

Innovative Pathways for the Screen Adaptation  
(Micro-Drama) of Online Literature from a  
Transmedia Narrative Perspective and Its Cross-  
Cultural Dissemination

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## Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (except some limited use of ChatGPT to aid with translation from some Chinese phrases to English and improve grammar and sentence structure in some places as permitted in the AUT Postgraduate Handbook), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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# Abstract

In recent years, Chinese online literature IPs (intellectual properties) have trended towards short-form dramatisation. IP primarily refers to original content with clearly defined ownership that can be continuously adapted across multiple media forms. Numerous popular web novels have been adapted into vertically oriented micro-dramas that deliver complete narratives within a few minutes and spread rapidly across social media platforms. The driving forces behind this phenomenon include the large, built-in fan bases and expandable story worlds of web novels, as well as the short, concise, and fast consumption habits shaped by algorithmic recommendation on short-video platforms. This study investigates the short-form dramatisation of two Chinese web novels, *Fortune Writer* (2024) and *How Dare You?* (2025), focusing on their transmedia narrative adaptation characteristics and cross-cultural communication effects.

The core inquiries analyse how web-novel IPs share and fragment their story worlds across different media. This also includes how short-form adaptations are received in the Chinese context and how they catalyse participatory cultural practices such as derivative fan production. To address these questions, the study adopts a methodological design that integrates qualitative and quantitative approaches, including textual analysis, audience data mining, and cross-cultural comparison. By reviewing relevant theories and literature, this thesis constructs a four-dimensional analytical framework—intertextuality, expandability, participation, and cross-cultural—to systematically elucidate the narrative strategies and dissemination mechanisms of short-form adaptations of web novels.

The findings reveal how micro-drama adaptations extend the originals in terms of plot and worldbuilding while maintaining connections through intertextual references. They also show how Chinese audiences embrace the micro-drama format and engage in narrative re-creation via *danmu* or bullet screens (real-time user comments overlaid on the footage), comments, reviews, and fan-made works.

In addition, when disseminated cross-culturally, micro-dramas need to reduce barriers to cultural understanding through localised translation and semiotic transformation to achieve effective reach overseas. The significance of this study lies in enriching localised interpretations of transmedia narrative and adaptation theory in the Chinese context, offering strategic insights for the global circulation of online-literature IPs, and contributing new cases and perspectives on participatory culture in the digital era.

# Introduction

Since 2010, screen adaptations of online literature (web-novel) IPs have become increasingly prevalent in China. From 2020, online micro-dramas emerged, driven by the vertical screen orientation/high frequency/fragmentation mobile ecology and algorithmic distribution. A *micro-drama*, or *microdrama*, is defined here as a network series primarily presented on mobile vertical screens, with complete yet highly condensed plotlines conducive to continuous binge-scrolling.

With single episodes ranging from tens of seconds to roughly 15 minutes, their high-density plotting and constant twists match fragmented attention, while their dissemination over multiple platforms and internationalised channels accelerate “going global” (Dou, 2024). In this configuration, online novels provide engaging story fuel while micro-dramas achieve rapid production, reach, and monetisation, together forming a flourishing, symbiotic content ecology.

Micro-dramas also incorporate *danmu*, often translated as ‘bullet screens’: real-time, user-generated text messages that are overlaid directly onto the video image and horizontally scroll across the screen at specific timestamps, thereby forming a dense, collectively produced commentary layer synchronised with the audiovisual content. Danmu transform otherwise individualised viewing into a quasi-synchronous, many-to-many interaction, by enabling geographically dispersed viewers to respond to the video and to one another in situ, turning the screen into a dynamic social space rather than a one-way display (X. Li, 2016).

This research focuses on two core issues:

- (1) Within transmedia storytelling, how online literature IPs facilitates cross-media narrative integration across diverse communication platforms.
- (2) How do micro-dramas, via translation, localisation, and audience re-creation in different cultural contexts, enable cross-cultural communication and stimulate universal emotional resonance, with bullet screens, comments, and derivative works functioning as mechanisms for meaning diffusion and re-contextualisation?

*Transmedia storytelling* denotes collaborative expansion across platforms around a unified story world, with each medium contributing irreplaceable elements. *Cross-cultural communication* emphasises the re-situating of texts within heterogeneous cultural contexts and audience participation in re-creation.

This study constructs a three-pronged analytical framework encompassing narrative worldbuilding, adaptive recreation and cross-cultural reception. Media convergence and participatory culture drive the expansion of story universes, as well as the transformation of

audience roles from passive content consumers to active cultural co-creators. Adaptation research focuses on the transformation between textual and visual narratives and the theoretical tension between textual fidelity and adaptive recreation. As a unique media form, micro-dramas manifest distinct textual and aesthetic features, including hook-driven opening narratives, intensive narrative twists within limited duration, stereotyped archetypal characters, vertical-screen visual narration, and in-depth social interaction mechanisms. Such inherent characteristics fit algorithmic distribution logic and social communication mechanisms, thereby reshaping public viewing modes and participatory pathways.

Chapter 2 details the complexity of transmedia ecosystems, including how micro-drama, within the context of media convergence, achieves systematic expansion across content, channels, and production through transmedia storytelling to construct an immersive, participatory story world. Chapter 3 details the research methods: samples, data, and assessment design. Chapter 4 compares genres and platform strategies horizontally, then investigates the micro-drama *Fortune Writer* to reveal the synergy between compressed re-narration and universe-scale expansion. Chapter 5 debates audience participation in the micro-drama *How Dare You?* and discusses how translation and localisation shape reception and diffusion.

Overall, as shown in the Figure 1, the thesis addresses the intertwined realities of content/platform/algorithm/globalisation in the micro-drama era, explaining the pathway that adaptation takes: web novels to micro-dramas to globalised content.

**Figure 1**

*Visualising the Content/Platform/Algorithm/Globalisation Pathway. Icons remixed and reused under CC Licensing from Freepik, Vecteezy and Icon Archive.*



Against the backdrop of accelerating digital media convergence and globalised circulation, transmedia storytelling has profoundly reshaped the production and consumption of cultural

content (Scolari, 2009). As a principal literary form in the digital era, online fiction—along with its micro-drama adaptations—exemplifies iterative media innovation and functions as a potent vehicle for cross-cultural communication.

The significance of this study lies in the examination of this new Chinese cultural media phenomenon becoming popular in Chinese and other communities around the globe, that as yet does not seem to have a strongly comparable Western counterpart. The transmedia adaptation from online novels to micro-dramas thus emerges as a valuable research object, which lays a solid foundation for exploring IP narrative expansion, localised cultural adaptation and the internal mechanism of China's digital cultural outbound communication.

# 1. Literature Review

Transmedia storytelling research centres on examining unified storyworlds extended across multiple platforms, the interactive mechanisms of audience participation, and the economic and cultural drivers of media convergence, emphasising that transmedia enhances narrative coherence and affective resonance through intertextuality, seriality, and immersion (Edwards et al., 2024).

While studies on adaptations of online fiction analyse visual transformation strategies (spatiotemporal reconfiguration, character symbolisation), adjustments to narrative structure (compressed pacing, juxtaposition of multiple plotlines), and audience psychological mechanisms (expectation horizons, engagement), thereby illuminating the balance between artistic re-creation and commercial value in the adaptation process (Yoon, 2025).

In the domain of micro-dramas, research focuses on the vertical-screen format, algorithm-driven content production, and affect-centred narrative paradigms, arguing that their fragmented dissemination aligns with user habits in a globalised context and that localisation strategies enable cultural symbols to permeate across audience strata (Hanney, 2025).

With the acceleration of digital media convergence and global communication, the adaptation of the web novel micro-drama based on a transmedia storytelling framework and its cross-cultural communication have become research hotspots (Ge & Du, 2025). Related research integrates interdisciplinary perspectives from literature, communication, film and television, cultural and digital technology studies (Nanou et al., 2018).

Transmedia refers to a form of cross-platform communication or storytelling that emerges within a context of media convergence (Scolari, 2009). The core discourse involves three key areas: the application of transmedia narrative theory in adaptation practices; innovative adaptation pathways (such as narrative restructuring, technology-enabled creation, and user participation); and the efficacy of cross-cultural dissemination (including strategies for cultural translation, mechanisms for emotional resonance, and the influence of algorithmic distribution) (Kustritz, 2022).

Chinese research in this field emerged around 2015 alongside the popularity of web literature IP, and grew rapidly post-2020 with the explosion of the micro-drama industry, with significant improvements in research depth and industry relevance (iResearch, 2025). Western research started earlier, with Jenkins (2006) as a significant starting point, continuously advancing discussions on the nature of transmedia storytelling, world-building, and participatory culture, and in recent years paying more attention to communication mechanisms and cultural negotiation in the context of globalisation.

Chinese and Western research share core concerns around transmedia/cross-cultural media, but display differing theoretical emphases. China leans towards industrial practices and local strategies, the West towards theoretical models and universal frameworks. "Methodologically, Chinese researchers often use case analysis, while the West emphasizes conceptual and model construction, and problem identification. China focuses on performance 'going global,' while the West emphasizes cultural power and communication democratization." (Sun & Li, 2022; Gambarato, 2013).

In one view, transmedia storytelling can break through media boundaries, activate collective intelligence, and promote global cultural dissemination (Kim, 2015; Freire, 2020). However, researchers differ on the status of transmedia storytelling as an independent artistic paradigm versus a marketing instrument; the prioritisation of innovative pathways (technology-driven versus content-centric); and the strategic direction for cross-cultural dissemination (standardisation versus localisation).

A critical gap currently exists in the absence of a framework that systematically integrates innovative pathways with cross-cultural mechanisms, and in the lack of a structural explanation of how transmedia narratives dynamically influence communicative efficacy and mediate between globalisation and localisation.

## 1.1 Research Analysing Web Novel to Micro-Drama Adaptations

"The post-2020 surge of Chinese research on adapting web novels into micro-dramas" (Li & Tian, 2022) demonstrates strong alignment with industry, emphasises localised innovation while employing worldwide dissemination strategies. The discourse concentrates on four dimensions: innovation in narrative mechanisms, technological and platform drivers, cross-cultural dissemination strategies, and industrial ecosystems with IP management. Critique of the research centres on inadequate theoretical elaboration, relatively monolithic methodologies, and insufficient focus on deep-seated cultural translation mechanisms (Xing, 2024).

### 1.1.1. Narrative Mechanism Innovation: From Text Transfer to Media-Adaptive Reconstitution

The core of micro-drama adaptation is simplified storytelling (extracting key plot points from the novel) and story structural reorganisation. This is based on the characteristics of short video media, which aims to achieve a creative transformation from a primarily written format to an

audiovisual one. R. Chen (2024), using *DouLuo Continent* (2021) as an example, pointed out that the cinematic writing style of "dialogue-driven, plot-hopping, close-up details" (p. 39-40) fits the fast pace and strong visual sense of short videos, while visual elements also assist with language barriers in cross-cultural communication.

In contrast to the original novel *Douluo Dalu* (2008), which draws heavily on setting depiction, internal monologue, and verbal narration to portray the characters' psychological growth, the micro-drama script condenses such narrative segments, reinterpreting characterisation through dense dialogue and well-designed dramatic actions to maintain a tight, cohesive narrative pace amid fragmented viewing scenarios (Huang, 2018). This shift from a description–narration mode to a dialogue–shot mode enables screen adaptations to intensify the visual articulation of motifs such as the *junzi* (gentlemanly) persona in *Douluo Dalu*, lessens over-reliance on cultural allusions, thereby lowering the threshold for cross-linguistic and cross-cultural reception. However, it inevitably does so at the cost of the nuanced psychological depiction and semantic layering in the source text (Y. Qin & W. Jin, 2021).

Y. Hu (2022) emphasised that digital narrative highlights fan interaction, promoting the shift of audiences from spectators to participants and giving rise to a decentralised modular structure. Yang and Fan (2025) suggested that emotional resonance is pivotal for transmedia linkage, achieved via character archetypes, familiar situational scenarios, and frequent narrative reversals that foster audience identification.

Fan et al. (2020) argued adapting online novels into screen productions requires employing flexible and plural narrative perspectives to enhance the delivery of information and therefore the intensity of emotional expression; but its also necessary to transpose ahistorical narrative time–space into concrete settings that reflect contemporary social reality. They contended that the dynamic interplay between these two dimensions is crucial in determining whether an adaptation can achieve both wide communicative reach and a high level of artistic expression. Ji (2019) summarised diverse paths from fidelity to integration, emphasising that perspective switching, structural reorganisation, and character realisation are key for the fusion of literary and visual quality.

In summary, adaptation proceeds through a systematic filtering, compression, and recoding of narrative elements. This recalibration adheres to the conventions of vertical framing, such as rapid pacing, and emotional intensification, with the objective of maximising per-episode tension and affective impact.

The micro adaptation of online novels is not just about text transplantation; It represents a narrative mode customised for short video features. By condensing the original plot and shifting towards dialogue and visual presentation, adaptation enhances cross-cultural

communication. At the same time, it inevitably sacrifices the subtle psychological portrayal and semantic depth of the original work. Cross media storytelling further emphasises the emotional resonance and interactive participation of the audience. The optimised narrative perspective and reconstructed story framework enable micro dramas to balance their wide dissemination impact and artistic value, forming a refined mechanism suitable for fragmented viewing.

### 1.1.2. Technology Drivers and Platforms

Algorithmic recommendations and artificial intelligence have emerged as critical variables in the adaptation production and dissemination chain. By analysing user preferences and content characteristics from massive amounts of data, algorithmic recommendations accurately push suitable adapted works to potential audiences. Artificial intelligence automatically creates and optimises text, images, audio, and video, thus improving the overall production efficiency of adapted works (Z. Zhang et al., 2025).

Lyu and Tan (2025) noted that vertical screen narratives shorten the distance between the audience and the screen, creating a stronger sense of immersion, because vertical screens are the primary means to access digital content. Micro-dramas are formatted to way smartphones are held, the narrow screen size, and fragmented usage: vertical screens naturally highlight close-ups and extreme close-ups of characters due to the significantly reduced horizontal distance of the scene, strengthening facial and emotional presentation, and when combined with short durations, fast pace, multimodal overlays (music, subtitles, filters, etc.), and interactive elements such as bullet screens and comments, they create a close, private, and continuous user experience for the audience. Based on this, the platform's algorithm, through detailed analysis of data such as dwell time, completion rate, and interactive behaviour, frequently pushes similar themes and narrative styles to audiences. This improves content matching efficiency and immersion, but it also continuously amplifies the visibility of a single narrative type, thus leading to content homogenisation and the generation and solidification of the 'echo chamber' effect (Lyu & Tan, 2025).

C. Guo (2025) contends that deep algorithm integration transforms user behaviour data into "high-trend tags" (p. 1), and with the support of platform tools (recommendation and distribution tools, AI-assisted creation tools, and monitoring tools) and AIGC (Artificial Intelligence Generated Content), solidifies successful narrative characteristics into replicable scripts and editing templates. These templates are then continuously strengthened through a data feedback mechanism, which in turn drives the micro drama narrative to change towards this fixed template. A process which ultimately destroys the uniqueness of the original work.

On the other hand, the same tagging and recommendation mechanism breaks down regional and subcultural elements into distributable symbols. Through interest graph matching, breaking down barriers between different circles, and leveraging the global traffic pools and localisation of platforms like TikTok, these cultural elements can spread across circles and borders, generating localised versions overseas. While this creates efficiency and scale, it also amplifies the risk of value distortion. Therefore, a "human-machine collaboration" (C. Guo, 2025, p. 4) creation model is needed, where algorithms provide data insights and distribution channels, while human creators are responsible for value judgments and cultural oversight, to strike a balance between narrative standardisation and cultural diversity.

Niu et al. (2025) studied industry data and described the intermingling pattern of forms such as 'long', 'short', 'live', 'audio' and the trend of generative AI enhancing the efficiency of personalised and batch adaptation. Wang and Yang (2024) found that existing AI voice synthesis still exhibits deficiencies in discerning complex emotional structures, prone to inducing emotional misinterpretation in cross-cultural settings; emotional recognition precision is crucial for global dissemination. Su and Li (2024) emphasised the need to be vigilant about the ideological motives behind technology and advocate embedding core values into local discourse systems.

### 1.1.3. Cross-Cultural Communication Strategies

Strategies for effective overseas dissemination are emphasised in Chinese scholarship. Most research advocates for a dual focus on localisation and emotional resonance. Hao and Lao (2025) propose a re-culturalisation strategy, such as introducing popular Western elements and strengthening female subjectivity, to align with the narrative preferences of the target market.

Hu and Zhang (2025) outlined the trajectory from mere 'porting' to localisation: integrating familiar semiotics, engaging local writers to reframe narratives, casting local actors to boost relatability; female-targeted content can incorporate globally resonant issues (such as gender equality). For female-oriented micro-dramas, effective localisation goes beyond formal adaptation to achieve content resonance. This progression is achieved by combining localised narratives and casting with the integration of globally significant themes, a necessary synthesis that deepens audience engagement. Li and Bai (2021) employ *Joy Of Life* (2019) to demonstrate how the "modern articulation of traditional culture" can create a space for intercultural dialogue. *Joy of Life* adapts ancient institutions, rituals, and values into narratives accessible to contemporary youth through a time-travel plot and internet-savvy dialogue. By combining elements of period drama, science fiction, and comedy, along with unconventional storytelling techniques, it revitalises the traditional costume drama genre. This creates a space

for dialogue between ancient and modern, Eastern and Western, as well as traditional and popular cultures.

Y. Wang (2025) identified "re-enchantment tactics" (p. 45) and "gratification emotional architectures," (p. 44), positing that micro-dramas can transmute real-life anxieties into idealised storylines, thereby diminishing cultural barriers. Yu (2025) studied comments on overseas platforms and argued that emotion is the starting point for cross-cultural translation and cognitive engagement; success relies on universal emotional schemas, via a participatory ecology, and cross-cultural collaborative production.

#### 1.1.4. Industrial Ecosystem and IP Management

Research around IP ecology primarily views micro-drama adaptations based on commercial value and as sustainable cultural output. Rather than analysing individual case studies, it broadly covers the evolution of the online literature industry and situates the adaptation of web novels into micro-dramas within a "one source, multiple uses" industry chain and a pan-entertainment IP ecosystem (Xu & Cong, 2024, p.88). For example, Jang and Kim (2020) systematically mapped key operational models—such as film–television links, game–audiovisual links, and copyright—assessing their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and constraints.

Xu and Cong (2024) emphasise that "multiple uses from a single source" and "full copyright operation, and cluster-style development" help lower cultural barriers (p. 89). They argue that through repeated multi-platform exposure and the packaging of Chinese stories as recognisable youth-culture genres, foreign audiences can gradually accept and adapt to unfamiliar Chinese cultural connotations, making them embedded in transmedia IP, thereby reducing interpretive difficulty for overseas audiences.

Chen (2024), citing *Love Between Fairy and Devil* (2022), demonstrated how the coordinated operation across novels, screen adaptations, comics, and games generates a "categorical dissemination effect" linking the work to a single category across media, while bullet screens, comments, and fan works propagate engagement. The same story can be presented through multiple media. Each medium has a different audience and combining them can maximise the story's influence and audience reach, forming a brand and enhancing its market influence and commercial value. Hence, when a narrative prototype is continuously developed and adapted across diverse media, it evolves from an individual popular work into a standardised cultural IP brand, producing sustained amplification effects in market operation and cultural communication (M. Chen, 2024).

