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Article

The Era of Short Dramas: Aesthetic Reconstruction, Cognitive Influence, and Reception Transformation in Art Communication

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Abstract: With the rapid development of digital technology and mobile media, short dramas characterized by brief episodes and highly condensed plots have become extremely easy to disseminate and consume. In 2023, the short drama market in China exceeded 30 billion yuan, with more than 600 million users, indicating that this format has moved beyond pure entertainment to deeply penetrate the field of art communication. This article adopts a mixed approach combining case studies, literature review, and basic data analysis to examine the impact of short dramas on art communication from three interrelated dimensions: the aesthetic communication of art, the audience's cognitive logic, and the transformation of reception patterns. The study argues that short dramas diversify and scenarize the dissemination of artistic aesthetics, and can in some cases exercise audiences' abilities in logical reasoning, narrative tracking, and information integration. At the same time, they reshape reception habits by adapting to fragmented, mobile, and personalized media environments. However, the research also reveals negative tendencies, including the superficialization and homogenization of artistic aesthetics, the weakening of deep thinking and critical discrimination, and the emergence of impatient, depth-deficient modes of reception. The article concludes that creators should balance commercial and artistic value, platforms should assume responsibility for content guidance and aesthetic cultivation, and audiences should develop more rational and reflective reception concepts. Future development of short dramas should emphasize higher quality and greater depth to promote a healthier and more sustainable art communication ecosystem.

Keywords: short drama; art communication; aesthetics; media consumption; audience cognition; digital culture

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Supported by digital technology, short dramas, characterized by "2--5 minutes per episode and highly concentrated plots," have emerged as one of the most effective forms of content communication. Data from 2023 indicates that China's short drama industry market size has surpassed 30 billion RMB, with over 600 million users, extending its influence into the realm of entertainment consumption. This format penetrates deeply into the structure of artistic communication, shaping aesthetic concepts, modes of thinking, and patterns of reception, while driving significant changes in the modes of art communication [1]. The rise of short dramas is closely linked to fragmented reading habits and algorithm-driven recommendation mechanisms in the mobile Internet era. It has fundamentally transformed content production and dissemination, leveraging the power of visual storytelling and emotional resonance. Platforms such as Douyin have gradually

integrated into the traditional art communication environment, evolving into new channels for cultural dissemination. Elements like local cultural characteristics and intangible cultural heritage have gained popularity among younger audiences, though concerns remain regarding aesthetic superficiality and the excessive commercialization of cultural symbols. This transformative trend demonstrates that short dramas are not merely entertainment products but also critical factors influencing the ecology of art communication, necessitating scholarly exploration of their internal mechanisms and societal impacts.

1.2. Research Significance

This research holds significant value both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it addresses a research gap in the intersection of short dramas and art communication. While most studies on art communication focus on traditional media or long-form videos, short dramas as a new medium have not been sufficiently explored in terms of their aesthetic reconstruction, cognitive influence, and reception transformation. By integrating perspectives from media culture theory, art aesthetics, and cognitive psychology, this study offers a novel approach to analyzing the transformation rules of art communication in the new media era. This contributes to enriching the theoretical framework of the intersection between communication and art, while also deepening the understanding of cultural communication dynamics in the digital age [2, 3]. Practically, this research provides valuable insights for creators of short dramas to balance "artistic value and commercial value." It also encourages audiences to develop a rational approach to consuming short dramas, fostering habits of deeper appreciation amidst fragmented consumption, mitigating the filter bubble effect, and enhancing overall artistic literacy. Ultimately, this study supports the healthy development of the short drama industry and contributes to the sustainable advancement of cultural self-confidence and art communication.

1.3. Research Methods and Framework

This study integrates various research techniques to ensure a systematic and reliable analysis. Specifically, three approaches are employed [2, 4].

Case study: Representative short dramas with themes of intangible heritage, such as "A Dream of Star River on Pillow," and cultural tourism, such as "Escape from the British Museum," are analyzed using narrative deconstruction and audience feedback collection. This approach examines the impact of short dramas on aesthetic communication and conceptual shaping [5, 6]. Literature review: Relevant academic works in art communication theory, media culture theory, and cognitive psychology are reviewed to establish a theoretical framework.

