

Effectiveness and Reflection: Short Video Marketing Explodes the Market of Domestic Literary Films-- A Case Study of Return to Dust

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ABSTRACT

The audience spontaneously acted as "tap water" to initiate short video marketing, successfully triggering the box office market of the domestic literary film *Return to Dust*, making it a typical case of the film industry with great significance. The "tipping point" of the film at the box office is not only due to the combined effect of the dissemination of the short video of secondary creation and the live streaming of the traffic stars, but also due to the topic sense created by the spiritual core of the film itself. At the same time, it benefits from the cross-media communication environment created by the UGC (user-generated content) model and the precise push of big data. With the combined force of these three parties, a breakthrough effect was formed, creating a "box office miracle" for domestic literary films. The short video explosion of the domestic literary film market is quite enlightening: only by taking quality as the core to create excellent films and taking traffic as gripper to promote film cross-media marketing, can we get out of the film development road of "traffic + quality" with Chinese characteristics.

KEYWORDS

return to dust; domestic literary film; short video marketing; triggering point

INTRODUCTION

There is no dispute that the biggest film box office dark horse in 2022 is the domestic literary film *Return to Dust* -- the box office in the first month of theatrical release was only 18.12 million (up to August 8), then in the second month showed an explosive rise, on September 7 successfully exceeded 100 million, and finally jumped to the seventh place in the box office of domestic literary film with 109 million.¹ Undoubtedly, the most important driving force behind this "box office miracle" was the editing and narration of the film's secondary creation of short videos, as well as the recommendation of traffic stars in the live broadcast. It is this kind of promotion initiated by the audience spontaneously on the video platform, for the domestic literary film that was about to "return to dust" detonated the box office.

¹The box office figures are all from Maoyan Professional edition, on December 10 2022. The following is not exhaustive.

Malcolm Gladwell suggests that three "triggers" are needed to cause epidemic: individual characters with great discourse power, intrinsic attraction of things themselves, and appropriate communication environment. (马尔科姆·格拉德威尔, 2014) First of all, there are two types of spokespeople with great topic tension. One is Hai Qing and Wu Renlin two starring strong contrast, the second is Dong Yuhui as the representative of the star. Second, there is the topicality of the film itself. Themes such as love, farmers and land have been explored by short video creators, forming the focus of film marketing and setting off a hot topic. At the same time, the video platform uses the UGC (user-generated content) model to continuously expand the audience group of movies, but also realizes the precision marketing for third- and fourth-tier cities in Northwest China through the big data algorithm mechanism. The combined efforts of these three parties eventually triggered the movie-watching boom of *Return to Dust*, creating a box office miracle that was not noticed at the beginning, but relied on short videos and live broadcasts in the middle and late stages to achieve a counter-attack.

RESEARCH METHODS

This paper will take a textual research approach and a data analysis approach. Starting from the film itself, it will link the film and the audience's evaluation of it, so as to reflect on the methods of the film's success and the implications of its success for future domestic film.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the results of the analysis are presented, but not discuss their significance. How the results are presented will depend upon whether the research study was quantitative or qualitative in nature. This section should focus only on results that are directly related to the research or the problem. Graphs and tables should only be used when there is too much data to efficiently include it within the text.

Actors and KOC

The trigger point theory suggests that a popularity is first driven by a few key figures with strong persuasive power. The key figures driving the popularity of *Return to Dust* are the film's actors and KOC, who created the first wave of popularity for the film. Actors are undoubtedly the easiest to communicate and interact with audiences as spokespersons of films and push them into cinemas. The short video creators, as opinion leaders, through their own accumulated private domain traffic and with their own personal experience of watching the film, can bring the popular content of minority films to the public domain with a more intimate perspective and interpretation, which is more likely to attract traffic for movies.

Unusual Actors

Hai Qing is the Best Actress in TV series and a hot topic figure on many media platforms. She previously called for the embarrassing situation of "Middle-aged actresses" and created the internet meme "You are my God", making her own with a certain flow base. The pre-publicity of the film has been centered around Hai Qing. A bilibili UP owner with only 4,000 followers, "一个优雅的痞子酱", uploaded a video about the film's casting, which

accumulated more than 600,000 plays. In the video, Hai Qing sincerely pleaded with the directors to give more opportunities to middle-aged actresses. After received the invitation from director Li Ruijun, Hai Qing went deep into the countryside to immerse experience the life of farmers. Over the course of 10 months, Haiqing used her professional acting skills of an actor to produce a disfiguring performance, actually represented a disabled, timid and kind rural woman in the film. This is a huge difference from the urban female image that Hai Qing created for audiences in previous TV series. A large number of short video creators combined Hai Qing's immersive professional experience with her disfiguring acting skills, which became important material for the second creation in the short video platform, creating the first wave of the film's popularity.



