

Analysis of Transmedia Storytelling in Chinese IP Films Focusing on "Detective Chinatown" IP

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Abstract: In the era of media convergence, many excellent IP films have appeared in China's film market. However, focusing only on short-term fan traffic does not bring long-lasting brand benefits for excellent IP. At present, most of China's IP resources blindly copy the successful cases of foreign transmedia storytelling, and do not give full play to their own advantages. Confusing the basic theoretical boundaries and ignoring the focus of theoretical practice have become the main problems facing China's IP film industry. Therefore, China's IP films need a clearer direction for guiding theoretical practice. This paper delves into the theoretical connotation of transmedia storytelling and sorts out the basic framework. With the help of literature research method and comparative analysis method, it compared the characteristics of One Source Multi Use (OSMU) and transmedia storytelling theory, and clarified the boundaries between similar theories. Combined with the situation of Chinese IP films and the structure of transmedia storytelling, the paper put forward the characteristics of three aspects, namely, media form, story world and narrative content, and provides a direction for the theoretical practice. On this basis, this paper took the more successful "Detective Chinatown" IP (hereinafter referred to as "Tang Tan" IP) in China as an example, analyzed the three aspects mentioned above, and verified the feasibility of these three characteristics in Chinese IP films. The results provide a clear direction for the theoretical guidance of transmedia storytelling as well as theoretical and practical ideas for Chinese IP films.

Keywords: Detective Chinatown, IP Film, OSMU, Structure, Transmedia Storytelling

1. Introduction

There exists a certain complexity in the Chinese film market itself. Coupled with the impact of media convergence and new media technologies in the post epidemic era, China's film industry has been forced to think about a new way out of the original pattern. According to the official statistics of China Movie Database, since the resumption of movie-going in China, there have been many films that have grossed more than RMB 2 billion or even RMB 5 billion at the box office, such as "My People My Homeland", "The Battle at Lake Changjin", and "Nezha: I am the Destiny". Most of these films are IP films, which can be reproduced across media based on the original text. Therefore, with the brand influence of IP films in the early stage, and with the help of transmedia storytelling method, the viscous flow of IP films can be increased. However, at present, the development of IP films in China is still in the primary stage of enthusiastic investment but lacks of macro rational analysis[1].

China's transformation of IP resources is currently stuck in the traditional OSMU operation mode, and even confuses the two concepts when applying transmedia storytelling theory. However,

Received: August 01, 2023; 1st Review Result: September 06, 2023; 2nd Review Result: October 10, 2023
Accepted: November 25, 2023

transmedia storytelling has a completely different narrative structure from OSMU. Instead of replacing OSMU as a media strategy, it is another strategy for utilizing IP that has emerged with the changes in the media environment[2]. Most of the current IP films in China are adapted from the original story background, utilizing the OSMU model to leverage the copyright flow of the source text. The expansion of the story world by the media platform in transmedia storytelling is neglected. Therefore, it is important to clarify the theoretical characteristics of transmedia storytelling and provide development ideas in combination with the situation of Chinese IP films.

Since the introduction of transmedia storytelling into China, more and more Chinese scholars have studied the theory. Scholar Zexin Ren takes the successful experience of Marvel Movies as an example, and puts forward a proposal for China's film and television IP transmedia storytelling practice[3]. Scholar Cuihong Yu summarizes the internal logic of transmedia storytelling theory through the tracking record and analysis of Marvel movies[4]. Scholar Xin Du analyzes the theory of transmedia storytelling with the case of *The Matrix*[5]. It can be seen that there are fewer cases in which Chinese IP films really conform to the concept of transmedia storytelling industry layout. Therefore, domestic scholars' research on transmedia storytelling in Chinese IP films is also relatively limited.

