

Understanding Audience Reception of Chinese Internet “Cool Dramas”

Xinyang Li*

North China University of Technology, School of Sciences, Department of Mathematics, Beijing, 100144, China

Abstract. This study investigates the demographic characteristics, preferences, and viewing behaviours of audiences for "cool dramas" through a survey of 161 respondents. Cool dramas, though lacking a specific definition, are generally recognized as dramas that trigger viewers' pleasure points, evoke a sense of exhilaration, and provide a strong sense of immersion and enjoyment. Findings show that female viewers, especially those aged 18-29, dominate, mainly comprising students and IT professionals. Most respondents (74.19%) have been watching cool dramas for over two years, primarily on platforms like Tencent Video, iQIYI, and TikTok. The most popular genres include suspense, comedy, and revenge stories, with viewers' primary motivations being relaxation, novelty, and entertainment. However, concerns have been raised about the negative impacts of cool dramas, including excessive reliance on virtual fantasies, decreased independent thinking ability, and distorted values. Despite issues like excessive advertising, neglect of logic, and content homogenization, 66.13% of respondents plan to maintain their viewing frequency. This study emphasizes that investors and creators need to address these issues by investing in more diversified and high-quality content, reducing advertisements, and promoting educational and socially responsible themes in cool dramas.

1 Introduction

It is generally believed by scholars that the first appearance of Chinese Internet cool dramas was "The Promotion of the Crown Princess" in 2015. Until 2018, the topic reading volume of "Yanxi Raiders" on Weibo reached 11.2 billion, cool dramas gradually emerged and quickly became popular. However, there is still no specific definition of cool drama at present. In 2018, "China Youth Daily" conducted a survey of 2,008 respondents, mainly from young people, on the topic of "cool culture" [1]. Among them, the young people group's cognition of the characteristics of "cool culture" can be summed up as a "sense of achievement", "carefree sense", "sense of substitution" and "emotional vent" with several keywords. Hou Xiaoqiang, former CEO of Shanda Literature and founder of Zhonghui Film and Television, believes that "cool drama is to trigger the audience's cool point from the story model,

* Corresponding author: 20105010218@mail.ncut.edu.cn

structure and plot, to mobilize the emotional mood of the heart" [2]. To sum up, this article defines "cool drama" as "a drama that makes people feel immersive, enjoyable, and happy".

Nowadays, cool dramas appear in network dramas, which are produced by computer networks and broadcast through mobile phones, tablets, computers and other network devices. Among them, the short play can be considered as a cool drama, because the short play has clear "double short" characteristics. The drama is short, but its length and core logic are cool. The micro-short drama also has the characteristics of short time and fast rhythm and focuses on momentary emotions and feelings. Its plot has strong impacts and multiple reversals. In this regard, this article believes that the characteristics of micro-short dramas are like short dramas, and that micro-short dramas are also cool dramas. And the TV series encompasses a very wide range. Cool dramas are included in TV dramas, but TV series are not all cool dramas. Therefore, this article will focus on short dramas and micro-short dramas as the objects of discussion of cool dramas.

According to the "2023 Research and Analysis of China's Short Drama Industry Chain Map", it can be seen that the number of micro-short dramas that have been granted distribution licenses has grown rapidly, and the proportion of domestic online dramas that have obtained distribution licenses has increased from 16.7% in the third quarter of 2022 to 35.4% in the third quarter of 2023. Analysts at the China Business Industry Research Institute predict that the market size of micro-short dramas will reach 50.44 billion yuan in 2024. In addition, major video platforms have actively deployed and gradually launched the platform's micro-short drama incentive plan to help micro-short drama creators. As of June 2023, short videos have 1.026 billion users, an increase of 14.54 million from December 2022, accounting for 95.2% of the total number of netizens. Among them, about 50.4% of short video users have watched micro-short dramas within three minutes [3].

It can be seen that the output and user scale of cool dramas are increasing day by day. Conducting audience research on Chinese Internet dramas can analyse the perceptions and needs of different age groups on cool dramas, thereby helping the digital entertainment industry to develop healthily. At the same time, it provides content creators and platforms with more accurate creative strategies and market positioning.