Figure 1. Return to Dust movie poster, 2022

Unlike Haiqing, who is a professional actor, Wu Renlin, the film's leading man, is the director's uncle, a farmer born in Gansu province. There is a great contradiction and conflict between the identity expectation of the hero in literary films and the natural identity of the farmers in Gansu. This sudden opposition creates the unique tension of the film. In the current time when flow is the most important, many movies are competing to choose flow stars to create momentum for the movie. However, *Return to Dust* is the opposite. The male protagonist as a farmer seems to have no merit, but the tension of this role brings the film a natural sense of conversation. Wu Renlin became the focus of the audience and also became the core figure of the second creation of short video users. Among the top 10 videos on the bilibili (Table 1), three of them are direct clips of Wu Renlin: they praise his natural and original acting skills and sigh at the suffering fate of the character Ma Youti; the other five are plot interpretation videos, which are also directly related to Wu Renlin. On the Tik Tok, the three videos topped by the film's official account are clips of Wu Renlin's scenes, all with more than a million likes, including his telling anecdotes about the shooting at the premiere scene, with 1.394 million likes. In the film, he is short and thin, wears simple clothes and speaks a native Gansu dialect. Wu Renlin presented the excellent "acting" with the real and sincere attitude- "I feel that he is acting, but he is not acting!" In addition to Hai Qing as a professional actor, the rest of the film are original rural villagers. Director Li Ruijun said in an interview that "non-professional actors are an important element of the film's authenticity"(李睿珺; 王小鲁, 2022) These non-professional actors have become the base of the film's authenticity, and also created a rich sense of conversation for the film.

Table 1. Top 10 short video plays related to *Return to Dust* on bilibili²

Title	UP owner	Upload time	Play volume (million)	Type Analysis
它没钱没票房，却吊打今年暑期档！	三代鹿人	Aug.21	601.3	Plot Interpretation
豆瓣 8.4 却曾紧急撤档，上映后排片量低至 1%，我必须抢救一下这部国产最佳！【洞察社会系列 77】	王小七 Fire	July.21	577.7	Plot Interpretation
感觉他在演戏，又感觉没演！	荒草音乐	Aug.22	476.7	Wu Renlin
#现实版隐入尘烟#大姐包着头巾坐在拖拉机上剥玉米	奶油奶油-	July.16	361.8	Plot Interpretation
《隐入尘烟》该消失？我从来没见过这么傲慢的差评！	三代鹿人	Aug.3	320.0	Responding to Controversy
“他抽我的血，还嫌弃我的血管”	爱睡觉的_Koala	Aug.29	214.0	Wu Renlin
谁说今年没有好电影？评分 8.4 全程泪如雨下：《隐入尘烟》	人间放映厅	Aug.26	202.7	Plot Interpretation
【隐入尘烟】西北荒漠种不出玫瑰，但我对你的爱犹如小麦花印入皮肤	可难瘦了	Aug.23	195.7	Plot Interpretation
这个夏天，一个农民的演技，秒杀了整个内娱！	荒草音乐	Aug.27	175.1	Wu Renlin
《隐入尘烟》成娱乐圈公敌？8000 万票房无人祝贺，导演动了谁的利益	神探李不二	Sep.7	121.0	Other

Short Video Creators

After the film was released online on August 9, new streams of related topics on Tik Tok continued to rise. The first key booster of *Return to Dust* was the video released by the Tik Tok account "空空日记". On August 22, the "空空日记", which regularly posts videos recommending and evaluating good things, uncharacteristically posted a reaction video to *Return to Dust*. In the title of the video he explicitly said that his own rural experience made him more able to relate to the main character in the film. The comment section also gathered a large number of viewers moved by the film, "爆哭，老四和贵英这一辈子太苦了" "看不了这个，最看不得老实善良的人被欺负活得那么惨" "昨天一阵哭好几场" and many other million comments conveying the emotional resonance of the audience. The video's popular discussion about the plot helped the topic of *Return to Dust* on Tik Tok reach 43 million views the next day. Subsequently the daily incremental play of Tik Tok topics began to grow, and with it the box office of *Return to Dust* began to soar (Figure 2, point A), and the daily box office continued to create new highs.

