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VIEWING, EMOTION, AND NARRATIVE COMPREHENSION OF CHINESE FAMILY MICRO- DRAMAS IN A PLATFORMIZED MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract:

In recent years, micro-dramas have become one of the fastest growing and most widely disseminated forms of online audiovisual content in China. Among them, family-themed micro-dramas have shown particular prominence. This study examines how audiences rapidly comprehend and emotionally engage with family micro-dramas. It focuses on their circulation in short-duration and rapid, platform-based media environments. Drawing on reception aesthetics, particularly the concept of the “horizon of expectation,” this study adopts qualitative textual analysis, integrating narrative and thematic approaches. Three highly popular Chinese family micro-dramas released between 2024 and 2025 are selected as case studies. These cases are chosen for their high viewership, strong audience engagement, and representation of contemporary family narratives. The analysis focuses on narrative structure, character relationships, emotional expression, and reception-oriented narrative strategies. The findings indicate that the effectiveness of family micro-dramas depends less on narrative complexity or formal innovation than on their alignment with audiences’ everyday family experiences. Familiar family relationships function as low-threshold narrative frameworks, enabling viewers to quickly identify character roles, conflict types, and emotional positions, thereby reducing cognitive effort. At the same time, these dramas employ emotional compression, concentrating conflicts so that narrative comprehension and emotional response occur simultaneously. This study argues that family micro-dramas represent a form of reception-driven narration adapted to platform-based viewing conditions. By combining accessible narrative structures with emotionally concentrated storytelling, they facilitate rapid meaning-making and audience engagement. These findings contribute to understanding narrative practices in platform-

based media and extend the application of reception aesthetics to contemporary short-form audiovisual content.

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Introduction

Compared with traditional television dramas and long-form web series, micro-dramas are characterized by short episode durations, dense plot development, and rapid updates. Their production, circulation, and viewing processes are closely integrated with the operational logic of short-video platforms. The emergence of micro-dramas, therefore, is not simply a change in content form, but is closely linked to broader transformations in platform-based media environments.

On short-video platforms, content is primarily distributed through algorithmic recommendation, and viewing typically occurs within continuously refreshed information feeds. Instead of selecting content based on fixed schedules or clear viewing intentions, audiences make ongoing decisions about whether to continue watching during sequential playback. This mode of consumption significantly shortens the time available for comprehension and evaluation, while also reshaping expectations regarding narrative pacing. At the same time, platform-based evaluation mechanisms influence narrative strategies. Metrics such as completion rates, user interaction, and immediate feedback have become key indicators of content performance. Under these conditions, creators must capture attention quickly and sustain viewer engagement within a limited timeframe. As a result, narrative progression becomes compressed, and emotional expression is intensified to accommodate fragmented attention and accelerated viewing rhythms.

Within this context, micro-dramas have developed a narrative mode characterized by rapid entry into the story and the immediate activation of emotional response. Short duration does not weaken narrative function; rather, it encourages the concentrated presentation of conflict and emotion, enabling high communicative efficiency in platform environments. During viewing, audiences often rely on emotional cues to determine whether to continue watching, which accelerates narrative comprehension.

Micro-dramas, therefore, should not be understood simply as condensed versions of conventional audiovisual works. Instead, they constitute a distinct content form shaped by platform operations, recommendation logics, and evolving viewing practices. This media environment also provides the conditions for the prominence of specific genres, among which family-themed micro-dramas have emerged as particularly significant due to their accessibility and resonance with everyday experience.

The Prominence and Research Significance of Family Micro-Dramas

Against the rapid expansion of micro-dramas, productions centred on family relationships have become particularly prominent. They have emerged as one of the most stable and consistently popular genres within platform-based media environments. A large number of family micro-dramas—focusing on reconstituted families, intergenerational relations, marital ethics, and parent-child interactions—have achieved high view counts and sustained discussion on short-video platforms. This pattern indicates a clear process of genre clustering rather than isolated success.

This trend reflects a strong alignment between family-based narratives and platform circulation logic. According to the 2024 Micro-Drama Industry Ecology Insight Report released by the China Netcasting Services Association, the proportion of family-themed micro-dramas increased from 2.6% in 2023 to 8.0% in 2024, making it one of the fastest-growing genres. Together with urban and romantic themes, family narratives have become a core component of female-oriented content. In 2025, family ethics and kinship-related themes ranked among the top three categories of native short dramas on Douyin, while their share on platforms such as Hongguo continued to increase. Representative titles, including *Inside and Outside the Family* and *The Arrival of the Eighteen-Year-Old Great-Grandmother*, have been widely recognised as phenomenon-level productions.

