

A Study on Audience Participation in Suspense Movies in the Era of Social Media: Taking "Lost in the Stars" as an Example

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Abstract: In recent years, with the popularization of the Internet and the increasing activity of the film market, the use of Internet marketing for movies has become a normalized phenomenon. The number of Chinese netizens and the box office of movies are both showing a positive growth trend. The growth of social media has provided more platforms for netizens to express their opinions, and the dual nature of film art has both artistic and commercial aspects that require the assistance of the Internet. Suspense movies use suspenseful elements to bring their topics and create a trend on social media, triggering emotional resonance among audiences. This article will use the tool of search data to support the discussion data of the suspense movie "Lost in the Stars" on the microblogging platform, as well as the Douyin platform. Through comprehensive analysis, it can be seen that the suspense element is the beginning of the discussion of the movie, but the popularity of the theme in the movie is the target of audience participation. An excellent suspense movie cannot do without audience participation, let alone discussions on social topics, all of which need to be based on the stability of social platforms.

1 INTRODUCTION

With the popularization of smartphones and the advancement of mobile communication technology, the activity level of social media is also constantly increasing. According to *The 52nd Statistical Report on the Development of China's Internet* released by the China Internet Network Information Center today, as of June 2023, the number of Internet users in China has reached 1.079 billion, an increase of 11.09 million compared to December 2022, and the Internet penetration rate has reached 76.4% (Beijing Daily Client 2023). It can be seen that social media has a large number of users and has gradually become a medium for communication between people. According to the data of Lighthouse Professional Edition, in the 2023 Dragon Boat Festival film schedule, the suspense film "Lost in the Stars" has jumped to the top of the box office, and there are two suspense films "Full River Red" and "Lost in the Stars" in the top five annual film box office rankings. The suspense movie itself has the attribute of being discussed, which makes people curious to explore the development of the plot, and social media provides a place for people to gather and express their opinions. This study mainly focuses on movie characters and

fans, movie box office and audience interaction, movie plot, and social topics. Write a program in Python to mine and analyze the text of the movie "Lost in the Stars" on the Weibo platform. The ultimate goal is to explore the audience engagement triggered by the suspense movie "Lost in the Stars" on social media and provide some reference and guidance for the marketing direction of suspense movies.

2 RESEARCH METHOD

In terms of research methods, this article adopts data search and data summarization. This article conducts data crawling on the suspense movie "Lost in the Stars", and summarizes and organizes the searched data into thematic keywords. Using Python to write programs for text mining, Python is an object-oriented, dynamic data type, and interpretive high-level programming language. Using Python programming for text data mining has advantages such as fast speed and accurate mining, which can greatly improve the efficiency of editors engaged in academic research (Tan & Liu 2019). During the release of "Lost in the Stars" from June 22 to August

22, 2023, this article used a program to crawl data from comments and posts on Weibo that contained the keyword "Lost in the Stars". A total of 8097 Weibo texts, including the keyword "Lost in the Stars", were searched and saved in the form of a table. The complete comments from duplicate users were manually removed, often focusing on one or more topics, after deleting Weibo posts with low relevance, a topic consisting of one or several keywords ultimately resulted in a total of 7046 Weibo texts. Therefore, after summarizing and filtering the data, comments with username and time will be removed before being organized. According to the word frequency system analysis, the top 30 most frequently appearing phrases on Weibo related to the movie "Lost in the Stars" are as follows (see Table 1 for details).

According to the frequency chart, high-frequency words can be summarized into three themes: movie characters and actor fans, movie marketing and box office, and movie plot and social topics (see Table 2 for details).

Table 1: High frequency phrases and word frequency in the movie "Lost in the Stars".

Phrase	Word Frequency	Phrase	Word Frequency
Lost	23494	Rend	1588
Lost in the Stars	23263	Rush	1585
Zhu Yilong	23087	Role	1362
Film	7792	Well Received	1152
Box Office	5990	Ni Ni	1120
He Fei	5881	Interpret	1033
Thank	4249	Movie	1029
Roadshow	2784	Hard	952
Audience	2286	Continue	1033
Friend	2195	Prediction	886
Love	2100	Disguise	885
A successful conclusion	2037	Chen Mai	373
Big Sell	1962	Janice Man	349
Video	1918	Du Jiang	97
Meet	1774	Huang Ziqi	84

Table 2: High frequency phrases and word frequency in the movie "Lost in the Stars".

