

Extreme East Asian Horror: Analysis of the Marketing Model of the Mock-documentary Horror Film "Incantation" in the Perspective of 4I Strategy

Shaojie Tie^{1,a}, Zhenzi Wang^{1,b,*}

¹Yunnan Arts University, Kunming, China

^asjietie@outlook.com, ^bjeannie_w@163.com

*Corresponding author: Zhenzi Wang

Abstract: The Web 3.0 era has reinforced the commodity nature of movies, and the survival of increasingly commercialized movies in the market has become a high-profile issue, and marketing strategies have become more customized. Among many marketing success stories, "Incantation" is a phenomenon, surpassing the NT\$150 million box office mark in only four weeks of release. As a Mock-documentary horror film, the story of "Incantation" has few highlights, a low investment of NT\$30 million, and a lot of traditional horror film shooting techniques, but it was able to beat other films released in the same year. This paper will analyze the sophisticated marketing model of "Incantation" in the context of Web 3.0, explore the key to its commercial success from four aspects: interesting, interests, interaction and individuality, and summarize the strategies to provide reference for how Chinese movies can "go out" through streaming media.

Keywords: 4I theory; mock-documentary; Web3.0; film marketing

1. Introduction

In recent years, technological advances have led to innovations in the ways and means of media distribution, with cinema's overwhelming influence on economic growth and the direction of mainstream culture, achieving the ultimate shift since the global pandemic. Streaming media, with its relatively low cost of distribution, ultra-fast speed and unrestricted distribution space, has undermined the dominance of cinemas since the birth of cinema, and the COVID-19 has directly closed the door to the future of offline cinema viewing. As a result, both film makers and audiences had to make concessions, and film production began to become more cost effective. But the film companies have not completely abandoned offline cinema as a profit model - the existence of film festivals is proof of this, and the arrival of commercial blockbusters in theaters is a strong incentive for cinemas to survive. Maximizing the commercial value of a film is still the eternal theme of film marketing, after all, film as a high cost art has long been inevitably commercialized. So while it is difficult to reinvent the film itself, how to keep the offline box office in line with the rhythm of online viewing, and thus achieve low cost and high revenue, is the core of marketing. Filmmakers have begun to communicate their identities through a combination of streaming and social media, differentiating themselves in innovative ways, creating a unique a priori image to attract audiences, and turning them into a steady reserve audience, which has become a highly effective marketing tool to help a film stand out in a competitive market. Film marketing should be both global and localized, and tailored to the production[1].

"Incantation" is an important example of successful marketing. Since its release in Taiwan region on March 18, 2022, the pseudo-documentary folk horror film "Incantation" has grossed a total of NT\$171 million at the box office, and in its fourth week of release, it has already exceeded NT\$150 million. It has been called a "phenomenal horror film" by the Taiwanese media. It was only on July 8 that the film hit the streaming giant Netflix like a hurricane, taking the top spot - becoming the number one broadcast in Hong Kong SAR and Taiwan region within two days. With the ritualization and de-ritualization of movie watching as the medium changes, "Incantation" still managed to bring audiences an immersive experience and made them cry out "scary", breaking the circle of horror as a more marginalized commercial genre, and the role of the team's tailor-made marketing tactics cannot be ignored.

The purpose of this study is to analyze how "Incantation" achieved a win-win situation for both online and offline screenings through a unique marketing approach that capitalized on the film's unique

innovation, the 4I's (Interesting, Interests, Interaction, and Individuality), as proposed by Don E. Schultz, a professor at Northwestern University, in his book "Integrated Marketing Communications" to meet the increasingly consumer-centric online media communications. The study analyzes how "Incantation" is a unique marketing approach that leverages the film's unique innovation to achieve a win-win situation for both online and offline screenings. This study will help to develop the analysis of the film's marketing model, and will have implications for the producers to make full use of such tools to promote and enhance the film's appeal and image.

