

A New Breakthrough of Film Propaganda in the Context of New Media – Taking the Hong Kong Film “Shock Wave 2” as an Example

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Abstract: After the release of “Shock Wave 2,” the box office far surpassed the first film “Shock Wave 1.” In addition to improving the quality of the narrative content, it is more important to promote the film in the context of new media. Many new breakthroughs have been made. The film combined the advantages of new media in its propaganda orientation and has achieved a better propaganda effect than the traditional propaganda. Therefore, investigating the use of new media in “Shock Wave 2” and in finding places that can be used for reference based on successful experiences, they will have certain enlightenment for further successful dissemination of Hong Kong police films and even Chinese films in the future.

Keywords: New media; Film; Shock Wave 2; Propaganda; Dissemination

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1. Introduction

As of February 28, 2021, “Shock Wave 1” that has been released on April 28, 2017 has a cumulative gross box office of 400 million. Three years later, the second movie tripled it. The Hong Kong movie that has been released on the mainland; “Shock Wave 2” has a cumulative gross box office of 1.3 billion on December 24, 2020. Behind the doubling of the box office, in addition to the improvement in the quality of the narrative content itself, there is also the promotion of the current new media. Nowadays, Weibo, Douyin, and WeChat have become the three giants of new media. Especially due to the impact of the epidemic, for movies to attract more audiences, they should not only use traditional propaganda models but learn to use the advantages of new media for propaganda. Compared to “Shock Wave 1,” “Shock Wave 2” combined the advantages of new media in its propaganda orientation and has achieved significant publicity effects.

2. Intentions of propaganda in the context of new media

“Shock Wave 2” has different propaganda intentions on Weibo, WeChat, Douyin, and live broadcast new media. It fully taps the advantages of different new media and presents different content according to local situations and the attributes of major new media.

In Douyin, the main subject has been the official propaganda account “Film Shock Wave 2.” From January 21, 2020 to February 26, 2021, a total of 156 short videos have been released and their contents are in the form of movie trailers, tidbits, clips, interview reports, and celebrity style.

On Weibo, “Shock Wave 2” did not officially establish an account for publicity. However, most influential users have released information regarding the movie including “We Media” and star users. Among the extensive information about “Shock Wave 2,” the main heat is the Weibo topics related to the

celebrities' life such as "Recent Photos of Andy Lau" and "Ni Ni has never weighed less than 50 kg since she was 30 years old." Other than that, the topics of the movie's content such as "How Andy Lau's lost leg was filmed" and "Jia Ling responded to Andy Lau asking her to act as his wife," have once been on Weibo's hot search.

In "Shock Wave 1," only a few celebrities promoted it on Weibo in contrast to "Shock Wave 2" where many celebrities initiated the topic regarding "Shock Wave 2." For example, Jiang Haowen, Peng Yuyan, Huo Siyan, Wu Jing, and many other celebrities have collectively released information through Weibo in regard to the movie's release which calls for the appreciation of "Shock Wave 2." Media users are like "bottled fireworks." Gu Amo and other bloggers who often publish information on movies have also posted comments and explanations related to "Shock Wave 2."

"Shock Wave 2" did not establish a publicity account on WeChat. However, there have been more than 100,000 WeChat articles such as "Why do Cantonese people look at "Shock Wave 2" in different styles?" in the public account, "Yue Zhi Yi Er," "There hasn't been such a good Hong Kong police movie for a long time" in "Sanlian Life Weekly," "Exceeds expectations! This year's most explosive domestic film was born" in "Top Movies," and "After watching Shock Wave 2, I learned how to attract rich woman" in "On Zai." In regard to time, the publication of these articles on their official accounts completed within ten days of the movie which has certain effectiveness. In terms of the content, Yue Zhi Yi Er's "Why do Cantonese people look at "Shock Wave 2" in different styles?" and On Zai's "After reading "Shock Wave 2," I learned how to attract rich woman" have been presented to the audiences via videos. Their works are no longer restricted to the plot content of "Shock Wave 2" itself, but interesting parts of the film have been dug out to deconstruct in creating rich entertainment and ridicule content. For example, in Yue Zhi Yi Er's video, Andy Lau's action scenes made it seemed like people have been watching Jackie Chan's movies or the plot in the play made people think of the TV series, "Line Walker 3." On Zai amplified the scene where Andy Lau and Ni Ni fell in love in "Shock Wave 2" as they collided with each other. The video has been interpreted as a laborer which ran into a landlady and met love, but the results was not worth the loss and he bore the grudges by the landlady. For publicity, while explaining the plot, it boldly deconstructed and expressed the film. It used elements such as "An encounter scene created by Andy Lau," "Andy Lau's action drama," and "Ni Ni's lines" in its deconstruction. In addition, articles written by Sanlian Life Weekly, Top Movies, and Tenth Screening Room introduced the plot of the movie using the traditional text format.