Compared with genres such as suspense, fantasy, or purely gratification-oriented narratives, family micro-dramas do not rely on complex world-building or frequent plot reversals. Instead, they are grounded in audiences' everyday life experiences. Family relationships possess high recognisability and emotional density, enabling viewers to quickly identify character roles, relational structures, and conflict focal points without extensive exposition. This low threshold of comprehension gives family micro-dramas a distinct advantage in short-duration, fast-paced information feeds.

Moreover, family micro-dramas demonstrate strong cross-generational appeal in platform environments. Whether through period narratives centred on intergenerational conflict or urban ethical stories focusing on in-law relations and remarried families, these productions evoke emotional resonance across diverse audience groups. This broad and stable reception base makes family micro-dramas more likely to be prioritised by platform algorithms and repeatedly adopted by creators.

From a research perspective, the significance of family micro-dramas lies not only in their thematic content but also in the narrative mechanisms and reception processes they reveal. By relying on highly typified family roles and ethical structures, these works compress complex social experiences into emotionally recognisable situations. This allows narrative meaning to be rapidly constructed during the viewing process. Family micro-dramas, therefore, are not merely a subcategory of micro-drama production. Rather, they provide an important analytical

entry point for understanding narrative efficiency and emotional mobilisation in platform-based media environments.

Literature Review

In recent years, scholarly research on micro-dramas and related short-form audiovisual content has increased significantly, reflecting the rapid development of this emerging media form. Existing studies have examined micro-dramas from multiple perspectives, including platform distribution mechanisms, narrative characteristics, audience reception, and industrial production. As a result, a relatively structured research landscape has begun to take shape. Based on a review of studies published in the past two years—when micro-dramas experienced accelerated growth and broader academic attention—current scholarship can be broadly grouped into several analytical strands. However, despite the expansion of this field, research specifically focusing on family micro-dramas remains limited. In particular, there is a lack of systematic analysis of how family-based narratives operate under platform conditions and how they are rapidly understood and emotionally engaged by audiences. This gap indicates the need for further theoretical development and empirical investigation.

Core Trajectories of Micro-Drama Research: Production-Oriented and Multi-Dimensional Approaches

Existing research on micro-dramas has largely been organised around a production-circulation framework, which can be broadly divided into three analytical trajectories.

First, studies on industry development and policy regulation focus on the broader industrial ecology of micro-dramas. For example, Li and Hou (2025) examine current development trends and propose future pathways for the industry, while Qiao and Chen (2025) analyse structural tensions and regulatory strategies from the perspective of copyright governance. Chen and Li (2025) explore the integrated model of “micro-dramas + cultural tourism,” highlighting the potential of micro-dramas to activate local cultural resources. Other studies, such as Zhang and Jiang (2025), address commercialisation processes by outlining industrial characteristics, competitive structures, and development prospects.

Taken together, this body of research provides a macro-level account of the industrial logic underpinning micro-dramas, with particular emphasis on production systems, regulatory frameworks, and market dynamics. However, by prioritising industrial operation and policy concerns, these studies pay limited attention to how specific narrative forms are experienced by audiences. In particular, they overlook how genres such as family micro-dramas are interpreted and made meaningful within concrete viewing contexts.

Second, a body of research approaches micro-dramas from the perspective of creative practice and ethical considerations, focusing on narrative design and value orientation at the production level. Lin and Huang (2025), for instance, identify a three-layered logic of “gratification” in micro-drama production, arguing that rapid conflict escalation and immediate feedback mechanisms are used to meet audience expectations. Wang (2025) examines micro-dramas centred on middle-aged and elderly characters, highlighting their role in addressing gaps in content provision. Li and Liu (2024) further discuss ethical issues in micro-drama creation, particularly in relation to value expression and moral responsibility.

While these studies move closer to textual and thematic analysis, they remain primarily concerned with how content is constructed by creators. As a result, they offer limited insight into how audiences comprehend, interpret, and emotionally engage with such narratives under conditions of short duration viewing. The reception process, therefore, remains insufficiently theorised.

