

Research on the Characteristics of Viral Online Marketing of Cinema Movies

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Abstract:

With the rapid development of interactive self-media platforms, the promotion and distribution strategies of cinema films have undergone significant changes, and viral online marketing has become an important means among them. However, despite the significant effects of this model in increasing film exposure and initial box office, the issues of misleading information and word-of-mouth risks have also received increasing attention. However, systematic research on these issues is still insufficient. This article provides an in-depth analysis of the characteristics, advantages, and potential problems of viral dissemination in the process of online promotion of cinema films, especially the negative impact of fragmented dissemination on film reputation and box office on self-media platforms. By analyzing a large number of cases and data, this article concludes that viral online marketing has a significant effect on enhancing the early attention of films, but it may also lead to a rapid decline in box office and reputation in the middle and later stages due to misleading information. Based on this, this article proposes a series of solutions, including strengthening content creation and review, building diversified communication channels, enhancing public opinion monitoring and crisis public relations, and strengthening interactive communication with audiences, aiming to help film promoters balance early exposure and long-term reputation and achieve sustained and stable box office performance.

Keywords: Cinema movies; viral online marketing; self-media platform; reputation risk; box office strategy

1. Introduction

With the high development of self-media interactive platforms, major online media platforms have be-

come high-frequency gathering points of traffic. In this context, the promotion and distribution of theatrical films has ushered in new opportunities. The media integration behavior based on major online

interactive platforms has greatly enhanced the manipulation of theatrical film publicity and distribution and also improved the quality of its communication scale.

In the process of publicity and distribution of commercial films at this stage, to attract traffic, large-scale integrated publicity matrix marketing is often adopted, combined with the push mechanism of the self-media platform, and the large-scale “wide net” style is pushed to the demand side, and at the same time, combined with the re-editing and dissemination of marketing accounts and self-media bloggers, a multi-polar and multi-subject chain and viral communication are gradually formed. Indeed, this marketing model can greatly enhance the early exposure of the film and promote the screening rate and box office number in the early stage of the film’s release, but its disadvantages are also obvious. Under the large-scale push mechanism, some movie clips may gain attention from the traffic explosion, and even gain a good reputation before the release, thereby attracting the audience’s interest in watching the movie. However, during the release week, when the audience can see the whole picture of the movie if it does not meet the audience’s expectations, it will often usher in a cliff-like decline in the box office and a rapid deterioration in word of mouth, which is not conducive to the continued stability of the movie box office in the middle and late stages of the broadcast.

At this stage, the research in the field of film and television publicity and network marketing mostly focuses on a specific work, analyzes the elements of its successful publicity, or analyzes the characteristics of the interactive platform of self-media, and explains the importance of media integration to the promotion and distribution of cinema films from a macro sense. At the current stage of research in this field, there are relatively few references to the problems and solutions of specific links and communication methods in the process of network marketing. This study focuses on the problem of virality in the process of online distribution of cinematic films and provides solutions.

2. Viral Online Marketing

2.1 Viral Online Marketing: Definition

Viral online marketing, as the name suggests, refers to the use of users’ social networks to spontaneously spread information and achieve rapid and widespread dissemination [1]. It imitates the characteristics of virus transmission and achieves efficient information dissemination at an extremely low cost, making it one of the most popular online marketing methods at present. The core of viral marketing lies in the attractiveness of content and user en-

agement. Only when the content is attractive enough and users are willing to actively share, can a true “viral effect” be formed [2].

The core of viral online marketing lies in stimulating user interest and encouraging active participation in information dissemination through creative content, engaging activities, and humorous elements. This approach does not rely on forced advertising by advertisers, but on users’ spontaneous sharing on social media, email, and other channels, forming a chain reaction that quickly and widely spreads information. Due to its reliance on user-initiated dissemination, viral online marketing has relatively low costs but significant benefits, bringing huge exposure and attention to brands or products in a short period. However, this strategy also has the problem of content homogenization, and pursuing large-scale dissemination may lead to uneven content quality. At the same time, viral online marketing fully utilizes the characteristics and advantages of social networks, guiding users to participate in information dissemination, achieving secondary creation and re-dissemination, and achieving broader marketing goals.