And there are many film commentary accounts on the short video platform. Such as “三代鹿人” “何止电影” in bilibili, and“老白说剧”“口袋电影” in Tik Tok. As the professional audience of the film, they interpret the film in detail through their own viewing

²Statistics from <https://search.bilibili.com/all?>, on October 15 2022.

experience from the aspects of film creation, plot setting, emotional expression and so on, to help the audience understand the core of the story, and break the audience's assumption that domestic rural themes and literary films are far from the public and divorced from reality. After the fan base accumulated by the good word-of-mouth of professional audiences and the strong diffusion power of platform promotion, the daily box office of films began to grow gradually, forming the first round of increase in cumulative box office. On August 26, the film's daily box office exceeded 1 million. On August 27, the daily box office reached 2.383 million, and the next day, it reached 3.658 million, creating a very striking reversal of downtrend .

The Popular Anchor

Another key point for *Return to Dust* to come out of the circle is Dong Yuhui (the popular anchor of Eastern Selection)'s positive response to the controversial movie review. During a break in Tik Tok's livestream on August 29, Dong spontaneously mentioned the film. In response to the controversial comments such as "selling tragedy" and "not real", he bluntly said, "The movie is real, and the feedback on the movie is also real.". There were hundreds of thousands of viewers in the studio and nearly 20 million likes. The clip was then posted on multiple platforms such as Tik Tok and bilibili, sparking heated discussion online. Dong Yuhui, as the popular anchor after "Weiqi", and his team "Oriental Selection" set off the upsurge of "knowledge + live broadcast". His dual identity as a student from a poor family in the northwest and a former gold medal teacher in New Oriental fits naturally with *Return to Dust*, this literary film with the theme of rural areas in the northwest. In the live broadcast, Dong Yuhui spontaneously talked about his afterthoughts of *Return to Dust*, and personally linked the real situation of the northwest rural area with the movie characters, responding to the audience's controversies with his own life experiences, successfully attracting traffic for the movie, and once again promoting the film breaking the circle. In the following days, the number of plays of *Return to Dust* on Tik Tok continued to increase, and the box office of theaters also skyrocketed. On September 2, the box office of a single day reached 8.914 million, becoming the first one-day box office champion, and on September 3, the box office reached 14.396 million.(Figure 2, point B to point C).

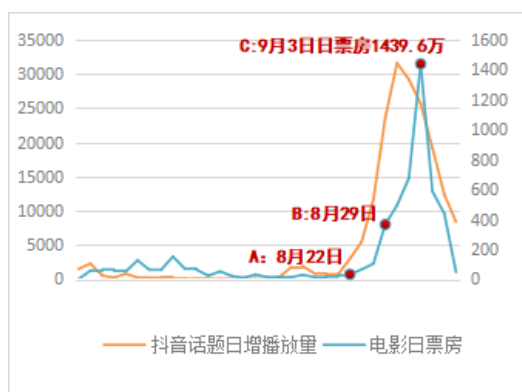


Figure 2. Return to Dust Tik Tok topic daily incremental play and movie daily box office trend graph³

³Data from Maoyan Professional edition "Want to see analysis", on December 2 2022.

The Content of the Film

The final effect of communication is not determined by the subjective will of the communicator, it is affected by the characteristics of the communicator, the arrangement of information content, information presentation, communication media and other factors. (卡尔·霍夫兰, 2014) And the key lies in the appeal of the event itself to the public. Director Li Ruijun has said in an interview that "popular is accidental, not popular is the norm" "Maybe people are moved by the feelings of Laosi and Guiying" "It may also be because the movie is exactly matched with some emotions of people at present". (外滩 The Bund, 2022) The broken circle of *Return to Dust* is not the result of intentional pre-marketing by the film maker, but the short video creator found the audience's concerns and interest points in the process of communication and took the initiative to create the second time. Conscious marketing drives spontaneous tap water, forming a double interactive upsurge of cinema viewing and online hot discussion. The attraction of *Return to Dust* lies in the fact that it reproduces the difficult life of the disadvantaged groups in northwest China by using the art of time and space. The film delicately portrays the true love of the marginalized and sincerely expresses the profound feelings for the land and wheat fields. It successfully inspires the resonance of the people under the siege of the epidemic for the hard life, arouses the yearning for simple love in the depths of people's hearts and the memory of the land with pastoral feelings.

