

Research on Emotional Communication Strategies of Films on Social Media: A Case Study of *The Wandering Earth 2* on the TikTok Platform

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Abstract. This paper aims to explore emotional communication strategies for films on social media, with a specific focus on the dissemination of *The Wandering Earth 2* on the TikTok platform. By analyzing the promotional content, user interactions, and emotional responses related to *The Wandering Earth 2* on TikTok, this study reveals how films can leverage social media platforms to facilitate emotional communication, thereby enhancing audience emotional resonance and engagement. The research indicates that the successful dissemination of films on social media relies not only on the creativity and entertainment value of the content but also on a deep understanding and grasp of users' emotional needs. This paper provides theoretical support and practical guidance for film marketing, highlighting directions for optimizing future film dissemination strategies.

1 Introduction

Reports from App Annie provide valuable data on user engagement, average time spent on the app, and the demographics of TikTok users [1]. These reports show that TikTok has one of the highest engagement rates among social media platforms. This means that a movie trailer can be watched by almost everyone in a country. On January 5, 2019, TikTok President Zhang Nan announced the latest user data for TikTok. As of January 2019, TikTok's daily active users (DAU) in China had surpassed 250 million, and its monthly active users (MAU) had exceeded 500 million. TikTok has a large market in China. So it is a good way to propagandize this movie. And eMarketer's research provides detailed analyses of TikTok's user base, advertising revenue, and market trends. Their reports indicate the growing influence of TikTok on digital marketing and its impact on social media advertising strategies [2].

Among the numerous studies on TikTok as a social media platform, most researchers focus on the platform's inherent characteristics. For example, Liu Xuetao in "Research on TikTok's Secondary Creation Short Videos under the Linkage Mechanism" [1], explores the content dissemination of TikTok short videos using the linkage mechanism. Other scholars,

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recognizing TikTok's commercial applications, study its business value. Jamil Raja Ahmed and his team show that consumer well-being should be an essential component of influencer marketing strategy in their research "Impact of social media influencers on consumers' well-being and purchase intention: a TikTok perspective" [2]. Even in the field of film marketing, research on emotional communication is rare, with most studies focusing solely on marketing strategies. For example, Jingyi Xu's research is based on the new 4C marketing theory, combined with China's national conditions and specific cases, to analyze and explore the short video marketing mode from the special attributes of short videos and marketing strategies [3]. Thus, the necessity of this study is evident.

This research will analyze user reactions to the promotional videos of *The Wandering Earth 2* on TikTok using both quantitative and qualitative methods, and combine this analysis with box office data.

Through this research, it can be understood how emotional content in social media influences audience engagement and enhances the dissemination of films. It also helps us to analyze the effectiveness of current emotional communication strategies and aid film marketing teams in creating more targeted and impactful promotional plans.

Understanding the emotional impact of films can contribute to the broader cultural conversation, influencing how films are perceived and discussed within society.

2 Theoretical Basis and Research Methodology

2.1 Overview of Emotional Communication Theory

Emotional communication theory examines how emotions are conveyed and interpreted in media, influencing audience perception, engagement, and behavior. It suggests that emotions enhance communication effectiveness by creating stronger audience connections. This theory is widely used in marketing, storytelling, and social media to evoke responses and drive actions [4]. Understanding it helps craft messages that deeply resonate with audiences, making interactions more impactful. According to Minghua Xu and Ziyao Wei, emotional communication includes expression, contagion, and sharing, affecting behaviors like reposting or liking congruent views and expressing doubt or anger toward opposing views [5].

2.2 Overview of Social Media Marketing Theory

Social media marketing is the process of using social media platforms and tools to promote and advertise products, aiming to increase product awareness, and reputation, and attract more consumers [6]. It involves leveraging platforms to engage target audiences, create meaningful interactions, and build brand loyalty. Key components include content creation, user engagement, influencer partnerships, and data analytics. Effective social media marketing leads to increased brand visibility, customer engagement, and higher conversion rates and sales.