Simultaneously, researchers have pointed out issues within micro-dramas such as weak cultural

representation, insufficient concern for realism, and generalisation of artistic expression (Luo, 2018): a high reliance on platform distribution and profit-making creates a tendency to standardised templates and homogenisation (Hu & Liu, 2024). Algorithmic predominance may also contribute to standardisation, leading to thin storylines and superficial expression (Qu, 2024).

Addressing these concerns, X. Wang (2025) proposed constructing a robust ecosystem integrating cultural values, communicating effectiveness through enhanced content quality, reinforced copyright governance, refined interactive mechanisms, and fostering cross-sector collaboration, thereby facilitating a shift from a 'traffic-driven' to a 'value-driven' paradigm.

In practice, assessments of quality are co-produced by multiple actors: state regulators, who privilege ideological correctness and cultural uplift; platforms, which operationalise quality through data-led indicators of retention, monetisation and risk; industry professionals, who draw on aesthetic and craft-based norms; and audiences, whose affective investments and everyday judgments are expressed through viewing, rating and participation (Hao & Lao, 2025; Chen et al., 2024).

## 1.2 The Evolution and Phased Features of Web-Novel to Micro-Drama Development

### 1.2.1 Narrative Structure: From Online Novels to Micro-Dramas

When online novels are adapted into micro-dramas, the literature indicates that notable shifts and innovative pathways appear in the narrative structure, developing features suited to digital media and fragmented circulation. Unlike traditional TV dramas that progress via layered foreshadowing, micro-dramas adopt a concise and straightforward narrative style. They typically introduce conflict or suspense within the opening seconds, seize attention quickly, and sustain interest through dense conflicts and continuous twists (Yan, 2024). This 'climax-at-the-start' and high-density narration repeatedly stimulates viewers within these brief durations, immersing them in relentless tension (Yan, 2024).

Given the very short episode length (seconds to a few minutes), transitional scenes and secondary subplots are compressed or excised; the arc is highly condensed to meet immediate viewing expectations (Dou, 2024). This aligns with the *Shuangwen* (爽, high gratification) tempo

in web novels—featuring rebirth, revenge, and meteoric rise—while the audiovisual medium accelerates propulsion and reversals to enhance sensory stimulation (Mašková, 2020). As Yan (2024) noted, micro-dramas hook immediately, then “bombard” viewers with high-energy reversals, delivering quasi-continuous narrative stimulation—a “mental spa” (p. 1). Online novels allow lengthy development of complex character arcs and vast worlds; whereas micro-dramas, constrained by time, often simplify or typify relationships and settings (X. Wang, 2024). Many micro-dramas present stereotyped or archetypal figures with instantly recognisable labels, such as ‘vengeful heiress’ or ‘time-traveling consort’ (Yan, 2024). Plots frequently reuse mature web-novel templates—CEO romances, historical power plays, and so forth.

After a hit in one subgenre, platforms may encourage similar creations, while others replicate success formulas, producing homogeneity of themes, storylines and characterisation (Yan, 2024). H. Zhang (2021) described genre patterning as a double-edged sword: it meets mass tastes and fuels adaptation success, yet over-patterning risks homogenisation and diminished originality. This is especially salient in micro-dramas, given low entry barriers and short cycles, yielding a slew of imitative works with few standouts. Scholars thus call for renewed narrative innovation beyond formulaic Shuangwen, expanding to more realistic topics and diverse aesthetic styles to improve narrative variety and quality (Chen & Jiang, 2025). Shuangwen or Wish-fulfillment fiction is a genre of online novels centered on satisfying readers’ instant emotional gratification, which adopts narrative formulas such as strong protagonist aura, fast-paced plots, counterattack and revenge scenarios as well as satisfying endings, downplays realistic logic and in-depth ideological reflection, and continuously delivers pleasant emotional enjoyment to readers.

Not all adaptations simply compress the main plot. Some showcase transmedia strategies that extend the story world. Studying micro-dramas derived from film/TV IPs, Yang and Fan (2025) found that such works build on the original world and explore untold areas via time travel, side stories, and other devices, enriching the narrative. They identify three core factors in successful derivatives: story universe, emotional resonance, and open production (where content is contributed to, influenced by and in some ways co-created by the audience participating via commenting platforms).

At the universe level, spin-off micro-dramas emphasise a shared worldview with the source to reinforce inter-text connections, such as prequels, extras, or parallel-perspective stories around the same novel IP across media, constructing an expanded universe and offering complementary information (Yang & Fan, 2025). This aligns with Jenkins’s model and helps avoid siloed versions that fracture IP value. J. Jiang (2017) noted that Chinese practice remains in its infancy: fragmented rights and weak collaboration lead to duplicated labour and missed synergies; only with unified worldviews and transmedia coordination can IP potential be fully

unlocked. A unified yet expanding world is therefore a key direction for improving micro-drama narrative quality.

Beyond plot structure, micro-dramas tightly integrate with digital-media affordances. Vertical-screen narration and interaction-oriented narrative design are notable. Wu (2022) argued that vertical presentation and social-media-like content blur the boundary between art and everyday life, enhancing immersion. Micro-dramas combine bullet screens, likes, and shares to construct synchronous virtual sociality; viewers watch and discuss simultaneously, generating an immersive, interactive experience. Strong hypertextuality occurs through referencing online memes, current topics, and influencer content as a means to enhance familiarity and resonance. While rare in traditional film/TV, such interactive narration has become pivotal for attracting younger audiences in the short video era (Wu, 2022).

In summary, the innovative pathways used include compressing main plots for fragmented spread, simplifying and typifying characters for quick recognition, exploring transmedia worldbuilding for universe-scale expansion, and leveraging digital interactivity for immersion—together distinguishing micro-drama narration from traditional series.

### 1.2.2 From Online Literature to the Rise of Micro-Drama

Micro-dramas, as a nascent cultural phenomenon, have experienced swift Chinese growth largely due to the profound participation and content underpinning provided by online literature (Y. Jiang, 2024). Although the micro-drama has been attempted internationally, such as the Quibi platform in the United States and the ‘instant noodle’ micro-dramas in South Korea, none have achieved the same sustained influence (Castellano & Meimaridis, 2021, p.5).

The reasons for their failure include both the inability to effectively integrate with social media communication mechanisms and the lack of a localised, systematic content production foundation (Duan, 2020). In contrast, the rise of Chinese micro-drama benefits from the deep integration of online literary works in content supply, genre innovation, and platform collaboration.

The development of Chinese micro-dramas began in 2019, marked by the launch of works such as *Tong Ling Fei* (2018) on Tencent's micro-drama platform. However, early micro-dramas adapted from traditional novels, comics, or original scripts performed modestly, with online literature IPs accounting for only 5% (Li & Xia, 2024).

With the active involvement of online literature platforms, the micro-drama industry entered a phase of rapid development. For instance, the Kuaidian platform leveraged its content

advantage in 'dialogue-driven novels' to pioneer self-produced micro-dramas like *I Have Five Boyfriends* (2019) and *My Dimensional Tenants* (2019), and established Kuaidian TV (A Chinese micro-drama platform) as a broadcasting channel, opening a new path for the transformation of online literature IPs into micro-dramas (L. Zhang, 2024). These works primarily adopted the vertical screen format, integrating elements of fantasy and school life, with view counts exceeding tens of millions, validating the market potential of online literature content in the micro-drama field (Hu, 2026).

During 2020-2021, micro-drama output grew markedly, with the share of online literature IP adaptations surging to 30.8%. In this phase, online literature platforms initiated structured efforts in IP cultivation and inter-platform partnerships. For example, MiRead Novel collaborated with Kuaishou to release works such as *Quan Chong Zhi Wu Zuo Yi Fei* (2017) and *Doctor Princess* (2019). Chinese Online, with its massive IP resources and professional adaptation team, became a key partner for Kuaishou's micro-dramas (Li & Xia, 2024).

Notably, the IP selection strategy shifted from initial top-tier popular IPs to more diverse mid-tier IPs, such as *Xi Jing Wang Fei* (2020) and *Hua Yan Yu Mao* (2022), which achieved high viewing numbers (exceeding 15 billion) and substantial revenue sharing through innovative settings and compact plots, further enriching the content ecosystem (Li & Xia, 2024).

During 2022-2024, micro-drama experienced a boom phase, with users reaching 576 million by June 2024, accounting for 52.4% of Chinese Internet users. Meanwhile the market share surged to 50.44 billion yuan, and online literature IP licenses grew by 55% compared to the previous year (Li & Xia, 2024). Platforms ramped up their initiatives, such as iQiyi introducing the 'Yunteng Plan' for micro-drama collaborations, and Himalaya partnering with Mango TV to create micro-dramas based on online literature IP (Ling & Zeng, 2025).

Meanwhile, online literature platforms began independently deploying micro-drama production lines: Dianzhong Technology released successful works like *Hi, Mom* (2024) through integrated production; Tomato Novel launched the Hongguo Micro Drama app, achieving an internal closed loop for IP content and micro-drama playback; Feilu Novel, China Literature, and others also promoted the transformation of high-quality IPs into micro-dramas through script solicitations and incubation programs (Y. Jiang, 2024). A defining feature of this stage is the platform's evolution from a mere content provider into an integrated role encompassing content production, management, and distribution.

To conclude, the convergence of online literature and micro-dramas goes beyond superficial platform interaction, forming in-depth internal ties and a symbiotic relationship in content creation. Online literature provides a stable content source and narrative paradigm for micro-drama, while micro-drama amplifies the influence of online literature through visual expression

for a primarily text based artform, forming an IP-centred transmedia content production system (L. Zhang, 2024). This integration propelled the rapid emergence of Chinese micro-drama while providing a critical lens through which to examine the evolution and narrative symbiosis of contemporary cultural industries.

### 1.2.3 Narrative Convergence between Online Literature and Micro-Drama

Micro-drama is intricately linked with online literature in terms of platforms, industry, and content, with nearly every category of viral micro-drama originating from online literature adaptations (Li & Xia, 2024). The established genre system, narrative paradigms, and user base of online literature provide the fuel for the rapid iteration and market explosion of micro-drama.

The evolution of micro-drama content closely mirrors the historical progression of genres in online literature. During its initial phase, micro-drama incorporated foundational premises from popular online literature. For instance, *Love Beyond Words* (2021), based on a MiRead Novel, embraced the 'rebirth and revenge' trope common in women's online fiction, and its rapid tempo, intense conflicts, and underdog-to-victor storyline aligned well with the attributes of micro-drama (C. Li, 2023). Similarly, *You'd I An Leng* (2021), originating from Tomato Novel, employed the 'system novel' and 'quick transmigration' settings, constructing compact dramatic conflicts within two minutes episodes, effectively capturing users' attention.

The success of Shuqi Novel's inaugural micro-drama *Tonight the Stars Are Like You* (2021) demonstrated the emotional power of adapting 'sweet pampering' fiction: the original's widespread acclaim served as a baseline for the show's popularity (China Youth Net, 2021). These early cases indicate that micro-drama is deeply rooted in the narrative soil of online literature. Upon reaching the boom phase, the shifts in micro-drama categories mirrored the trending patterns in online literature types, and nearly every major sensation in each wave originated from adapted web novels (L. Zhang, 2024). Within the women's genre, the popularity of 'bossy CEO' and 'sweet pet' fiction in online literature directly spawned micro-dramas such as *After the Flash Marriage, Mr. Fu's Mask Can't Be Hidden* (2023), which combined web novel tropes including 'alpha male,' 'contract marriage,' 'sweet affection,' and 'secret identity,' and exceeded 20 million yuan in top-up turnover in a single day (China Writers Association Online Literature Center, 2024; Li & Xia, 2024).

As online fiction genres advanced, 'secret identity' and 'adorable child' stories quickly gained popularity in the micro-drama medium. *After the Flash Marriage, the Crazy Youth Forces Me to Have a Baby* (2024) utilises a powerful heroine and secret identity premise. Key web novel

tropes like 'anguished romance' and 'reincarnation vengeance' also yielded blockbuster micro-dramas, such as *You Are My Myriad Stars* (2023). *QIASHIHANBINGYUJIAOYANG* (2024) used the 'rebirth' device to provide the heroine with a drive to overturn her destiny (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 2025).

Online literature's premise of 'transmigration' (where characters are transplanted into another body, time, or world) was revitalised in micro-drama, giving rise to various forms such as standard transmigration and reverse transmigration. *Hi, Mom* (2024), adapted from a web novel on the Fanqie (Fizzo) Novel platform, combined time travel and period literature, with the female lead using modern thinking to navigate family and social relationships in the 1980s, achieving massive commercial success (Wang & Zhang, 2025). In contrast, *Oops! The Empress Comes to Work* (2023) employed the reverse premise, where a historical queen transmigrates to the present day, leveraging her courtly abilities and thought processes to generate incongruity and comedy in modern settings.

Popular themes in male-oriented micro-drama also rely deeply on online literature adaptations. Whether it is *My Wife, My Boss* (2023) showcasing counterattack, or *Di Shi Long Xu* (2022) and *Urban Super God of War* (2025) demonstrating absolute power, their core narratives of 'playing dumb to eat the tiger,' 'slapping face revenge,' and 'return of the war god' are directly derived from established genres in male-oriented online literature. Mainstream male genres such as fantasy and urban superpowers also found new forms of expression in micro-drama works like *Wu Ji Tian Zun* (2024), *Wan Dao Long Huang* (2023), and *Du Shi Jue Pin Yi Shen* (2024) (Zhan, 2024).

The more finely crafted 'premium micro-dramas' also predominantly stem from web novel adaptations and earn reputations for excellence. For instance, *Fortune Writer* (2024), based on Zhihu's Salt Selection tales, adeptly employed the trendy web novel premises of 'novel transmigration' (characters are transported into the book) and 'self-realisation of a malicious supporting female.' The novel's tight, roller-coaster narrative framework was naturally fitted for short-form adaptation, leading to unprecedented viewership and top ratings on Tencent Video (Zhang, 2024).

*Provocation* (2023), produced by Chinese Online, combined the Chinese Republic era background with elements such as 'tortured love' and 'revenge,' resulting in record-breaking revenue (Wang & Zhang, 2025). *Grant Her the Handle* (2024), adapted by the Tomato Short Drama platform, infused the emotional dynamics of power scheming into a story of turbulent times and rekindled love. These examples show that online literature offers micro-dramas abundant narrative resources, fundamental storytelling components and universal settings, that have passed rigorous market testing and cater to the audience's aesthetic and viewing tastes.

To conclude, the emergence and flourishing of micro-drama is a natural outgrowth of online literature types defined over decades. Each trending category in online literature, whether aimed at women, men, or based on pan-genre topics, has generated a series of viral micro-drama adaptations. This demonstrates that online literature serves as a motivator for micro-drama content creation, establishing a firm base for their storytelling co-existence.

### 1.2.4 Micro-Drama Creation

Beyond direct IP adaptation, micro-dramas are notable for the extraction, recombination, and secondary creation of core narrative elements from online literature, which can be described as "transmedia narrative symbiosis" (L. Zhang, 2024, p.84). Micro-drama plots, settings, and character development draw upon the reservoir of narrative elements derived from online literature.

One example is the *Dragon King Son-in-Law* (2020) series. Its origin was an information flow advertisement (a form of native or unobtrusive advertising) produced by online literature platforms for 'son-in-law literature,' designed to drive traffic to the novels through highly dramatised 'counterattack and face-slapping' plots (Wu & Zhao, 2024). It does not qualify as a direct adaptation but instead represents an intensified extraction and montage of the typical persona (the unassuming husband who is truly a VIP), conventional narrative framework (the protagonist's hidden identity is revealed after experiencing humiliation and setbacks), and affective pacing (crescendo from nadir to zenith) inherent in the 'son-in-law' online fiction category.

The popularity of this series demonstrated that the narrative elements of online literature themselves, even when detached from the original text, possess strong transmedia dissemination potential and emotional resonance, providing an effective 'grammar' for micro-drama creation. Numerous viral micro-dramas that are deemed original are in fact adept utilisations of this web novel grammar. For instance, *Please! Don't Spoil Me* (2022) derives its central narrative from the well-established 'novel crossing' trope in women's web fiction; and *The Killer Is Also Romantic* (2022) combines features like 'double powerful masks,' 'hidden identity,' and 'political intrigue.' (Li & Xia, 2024). Director Zhizhu's *The Princess Royal Above* (2022) and *Snow in the East Pavilion* (2023) display element fusion: the former introduces niche but trending web novel premises such as 'fourth love' and 'gender inversion'; while the latter overturns viewer assumptions by injecting a contemporary time-traveller side character into classic historical fiction patterns like 'vengeance' and 'underdog rise.'

The success of these works does not stem from a unique story, but from the precise selection

and creative combination of web novel elements that have been market-verified and have high resonance (M. Zhang, 2025).

Therefore, online literature is the fertile ground, a vast field of narrative components harvested and enacted by micro-drama productions (B. Yan, 2023). Both sustain and enhance a common storytelling ecology. This phenomenon aligns with Jenkins' theory of transmedia storytelling, where the story experience is not confined to a single medium but spans multiple platforms, with each new text making a unique contribution to the overall story world (Jenkins, 2006). This also clarifies why the notion of IP has supplanted the traditional concept of the 'auteur' within content creation—IP inherently represents this storytelling nucleus capable of transmedia mobility, possessing great flexibility and generative potential.

In summary, the creation of micro-drama is deeply influenced by online literature at a surpass structural level, manifesting as a transmedia narrative symbiosis characterised by the recombination of online literature elements, molding the storytelling models and production decisions of micro-dramas. This co-existence grounded in component integration dissolves the divides between literary and visual media, signals the advent of a novel content creation age focused on IP and routine cross-platform engagement.

## 1.3 Theoretical Framework from a Transmedia Storytelling

### Perspective

It is clear that content production for online novel visualisations has continually evolved with media integration and is not merely straightforward story transposition. The introduction of transmedia narrative theory offers fresh perspectives on the mutual interaction between media and culture under media convergence.

In this section I incorporate transmedia narrative theory into the online novel visualisation process, establishing a practical framework for the case study analyses of online novel visualisation in Chapters 4 and 5.

#### 1.3.1 Dissemination Pathways: Media Channels and Transmedia Circulation

Micro-drama adaptations are disseminated differently from traditional audiovisual works, reflecting new media content flows involving audience interactive engagement. They primarily circulate via TikTok/Douyin-like platforms and 'mini-theatre' modules in major video apps such as Tencent Video, iQiyi, and Youku (Tan & Jiang, 2024). Recommendation algorithms push

content to likely viewers and enable decentralised distribution (Li et al., 2025). Unlike scheduled broadcasts, micro-dramas circulate via algorithmic content feeds: viewers encounter clips serendipitously and, once hooked, subscribe and/or binge-watch the whole series. Algorithmic content recommendation expands reach and accelerates virality. In 2023, Douyin's micro-drama paid users reportedly grew 300%, daily plays rose 100% each year, and 12 series surpassed one billion views (L. Jiang & R. Wang, 2022).

