
Original Research Article

An inquiry into the narrative innovation of short video content from the perspective of creative media

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Abstract: Short video platforms like TikTok, Reels, and YouTube Shorts have experienced explosive growth and are completely changing how people communicate and consume information online: This paper studies the narrative innovations being produced in this extremely constrained but very active medium from a "creative media" perspective. This lens steps out from the textual analysis to look into the more complicated dance that goes on between technological chances, users making stuff up, and algorithms picking what to show together as one big creative system. With time restraints (15-60sec) and vertical aspect ratio constraints, it is not that it limits story-telling but that it actively encourages new story shapes. What this question is looking for are four primary innovations: Compressing plot into "micro-narratives" driven by immediate hooks, quick payoff structures; moving away from passive consumption toward "participatory narratives," made possible by features like Duets and Stitches; algorithmic storytelling, where the For You page creates an endless, personalized stream of an endlessly looping, endless show; ambient and aesthetic narratives that focus on mood, feeling, sensation, over the traditional "show." This paper claims that these innovations represent a significant development in narrative logic, challenging traditional narrative theory, and showing how creative media environments create new ways of making meaning. The results indicate that short video is no "lesser" story-telling but a special and advanced story-telling ecological system.

Keywords: short video; narrative innovation; creative media; algorithmic storytelling; participatory culture; micro-narrative

1. Introduction

In today's digital ecosystem, short video has become a powerful force in culture and communication, completely changing the way people create, distribute, and consume information globally. Platforms like TikTok have accumulated billions of users, forming a kind of attention economy where being brief is key and creative expression has been made accessible to everyone. This earthquake demands us to rethink the theories about communication we already hold, and gives particular emphasis to the theories about the telling of stories. Traditional narrative forms are generally imagined as following a set framework like Freytag's Pyramid with its measured-out introduction, rising action, climax, falling action, and ending^[1]. A format that requires immediate capture in just seconds leaves these traditional forms behind. The central problem this paper investigates is how classic narrative theory can no longer effectively explain the flourishing of new kinds of telling stories in this new environment^[2]. In terms of the creative media perspective, which holds that the medium, its technology, the way it is used and its content are indivisible, this article plans to understand the narrative innovations brought about by short videos. We're focused on looking at those technical limitations, and all those creative spaces, not as an ending for what was old, but actively making the completely new kinds of stories, fusions, fluxes. This paper begins with a theoretical framework of creative media studies, then analyzes its unique platform mechanics that have shaped content, identifies and deconstructs key narrative innovations, and concludes with reflections on the broader cultural implications of these narrative evolutions.

2. The theoretical framework: Creative media, narrative in the digital age

To have a more complicated knowledge on short video phenomena, it is essential to view it from the

position of creative media. It departs from traditional media studies by refusing to treat the "text," the video, separately from the "technology," the platform and its algorithms and creative tools, nor from the "user," both creator and watcher. Instead it sees all three as constituting a system together, in which creativity arises from connections made within this system. Legacy media, like film or TV, were on a broadcast model where producer and customer are clearly separate things^[3]. In contrast to broadcast media, creative media platforms are defined by what Lev Manovich calls "database logic" and "modularity". The stream is not a fixed narrative but a huge database of discrete elements (sounds, filters, videos) that can be endlessly remixed and recontextualised. In addition, it also places a heavy use of the theories of participatory culture from someone such as Henry Jenkins. Narrative in the short video age has become more of a collaborative and networked process as opposed to an authorial declaration from on high. Storytelling is less about handing over a finished product, and more about getting the ball rolling, starting a trend, or giving something raw—Like a sound, or a format—For someone else to pick up and build on. Therefore, we need to look beyond the single video, and towards the entire ecosystem of replies, "stitches", "duets" and algorithm-curated videos that surround it.

3. Constraints and affordances of shortvideo

Short video platforms have their own architecture and it is this architecture, which gives rise to narrative innovation. These platforms are a dialectic of extreme constraint and creative space. The most prominent being temporal brevity. With time constrained to an average of 60 seconds or less, creators must let go of the traditional method of exposition and character formation and prioritize the instantaneous. This kind of temporal stress fosters an "narrative efficiency" in which every second exists inside a web of engagement^[4]. Another key feature is the vertical 9:16 aspect ratio which allows for a more intimate, direct address like feeling that evokes a face to face sense and therefore leans towards confessional/personal or testimonial mode of storytelling. But these restrictions are outweighed by some awesome affordances such as a built in creative suite. Filters, AR effects and other cool things and time lapse, green screening but also those huge, searchable libraries of cool sounds and music are not extra on the content they are a tool of narrative. A given sound clip can contain a whole bunch of intertextual meaning and immediately tell us if it's a joke, a certain mood or certain drama that we might need a lot of words to explain. The algorithmic distribution page - the "For You" page is probably the most important affordance since it disavows the importance of pre-existing followers and allows for new ideas and narratives to go viral simply because the algorithms decided so.