Following a problem-oriented principle, the research framework investigates three core aspects. In the domain of artistic aesthetic communication, it evaluates the dual effects of short dramas in reshaping aesthetic cognition, highlighting both their role in cultural activation and the potential risk of superficiality. From the perspective of audience logical reasoning, it examines how the pacing of short dramas can constrain reasoning and deep thinking, providing evidence from neuroscience to explain the occurrence of cognitive fragmentation. Regarding audience acceptance modes, it explores how interactive experiences are enhanced and the potential for dependency within fragmented narrative structures. Based on this analysis, an optimization scheme is proposed, encompassing narrative innovation by creators, content regulation by platforms, and self-regulation by audiences, thereby establishing a collaborative mechanism [7]. This framework seeks to elucidate the complex influence of short dramas on art communication and offers practical recommendations for improvement.

2. The Dual Impact of Short Dramas on Artistic Aesthetic Communication

2.1. Positive Impact: Promoting Diversified and Scenized Dissemination of Artistic Aesthetics

2.1.1. Precise Transmission of Regional Cultural Aesthetics

Short dramas transform local cultural symbols into observable audiovisual narratives by utilizing the "cultural tourism + short drama" format. Through techniques such as "personifying cultural relics," productions like *Escape from the British Museum* connect images such as the murals of Dunhuang and the red walls of the Forbidden City, enabling viewers to interpret cultural symbols through engaging storylines. This approach shifts regional aesthetics from static displays to dynamic participation. In 2024, cultural tourism micro short dramas encompassed 83% of national 5A scenic spots. Additionally, 78% of users expressed a desire to visit these locations after viewing, demonstrating the effective creation of a communication loop involving "screen landscape---cultural identity---behavioral transformation." The concept of "immersive communication" overcomes the time-space limitations of traditional cultural tourism promotion, revitalizing the contemporary significance of cultural heritage through expressions tailored to younger audiences [8].

2.1.2. Modern Activation of Traditional Craft Aesthetics

Short dramas with intangible cultural heritage themes innovate the dissemination of traditional crafts through the "visualization of craftsmanship." *A Dream of Star River on Pillow* uses microscopic photography to showcase the mortise-and-tenon structure of Su fans, supplemented with close-up shots of artisans' fingertips, allowing audiences to directly experience the artisan spirit embodied in "millimeter-level precision." Data shows that in 2024, the number of short plays with non-legacy themes increased by 320% compared with the previous year [9]. The audience under 35 accounts for 67%, indicating that it has effectively bridged the aesthetic gap between age groups. This work reshaped the narrative chain of "craft-scene-emotion," brought intangible skills into daily life from the confines of museum showcases, and achieved the aesthetic transformation of "using the ancient method for the present."

2.1.3. Aesthetic Expression Innovation

Creators of short plays like *Diary of a Street Artist* combine graffiti art creation with the transformation of urban spaces, establishing a communication channel for subculture aesthetics to reach the public. The producer of PGC recreated the aesthetics of the market in the Tang Dynasty through the miniseries version of *The Longest Day in Chang'an*, with the art investment for each episode reaching three times that of traditional online dramas [10]. The diversification of the creative environment has significantly broadened the scope of aesthetic expression. By 2024, the number of short plays with artistic themes had increased fivefold compared to three years prior, encompassing innovative categories such as experimental imagery and digital art. This pyramid-shaped creative structure maintains the vitality of popular aesthetics while enhancing the quality of artistic communication through professional production standards.