2.3 Film Marketing Strategies

Film marketing strategies involve releasing engaging trailers and teasers to capture audience interest, utilizing social media platforms for promotion through movie-related content and interactive activities, and leveraging celebrity endorsements by having the film's stars and director participate in media interviews and public appearances [7]. Additionally, partnerships and sponsorships with brands help in cross-promotion, while premieres and

special screenings create buzz and word-of-mouth. Merchandising builds brand recognition and engages fans, and sharing behind-the-scenes footage and exclusive content maintains ongoing interest and engagement [6]. To analyze the propagation outcome, this research meticulously collected and analyzed data. On June 1, 2024, an in-depth investigation was conducted by searching for TAGs associated with the movie *Wandering Earth 2* on TikTok. From the three video comment sections with the highest number of likes, 50 popular comments were selected, resulting in a dataset of 150 emotional comments categorized into four aspects. Sentiment analysis was then performed on these categories. During the promotion period of *The Wandering Earth 2*, the marketing team released 453 videos on TikTok. This study will analyze the top 30 most popular 3videos among them.

2.4 Research Methodology

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3 The Characteristics of the TikTok Platform and the Emotional Symbols in the Movie *The Wandering Earth 2*

3.1 Characteristics of the TikTok Platform and Movie Promotion on TikTok

Virality on TikTok is achieved through high engagement metrics like likes, comments, shares, completion rates, and rewatch rates, which the algorithm uses to gauge video quality and relevance. Movie dissemination on TikTok leverages these metrics, along with the platform's short-form video format, creative editing tools, and interactive features, to engage users and promote viral sharing. AI-driven recommendations and trend alignment further enhance the reach and impact of movie content on the platform [8].

TikTok's interactive features, such as comments, likes, and shares, create a community around content, increasing engagement and visibility. The platform's AI algorithms recommend personalized clips by analyzing user behavior and maximizing engagement. Trends and challenges, often initiated by influencers or brand campaigns, encourage users to create and share videos around common themes, leading to exponential growth in views and participation. For movie promotion, TikTok leverages these characteristics to enhance reach. Users engage with movie content through reviews, reactions, and remixes, while challenges like the Dance Challenge and Lip Sync Challenge promote user participation and content creation, amplifying the reach of movie-related videos.

TikTok's format of short-form videos (typically 15 to 60 seconds) caters to the decreasing attention spans of modern users. This format encourages quick consumption and sharing, leading to rapid dissemination of content. According to a report by Website Rating, TikTok users spend an average of 850 minutes per month on the app, indicating high engagement levels with short-form content [9].

A significant characteristic of TikTok is its emphasis on user-generated content. The platform's editing tools, effects, and music library make it easy for users to create professional-looking videos. The community-driven nature of TikTok encourages interaction

through duets, stitches, and collaborations, which further amplify video reach. This environment fosters user participation, enabling users to create various movie-related videos, including reviews, reactions, and remixes, thereby amplifying the reach of the original movie content [10].

TikTok's interactive features, such as comments, likes, and shares, foster community engagement and visibility. AI algorithms recommend personalized clips based on user behavior, enhancing engagement. Influencers and brand campaigns initiate trends and challenges, prompting users to create videos around common themes, driving views and participation. TikTok leverages these dynamics for movie promotion, where users interact through reviews, reactions, and remixes. Challenges like the Dance Challenge and Lip Sync Challenge encourage user participation and content creation, expanding the reach of movie-related videos [11].

3.2 Emotional symbols in *The Wandering Earth 2*

In *The Wandering Earth 2*, emotional themes are prominently featured. Liu Peiqiang illustrates family through his sense of responsibility, joining the Navigator Space Station selection for his wife Han Duoduo despite her terminal illness. Tu Hengyu portrays paternal love by pursuing the Digital Life Project to preserve his daughter Yaya's consciousness. Love is shown through Liu Peiqiang and Han Duoduo's unwavering relationship. Friendship is evident among colleagues, displaying camaraderie and sacrifice. The mentor-student bond between Ma Zhao and Tu Hengyu provides moral support. Human unity and sacrifice are embodied through global cooperation amid Earth's crisis, with individual acts of heroism emphasizing humanity's noble nature.

According to the tag on TikTok that relates to *The Wandering Earth 2*, many of the users feel that this movie is very touching. A total of 5,139 people participated in the topic "The Wandering Earth 2 is so moving", with an accumulated view count of 480 million. The movie's story is about astronauts going on a mission they won't come back from, risking their lives to keep all the humans left on Earth safe.

As a major production from China, the film heavily targets the domestic market. Cultural elements, familiar actors, and national pride in local film production play significant roles in attracting Chinese viewers.

3.3 The Target Audience for *The Wandering Earth 2*

Gender distribution analysis of Spring Festival box office data shows that for *The Wandering Earth 2*, the proportion of female ticket buyers exceeds that of males. This suggests the sequel has successfully attracted a significant female audience.

