

# An In Depth Study of Short Web Series in Mainland China - KuaiShou

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**Abstract:** Witnessing the boom of the short web series that has been developing rapidly in these 4 years since 2019, this essay takes KuaiShou, one of the most popular Chinese short video platforms, as an example to analyze how and why the short web series become so popular among Chinese audiences from the 4 key perspectives of visual media in Chinese society, which are technology, media organization and its industry, market, and regulation. This essay analyzes the Internet technology as well as the hardware contributions to the rise of KuaiShou's short web series, the relationship among the KuaiShou platform, short web series production studios and advertisers, how KuaiShou's short web series meets with audiences' characteristics, and how government's censorship regulation as well as supportive policies affect the short web series production. This essay also discusses KuaiShou's overall valuable practice in the short web series development and gives some advice of quality improvement on KuaiShou's further development and competitiveness improvement of the short web series.

**Keywords:** short web series, digital media, media development, uses and gratifications, audience psychology

## 1. Introduction

Since KuaiShou (快手), one of the most popular Chinese short video platforms, started its "KuaiShou Little Theater" channel for short web series, short web series have developed prosperously on Chinese short video platforms. Over 1 billion audiences watched short web series on KuaiShou in 2021, and one of its short web series, YuErDaZuoZhan (育儿大作战), has received more than 490 million views (Zhang, 2022). Noticing the boom of short web series, this essay tries to analyze how and why short web series become so popular among Chinese audiences from the 4 perspectives of technology, media organization and the industry, market, and regulation.

According to the features from the particular channel for short web series, this essay defines short web series as a series with a duration between 1 minute and around 10 minutes, distributed on the short video platform. Take short web series on KuaiShou for example, the typical characteristics of short web series contain a portrait display style, a fast narrative pace, either a small or a big reversal plot in every episode, and many close-up shots. The typical genres of short web series on KuaiShou include romantic costume drama and realistic themes containing family life topics and professional life topics.

## 2. Technology

As a streaming media that rely on the Internet to transmit the short web series, Kuaishou depends on lots of Internet technologies to develop its short web series. Thanks to the internet, radio signals could be sent through optical fiber to multiple devices including mobile phones that almost everyone uses in daily life. The wireless router and base stations have nearly been everywhere in cities and a large number of rural areas nowadays, providing networks so that people can watch short web series on phones. The development of 5G in base stations has improved the signal flow with better carry capacity, which reduces the delay of signal transmission between base stations and devices where audiences watch short web series. Therefore, millions of people are allowed to successfully visit the same short web series channel on the KuaiShou platform and watch hit short web series during the same period, the leisure time when most people get off work in the country, for example.

On top of that, cloud computing, and mobile devices' CPU (Central Processing Unit), as well as GPU (Graphic Processing Unit), also contribute a lot to the short web series development. The cloud of KuaiShou is PaaS (Platform as a Service), allowing its users to find and play the short web series that they subscribed to or favorited before on different devices as long as they log in to their accounts. Additionally, the cloud saves the record of played video progress in the past so that audiences can continue watching the short web series even though on different devices. The progress of CPU nowadays has sped up the rate of the devices processing videos of short web series, which could be displayed for audiences more quickly on phones. The pixel of videos on the KuaiShou platform becomes better due to the development of the GPU, offering a better watching experience on phones for audiences of short web series.

## 3. Media Organization & Industry

KuaiShou is an autonomous commercial private corporation that has a lot of autonomy in the production sector and a great number of channels in the distribution sector, which allow the creation of various short web series, attracting more views. Many specialized production studios, such as CreateOne and ZhiZhu Studio, make short web series attractive, and the KuaiShou platform is responsible to distribute them. As a user-generated private streaming media as well as commercial media, KuaiShou accumulates and organizes resources for production and distribution for commercial benefits, so its short web series mostly create certain entertainment content that caters to the market's needs, gaining more views. Media advertising income plays an important role in running commercial media. The more views the short web series on KuaiShou gains, the more money advertisers give to KuaiShou for advertisement, which facilitates the development of the KuaiShou

short web series from the financial perspective. Moreover, the great need for promoting short web series makes financial win-win results between the KuaiShou platform and studios of short web series, which means KuaiShou can attract advertisers, and because of more views, studios can gain more bonuses according to certain incentive policies from the platform. Besides, the targeted promotion of short web series on the short video platform increases the view more efficiently. Although KuaiShou is commercial media, it also takes the role of political organs and public service media and creates some short web series that contain social responsibilities, such as the short web series with a medical theme named RenXin (仁心) showing the reality of hospital workers' lives during these years.