The phenomenon of misinterpretation of theoretical concepts and the lack of excellent practice cases have become the main problems in the development of China's IP film market at present. Transmedia storytelling in China has only realized the formal transformation from textual medium to film medium, and the real transmedia system has not yet been formed[6]. This study starts from the perspective of IP films and in the second part of the article, the basic theoretical concepts are identified. In the third part of the article, the conceptual distinctions are compared to determine the theoretical scope of transmedia storytelling. Combined with the narrative structure, it proposed the characteristics of transmedia storytelling in three aspects: media form, story world and narrative content. Finally, in the fourth part of the article, the feasibility of the above features is proved by utilizing "Tang Tan IP". This study aims to clarify the theoretical features of transmedia storytelling and discuss the practical strategies of transmedia storytelling theory with practical cases. To provide a certain reference direction for the development of transmedia storytelling in Chinese IP films.

2. Theoretical Research

2.1 IP Film

"IP" is the abbreviation of "intellectual property". With the development of the times, IP has been given more meaning, which can be a book, a character, a story, or a film. In the film and television industry, IP is gradually becoming a copyrighted product that can generate economic value and certain social benefits[7]. It can be based on the content of the text, myths and legends, character images, and other IP re-creation, and finally presented in the form of film works. It can also be a mature film recognized by society and the audience and thus developed into a film IP.

In the transmedia storytelling study of "Tang Tan" IP in this paper, it prefers to define IP films as IP developed from a recognized film and gradually developed from IP films to comics, web series, games and other platforms through the continuous creation of this IP film.

2.2 OSMU

OSMU is a creation based on a stable story core, which emphasizes "One Source Multi Use" and falls under the scope of copyright operation. "One Source" refers to one copyright creative work and "Multi Use" refers to the multiple fields involved in copyright development. In the IP film industry, IP resources, as the core of copyright development, can be extended to other media platforms in various

ways. All platforms are interrelated and influence each other to form a multiple industry chain. In the process of adaptation, the scriptwriter will make certain content changes according to the characteristics of the medium on the basis of the source text, and finally the same story or IP will be presented in different versions. It can maximize the copyright revenue by crossing the boundaries of forms or platforms. The OSMU model is the most important model in the all-rights operation, which is the project management model of the western culture industry[8].

2.3 Transmedia Storytelling

The discussion of "narrative" and "media" has existed since the beginning of narrative studies. As media technology continues to evolve, cultural content in various fields is trying to bring audiences a better experience through games, films, and other media platforms. Before 2006, the American scholar Henry Jenkins had in fact initially expressed his ideas about transmedia storytelling in related books and magazines. However, it was not until 2006 that "Transmedia Storytelling" was clearly conceptualized in Henry Jenkins' book "Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide."

After the concept of transmedia storytelling was introduced, there are still different views on the concept of transmedia storytelling in academia. Frank Rose called it "Deep Media" and Christy Dena called it "Cross-media"[4]. For the part of transmedia storytelling theory, this paper used the research of two major scholars, Henry Jenkins and Marie-Laure Ryan to explain the development process of this theory [Table 1].

[Table 1] Transmedia Storytelling Theory

	Henry Jenkins		Marie-Laure Ryan	
Main Publications	1992 TEXTUAL POACHERS:Television Fans And Participatory Culture	Provides a research foundation for transmedia storytelling's audience engagement theory[9].	2004 Narrative Across Media	The static pictures, dynamic pictures, music and digital media are classified and described.
	2003 Quentin Tarantino's Star Wars --- Digital Cinema, Media Convergence and Participatory Culture	The modes of media transformation are summarized.	2006 Avatars of Story	The concept of "digital transgression" was introduced. Exploring the "transgressive" behavior of stories.
	2006 CONVERGENCE CULTURE: Where Old and New Media Collide	Formally proposed the concept of transmedia storytelling.	2013 Symposium on Narratology, Guangzhou, China	The relationship between "story" and "world" is summarized in three types of textual proliferation.
	2009 Personal Blog	The 7 principles of transmedia storytelling are presented.	2014 Storyworlds Across Media	Concepts such as story worlds and transmedia are analyzed.
Core Content	A transmedia story is presented across multiple media platforms, where each new text makes a unique and valuable contribution to the overall story, and transmedia storytelling at its best when each medium is doing its job well and doing its part[10].		Combining traditional narrative theory and digital media to explore the new situation of storytelling. Sorting out the relationship between "story" and "world".	
Features	The discussion is mainly focused on its fan culture and fusion culture. The importance of the story world for story extension is emphasized.		Compatible with the views of different scholars, it organizes concepts about story worlds.	