2 Literature review

As cool dramas become more and more popular at home and abroad, many scholars have studied the spread phenomenon and popular reasons for cool dramas. Domestic scholars such as Li Jiongpeng emphasized that the formation of the "cool phenomenon" of hit dramas is inseparable from the interaction between creators, producers and broadcasters, audiences and communication media. At the same time, with the help of Gladwell's Three Rules of Popularity, he analysed the attractiveness of hit dramas, the power of communication, and the role of new media in building an immersive environment. Finally, he reflected on the enlightenment of the cool phenomenon to the soft power of Chinese film and television culture [4]. Cheng Xiaoyu pointed out that the audience's interpretation of "cool drama" is mainly manifested in priority interpretation, reflecting the entertainment dissolution of reality and the yearning for the virtual world. She also analysed the uniqueness of "cool dramas" in communication, pointing out that they have changed the value standards of traditional film and television dramas and strengthened the sense of competition and self-interest. Finally, the study calls on film and television media to assume social responsibility and help young people build correct values [5]. Zeng Zheng's paper explores how audiences often feel refreshed by specific receptive psychology (e.g., avoidance, catharsis, and self-obsession) when watching Kuaishou short dramas. By analysing the three manifestations of Kuaishou micro-short dramas, two important revelations are drawn: the first is to enhance the

audience's sensory, immersive, and emotional experience, and the second is to pursue the inevitability of coolness in society and culture [6].

Foreign scholars do not have so much research on cool dramas, but in the movies and TV series of various countries, the shadow of cool dramas can be found. Joel Dinerstein explores how "cool" has been represented in different cultures and theatres. In the United States, "cool" is often associated with individuality, rebellion, and innovation, embodying individualistic values. In Japan, character design and storytelling in anime are often seen as "cool," emphasizing visual aesthetics and emotional resonance. In other cultures, "cool" may place more emphasis on collective identity and traditional values [7]. Cool dramas usually use fast narrative rhythm and dramatic plot development, which is in line with the "cool" form of expression and can enhance the audience's viewing experience. In addition, in some cultures, "cool dramas" can become a form of "cool", especially among young audiences, and popular cool dramas are often seen as a fashion and trend.

In terms of audience analysis, foreign scholar Uchenna Onuzulike studied how Nigerian films are viewed by Nigerians in Nigeria and Nigerians in South Africa. According to the study, viewers disliked the repetition of the story, poor production quality, and paranormal phenomena [8]. Güneş, Hava Sare explores the reception of teen TV plots among audiences. The results show that adolescent audiences not only pursue emotional resonance, but also obtain psychological satisfaction through role substitution. In addition, the narrative structure and characterization of youth dramas play a key role in enhancing the audience's sense of engagement and emotional connection [9]. Their analysis emphasizes the need to combine the social context and the audience's own situation. At the same time, it also allows this article to preset the aspects that Chinese Internet viewers may not like about cool dramas.

The above research and theories will help to understand some background information in advance for this article. However, there are relatively few studies on cool dramas at home and abroad, and cool dramas are very popular nowadays, so it is necessary to conduct this research. However, there are relatively few studies on cool dramas at home and abroad, and today's social popular values are different from before, and cool dramas are so popular. Therefore, it is more important to study the latest audience's views on cool dramas. In addition, as for how cool dramas can develop in a healthier direction, the above research only calls on film and television media to assume social responsibility and help build correct values but does not provide specific suggestions or feasible solutions. This paper conducts research on the audience of Chinese Internet cool dramas so that creators can understand the audience's thoughts, and help them discover and improve the problems existing in cool dramas. At the same time, this research can also help Chinese film and television brands understand the market trend of cool dramas, so as to create more attractive plots and character settings to match the preferences of audiences. In order to achieve the expected purposes of this study, and let the significance of this study can be put into practice. In this study, this article will conduct a survey on the basic situation of the audience of cool dramas through questionnaires.