2.2 Movie Promotion & Viral Marketing Online Link

The combination of movie promotion and viral online marketing is mainly reflected in using online platforms to build topics, create hot topics, and stimulate audience interest and resonance through creative content [3]. For example, by posting movie trailers, behind-the-scenes footage, celebrity interviews, and other content on social media, combined with popular topic tags and recommendations from KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders), it attracts user attention and spontaneously spreads. In addition, the film company will also plan various online activities, such as interactive Q&A, movie-watching lottery, etc., to enhance user participation and further promote the viral spread of information [4].

In the digital age, self-media and social media have become key channels for film promotion, with a large user base and a highly social atmosphere, providing new opportunities for film producers to directly interact and expand their publicity. Weibo, WeChat official account, TikTok, and other platforms released trailers, behind-the-scenes tidbits, and other content, attracting widespread attention and discussion, and precise positioning and personalized strategies improved the film’s exposure and communication effect. Social media, such as WeChat circle of friends, microblog topics, Tiktok challenges, etc., have become an ideal place for viral marketing by user stickiness and social attributes. Users can be motivated to participate in interesting activities to achieve rapid infor-

mation diffusion, which is cheap and effective. Key Opinion Leader (KOL) is a marketing concept that usually refers to experts in a certain field who produce professional content through different platforms, attract a large number of fans' attention, and play a key role in influencing fans' consumption behavior. The influence of internet celebrities on social media is enormous. Collaborating with them to watch movies, share, or participate in promotions can quickly expand the audience, and increase expectations and trust. User-initiated dissemination and secondary creation are crucial in viral marketing. Encouraging users to post their reviews, create film review videos, or participate in creative activities enriches promotional materials, stimulates a sense of participation and belonging, and promotes the dissemination and discussion of the film. In summary, self-media, social media, KOLs, internet celebrities, and users' secondary creation and dissemination together constitute a diversified strategy system for film promotion, providing strong guarantees for the successful promotion and widespread dissemination of films.

In summary, the combination of film promotion and viral marketing on the internet has achieved rapid and widespread dissemination of film information through self-media platforms, social media, the influence of KOLs and internet celebrities, as well as secondary creation and dissemination by users. This combination not only increases the exposure and discussion heat of the film but also enhances the audience's expectations and trust in the film, laying a solid foundation for the improvement of the film's box office and reputation.

3. Specific Manifestations of Viral Online Marketing

3.1 Online-Offline Integrated Marketing Approach

Viral online marketing is not isolated from online activities, but closely integrated with offline activities to form a synergistic effect. For example, offline events such as movie premieres, themed exhibitions, and celebrity meet-ups not only generate buzz for movies but also provide rich materials and topics for online promotion [5]. At the same time, the popularity of online activities can also drive enthusiasm for offline movie-watching, forming a virtuous cycle.

Taking *Inception* as an example, Warner Bros. cleverly utilized a combination of online and offline marketing strategies before the movie's release. Online, they have opened an official website, not only releasing trailers and behind-the-scenes footage of the movie but also stimulat-

ing the curiosity and exploratory desire of the audience through the release of mysterious information. These online activities effectively capture the audience's attention and provide them with preliminary movie information and viewing expectations.

Offline, Warner Bros. has adopted more intuitive and impactful promotional methods. They hang giant posters on real streets, simulating scenes from movies, creating a mysterious and captivating atmosphere. This offline experience not only allows the audience to feel the charm of movies in real life but also inspires their desire to go into the cinema and explore the truth. In addition, offline events such as premieres and meet and greet events are also important ways to enhance audience participation and experience. Through close contact with actors and directors, audiences can gain a deeper understanding of the story and creative process behind the film.

At the same time, offline movie press conferences, post-screening meetings, and behind-the-scenes exposures can cleverly utilize the traffic-driving effect of key opinion leaders (KOLs) and related celebrities to provide more diverse channels for film traffic exposure, enhance audience appeal, and drive box office growth. At the same time, diversified offline activities can also provide relevant materials and material support for online promotion and distribution, allowing the influence of offline activities to be re-fermented under the operation of an online media matrix.

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3.2 Traffic Effect via KOLs & Hotspots

As opinion leaders in the industry, KOLs have a huge fan base and strong influence. By collaborating with KOLs, film promotion can quickly gain a lot of exposure and attention [6]. In addition, keeping up with social hot topics and current events, cleverly combining film elements with them, can also effectively enhance the discussion and attention of movies [7].