Serial Number	Summary of Theme Words	Keyword
Topic1	Movie Characters and Actor Fans	Zhu Yilong, He Fei, Role, Ni Ni, Janice Man
Topic2	Film Marketing and Audience Interaction	Box office, Roadshow, Thank, Big Sell, Video, Interpret, Prediction
Topic3	Movie Plot and Social Topics	Lost, Lost in the Stars, Friend, Love, Meet, Rend, Disguise

3 RESEARCH RESULTS

Social media has a diverse nature, and each user of social media has a different perspective, which leads to different interpretations and understandings of movies. According to Table 1, through text mining of Weibo comments on "Lost in the Stars", it was found that the high-frequency phrases of Weibo user groups are mainly concentrated on the actors of the movie, the plot speculation of the movie, and the box office marketing of the movie.

3.1 Movie Characters and Fan Audiences

According to the high-frequency phrases in Table 1, it can be intuitively observed that the frequency of "Zhu Yilong" is as high as 23263 words, and the shouting topics include # Actor Zhu Yilong: Stupid Methods to Shape Characters, # Zhu Yilong's Character Interpretation Ability, # Zhu Yilong Ni Ni Ni's Explosive Power in Confrontation Lines, etc. This indicates that role actors are one of the key factors affecting the popularity of a movie. Stars themselves are the highlight of a movie and the main selling point for successful marketing. The celebrity's inherent aura can bring the audience to the work. Stars showcase their charm by searching for character works that match their character images, and while achieving their success, these character images also attract more fan groups, making them the target audience for film works. Simply put, fan culture refers to using fans to resonate with people or things, and using emotional support to drive economic and commercial value. American scholar John Fiske believes that fan communities are "primarily recipients of popular culture. All audiences in popular culture can create cultural industrial products in their developmental social context, to obtain a sense of

pleasure and meaning related to self-identity." (Fiske 2021). With the development of the Internet era, the way of following celebrities is also changing, and social media platforms have gradually become the main platform for fans to discuss and spread. Fans often engage in consumer behavior while fanatically following their idols, leading to a huge fan industry (Zhang 2022). For fans, releasing new albums, hosting events, and concerts are the most basic expenses for their idols. Fans will also be more enthusiastic about following the products and endorsements used by the celebrities. When their idols release a movie, they not only buy tickets to support it, but also engage in spontaneous promotion, booking, and voting. These behaviors add heat to the film works. So in recent years, film directors have also chosen some popular celebrities as their main characters when choosing actors, so that their works can gain more attention and box office to meet greater market demand and achieve economic benefits. But for fans, this watching behavior has become an emotional consumption of idols.

Table 3: Number of fans of the main actors in Douyin and Weibo of "Lost in the Stars".

Moniker	Number of Douyin Fans (ten thousand)	Number of Weibo Fans (ten thousand)
Zhu Yilong	97.7	3089.9
Ni Ni	81.8	2506.7
Janice Man	300.5	1064.8
Du Jiang	159.8	1166.9
Huang Ziqi	35.5	30.6

According to the data summary in Table 3, it can be seen that the main characters in the drama are actors Zhu Yilong, Ni Ni, and Janice Man and Dujiang both have a huge fan base, and their movies will naturally trigger a large number of fans follow and discuss with fans. The film gathered the Golden Rooster actor Zhu Yilong, the best female host nominee Ni Ni of the Golden Rooster Award, and the powerful actor Janice Man and Du Jiang. The strong cast in the movie also has a certain degree of national popularity and acting skills, which has become the main marketing strategy of the movie "Lost in the Stars". The lead actor Zhu Yilong not only occupies more than 90% of the scenes in the film but also contributes more than half of the popularity and attention. In addition, director Chen Sicheng. The trilogy with "Tang Dynasty characters" lays the foundation for suspenseful IP, creating a tense atmosphere through the constantly changing plot, overlapping elements, fantastic audio-visual

language, and compact narrative rhythm, making the audience feel a strong sense of watching.