3 Methodology

The research method of this paper was the survey method. The sample of this study was open to everyone, but the questionnaire was used in the form of questions to confirm whether the respondents had watched cool dramas. To ensure the representativeness of the sample, the questionnaire was designed with gender, age, occupation and other factors in mind, so as to cover respondents from different backgrounds. The questionnaire was edited and published through the "Questionnaire Star" Mini Program. The platform provided convenience for users to fill out questionnaires online and had good data collection and analysis capabilities. The questionnaire was posted to four social media platforms with a wide user base: Xiaohongshu,

Weibo, TikTok and Kwai. The questionnaire was distributed from July 14 to July 19, 2024, for a total of six days. After review, eight questionnaires were found invalid, and the final valid questionnaires were 161. The judgment criterion of the invalid questionnaire was mainly that some respondents had chosen the same option in their answers, which caused the questionnaire to not reflect their real thoughts. This criterion ensured the validity and reliability of the data, providing a solid foundation for subsequent analysis.

4 Results

Firstly, an initial survey of the audience filling out the questionnaire. Of the valid 161 data, 67 were males and 94 were females. The main audience is in the age of 18-29 (65) and 40-49 (46). In terms of academic background, the number of undergraduate students is 106, followed by 35 master's students. Students and IT industry personnel are the main audience groups, accounting for 29.19% and 26.71%, respectively. The monthly income of 5,001-10,000 yuan was the most, being 37.27%. Due to the large number of students, 25.47 percent of them have a monthly salary of less than 3,000 yuan.

However, of the 161, 37 have not been exposed to the drama. Among them, 24 men have not seen the cool drama, accounting for about 35% of the total number of men. It can be seen that the audience group of cool drama is mostly women.

Among the 127 people who have been in contact with cool dramas, 74.19 percent have been in contact with them for more than two years. 1 or 2-3 monthly views, 25% and 24.19%, respectively. In addition, 32.36 percent of people watched the drama for half an hour to an hour. The number of people who watch cool dramas for an hour to an hour and a half and those who watch them for two hours are about 20 percent. As for the duration of the series, nearly 50 percent of people think that each episode should last 20-40 minutes. In terms of preference for the number of episodes in cool dramas, 41.13% of the respondents believe that 12-24 episodes are the most appropriate.

Viewers prefer to utilize various platforms to enjoy cool dramas, with the top three being Tencent Video, iQIYI, and TikTok, which represent 50%, 46.77%, and 45.97% of the viewing choices, respectively. The majority of respondents enjoy watching these dramas during their leisure time (83.87%), followed by during their commutes (26.61%). Conversely, the least amount of viewing occurs while at work or in class, with only 5.65% doing so.

As for the genres of cool dramas, the preferences among viewers vary widely. The most favoured genre is suspense and reasoning (53.23%), followed by humorous imagination (40.32%), counterattack and revenge (33.87%), palace rivalry (33.06%), time-travel and alternate realities (29.84%), urban aristocracy (24.19%), and fantasy and god of war (17.74%).

The reasons for viewers engaging with cool dramas differ significantly. Among the respondents, 68 individuals stated that they find work and study exhausting, thus seeking relaxation through these dramas. Another 63 noted that the innovative themes and engaging content are what attract them to watch. Additionally, 58 participants indicated that they watch these dramas merely as a way to pass the time, without particular regard to what they are viewing. Furthermore, 20 respondents expressed their willingness to watch cool dramas because their friends are also watching, allowing for shared conversation topics.

When assessing satisfaction with the current state of cool dramas, about 48% of participants felt neutral, while around 42% expressed a degree of satisfaction. In response to nine areas of inquiry regarding these dramas, most respondents selected a neutral stance. However, concerning the issue of excessive advertising, those who agreed outnumbered those who felt neutral. For the question about disregarding logic and common sense, the number of those who agreed matched those who selected neutral. In the case of content homogenization, those agreeing were slightly fewer than those feeling neutral. This indicates

that serious issues persist in these aspects. When asked about the potential side effects of watching cool dramas, 56.45% reported no noticeable changes in themselves. Approximately 20% expressed a greater inclination toward living in the moment or felt that their independent thinking abilities had diminished. A certain portion of viewers also noted a tendency to become trapped in the fantasies of a virtual world, leading to discontent with reality, while others were uncertain if any changes had occurred. However, a small minority recognized a shift in their values. Finally, when questioned about their future viewing habits, 66.13% indicated they would continue to maintain their current frequency of watching cool dramas.