Episode lengths are perfectly tailored to users' fragmented leisure moments (i.e. commuting, waiting), and repeated exposures during such idle time drive touchpoints and habitual behaviour (L. Jiang & R. Wang, 2022). This mechanism forms a 'content/platform/algorithm' loop: trending IP attracts users, platform boosts exposure, and traffic feeds production. Yet scholars warn of adverse effects, for instance Qu (2024) argues that recommendation algorithms may lead to a chain of "content deviance, value imbalance, and algorithmic echo chambers" (p.74). To cater to algorithmic preferences, creators may adopt sensational strategies, such as exaggerating emotional tension, forcing dramatic identity reversals of characters, and designing provocative opening plots to boost click-through rates, burying quality content. Helberger et al. (2018) thus "advocate moving from "algorithmic neutrality" to "algorithmic responsibility" (p.197), adding diversity, strengthening reviews and ratings, and preventing deformative trends.

Built-in fan bases of online-literature IPs are crucial. Dan (2023) observed that micro-drama releases often spark enthusiastic responses from original-novel communities; core fans amplify the marketing via social media. Platforms also emphasise fan operations—discussion zones, character polls, and bonus content—to stimulate interaction. Audiences become both viewers and distributors. (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013).

In transmedia environments, fans across novel, comic, and screen subcultures relay news via Weibo topics, WeChat posts, and short-video edits (Ni, 2025). For example, the 2024 Spring Festival hit *The Little Nian and the Butcher* garnered 500,000 likes and 30 million trailer views on the Kuaishou app and drew 25 million first-episode viewers, driven by viral social diffusion (Slodkowski, 2024). UGC/fan works—clip montages, meme packs, and explainer videos—further re-disseminate and re-create content across major platforms (Wei, 2022).

At a broader level, micro-dramas are embedded within full-media IP strategies. Xu and Cong (2024) argue that screen adaptations of web-novel IPs have entered a phase of "full rights, full media, and globalisation" (p. 89). A single IP may develop into novel, comic, animation, film/TV, game, and micro-drama forms, maximising its communication effect through multi-platform distribution (Ni, 2025). Micro-dramas can sustain IPs during downturns and amplify them during upswings, expanding audience markets (Global Times, 2024). Cross-promotion is

common: novel serialisation pages embed micro-drama clips to drive clicks, and micro-drama endings direct viewers to novel platforms, achieving two-way traffic (Tencent, 2024).

Major online literature platforms have launched micro-drama cultivation and incubation initiatives, allocating capital and IP resources to support screen adaptations. Meanwhile, industrial communication is expanding to overseas markets. *The 2024 White Paper on China's Micro-Drama Industry Development* points out a developmental transition toward high-quality production, technological empowerment, and international expansion (p. 54). Platforms including iQIYI and Youku have exported micro-drama works to global audiences via YouTube and TikTok. Accordingly, the industry is forging new cross-cultural communication models on a global scale.

### 1.3.2 Cultural Context: Local Narratives and Cross-Cultural Communication

Micro-drama adaptations of online novels constitute both formal innovation and practical exploration in cross-cultural communication (Hutcheon & O'Flynn, 2013). Many online novel IPs embody rich Chinese cultural elements, ranging from historical legends and folk traditions to traditional ethical values (Y. Zhang, 2025). Creators often adopt metaphorical techniques to reconstruct traditional cultural symbols and reinterpret classic imagery within modern narrative frameworks, thereby enriching the work's cultural connotations. (Y. Zhang, 2025). For instance, *The Little Nian and the Butcher* embeds 'Nian-monster' folklore and conveys the cultural meanings of the New Year via dialogue and plot metaphors, yielding a distinctly culturally Chinese tone and resonance (Shen, 2025). Younger audiences display renewed interest in national cultural symbols; creatively transforming them to carry new meanings can elicit strong identification (Tie et al., 2025). Such embedded cultural contexts prepare IPs for cross-cultural travel: stories rooted locally yet refreshed creatively (Straubhaar, 2021).

With the global expansion of Chinese online novels and micro-drama adaptations, the cross-cultural reception and re-creation of these media by international audiences have emerged as a critical area of research. Chinese *xianxia* (immortal heroes) and fantasy web novels have cultivated substantial overseas 'Animation, Comics, and Games' (ACG) fandoms through translation; readers build communities to parse Chinese culture and localise interpretations (L. Zhao, 2021). Likewise, *The Untamed* (adapted from *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation: Mo Dao Zu Shi*) gained popularity across Asia and the West. Overseas viewers engaged in transnational fan creativity by producing fan art, fanfiction, subtitles, and video remixes (Stein, 2025). Viewed through the lens of participatory culture, cross-cultural fan groups act as grassroots facilitators and cultural interpreters—reframing culturally distant content within local idioms. (Jenkins, 2013). Western viewers, for example, may analogise character relationships to

local literary archetypes or interpret *wuxia* ethics through the paradigm of Western superhero narratives, thereby mitigating cultural dissonance. In this process, audience re-creation both extends and reshapes cross-cultural meanings. Hallinan et al. (2021) describe such phenomena as “migration and re-ritualisation” (p.18) across media and cultures: as stories travel, their forms and meanings transform, yet new cultural significance emerges through collaborative retellings.

Given diverse aesthetic preferences and values across markets, outbound micro-dramas must adjust narrative strategies to cultural differences. Xu and Cong (2024) propose five strategies for globalising web-novel IPs: thematic elevation, image re-shaping, re-narration of plots, cultural deepening, and international collaboration. Although empirical research is nascent, micro-dramas possess substantial cross-cultural potential: their short, fast, and stereotyped narratives are linguistically and culturally portable.

### 1.3.3 Building the Story World—Intertextuality

When the narrative medium changes, the focus of narration also shifts. Transmedia narrative creates a diverse and open narrative realm, in which texts from various media constitute a dynamic and coherent macro-text via interconnection, establishing a cohesive storyworld with a unified mythos and expansive interpretive potential (Dena, 2009).

According to Herman (2009), a storyworld functions as a virtual realm where distinct media leverage their specific affordances to construct a comprehensive and unique universe. In this context, transmedia storytelling emerges as a framework that builds these worlds and structures events across platforms by deploying interdependent narrative components—a significant departure from traditional, single-medium literary models. Constructing this storyworld is paramount; it establishes the diegetic environment for the tale and provides a unified narrative architecture for the evolution of characters, situations, and plotlines. Ultimately, texts across various platforms expand within this schema, becoming synergistically interconnected as they mutually complement and clarify the overarching macro-narrative..

Having explored the larger rationale for story world building, this section employs Ryan's theories of immersion to categorise intertextual stories.

Firstly, within a cohesive storyworld, various media texts share core narrative elements, such as character archetypes, narrative arcs, and diegetic environments. According to Ryan (2015), rendering narratives visually yields spatial immersion, generating suspense through unusual encounters produces temporal immersion, and blurring the lines between fantasy and reality fosters emotional immersion (p. 42). Immersion can be used to understand the shared elements of texts in transmedia storytelling: characters, events, and space. Persona expansion enables

viewers to identify with and feel empathy (e.g., when a secondary villain's backstory is expanded in a spin-off web comic); techniques like analepsis and intercalation in events can engage audiences in temporal immersion, such as the frequent use of cliffhangers and flashback sequences in micro-dramas; and spatial dimension expansion provides users with an immersive environmental experience. In Ryan's (2015) study of transmedia narrative, personas are the foundation of the universe and the thread for investigating the world through text. Frequently, we only comprehend the story world via character portrayals and viewpoints.

Secondly, micro-drama adaptations frequently foreground peripheral figures from original web fictions, utilising them as foundational anchors for new storylines. By expanding the backstories of these previously minor characters, viewers form affective connections and sympathy with them. Exploring previously under-utilised characters appears to be a highly effective transmedia narrative strategy.


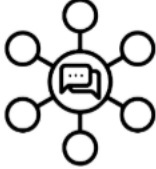

Transmedia storytelling relies heavily on dynamic narrativity and expansive world-building. In terms of narrativity, the selection and ordering of events can be examined through the structural framework proposed by Gambarato et al. (2020). They distinguish between primary macro-narratives and secondary micro-narratives; while subsidiary plots may not alter the tale's core causal trajectory, they significantly enhance the chronological flow and amplify the situational mood, engaging the audience more deeply. Furthermore, the expansion of a story universe is fundamentally tied to its spatial construction, a core concept theorised as 'worldness' by Tosca and Klastrup (2019). They argue that when transposing narratives across media, moving from text-based platforms (like web novels) to visual adaptations transforms conceptual spatial realms into direct visual representations. This shift from the imaginary to tangible reality creates a profound verisimilitude of setting. Consequently, spatial extension serves as a foundational strategy in transmedia practices. For example, scholar Zhang Jingyu (2016) proposed that fantasy IPs tend to adopt a 'space-first' creative model, linking series media works through a consistent spatial background, thus enabling viewers to adopt the story universe faster.

### 1.3.4 Utilising Diverse Media—Expansivity

Within transmedia storytelling, different media have their own characteristics, and by integrating media with different qualities to form a complementary media matrix, audiences participate in transmedia storytelling from multiple aspects (Mittell, 2015). This section elaborates on the expansiveness of media at three levels: content, channel, and production. (See Figure 2)

**Figure 2**

*The Expansiveness of Media from Three Levels: Content, Channel, and Production. Icons remixed and reused under CC Licensing from Freepik, Flat Icon, and Vecteezy.*

		
CONTENT	CHANNELS	PRODUCTION
<p>Is concerned with sourcing content for adaptation, and balancing fidelity with differing opportunities from adapting material into new formats</p>	<p>Is concerned with identifying diverse channels to reach new potential audience and existing audience, including opportunities for fan participation</p>	<p>Is concerned with those professional participants with the abilities and access to transform content into transmedia formats, sometimes this includes the original IP author</p>

The expansion of media content is the foundation for transmedia storytelling. However, expansion is not simply extending or modifying textual content, but needs to be viewed in combination with media. To be considered an extension or expansion of media content, the narrative content deployed across various media must enhance the material relative to the source tale, it must retain the tone of the original story universe, it must fill in any storytelling gaps, and introduce fresh inquiries. Overall, the story content on different media needs to make unique and valuable contributions to the whole, and all stories need to be unified and interconnected with each other.

Turning to media channels, the affordances of different media vary, their integrated use expands narrative scope while compensating for individual limitations (Evans, 2011). Diversifying channels can generate more access points for viewers, targeting specific demographic segments via niche channels and enlarging the viewer pool, while comprehensive channel integration can consistently reinforce the audience's immersion in the story universe. The storytelling capacities of individual medium channels possess different strengths and weaknesses, so that integrating them can create a holistic complementary narrative grid, collectively widening audience exposure and rendering the narrative more engaging (Hutchby, 2001). Therefore, the strategic orchestration and cross-platform synergy of media channels constitute a fundamental pillar of transmedia storytelling.

From the perspective of media production, traditional media content production is usually

controlled by a few experts. A small number of skilled media creators produce professional content, without much audience participation. However, the production of transmedia storytelling is clearly not dominated by a single entity; to engage broad audiences and deliver a harmonious narrative experience, multi-party participation is essential. As Dena (2009) posits, translating a cohesive storyworld across various platforms inherently necessitates collaborative authorship. In an expansive transmedia franchise, the production team often encompasses creative practitioners across diverse media sectors, including literature, film, sequential art, and interactive media. Outputs generated from such synergistic co-creation feature more fluid narratives, enhanced technical prowess, and greater structural coherence. Ultimately, integrating cross-sector expertise not only enriches the narrative depth but also optimises the multimodal affordances of the entire storyworld.

### 1.3.4 Migration of the Audience Role—Participatory Nature

The ultimate objective for commercial media creators employing transmedia narrative is to attract the largest number of consumers and achieve higher financial returns (Scolari, 2009). Thus, in transmedia narrative, the audience's position is crucial; from an enjoyable experience, they may continue engaging with the story, initiating interaction and purchases (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013). Fans, being the most vigorous viewer segment, are devotees of transmedia narratives and the primary agents in aiding works to gain significance (Hills, 2002).

Audience initiative and creativity in transmedia storytelling can be examined through the theoretical lenses of textual poaching and nomadism. Originating from de Certeau (1980), these concepts refer to fans participating in media narratives: in the process of reception, they turn from guests into hosts, poaching things that are useful to them and nomadising over various texts. Jenkins (2010) observed that fans traverse both textual and communal boundaries, gathering in collectives to exchange, debate, and reimagine acquired information.

In Jenkins' "Seven Principles of Transmedia Narrative," he stressed the significance of viewer involvement, stating that transmedia narrative must promote and incite audiences to turn into 'prosumers,' and their capacity to generate fresh content positively impacts the expansion of the story universe (Jenkins, 2010). Therefore, a high-quality transmedia storytelling text needs to reserve sufficient narrative space for fans and provide them with conditions for close contact with the text, so fans can interpret, create, and consume it. Subsequently, Jenkins posited that participatory culture comprises four types: *affiliation*, where viewers locate relevant fan groups via the internet and willingly join them; *expression*, namely the 'poaching' procedure, where audiences consume the textual material and then generate novel related content, like fan works, fanvids, or fan art; *collaborative problem-solving*, indicating that audiences will establish communities to collectively investigate specific aspects of the story; and *circulation*, where

audiences disseminate content across various media platforms. Naturally, only a subset of audiences will vigorously engage in textual content deliberation and creation, and these viewers' roles may transition towards creators. Jenkins also argued that viewer zeal is intimately connected to the appeal of transmedia narrative material; the calibre of the content dictates whether audiences develop a creative interest in it. Moreover, audience creation is not mere involvement but rather employs textual substance to convey personal views and principles.

Baym (2000) investigated the 'fan community' often mentioned in participatory culture. In transmedia storytelling, fans gather together to form communities based on common content preferences. Here they share content related to the story text and connect content from different media, then use collective wisdom to answer the hidden secrets of the story world. Gradually, certain rules and opinion leaders will form in the fan community. The potential of fan collectives is immense; apart from consistently generating new textual matter, they can also draw in additional enthusiasts.

In summary, the participatory nature of the audience includes the interpretation and re-creation of transmedia storytelling text content, the consumption and construction of text meaning, and interactivity.

## 1.4 Transmedia Research in the West

Research on transmedia storytelling in Western academia boasts a robust lineage. While its conceptual roots can be traced back to early explorations of media intertextuality (e.g., Kinder, 1991), Jenkins (2006) established the foundational framework for contemporary scholarship. In his seminal work, he foresaw that the web-based distribution of television would cultivate a global market for international producers—a prediction that has comprehensively materialised with today's proliferation of transnational streaming platforms.

The research primarily focuses on theories of transmedia narrative systems; innovative strategies such as worldbuilding, memory mechanisms, and compression/expansion; and communication and cultural power negotiation in the context of globalisation. Compared to the practical orientation of Chinese research, Western academia focuses more on building conceptual models, analysing power relations in cross-cultural communication, and theoretical discussion of narrative democratisation.

This divergence is closely related to different historical developments in media studies. In China, communication studies were imported, after the Reform and Opening-up periods, as an applied extension of journalism and propaganda work and have been consistently described as 'practice-oriented': geared toward policy guidance and media reform (Y. Liu & J. Qin, 2021). In

contrast, in North America and Europe the field was institutionalised earlier as a theory-driven social science and humanities discipline, where academic advancement depends heavily on the production of abstract models and critical concepts (Krämer, 2024).

Moreover, Chinese communication research is largely funded and evaluated by state and commercial actors, which encourages strategic and normative reflections on how media can serve nation-building and cultural diplomacy (Hu et al., 2015), whereas Western scholarship, supported by relatively autonomous universities and foundations, more often foregrounds power relations, inequalities and the democratisation of communication in a globalised media environment (Glück, 2018). Comparing these scholarships provides a critical perspective for understanding the global dissemination of web novel micro-drama adaptations.

### 1.4.1 Western Theoretical Traditions of Transmedia Storytelling

The phenomenon of adapting online novels into micro-dramas can be examined within the framework of transmedia storytelling. Jenkins (2007) proposed that transmedia storytelling tells a unified story across multiple media platforms, with each medium contributing irreplaceable content that collectively builds an extended story world. He emphasised that, amid media convergence, audiences are no longer passive consumers but active participants in the production and circulation of texts, forming a new ecology of participatory and spreadable media. Jenkins noted that the success of *The Matrix* arose from cinema, animation, games, and comics working in concert, enabling audiences to assemble dispersed clues for a complete experience (Jenkins, Lashley & Creech, 2017).

In a similar vein, Ryan and others differentiate transmedia storytelling from traditional adaptation, marketing, or multimodal narration. Ryan (2016) advocated replacing a narrow focus on storytelling with 'transmedia world-building,' arguing that the heart of transmedia projects lies in shaping a continually expanding universe rather than merely repeating plots across media. She distinguished 'world-dominated' from 'plot-dominated' narratives to describe projects driven by worldbuilding versus those still centred on a single storyline (Ryan, 2016).

Successful IP narratives often expand bottom-up through cumulative additions (such as Harry Potter fan extensions), not through one-off, top-down designs (Ryan, 2015)—offering a theoretical anchor for multi-platform development of online-novel IPs and directing attention to how different media share and enrich a common world.

Traditional adaptation studies focus on differences between novels and audiovisual media and mechanisms of conversion. Bluestone (2003) argued that novels rely on linguistic description

and reader imagination, whereas film and television present through audiovisual imagery; adaptation thus entails not mere plot relocation but the transformation of sign systems and reconstruction of narrative strategies. Bortolotti and Hutcheon (2007) posit the central tension between fidelity and re-creation: while adaptations seek to preserve the essence of the source to satisfy existing readers, they also require creative transformation to suit new audiences and media languages, leveraging audiovisual affordances (Beja, 1979)

From a popular culture perspective, the boom in adapting online novel IPs stems from built-in fan bases and commercially attractive genre elements, yet the process must guard against homogenisation (P. Luo, 2019, p.135). Drawing on the foundational tenets of reception aesthetics, adapters should strategically deploy Iser's (1978) 'gaps' and 'negations' to challenge the audience's established 'horizon of expectations'. Through techniques such as multilayered narrative subversions and perspective shifts, adaptations can continuously recalibrate fan anticipation and ultimately transcend the confines of the source text. In short, balancing narrative innovation with audience expectations is a key concern for all adaptations.

Micro-drama adaptations of online novels also raise issues of cross-cultural communication and reception. Chinese online literature and audiovisual works are gaining audiences worldwide, but viewers from different cultural backgrounds respond differently to the same IP adaptations, necessitating examination through a cross-cultural lens (Chen & Chang, 2024). Cross-cultural communication theory prompts attention to cultural discount effects—diminished appeal of cultural products abroad due to differences in values and aesthetics—and to the importance of localisation.

In recent years, China has advocated aligning cultural exports with national image building (Communist Party of China Central Committee, 2021). Theories of cross-cultural narration urge creators to negotiate the inherent tension between global resonance and cultural specificity, thereby comprehensively exploring the translatability and re-creation of cultural elements across diverse contexts.. Scholars suggest leveraging mythic motifs and universal emotions to transcend cultural barriers, while mobilising fan communities and digital platforms to promote participatory interpretation among foreign audiences (García, 2017). These perspectives support analyses of how micro-drama adaptations of online-novel IPs are received and re-created by overseas audiences: how texts embed within cultural contexts, how audiences participate through fan works in dissemination, and how media technologies reshape textual boundaries and literacies.