Finally, research within cultural and communication studies tends to emphasise the cultural value and dissemination pathways of micro-dramas. For example, Hu highlights the advantages of vertical-screen micro-dramas in international communication, particularly their adaptability to mobile viewing environments. Other scholars examine global circulation. Chen and Chen (2025), for instance, analyse creative strategies and cross-cultural adaptation in the process of “micro-drama globalisation.”

Although this line of research sheds light on the communicative potential of micro-dramas, it largely focuses on dissemination outcomes rather than audience reception. In particular, it does not sufficiently address how certain genres—especially family micro-dramas—lower the threshold of narrative comprehension and generate emotional resonance. This limitation is especially evident under the short-duration and rapid circulation conditions of platform-based media.

Overall, existing research has predominantly focused on production, industry, and dissemination, while paying relatively limited attention to reception processes. In particular, there is a lack of systematic analysis of how family micro-dramas are rapidly understood and emotionally engaged with by audiences. This gap highlights the need to shift from production-oriented perspectives to a reception-based analytical framework.

Family Micro-Dramas and the Research Gap in Reception Aesthetics

Existing scholarship reveals two related limitations in current research: the lack of systematic study of family micro-dramas and the insufficiently targeted application of reception aesthetics. On the one hand, research specifically addressing family micro-dramas remains limited. Studies of family narratives in Chinese audiovisual media have largely focused on traditional television dramas, particularly in relation to intergenerational relations, marital ethics, and family values. In contrast, family-themed micro-dramas are only sporadically discussed in existing micro-drama research. For example, Zhang (2025), in a study of micro-dramas featuring family-related plots, briefly addresses ethical expression but does not examine how family relationships enable audiences to rapidly identify characters and conflicts, or how everyday experience lowers the threshold of narrative comprehension. Other studies consider character construction, narrative features, or genre classification, treating family narratives as one category among many, without developing a systematic account of their reception mechanisms.

On the other hand, the application of reception aesthetics to micro-drama research remains insufficiently specific in its thematic focus. As a theoretical framework concerned with processes of audience meaning-making, reception aesthetics has been introduced into the study of micro-dramas in recent years. Yang and Ma (2024), for instance, apply this framework to analyse the overseas circulation of “gratification-oriented” micro-dramas, arguing that cross-cultural acceptance depends on the alignment of horizons of expectation. Liu (2024), drawing on the Douyin micro-drama *My Name Is Li Lu*, examines how vertical-screen formats

adapt to audience reception habits. Tian (2024) further explores how pre-existing cognitive frameworks shape audience expectations in online micro-dramas.

However, these studies do not place family-themed micro-dramas at the centre of analysis. More importantly, they do not examine how shared family experiences function as a collective horizon of expectation, nor how emotional presentation and narrative comprehension operate simultaneously in short duration viewing contexts. As a result, the application of reception aesthetics remains insufficiently connected to the specific narrative conditions of family micro-dramas.

Taking together, these limitations point to a broader gap in existing research. While family micro-dramas offer a particularly suitable context for examining reception processes, they have not been systematically analysed from this perspective. This study therefore seeks to bridge these two strands by applying reception aesthetics to the analysis of family micro-dramas, with a focus on how audiences rapidly construct meaning and emotional response under platform-based viewing conditions.

Analytical Focus of This Study

A synthesis of existing scholarship suggests that, although research on micro-dramas has addressed industrial, creative, and cultural dimensions, two key limitations remain. First, studies of family micro-dramas have largely remained at the level of genre classification, without examining the reception mechanisms through which family narratives draw on everyday experience to lower the threshold of narrative comprehension. Second, while reception aesthetics has been introduced into micro-drama research, it has not been systematically adapted to family-themed narratives. As a result, there is limited analysis of how family relationships activate audiences' horizons of expectation and how emotional engagement participates in processes of narrative understanding.

To address these limitations, this study adopts reception aesthetics as its core analytical framework and focuses on highly popular Chinese family micro-dramas released between 2024 and 2025. It asks how family micro-dramas are rapidly understood by audiences and how they generate immediate emotional engagement under platform-based viewing conditions. To answer these questions, the analysis examines two interrelated narrative strategies: low-threshold narration and emotional compression. The former relies on the recognisability of family relationships to enable audiences to quickly identify characters and evaluate conflicts, while the latter concentrates emotional confrontation in ways that allow comprehension and emotional response to occur simultaneously during viewing.