Analysis of age distribution shows *The Wandering Earth 2* has attracted a large number of young viewers interested in science fiction themes and special effects. The film's release during the Chinese New Year also drew a significant family-oriented audience. Gender distribution among viewers was nearly equal, with a majority falling within the 20-29 age group.

Building on the success of *The Wandering Earth 1*, many fans of the original film are expected to follow *The Wandering Earth 2*. Science fiction enthusiasts are likely to appreciate its futuristic setting, advanced technology, and speculative themes of space exploration and planetary survival. Those interested in technology, space, and environmental themes are also key audiences. The film's exploration of planetary engineering and survival resonates strongly with viewers passionate about these subjects.

Young adults and teens are drawn to visually spectacular, high-energy movies. This film's action-packed narrative, special effects, and engaging storyline are crafted to captivate

younger audiences seeking entertainment and escapism. It also resonates with viewers who appreciate and celebrate Chinese achievements in cinema and technology.

The Wandering Earth 2 also aims to attract a global audience with its universal themes, high production values, and extensive international marketing.

This movie has effectively engaged a diverse audience through strategic targeting and timing. Significant female viewership, strong presence among young and family-oriented viewers, and international appeal highlight its broad emotional and thematic connection with varied audiences.

4 Analysis of short video content strategies

4.1 Short Video Strategies

TikTok short videos condense and simplify movie trailers, extending and supplementing the main promotional content. These videos, based on the main trailers, aim to capture the audience's interest in the core plot of *The Wandering Earth 2* through concise and vivid presentations. Before the film's release, TikTok's movie section heavily promoted it with multiple short videos, including trailers and behind-the-scenes footage.

One trailer, "Spaceflight Squadron's Mission to Death", sparked widespread discussion and moved viewers, clearly conveying the film's emotional depth. Other trailers highlighted the exceptional performances of actors Li Xuejian and Ning Li, with 95% of 55,052 comments expressing admiration for their acting. Many viewers praised Li Xuejian's past works, making the video a hit among fans of the veteran actor.

The behind-the-scenes footage featured lighthearted and humorous stories from the set, including Wu Jing celebrating a young actor's birthday and Sha Yi buying drinks for the crew after losing a bet to Wu Jing. These moments helped connect the actors with the audience.

The marketing team emphasized hardcore sci-fi elements and stunning visuals in their short videos and posters, collaborating with various Chinese research institutions' official accounts. Official blogs reposted scientists' interviews and explanations about *The Wandering Earth 2*, boosting credibility and sparking discussions among viewers. This content garnered 552K likes, 5.8K comments, and 7.8K shares.

The marketing team collaborated with KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders) and MCNs (Multi-Channel Networks) to broaden audience reach and attract new viewers. Approximately 6% of the videos were shared by KOLs, as highlighted in Kejin Xu's research on the influence of KOLs in movie marketing on TikTok [11]. Partnering with Orange Entertainment, a prominent KOL, generated considerable anticipation during the trailer release. Working with MCNs included inviting top influencers to participate in roadshow events, facilitating detailed interactions, and enhancing the film's reputation.

4.2 Emotional Strategy

The Wandering Earth 2 used various TikTok strategies, including a live stream on March 18, 2023, with creator Gong Ge'er and actress Zhu Yanmanzi sharing behind-the-scenes stories. Influencers amplified the campaign, enhancing its credibility and reach. The marketing team also organized a challenge for users to recreate film scenes, boosting visibility and community interaction. This strategy engaged audiences through content creation, influencer partnerships, and interactive elements, building a cohesive community and increasing brand resonance.

Activities and challenges focused on the movie’s emotional scenes, resonating with the audience. This engagement prompted users to share their feelings, further spreading the campaign.

4.3 Social Interaction Strategy

Distributors can post cast and crew interviews discussing their experiences and favorite scenes, prompting fans to comment and ask questions. The official account of *The Wandering Earth 2* released an interview with Andy Lau and Sha Yi, where Lau praised Chinese-made filming equipment and expressed confidence in Chinese sci-fi. Many users commented with pride and support for Chinese sci-fi movies.

Post-reaction videos of key scenes, featuring cast members and fans, generate comments as viewers share their thoughts. The official account released a video of armed police officers watching the movie, sparking tributes and discussions. Another video showed *Wandering Earth 1* star Qu Chuxiao in tears while watching, attracting discussions among his fans and boosting interest in both movies, enhancing fan engagement.

Additionally, hashtags make the videos easier to find by users searching for related content, simultaneously, they allow marketers to track the performance of specific campaigns and measure engagement levels.