The influence of KOLs is closely related to their fan base. As authoritative figures in the field, their content published through multiple channels can quickly attract attention and stimulate discussion. In movie promotion, collaborating with KOLs can directly reach loyal fans who highly trust KOLs' recommendations and are easily attracted by film information and converted into moviegoers. KOLs spread positive word-of-mouth through diverse content and stimulate audience interest.

The traffic effect of hot events should not be underestimated, as they can quickly attract public attention and discussion. The combination of films and hot topics can be leveraged for marketing and bring exposure opportunities. Creative marketing activities can attract audiences, increase traffic, extend the promotional period, and increase expectations.

The 2022 film 'Hidden in Dust and Smoke' is representative of this aspect, cleverly utilizing the phenomenon of 'tap water', where audiences spontaneously spread and promote box office and influence growth. Short video works created by movie fans inspire discussion and resonance, create hot topics on social media, enhance exposure, enrich narrative and emotional depth, and make the film stand out. The humanistic care and delicate depiction conveyed in the film touch the audience, stimulate emotional resonance, encourage viewers to watch the film, and drive box office growth. The surge in box office revenue from 18 million to 110 million proves the potential and value of short video platforms in promoting film and television works.

3.3 Pan-Content Communication in Marketing

Viral online marketing emphasizes the diversity and rich-

ness of content to meet the needs of different audience groups. Film promotion should break through traditional boundaries and present film content in various forms such as graphics, videos, and audio while incorporating various elements such as music, fashion, and technology, forming a "pan content dissemination" pattern [8]. In the practice of viral online marketing, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* is undoubtedly a classic case of fully utilizing the "pan content dissemination" strategy. This reboot not only carries the expectations of countless fans but also successfully attracts widespread attention from global audiences through diverse and innovative content marketing methods.

The marketing team of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* adopted a comprehensive and content-driven communication strategy during the promotion process. They not only released stunning trailers and exquisite posters but also delved into every detail of the film, creating a rich and diverse range of content forms. Through carefully crafted short films, the background stories and personality traits of both new and old characters are deeply introduced, creating a deeper emotional connection between the audience and the characters. At the same time, a series of documentaries and interviews about behind-the-scenes work such as special effects production, costume design, and scene construction showcased the exquisite craftsmanship of the film production and the team's efforts, further enhancing the audience's expectations and curiosity for the film. In addition, the marketing team has also launched mobile games and interactive apps related to the film, allowing viewers to immerse themselves in the universe of *Star Wars* before watching, and experiencing the adventures and challenges of the characters. This innovative interactive approach greatly enhances audience engagement.

The pan-content dissemination strategy of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* is not limited to a single channel or region, but covers a global scale. Through multilingual trailers, posters, and promotional materials, as well as promotional events held around the world, the film has successfully attracted the attention of audiences worldwide. More importantly, the universal values of courage, friendship, and family conveyed in the film transcend cultural and regional boundaries, triggering strong emotional resonance among global audiences. This emotional connection not only deepens the audience's love and recognition of the film but also earns it a widespread reputation and influence worldwide.

3.4 Information Matrix & Secondary Creation in Communication

In viral online marketing, the dissemination of informa-

tion often presents a matrix-like spread. The promotion of movies requires the construction of a multidimensional information matrix, including official releases, KOL recommendations, user-generated content (UGC), etc., to form a strong communication force [9]. At the same time, encouraging users to engage in secondary creation, such as editing movie clips, creating mixed videos, etc., can not only enrich the dissemination of content but also stimulate users' sense of participation and belonging [10].

In viral online marketing, building an information matrix and encouraging users to engage in secondary creation are key strategies to enhance communication effectiveness and increase user engagement. The following is a detailed discussion of these two aspects:

In the era of information explosion, building an efficient and comprehensive information matrix and cleverly motivating users to engage in secondary creation has become an indispensable strategy in viral online marketing. This strategy not only strengthens the dissemination of information but also deeply explores the potential of users, injecting strong momentum into the promotion of movies. The construction of an information matrix first relies on the authority and accuracy of official releases. The film promotion team, through carefully planned official channels such as official websites and social media platforms, releases high-quality and unique trailers, posters, and plot introductions, laying a solid foundation for the subsequent viral spread. These officially released contents, with their unique appeal and professional level, quickly captured the attention of the audience and became the starting point of information dissemination.