Transmedia storytelling breaks away from the traditional narrative, which focuses on textual narrative and extends the narrative to the narrative power of the medium. It is an advanced IP operation concept that integrates content creation, industry layout, and fan engagement.

Transmedia storytelling emphasizes intertextuality and expansion. It can have many texts, but each text is interconnected, expanding the boundaries of the storytelling world across different media platforms. This allows the audience to enter the story from any platform and have a new experience. Intertextuality, expansion, and engagement are the core elements of transmedia storytelling.

3. Theoretical Characteristics of Transmedia Storytelling

3.1 Research Methods

This paper first started from the theory and adopted the literature research method. Through the multi-faceted interpretation of the definition of IP film, it is clear that the research object of this paper is the IP developed from a film that has gained audience recognition. By interpreting the OSMU operation mode, the core content of IP copyright operation under this mode can be understood. In addition, the process of the refinement and development of the theories about transmedia storytelling was sorted out according to the chronological clues. The existing theoretical contents about transmedia storytelling were preliminarily elaborated. The theories of two scholars, Henry Jenkins and Marie-Laure Ryan, were organized to form the theoretical framework of this paper. This framework will provide some theoretical support for subsequent research.

In the process of content creation, Chinese IP films have difficulties in clarifying the difference between OSMU and transmedia storytelling theories, and certain theoretical deviations have occurred. This leads to the inability to fully utilize IP advantages in content expansion, worldview construction, and narrative relevance. The mixing of theories has also resulted in the inefficiency of source text content conversion. In view of this situation, this paper used the comparative analysis method to analyze the differences between the two concepts and clarify the theoretical boundaries between OSMU and transmedia storytelling. Providing a foundation for the subsequent characterization study of transmedia storytelling. The structure of transmedia storytelling theory was analyzed in the characterization study of transmedia storytelling to summarize the characteristics of transmedia storytelling theory in terms of media form, story world, and narrative content.

Finally, with the help of the case analysis method, the theoretical framework and characteristics mentioned above were verified. Taking "Tang Tan" IP as an example, the related interview data, media linking mode, and worldview structure were analyzed. Also, the application strategies of Chinese IP films on transmedia storytelling theory were explored, and reference ideas for the exploration of transmedia storytelling practice in Chinese IP films were provided.

3.2 Research Process

3.2.1 Conceptual Distinctions in Transmedia Storytelling

At present, both the theory and practice of transmedia storytelling in China are in the initial development stage. Many IP films cannot clearly distinguish between the operation mode of OSMU and the concept of transmedia storytelling. In fact, both of them are good strategies in the process of IP operation, only that they have different focuses and different operation methods, and the works to which they apply are also different [Table 2].

[Table 2] Comparison of Characteristics between OSMU and Transmedia Storytelling

	OSMU	Transmedia Storytelling
Media form	Multiple media forms	Multiple media forms
Storytelling form	Adaptations of the same story in different media	Multiple stories work together to form an overall narrative framework
Story content	Essentially the same	Different but interrelated
Source text	Stabilized	No absolute source text
Boundary	Relatively fixed	Expandable
Characteristic	Restatement of the source text	Additions to the story
Direction	Iteration of IP	Extension of IP
Theoretical core	Stability of source text	The Unity of the Story World Intertextuality and Expansion of Story Content
Advantage	Maximizing Individual Copyright Benefits	The Creation of the IP Universe

Both OSMU and transmedia storytelling, though relying on multiple media platforms for story dissemination, still have certain differences. OSMU needs to be created based on the content of a successful source text, which is adapted according to the characteristics of different media platforms. It can be said that the overall structure of OSMU is a radial graphic with the source text as the center spreading out to the surrounding.