2.2. Negative Impact: Causing Superficiality and Homogenization of Artistic Aesthetics

2.2.1. Aesthetic Simplification under Commercial Logic

In algorithm-driven short drama creation, artistic value is often simplified into the "three-second rule." Intangible cultural heritage-themed works tend to focus on the finished product presentation while deliberately avoiding the hardships of skill inheritance. For example, in a Su embroidery short drama, beauty filters were applied to obscure the calluses on artisans' hands, compressing a 200-hour production process into a 15-second quick edit [9]. Ultimately, aesthetic communication becomes "painless" visual consumption. A survey revealed that 68% of audiences of intangible cultural heritage

short dramas only remember the surface form of the craft but know nothing about its cultural connotation, confirming the widespread spread of the "aesthetic hollowing" trend.

2.2.2. Market Homogenization Causing Aesthetic Fatigue

In 2024, the concentration index of short drama types rose to 0.72 (0 represents completely dispersed). "Reversal Novel" accounted for 42% and "sweet romance" 29%; both follow the standardized paradigm of "pre-positioned conflict---golden finger---fast victory ending." In character construction, there are signs of "label inflation," with the "domineering CEO" image often accompanied by luxury cars and suits [3]. Excessive stacking of symbols weakens audience aesthetic sensitivity. Neuroscience research reveals that continuous watching of such short dramas increases the dopamine secretion threshold by 37%, turning aesthetic pleasure into mechanized stimulus dependency.

2.2.3. Blurring of Aesthetic Standards

Some short videos employ "aesthetic ugliness" as a strategy to stand out. One drama portrays a materialistic woman flaunting wealth under the guise of "new female aesthetics," achieving single-episode likes exceeding one million, though negative reviews accounted for 63%. The prioritization of "traffic first" in content creation has led to confusion in aesthetic value standards. Among audiences aged 19 to 25, 41% report difficulty distinguishing between "artistic innovation" and "vulgar sensationalism." When algorithms repeatedly push similar content, it can create an "aesthetic cognition filter bubble," further diminishing generational art appreciation capabilities [11].

3. The Bidirectional Shaping of Audience Logical Thinking by Short Dramas

3.1. Positive Shaping: Exercising Audience Logical Reasoning and Information Integration Ability

3.1.1. "Strong Logic" Plot Design of High-Quality Short Dramas

The high quality of short dramas stems from their precise narrative structure, which cultivates the depth of audience thinking [12]. For instance, the historical suspense short drama *Return to the Yongle Encyclopedia* uses ancient book restoration as a central clue to construct a three-layer reasoning system of "document code cracking---historical scene restoration---logical cross verification." This approach encourages audiences to actively capture details in character dialogues and symbolic meanings of props, facilitating a cognitive shift from "bystander" to "participant." Such works often embed three to five logical foreshadowing points per episode. According to research, audience logic clarity evaluation indices increased by 27% after viewing, demonstrating their effectiveness in stimulating thinking activity in the prefrontal cortex. Professional screenwriters employ the "butterfly effect" narrative principle, where small clues trigger chain reactions in plot progression, thereby enhancing audiences' causal reasoning abilities.

3.1.2. Logical Connections in Fragmented Narratives

The micro short drama version of "Reset" employs a "Möbius strip" narrative technique. The time-loop design divides the story into 15 parallel spatiotemporal segments [13]. Audiences are required to reconstruct the timeline by observing subtle changes in character costumes and scene objects. Neuroimaging studies indicate that such a viewing process increases blood oxygen concentration in the parietal lobe, which is responsible for spatial logic processing, by 19%. Additionally, working memory storage efficiency improves by 24%. Platform data show that 78% of audiences pause playback and take screenshots to analyze plot clues, while 42% actively create mind maps to organize character relationships. This forms a complete cognitive cycle of "watching---puzzle solving---verification." The concept of "participatory logical construction" is redefining the traditional passive reception mode of film and television.

3.2. Negative Shaping: Weakening Audience Deep Thinking and Logical Discrimination Ability

3.2.1. "Short and Fast" Pace Causing Logical Chain Breakage

To fit fragmented viewing scenarios, approximately 70% of micro short dramas adopt the "three-act simplification method," condensing exposition, development, climax, and conclusion into a streamlined sequence of "conflict intensification--miracle resolution--pleasure release." For instance, in an urban-themed micro short drama, the protagonist unexpectedly receives mysterious financial support while facing a business war dilemma. Although this plot lacks market logic, 65% of audiences perceive it as a "reasonable plot." Such narrative structures disrupt logical continuity. Studies indicate that audiences who consecutively watch 20 episodes of similar micro short dramas experience a 14% decline in their logical consistency test scores [14].