This study contributes to existing research in two ways. First, it provides a reception-oriented analysis of family micro-dramas, shifting attention from production and genre classification to audience comprehension and emotional engagement. Second, it extends the application of reception aesthetics to short-form audiovisual content by demonstrating how narrative strategies are shaped by platform-based viewing conditions.

Theoretical Perspective: Reception Aesthetics

This study adopts reception aesthetics as its core theoretical framework. This approach emphasises that the meaning of literary and audiovisual works is not fixed within the text but

is actively constructed by audiences during the process of reception. Rather than focusing on authorial intention or textual structure, reception aesthetics foregrounds the role of the audience, examining how meaning is generated through viewers' prior experiences, emotional structures, and value judgements.

The key concept guiding this study is Jauss's notion of the "horizon of expectation" (Jauss, 1982). This concept refers to the cognitive and affective frameworks that audiences bring to the viewing process, shaped by their life experience, cultural knowledge, and accumulated emotional memory. In the context of micro-dramas, where narrative time is highly compressed, audiences rely heavily on these pre-existing frameworks to make rapid judgements about character relationships and plot development. Meaning is therefore not gradually constructed but quickly inferred through the activation of familiar cognitive patterns.

This study applies reception aesthetics to analyse how family micro-dramas mobilise shared social experiences, particularly family relationships—as a collective horizon of expectation. It focuses on how such familiarity enables audiences to rapidly identify narrative elements and construct meaning under conditions of short duration viewing.

Research Method

This study employs qualitative textual analysis, integrating narrative analysis and thematic analysis. Three highly popular Chinese family micro-dramas released between 2024 and 2025 are selected as case studies. These cases are chosen based on their high view counts, strong audience engagement, and representativeness of contemporary family narratives.

The analysis focuses on how narrative strategies facilitate rapid comprehension and emotional engagement. In particular, two analytical dimensions are identified: low-threshold narration and emotional compression.

First, low-threshold narration refers to the use of familiar family roles and relational structures to enable audiences to quickly identify character positions and conflict types without extensive exposition. Second, emotional compression refers to the concentration of emotional conflict within a limited narrative duration, allowing comprehension and emotional response to occur simultaneously.

Through close textual analysis of narrative structure, character configuration, and emotional presentation, this study examines how these strategies operate in specific scenes and sequences. The aim is to demonstrate how meaning is rapidly constructed in the reception process under platform-based viewing conditions.

Narrative Conditions in Platform-Based Media

The narrative strategies discussed above are closely shaped by the structural conditions of platform-based media environments. Three key conditions are particularly relevant.

Short-duration constraint. Episodes of micro-dramas typically range from one to ten minutes. This limited duration restricts the development of complex plots and necessitates rapid entry into central conflicts.

Emotion-driven circulation. Platform algorithms prioritise metrics such as completion rates and user interaction. As a result, emotional intensity becomes a key factor in sustaining viewer engagement. Immediate emotional feedback often proves more effective than narrative completeness in enhancing circulation.

Rapid distribution logic. Content is delivered continuously through algorithmic recommendation within information feeds. Faced with abundant viewing options, audiences make decisions within a few seconds. This condition favours narratives with a low threshold of comprehension, enabling quick recognition and acceptance.

Research Methodology

Methodological Approach

This study adopts a qualitative textual analysis approach, integrating narrative analysis and thematic analysis. It examines how family micro-dramas construct meaning through the configuration of character relationships, conflict structures, emotional trigger points, and narrative resolutions.

The analysis proceeds in two stages. First, individual cases are analysed to identify key narrative and emotional features. Second, a cross-case comparison is conducted to identify recurring patterns in narrative design and reception mechanisms across different works.

Rather than providing detailed plot summaries, the analysis focuses on identifying recurrent narrative strategies and examining how these strategies draw on audiences' pre-existing family experiences and emotional expectations to facilitate meaning production.

Sample Selection Criteria

This study selects family micro-dramas that achieved significant dissemination on short-video platforms between 2024 and 2025. The selection is based on three criteria.

Dissemination impact. Works with view counts exceeding 500 million on major platforms such as Douyin and Hongguo, interaction rates of at least 3%, or inclusion in annual Top 20 popularity rankings. These indicators reflect the actual communicative reach and audience engagement of the selected works.