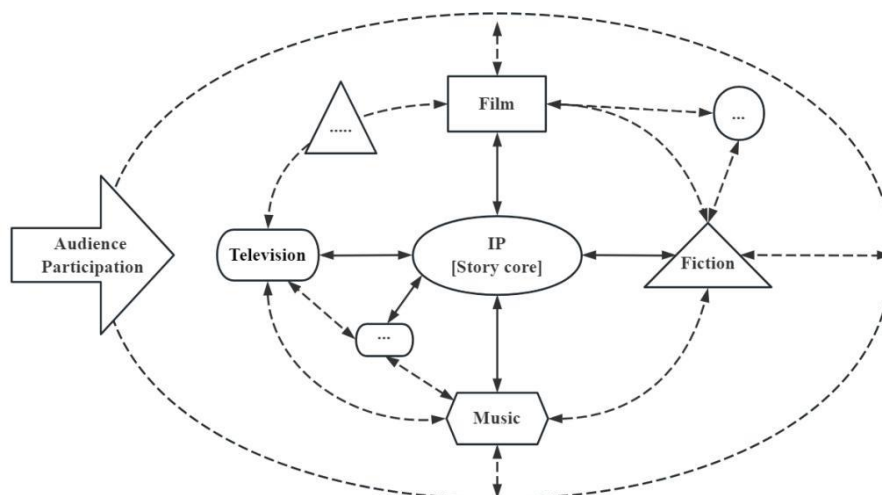
Transmedia storytelling emphasizes the unity of worldviews. There is no absolute source text, and there are no story boundaries. Each story is independent of each other. However, there is a certain connection between these stories that allows the audience to enter the same story world from any one of them. Rather than reusing the same stories in different media as OSMU does, transmedia storytelling is interconnected by presenting different stories in different media[11]. Therefore, the overall structure of transmedia storytelling can be seen as a large geometry composed of many small geometries.

OSMU is a concept that highlights the importance of the original works industry in terms of the cultural content industry[12]. It can break the traditional boundaries between different industries and maximize the revenue from the added value of copyrighted content. Transmedia storytelling is the practice and aesthetics of narrating across multimedia channels. The holistic elements of the story are dispersed across multiple communication channels with the goal of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience[13]. The difference in theoretical significance determines the difference in the place of application. "Avoiding unnecessary repetition between media" is an important characteristic that distinguishes transmedia storylines from the so-called OSMU[14]. Transmedia storytelling is more researchable as the central argument of this paper.

3.2.2 The Structure of Transmedia Storytelling

Although the theory of transmedia storytelling does not have an absolute source text, this does not mean that it does not have a clear narrative structure. Among the many textual systems of transmedia storytelling, there exists a "Canonical Core". Creators can use the works of the Canonical Core as the basis for their creation, and thus provide an "Intended Structure" for the operation of the entire story world[15]. In the story world of IP films, the "Canonical Core" is the IP, and the "Intended Structure" is a series of character relationships and storylines derived from this core IP. By developing the contents of these "Intended Structures" into their own narrative text, a story world with a unified worldview can be constructed [Fig. 1]. Therefore, the story world first needs a "story core", which

consists of two parts, one is the core worldview, and the other is the meta-text[16].



[Fig. 1] Structure of the Story World

Transmedia storytelling is an integrated world where each story across media has uniqueness and integrity[17]. As with the structure represented in [Fig. 1], the dotted line in the outermost circle represents the extensibility of the story world boundary. The "Story Core" within the story world represents the unity of the worldview. The core worldview derives more stories with the help of multiple media, and there can be direct or indirect relationships between stories, which form a complex mesh narrative structure. The shape of the medium in the story world and the content of the stories can be constantly expanded. Each story can serve as an entrance to the story world, and this semi-open structure provides more possibilities for audience participation.