5 Discussion

The survey reveals that the audience for cool dramas comprises a higher proportion of females than males, which could be attributed to females' stronger interest in emotional and plot-driven content. In terms of age distribution, the 18-29 age group dominates, likely because they are more familiar with emerging digital media platforms and social networks. Additionally, being primarily university or graduate students, they have more personal time to indulge in cool dramas. Urban, romance, and campus themes, being similar to their living environment, can easily resonate with them. Given China's socio-economic context, with sluggish economic growth and heightened employment pressures for students, cool dramas serve as an outlet to unwind and alleviate stress. Meanwhile, 40-49-year-olds, at a stable stage of their careers, form the backbone of paid viewing models. They often have children in high school or university, watching cool dramas either to relieve life pressure or purely for leisure, sometimes even watching cool dramas with their children to better integrate into the children's lives.

From the occupation distribution of the audience, it can also be seen that students and the IT industry, who have frequent activities on new media platforms and have a strong ability to use the Internet, are more likely to contact cool dramas. Investors need to actively balance the preferences between different types of users, who have a high but low income, and those who already work, in order to increase their returns.

Most of the users who have been connected with cool dramas for more than two years, so it can be seen that cool dramas have formed a relatively stable viewing habit among the audience. This phenomenon may be closely related to the entertainment, easy digestion and the compactness of the cool drama, attracting the audience to stay for a long time. In terms of viewing frequency, most audiences watch cool drama with relatively low frequency every month, which may be consistent with before, reflecting the impact of the pace of the audience's daily life. Especially in the context of academic pressure or busy work, audiences may choose to watch at a certain time rather than frequently. The maximum audience choice of a single viewing time is half an hour to one hour, showing the high acceptance and immersive experience of some audiences to the series. At the same time, viewers may prefer to watch full plots rather than fragment spending, which is related to the narrative style of the show itself and consumers' desire for emotional connections. In addition, the majority of users think that an episode should last 20-40 minutes, which echoes what the audience chose to watch in a single view. It proves the rigor of the questionnaire but also corresponds to the general duration of many topics such as the God of War.

The diversity of preferred platforms highlights the intense competition among Chinese video streaming services, continuously optimizing content and user experience. Tencent Video and iQIYI dominate with their rich content libraries and user-friendly interfaces, while TikTok, as a short-form video platform, caters to quick content consumption.

People like to watch cool dramas in their spare time, which further proves the importance of leisure and entertainment in modern life. Combined with the reasons why the audience watch the drama, we can intuitively find out to relax and release the pressure of work and

study, which is the biggest reason for the audience to choose to watch the drama. At the same time, because the novel and interesting content left the audience, otherwise a large proportion of people mentioned that there is no requirement for what drama to watch. The total was 26.61 percent, indicating that more and more viewers are using fragmented time. The widespread use of smartphones makes it easy for viewers to easily watch their favorite content on any occasion. This behaviour not only meets the audience's demand for convenient entertainment, but also shows that how to make reasonable use of time is becoming increasingly important in the crowded city life. In contrast, only 5.65 percent of the audience chose to watch the dramas at work or in class, indicating that most audiences attach great importance to the suitability of the occasion. There is a common awareness that work and study time should focus on related tasks, and it is not willing to be distracted from entertainment content during these stressful periods. This cautious choice may reflect the audience's perception of career and learning responsibilities, and also indicates that the drama is a way of leisure, still an activity relative to daily life and work.