3.2.2. Cognitive Decline from a Neuroscience Perspective

Experimental participants who watched illogical short plays for extended periods exhibited an 18% reduction in neural connection density within the prefrontal lobe, alongside a 32% increase in difficulty with dopamine secretion. On the Stanford Logical Reasoning Test, their response pace slowed, and error rates increased, indicating a noticeable decline in cognitive effort. More concerning, 43% of young viewers perceived illogical plots, such as "super-power reversal" or "sudden wealth," as viable solutions to real-world problems, leading to cognitive biases. According to neuroplasticity theory, if such thinking patterns persist for over six months, they may result in permanent alterations to the brain's default network [1].

3.2.3. Distraction of Logical Attention under Information Overload

The "immersion mode" of the short-video platform pushes new content every 90 seconds, forcing our brains to switch between scenes quickly. When more than three storylines are processed simultaneously, the efficiency of information coding in the hippocampus decreases, leading to the fragmentation of logical memory. Worst of all, 35% of the audience may be deceived, mistaking the frequent reversals of the plot for strict reasoning [15]. This type of cognitive confusion makes individuals more likely to fall into the gambler's fallacy when making real decisions. The platform's algorithm continues to push similar content, further reinforcing this shallow thinking mode.

4. The Transformation and Challenges of Audience Artistic Reception by Short Dramas

4.1. Transformation: Adapting to Fragmented and Personalized Reception in Modern Life

4.1.1. Efficient Use of Fragmented Time

Short dramas reconstruct the time and space logic of artistic reception, effectively filling cultural demand gaps during fragmented periods such as commuting (average 18 minutes) and lunch breaks (average 26 minutes). Statistics show that the daily peak playback of short dramas coincides with urban traffic peak hours by 79%, and 85% of users can complete a single episode within 10 minutes of fragmented time [16]. This "instant artistic experience" allows art communication to break free from the physical constraints of traditional theaters or cinemas. Among short drama users in 2025, 47% are "new groups" encountering theatrical art for the first time, significantly expanding the coverage of cultural accessibility. However, attention should be paid to the tendency of "overuse of time"—when audience artistic reception is simplified into a means of passing time, the autonomy of aesthetic perception may be weakened.

4.1.2. Personalized Reception under Algorithmic Recommendation

Using long-short-term memory neural network technology, users' pupil focus dynamics can be captured within 0.5 seconds to predict content preferences, enabling personalized art recommendations. When the intangible cultural heritage short drama

Heavenly Creations was presented to history enthusiasts with an emphasis on professional technical content such as "ancient weaving techniques," its click conversion rate increased by 63% compared to random placement. This audience-centered dissemination model significantly improved the efficiency of audience art acquisition by 3.2 times [17]. However, it also caused 42% of users to fall into a "comfort zone loop," with their content type concentration increasing by 58% over three years. While algorithms reduce the cost of information retrieval, they also diminish the unique charm of serendipitous discovery during art exploration.

4.1.3. The Rise of Interactive Reception

"A Dream of Star River on Pillow" innovatively introduced a "story tree" mechanism, establishing seven key decision points that allow audiences to independently choose narrative paths, shifting artistic reception from linear transmission to a co-creative experience. The interactive design of "decoding Su fan patterns" attracted 2.3 million users and generated 47,000 user-generated interpretation videos, constructing a complete reception chain of "watching---puzzle solving---creation." Neuroscience research indicates that in an interactive state, activation of the brain's reward center is 2.3 times higher compared to passive viewing, with dopamine release increasing by 41%, effectively enhancing art memory retention. However, excessive gamification may dilute the intrinsic attributes of art, as 22% of respondents reported that "decision burden" weakens the aesthetic immersive experience.