Writing about Suffering

Return to Dust portrays a pair of the marginalized who are excluded from the public: Cao Guiying is physically disabled and Ma Youtie is oppressed by his brother and sister-in-law, the two married far away from the village, living an isolated life rejected by the public. The pain of the marginalized who are not accepted by the mainstream has been widely resonated by the sinking market after being spread and amplified by short videos. In the short video of the second creation, there are many clips of movie lines and scenes, as well as many explanation videos that deeply analyze the farmer images and the movie plots.

Return to Dust depicts the pain and poverty suffered by Ma Youtie and Cao Guiying, and depicts their kindness and hard work in a more detailed way. The film shows their optimistic and tenacious attitude towards life and suffering. Through it, the philosophy and wisdom inherited from the agricultural civilization for thousands of years -- the deepest respect and love for land and life. Using the land and wheat fields as imagery, *Return to Dust* presents the reality of the plight and inner world of the Chinese peasants at the lower class, embodying what Frye calls "low mimetic": "Neither superior to others nor superior to his environment, the protagonist is one of us. We will have a sense of his ordinary human sexuality. We resonate with his idea of ordinary humanity and demand of the poet the same principles of possibility that we find in our own experience." (耿婷婷, 2010) Youtie and Guiying such a marginalized couple, find a pastoral interest in the idyllic "paradise of the world" amidst the world's disdain and indifference, and they build their own home brick by brick like swallows carrying mud. The land, the golden stacks of wheat and the fragrant roasted fish, rendered the two people's desire for a happy life. The spring planting and the autumn harvest is happy despite the hardships. They farmed with passion and dedication,

just like everyone who are full of expectations in the cycle of the seasons when facing poverty and illness. This down-to-earth attitude of life can undoubtedly bring some spiritual comfort and hope to the audience who are increasingly struggling under the siege of the epidemic.

Focusing on Love

With its characteristics of easy resonance and emotional identification, love subject plays a very important role in young audiences who are the main consumer group in films market. However, the love story of Ma Youtie and Cao Guiying, which focuses on the love story of the marginalized from a bottom-level perspective, still brings shocking power to the audience in the most common and pure way.

In the short video related to the film, scenes such as "Wheat flower" and "eating eggs" became hot topics for viewers to discuss. A short video titled "西北荒漠种不出玫瑰，但我对你的爱犹如小麦花印入皮肤" received 1.957 million views. Ma Youtie used small wheat grains to print the shape of a flower on Guiying's hand: "打个记号，以后就跑到哪里都不会丢了" It expresses the ultimate sincerity and purity of love in a poor environment. Material poverty brings not only hardships to Youtie and Guiying, but also the love between them from nothing to a life of dependence and the longing to rebuild their lives. Godard's film *Passion* says, "Everyone should love labor or try to love." Ma Youtie and Cao Guiying were like this. They worked hard to farm, fell in love with each other, stayed together for warmth, and saved each other. The relationship between Youtie and Guiying is a mutual recognition and survival dependence based on being dependent on each other like animals. It is a kind of groupism of the smallest unit, which is more primitive and profound. *Return to Dust* unloads the status and money packaging of love, pulling it down from the altar built by material civilization, back to the earth, into the soil. Their love is simple and pure because they have nothing, inspiring audience who are far away from the land and have lost themselves in the process of urbanization to yearn for simple feelings, evoking a strong identification with such feelings in the audience's subconscious.

Dialoguing with the Land

The rural life scenes of *Return to Dust* are rooted in the land, providing a healing place for people who have been hit by reality, realizing the recall of human subjectivity in a impetuous society. "Rural space has also become a narrative space for guarding traditional national culture and exploring the warmth and humanity of human society." (胡馨月; 李月, 2012) A clip of the film posted by the official account of Tik Tok has been liked 1.57 million times: Guiying tells Youtie to stop eating momos after they fell on the ground, and Youtie says, "土都不嫌弃我们，我们还嫌弃土干啥" It is precisely because of this deep attachment and dependence to the land that Youtie and Guiying, two marginal characters who are abandoned by their peers due to economic distress and disability, not only harvest heavy wheat, but also find themselves and comfort when they shed sweat on the land. "No pains, no gains", the land gives everyone undifferentiated feedback and care.