In terms of live broadcast, on December 4th, Andy Lau, the star of "Shock Wave 2," visited Weiya Taobao live broadcast room to promote the film. When Andy Lau appeared in the live broadcast, they launched a commentary of Andy Lau's autographed poster event. Fans have left comments in the comment area and Andy Lau sang the representative song after swiping the screen. Then, the "bomb" prop in "Shock Wave 2" appeared in the live broadcast in the form of a "gift" which required Andy Lau to successfully pass through the game three times in order to dismantle the bomb. During the game, users could enjoy Andy Lau's singing, Cantonese-speaking, and actions imitations. All these have been carried out to introduce the plot of "Shock Wave 2" and for the pre-sale movie tickets during the live broadcast.

According to different propaganda orientations selected by different new media, "Shock Wave 2" has achieved significant propaganda effects in major new media which directly or indirectly contributed to the promotion and high box office of the film.

3. Propaganda effects in the context of new media

According to the statistical data of "Shock Wave 2" on Weibo, Douyin, WeChat, and the performance in the broadcast room on Maoyan Professional app, it can be appreciated that the film has a very good spread in the context of new media^[1]. On Weibo, Maoyan data showed that the top Weibo searches for life content of the two stars; Andy Lau and Ni Ni, ranked first such as "Recent Photos of Andy Lau" and "Ni Ni has

never weighed less than 50kg since she was 30 years old.” The most popular Weibo search for “Shock Wave 2” ranked third such as “How Andy Lau’s lost leg was filmed” and “Jia Ling responded to Andy Lau asking her to act as his wife.” A large number of fan users’ comments, thumbs up, and forwarding topics have been obtained by publishing the movie stars’ dynamics before and after the movie is released, prompting topics to be on the hot search list. Thereafter, many more audiences would learn about the celebrities’ dynamics through hot searches. In fact, it paves the way for promoting the upcoming movie. Immediately after the movie has been released, the top five users (Weibo users with the highest re-comments) consisted of three celebrity microblogs and two self-media microblogs with a total of 6.03 million microblog interactions; Xu Zhengxi Jeremy Jones, Variety Appreciation, Ni Ni V, Han Dongjun Elvis Han, and The Little Crew, respectively. It can be seen that movies achieve a better publicity effect by creating hot searches on Weibo, celebrities, and self-media in order to promote them.

From January 20, 2020 to May 16, 2021, Maoyan data showed that Douyin’s publicity effect on the topic of “Shock Wave 2” can be seen from four aspects which are account influence, topic popularity, video discussion, and search index. From December 21, 2020 to December 28, 2020; the week of the film’s release, it achieved the second highest weekly ranking on Douyin with an account influence of 1.521 million, topic popularity value of 454,000, video discussion degree of 547,000, and a search index of 9.407 million. From November 22, 2020, it has topped the list for 109 days and has been listed 26 times. The official publicity account, “Shock Wave 2” has been the subject of investigation. As of May 16, 2021, the account has received 14.913 million likes and 393,000 fans. Among them, four works have been praised more than one million and short videos have the best transmission effect in which they showed the highlights of the movie and the celebrities’ style. Among them, two highlights have been emphasized which are Ni Ni’s emotional outburst in crying scenes and Andy Lau’s continuous practice with prostheses. The celebrity style is appreciated in Andy Lau’s masterpiece “Seventeen” as well as when Ni Ni and Andy Lau joined the blue line challenge. It can be seen from this that the contents that display the true feelings and life-like images of these stars have been able to receive more likes.

The data on WeChat showed that after the movie has been released, the WeChat index reached 4.873 million on December 26, 2020. Compared to the WeChat article of “Shock Wave 1” in which the highest reading volume only hit 75,000, “Shock Wave 2” which has five WeChat articles received over 100,000 views; two of which are in the video format and three in the text format. “Shock Wave 2” is richer in expression and content; hence, making the article more readable and influential.

In terms of live broadcast, Wei Ya and Andy Lau cooperated for the first time to promote the film in a live broadcast room. In the live broadcast of the anchor and the star, the number of viewers reached 5.02 million in just over an hour. With the help of the live broadcast of the new media, the pre-sold tickets sold out within 3 seconds and the live broadcast sold a total 660,000 movie tickets became a new record for ticket sales across the internet.

4. Learning from the new media to promote breakthroughs

In the post-epidemic era, offline propagandas have been subjected to certain time and space limitations. Hence, propagandas through new media technologies have more advantages. It does not only save time and cost of the crew to visit the site in person but also solves the space limitations when that the cast from both sides are not able to get together for live promotion. At the same time, this also reduces the security risks. Compared with “Shock Wave 1,” “Shock Wave 2” has made bold breakthroughs in new media communication and has successfully achieved better communication effects. This indicates that the future of film promotion would rely much more on new media technologies. Therefore, referring to the success of “Shock Wave 2” in new media technology and learning from some of these experiences, it would help Chinese films to enter a virtuous circle of development in the future.