3.2 Film Box Office and Audience Interaction

In today's film industry, the distribution and marketing of film and television inevitably rely on the dissemination and interaction of multiple platforms (Yin & Zhang 2023). Short video platforms, as the main force of promotion, form a layered marketing model in the media network. At the beginning of a new movie's release, to attract more audiences, the film company will use social media platforms for promotion. "Lost in the Stars" achieved comprehensive promotion in marketing, with a total of 42 marketing events both online and offline. According to the data provided by Lighthouse Professional, the cumulative number of people who wanted to watch "Lost in the Stars" before its release was 687852, with a male ratio of 23.5% and a female ratio of 76.5%. The "Lost in the Stars" account on the Douyin platform has 1.928 million fans and 120 million likes, and the "Movie "Lost in the Stars" account on the microblog social media platform has 196000 fans and 6.833 million reviews. Then the cumulative number of videos played is 90.063 million. In terms of box office performance, according to statistics from Lighthouse Professional, "Lost in the Stars" grossed 90.3106 million yuan in the pre-sale box office, with a cumulative box office of 3.523 billion yuan and a total number of views of 84.854 million. She stood out in the summer movie of 2023. As a domestic suspense film in mainland film history, "Lost in the Stars" can also be considered an excellent film with a box office of over 3.5 billion yuan.

Sociologist Collins' theory of the interactive ritual chain suggests that "interaction and ritual can continuously generate emotional energy and connect this emotion with symbols, forming the foundation of organizational beliefs, organizational thinking, organizational moral norms, and organizational culture." According to Collins' advocacy, people share common emotions and emotional experiences in interactive rituals (Meng 2023). According to the data of Cat's Eye Film Professional Edition, as of 0:00 on June 30, 2023, a total of 1351 related topics of "Lost in the Stars" have been on the hot search and hot list on Weibo, Douyin, Kuaishou, and other social platforms, and the cumulative duration of the list has reached 779 hours and 35 minutes. Compared to other movies released in June, "Love Never Ends" has 194 hot topics, and "Spider-Man: Across the Spider-

Verse" has a total of 100 (Jun 2023). Chen Sicheng said in an interview with *"Southern Weekend"*: "The highest pursuit of all art is to appreciate both the refined and the popular. If a film is made, it is an extreme expression of the individual and the author, but others cannot see it. What is the meaning of it? Movies are something that needs to be shared with people." (Li 2023). The phenomenon of a movie's high box office and high popularity is undoubtedly a recognition of its functional topic. The film *"Lost in the Stars"* is actually like a mirror of social phenomena, and viewers can find emotional resonance and similar events encountered in real life from its plot. The popular plot narrative and emotional tone also promote public discussion of such suspenseful movies and then continue to ferment.

The development of new media social platforms gives audience users more rights, unlike in the past when movies were mainly promoted by promoters, directly transmitting the content and value expressed by movies to the audience, rather than allowing the audience to express their thoughts and opinions before and after watching. Nowadays, audience users can directly express their opinions and speculations through social media platforms. This personal power enhances user self-awareness indirectly increases audience participation in online society, and constructs self-identity and social identity in topic discussions. The movie *"Lost in the Stars"* utilizes the user's participation in topics on the internet, and through the occurrence of interactive rituals and the reproduction of subcultural cultural capital, the shared symbols and group morality generated by interactive rituals strengthen the identity of viewers. The active participation of users in online topics has become a hot topic in the public opinion of *"Lost in the Stars"*. The significance of user opinions has been reproduced, attracting more people to go to the cinema to explore the content of the film and expanding the dissemination scope of *"Lost in the Stars"*. For the audience, the official movie account is equivalent to the "main venue" for interactive ceremonies. This is the main discussion area and speech venue, where the audience then conducts interactive behaviors such as commenting and commenting on the content published by the official movie account. This is the interactive sharing of the movie as a major focus of attention, and each piece of content published by the official account can serve as a small focus of attention and independently become a "sub venue" for interactive ceremonies, which is a small discussion venue for audiences with a certain attitude (Liu & Zheng 2023).