According to the 7th National Census data, there are still 500 million rural people in China, accounting for 36.11% of the total population.(第七次全国人口普查主要数据情况,

2021) Farming culture has always been the most profound inheritance on the land of China, and it is the genetic code engraved in the blood of many people. Chinese people have a natural affinity for land and a strong sense of identity with farmers. The rural life in the film is exactly the true portrayal of rural life in many people's memories. Bakhtin's "dialogue theory" points out that people's construction of self-subjectivity is realized through the dialogue between self and others.(巴赫金, 1998) *Return to Dust* leads a group of audiences, who have been besieged by the epidemic for a long time, to seek the meaning of survival from the land and to recover human subjectivity in the interaction between human beings and the land. The film shows the life of farmers in the cycle of the four seasons. Through each brick and tile, each meal and vegetable, spring planting and autumn harvesting, people and the land establish the most simple truths about life and sincerely realize the return of human subjectivity in the most clumsy way. The short video amplifies the warmth of the film about land, showing the tolerance and care of the land for people, guiding the audience to return to the land through the film narrative, and realizing the dialogue between the audience and the true state of life. When the hometown becomes a memory that can no longer be reached, it is easy for the audience to resonate in the siege of the epidemic and trigger collective nostalgia. Therefore, the film becomes the carrier of the group's sense of distress and local feelings, and jointly inspires the formation of the utopia of hometown memory.

Because of this concern for the underprivileged, recognition of simple love and remembrance of the land, *Return to Dust* set off a wave of analysis, discussion and exchange of plot by users on the short video platform, pushing the film to break the circle quickly. The film's score on Douban rose from 7.8 to 8.5, and the box office soared, a miracle driven purely by audiences' own choices.

Cross-media Communication

The Law of Environmental Power states the environment that initiates an epidemic is so important that even a small change in the environment can determine whether or not it causes an epidemic. In the digital media environment, capital chases new surplus value growth points, and the relationship between leisure and labor has changed. Playing labor, as a hot spot for capital to chase(袁继红; 丘仙灵, 2022), has driven the rapid expansion of UGC. The short video of *Return to Dust* has created a spontaneous UGC boom precisely through the viewers' conscious play labor: the short video breaks down the content of the film, blending and combining elements of the film to create a new art form, realizing the transformation from film to short video in two different media. The new media age refers to an era in which Internet technology and information networks are highly developed. In this era, internet technology has penetrated into every aspect of society and people's lifestyles have been affected and changed to a great extent.(Yujie Qian, 2022) "Compared with movies, short videos have an average length of five minutes, and the precise delivery of content interests, making communication more vertical, recognizable and interactive".(马一丹, 2022) These short videos of editing and interpretation are free of charge for the diversion and promotion of the film, and push the film to break and out of the circle.

External Context

In the context of media integration, film is no longer just a single channel transmission through cinemas, but a process of multi-channel transmission and interactive communication through short videos, Weibo, Wechat and other media with the Internet as the carrier. The new media environment has brought about changes in audience psychology in terms of de-centralisation and de-authorisation, the pursuit of the everyday and an emphasis on the user experience. (Wang Yue, 2022) With a user base of 962 million (第 50 次中国互联网络发展状况统计报告, 2022), short video platforms have become a huge force that cannot be ignored. Many films have gained high revenue at the box office through short video marketing. A classic example is *Long Day's Journey Into Night's* "One Kiss Across the Year", which created momentum and raised awareness before the film release, making 262 million at the box office on its opening day. Compared with these conscious independent marketing, *Return to Dust* can be described as "unintentional", by the audience's spontaneous editing and secondary creation, through the video platform to achieve successful marketing.