2. Main Body

2.1 Strategy: Interesting

With the advent of the Web 3.0 era, the Internet has become both a supplier and a follower of audience demand, and film, as one of the arts most influenced by the Internet, has inevitably been repeatedly impacted and changed by streaming media. After the disintermediation brought about by the birth of cinema and the re-intermediation brought about by the impact of streaming media, movie marketing is constantly transforming with the changes of media and Internet environment. Nowadays, "entertainment" has become the biggest selling point of the Internet as a utopia in some ambiguous sense, and the communication efficiency of print text has gradually slowed down, while video has become the main force. The lack of interesting elements has been put at the end of the viewing order, and content without explosive points will no longer have any broadcast value to the audience[2]. The creation of interesting points of "Incantation" was mainly divided into pre-release and post-release, with a four-month-long window and online marketing to whet the appetite of non-Taiwanese audiences with limited viewing methods, achieving the ultimate "hunger marketing". On November 24, it was even ranked in the top 10 of Netflix worldwide with 10 million hours of paly volume.

2.1.1 Pre-release: Tomb-sweeping season and trailer

The placement of the trailer went viral. The first is the number of viral sensations, this massive, cannot ignore the way the trailer directly stunned the audience. Secondly, since "Incantation" is a mock-documentary horror film, "authenticity" is the biggest selling point of the film's images - real, immersive and lifelike, but this documentary is not normalized. In addition to the official trailer, the production team has placed several short videos on social media platforms as previews. Among them, the previews "Fire Swallowing", "Curse", "Too Deep" and "Procession" are all shot in typical short video style - from a cell phone and from a spectator's point of view, with rough texture, direct feeling and a sense of immersion. The scenes are filmed from bedrooms, streets and other living spaces to the superstitious acts of worship and rituals themselves, creating a progressive atmosphere of terror. While the "Night Journey" and "Ghost Hand" are based on the objective and unchanging viewpoint is always declaring the horror of unknowable power, distorting the known spaces such as streets and stairwells into unknown horrors, and thus the atmosphere of "evil" is directly heightened to the extreme[3].

After a scary atmosphere was created, the film was released during the Tomb-sweeping Day, and the choice of slot directly increased its competitiveness. The atmosphere of the Tomb-sweeping Day maximized the audience's fear, and the theater offered a midnight show and posted a warning: Do not watch if you are particularly religious. Batman, on the other hand, was a clumsy film that clearly chose the wrong time slot and was overtaken by "Incantation" with NT\$23 million at the box office.

2.1.2 Post-release: Word of mouth and window period

A longer window period for hunger marketing. For the purpose of protecting theaters, the window period in Taiwan region is generally long, and "Bad Omens" was delayed again and again due to poor box office. On July 8, Netflix, the streaming giant, came on the scene and won the top spot - becoming the number one viewer in Hong Kong SAR and Taiwan region within two days. The film's popularity was maintained and word-of-mouth turned around. After the film's release, a three-pronged approach of mainstream media, the production team and audience outreach helped to create an "evil" atmosphere in the social sphere related to "Incantation". Firstly, the mainstream media news broadcast, Sanli News and other Taiwan TV stations reported that the audience went to the temple to exorcise the evil spirits after watching the film, bringing the drama to the peak. Secondly, the production team directly released some of the deleted clips and said that they "had to abandon part of it because it was too scary", directly maintaining the film's popularity on the Internet. The role of audience publicity is also not to be underestimated, firstly, they made a lot of short horror videos imitating the pilot trailer, and then they claimed to have seen ghosts after watching the movie, adding to the popularity of "Incantation".

Although a large number of audiences commented "so wretched" after watching the film and gave it a low rating, "Incantation" still scored more than 92% of all horror films. - This shows that even though it was cursed, most of the viewers who were attracted to the film still felt that there was something to be said for the horror film.

2.2 Strategy: Interests

Interests in 4Is are related to the increasingly social media fans, and companies need to create opportunities to promote the sharing desire of media consumers, so as to promote the interaction of information. To achieve this, there must be a lot of buzz, so the Internet media will always plan and organize entertainment activities for the benefit of consumers, which are usually of two kinds: material and spiritual. Material benefits are usually direct and tangible, such as special offers from Internet businesses to their customers, while spiritual benefits are those that satisfy consumers' inner needs. The benefits of "Incantation" are twofold: not only is it available on Netflix, which is one of the world's most popular but less expensive subscriptions, but it also provides an outlet for viewers around the world to express their emotions in the face of the epidemic[4].