From the selected videos, the researchers collected these frequently appearing tags: “Wandering Earth 2 is too good to cry,” “Sha Yi makes me cry in Wandering Earth 2,” “Moved by Li Xuejian’s sincerity in Wandering Earth 2,” “Wandering Earth 2 roadshow”, and “Wandering Earth 2 wins audiences’ hearts with sincerity”. These tags resonated with viewers, who commented on touching plot points: Zhou Jiezi’s speech on human civilization, the concept of digital life, and Liu Peiqiang’s “cosmic cigarette” scene. The promoters effectively used emotional marketing to convert audience resonance into box office success.

5 Results of Top Comment Analysis

Audiences praise *The Wandering Earth 2* for its visual effects, storyline, and international perspective. Many believe the film has improved significantly in plot and visuals, with a broader story and intricate special effects enhancing the viewing experience.

As shown in Graph 1, out of 150 comments, 44.66% expressed adoration for the video, 35.92% felt pride, 10.68% conveyed sadness (likely due to the theme of astronauts sacrificing themselves), and 8.74% expressed disappointment, primarily because Chinese sci-fi films didn’t meet their expectations.

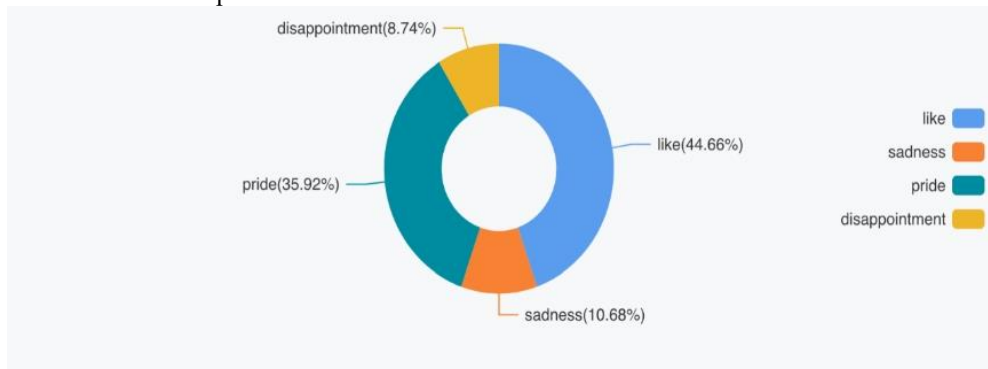


Fig. 1. 150 hot comments of *The Wandering Earth 2*

Data show that creating BGM music with different emotional tones and producing emotionally intense clips in social media propaganda videos can effectively steer audience emotions to align with the author's objectives, aiding targeted commentary and promotion.

6 Discussion

6.1 The Role of Emotional Symbols in Movies

Emotional symbols in movies evoke specific feelings and responses from the audience. These visual, auditory, or narrative elements enhance the story's emotional depth. Visual symbols unify images and colors, serving multiple communicative functions. Colors, lighting, and imagery convey emotions: dark, shadowy scenes evoke fear or tension, while bright, warm colors suggest happiness or warmth. Soundtracks and sound effects set the emotional tone in movies, conveying the author's precise meaning and helping the audience interpret symbols, especially in emotional moments like tragic endings. Other emotional symbols include character expressions, gestures, dialogue, monologues, setting, and environment. Together, these elements create an immersive experience that deepens viewers' connection with the characters and story.

6.2 Reasons of Communication Strategies Working

Diffusion of Innovations Theory explains how new ideas spread in society. *Wandering Earth 2* leverages "opinion leaders" and "early adopters" on TikTok to promote the film, attracting a wider audience. Uses and Gratifications Theory explores how audiences use media to fulfill needs. Shake users derive entertainment, information, and interaction from *Wandering Earth 2*'s diverse content, enhancing engagement. Social capital theory highlights the use of social relationship resources. *Wandering Earth 2* fosters interaction through Jitterbug's interactive activities, building a vibrant fan community.

Additionally, word-of-mouth (WOM) theory underscores how information spreads. Jitterbit users generate word-of-mouth by sharing and commenting on *Wandering Earth 2*'s videos, amplifying the film's reach. Gamification theory emphasizes that user engagement and motivation will be enhanced through game elements like rewards and competition. *Wandering Earth 2*'s interactive activities on TikTok, such as the Challenge, leverages this by setting up competitive rewards to drive active participation and enthusiasm sharing.