3.3 Research Results

The above research proves that the story world under the theory of transmedia storytelling needs to ensure a unified worldview, story boundaries that can be continuously expanded, diverse media forms, and a net-like narrative structure. In addition, media, narrative, and worldview all present their own characteristics respectively. The vitality of transmedia storytelling lies in the expansion of limited story texts through multiple media methods and means, thus creating IP with lasting vitality[18]. The conceptual distinctions and structural analysis illustrate the need to avoid unnecessary repetition and maintain the diversity, intertextuality, and extensibility of story worlds in the practice of transmedia storytelling theory. While ensuring the unity of the worldview, the activity between stories and stories, and between media and boundaries are maximized, so that the story world can be in an organic dynamic balance. Therefore, intertextuality, participation, and expansion have also become the core features of transmedia storytelling theory. In this paper's research on IP films, it can be simply summarized that the diversity of media forms, the unity of story worlds and the intertextuality of narrative contents should be maintained in the process of theoretical practice. The "Tang Tan" IP series has well practiced these three characteristics, and has achieved good results in the Chinese IP film market.

4. Transmedia Storytelling Strategy for "Tang Tan" IP

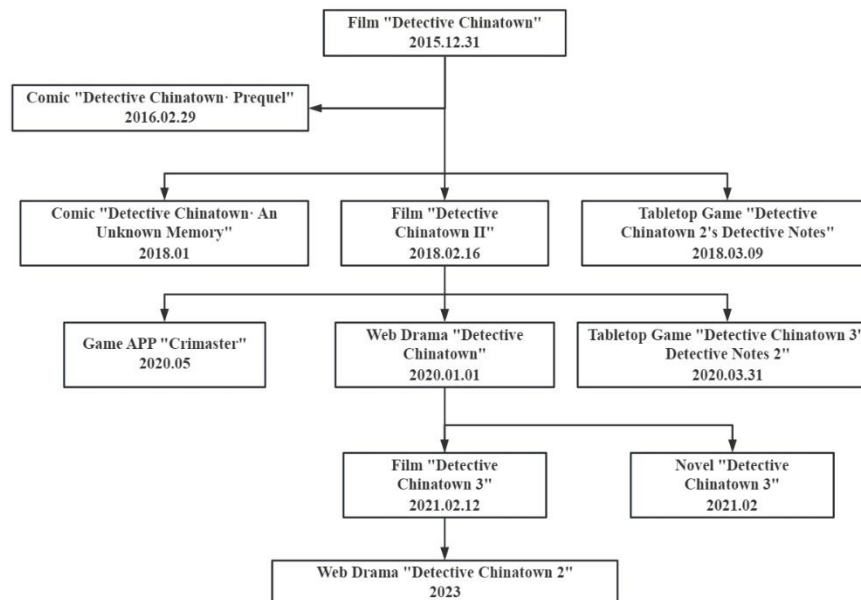
4.1 Diversity of Media Forms

To date, the "Tang Tan" IP series has three films, one web drama, two comics, one detective game,

two tabletop games and one novel [Fig. 2]. The "Tang Tan" IP has established a cosmic narrative framework. From 2015 to 2021, the box office of the film series increased from RMB 823 million to RMB 4.5 billion. Shortly after the release of the first film, the "Tang Tan" team collaborated with comic artist Maiya to launch the "Detective Chinatown-Prequel" comic on the official Weibo page. Prior to the release of the second film, the team collaborated with comic artist Mo Fei to release the hilarious speculative comic "Detective Chinatown-An Unknown Memory". The "Tang Tan" IP series is gradually taking on a multi-media narrative trend.