In terms of propaganda and disseminators, high-quality new media accounts or celebrity users can be used to an advantage. The promotion of these users has prompted more people to pay attention to the film. Just like Lazarsfeld's two-step flow of communication, idols act as opinion leaders to some extent while fans are followers where the pre-existing position of the former would influence the latter's choice ^[2].

In regard to time, the future propaganda cycle stretches the propaganda period and allows relaxation in certain amount of propaganda work during filming. The extension of time digs out and accumulates many potential users. For example, "Shock Wave 2" has been promoted in a short video on Douyin a year before the movie is released. Offline publicity activities have also reduced due to the impact of the epidemic which eliminated the time cost of many offline city events. Time can maximize the value. As long as there is a mobile phone, various parties are able to connect to an event at any given time. Usually, only one event can be completed in half a day, however, the use of new media reduces the journey back and forth. It is possible to connect between TV stations and new media platforms in one morning or arranging an event in Guangzhou while the event would also appear in Shenyang via the internet.

In terms of publicity space, one should not be restricted to conduct live publicity activities only in theaters but to try conducting them through multiple platforms such as Douyin and Taobao. Scholar Peng Lan said, "Compared to television, personal live videos or short videos have elements of design and performance. They also emphasize more on the background of life where it is easier to arouse the resonance and presence of ordinary users ^[3]." At the beginning of November 2019, "My Dear Liar" starring Dapeng and Liu Yan took part in the Wei Ya live broadcast room to launch a live ticket sale. "Wild Goose Lake," "Sheep Without a Shepherd," "Only Cloud Knows," and other movies have also been guests in live broadcast rooms for propaganda. In early 2021, due to the impact of the epidemic, Andy Lau who is in Hong Kong and Rao Xiaozhi in the mainland used the Douyin platform to live broadcast their movie, "Endgame" in which the publicity effects are remarkable. More than 32 million netizens watched the live broadcast that day which broke the record of the short video platform. With the live broadcast scene, the limitation of space has been broken where the two parties do not need to meet in person. The communicators are able to enjoy the live broadcast in a relaxed state compared to the stage whereas the audiences can also be closer like family and friends enabling them to see the celebrities' every move on screen and interacting with them through comments. These behaviors have enhanced the audiences' sense of participation and goodwill. At the same time, new media promotion platforms can accommodate more people in live broadcast rooms compared to traditional offline movie conferences or screenings. In addition, it can also use technical means to sell hundreds of thousands of tickets in a short time after the promotion. Hence, publicity on new media platforms such as live broadcast rooms would become a major trend in future movie marketing.

In terms of the form and content of publicity, as of the end of 2020, the number of short video users in China has reached 873 million, accounting for 88.3% of total netizens. The average daily usage time per capita is close to 2 hours, surpassing instant messaging software ^[4]. Short videos have become the main platform for attracting mass traffic consumption. In the future, promotion of movies can be in the form of videos however, the time should not be too long. Using the shortest time to catch the audiences' attention will fit the habit of visual viewing and speed reading among users. In terms of content, the content released by new media has a greater degree of freedom which is different from the official template of traditional media. In the transfer of ideas, a certain plot in the movie can be boldly deconstructed and a new and humorous idea can then be conveyed to the audiences. The French philosopher, Derrida believes that difference means that the emergence of meaning has both delay and difference. Meaning depends on both the difference in structure and the relationship between the past and the future ^[5]. It is not uncommon for films to use difference to propagate. For example, the Hong Kong drama, "Line Walker 3" that has been broadcast in the same year, their actors such as Zheng Kai, Zeng Shunxi, and Lin Feng have used Weibo

to urge everyone to watch the film on Tencent Video. During the promotion, the actors redefined the word undercover as “holding” and pushed “Line Walker 3” on Weibo’s hot search list ^[6]. Bold deconstruction allows the audiences to experience a different film propaganda style which is able to inspire the audiences’ freshness and attention.

5. Conclusion

The publicity of future films requires the clever use of new media technologies, starting from the disseminator, time and space, as well as the form and content. Otherwise, in this cruel market, there is no chance to attract the attention of the audiences which would affect the film’s box office market and even the release of the film’s subsequent series. While adhering to high-quality content, Hong Kong films have shown a full range of new media propaganda trends. This move has won a certain market share in the post-epidemic era. The successful experience of this exploration also reveals the future development of films in which the status of the media will become more and more important.

Project

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Disclosure statement

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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