7 Suggestion

7.1 Boosting Engagement with Emotional Symbols and Social Media

To increase user engagement through emotional symbols in the movie, initiatives can be launched such as creative challenges or hashtag campaigns centered around key themes or scenes. These efforts encourage users to share their interpretations and reactions through fan art, memes, or video responses using designated movie-related hashtags. By sharing content that resonates with the movie's emotional themes, fans are motivated to connect on a personal level, sharing their own experiences and feelings. Recognizing and featuring the best user-generated content on official platforms not only amplifies fan participation but also builds community excitement. Additionally, leveraging platforms like TikTok to promote offline exhibition activities enhances brand visibility and heightens audience anticipation for the film [12].

Collaborate with TikTok influencers to highlight the movie's emotional impact, review it, and share experiences. Their influence can inspire followers to create similar content, significantly boosting engagement and spreading emotional themes. Encourage users to focus on the movie's themes like love, sacrifice, or adventure by prompting them with questions that inspire personal stories or recreations of emotionally charged scenes. Additionally, develop custom filters and effects related to the movie for users to apply, enhancing their videos visually and aligning with the movie's aesthetic.

7.2 Using Data Analysis to Optimize Movie Marketing Decision

The marketing team for a film can leverage data analysis to optimize their marketing strategies in several impactful ways.

Partner with TikTok influencers to emphasize the movie's emotional impact, review it, and share experiences. Their influence inspires followers to create similar content, boosting engagement and spreading emotional themes. Prompt users with questions to explore themes like love, sacrifice, or adventure through personal stories or recreations of key scenes. Develop custom filters and effects for users to visually enhance their videos and align them with the movie's aesthetic [12]. Using the art film "Long Day's Journey into Night" as an example, despite the common challenges faced by art films such as a perceived "slow pace" and difficulty in understanding, it managed to surpass 100 million yuan in box office revenue in China. Lighthouse Film Lab data indicates that TikTok contributed significantly to the film's marketing efforts, accounting for 37% of its promotional activities. Leading up to its release, the hashtag "Long Day's Journey into Night, Super Wants to Meet Someone" trended on TikTok, generating 170 million video views. TikTok's algorithmic features, including keyword matching, user interests, and geographic targeting, played a crucial role in achieving precise audience engagement [13].

Analyze social media trends and audience interactions to identify popular topics, hashtags, and content types. Align movie marketing with these trends to boost visibility. Use geographic data to target regions with the most potential audience, employing localized content and strategies. The platform recommends videos based on titles, tags, descriptions, and cover images, and suggests relevant content based on users' friend relationships and geographic locations, such as local cinema events [12].

Tracking key performance indicators (KPIs) such as engagement, click-through, and conversion rates helps identify effective strategies and allocate resources. The official TikTok account for "The Wandering Earth 2" pinned three videos: "The Spaceflight Squadron's Mission to Death" and "Li Xuejian's Acting Skills", which garnered many likes and comments expressing anticipation. Another video resonated emotionally with viewers, encouraging them to convert their feelings into consumption and gain a sense of participation [14].

Systematically collecting and analyzing feedback from preliminary screenings and test audiences is crucial. This data helps refine marketing strategies and, if necessary, make adjustments to the film itself. For instance, *YOLO* faced challenges during promotion, including accusations of plagiarism regarding its poster and criticisms of lead actor Lei Jiayin's performance. In response, the filmmakers swiftly adjusted their marketing strategy, shifting focus to other actors to mitigate negative perceptions. These measures ultimately led to the film's critical and commercial success.

8 Conclusion

Research shows that leveraging platforms like TikTok for film promotion effectively creates emotional connections, boosts engagement, and enhances box office success. *The Wandering Earth 2* exemplifies how targeted emotional strategies can drive viewer participation and positive reception. Social media's interactive nature makes it indispensable in modern film marketing, reaching diverse audiences and fostering deep emotional bonds with films.

Examining TikTok's role in promoting *The Wandering Earth 2*, this study emphasizes strategic social media use for film marketing. It demonstrates how interactive content and user participation amplify impact, contributing to theoretical insights and practical strategies for digital-age film promotion. The research underscores the importance of emotional communication and strategic social media use, guiding academics and practitioners alike.

Future research could explore how emotional engagement influences audience loyalty and repeat viewership, compare effective strategies across social platforms, analyze cultural interpretations of emotional themes, and examine the impact of technologies like AR and VR on film marketing. Addressing ethical considerations in emotional manipulation ensures respectful and authentic marketing practices.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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