Driving traffic to UGC is a marketing model that many literary products are trying to create. Users spontaneously gather into a circle as movie audiences, second-generation short videos' producers and film disseminators, producing topics and hotspots, which is quickly broken due to the spread of influence. After the online broadcast of *Return to Dust* was launched, the self-publishers first uploaded short videos related to the movie, which not only created private traffic for themselves, but also brought public traffic to the movie, forming the first wave of interaction between the movie and the audience. Then, the users attracted by short videos poured to theaters. While the audience grew, more audiences joined this circle to discuss and analyze the plot, forming the second wave of interaction between movies and audiences. As the group of followers expanded, the number of second-rate short videos grew and spread wider, triggering more users to follow, watch and discuss the film, sparking a buzz on the topic of *Return to Dust* and thus driving up the film's release rate and box office. Through the UGC mode of short video platform, it not only promotes the effective dissemination of the work, but also promotes fan grouping and fan co-creation. So that viewers can give full play to their initiative, use the resources of short video platform and the movie itself, independently choose the content of the movie to meet their psychological needs for sharing, and conduct high-intensity connection and interaction with other audiences on the platform to obtain the value-added effect in emotion, experience and socialization. This further enhances the audience's emotional resonance, expands the scope of the movie, and creates a strong momentum for the box office.

Internal Context

Context plays a crucial role in driving popularity, and the internal context - the construction of the film's scenes - is a central element of film marketing. The word "scene" originally refers to the location and setting of a shooting, but can also refer to the scenes in a play or film. The northwest rural life scene of *Return to Dust* creates a certain "sense of presence" for the audience. Through the spatial narration of the film, it not only deepens the richness of the picture vertically, but also expands the space of the audience's imagination horizontally -- extending from the big screen to the real reality space. *Return to Dust* presents

the life of farmers in rural Gansu province in 2011. The film was shot in the real village, Huawangzi in Zhangye, Gansu. Director Li Ruijun used a year's shooting time to record the rural working life in all seasons with long shots and similar documentary techniques. In the film, the wheat, land, donkeys, desert and sand, truly reproduce the natural environment of the Northwest. Except for Hai Qing, the other actors are non-professional actors, their authentic Gansu dialect and natural acting reproduce the real Northwest rural cultural environment. The two together present the original northwest rural scenes, creating an immersive "sense of presence" for the audience, which has a huge appeal to the audience with the background of rural life (especially in Northwest China).

Robert Scoble once predicted that in the context of the new era of the Internet, the scene will reshape life and business models based on the power of digital technology, among which social media and big data play an important role. *Return to Dust* constructs a scene about the "Northwest countryside" with the spatial narrative of the film. Under the big data algorithm, the short video platform quickly identifies the target audience groups by collecting and analyzing the user's data in multiple dimensions, such as their identity and preferences, and repeatedly pushes relevant short video programs to them. The aim is to make the film resonate with the audience in terms of scene presentation, story content and emotional expression, thus maximising the conversion of user attention into box office purchasing power.

According to the "Want to See" data survey, the audience group of *Return to Dust* has its own characteristics, and the willingness to watch is quite different from other films: first-tier cities with good viewing habits and high consumption level accounted for only 10.5%, second-tier cities as high as 26.9%, third-tier cities as high as 11.3%, and fourth-tier cities became the main active areas of *Return to Dust*, accounting for 51.3%.⁴ This unusual data shows that the most popular area for *Return to Dust* is the fourth-tier cities that are most closely connected with rural areas. It can be believed that the scene construction of the northwest countryside and the love story of simple farmers, as the internal scene of *Return to Dust*, contributed the biggest box office help to the film.

Enlightenment Significance

Return to Dust has taken a path to break the circle that was not expected for a niche film. (猫眼研究院：2022 暑期档数据洞察，2022) In the general environment of recession, *Return to Dust* was able to stand out and embark on a miraculous road of box office reversal, and the reasons for its success are quite valuable to learn from. Film quality is the core element of its success. For films, content is the source and the foundation of film marketing and publicity. At the same time, short video as the most popular media tool, its huge flow can often become an accelerator and amplifier to trigger the popularity. Multi-channel promotion through digital media has become an essential element of movie marketing, and the participation and guidance of digital capital is becoming the core element and profit source of movie value growth.

⁴Data from Maoyan Professional edition "Want to see analysis", on December 14 2022.

