billion total plays and reaching approximately 200 million users in over 150 countries and regions. Currently, the two key markets are Southeast Asia, which holds vast development potential, and North America, which boasts a well-developed consumption framework [11]. The Southeast Asian market is culturally similar to China, making users more

receptive to modern Chinese dramas. Meanwhile, the North American market has strong purchasing power, with a well-established digital entertainment ecosystem that holds immense growth potential.

The main components of the overseas platform ecosystem are Chinese-language professional micro-drama apps, like ReelShort and ShortTV. And these apps have successfully applied proven domestic monetization models. Besides, global short video platforms have become key distribution channels for micro-dramas, using a free-to-watch model to build a user base before guiding them to independent apps for paid conversions [12]. Additionally, collaborating with local media and other organizations is a crucial strategy for quickly penetrating target markets.

4.2 Cultural Adaptation and Narrative Innovation

The success of online micro-dramas abroad relies on cultural adaptation and narrative innovation. The direct transplantation of domestic content or simple language translation often fails to resonate with target audiences due to cultural differences, thereby impacting communication effectiveness. By adhering to cross-cultural communication theories, successful international cases preserve the core narrative while making deep adaptations to symbols.

In terms of cultural adaptation, the series *The Double* on popular micro-drama platforms such as ReelShort did not subvert the core of the story. Instead, it effectively reduced the cultural discount by employing local actors and using costumes, makeup and scene settings that conform to local aesthetic preferences. This localization strategy at the visual and aesthetic levels can enhance the audience's sense of immersion and identification, in line with Hofstede's cultural dimension theory on adapting cultural symbols. Regarding narrative innovation, micro-dramas blend cross-cultural genre elements such as "overbearing CEOs," "werewolves," and "vampires" with Western Gothic traditions and urban legends, resulting in a creative transformation and fusion of cultural symbols. At the textual level, authentic English dialogues are employed, and cultural dimensions such as individualism and autonomy are reinforced at the value level to align with the deep-seated cultural psychology of target regions. At the strategic level, a systematic overseas expansion path should follow the principle of "global framework, local expression," conducting in-depth research on the cultural customs, social issues, and aesthetic orientations of target regions. Distribution should strengthen cooperation mechanisms with international content platforms and leverage local social media for precision marketing. In terms of organizational construction, localized operation and creative

teams with cross-cultural communication capabilities should be established to ensure the effective execution of content production and dissemination strategies.

4.3 Business Models and Dissemination Challenges

Although the expansion prospects of micro-dramas in overseas markets are widely regarded as promising, their globalization process is facing multiple structural challenges. The primary obstacle is the phenomenon of cultural discount, which significantly restricts the effective dissemination and market acceptance of content. Even after localization efforts, the narrative logic and values rooted in Eastern culture may still lead to misunderstandings among overseas audiences, hence weakening dissemination effectiveness. The issue lies in the fundamental differences in how audiences from different cultures decode symbolic systems, directly affecting cross-cultural content acceptance.

Moreover, the transnational copyright protection mechanism is still imperfect, posing potential risks to industrial development. Due to their lightweight content volume and rapid dissemination speed, micro-dramas are more susceptible to piracy and unauthorized distribution. According to the 2023 Report on Copyright Protection for Chinese Online Literature and Micro-Dramas Going Abroad, over 56% of short and medium-length works face infringement issues abroad. In regions with significant legal differences, the high costs and challenges of enforcing rights severely hinder the sustainable development of the original content ecosystem. Besides, the competitive landscape in overseas markets is becoming increasingly fierce. Local production companies, leveraging their knowledge of regional cultures, release content that better suits local tastes, creating dual pressure for domestic companies going global from both localization competition and internal rivalry.

To address the above challenges, the industry needs to adopt a systematic strategy. At the content level, efforts should be made to upgrade from language translation to cultural translation, and actively collaborate with local screenwriters and cultural advisors to jointly develop narrative works that combine cultural commonalities with local characteristics. As for copyright protection, it is recommended to form an industry-specific copyright alliance, integrate resources, and establish a collaborative mechanism with international legal institutions and digital copyright organizations. In addition, technologies such as digital watermarking and blockchain should be utilized to enhance the capacity for monitoring and collecting evidence of piracy. For brand building, micro-dramas should avoid getting trapped in the homogenized competition

of feel-good dramas. And they can integrate cultural elements like Chinese martial arts and xianxia history with modern storytelling to create a brand with distinct Oriental aesthetics, building sustainable global competitiveness.

5. Conclusion

This study reveals that the rapid ascent of China's micro-drama market is an inevitable outcome, driven by the synergistic interplay of technology, capital, platforms, and users' psychological needs. This content has reshaped online audiovisual consumption, reflecting audiences' need for instant emotional satisfaction and social identity. In the process of global expansion, micro-dramas, as a new cultural medium, face both great market potential and significant challenges, including cultural adaptation and copyright issues. In the course of global expansion, micro-dramas, as an emerging cultural dissemination vehicle, encounter both vast market opportunities and substantial challenges, including cultural adaptation and copyright safeguarding. Therefore, the continued development of micro-dramas requires a shift in model. The domestic market needs to transition from expansive growth to more refined strategies, while the international market should focus on quality-driven, precision-based operations. The future competition in the domestic market will focus on content innovation and value, shifting from a traffic-driven model to one that prioritizes content and value. The key to the success of micro-dramas' international expansion lies in a profound understanding of target cultures and effective localization. By innovating narratives and building a distinct brand, Chinese micro-dramas can transition from a commercial trend to internationally recognized cultural products. The success of cross-cultural communication depends not only on the refinement of the business model but also on the ability to tell stories that resonate with universal emotions while maintaining cultural distinctiveness.

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