4. Short video content narrative Innovation

4.1. The compression of plot: The dawn of the micro-narrative

Most immediate innovation driven by time is the perfection of the "micro-narrative"; this type of story is a radical abridging/rearranging of the typical plot. The micro-narrative mostly dispenses with the "rising action" and often starts at a moment of peak tension or curiosity. Now it is not the gentle call to come into the story but an aggressive demand for your attention, within one or two, maybe three seconds. This hook could be a startling statement, a provocative visual image, or even a question asked by on-screen text^[5]. The "plot" heads straight towards a "payoff", which might be a 'punchline'(comedy sketches), a 'reveal' (transformation videos), a 'moment of catharsis' (person stories), a 'life hack' (informational content). The resolution can be abrupt or completely non-existent, it's usually a call for action(e.g., "follow for part 2") or a conclusion that's open ended on purpose to start debate in the comments. This "hook-climax-payoff" form can pack as much emotion or information into the least amount of time as possible, which reengineers storytelling pace for a viewing audience used to fast-scrolling and divided attention.

4.2. Collaborative authorship: The shift to participatory narratives

Short video platforms have operationalized participatory culture on a massive scale, turning narrative from a solitary act of authorship into something networked, collaborative, and ongoing. Platform-native is key: Take "Duet" and "Stitch" for example. They give users the power to appropriate, comment on and add to other people's videos, slotting their own content right into the heart of the original. So it creates "narrative chains" or "narrative

trees", where the first video is just the protagonist or the initial prompt, but all the subsequent responses become the second act, they become the counter argument, the alternative perspective. And audio is also important in this creation. With the user uploading a video that has an original sound, that "sound" is now a piece of something detachable and reusable. This sound then becomes a "meme," a "challenge," a "format," a free floating narrative signifier, gaining additional layers of meaning with each iteration. In such an ecosystem, the "authors" of a narrative tend to be amorphous, communal entities and the story itself is a fluid, living document that is never actually "completed," but rather exists as a continuously remixable, reimagined text.

4.3. Curatorial logic: The emergence of algorithmic storytelling

A more substantial and abstract kind of innovation pertains to the role of functions in terms of the algorithm itself as a narrative teller. From the perspective of creative media, the "story" is more than the singular video. It's the experience of consumption that has been curated. the FYP or Reels tab acts as the narrator in the story. It draws from huge amounts of content available in its database and creates a personal yet infinite, endlessly looping emotional narrative for every user. This algorithm is learning to predict what the user's desires, moods, and interests are, and it will provide the user with a series of videos which if watched one after another, may create a bigger thematic or affective journey. A user may be given a "story" of culinary adventure, followed by a "story" on fitness transformation, with bits of absurdist humor sprinkled throughout. It's a move away from authorial storytelling (someone tells us what's supposed to be happening), to curator-like storytelling (an algo puts pieces in order so they feel like something). The "scroll" becomes a narrative act, an unending search for the next plot point in a story that is constantly being written by the platform's artificial intelligence, a personal narrative crafted exclusively for the audience of one.

4.4. Experience over plot: The rise of ambient and aesthetic narratives

Finally, the short video format has generated a kind of storytelling as the most powerful kind of storytelling that doesn't have any kind of plot at all, it's called the "ambient" or "aesthetic" narrative. In these videos, what gets communicated, what constitutes "the story" here, isn't told via any kind of plot, a progression of events, but through a certain mood or sensation; vibe. Lots of them out there, from day-in-my-life vlogs that offer a collage of the banal—My coffee brewing time, time spent scribbling and noting down things, time spent on my skin care regiments— To GRWM, where the story is just me transforming. These videos tell a story about a certain lifestyle or identity or a certain feeling. The narrative elements are sensory- the pen on paper ASMR, the pleasure of a tidy room, the specific color grading of the video, or the precise choice of background music. This type of storytelling is experiential — The audience isn't asked to follow a story so much as to inhabit a space and feel an emotion. This represents an important narrative shift away from the Aristotelian emphasis on "action" toward a more poetic, sensuous, and atmospheric way of meaning-making that matches the private, repetitive, and engrossing nature of the short video stream.

5. Conclusion

This inquiry, from the perspective of creative media, confirms it is not a shortcoming or inferior version of a long story, but an entirely innovative narrative environment. Brevity is constrained by the vertical frame and augmented by the affordances offered by the integrated creativity, participation and algorithms curating. All this has given rise to entirely new forms of narrative logic. Four major changes have surfaced – hyper-efficiency of 'micro narrative' (the hook - climax - payoff format); 'participatory story' created through co-creation and remixing; 'algorithmic story' chosen autonomously by the platform itself ('ambient stories'); These forms represent a decisive break from forms that linear, author-centric. they like modularity, collaboration and emotion participation. This shift carries immense implications for media literacy, communication studies, and creative industries, pointing at narrative becoming less a matter of "the story told" and more a matter of "the experience shared" and "the conversation started". Future research must continue charting these developing forms, maybe through cross-platform and cross-cultural comparisons, so as to truly fathom the long-term effects of this creative media revolution on how we shape and perceive our world.

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