In addition to the film and comic, the "Tang Tan" team also interspersed a web drama during this period, which focused on three different stories. Then, the team cooperated with Qingdao Chemen Network Technology Co., Ltd., and launched a deductive detective game APP --- "Crimaster". In addition, they also cooperated with "OMESCAPE" board game brand to launch the tabletop games "Detective Chinatown 2's Detective Notes" and "Detective Chinatown 3's Detective Notes2"[9].

There are many works related to "Tang Tan" IP. In 2023, the "Tang Tan" IP is expected to release its second web drama "Detective Chinatown 2", and there are plans to expand the story to new platforms such as musicals and animation.



[Fig. 2] "Tang Tan" IP Series Works

4.2 Unity of the Story World

Marie-Laure Ryan explains it vividly through the case of "The Matrix", saying that "the whole Matrix series is like a piece of Swiss Cheese. The film itself provides a story world that is like a piece of cheese full of holes, and the other texts exist to fill those holes and help the audience build a more complete and unified image of the world in their imagination[19]."

For the "Tang Tan" IP, the film is responsible for establishing the main storyline and worldview, while the web drama is responsible for developing side quests based on the main line and opening up the boundaries of the story world. The comic is used to explain the background of the story and characters, and to make the characters and the detective case more three-dimensional. Novels are used to supplement the details that the film fails to present. The game is used to give the audience a window into the world of the story and to unleash the power of fans involvement. In the worldview of "Tang Tan" IP, each work appears to fill the holes in Swiss Cheese, making the story world gradually become complete. At the same time, no matter how the story expands, the core of the story world will not change and the worldview will always be stable.

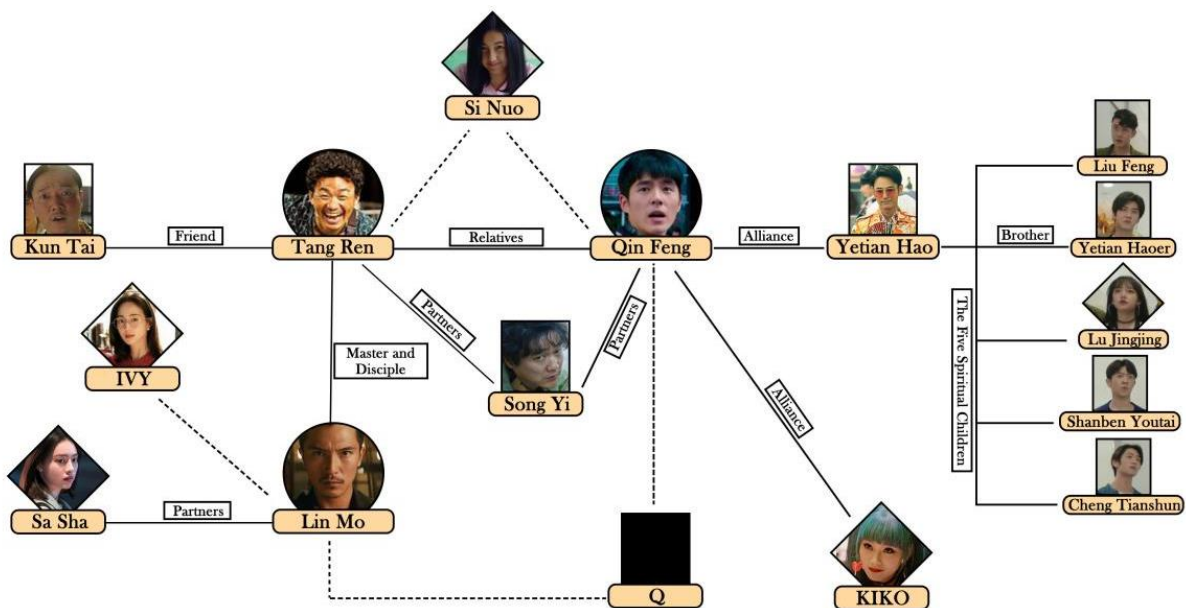
The importance of the core worldview is mainly expressed in the unity of style and the unity of core ideas for works in different media platforms. "Tang Tan" is a Chinese IP identity, but the location of the story is abroad, such as Chinatown in New York, Chinatown in Tokyo and Chinatown in Bangkok. It promotes Chinese culture while showcasing the cultures of other countries from different perspectives. It also reflects the inclusiveness of Chinese culture. This is the unity of the "Tang Tan" IP in cultural communication.