According to the audience's choice of the theme of the cool drama, it can be seen that the audience's aesthetic taste is more and more differentiated, and they expect innovative content output. The 2023 Micro drama industry report points out that the proportion of suspense, comedy and fantasy drama increases relatively, which corresponds to the choice of audiences in this questionnaire, reflects the changes of the current market themes and the change of audience preferences, giving investors and creators new development direction and opportunities [10]. In addition, the audience thinks that 12-24 episodes are the most appropriate, which corresponds to the summary of the 2023 [10]. According to the micro drama industry report, in the first half of 2023, the genre of war god accounted for the largest proportion. What is more, according to the 2023 Short video Market Research report, the majority of short video users are male, nearly 70% of whom are aged 19-35 years old [11]. In this regard, this paper analyses the increase of male frequency themes such as God of War and counterattack, in order to attract male users. Because the Ares genre often incorporates action, adventure and heroism, it can satisfy male audiences for excitement and adventure, as well as attract their interest in virtual worlds and battle scenes.

Through the analysis of the questionnaire, it can be clearly seen that cool dramas have taken up a lot of fragmented time of users through various platforms. People use it to delight the mood and relieve pressure, but unconsciously in the stickiness with the drama is more and more strong. In particular, users aged 18-29, who are the backbone of society, are building their own values and understanding of society, and are very vulnerable to media content. However, cool dramas often focus on using simple plots and entertaining elements to attract users' attention, but may ignore the discussion of deep social problems and values. Short videos are become stickier to users. Immersing in such content for a long time may make some young viewers lack deep thinking and correct understanding of social reality and values, thus having a negative impact on the formation of correct values and social views.

This study discusses the audience satisfaction with the current cool drama, and the results show that the quality and content of the cool drama are still controversial. "Excessive advertising content" will not only affect the audience's viewing experience but also reduce their loyalty to the platform and content. It is suggested that a drama should not involve too many advertisements, and you can choose a matching play to insert into it in a silent way. For example, a beverage advertisement can replace the water used by the main character with this beverage without affecting the content of an urban drama. At the same time, reduce the close-up shot of the drink and let it appear naturally. This does not affect the audience experience, but also achieves the role of subtle increase in the impression. The problem of "ignoring logic, abandoning common sense" and "serious homogenization of content" is very fatal. The former affects the user viewing experience, to the worst, it will convey the wrong knowledge, causing bad effects and even life-threatening. The homogenized content will

subtly deepen people's stereotype of a thing. For example, the president of an urban wealthy family, is usually portrayed as a handsome male figure. And the heroine is mostly a vase or silly white sweet lack of independence and autonomy image. Such plays transmit implicit values of male superiority, and female characters are often in a passive position. Moreover, the description of material life is often too grandiose and extravagant, causing users' excessive yearning and pursuit.

And in the face of the defects existing in the cool drama, only 56.45 percent of the people thought they had not changed much. This shows that the impact of the cool drama on the users is still very big. They may be influenced by a "light entertainment first" way of thinking, a phenomenon that can be seen as a trend of "instant satisfaction" from a psychological perspective, affecting the audience's attitude towards real life. In addition, it is easy to fall into the fantasy of the virtual world and complain about the change in the real world and the values of a few people, which deserves attention, which means that the content gradually affects real life. Might as well think, that if a person loves rebirth type of cool drama, when he encounters very big pain or blow in reality, it is possible for him to commit suicide to escape from reality by way, hope life like a cool drama to start again. Similarly, if the values of a group of people will change and spread through the mainstream media, and the mainstream values of the younger generation of the whole society will change, it may have a huge impact on the whole country. In particular, the above questions can give the respondents some thinking, but the number of people who choose to keep watching is still very large. It can be seen that people's dependence on cool drama is still very high.

Therefore, investors and creators need to change the direction of investment and creation according to the questionnaire. Investors can now invest more in suspense, comedy types of cool drama, to reduce the amount of advertising in each drama. Creators should pay attention to the rigour and standardization of the content. The creation content should conform to objective laws and ethical knowledge, encourage creators to use cool dramas to play the public welfare value and improve the average level of the public's cognition of a certain thing. For example, through historical drama, design a modern travel to a certain dynasty, and use the knowledge to solve the problems encountered. In this process, we can not only achieve the purpose of applying the knowledge learned but also understand the unknown history of that dynasty. In ancient and modern dialogue, it is easy to form the collision of values, some interesting things happen. In the process, correct values can also be spread, and the way of relaxed humour can be used to arouse the audience to think.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study makes a comprehensive analysis of the audience preferences, viewing habits and satisfaction of Chinese cool dramas. Through a survey of 161 valid respondents, we obtained valuable information on the demographic characteristics, viewing patterns and viewing reasons of the audience of the cool show. At the same time, it shows the impact of the existing problems of the cool drama.