2.2.1 Economic benefits: accurate market positioning

The choice of platform is a big part of this successful movie. Netflix, the streaming platform on which "Incantation" is available, has two major advantages: first, it is more affordable than other streaming platforms in Taiwan region, although both IQIYI and WeTV in China occupy a certain streaming market in Taiwan region, Netflix has lowered its prices compared to IQIYI's outrageous behavior of raising prices without increasing the volume, which is better in terms of economic advantages. Netflix has won 221.6 million subscribers as of the first quarter of 2012, compared to 67 million for HBO, due to the higher quality and clarity of the episodes aired, plus the ability to set them according to personal preferences. With Netflix's strong viewership, "Incantation" landed like a hurricane, and was the number one show in Hong Kong SAR and Taiwan region within two days, the top 10 show on Netflix worldwide by November 24, and the number one show in 29 countries.

2.2.2 Emotional value: catharsis and curiosity

With the epidemic sweeping the world, the economic situation has taken a sharp turn for the worse in the twenty-first century, the increasing pressure of survival has intensified the unease and fear in the hearts of the audience, restraint and repression have long been unable to be tormented by the status quo, so horror films as a legitimate venting channel to seize this opportunity to make a comeback. In addition to the regular audience, more former horror film "passersby" joined the ranks. Such was the case with "The Medium", a similar hit throughout Asia, which beat out Hollywood blockbusters like "Fast and Furious 9" and "James Bond: No Time to Die" to become the number one box office debut in Thailand. The broadcast of "Incantation" followed its lead and became the second highest grossing horror film in Taiwan's film history. Chinese horror or East Asian horror has always been a lingering nightmare for Asians, and the cycle of karma and other fatalism is reflected in horror films is the inner fear that audiences on this continent have always had to face, so the extremely localized folkloric characteristics not only awaken the memories of the homeland of Asians, but also cater to other cultural regions of the East as an exotic The ultimate fantasy that can reap a global audience.

2.3 Strategy: Interaction

The biggest impact of the increasing socialization of media is the emergence of interactivity, as users are no longer just single receivers, but a juxtaposition of the triple identity of "receiving + spreading + producing". The producer of any product can directly feel and perceive the user's experience. The marketing of "Incantation" is highly interactive, achieving a sense of participation and social interaction, and strengthening the film's authenticity.

The sense of participation is mainly based on the interaction with the collective memory of Taiwan residents in the first stage, and the director's personal memories through interviews in the second stage to intensify the film's authenticity. The social interaction relies mainly on enhancing the audience's sense of integration.

2.3.1 Participatory interaction: collective + individual

The collective memory is credited. According to sociologist Habwachs, the mind reconstructs its memories under social pressure, representing an escape from society. The collective memory of

"Incantation" is a double function of "escape + catharsis". In the early stages of the film's promotion, the typical East Asian horror film feature of being based on real events was at the forefront of the promotion. The collective memory event chosen for "Incantation" had two major attractions: first, it was widely disseminated, and the 2005 incident in Kaohsiung, in which a whole family was possessed by an evil spirit, was so influential in Taiwan at the time that it even triggered the local police to mobilize, which greatly enhanced the credibility of the event with news coverage and the involvement of public authorities. The second is that the incident happened relatively recently. Compared with other early horror incidents, the "Kaohsiung, Taiwan, Family Evil", which happened after the millennium, remains more in the minds of the post-00s movie-viewing group, and as the main force of horror movie fans, they have laid a certain number of viewers for the early release of "Incantation". The interaction of personal memory is the icing on the cake. The personal memory here mainly refers to the director's real experience. In the late stage of the film's broadcast, director Ko Mengrong kept talking about the similarity between his real personal experience and the film's plot in interviews, further emphasizing the connection between the film's plot and real life, thus arousing the audience's emotional resonance and deepening the credibility of the film's horror. He also put effort into the characterization of the film, for example, the screenwriter and the character have the same name, which is interesting and even evil.

2.3.2 Social interaction: content and process

The production team responded positively to the audience's complaints. It is also one of the characteristics of the entire team to pay attention to audience comments in a timely manner and to respond positively to audience questions about the content of the film. After the release of "Incantation", the curse of the female lead in the film to the audience caused a lot of comments about the work "obscure" and gave a low score, the director immediately responded that "everything is false", and opened up the production process and inspiration of the big black Buddha mother and The director immediately responded that "everything is fake" and disclosed the production process and the source of the curse spell - emphasizing the falsity of the source of the object that brought the sense of bad luck - to help the audience put aside their personal prejudices and treat the work positively. The team's approach also helps to retain a timid audience[5].