Jenkins (2006) established the core definition of transmedia storytelling, emphasising collaborative creation in the construction of an open story world that is "both independent and complementary," and relying on cross-sector collaboration to ensure brand consistency and

artistic integrity. Ryan (2012) advanced a 'database narrative' model centred on worldbuilding, permitting the derivation of multiple narrative units whilst preserving worldview coherence, thereby accommodating fragmented and modular consumption patterns. Jenkins (2006) also emphasised participatory culture: fans forming knowledge communities through interpretation, reconstruction, and reproduction, promoting the shift from individual consumption to network collaboration, thus also creating tension between institutional control and user participation.

Hutcheon and O'Flynn (2013), drawing from adaptation theory, posited that transmedia transformation constitutes a dynamic transmutation across the three modes of "telling-showing-interacting" (p.12) while commentary, editing, and fan works in the social media era collectively shape a decentralised, fluid narrative ecosystem. According to Freeman and Proctor (2018) "perhaps the biggest challenge and the biggest opportunity for understanding this transmedia phenomenon right now is the sheer breadth of its interpretation" (p.1). This is because increasingly "smaller national communities and often far less commercial cultures around the world are now beginning to make very different and altogether nationally specific uses of transmediality" (Freeman & Proctor, 2018).

## 1.4.2 Narrative Strategy Innovation

Traditionally, Western scholars have emphasised actionable narrative strategies. Harvey (2015) advocated a transition from 'vertical memory' to 'horizontal memory,' abandoning the pursuit of linear representation of the source text in favour of constructing combinable plot modules within a shared universe, underpinning cross-platform intertextuality via 'additive understanding' and examining the tension between IP governance and cultural memory.

Scolari (2013) proposed "coexisting expansion-compression" (p.18): micro-dramas as 'nano-texts' both fill gaps in the main storyline through refinement (compression) and expand meaning boundaries through multimodal expression (expansion), often aided by rhetoric such as collage, parody, and reset. Z. Fan (2024) focused on user participation design, pointing out that when the audience can intervene in the narrative process, their identity shifts from spectator to 'accomplice,' with the degree of immersion influenced by platform, experience expectations, and individual differences. Feiereisen et al. (2021) studied consumer behaviour models and suggested presetting multiple viewing paths and entry points for different users, while balancing local emotional structures and global circulation potential.

### 1.4.3 Participatory Communication and Cultural Power Negotiation in the Global Context

In the context of global communication, research focuses on cultural translation, power relations, and narrative democratisation. Jenkins, Lashley, and Creech (2017) pointed out that user-generated content and social sharing become key drivers of narrative diffusion, and communication effectiveness relies on the involvement of diverse voices and localised reconstruction. Gambarato (2012) emphasised guiding cross-platform tracking through 'narrative gaps' and 'migratory cues,' and advocated for open mechanisms like voting decisions to enhance fluidity.

Edwards et al. (2024) argued that transmedia practices should focus on intermedial meaning linkage and emotional resonance, both adapting to the reception habits of the target culture and maintaining the source text's characteristics in language, symbols, and values, while actively constructing fluid and inclusive identity narratives to enhance international resonance. Jensen (2016) employed a three-tiered textual system to parse transmedia intertextuality, positing that digital media function as "meta-media" (p.7), facilitating the integration of local semiotics into universal narrative structures. Latt (2024) used the integration of Korean webtoons and K-Pop as an example, showing that a narrative system of "visual storytelling + symbolic elements" (pp. 50, 59) reduces language barriers and can result in specific values and aesthetics.

## 1.5 Research Gaps and Limitations

Current scholarship predominantly concentrates on singular case studies and is deficient in the categorical synthesis of innovative pathways and the validation of underlying mechanisms. For instance, empirical models are still lacking to describe how 'world-driven' narratives in micro-dramas utilise 'nano-texts' to simultaneously address gaps in the central plotline and sustain worldview coherence; likewise, the collaboration principles governing common tropes ('underdog triumph,' 'sweet pet') remain inadequately delineated.

Participatory mechanisms are frequently reduced to superficial interactions such as *danmaku*—(a real-time, on-screen commentary system that fosters a sense of virtual co-viewing), and comments; the discourse inadequately addresses how open production forms like UGC (user-generated content) and voting reconfigure narrative authority, and how algorithms covertly constrain the scope of participation (Jenkins, 2006; Scolari, 2013). Current scholarship remains predominantly descriptive, often falling short of exploring the underlying mechanisms. Specifically, there is a dearth of cross-cultural quantitative evidence to address two critical

dimensions: first, how the unique affordances of vertical-screen immersion cognitively and emotionally foster cross-cultural empathy; and second, how the infrastructural homogenisation driven by recommendation algorithms ultimately impacts cultural diversity (Hu & Liu, 2024; Lyu & Tan, 2025).

The prevalence of single-case study methodologies constrains generalisability and transferability, while the lack of cross-regional comparisons (e.g., against Webtoon adaptations) and discussion of the ethics and systems of AI mediation (AI voice emotion recognition, human-AI collaborative workflows) hinders prospective guidance for future creative paradigms (Su & Li, 2024; Wang & Yang, 2024).

## 1.6 Summary

Research since 2020 has transitioned its focus from micro-level 'media conversion mechanisms' to the macro-dynamics of transnational media ecosystems. Consensus includes: narrative cohesion enhancing transmedia storytelling through multi-platform expansion and audience participation (Hutcheon & O'Flynn, 2013; Jenkins, 2006; Ryan, 2012); web novel micro-dramas, with their lightness and high emotional density, becoming potential carriers for Chinese culture going global (Li & Xia, 2024); and the capacity of multimodal visual storytelling and algorithmic curation to effectively lower cross-cultural barriers, to some extent (Lyu & Tan, 2025).

Disagreements lie in how transmedia storytelling is positioned (artistic paradigm or commercial tool), innovation priorities (technology-driven or content-based), and research methods' over-reliance on individual cases, lacking cross-cultural comparison and quantitative verification (Kwon & Byun, 2016). Future research necessitates a mechanism-oriented integrative framework that joins narrative innovation with cross-cultural dissemination and evaluates its efficacy through data-driven and comparative studies (Peña & James, 2023).

## 2 Transmedia Narrative Ecosystems: Media Convergence and the Expansion of Micro-Drama

### 2.1 Transmedia Storytelling in the Era of Convergence Culture

In the context of contemporary convergence culture, the core of transmedia storytelling is not mere “reskinning and redistribution,” but the co-evolution within a shared story world (Jenkins, 2006, p.95). Its basic elements consist of the circulation and corroboration of content; collaboration within media industries around a unified narrative goal; and audience participation across platforms (Scolari, 2009).

Expansion provides audiences with a broader text–audience experience and sustained motivation to participate (Hutcheon et al., 2007). This denotes differentiated content dividing interpretive labor required to bridge narrative gaps in character motives and relationships, thereby compensating for the textual compression inherent in short-form media.. It also comprises coordination on the channel side, combining full episodes, repackaged materials, ancillary content, social interaction, live events, and branded merchandise to broaden reach while deepening immersion. Lastly, it also contains multi-platform production collaboration, using a worldview, timeline, and causal matrix to ensure consistency, guarding against waste caused by duplicative production under copyright/licensing regimes (Kinder, 1991).

Crucially, audiences are no longer passive recipients. Transmedia contexts disrupt one-way power relations; discursive agency is increasingly decentralised and shared with audiences, and participatory culture becomes the driving force for the sustained growth of the story world. In the industry, this mechanism requires that each platform establish co-creation points for audience migration and creativity (Ni, 2025). It also explains why frequent exposure/reinterpretation/reentry forms a loop of immersion (Mittell, 2015).

Accordingly, this chapter establishes the theoretical foundation for the study. It sketches the logic of coordinated expansion across content, channels, and establishes analytical criteria for subsequent discussion of content extension, channel expansion, and production integration.

#### 2.1.1 Norms for Expansion at the Level of Media Content

Expansion of transmedia content is not arbitrary; but obeys specific evaluative criteria to ensure that each medium-specific text stands alone while enhancing the overall experience.

Firstly, transmedia expansions should enrich the original story. New content should not be

redundant; but add new dimensions, deepening character backstories, extending plot threads, or enhancing thematic expression (Harvey, 2015). For example, beyond the core novels and films of *Harry Potter*, the official 'Wizarding World' materials (e.g., histories, character backstories) further expand readers' knowledge, rendering the world more three-dimensional.

Secondly, maintaining narrative coherence with the source text is paramount. Transmedia storytelling demands that content across media maintain consistency in logic, style, and theme to avoid contradictions or disjunctions. The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) exemplifies this: each standalone film adheres to a unified worldview and character bible while weaving interrelated plots and details that collectively build a coherent narrative system. Such unity reinforces both credibility and immersion. Thirdly, expansion should bridge diegetic gaps within the primary text. Transmedia often addresses unelaborated arcs or details to offer audiences a fuller understanding (Klastrup & Tosca, 2004).

In *Game of Thrones*, for instance, underexplored backstories in the TV series are supplemented by official publications, making the world more complete. Finally, superior transmedia expansions aspire to cultivate emergent meanings, supplementing the original narrative while imbuing it with new connotations and values through differentiated media affordances. In *Star Wars* franchise, films, animation, comics, and novels pursue common themes (justice, freedom, choice) through distinct modalities, making each part indispensable to the whole. Content does not expand without limits; it must adhere to a unified narrative system. Medium specific texts retain autonomy, but they must echo one another in storyworld mythos, causal plot logic, and character arcs (Klastrup & Tosca, 2004).

Consider the *Three Body Problem*: the novels, audio dramas, and comics each present stories within the same universe through distinct modalities, yet all strictly follow the work's scientific premises and philosophical concerns, ensuring consistency and depth. Consequently, transmedia content expansion typically maintains a stable world architecture. The worldview provides common rules and frameworks across media. In *The Lord of the Rings*, whether in novels, films, or games, Tolkien's Middle Earth—its history, peoples, geography, and languages—remains the backbone. This unity supports cross-media narration and gives audiences a coherent experience.

In summary, transmedia storytelling diversifies narrative expression across media, affording audiences a more plural and profound experiential engagement.

### 2.1.2 Coordinated Operations of Diverse Media Channels

In an era of increasing media convergence, transmedia storytelling depends on the coordinated operation of diverse channels, key to understanding expansion mechanisms. With rapid

advances in digital technology, new platforms proliferate from traditional books and screen media to social media, short video platforms, interactive games, and virtual reality - an emerging rich media ecosystem (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013).

Meanwhile, audience access has become fragmented and diversified, opening space for transmedia practice. Distinct channels, each with unique dissemination traits and audience segments, can effectively attract niches and offer varied points of entry. Such channel orchestration allows every audience member to enter the story world in a way that suits them, dedicated readers, spectacle seekers, and interaction enthusiasts alike.

This coordinated multichannel approach creates a distinct sense of being enveloped by the story world, which is consolidated through repeated reinforcement. Each encounter via a different channel strengthens understanding and emotional investment. Cross-channel experiences corroborate and complement one another to build a vivid, multifaceted universe (Kinder, 1991).

At the same time, the expansion of channels multiplies opportunities for audience participation. Expanded channels are not mutually exclusive or competitive; being complementary and combinable. Each channel, leveraging its distinct appeal, reaches different audience types, while internal narrative logic connects them. A successful online literature adaptation might deploy social media marketing following its debut, disseminate video highlights via short-video platforms, organise discussions in online communities, and use physical merchandise to reinforce brand recognition.. Such coordination enlarges coverage and enhances narrative penetration and impact. In short, coordinated multichannel narration has become a crucial pathway for constructing immersive story worlds under media convergence. Through smart channel design and content distribution, it creates rich, coherent experiences that satisfy diversified media habits while enabling possibilities for extending and deepening the world.

### 2.1.3 From Linear to Transmedia Coordinated Modes of Media Production

Throughout media history, transformations in production modes have been tightly coupled with technological evolution. Traditionally, industries followed a linear production model in which content production depended entirely on the carrier medium (Caldwell, 2008): print media focused on text reportage; radio on audio; television on audiovisual programs.

Narration was fixed and singular; cross-medium theme reuse or collaboration was rare, with each medium producing and circulating content in relatively closed systems. With the rise of digital and network technologies, change accelerated. A key marker of this transformation is that a single story began to be systematically presented across multiple platforms. Collaborative narration among media gradually replaced single medium production (Johnson, 2013).

This new mode leverages each platform's narrative strengths to generate diverse outputs while maintaining internal consistency of the story world.

Through collaboration and mutual corroboration, heterogeneous formats propel story world development. This collaborative mode has notable effects. Firstly, the boundaries of the world are continually extended across transmedia. Secondly, platforms are developed for richer forms: social media excels at constructing character/audience interaction; mobile apps deliver personalised experiences; virtual reality can create immersive environments. Such forms greatly expand expressive power and affective impact.

Transmedia has fundamentally altered the nature of content production, as outputs are generated through the interweaving of multiple sign systems (Murray, 2009). Coordinated narration disrupts linearity to create three-dimensional, plural experiences.

As an example, online literature—rich in imagination and psychological nuance—can construct complex worlds and relationships; screen works intensify spectacle and emotional tension through integrated audiovisual language; comics deliver kinetic panel-based narration via visual semiotics; and audio drama sparks the listener's imagination with the power of sound.

Coordination among these forms broadens and deepens the story while diversifying audience experience. However, where platforms merely restate the core story or make only minor variations, the effect of transmedia is greatly weakened. Authentic transmedia should be more than the sum of their parts.

Thus, collaborative narration represents a new direction for media production. Realising its full potential nonetheless requires surmounting rights management challenges and creating incentives for innovation. As technologies advance, collaborative modes could display greater vitality and creativity.

## 2.2 Narrative Innovation of Micro-Drama under Transmedia

### Convergence

#### 2.2.1 Structural Innovations and Experiments in Micro-Narrative Structure

A product of media convergence, micro-drama spans an array of genres and subjects, with continually innovating narrative modes to match evolving audience demand for cultural products (Y. Jiang, 2024). As a novel audiovisual form, its structural shifts have spearheaded creative reform. Recent industry data indicate that weekly penetration of micro-drama has surpassed 50%, with 31% of users watching more than one hour daily, signaling its growth into a mode of mainstream daily entertainment (Miaozhen Systems, 2025).

Temporally, micro-dramas employ rapid exposition and eschew traditional backstories, and present core conflict and plot directly (M. Wang, 2024). In growth and inspiration micro-dramas, for example, brand-integrated narratives leveraging the 'independent woman' archetype convey messages within minimal time, suiting fragmented viewing habits (iResearch, 2024, p. 31). The result is a stronger dramatic jolt within a short duration. A compact structure—rapid scene changes and brisk dialogue—ensures that each beat locks into the next. The hit micro-drama *Inside and Outside the Family (Jiali Jiawai)* precisely calibrated its rhythm; performance indicators increased significantly every year, garnering multiple high-profile industry awards.

Micro-dramas experiment widely with narrative techniques. Beyond traditional chronological or analeptic (flashback) narration, they employ parallel and nonlinear strategies. The Shenzhen Health Commission's popular science micro-drama *Traveling into a CEO Micro-Drama to Do Science* (2024) borrows 'popular online fiction tropes such as chuangyue (time-travel), zhongsheng (reincarnation), and the 'domineering CEO' archetype to create emotions via impossible scenarios, creating attention grabbing stories whilst disseminating medical knowledge. Micro-dramas also explore interactive narration, allowing viewers to co-create the story by choosing plot directions and interacting with characters (Ryan & Thon, 2014). China's first Mars-themed interactive science micro-drama *Flight to Mars* lets audiences unlock different branches, learning planetary science while enjoying narrative play. Tencent Video and China Police Net coproduced *Master*, the first antidrug interactive micro-drama, which offers action or plot options at key junctures to heighten participation and immersion.

Creatively, the form privileges tight plotting and emotional intensity within limited length. Through carefully engineered beats and nuanced characterisation, emotional resonance is created (S. Jiang & J. Wang, 2022). Micro-dramas also absorb strengths from film and web series, blending popular elements and styles.

### 2.2.2 Innovations in Character Construction

Given time constraints, the challenge is to render well-rounded characters swiftly and vividly. Labeling becomes a primary tactic: stereotypes ("tall rich handsome," "white rich beauty," "live in son-in-law of a wealthy family") enable rapid audience recognition (Wu, 2022).

In micro-dramas such as *Shengxia Fendela* (adapted from *Three Years of Cold War, We Filed for Divorce and He Regretted It with Red Eyes*) and *After the Early Dead White Moonlight Returns after Eleven Years, the Capital Is in Chaos* (adapted from *The Early Dead White Moonlight Returns after Eleven Years*), character images are easily recognised and accepted—proof of the strategy's efficacy. Micro-dramas are adept at minute detail to capture distinct traits and inner worlds: speech, gestures, and interactions with environments reveal personality

and affect, enabling quick identification. In the vertical video ecology, the vertical frame limits onscreen headcount; thus, tight focus on the protagonist is common. Close attention to expressions, micro-movements, and demeanor conveys character (Gao & Wu, 2019), maximising personality transmission within constrained frames.

At the level of character design, micro-dramas endow figures with distinctive backstories, traits, and values that provoke empathy or aversion, prompting reflection on humanity, emotion, and social issues. In *Quest for Safeguarding Treasures (Hubaoxunzong)*, for example, the focus shifts from the supernatural sensationalism typical of tomb-robbing genres to the growth of young archaeologists, yielding more realistic character development.

### 2.2.3 Novelty in Plot Engineering

Micro-dramas leverage tight plotting and suspense to intensify affective resonance. Suspenseful stories ignite curiosity, pulling audiences to continue watching and chase updates. As tension engineered through rolling climaxes mounts, viewers experience joys and sorrows alongside the characters. Data from 2025 show further contraction toward five-episode micro-drama arcs: the share of those tagged '1–5 episodes' rose from 40% to 57%, necessitating even tighter, climax-driven plotting (Gouzheng Technology, 2025).

Harnessing the interactive affordances of new platforms, micro-dramas invite audiences into narration through bullet screens and replies, making them part of the story. In informational science micro-dramas, this has been especially potent: *Flight to Mars* and *Master* use this audience interaction to engage with learning via entertainment.

These innovations break the frame of traditional TV storytelling and grant micro-dramas richer expressive space. As artificial intelligence is increasingly integrated into the production pipeline—ranging from algorithmic scriptwriting and storyboarding to automated scene generation—narrative construction can be meticulously calibrated to align with granular audience preferences. As technology advances, innovation in plot engineering could further catalyse formal transformation.

## 2.3 Overseas Circulation of Micro-Drama

The overseas expansion of Chinese micro-drama is a systemic 'glocalisation' project rather than a simple export of cultural products. The aim is to execute global commonalities in content distribution and implement a global framework for narrative themes, monetisation strategies, and operations, while executing precise local adaptations in narrative elements, pricing, and team building. This unifies global appeal with local affinity (Z. Chen, 2025).