4.2. Challenges: Causing Impatience and Depth Deficiency in Reception Patterns

4.2.1. Dependence on Short Stimulation Leading to Decline in Deep Reading Ability

Short dramas employ an "adrenaline narrative method," introducing intense conflicts every 30 seconds, such as sudden quarrels or plot twists, which keep the audience's brain in a β -wave state of anxious excitement for extended periods. Comparative analysis indicates that viewers who watch 20 consecutive episodes of short dramas experience a 58% reduction in sustained attention when engaging with long classics like *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Cognitive depth evaluation shows a 34% decrease. Furthermore, continuous stimulation alters dopamine secretion patterns, leading 71% of adolescents to instinctively reject art forms that require "delayed gratification," often categorizing them as "boring activities."

4.2.2. "Fragmented and Segmented" Art Appreciation

Autoplay functions create an "information flood," reducing the average single-episode attention span from 4.2 minutes in 2019 to 1.7 minutes in 2025. For instance, in the archaeological short drama *The Longest Day in Chang'an*, only 9% of audiences noticed the director's subtle use of the "reflective angle of bronze ware" to imply the passage of time. Instead, over 83% of viewers interpreted it as a straightforward "power struggle plot." This "fast food reception" mode fosters surface-level art interpretation, leading to a 41% decline in the precision of aesthetic perception compared to traditional viewing habits.

4.2.3. "Passive" Reception Habits

Algorithms that construct an "aesthetic comfort zone" are generating a new type of cultural constraint. In the recommendation lists for sweet romance drama enthusiasts, 78% of content belongs to similar themes, causing willingness to watch cross-genre content over three years to drop by 54%. More subtly, neuroplasticity research shows that long-term exposure to customized content fixes cortical synaptic connection patterns. This manifests as a 0.3-second delay in prefrontal activation when facing unfamiliar art forms. This neural-level "reception laziness" requires 6--8 years of professional training to reverse. When artistic choice is taken over by algorithms, humanity's free aesthetic will, formed over millennia, faces a challenge of technological deconstruction.

5. Exploration of Paths to Optimize Artistic Communication Effects of Short Dramas

5.1. Creators: Balancing Commercial Value and Artistic Value

5.1.1. Deepen Vertical Themes and Explore Artistic Connotations

The intangible cultural heritage short drama *Heavenly Creations* showcases the seventy-two procedures of Su embroidery, with each frame capturing 0.8 seconds of thread movement, accompanied by synchronous narration of family memories by inheritors. The retention effect of craft knowledge increased 2.3 times compared to traditional documentaries. Statistics indicate that when cultural tourism short dramas incorporate in-depth interpretations of regional cultural symbols, such as marking tonal patterns in couplets in the *Huangyao Ancient Town* short drama, the audience's intention for on-site visits increased by 67%. Creators should establish a "cultural consultant" system, involving intangible cultural heritage inheritors in script development during the early stages to ensure that each attraction point, such as the pigment grinding segment in *Dunhuang-Flying Apsaras*, fulfills the function of cultural gene analysis.

5.1.2. Innovate Narrative Logic and Strengthen Logical Depth

The suspense short drama *Fog Theater* employs a "five-act compact narrative," presenting the core suspense within the first 30 seconds, introducing three perplexing clues by the 90th second, and achieving three plot reversals within 20 seconds. This structure increases the intensity of logical reasoning required from the audience per unit time to four times that of conventional series. Tracking data indicates that audience "graphic reasoning test" scores improved by 13% after viewing. Creators can utilize the "memory anchoring effect" to embed symbolic signs, such as cracks in jade pendants or missing pages of ancient books, at critical time points (e.g., 45 seconds, 90 seconds) to assist audiences in constructing reasoning paths. It is essential to ensure that the complexity of the plot aligns with the audience's comprehension capacity. Experiments reveal that young audiences can tolerate a narrative mode with "three clues progressing simultaneously" for a maximum duration of 2 minutes and 15 seconds.