At the same time, recommendations from KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders) have become an indispensable part of the information matrix. KOLs, with their profound influence in specific fields and extensive fan base, are able to quickly convey movie information to a wider audience. The film promotion team has achieved rapid dissemination and deep penetration of information by accurately identifying and collaborating with KOLs related to the film, leveraging their power.

In addition, the addition of user-generated content (UGC) adds rich colors and realism to the information matrix. Based on their love and understanding of movies, users create diverse content such as film reviews, reviews, and edited videos. These UGCs not only enrich the dissemination of content but also enhance the credibility and resonance of information. The film promotion team actively guides and encourages users to generate content, and through providing creative materials, organizing creative activities, and other means, stimulates users' creative enthusiasm and participation, further expanding the scope of information dissemination.

Cross-platform dissemination is another important strategy in information matrix construction. The film promotion team has developed differentiated communication strategies based on the characteristics and user groups of different social platforms, achieving multi-channel and all-round coverage of information. This cross-platform dissemination not only increases the exposure and dissemination effect of information but also enhances the popularity and influence of movies among different audience groups.

The film promotion team also spares no effort in encouraging users to create again. They provide rich creative materials and guidance, lowering the threshold for users to create; By organizing creative competitions, challenges, and other activities, it aims to stimulate users' enthusiasm and participation in creating; At the same time, actively showcasing and promoting users' excellent works can enhance their sense of belonging and achievement. In addition, maintaining good interaction and feedback mechanisms with users is also crucial. The film promotion team promptly responds to user comments and messages, answers user questions and confusion, and continuously optimizes communication strategies and creative guidance based on user feedback and suggestions.

In summary, building an information matrix and encouraging users to engage in secondary creation complement each other, together forming an effective strategy for improving communication effectiveness and enhancing user engagement in viral online marketing. This strategy not only promotes the widespread dissemination and profound influence of film information but also brings unprecedented opportunities and challenges to film promotion.

4. Problems & Solutions of Viral Network Marketing

4.1 Core Issues in Viral Online Marketing

The core issue of viral online marketing lies in balancing the attractiveness and authenticity of content, ensuring effective dissemination of information, and addressing the challenges of negative word-of-mouth [11]. These issues are directly related to the success or failure of marketing activities and the long-term development of movies.

4.1.1 Fragmented dissemination risks misleading info out of context

In the process of viral transmission, information is often presented in fragmented and brief forms to adapt to the dissemination characteristics of social media and other platforms. However, this fragmented dissemination method can easily lead to damage to the integrity and accuracy

of information, resulting in misleading information that is taken out of context. When this information is widely disseminated, it may hurt the image and reputation of the film, and even lead to public misunderstanding and controversy.

4.1.2 Over-reliance on viral transmission risks neglecting/misunderstanding film content

The core of viral online marketing lies in attracting audience attention through creative content and the power of social media dissemination. However, if one overly relies on this approach and neglects the promotion and advertising of the content of the film itself, it may lead to a lack of in-depth understanding of the core values and storyline of the film by the audience. In addition, some viral content may be too focused on attracting attention and deviate from the theme and style of the film, leading to misunderstandings and dissatisfaction among the audience.

4.1.3 Difficulty in predicting & controlling viral transmission effect

The effectiveness of viral transmission often depends on the combined effects of multiple factors, including the creativity of content, audience acceptance, and algorithmic recommendations on social media. These factors are highly uncertain and uncontrollable, making it difficult to accurately predict and control the effects of viral transmission. On the one hand, this uncertainty poses challenges and difficulties for marketers; On the other hand, it may also lead to increased risks in marketing activities, such as budget overruns, negative public opinion spread, and other issues.

4.2 Solutions to Viral Marketing Problems Overview

To address the above issues, the following solutions can be taken: firstly, strengthen content creation to ensure the originality and high quality of the content. Second, build diversified information dissemination channels to achieve precise delivery and effective coverage; Thirdly, strengthen public opinion monitoring and crisis public relations capabilities, and promptly respond to the challenges of negative word-of-mouth; The fourth is to strengthen interaction and communication with the audience and establish long-term trust relationships [12]. In the practice of viral online marketing, although it has demonstrated strong market penetration through its low-cost and high-efficiency characteristics, it also comes with a series of potential challenges that cannot be ignored. These challenges mainly focus on content homogenization, single communication channels, negative word-of-mouth risks, and low audience engagement. To effectively address these issues,

it needs to adopt a series of comprehensive strategies to ensure the sustained success of viral online marketing and the steady development of the brand.