Breaking the fourth wall and interacting with the audience. In the film, the fourth wall refers to the distance between the screen and the audience. In "Incantation", the heroine interacts with the audience by telling the people watching the tape what happened, constantly emphasizing the truth of her experience, and even using the lie of "blessing" to make the audience participate in sharing the curse for her daughter. In this way, the audience and the heroine "socialize" with each other through the content of the film, increasing the sense of interaction.

2.4 Strategy: Individuality

In the field of social media, if you want to win, you must grasp the most important feature - individuality. The ultimate goal of a product is to beat the competition and win the largest group of buyers, the attractiveness of the content is the most powerful weapon. The most powerful weapon to create great content is personalization - that is, a characteristic that is difficult to replicate. Competitors need to bring their own identity and culture to the table and use personalized language to create an image that stands out from the usual patterns and gain attention. Personalization in filmmaking can be interpreted to some extent as "authorship" or "content is king", and also as "IP"[6].

2.4.1 Series: The pursuit of authorship

The pursuit of authorship has emerged. After the successful broadcast of "Incantation", director Ke Mengrong expressed his hope to produce the second installment and gave a more specific plan, that is, the production of a series of works, and also mentioned the "one-word universe" that is already in the planning stage. He also indicated to the media that he was pursuing an avant-garde approach to filming. The director's ambition can be seen in the popularity of "Incantation" and the extreme production, distribution, and screening of the film, as well as in his plan to create a series of works that not only emphasize the theme of "authenticity" but also pursue "avant-garde" filming techniques, with a certain authorial pursuit and dedication to the individual appeal of his works. At a time when epidemics are prevalent and cinemas are dying, Ke and his production team have ensured the "oriental" and unknown appeal of the localized content, and at the same time achieved a low-cost and high-return result in terms of promotion, which is worthy of study by the promotion teams of similar pseudo-reality works. It is worthwhile to learn from the publicity team of similar pseudo-reality works.

2.4.2 Doll sales: an attempt at industrialization

The industrialization trial has the ambition to reap both fame and fortune. After the movie was aired, the production team seized the opportunity to launch a derivative of the work, the Big Black Buddha doll. The doll came in two sizes and was sold in limited quantities. Pre-orders of the 1/4 version came with a free amulet, metal teeth and a holster for the amulet, and a public exhibition was held for the doll, which extended the audience's viewing behavior directly to everyday life and further invaded the audience's living space, similar to the commercial pursuit of Disney derivatives. The production of this derivative is a bold attempt by Taiwanese filmmakers to chain the production of films in an era of increasing commercialization of art.

3. Conclusion

The results of the study show that film marketing is the key to box office success, and that promoting the audience's empathy, attention and understanding of the work is a very effective way to promote it. Although "Incantation" is an extremely localized mock-documentary horror film, it has achieved both "internationalization" and "localization" in its promotion, which is worthy of reference. As the content of films becomes increasingly rich, marketing methods must also be adapted to the specificity of the work, to promote the content in the most efficient way, and to keep up with the changes in social media formats and technologies. The endless global pandemic of the new crown also requires us to rethink the survival of cinema as a high-cost art product, the way to survive in the streaming era, the win-win situation of low cost and high efficiency, and the stability of the industry chain.

References

- [1] Philip Kotler, Joanne Scheff(2004). *Stragedies For Marketing Performing Arts*(Qingchun Chen, Trans.). Beijing, People's University of China Press. (Original work published 1997). p267
- [2] Zhouzhou Bian. *The Discourse Elements and Marketing Strategies of Niche Literary Films from the Perspective of Love Myth* [J]. *Film Review*, 2022(09):50-53.
- [3] Yang Yang. *Cross-Media Marketing Strategies of Hollywood Musical Films* [J]. *Contemporary Cinema*, 2022(02):148-155.
- [4] Yushui Huang, Xiaobo Zhao. *Emotional Marketing of Film in the Time of Artificial Intelligence* [J]. *Contemporary Cinema*, 2020(12):146-150
- [5] Chen Yanjun. *Marketing of Chinese Film Industry in the Era of "Internet+"*[J]. *Film Review*, 2018(04).
- [6] Li Beibei. *On Film Marketing Strategy of Surprise Hit* [J]. *Contemporary Cinema*, 2018(01): 148-151.