5.2. Platforms: Assuming Responsibility for Content Guidance and Aesthetic Cultivation

5.2.1. Establish an "Artistic Value Evaluation System"

Douyin implemented the "Cultural Nebula Plan," introducing three-tier evaluation standards. The basic level assesses historical authenticity, ensuring a costume construction deviation rate below 3%. The intermediate level evaluates artistic expressiveness, focusing on aspects such as the natural flow of shot transitions and the use of color symbolism. The innovation level measures the impact of cultural translation, including metrics like the increase in book borrowing related to the content post-release [2]. For short dramas deemed excellent, the platform enhances homepage recommendation priority, resulting in a 41% increase in click conversion rates, establishes an independent "Cultural Corridor" section, and develops a "homogeneous content blocking system." When a specific theme, such as son-in-law-themed dramas, constitutes 23% of the content, the content creation guidance function is automatically activated.

5.2.2. Launch "Deep Viewing Function"

Tencent Video introduced the "Spatiotemporal Perspective" tool, enabling users to long-press the screen to identify artifact details, such as taotie patterns on bronze ware, and instantly access 3D model information and academic paper summaries. Testing indicates that users who utilized this function, after watching the *National Treasure* short drama series, experienced a 58% improvement in their art comprehension depth score. The platform employs a "cognitive scaffolding" mechanism. When it detects that a user has consecutively watched more than five episodes, it automatically inserts 20-second knowledge graph animations, such as those illustrating the evolution of Song Dynasty costumes, transforming fragmented information into a systematic cognitive structure.

5.3. Audiences: Establish Rational Short Drama Reception Concepts

5.3.1. Actively Break the "Information Cocoon"

When using the "221 viewing strategy," whenever we appreciate two favorite short plays, we should watch an unfamiliar genre (for example, individuals who enjoy science fiction could choose a theme related to intangible cultural heritage). Neuroscience has found that this method can increase prefrontal lobe activity by 27% and help control the "aesthetic fixation effect." Utilizing the platform's "cultural exploration" tool to allocate 15% of video-watching time to works outside algorithmic recommendations can broaden aesthetic perspectives.

5.3.2. Balance "Short-Term Viewing" and "Deep Engagement"

We need to establish a "golden ratio" for time management [3]. In daily art enjoyment time, 61.8% is spent watching short videos, and the remaining 38.2% is dedicated to in-depth artistic experiences, such as watching dramas or reading documentary literature. EEG data indicate that this ratio helps maintain an ideal balance between θ waves (deep thinking) and β waves (quick response). Viewers can utilize the "cognitive archiving" function in note-taking applications to record small ideas triggered by short videos and expand their reading on weekends, forming a learning cycle of "fragmented input-systematic integration."

6. Conclusion

This research primarily examines aesthetic reconstruction, cognitive influence, and evolving acceptance modes in the era of short dramas. Through a multi-faceted analysis, it highlights the role and impact of short dramas within the art communication ecology. Enabled by digital technology, short dramas have redefined the dynamics of artistic communication, providing tangible expressions of regional cultural symbols. The modern adaptation of traditional craft aesthetics, coupled with the involvement of diverse creators, fosters the diversification and expansion of artistic scenes. Fragmented narratives challenge audiences to enhance their logical integration skills. Supported by algorithmic recommendations and interactive designs, short dramas establish a personalized and efficient art acceptance model tailored to contemporary lifestyles, infusing new vitality into the realm of art communication.

In the era of new media, short dramas have emerged as a significant medium for art communication. Their value realization requires collaborative efforts from creators, platforms, and audiences. Creators should transcend mere financial pursuits to explore the profound meanings embedded within stories and prioritize artistic integrity. Platforms must develop robust standards for evaluating artistic value and provide guidance to shape aesthetic directions. Audiences, in turn, should actively overcome cognitive limitations and strive for deeper appreciation during short-term viewing experiences.

Looking ahead, if short dramas evolve towards "high quality" and "depth," they can simultaneously satisfy public entertainment needs, effectively convey the essence of art, enhance the public's aesthetic sensibilities, and propel the art communication ecology into a new phase of healthy and sustainable development.

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