### 2.3.1 New Dynamics of Chinese Micro-Drama Abroad

Since 2023, Chinese micro-drama has surged overseas. Leading Chinese micro-drama platforms recorded 28.23 million global downloads in 2023, an explosive increase over 2022. The app ReelShort (under ChineseAll) even topped the U.S. iOS Entertainment chart, signaling strong momentum in Europe and North America (Z. Chen, 2025). Micro-drama has therefore taken up the baton from online literature as new vehicle for China's cultural outreach. This pattern rests on a foundation of online literature: over two decades, China has amassed abundant IP and adaptation experience. From 2021 to 2022, micro-drama filings grew 600%; classic IPs from Jinjiang Literature City, Qidian, and others now supply a continuous stream (Ren, 2022). Micro-drama has become a key route to unlock the latent commercial potential of online literature IP, especially mid-tier properties. The new overseas landscape resulting from market opportunities and content innovation offers a fresh pathway for the global circulation of Chinese popular culture.

### 2.3.2 Glocalisation: Integrating Globalisation and Localisation

Globalised micro-drama combines global themes and forms with localised narrative elements. Producers draw on a proven repertoire of themes honed by online literature: rise from below, rebirth, turbulent romance, revenge, and so on. These themes map onto universal emotional structures, such as power dynamics and underdog redemption arcs, which constitute a universally resonant narrative foundation (Hogan, 2003).

Micro-drama inherits the forms of China's established "Shuang" (cathartic) media grammar: high pace, sensational high density, and heightened affect. Each 1–2 minutes episode packs in suspense, conflict, and reversal, eschewing traditional setup to deliver maximum instantaneous narrative catharsis—optimally matching hyper-fragmented media consumption habits and the continuous demand for sensory stimulation.

At the level of narrative elements, deep localisation reduces cultural barriers. Three strategies stand out:

- Topics and symbols tuned to local taste: In the West, ReelShort successfully deploys supernatural romance tropes (e.g., werewolves and vampires); in Southeast Asia, FlexTV and MoboReels emphasise bittersweet melodramas and angst; in Japan, TopShort blends the Japanese "ojōsama" (the wealthy, aristocratic heiress archetype) genre with workplace elements.
- Casting, settings, and language are localised (Time Magazine, 2025): Local casts increase identification; situational symbols (e.g., replacing Chinese 'matchmaking at the civil office' with mixer parties or church weddings) heighten immersion. Beyond basic

subtitles and dubbing, micro-dramas employ linguistic transcreation—rewriting culture-specific internet slang into resonant local idioms and adjusting conversational power dynamics to align with regional social norms.

- Value calibration: For Western markets, classic 'high-handed' (bossy president) male power fantasies are adjusted toward dual protagonist parity, granting female leads more independence and resistance to align with social norms (Liu, 2024).

### 2.3.3 Global Business Framework with Local Pricing

Business strategies combine globalised distribution/monetisation with localised pricing. Distribution platforms mix paid user acquisition (app store ads) with social funneling (free clips on YouTube/TikTok), using high conflict hooks to trigger curiosity and drive app downloads. Monetisation typically employs a soft paywall, combining per episode purchases, ad monetisation, and subscriptions (Li et al., 2024). Users unlock episodes by paying, watching ads, or completing tasks for virtual currency—an effective exploitation of suspense driven habits.

For pricing, platforms adopt differentiated local rates based on economic level and payment habits (He & Wang, 2016). In high ARPU markets like the U.S., per episode pricing on ShortMax is around US\$0.40; in Southeast Asia (the Philippines, Thailand), prices drop to US\$0.20, with more ad-unlock activities, precisely matching perceived content value to broaden the base and maximise revenue.

### 2.3.4 Global Operations with Local Teams

Operations reflect global concepts within localised teams. Globalised micro-dramas operate on algorithmic distribution mechanisms: modelling profiles of overseas users, deploying personalised recommendations, and rapidly replicating popular genres, such as werewolf stories (ReelShort Werewolf Hub, 2025; Tang, 2025). They also build transmedia ecologies, linking online literature, micro-dramas, and interactive games. For example, ShortMax's hit *Awakening Rejected Mate* (2023) adapts an overseas werewolf novel, while ReelShort's *The Double Life of My Billionaire Husband* (2023) derives from an interactive game. Such integration extends the storyworld and heightens consumer retention.

Localised creative and operational teams are crucial (Keane & Moran, 2008). Many firms emulate the success of online literature globalisation, adopting a transnational co-authorship model that pairs China-based showrunners with localised scriptwriters, such as the bilingual team in California set up by producers Dianzhong Technology (*Forest Dream*). Leveraging cultural competence and lived experience, local writers understand local aesthetics and cultural preferences in topic selection, narration, and language. Localisation can therefore comprise content transformation and marketing.

In summary, micro-dramas undergo a multilevel, systemic process of 'glocalisation': global themes with local elements in creation; global models with local pricing in business; and global concepts with local teams in operations. Originating in China, micro-drama has been transformed into a cultural product capable of taking root in diverse terrains.

### 3 Research Methodology

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, building an analytical framework grounded in transmedia narrative theory to systematically explore the narrative transformation mechanisms and dissemination effects involved in adapting web novels into micro-dramas, integrating qualitative and quantitative methods.

The research design comprised three core steps: first, selecting representative cases through purposive sampling; second, conducting in-depth structural analysis of the cases using textual analysis; finally, applying quantitative content analysis to systematically code and quantitatively process audience feedback data. This research design was a foundation for the theoretical depth of the study and the comprehensiveness of empirical data, enabling a complete presentation of the pathways and communication patterns of web novel micro-drama adaptations from the dual perspectives of production and reception.

In terms of research sample selection, this study adopted a stratified sampling strategy, gathering two types of data: case samples and data samples. The case samples comprised the two online novels :*Fortune Writer* and *How Dare You?*, along with their micro-drama adaptations, selected based on three criteria: dissemination impact, cross-cultural attributes, and material integrity. Table 3.1 summarises basic information about the two case studies. Importantly, *Fortune Writer* was selected as a typical representative of the local cultural context, demonstrating traditional cultural elements in transmedia narrative conversion; while *How Dare You?*, with its international narrative style, was selected as it typifies adaptation and reconstruction in the cross-cultural communication process.

**Table 3.1.**

*Case Sample Details*

Online Novel	<i>Fortune Writer</i>	<i>How Dare You?</i>
Author	Lin Yannian	Qi Yingjun
Micro-Drama	Fortune Writer	How Dare You?
Platform	WeTV	iQiyi
Release	2024.3.20	2025.6.28
Episodes	24	89
Episode Length	17min	2min
Genre	Romance, Fantasy, Ancient	Romance, Fantasy, Ancient

The data sample was derived from user commentary data for *How Dare You?* on the Douban

platform, gathered as a complete sample using custom Python scraping scripts, and refined through rigorous data preprocessing—encompassing deduplication and noise reduction—to construct a standardised textual corpus amenable to quantitative analysis. This sample structure design ensured both the depth of qualitative research and provided sufficient data support for quantitative analysis.

The research process of this study followed strict academic norms and unfolded in a sequence of theoretical construction, case analysis, and data verification.

Firstly, grounded in transmedia narrative theory, an analytical framework was constructed across three dimensions: storyworld construction, cross-media narrative expansion, and audience engagement, furnishing theoretical direction for the ensuing investigation.

Secondly, in-depth textual analysis was performed on the two case samples via close reading and comparative analysis. The continuities and innovations across narrative elements, semiotic systems, and affective structures between source texts and adaptations were systematically investigated, paying special attention to the mechanisms through which distinct media attributes influence narrative articulation.

Lastly, quantitative content analysis was applied to the collected commentary samples. By devising a systematic coding protocol (see Sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2), unstructured textual data was converted into quantifiable analytical units, whereupon methods such as lexical frequency analysis, computational sentiment analysis, and thematic categorisation were used to uncover audience reception patterns and evaluative dimensions regarding the adaptations.

The research process emphasised mutual verification and complementarity between methods, ensuring that the research findings possess both theoretical explanatory power and the support of empirical data, thereby enhancing the reliability of the research conclusions. The methodological innovation of this study lies in combining traditional text analysis methods with computational text analysis techniques, constructing an analytical framework capable of handling both structural text and non-structural data simultaneously.

At the specific operational level, textual analysis employs the constant comparative method, refining narrative patterns through an iterative coding process. Content analysis, aided by computational linguistics methods, achieves systematic processing of large-scale text data. This hybrid approach broadens analytical dimensions in literary and screen studies while offering a novel methodological paradigm for transmedia narrative research, with considerable academic and applicative value.

### **Figure 3**

*Mixed methods visualised in three stages. Icons remixed and reused under CC Licensing from*

Freepik and Flat Icon.

1. TRANSMEDIA ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK



2. CASE STUDIES

3. COMMENTARY TEXTS



## 4. Building the Story-World of *Fortune Writer* in a Transmedia Context

### 4.1 Story World Construction Philosophy and Intertextual Narrative Logic

The primary objective of a transmedia narrative is the synergistic construction of a story-world across diverse media platforms, with each platform's content offering distinct and meaningful additions to the narrative whole (Jenkins, 2006). What, then, constitutes a story world? Ryan (2012) compares it to a block of cheese, requiring constant filling of its holes to achieve a complete and cohesive representation.

This explains the preference in transmedia narrative for fantastical genres, such as period dramas set in constructed worlds and imaginative *Xianxia* tales. *Xianxia* (literally 'immortal heroes') is a Chinese fantasy genre heavily inspired by Daoism, martial arts, and traditional mythology, focusing on characters' cultivation of spiritual powers. Operating at a high degree of ontological distance from empirical reality, these worlds inherently contain expansive narrative gaps that invite active audience interpretation and world-building, effectively stimulating audiences to interpret the texts, creating the desired interactions of transmedia storytelling.

The source novel for this chapter's case study, the micro-drama *Fortune Writer*, is set in an alternate pseudo-historical era. Layered with rich aesthetic environments, unconventional narrative tropes, and multifaceted character archetypes, it crafts a distinct fictional universe characterised by profound conceptual world-building and removed from the ordinary.

The metatextual plot, involves Su Yunqi, discovering she is a character subject to the whims of the 'Book of Fate' penned by a mysterious author, and attempts to change predestined tragedies.

This chapter focuses on the significance of story world construction. Using the intertextuality present in *Fortune Writer* as a starting point, this chapter examines the intertextual relationships between media content during the novel's adaptation into a micro-drama, investigating how the literary source and its audiovisual adaptation employ intertextual strategies to intertwine, building a cohesive story world while also utilising narrative fragments dispersed across both media platforms to enhance the audience experience.

Specifically, this chapter probes the intertextuality between the literary and audiovisual texts by

examining events, plotlines, and characters, identifying narrative alterations and exploring how newly introduced elements interact with the source material.

### 4.1.1 Principles of Transmedia Storytelling

Jenkins' (2010) seven principles of transmedia storytelling offer a systematic theoretical framework for assessing a story IP's suitability for cross-media adaptation, particularly its potential for conversion into a micro-drama format. These seven principles are interconnected and collectively contribute to the expansion and enrichment of the story world.

#### **Spreadability and Drillability**

The story world offers both easily shareable and quickly accessible entry points, as well as deep mysteries that allow core enthusiasts to engage in exploration. Micro-drama, with its fragmented nature and fast pace, inherently serves as an ideal entry point, captivating broad audiences with highly intense narrative snippets. Concurrently, it can direct viewers to engage in deeper 'drilling' across associated media (e.g., novels, comics) by embedding intertextual cues, hidden narrative nodes, and unresolved enigmas.

#### **Continuity and Diversity**

Transmedia storytelling requires maintaining continuity in the macro worldview while pursuing diversity in specific media expressions. Micro-drama adaptation must strictly follow the core worldview settings (such as basic rules, key history, character relationships) to ensure brand consistency; but at the same time, it can fully utilise the advantages of its audiovisual language and narrative rhythm to showcase a unique charm different from the original novel, achieving diversity in its formats.

#### **Immersion and Extractability**

Effective transmedia narratives enables immersion within the story world, while simultaneously allowing audiences to effortlessly extract core elements, facilitating seamless transitions between different media. Micro-drama allows for the audience to become immersed through strong visual spectacle and emotional impact. Furthermore, to fully realise 'extractability,' these adaptations must provide cultural artifacts that viewers can extract and deploy in their physical, everyday lives—such as viral catchphrases, replicable aesthetic behaviors, or tangible branded merchandise—thereby extending consumer engagement beyond the screen.

#### **Worldbuilding**

The essence of transmedia narrative is prioritising the world over the story. Assessing an IP's potential for micro-drama adaptation hinges on whether its worldview possesses ample scope

and depth to sustain multiple standalone yet interrelated micro-drama series, beyond merely recounting a singular, linear protagonist's tale.

### **Seriality**

This implies the narrative is composed of multiple interconnected installments. The serialised format of micro-drama inherently aligns with this principle. Each season of micro-drama can serve as a relatively complete narrative unit, collectively piecing together a bigger story picture, cultivating viewers' sustained attention and habit of following the series.

### **Subjectivity**

Transmedia storytelling allows multiple characters or groups to become the focus of the story. This opens abundant possibilities for micro-drama development, such as creating individual micro-drama series centred on different members of the main cast, or narrating from an antagonist's viewpoint.

### **Performance**

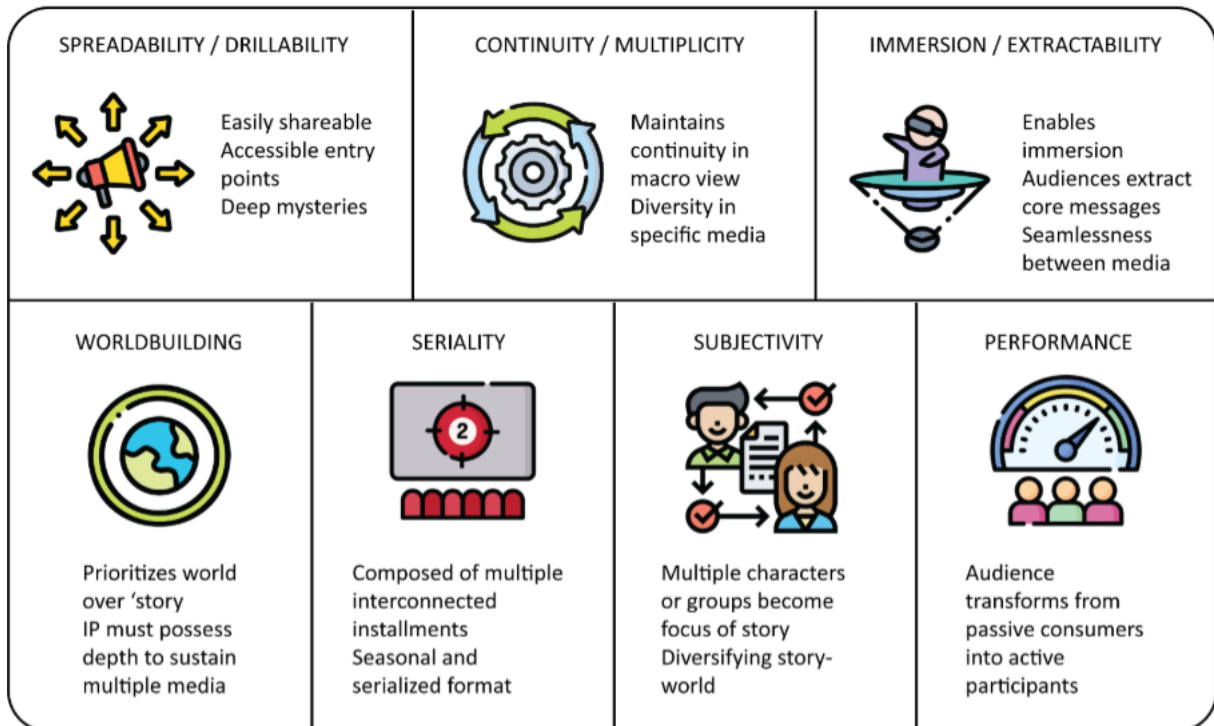
Transmedia storytelling encourages the audience to transform from passive consumers into active participants. Micro-drama can incentivise viewers to engage in secondary creation, plot interpretation, and social sharing by setting open endings and sparking social topic discussions, thereby forming a powerful community effect that feeds back into the IP's popularity.

Jenkins' seven principles constitute a comprehensive framework for evaluating the viability and direction of micro-drama adaptation, centred on evaluating the potential of the original IP to evolve from a single story into an expansive world. These principles have distinct emphases and are intrinsically linked to intertextual narration and story-world building (see figure 4).

### **Figure 4**

*Jenkins' Systematic Theoretical Framework for Assessing Story IP's Suitability for Cross-Media Adaptation. Visualising the Content/Platform/Algorithm/Globalisation Pathway. Icons remixed and reused under CC Licensing from Freepik, Flat Icon and PNGAAA.*

## SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF TRANSMEDIA NARRATIVE



### 4.1.2 The Philosophy of Story World Construction in Transmedia Narratives

This section will explore the concepts of 'fictional world' and 'possible world', to help explain story world construction in a transmedia storytelling context.

#### Story Worlds and Possible Worlds

Building upon the concepts of the 'possible world' and audience 'recentering' (Ryan, 2012), the micro-drama *Fortune Writer* can be viewed as a concrete realisation of a specific possible world: ancient officialdom and familial ethics, augmented by supernatural elements such as the Book of Fate, constructing a textual reality world at the fictional level. This world is distinct from the real world yet references real-world experiences. When audiences engage with the micro-drama and its related adaptations, supplementary materials, and derivative creations, they psychologically recentre around this world.

Through this process, they actively interpret character motivations, extrapolate the diegetic laws governing fate, and bridge implicit narrative lacunae. Essentially, the audience recentres the world (further enriching the textual reality world) into a relatively stable story world in their

minds. Thus, *Fortune Writer* offers a fantastical version of a possible world grounded in the real world; additionally, through continuous recentering practices by the audience, this fictional world gradually acquires a more complete form as it circulates across media.

### **Fictional Worlds and Accessibility Relations**

If a fictional world shares ontological properties or empirical logic with the actual world, they are deemed mutually accessible. Consequently, if a fictional world includes impossible entities or logic, it can thereby access the impossible world, a world that cannot exist in reality (Zhang, 2017). The accessibility relations between the fictional world, the actual world and the impossible world profoundly affect the narrative's aesthetic reception and immersive potential. The higher the accessibility value between the fictional world and the actual world, the more similar content they share, and the more real the fictional world will feel (Alber, 2009).

Conversely, closer accessibility relations with the impossible world render its fantastical nature more pronounced. Furthermore, transmedia story worlds often maintain accessibility relations with both the actual and impossible worlds. Fictional worlds closer to the impossible world demand greater interpretive and supplementary effort from audiences, who in turn find it easier to immerse themselves in such works and undergo a recentering experience (Ryan & Thon, 2014).

However, this doesn't imply that proximity to the impossible world inherently benefits transmedia narratives. Story world construction must also adhere to the 'principle of minimal departure' where audience comprehension relies on the activation of knowledge from their actual life experiences (Ryan, 2015). Thus, story worlds are ontologically dependent upon the actual world. A fantastical fictional world must not stray too far from realistic norms, lest it become cognitively alienating to audiences. In conclusion, the accessibility relations between a transmedia story world and both the actual and impossible worlds determine the fictional world's genre and scale, which in turn critically influence subsequent transmedia cinematic or televisual adaptation.