Firstly, content is the soul of marketing, with originality and high quality at its core. Faced with the dilemma of content homogenization, it must strengthen the power of content creation, establish a team full of creativity and passion, and constantly explore novel, interesting, and valuable content ideas. At the same time, it attaches great importance to copyright protection, ensures the originality of every piece of content, and avoids falling into the quagmire of plagiarism and infringement. In addition, establish a comprehensive content review mechanism to ensure that all content accurately fits the brand tone and meets the diverse needs of the audience, thereby attracting and retaining their attention and sharing.

Secondly, the diversification of communication channels is the key to expanding marketing influence. Single-channel communication often makes it difficult to reach all target audiences, limiting the effectiveness of communication. Therefore, it needs to actively build a diversified information dissemination network, including various channels such as social media, short video platforms, search engines, etc., to achieve comprehensive coverage and precise reach of information. At the same time, utilizing big data analysis technology to deeply explore the behavior habits and preferences of the audience provides powerful support for precise targeting. In addition, establish partnerships with key opinion leaders (KOLs) in the field, leverage their strong influence to expand brand communication and enhance marketing effectiveness.

Furthermore, strengthening public opinion monitoring and crisis public relations capabilities is an important guarantee for maintaining brand image. In the era of the internet, negative information can often spread at an astonishing speed, causing immeasurable damage to brand image. To this end, it must establish a comprehensive public opinion monitoring system, track and analyze relevant information on the internet in real-time, and promptly identify and respond to potential crises. At the same time, develop detailed crisis public relations plans, clarify response strategies and processes, and ensure rapid and effective response in the event of a crisis. In addition, actively communicating and interacting with the audience, explaining the truth, and resolving misunderstandings and conflicts, is an important means to maintain brand image and enhance audience trust.

Finally, strengthening interaction and communication with the audience is key to establishing long-term trust relationships. The audience's participation directly affects the formation of brand loyalty. Therefore, it needs to establish diverse interactive mechanisms, such as online Q&A,

voting surveys, user feedback, etc., to encourage the audience to actively participate and express their opinions and suggestions. At the same time, personalized services and content are provided based on the preferences and needs of the audience, enhancing their sense of belonging and satisfaction. More importantly, continuously conveying the core values and concepts of the brand to the audience, establishing long-term trust relationships through emotional resonance and value recognition, and cultivating a group of loyal brand fans.

In summary, by strengthening content creation, building diversified communication channels, enhancing public opinion monitoring and crisis public relations capabilities, and strengthening interaction and communication with audiences, it can effectively address potential issues in viral online marketing, improve marketing effectiveness, and reduce potential risks. This can not only promote the rapid development and expansion of the brand but also lay a solid foundation for the sustainable development of the enterprise.

5. Conclusion

This article delves into the characteristics, significance, core issues, and solutions of viral online marketing for cinema films. Viral online marketing, with its low cost and high efficiency, has demonstrated strong market penetration in the field of film promotion. However, with its widespread application, a series of problems have gradually emerged, such as content homogenization, single communication channels, negative word-of-mouth risks, and low audience engagement. In response to these issues, this article proposes comprehensive strategies such as strengthening content creation, building diversified communication channels, enhancing public opinion monitoring and crisis public relations capabilities, and strengthening interaction and communication with audiences to ensure the sustained success of viral online marketing and the steady development of the brand. Through the research in this article, it can be realized that viral online marketing is not a short-term action that can be achieved overnight, but a strategic measure that requires long-term investment and fine management. This article aims to support future research in exploring specific application cases of viral online marketing in film promotion, ana-

lyzing in depth the reasons for its success and failure, and providing richer experiences and inspiration for the online marketing practices of the film industry. Meanwhile, with the continuous advancement of technology and changes in audience behavior, the strategies and methods of viral online marketing also need to be constantly innovated and optimized to adapt to new market environments and audience demands.

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