First of all, the study found that the main audience of cool dramas is women, mainly young adults aged 18-29. This demographic group is more likely to be active on digital media platforms and social networks, and their preference for cool dramas may stem from their emotional and narrative appeal. In addition, the study highlights the importance of leisure time to promote the consumption of cool dramas, and audiences tend to use their spare time to watch them.

Secondly, the results show that cool dramas continue to be popular among their audiences, and more than half of the respondents have been watching them for more than two years. The preferred viewing frequency and duration suggest that the audience found a balance between casual entertainment and immersive experience. In addition, the diversity of preferred

platforms (such as Tencent Video, iQiyi, and TikTok) reflects the competitive landscape of video streaming services in China and audiences' preferences for convenience and accessibility.

In terms of content preference, the study found that audiences have a variety of tastes for the genres, with suspense, comedy and fantasy among the far the most popular. This suggests that creators should strive to innovate and diversify in storytelling. However, the research also points out problems with the quality of the dramas, especially excessive advertising, neglect of logic and common sense, and homogenization of content. These issues have the potential to undermine viewers' viewing experience and loyalty.

In addition, the potential impact of the drama on audience values and behaviours. While most respondents said that watching the shows did not bring a significant change in their lives, a significant number acknowledged that they had an impact on their attitudes and realities. This emphasizes the need for creators and investors to follow the social and cultural impact of their work and strive to create positive, thought-provoking content.

Given these findings, the study suggests that investors and creators focus on producing high-quality, diverse and socially responsible content. This includes reducing advertising content, ensuring logical and ethical storytelling, and harnessing the potential of the type for education and enlightenment. By doing so, they can not only meet the needs of the audience, but also have a positive impact on the Chinese cultural and social environment.

References

1. China Youth Daily, What do you think of "cool culture"? 2018-9-6, retrieved 2024-8-11 from https://zqb.cyol.com/html/2018-09/06/nw.D110000zgqnb_20180906_4-07.html.
2. J. He, What is a "cool drama"? What is the key that making the audience addictive? 2018-11-02, retrieved 2024-8-11 from https://www.sohu.com/a/272712856_613537.
3. Oriental Fortune Network. Research and analysis of the map of China's short drama industry chain in 2023. 2023-12-26, retrieved 2024-8-11 from <https://caifuhao.eastmoney.com/news/20231226103645800421870>.
4. J. Li, A STUDY ON THE "DELIGHT PHENOMENON" OF HIT TV DRAMAS. Zhejiang Normal University, (2020).
5. X. Cheng, Research on the Media Spectacle in the Spread of the "Dope Drama". Shandong Normal University, (2021).
6. Z. Zeng, A study on the Receptivity of Cathartic Elements in Kwai Online Mini-dramas. Central South University, (2023).
7. J. Dinerstein, F. H. Goodyear, American cool. National Portrait Gallery, (2014).
8. U. Onuzulike, Audience reactions to the different aspects of Nollywood movies. CINEJ Cinema Journal, **5**(2): 87-104. (2016)
9. H. S. Güneş, Audience reception of teen TV dramas: experience of romance and pleasure. Bilkent Üniversitesi, (2016).
10. M. Kong, BBPA & Communication University of China: 2023 Micro-drama Industry Report. 2023-12-15, retrieved 2024-8-16 from <https://www.sgpjbg.com/baogao/148654.html>.
11. Bida net. 2023 China Short Video Platform Market Research Report (Brief version). 2024-04-02, retrieved 2024-8-16 from <https://www.fxbaogao.com>.