In *Fortune Writer*, the story world operates on multiple levels—such as the functioning of bureaucracy, family structures, and gender power dynamics—by extensively drawing on real-world experiences. This allows the audience to rely on pre-existing knowledge to understand the characters' situations and emotional responses, thereby maintaining a high degree of relevance to the real world. On the other hand, through supernatural elements like the Book of Fate, the character of the Writer, and the 'awakening of non-player character (NPC) self-awareness,' the work introduces elements unattainable in reality, establishing a strong connection with the impossible world. This prompts the audience to actively deduce the rules of this framework and fill in narrative gaps, thereby enhancing immersion. Under the combined

influence of these two relationships, the fictional world of *Fortune Writer* is shaped into a cohesive narrative universe that synthesises empirical realism with speculative fantastical elements. This duality effectively offers the optimal condition for transmedia storytelling: the grounding in real-world experiences ensures immediate audience accessibility, while the distinct fantastical elements provide the necessary narrative 'gaps' for active exploration. This provides a relatively solid foundation for transmedia expansions, such as film and television adaptations, audio dramas, and supplementary texts.

## Modes of Story World Construction

Based on the modes of transmedia worldbuilding discussed previously, *Fortune Writer* aligns more closely with a satellite model: the original novel and the micro-drama together form a narrative central star, carrying a complete worldview and character relationships. The audio drama of the same name, supplementary texts, as well as interpretations and fan creations on community and short video platforms, function as satellites orbiting this core narrative. These elements primarily supplement and enhance the emotional depth and character portrayal, rather than reconstructing the narrative structure by adding key plot elements or opening independent timelines. The transmedia development of *Fortune Writer* has not yet evolved into a tree-like structure that heavily relies on multiple media texts to complete the overall setting, nor has it developed into a radial narrative universe with multiple parallel timelines and protagonist pathways emanating from a common starting point. Its transmedia practice can generally be regarded as a phase of cross-media upgrading and brand management for online literature IP.

### 4.1.3 The Intertextual Narrative Logic of Transmedia Storytelling

Previously, this chapter took a broad perspective of transmedia storytelling. This section shifts focus to the microscopic level—the intertextual linkages between the story texts within a transmedia narrative, with the objects of study being the various texts contributing to the story itself. Transmedia intertextuality encompasses two notions: firstly, the narrator's re-shaping of content through the interactive utilisation of prior textual works; and secondly, the stimulation of audiences to explore intertextual content upon receiving a text (Kinder, 1991; Jenkins, 1992).

The following analysis will detail how the creation and expansion of media texts within a transmedia narrative integrate these two intertextual concepts, and in doing so, make distinctive and valuable contributions to the overall story. With the extension of media, the

text's actual world absorbs some clues from the original story-world and then uses the characteristics of the media platform to supplement the text content, allowing more possible worlds to be realised; this is the transformation process of transmedia storytelling texts (Ryan & Thon, 2014).

To achieve this intertextual expansion, creators must carefully orchestrate narrative clues. On one hand, creators need to keep the core content unchanged, such as setting and characters; on the other, creators can also create some fragmented narrative clues, open a small gap in the story, and leave it open for the audience to solve the mystery and fill the hole. Intentional narrative gaps left by the author provide greater scope for interpretation (Mittell, 2015). The aim is to further stimulate the audience's desire for deep exploration. These are all ways to enhance intertextuality in transmedia storytelling. To realise the ideal state of transmedia narrative—a win-win scenario for creators and audiences alike—the intertextuality of story texts across different media must evolve and be continuously refined.

## 4.2 The Construction of the Story World in the Micro-Drama

### Adaptation of *Fortune Writer*

According to Ryan (2022), transmedia narrative is essentially a process of "telling different stories centred around a pre-existing story-world" (p. 182). This section examines the choice of story world type and its construction mode in the transition from the novel *The Writer* to the micro-drama *Fortune Writer*.

#### 4.2.1 Selection of a Fantasy Story World Based on Accessibility

Most renowned transmedia storytelling, both in China and abroad, feature fictional story worlds strongly related to impossible worlds—such as fantastical alternate worlds or imaginative futurism. Transmedia narratives with such themes often yield more potent narrative outcomes (Ryan & Thon, 2014). This association is not a coincidence; there are logical reasons behind transmedia creators' preference for drawing from fantastical fictional worlds, although this does not mandate that all transmedia storytelling story worlds lean towards the impossible world (Wolf, 2012).

Firstly, creating such story worlds requires significant cognitive effort from creators, who must imagine and depict a novel universe. The inherent mystery and uncertainty of such worlds empower audiences to fill narrative gaps, thereby stimulating participatory engagement.

Secondly, the adaptation of popular novels for screen has become a significant trend in

transmedia narrative. Compared to realist genres, historical fantasy worlds align better with popular tastes within China's specific geographical, historical, and social context, serving to circumvent risks associated with real-world cultural conflicts while also resonating with public yearning for escapist worlds amidst the shadow of the pandemic.

Finally, the target demographic for transmedia narrative largely consists of children and youth, and such imaginative works cater to their affection for and pursuit of fantastical realms.

The theme of *Fortune Writer* aligns perfectly with this point: an imaginative fictional world, beautifully crafted scenes, and a conflict-driven story setup. These elements, detached from reality, enable viewers to forget the real world and immerse themselves in the twists and turns of the fantastical narrative, gaining pure emotional experience and psychological fulfillment through viewing.

Simultaneously, this inspires interactive behaviours, and the audience for ancient-style female-centric idol dramas possesses greater latitude for content interpretation and recreation. The establishment of this ancient-style novel's story world substantially laid the groundwork for its subsequent viral success.

#### 4.2.2 Satellite Model Story World Construction Maintaining a Consistent Worldview

The story world can be expanded across different media, and audiences can deepen and broaden their knowledge of this world's inhabitants and elements through engagement with various media texts. Although this story world allows for greater imaginative space compared to the actual world, it does not imply limitless expansion.

Objectively, a 'bottom line' exists at the levels of cross-media text production and audience reception, constraining transmedia extension. This boundary is articulated in Ryan's (2012) "multiple texts-multiple stories-one world" model, which posits that "all texts and stories must comply with a single worldview" (p. 12). In other words, all stories across different media must inhabit the same originally established world and adhere to a consistent set of logical values and temporal causality.

The story world of *Fortune Writer* also follows this principle in its adaptation from novel to micro-drama. The setting in the original novel involves a meta-fictional universe where the predetermined narrative order is actively contested; the protagonist wants to resist the novel's own setting. Similarly, the micro-drama establishes the worldview foundation from the outset: the protagonist is a supporting character within the novel's world, pitted against the novel's

very fabric.

Within this world, the core storyline of the *Fortune Writer* source material follows the heroine Su Yunqi's journey from awakening self-awareness to confronting the 'Book of Fate' to defy destiny. The plot commences with Su Yunqi serendipitously acquiring the Book of Fate, leading her to realise she is merely the 'malicious female supporting character' penned by the author. Instead of accepting this scripted outcome, she chooses to resist, subverting the authority of the Book of Fate to reclaim her narrative agency. This act of subversion constitutes the very substance of the 'contested world,' as the protagonist actively dismantles the oppressive diegetic rules imposed upon her.

Following the Satellite model, the narrative presented in the source novel *The Writer* represents the core 'star' story, while narratives on other networked media, like the micro-drama, function as satellites orbiting this star. As a satellite text, *Fortune Writer*, is generated around the plot and characters of the original core story. A unified worldview, characters, and plot act as the gravitational force; the drama and the novel interact, co-creating a complete narrative space.

Concurrently, with the drama's story at the centre, numerous social media platforms orbit it, enriching the narrative content. For instance, various materials released officially for the micro-drama on platforms like Weibo and Douyin can be viewed as satellite texts. These satellite texts enhance the story-world's content and significance, inviting wider audiences to explore the core story. Per the satellite story-world construction mode, *Fortune Writer* does not construct a huge story system but emphasises improving audience interactivity through multi-media narrative.

## 4.3 Analysis of Intertextuality in the Micro-Drama Adaptation of *Fortune Writer*

This section uses the *Fortune Writer* micro-drama as a case study, focusing on the intertextual shifts in key clues, events, and characters from the novel to the micro-drama text. It analyses these changes in light of transmedia intertextual logic to draw relevant conclusions.

### 4.3.1 Replicating Key Elements to Fulfil the Audience's Horizon of Expectations

Original fans of a novel possess preconceived understandings of the story world derived from

descriptions in the text. When the novel is adapted to become a TV drama, the text is visualised through images, accompanied by dialogue and sound design. The creators are committed to transforming the audience's horizon of expectation for the story into intuitive images (Rockhill, 1996).

Consequently, the fulfillment of the audience's horizon of expectations serves as one criterion for evaluating the success of a novel's screen adaptation. Naturally, meeting the audience's expectations does not entail a verbatim transposition of the story from page to screen; it necessitates creators probing the audience's underlying preferences and affections, making informed choices accordingly—such as what elements to faithfully replicate and what aspects to alter (Hutcheon & O'Flynn, 2013).

Analysing the transmedia journey from the online novel *The Writer* to the micro-drama shows that, while the content appears to have evolved and diversified considerably with the shift in medium, this diversification is centred around the source material's most crucial elements and is not arbitrary. This key element is also the fundamental reason the original work garnered widespread attention and appeal.

The following analysis will focus on this pivotal element. The most crucial element is the story. Lin Yannian, mentioned in an interview as the original author, the story she most wants to tell is one that allows these imperfect supporting female characters to win once—not to win against the female lead, but to win against the writer, to win against their destined fate and tragic ending.

The micro-drama firmly adhered to this framing, casting actors suited to the original roles. Lin Yannian described Su Yunqi's character essence as "flawed yet powerful," a strength derived not from noble status or physical prowess, but from "an unconditional love for oneself". Based on this, the Fortune Writer micro-drama chose Li Muchen, the most popular actor in the micro-drama field, as the female lead. Whether in terms of appearance or overall temperament, it is quite a match. The audience expressed high satisfaction with this casting, forming a strong mental association between Su Yunqi and the actress Li Muchen. The faithful representation of the characters constituted a significant factor in the drama's success.

#### 4.3.2 Preserving Core Events, Supplementing Subsidiary Plots: Adapting to Micro-Drama Runtime and Pacing

Micro-dramas must retain the narrative backbone, fill 'narrative gaps,' and optimise motivations

and transitions to enhance coherence and watchability. Despite its compact narrative length, the original novel *Fortune Writer* possesses high narrative density, interweaving multiple threads driven by an accelerated narrative tempo. While focusing on the protagonist, many locations are briefly mentioned, and two or three events are concentrated in each chapter. This fast-paced reading experience spurs the audience to closely follow the novel's content. However, in a micro-drama, particular events in the plot must be prioritised to leave a lasting impression on viewers. Overly succinct or convoluted narratives risk audiences overlooking or forgetting parts of the content.

This section looks at how *Fortune Writer* achieves intertextuality with the source material, while ensuring logical plot allocation and narrative flow. The following analysis divides the story content of *Fortune Writer* into three phases (early, middle, late), sorting the intertextual relationships between the drama and the novel according to story content, identifying differences in event inclusion and adaptation, and examining the effects and rationale behind these changes.

### Early Phase: Establishing Context, Adding Detail

In the micro-drama's early phase, particularly in the first episode, the exposition of the world and the setup for the heroine's awakening of self-will exhibits notable differences from the novel (see Table 3.1). For instance, the novel's first half tightly revolves around the core premise of the Book of Fate's verdicts. The heroine, upon discovering her grim, preordained fate (including explicit decrees like "Su Luoluo and Wulehuai shall consummate their relationship"), solidifies her motivation to "seduce Wulehuai to alter her destiny." The plot propulsion carries strong fatalistic and romantic overtones. In contrast, the drama version restructured the main plot into an interlocking chain of investigations—beginning with a case inquiry, introducing the key piece of evidence, the "Chun Gong Secrets" implicating the Fuhua Institute, and ultimately leading to the Locked Armor Guard's enforcement actions.

**Table 4.1.**

*Comparison of Initial Narrative Elements: Novel vs Micro-Drama*

<i>Fortune Writer</i> novel's worldview description	English translation of dialogue
所有人去扑进去救她,而我颤抖着拿起了那本书。封面写着《命书》。	(Everyone rushed in to save her, while I, trembling, picked up that book.

里面只有一行字,墨迹未干,仿佛是上一秒刚刚写上去的。

「相府主母苏若梅和其女苏云绮恶有恶报,最终沦为北狄奴隶,被凌辱致死。」

纸上那行字,就在那一刻,发生了变化。

「相府主母苏若梅」几个字消失,只剩下了「苏云绮恶有恶报,沦为北狄奴隶,被凌辱致死。」

另一行字浮现:

「相府主母苏若梅投湖自尽。」

头上电闪雷鸣,周围的哭喊惊叫在那一瞬间,涌进了我的耳里。

「夫人死了!夫人没气了!」

「夫人投湖自尽了!」

原来,娘亲是从这本书上,预见了我们母女的未来,想自尽改变结局。

在那之后,书上又浮现另一行字:

「周朝被北狄灭国,苏落落和北狄王乌勒淮成婚,母仪天下。」

苏落落是我的庶妹,生母是我娘亲买来的奴婢,是个什么都不会的废材。

可她竟能荣华至此,而我竟会如此凄惨?然而,除了娘亲投湖自尽的那行字笔墨已干,其它字都还湿漉漉的,还未干掉。

母亲投湖前曾说:

「笔墨若干,结局即定。」

难道是说,上面的预言,在笔墨干掉之前,都是可以改变的?

On the cover were the words: Book of Fate. Inside, only a single line of text remained, the ink still wet as if it had just been written moments before.

"Su Ruomei, the primary wife of the Chancellor, and her daughter Su Yunqi, faced retribution for their evils, ultimately becoming slaves of the Northern Di tribe and dying humiliated."

Right at that moment, the words on the paper shifted.

The characters for "Su Ruomei, the primary wife of the Chancellor" vanished, leaving only: "Su Yunqi faced retribution for her evils, became a slave of the Northern Di tribe, and died humiliated."

Another line surfaced:

"Su Ruomei, the primary wife of the Chancellor, drowned herself in the lake."

Lightning lit the sky above, and the surrounding cries and screams flooded into my ears in an instant.

"The Lady is dead! She's not breathing!"

"The Lady drowned herself in the lake!"

So, it was from this book that Mother foresaw our future—hers and mine—and sought to change the outcome by taking her own life.

After that, yet another line emerged in the book: "The Northern Di destroyed the Zhou Dynasty. Su Luoluo married Wulehuai, the Di king, and ascended the throne as his queen."

Su Luoluo is my half-sister, born to a maid my mother purchased—a good-for-nothing who could do nothing right.

How could she rise to such glory, while I end in such misery?

Yet, aside from the line about Mother's drowning, which had dried, all the other characters were still wet, the ink not yet set.

Before she drowned, Mother once said: "If the ink dries, the fate is sealed."

Could it be that the prophecies written here can still be changed as long as the ink hasn't dried?)

*Fortune Writer* micro-drama 's worldview visual depiction. Episode 1 02:35



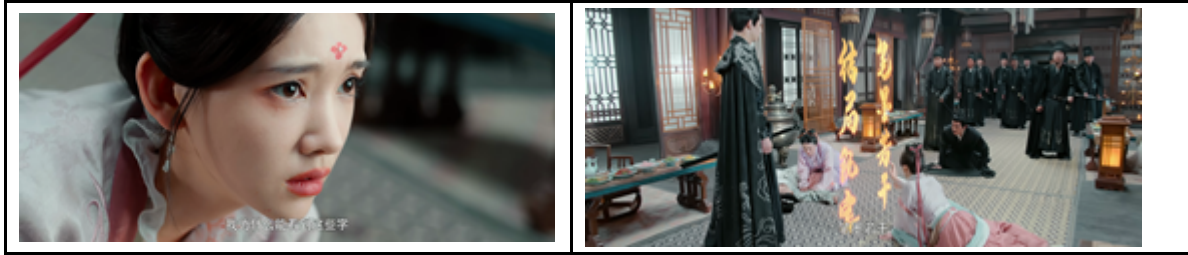
*Fortune Writer* novel heroine's awakening of self-will exhibits.

English translation of dialogue

我看着平时端庄高雅的母亲如同恶鬼一样,吓得瑟瑟发抖。  
 她把我连拖带拽地带着湖边,状若癫狂,府兵无人敢靠近。  
 我大哭着,想要逃跑,喊着:「娘,不要杀我,阿绮不想死。」  
 她狠狠扇了我一巴掌:  
 「现在不死,难道你要将来被无数男人凌辱死吗?」  
 我一口咬在她的手上,然后扑向奶娘。  
 母亲凄苦地望着说:  
 「乖,阿绮,随我去吧。」  
 我摇摇头,她边哭边笑:  
 「镜花水月啊,何为真,何为假?」  
 「笔墨若干,结局即定。」  
 她掏出一本薄书,扔在地上,转身投进了湖里。  
 所有人去扑进去救她,而我颤抖着拿起了那本书。

( I watched as my mother, usually so poised and elegant, turned into a shrieking spectre, her face twisted with madness. Trembling with fear, I could only stare as she dragged me toward the lake, half-pulling, half-carrying me. The guards didn't dare come close.  
 I sobbed, struggling to break free, crying out, "Mother, please don't kill me! Aqi doesn't want to die!"  
 She slapped me hard across the face:  
 "Better to die now than be violated and tortured by countless men in the future!"  
 I bit down fiercely on her hand, then lunged toward my wet nurse.  
 My mother stared at me with bitter sorrow in her eyes and murmured,  
 "Be good, Aqi. Come with me."  
 I shook my head. She began to laugh and cry at once,  
 "Like a reflection in a mirror, blossoms on water— what is real, and what is illusion?"  
 "Once the ink dries, the ending is sealed."  
 She pulled out a thin book, hurled it to the ground, and then turned and threw herself into the lake. Everyone rushed in to save her, while I, trembling, picked up that book.)

*Fortune Writer* micro-drama heroine's awakening of self-will visualised. Episode 1 14:01



Simultaneously, the series incorporated conflicts with greater socio-realistic resonance, such as the Chancellor accusing the heroine of losing her virtue, successfully shifting the overall tone from the novel's emphasis on internal monologues and romantic complexities towards a more suspenseful atmosphere of intrigue and political machination.

### Middle Phase: Expanding Events, Seeding Foreshadowing

The micro-drama's plot developments find their correlates in the novel (Table 3.2). Progressing into the middle phase, the micro-drama focuses its narrative thrust on a tangible plot and symbolic imagery: commencing with the "Book of Fate countdown," rapidly expanding into the investigation surrounding the "Chun Gong Secrets" and depicting conflict through sequences involving the "Locked Armor Guard insignia" and "Nine-Segment Needle torture."