At the beginning of each "Tang Tan" IP work, the director will quote a phrase based on different ancient books, which contains the spiritual connotation of ancient Chinese culture and is also the core idea that each story wants to express. Although the overall "Tang Tan" IP follows the inherent style of "comedy + reasoning", the core values in the Tang Tan IP world are also very educational.

4.3 Intertextuality of Narrative Content

Transmedia storytelling, in addition to ensuring a unified worldview, also needs to give full play to the interconnectedness of narrative content in the context of media linkage. Each story is connected and echoes each other, but at the same time is an independent story. Chen Sicheng, the core director of "Tang Tan" IP, said, "When the movie came to the second part, I suddenly felt that the film had a new spatial dimension after I came up with the concept of Crimaster World Detective Ranking[20]." As Chen Sicheng said, the concept of "Crimaster World Detective Ranking" has become an important connection point of the "Tang Tan" IP story, which greatly promotes the relevance of different media stories.

Stories depend on the world, and characters create stories. The three films of the "Tang Tan" IP are based on "Tang Ren" and "Qin Feng" as the main narrative characters. The comedic overtones of "Tang Ren" and the image of "Qin Feng" as a talented young man have left a deep impression on the audience, forming a conceptualized "central character" image. Other works such as web drama and comic have also featured more than a dozen new characters such as apprentice Lin Mo, hacker girl KIKO, Yetian Hao, Q and IVY. These characters are all related to the Crimaster World Detective Ranking, so the story unfolded in these characters also produced a strong correlation [Fig. 3].



[Fig. 3] Relationship Diagram of the Main Characters of "Tang Tan" IP

Within the same story world, many smaller stories unfold using different mediums, and these smaller stories are linked together through characters and content to generate more cross-currents. A complex spectrum of characters is used to extend the boundaries of the story, and the interconnectedness of the clues drives the synergistic performance of the narrative content.

5. Conclusion

The value of IP lies in its potential to be continuously developed and innovated. Transmedia storytelling theory can better realize this potential. However, China's research on transmedia storytelling theory is still in the early stage. There are still many problems in theoretical research and theoretical practice. Clarifying the core idea of transmedia storytelling can help works aiming at "Cosmized Narrative" to realize their creative value. This article is based on the situation of the Chinese IP film market, combined with the OSMU theory, and summarizes the practical strategies of transmedia storytelling theory suitable for Chinese IP films. Maintaining the diversity of media forms, the unity of the story world, and the intertextuality of narrative content have become the basic characteristics of transmedia storytelling theory in this study. As a relatively successful local IP for transmedia storytelling in China, the "Tang Tan" IP has effectively verified these basic characteristics in terms of story layout, character relationships, and media relationships. At the same time, it also provides more specific methods for the practice of transmedia storytelling in China, which has high reference significance.

Meanwhile, this paper only analyzes the characteristics of transmedia storytelling theory from a single aspect, theoretical analysis of lack of relevance. Similarly, in the study of transmedia storytelling of IP films, there are certain differences between different IPs, and it is not enough to just analyze "Tang Tan" IP. The IP film market will continue to change over time, theories will continue to improve and develop, and more excellent works will emerge in China. In the future, the article will combine the theories of fan culture and franchising to analyze the transmedia storytelling strategy of China's IP film market more comprehensively from a new perspective.

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