#### 4. Audience

The rise of the short web series of KuaiShou is essentially related to its great popularity among the audience. Audiences' characteristics including demographic characteristics, lifestyles, psychological characteristics, and cultural orientation influence their consumption of short web series a lot. With the development of new media technology, streaming media audiences increase greatly during these years, and streaming media almost have audiences of all age groups from the 20s to about 60s. The average monthly active users of KuaiShou in June 2022 were approximately 480 million views (Trustdata mobile big data monitoring platform, 2022). Audiences from third-tier cities have the greatest preference for streaming media like KuaiShou, and most of them do not have a busy life so they have lots of time for self-entertainment on short video platforms. Besides, audiences from the first and second-tier cities also have lots of fragmented time to watch short web series for a couple of minutes in each episode on KuaiShou when they have a break during work time, that is to say, the short duration of short web series fits the lifestyle or habits of audiences from almost every tier of the city, and consuming short web series on streaming media is mostly an individual activity as using mobile phones in daily life. The peak of users using the short video platform in a day is around noon and 21:00 in the evening, while lots of hit short web series on KuaiShou such as RenXin and RuHuaRuTu (如花如茶) release at 12:00 at noon (Kuaishou Theater, 2022), therefore, when most users go on the KuaiShou platform and refresh the video page, they can watch the newest short web series.

According to the uses and gratifications theory (Katz et al., 1973), audiences seek to gratify particular psychological needs on various short web series. The costume-infighting short web series on KuaiShou that contains a tight narrative and satisfying plots meets the tension-free needs of its audience, who want pleasure and stress relief in watching those stories with ideal plots they want after a busy day ended. The content about rich families and ancient imperial life in short web series also caters to viewers' cognitive needs and gratifies their curiosity about how rich families' conflict looks. Short web series with themes such as romance and family life topics make audiences easily emotionally identify with characters in stories. Audiences can gratify their emotional needs, for example, while watching romantic series, they enjoy happiness as if they experience the same as what characters experience. Moreover, personal integrative needs and cultural orientation affect audiences' different choices of watching short web series. Recently, ZhangGongZhuZaiShang (长公主在上), an emerging story setting of females being more empowered than males is welcomed by a number of female spectators, therefore, one of these kinds of short web series has successfully received over 360 million views (Zhang, 2022).

#### 5. Government Regulation

Last but not least, government regulation also affects the development of short web series. To overcome the negative impact of the epidemic, the government supports the development of emerging new media and streaming media platforms like KuaiShou to boost the economy. Policies of promoting innovative and integrated development of television with new media, new technologies, and new forms of business launched by the Media Convergence Bureau from the Chinese National Radio and Television Administration offer more opportunities, resources and suggestions for the short web series production. On the other hand, censorship affects the short web series creation, limiting the visual narrative of short web series. For instance, in order to pass the initial review as well as release the series later, production studios have to delete certain storylines or avoid blood scenes being presented too realistic, which dissatisfies audiences with short web series' quality.

#### 6. Conclusion

Overall, KuaiShou is on the right path in catering to the trend of audiences' fast-food style of media consumption and developing a fast narrative-style short series online that everyone could watch for free. The short web series on KuaiShou not only provides instant gratification to audiences in a couple of minutes with its simple and accessible style of creation but also attracts viewers continuously with its short production cycle. To keep the prosperity of the short web series of KuaiShou, quality improvement is one of the most useful suggestions. The competition in the short web series industry is getting fiercer that not only short video platforms such as KuaiShou and TikTok but also professional streaming media platforms including Tencent Video have developed short web series. However, the quality of short web series on KuaiShou is uneven. Additionally, there are many short series following a similar pattern, likely leaving audiences with the stereotype that the quality of short web series on KuaiShou is rough, which is not conducive to the long-term development of the short web series on KuaiShou. Therefore, improving quality is quite important for KuaiShou to be more competitive and gain a larger market in the future.

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