**Table 4.2**

*Comparison of Plot Developments: Novel vs Micro-Drama*

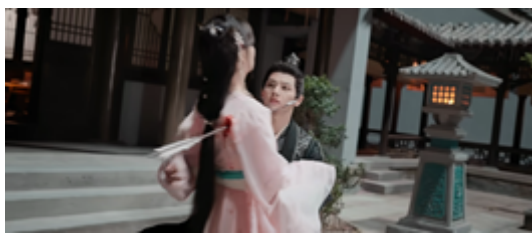
Intertextuality in novels	English translation
<p>突然,她惨叫一声,捂住了脸,鲜血顺着她的指缝流下来。 而我的手里拿着划破她脸颊的簪子。 她看到满手的鲜血,面色惨白,望向镜子,看见了一条深可见骨的伤口从她大半张脸划过。</p>	<p>(Suddenly, she let out a piercing scream, covering her face as blood trickled between her fingers. The hairpin in my hand had sliced across her cheek. Seeing her hands covered in blood, her face turned ghostly pale. She glanced into the mirror and saw a bone-deep gash slashed across most of her face.)</p>
<p>Micro-drama screenshots. Episode 16 07:38</p>	



「东南方向冒出一支冷箭,射向乌勒淮后心,苏落落挺身挡箭。」  
余光看见了东南方向的弓箭手,我冷笑一下,飞快躲在乌勒淮身后,让他直面那只冷箭。乌勒淮转身,看见了那只飞来的箭。他挥剑,那支箭被他扫落在地。我还没来得及失望,下一刻,一阵剧痛袭来。我中箭了...  
箭从我背后射来,穿透我的胸膛。怎么会这样?  
我颓然倒地,被他扶住:  
「你替我挡箭?」

(A covert arrow shot from the southeast, aimed straight at Wulehuai's back. Su Luoluo rushed to shield him.  
Out of the corner of my eye, I spotted the archer in that direction. A cold smirk curled on my lips as I swiftly ducked behind Wulehuai, leaving him directly in the arrow's path.  
Wulehuai turned and saw the incoming arrow. With a swing of his sword, he sent the arrow clattering to the ground.  
Before disappointment could even register, a searing pain tore through me.  
I'd been hit...  
The arrow had come from behind, piercing straight through my chest.  
How could this be?  
I collapsed weakly into his arms as he caught me: "You... took the arrow for me?")

Micro-drama screenshots. Episode11 02:57



「你不会。不过,你说了不算。我才是执笔人。」  
她露出阴狠神情,嘴里念念有词。我失去了控制,不由自主地拿起了匕首。我如同一个木偶,在她的操控下,用匕首挟持了她。  
「淮哥哥,你还在等什么?!杀了她呀!」  
苏落落声嘶力竭地喊着。

(She looked me over and laughed: "You wouldn't dare. But what you say doesn't matter. I'm the one holding the pen."  
A sinister expression crossed her face as she began chanting under her breath.  
I lost control, my hand moving against my will as I picked up the dagger.  
Like a puppet manipulated by strings, I pressed the blade against her throat.

乌勒淮终于搭上了弓箭。  
我悲哀地望着他。  
眼睁睁看着自己走向注定的结局。  
「淮哥哥,快动手!你忘了我替你挡箭了吗?你忘了我们在草原看星星了吗?」  
苏落落不断提醒着他。  
可笑的是,那都是,我为乌勒淮做的。  
乌勒淮听到她的话,似乎终于下了决定,将弓拉满,瞄准了我。

"Brother Huai, what are you waiting for?! Kill her!"  
Su Luoluo's voice shrieked hysterically.  
Wulehuai finally nocked an arrow to his bow.  
I gazed at him with sorrow in my eyes, my vision blurring as I watched myself march toward an inevitable fate.  
"Brother Huai, hurry! Have you forgotten how I took an arrow for you? Have you forgotten the nights we spent stargazing on the grassland?"  
Su Luoluo kept reminding him, pressing relentlessly.  
The bitter irony was—those were all things I had done for Wulehuai.  
Hearing her words, it seemed he finally made a decision. He drew the bowstring taut, aiming straight at me.)

Episode 15 06:39



The romantic subplot between the female and male leads employs motifs like prayer plaques, longevity noodles, jade pendants, and transplanted peach trees to progressively develop trust and foreshadow personal histories, culminating in the stark reversal of a substitute marriage. This series of events not only enriches the audience's narrative experience but also foreshadows future plotlines.

The interlocking design provides the audience with many clues to participate in the narrative. The middle section of the *Fortune Writer* micro-drama places greater emphasis on characters' internal transformations: the Book of Fate issues rigid commands (for example, mandating an intimate encounter with Wulehuai), compelling the heroine to repeatedly employ impersonation and substitution to fulfill plot requirements; the novel, conversely, utilises techniques like name-changing and memory-alteration to depict both her manipulation by the Book of Fate and her active resistance against it. These depictions significantly enhance the plot, allowing audiences to better comprehend the characters' actions and become emotionally invested in their relationship.

## Late Stage: Adding Events, Profound Theme

In the story's conclusion, the novel *The Writer* favours a 'cycle of fate' deterministic structure, highlighting the heroine's repeated, futile attempts to rewrite her story, inevitably pulled back to the preset ending. The micro-drama *Fortune Writer*, however, realises this theme through a sequence of concrete events: Lu Huai dies saving Su Yunqi, and Su Yunqi chooses death to escape manipulation, followed by a world 'reset,' with their reunion under a tree providing emotional closure (see Table 3.3).

**Table 4.3**

*Comparison of Endings: Novel vs Micro-Drama*

Novel Ending	English Translation
<p>「那执笔人到底是谁？」 「你还记得我告诉过你吗？我自你来处来，到你去处去。」 眼前的浓雾似乎在慢慢散开，我拨开云雾，朦朦胧胧中有一人在望着我。 我走向她，那人面容从模糊渐渐清晰。我愣住了。 「我自你来处来，到你去处去。」 谁会自我来处来，到我去处去呢？ 我终于明白了。 我，就是执笔人。 执笔人的笔下勾勒万千世界，掌管万物运行。 执笔人必须无情无欲无惧，千百年来，我见着世间众生的悲欢离合，从未动摇。 直到一日，我困惑了。 …… 如果不是这次觉醒，那么我可能会一直陷在循环里，苏落落便成了这个世界实质的执笔人。 执笔人需要不停创作故事。 我拿出命书，提笔写下： 「2022年4月28日，a市一家咖啡厅…」 随着我写下这行字，周围的环境物转星移，快速变换，渐渐出现了人声、音乐和咖啡香，变成了咖啡厅。</p>	<p>"Who exactly is the writer?" "Do you remember what I told you? I come from where you came, and I go to where you go." The thick fog before me seemed to be slowly dissipating. I parted the clouds, and in the hazy mist, a figure was watching me. I walked towards her, and her face gradually became clearer. I was stunned. "I come from where you came, and I go to where you go." Who comes from where I come and goes to where I go? I finally understood. I am the writer. The writer's pen depicts countless worlds, governing the workings of all things. The writer must be ruthless, desireless, and fearless. For thousands of years, I have witnessed the joys and sorrows of all beings, never wavering. Until one day, I was perplexed. ... If it weren't for this awakening, I might have remained trapped in this cycle forever. Su Luoluo became the true writer of this world. The writer needs to constantly create stories. I took out my destiny book and wrote: "April 28,</p>

	2022, a coffee shop in City A..." As I wrote this, the surrounding environment shifted rapidly, gradually revealing human voices, music, and the aroma of coffee, transforming into a coffee shop.
--	--

Micro-drama Ending Episode 24 17:57



Simultaneously, the drama employs more direct visual storytelling to establish the rules: memory erasure, plot reset, and the Book of Fate reactivating, making the answer to 'who is writing everything' more explicit, thereby achieving narrative coherence and resonance from start to finish. In terms of narrative, it is captivating, pushing the emotion of the entire drama to the peak, bringing viewers a dramatic viewing experience, and triggering intense discussion.

The micro-drama enhances the empathic qualities of the novel form through high-density causal narrative progression and visual conflict, while retaining the core theme of resisting fate. Correspondingly, it sacrifices the novel's nuanced layers of psychological depiction and ethical deliberation, such as the complex moral ambiguities surrounding traditional familial loyalty versus individual autonomy.

At the same time, it extends a love story, and during the process, it also adds side-plots such as the 'Secret Book of Spring Palace Affairs.' These subsidiary events ultimately serve to promote the heroine's change of fate. However, the core events in the Li Muchen-starring *Fortune Writer* micro-drama remain largely unchanged from the source material. Across both media, the main events resonate, and the expanded subsidiary plots contain intertextual clues linking back to the novel.

The adaptation process of *The Writer* from page to micro-drama fulfills Jenkins' principles of Drillability, Diversity, and Extractability, allowing original readers to view the drama without a sense of disconnection, fostering interest in exploring the Book of Fate universe through intertextual comparison, and enabling interpretation and speculation about the micro-drama's developments in relation to the original storyline.

Furthermore, due to the inherent narrative characteristics of micro-drama and its broad demographic reach, viewers tend to prioritise affective intensity over rigorous diegetic logic. Consequently, audiences exhibit a higher tolerance regarding meticulous plot details, intricate logic, and comprehensive narrative completeness. Therefore, in the handling of events and plots, besides the retention of core events and the modification of subsidiary events, the micro-drama changes some more complex events from the original work, such as rewriting the male lead's identity from Wulehuai to Lu Huai (King Su). These alterations render the romantic development between the leads more logical and emotionally resonant for the audience.

Ultimately, the *Fortune Writer* micro-drama achieves an optimal equilibrium in its narrative curation. By retaining core plot milestones while strategically making adjustments and extensions to subsidiary events, it sustains the engagement of audiences familiar with the original work. Concurrently, it incentivises new viewers to revisit the source text, actively seek intertextual clues, and construct a comprehensive understanding of the overarching storyworld.

### 4.3.3 Fleshing Out Characterisations, Supplementing Character

#### Relationships

Different media exhibit variations in how they establish and present characters and their relationships. Firstly, regarding character construction, personalities are not monolithic and evolve in response to narrative events (Chatman, 1978). Moreover, the evolution of character relationships plays a crucial role in driving the plot forward; therefore changes in these aspects must be justified and necessary (Moretti, 2011). Without sufficient justification, audiences may question these elements, hindering their ability to recognise the character's core consistency

and maintain empathic identification, ultimately breaking immersion. The subsequent analysis examines what changes the *Fortune Writer* micro-drama has undergone relative to the original work in terms of character settings and relational dynamics, and whether these adaptations are narratively justified.

## From One-Dimensional to Rounded Characters

In online novels, the author's description of characters tends to match a specific persona, allowing readers to envisage a certain archetype, and during the reading process resonate emotionally with the characters in the story world. For instance, in the novel, Su Yunqi as the 'malicious female supporting character,' is imbued with a clear self-awareness and an indomitable spirit of resistance.

After Su Yunqi fortuitously obtains the Book of Fate and learns of her role as a supporting character, her core motivation shifts from mere malice to proactive defiance: "If fate is unjust to me, then I'll seize control myself!" This character evolution naturally elicits audience empathy. Particularly through the novel's use of internal focalisation, readers are encouraged to adopt Su Yunqi's cognitive perspective, becoming deeply engrossed in her struggle. This intense affective engagement effectively fosters a deeper willingness to suspend disbelief, prompting audiences to look past minor archetypal constraints or narrative contrivances.

Characters in the novel tend towards being flat as described through text. However, in micro-dramas, audiences typically observe the story as external viewers, assessing characters' actions more critically and spontaneously forming connections between their behaviours and personalities. They naturally scrutinise one-dimensional portrayals, demanding greater psychological depth and relatable character motivations to sustain their affective engagement.

Compared with novels, micro-dramas need more delicate and nuanced character portrayals. Well-rounded characters are those who exhibit internal consistency despite their psychological complexity and conflicting motivations. A significant portion of a screen drama's story world's growth stems from the diversity and potential for change inherent in its characters. The shaping of the roles in the *Fortune Writer* micro-drama is an example, expanding upon the original work's characters.

Upon discovering her tragic fate, Su Yunqi chooses to strategically confront her predetermined script, with clear and potent motivations. Although the male lead Lu Huai (an adaption of Wulehuai) is initially cold and ruthless, through multiple encounters with Su Yunqi, his compliance with the Book of Fate gradually erodes, with scenes of him breaking the rules appearing early on. Only when two such individuals fall in love does it feel justified to the

audience, allowing them to achieve deep immersion and emotionally endorse the romantic pairing.

Consequently, when audiences revisit the plot of the source novel, they often find the romance between the leads less convincing, primarily due to the flatter characterisations and unbalanced power dynamics. The drama's multifaceted depiction endows the characters with openness, meaning they resemble real individuals with complex, contradictory, and dynamic personalities. This is very important for the organic enrichment of the transmedia storyworld, because the boundaries of the world change with the character alterations, attracting the favour of the audience.

### **Supplementation of Character Relationships**

In addition to changes in individual characters, the elaboration of relationships between individuals is also a common way for transmedia to extend the story world (Ryan & Thon, 2014). Individuals, after all, do not exist in isolation. The formation of personality, thoughts, and emotions is inseparable from the portrayal of their relationships.

Similarly, skillfully designed character relationships can highlight themes and create dramatic impact. Character relationships usually serve the story, but to avoid the insertion of relationships being too abrupt and appearing artificial, they need to have understandable motivations (Bordwell, 2008). It follows that supplementary character relationships positively impact the overall narrative only when sufficiently motivated and logically justified.

Although individual micro-drama episodes are short, the total number of episodes is high, making it a long-form narrative compared to many novels. This structural demand necessitates a complex network of supporting roles, thereby organically justifying the integration of these supplementary dynamics.

Compared with the original work, *Fortune Writer* offers more intricate network of character relationships, including those of the male lead, Lu Huai. As opposed to the novel, where the male lead is the Northern Di noble Wulehuai and the conflict focuses on external factional conflicts, in the drama, Lu Huai, a key figure of the "Locked Armor Guard," shifts the conflict from external to inside the system. He embodies rules and order, while the heroine represents individual will, creating an inherent opposition. As their relationship deepens, they continually test and even transgress these boundaries, causing their dynamic to oscillate between confrontation, mutual validation, and renewed conflict.

This alteration intensified the micro-drama's dramatic conflicts and strengthened its thematic

grounding in free will. By replacing Wulehuai with Lu Huai and linking Su Yunqi's personal plight to court politics, the micro-drama articulated a different perspective on relationships. The introduction of this substantially revised role significantly advanced the narrative, achieving notable success through widespread audience appeal.

In summary, the intertextual narrative texts of the *Fortune Writer* transmedia adaptation largely fulfill the criteria of Drillability and Multiplicity for much of the story world's content, while also fostering an environment conducive to Extractability for viewers. The drillability of the *Fortune Writer* texts is evidenced by the agency displayed by its audience. Audiences rapidly immerse themselves in the story texts via the connecting threads—plotlines, events, and characters—between the micro-drama and the novel, seizing upon intertextual elements for interpretation and creation, thereby enriching not only the thematic significance but also the multimodal depth through audiovisual craftsmanship and character performance within the overarching transmedia universe.

The process of the audience perceiving the text is no longer a linear acceptance like a single arrow: their desire to actively participate in the narrative is realised. Many audiences, after watching the TV drama, spontaneously search for other elements to flesh out the storyworld—a practice that serves as a vital component of transmedia intertextuality.

# 5 Audience Participation in the Micro-Drama *How Dare You?*

## 5.1 Audience Interaction under Participatory Culture

In the realm of transmedia storytelling, the architecture of a storyworld is fundamentally contingent upon active audience engagement. The successful realisation, transmedial expansion, and narrative coherence of these universes are profoundly shaped by their recipients, positioning audiences as active co-creators rather than passive consumers (Scolari, 2009). Creating a single text does not construct a complete world; securing audience acceptance, recognition, and response is pivotal.

### 5.1.1 Shifts in Audience Identity

In the age of media convergence, audiences have evolved from passive recipients to active contributors (Carpentier, 2011). Technological empowerment gives them agency over media; monopoly by authorities and experts over production and interpretation has been broken (Bruns, 2008). Film now inhabits a digital environment in which viewers freely voice opinions across platforms.

In transmedia contexts, audience capabilities are fully displayed: they launch topics, spearhead discussions, and actively participate in interpreting and creating texts across novels, TV dramas, and beyond (Shirky, 2008). Digital native youths, witnesses to the internet's rise, are the most active. Their voices populate new media spaces, and increasingly shape mainstream cultural dissemination.

Audiences choose what and how to watch and share their decoded meanings through media channels. Technological innovation has disrupted content production, enabling audiences not only to receive stories through more media but also to generate extensive text and video atop them. Empowered by technology, audiences release creativity and passion: aspiring to be new masters of the online world, they 'mod,' collage, and rework across media texts, gaining recognition from 'net native' cohorts (Lessig, 2008).

Meanwhile, capital recognises the commercial value of participation. Producers 'cede' some power to guide and encourage audience contribution, spurring attention and consumption—and ultimately profit.

### 5.1.2 Fan Participation

When audiences transcend passive roles, becoming topic initiators (even leaders) through technology, the space for online participation and interaction expands, and open texts around primary screen works proliferate, becoming 'participatory culture' Jenkins (2009). Large enough audience groups snowball, shaping production. Fans are exemplary consumers: highly cohesive, creative, and willing to spend. Fans fragment the originals, extract desired elements, and recombine them into new stories—an uncertain, fluid process.

Fans as nomads, are not tethered to a single text or site but roam across many texts and communities (Jenkins, 2006). In this fluidity, they mobilise cross-textual knowledge to construct their own meanings and disseminate their creations, revealing the story world to more people.

### 5.1.3 Audience Participation in Screen Adaptations of Online Fiction

The aim of much transmedia is to attract more audience consumption and generate greater economic returns, which audience agency and creativity contribute to. Participation is especially critical for online fiction adaptations to screen. Authors of online fiction foreground reader feelings and feedback; to enhance world completeness, they draw on collective intelligence to win attention, recognition, and income (Feng, 2017).

When adapted for the screen, producers again draw on their symbiotic relationship with audiences. Viewers are consumers, so producers seek works that invite participation to increase returns; while audiences fulfill emotional and social desires through interaction (Jenkins, 2006). As Jenkins (1992) noted, ideal transmedia ultimately drives consumption, and this interaction powers its generation.

## 5.2 Audience Participation Motives for *How Dare You?*

Using web-scraped Douban reviews to analyse participation motives, I examined representative fan cases to unpack the engagement patterns of highly active groups—elucidating how and why audiences participate and co-construct the story world.

Douban and TikTok comments (authoritative platforms with strong community affordances) were sampled, treating reviews as vehicles of secondary narration to examine motives. Douban's review system is extensive; many users rate and comment after viewing. Users can post short reviews (less than 140 characters) or long essays from varied angles—roles, acting,

cinematography, settings—offering insights into viewing psychology. Practically, these reviews span a wide range, from casual participants to ardent fans; their scale and structure facilitate collection and coding.

TikTok, by contrast, functions as a frontline screening room for micro-drama and an interaction hub: accounts post 15–60 second high-energy clips, bloopers, and trailers; audiences interact by liking, commenting, sharing, saving, and following. Comment genres skew toward short quips and emoji. Like Douban, TikTok threads mix passersby with core fans, driving hashtag diffusion (e.g., #microdrama) and forming a loop of official release/user reproduction/topic feedback. Accordingly, I gathered hot comment threads under the top eight *How Dare You?* TikTok clips, together with Douban long reviews, to triangulate spontaneous reactions and sustained motives. Overall, these corpora furnished abundant firsthand material for observing viewing psychology.