3.3 Movie Plot and Social Topics

"Lost in the Stars" itself is a movie with suspense elements. According to the high-frequency phrases in Table 1, it can be seen that "disappearing" and "disappearing her" in the movie title are the most talked about and discussed. This is also the core of the suspenseful elements in this movie. The movie had a total of 21 marketing events before its release, but all of these marketing activities avoided the suspenseful point of the movie plot - "True Li Muzi", and the name of Huang Zishan, who played "True Li Muzi", was removed from the cast list. Otherwise, for a suspenseful movie, spoilers are the most taboo thing. During the early promotion process, there was no presence of Huang Zishan in any short videos or materials. It was not until the premiere roadshow of the movie that Huang Zishan truly walked up to the audience. This kind of promotion was known as the # Disappearing She Without a Spoiler Version Spoiler #, which protected the mystery of the suspenseful movie and attracted the audience to go to the cinema to directly find the answer.

Tragedy is the core of horror games, and life and death have been the most common choice for exploring suspense points in suspense-themed works in the past. However, the meaning represented by "suspense" is constantly changing, from the ups and downs of the plot to the deeper themes, which can be seen as "suspense" undergoing a return to realism (Tan 2023). After the film *"Lost in the Stars"* was released, Douyin also led the discussion of marriage phobia, anti-gambling, love brain, and other hot topics on Weibo. First of all, these topics are close to daily life, which are the topics that many couples and young people are concerned about at present. In addition, the film itself is adapted from the real Thai wife killing case, and the story is about He Fei's wife, Li Muzi, who disappeared during the wedding anniversary travel, The story of He Fei's efforts to find a wife. In Table 1, it can also be seen that the character phrase "He Fei" has appeared 5881 times, and the top 6 high-frequency words are the focus of everyone. He Fei is the protagonist in the plot and a hot topic of discussion among the audience. At the beginning of the movie's release, various hot topics were created through the Weibo platform, which resonated emotionally with users and became the key to quickly establishing a movie brand and reputation. Director Cui Rui believes that "filmmakers have a special mission that is different from other industry workers because each film has the opportunity to

speak up for a group. Due to the constraints of their circumstances, the edges or low status of their identity, they cannot spread their feelings, and as filmmakers, it is their responsibility to speak up for them." (Cui 2023). When making "Lost in the Stars" Director Cui Rui's first focus was on what topics the movie was discussing, which must have a certain positive energy that can motivate the audience, such as caring for the other half around them, paying attention to their needs, understanding their difficulties, and not neglecting communication. These positive emotional values are also what the movie wants to convey to the audience. "Lost in the Stars" finds the key points that resonate with the audience's emotions through a "reversal" approach, thereby arousing the audience's curiosity about the plot and generating movie-watching motivation. In the later stage, it forms emotional resonance with the target audience through "human nature, love, and friendship". This easy-to-understand plot and distinct social theme create a good connection with the audience, thereby promoting box office growth.

4 SUGGESTION

From the perspective of movie stars and fan audiences, suspense is the core of suspense movies. In the future development of suspense movies, when pursuing high-visibility actors, more attention should be paid to the shaping of movie characters, and the strength and love of fan groups should follow the shaping of movie characters. From the perspective of suspense movie box office and audience interaction, social media should provide more venues for movies, allowing viewers to express their feelings and thoughts after watching. This not only allows for discussions among audiences but also allows directors and actors to make progress in the discussions. Finally, in terms of film plot and social topics, suspense films should not only focus on their film creation but also consider audience participation. The content of the film should be connected to social topics to trigger emotional resonance among the audience and bring relevant heat to the film work. And how to make good use of social media platforms to actively promote movies is also the most important. When suspenseful movies are discussed on social media platforms, it is worth considering how to guide the audience to produce the correct values with the correct "wind vane".

5 CONCLUSION

The research result of this study is that through audience participation analysis of the suspense movie " *Lost in the Stars* ", it can be concluded that the inclusiveness of social media provides a broad discussion platform for suspense movies, and the plot and theme of suspense movies also need to be in line with social trends to trigger public discussion and provide correct value guidance for the audience. Thus, it can be further concluded that while films develop and grow, they not only need to balance their commercial value but also reflect their artistic value. The ultimate goal of artistic works is to serve society as inspiring and inspiring works. In future research, more attention should be paid to the spiritual value conveyed by film works.

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