Quality

What really determines whether a thing is popular or not is its own power of adhesion. Therefore, the quality of the film is the key to the success of marketing. *Song of the Phoenix*, which is also a niche literary film with *Return to Dust*, broke through with a very low screening rate and won nearly 90 million at the box office. And the first day box office broke 200 million *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, due to word-of-mouth precipitous decline, the final box office failed to break 300 million. The broadcast of *Return to Dust* on the network platform became the starting point of its later comeback, because the film's real and touching content and simple and sincere emotions triggered deep resonance among the public. The audience is willing to go to the cinema and contribute to the box office of a good film even after the film is already on the video platform. All of these things show that high quality is the key to a film's high box office. At the same time, as a niche rural literary film with unfavorable box office in the early stage, the box office success of *Return to Dust* also proves that in the contemporary society where fast food culture prevails, the so-called "niche" and "literary" films may be widely favored become "popular" with certain opportunities. Film creators should not underestimate the audience's ability to understand and appreciate movies, and should not regard film art as what appeal to highbrows only, but should be more sincere and pragmatic to create more works that are down-to-earth, relevant to reality and close to the audience.

Traffic

The unconscious marketing of *Return to Dust* provides a worthy reference for domestic literary films to break out of the circle. This film provides a path for the subsequent film industry to turn passive into active marketing, using the short video platform to carry out a large-scale and multi-angle marketing and publicity, realizing IP co-construction and value co-creation. The three rules of the tipping point theory reveal to a certain extent the necessary elements to trigger the popularity, so domestic literary films should also pay attention to the cooperation of these three aspects when using the short video platform for marketing.

Choose the right spokesperson for the film to create a sense of conversation and attract traffic to the film. Spokespeople first consider the roles of the actors in the film, and actors with strength and traffic are often able to maximize the fan economy. *The Fallen Bridge* which is the same time as *Return to Dust*, has the cooperation between Ma Sichun, the Golden Horse Best actress, and Wang Junkai, the top traffic actor. The two actors raised the audience's expectations from the film's shooting stage, and also made full use of their popularity on the short video platform to attract traffic for the film during the release stage. At the same time, KOL with a high degree of film content is also very suitable for driving traffic to the film. For example, Oriental Selection, as the leader of the trend of "knowledge + live broadcast", conforms to the ideological characteristics of domestic literary films. It can not only help the film sell tickets and expand the scope of the film, but also interpret the theme and plot of the film to help the audience understand the connotation of the film.

From the film creation stage, marketing start to find the attachment point, and put the marketing role in front of the initiative. Transmission is an amplifier. After the film is made, the transmission can only enlarge the final coefficient, but if the transmission is considered

in the creative stage of the film, it will enlarge the base of the film. Before film creation, marketing can conveniently join the early development and preparation stages to expand the possibility of interaction with the audience for the story from the perspective of communication. During the movie creation process, the short video marketing team can join the movie shooting, accumulate a lot of available materials for the marketing planning of the movie promotion period, and create momentum for the movie before the release of the film. During the release of the film, it is necessary to pay close attention to the trend of public opinion, actively guide the audience and timely respond to the controversy related to the film. In this way, marketing can participate in the whole process of film .

With the development of the industry trend of media convergence, more and more films have begun to incorporate video platforms directly into the producers of films. The film *New Gods : Yang Jian* by *Light Chaser Animation Studios* directly included bilibili and Tik Tok as producers. The number of views on the short video platform continued to soar, and the box office reached 134 million in the first week, eventually earning 555 million. Video platforms are included in the film's producers, which is conducive to building a multi-win situation. First, the film has a huge user group of propaganda platform, can directly use it to promote the film. Second, the video platform has solved the core copyright problem. The video platform has obtained its own shortage of copyright, guaranteed the source of high-quality content, and avoided the embarrassment of unauthorized and pirated content. At the same time, film marketing can also take advantage of short video fragmentation and big data to obtain the hot spots and trends of mass consumption, so as to more accurately enter the consumer market.

CONCLUSION

The box office success of *Return to Dust* is certainly due to the hot topic evoked by the short video marketing, but the most important thing is the sincere attitude of the creative team in restoring the relationship between people and the land under their feet. The success of the film has great implications. First of all, quality is the core to create a film that can stand the test of the public. At the same time, various marketing models of new media should be used to drive the box office. Domestic films need to follow the development road of "flow + quality", so as to better fulfill the task of "thriving and developing cultural undertakings and cultural industries, adhering to the people-oriented creation orientation, and releasing more excellent works that enhance the spiritual power of the people" proposed in the Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, which is a win-win situation of social effect and market effect. This is the right path for the development of the film industry with Chinese characteristics.(二十大报告：推进文化自信自强，铸就社会主义文化新辉煌，2022) .

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