### 5.2.1 Data Collection and Processing

I selected short reviews of *How Dare You?* to sample on Douban: they are more numerous than long reviews, and, being mainly written by nonexperts, better reflect mass attitudes (emotion, stance, opinions) toward the screen version. As of 13 October 2025, *How Dare You?* had 120 ratings in the Douban TV section, with an average rating of 2.73 (Douban ratings range from one to five stars, indicating ascending satisfaction). On TikTok, the eight most liked episode clips attracted 1,519 non-negative comments. Python was used to scrape Douban short review pages and comments under the top liked TikTok videos tagged “How Dare You?”

Data was collected on 14 October 2023. Specifically, I pulled all short reviews under “most helpful,” cleaned and extracted fields, and stored the comment text, username, time, likes, and Douban star rating in a Microsoft Excel database. I then sorted by timestamp and carefully analysed the text.

#### **Figure 5**

*Excerpts from Douban Film Reviews*



A	B	C	D	E	F	G
index	user_id	user_profile	comment			
1	user3629358733502	/@user3629358733502	neme film?			
2	125135sassy	/@125135sassy	how unserious is this director			
3	mary290112	/@mary290112	how are you? i'm fine thankyou, and you? k			
4	mena1_e	/@mena1_e	I can't find it on iqiyi			
5	dianrahmasari7	/@dianrahmasari7	Udah nonton ini			
6	tftwisted	/@tftwisted	When is the release?			
7	s.or.me	/@s.or.me	пмср?			
8	beatrice.kons	/@beatrice.kons	The anime is now a real tv show			
9	carol_dmolokoane	/@carol_dmolokoane	someone spoil it for me...			
10	naana_dewi	/@naana_dewi	its already released at iqiyi.			
11	jasonb088	/@jasonb088	title			
12	ilovemori06	/@ilovemori06	i thought this one is the short film?			
13	amychaaan	/@amychaaan	ok fine, I'll reinstate my subscription iqiyi. Ha			
14	sooners_2	/@sooners_2	is it already airing or			
15	zion_13	/@zion_13	speaking english like they're carryi			
16	ms.thnh	/@ms.thnh	Y bon trong truyện			
17	sakshitarde	/@sakshitarde	does anyone know the release date?			
18	yelan_07	/@yelan_07	what was that			
19	sofionlystay	/@sofionlystay	es muy divertida			
20	linolia_lina	/@linolia_lina	Is the title 'how dare you?'			
21	meiren.cos12	/@meiren.cos12	IQIYI? Can't wait to watch lol			
22	rosetr00	/@rosetr00	isn't it vertical short drama. iqiyi has vertical			
23	maywiwolv	/@maywiwolv	ya me ví dos series de estos 2 por dón			
24	mafermaffy	/@mafermaffy	Son los mismos de rindete a mi abrazo??			
25	christinedoxo	/@christinedoxo	They made a live version of the donghua?			
26	biakza.lenpar	/@biakza.lenpar	they too cute			
27	hy.n2705	/@hy.n2705	Ai cho mk xin tên chuyên đc k trc mk đọc đ			
28	phi.ppin	/@phi.ppin	wait he congrui and this lady are they real li			
29	kimsong21	/@kimsong21	thấy short này hay hơn bản điện ảnh bộ này			
30	aillika_520	/@aillika_520	versi long dramanya aja belum rilis udah			
31	mainlanhlung	/@mainlanhlung	Thấy trailer đẹp lắm mà ta, diễn viên khác m			
32	mariahherman17	/@mariahherman17	di drama takdir china dengan kaisar cewekny			
33	fenghuang_03	/@fenghuang_03	I like how the drama is relative to the dongl			
34	zlh229	/@zlh229	ko đẹp bằng hoạt hình			
35	elbarique	/@elbarique	c'est un animé de base??			
36	kid1398	/@kid1398	còn ra thể thống gì nữa mới xem bản hoạt l			
37	blaire0_6	/@blaire0_6	can't stop laughing			
38	1stjlex	/@1stjlex	còn ra thể thống gì nữa xem hoạt hình t			
39	infinitycastle093	/@infinitycastle093	what the hell is this drama			
40	nickicheche	/@nickicheche	They acting together on another one. Nice!			
41	liveloughlovemeclouik	/@liveloughlovemeclouik	finished the animated series of this, got so			

Note. L: DouBan film reviews; R: Data transferred to MS Excel spreadsheet

Figure 6

TikTok Comments Transferred to MS Excel Spreadsheet

A	B	C	D
序号	name	content	stars
1	L.C.	可以当剧情简介看。短剧的缺点是看5	3
2	薛定谔的脑子	这个故事还挺适合拍竖短的，感觉女-	5
3	多喝水c	很丰富的剧情 惊喜!	5
4	杰德的十四行诗	2025 (52nd)	0
5	kovi7(单汐禾)	选角都挺不错的，个人觉得还算还原，	4
6	皮皮一号	难看。很难相信这还是七英俊小说改的	0
7	阿五	5/10 后半段剧情简化很多，删掉了不	2
8	树新峰, 🐱🐶 99	节约成本，省略了很多动漫里的剧情。	3
9	AGPの黄昏	改动还是挺大的，感觉木有剧版的好	3
10	Se7en、小七	很还原动画版，不错	4
11	风舞狂澜	刘念妖妃造型真的好看呀。How are y	4
12	黄鹅酿 🐸	How are u	5
13	MOMO	看到二十集.....	2
14	望穿秋葵	百念好何的二搭作品。知名小说改编	3
15	我是我自己	看到第三集，我只能说这选角也太贴	5
16	本味何知	竟能同时兼具长剧和短剧的短处，权	1
17	xxxxxxY	算是短剧标杆了	5
18	暗里着迷	how are u	4
19	#NAME?	整体还不错，他俩三搭确实非常有默	3
20	阿默沫	剧情好敷衍	2
21	子人曰	不要再沉迷穿越穿书了，好吗？好的。	4
22	JLin10969	好无聊的权谋，四人的颜值支撑我看	3
23	momo	这么火的cp爱奇艺还拍的这么无聊 还	2
24	SpyLiu	一般，故事太快，光顾着爽了。	2
25	珊珊	3.5★颜值高，妆造华丽。这版好长，	4
26	木山豆蔻	动画几个印象比较深的场面要么没拍	2
27	超级玛丽·苏	real talk，原著绝对的高手	2
28	ㄟ.ㄟ.	前70集左右和动画第一季内容差不多，	2
29	朱古力	以后这类短剧不知道豆瓣如何归类	3
30	嘛哩嘛哩叭吽塔	No.2795: 89集全，女主演的还行，配	2
31	仟僂	3+，不是很智斗，反而有点拖沓剧情	3
32	poo	感觉剧情太满了，短剧能拍到这个程	3
33	蝴蝶姐姐	没有看过原著，看过一些情节，感觉	3
34	oasisl	竖短承载不了复杂的人物关系和故事，	2
35	非必要不增实物	这个还真可以	0
36	夏予川	?	1
37	柴犬妹妹	不行。感觉看到难看的了。	1
38	boogy_vane	感觉剧情好急促，很多都没交代完整	4
39	微光	妆造还行但制作粗糙 多给一星是因为	2
40	YIUing	剧情很那个 居然还是爱奇艺出品	1
41	12贞	剧情太快了 快到来不及品味文本中的	3

I then created categories as nodes around attitudes toward adaptation and affect toward micro-drama, then conducted line by line coding, iteratively adding and revising nodes. I coded 1,631 raw statements, followed by axial coding to analyse relations among initial categories, raising them to first order categories. Not all open coding categories were used in axial coding; unrelated or off topic nodes were removed. The filtered result yielded four second order categories under two core dimensions—Overall Tendency and Content Evaluation—as shown in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1**

*Coding Schema*

First order category	Second order category
<i>Overall tendency</i>	Attitudes toward remake as micro-drama

	Evaluations of micro-drama as a form
<i>Content evaluation</i>	Specific evaluations of the micro-drama
	Evaluations of acting/performance

*Note.* Coding schema for evaluations of *How Dare You?*

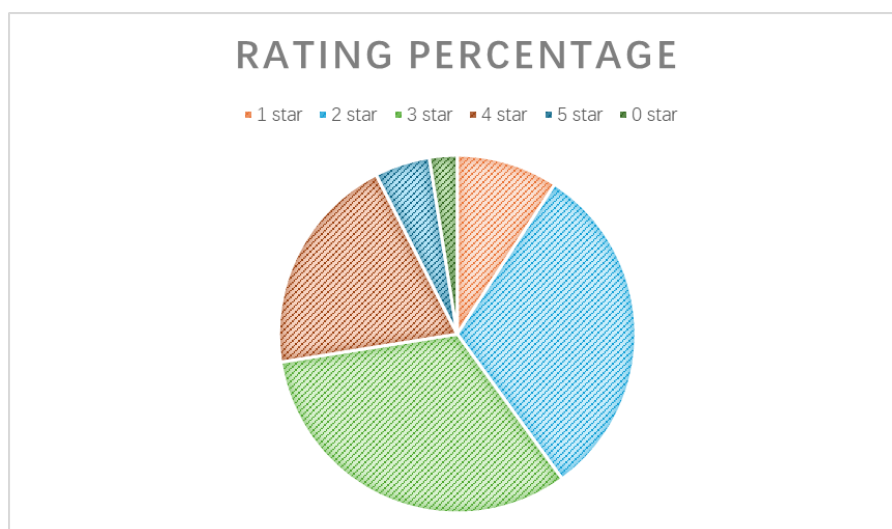
## 5.2.2 Analysis of Review Texts

### Overall Tendency

After processing, I extracted audience attitudes toward the adaptation and the series to infer their motives. Star rating distribution shows the largest shares at three and two stars; five and one stars together account for 14.17%. Conversely, the sampled TikTok comments exhibit a conspicuous scarcity of overtly negative posts, suggesting a platform-specific favorable bias. Although adapted from online fiction, the acceptance of the micro-drama versions remains moderate and nuanced rather than uniformly positive. While IP adaptations often suffer from severe polarisation—driven by the divergent evaluative criteria of original novel fans, drama fans, actor fans, and CP fans—*How Dare You?* does not display extreme bifurcation. Overall, the feedback points to a stable, mid-tier reception, indicating a relative success in avoiding the typical pitfalls of transmedia adaptation.

### Figure 7

*Distribution of Douban Film Review Ratings for How Dare You?*



## Viewers Care More about Perceived Quality Than Strict Fidelity

Under Overall Tendency, reviews labeled “attitude toward adaptation” are typically by readers of the original source, often including direct comparisons of novel and drama. A small number expressed dissatisfaction with changes (e.g., “the story is too jumpy and uninteresting”). More acknowledge that changes are modest and iconic scenes are preserved. Comments frequently target the screenwriting, e.g.: “Vertical micro-dramas can’t carry complex relationships and stories; keeping it simple and purely ‘爽’ (gratifying) is what keeps people watching,” and “With the original as a base, it’s worth seeing, but too much was cut, and the shortform constraint makes the plot jumpy—strong start, weak finish.” These responses suggest that original novel fans exhibit a pragmatic medium-awareness: rather than demanding strict textual fidelity, they are willing to compromise on narrative depth to accommodate the inherent structural constraints of vertical micro-dramas. Their acceptance stems not from rewarding ‘innovation,’ but from acknowledging the format’s limitations. The key drivers of ratings among novel fans include whether adaptation improves viewing, whether it violates the core premise, and whether care is evident in production. Thus, adapting an online novel into a micro-drama requires both bold formal innovation and substantive content enhancement.

## The Content Sparks Interpretive Zeal

Under Content Evaluation, I separate series level and performance level commentary. Viewers offered detailed assessments across character setups, plotting, costumes, makeup, VFX, sets, and music. Examples are paraphrased from Douban:

“Looks great; makeup is exquisite. Casting the male lead was a coup—extra star for sentiment! That said, the ‘mad king’ isn’t mad enough; the ‘enchantress’ needs work; there’s still quite a gap from the novel.”

“A micro-drama in length, a long series in texture, anime style melodrama, faithful to the original; the male lead fits period roles, the female lead embodies the enchantress vibe; why not finish the extras? I want the modern-day reunion!”

“High visuals and lavish styling. This cut is long, not manic, not very funny; love arc complete; tactics unimpressive survival is barely plausible; less thrilling than the previous version.”

Positive feedback far outweighs negative. Overall, the adaptation’s emphasis on transmedia, production investment, and cross-media leverage stimulates curiosity and interest, fostering

sustained transmedia engagement and catalysing participatory practices, ranging from textual interpretation to secondary creation.

### 5.2.3 Participation Motives: Textual Control and Affective Appeals

This section examines the psychological shift from narration to secondary narration—how audiences receive and understand a story, then respond. In transmedia, audiences first naturalise a text, then engage in secondary narration. No narrative can display every state and detail; there are always gaps to be filled by imagination and experience. In essence, engaging in this secondary narration constitutes a fundamental form of participation. In the dataset, 98.10% of sampled Douban and TikTok reviews were positive, indicating strong motivation to participate. Two core motives emerge:

- Desire for interpretive agency and epistemic curiosity: Once attracted, audiences follow to obtain more content; epistemic curiosity and interpretive desires drive them to intervene—expressing satisfaction or dissatisfaction and projecting preferred developments.
- Demand for affective returns: Audiences seek emotional payoffs and psychological fulfillment through consumption. In *How Dare You?* textual changes, onscreen narration, and performance cater to fantasies of idealised romantic dynamics. Fans actively co-construct the world for deeper bonds and fulfillment. On social platforms, playful meme-making also functions as sociality—garnering social validation and recreational gratification—thus inadvertently participating in secondary narration.

It is clear that participatory input into textual meaning and multilayered affective needs are the primary drivers of secondary narration.

## 6 Conclusion and Reflections

Adaptation of online fiction to the screen originated in the internet era. The advance of media convergence ushered in an age of transmedia storytelling, enabling the cross-media construction and expansion of story worlds that develop along multiple narrative lines, horizontally and vertically. This evolution constitutes a new mode for screen developers, marking a broader transformative shift in contemporary media production.

Digital and internet technologies have transformed the production and circulation of audiovisual information. A story world is no longer confined to a single textual narrative; it is extended through film, television, animation, games, and other media. Intertextuality is the foundation of this extension: taking the original text as the core, dispersed across different media, interrelated and mutually referencing one another.

As convergence accelerates, whether creators can leverage multi-media coordinated narration has become a key determinant of transmedia effectiveness. In transmedia storytelling the construction of a story world is inseparable from audience participation. Whether a story world is successfully built, how it expands while moving across media, and how it maintains coherence are all influenced by recipients. Audiences are an integral part of co-constructing the world. Accordingly, this study examined how the transition from online fiction to micro-drama extends world boundaries through intertextuality at the story level, how different media contribute their respective narrative value through expansion to help achieve optimal transmedia effects, and how micro-drama innovates via globalisation.

The study reviewed the trajectory from online fiction to micro-drama to reveal a shift from re-making to recombination, changing from adaptation to transmedia storytelling. Aiming for fidelity alone cannot deliver superior and/or equivalent narrative effects in the screen versions of online fiction. By comprehensively integrating story world, media, and audience, transmedia storytelling is emerging as a significant framework for the screen conversion of online literature, augmenting and, in some cases, reconfiguring traditional adaptation models.

Systematically collating the conceptual content of transmedia storytelling, this study developed a theoretical framework to guide subsequent case analyses. Firstly, the core of transmedia storytelling is story world construction: during the process, the 'transfictional' components—setting, character, and event—are integrated into a single world. Texts across different media interrelate, guide, and supplement one another, contributing to an interconnected and expansive narrative ecosystem.

Secondly, media fusion in transmedia is realised through expansion at three levels—content, platforms, and production—fully leveraging diverse media to achieve effective transmedia

narration. In addition, transmedia must provide audiences with broader textual experiences and stimulate sustained participation. In practice, this means leaving sufficient space to invite 'secondary narration,' allowing audiences to fill in gaps, aggregate collective intelligence to interpret or create textual meaning, and, through feedback, co-construct a complete storyworld. These strategies add substance to the story world and yield favorable market outcomes.

Building on this framework, the study analysed the micro-dramas *Fortune Writer* and *How Dare You?* from three angles: the construction of the story world, the expansion of media platforms, and the dynamics of audience participation.

*Fortune Writer* combines an accessibility-oriented fantasy story world with a Satellite construction model under a shared worldview. Because transmedia storytelling must satisfy both coherence and diversity to attract audiences to co-construct the world, *Fortune Writer* achieves intertextuality between novel and screen version in three ways: restoring key elements to meet expectation horizons; preserving core events while supplementing subordinate plots; and enriching character design to fill relational gaps.

In terms of media expansion, *Fortune Writer* realises media convergence through the extension of content, the broadening of channels, and integration at the level of production. The micro-drama supplements many narrative gaps based on the original novel while maintaining unity in worldview, principal characters, and key clues. Platform expansion is reflected in innovative social media operations.

In its production, the series fuses television's audiovisual norms, short-form editing, with traditional cultural elements to create a lavish Eastern visual aesthetic. By integrating multiple forms of cultural heritage, it conveys the enduring charm and aesthetic appeal of Chinese tradition eliciting emotional resonance.

This study supported the premise that audience participation is fundamental to transmedia storytelling. Empowered by technology, audiences wield the power to shape media; challenging the traditional top-down control of media professionals. Fans possess remarkable cohesion, creativity, and spending power; from transmedia products they select what matters to them and piece together a story world. When developments diverge from their preferences, they modify and create the content they desire.

Analysis of Douban and TikTok evaluations of the micro-drama *How Dare You?* found that audiences proactively participate in interpretation, re-creation, and consumption driven by a desire to control textual meaning. The relationship between audiences and producers is dynamic and can be reciprocal. Producers, aligning with audience expectations, utilise media to craft captivating stories and distinctive discourses that attract viewing, recognition,

and participation, ultimately achieving capital returns. In turn, audiences satisfy their interpretive control and emotional needs through active engagement, creative re-interpretation, and immersive media consumption.

In summary, current production and dissemination pathways for the screen adaptation of online fiction are not yet fully mature, but growing scholarly attention has spurred innovative explorations in adaptation modes, narrative techniques, and media development that offer new possibilities for digital storytelling. Limitations remain: the scope is broad but the depth insufficient; for example, the analysis of world construction relies only on two cases yielding limited applicable data. Future research should pursue deeper inquiry into the screen adaptation of online fiction from a transmedia perspective.

Despite these insights, several limitations of this study must be acknowledged. First, the empirical focus is relatively narrow, primarily drawing upon case studies of specific micro-dramas such as *Fortune Writer* and *How Dare You?*. This limited sample size may restrict the ability to generalise the findings across the broader spectrum of online literature screen adaptations. Second, the audience reception data was predominantly sourced from platforms like Douban and TikTok. While these platforms are highly active, their user bases inherently carry specific demographic and algorithmic biases, which may not fully represent the diverse attitudes of the entire viewing public. Therefore, future research should seek to expand the scope of analysis. Examining a wider variety of transmedia genres, incorporating more comprehensive cross-platform data, and conducting longitudinal studies over extended timeframes will be essential to developing a more holistic understanding of the evolving dynamics among online fiction, media convergence, and audience participatory culture.

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