Core narrative attributes. Family relationships—such as spousal, parent-child, intergenerational, and in-law relations—must constitute the central narrative structure rather than serving as a secondary background element.

Genre diversity. The sample includes different narrative types, such as period family narratives, reconstituted families, original families, and stories focusing on middle-aged and elderly characters, in order to avoid homogeneity and enhance the analytical scope of the study.

Case Selection and Analytical Scope

Based on these criteria, three works—*Midsummer Fendler Rose*, *Hi Mom*, and *Flash Marriage: My Elderly Spouse Is a Tycoon*—are selected as the core analytical cases.

This study does not employ empirical methods such as audience interviews or surveys. Instead, it analyses how audience comprehension and emotional response are presupposed within the narrative structures of the texts themselves. This approach is consistent with reception aesthetics, which emphasises meaning as a process constructed in the interaction between text and audience.

To reduce the subjectivity associated with single-case interpretation, the study adopts a comparative approach, identifying shared narrative patterns across multiple works. Through this method, it explains how family micro-dramas achieve efficient meaning production under platform-based viewing conditions.

Family as a ‘Low-Threshold’ Narrative Form

In a platformized media environment, the narrative time of micro-dramas is significantly compressed, and audiences are often required to make viewing decisions within a very short period. Under such narrative conditions, ease of comprehension becomes one of the core factors influencing dissemination effectiveness. Family-themed micro-dramas stand out among various micro-drama genres, and their communicative advantages are not isolated cases but represent a common characteristic of family-themed productions within industry. A wide range of family micro-dramas—differing in style and domestic settings—achieve high levels of circulation and emotional resonance through low-threshold narration. Their completion rates consistently rank among the highest within comparable genres and they attract audiences across different age groups. This widespread phenomenon is closely related to the fact that their narratives are built upon family relationships familiar to audiences, endowing them with an inherently low threshold of understanding.

From *Home and Away* which focuses on reconstituted families and has accumulated over 1 billion views, to *Sunshine by My Side*, which portrays original families and ranked among the Top 5 family-themed micro-dramas on Douyin in the first quarter of 2025; from *My Mother-in-Law’s Heartwarming Meals* centred on mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relations with an interaction rate of 4.2% on the Hongguo platform, to *Togetherness of Three Generations* depicting multigenerational households and recognised as an annual blockbuster in the kinship genre on Kuaishou; from *The Dim Light of a Single Mom* which tells the story of a single-parent family, to *Affection Across Cities*, portraying geographically separated families, and further to *Warm Ordinary Days* and *Home in the Old Street*, which depict the everyday life of ordinary suburban families—these works differ in the family forms they focus on and in their core conflicts. Nevertheless, all of them rely on the universality of family relationships to achieve low-threshold narration, rapidly capturing audience attention and thereby demonstrating the general applicability and feasibility of family narratives as a low-threshold narrative form in micro-dramas.

As the most fundamental form of interpersonal relations in society, family relationships have generated stable and widely shared cognitive consensus in everyday life. Family roles such as parents, children, spouses, and in-laws have long been associated with relatively fixed identity positions and behavioural expectations in public perception. When watching family-themed micro-dramas, audiences usually do not require additional narrative explanation to quickly identify relationships between characters and the types of conflicts that may arise. This cognitive convenience constitutes the core prerequisite of low-threshold narration in family-

themed narratives. The numerous popular works mentioned above clearly demonstrate this characteristic, forming a large-scale and widely shared phenomenon across the industry.

Taking *Home and Away* as an example, the opening episodes establish the narrative solely through dialogue between the engineer Chen Haiqing and the ink factory worker Cai Xiaoyan, along with brief scenes of interaction between the two children. Through these elements alone, audiences are able to quickly recognise the family as a reconstituted one and clearly identify relationships such as spouses and stepchildren, without the need for additional background exposition. Once the characters appear, their roles and positions within the family are automatically recognised by viewers, enabling the story to enter its core narrative rapidly.

Sunshine by My Side focuses on an ordinary original family. Its opening relies on a single everyday scene—a mother urging her child to do homework while the father mediates—to quickly establish the core relationships between parents and an adolescent child. Without the need for further interpretation, audiences can anticipate subsequent conflicts such as academic disputes or parent-child estrangement, achieving rapid narrative immersion.

My Mother-in-Law's Heartwarming Meals centres on the relationship between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Through an opening sequence depicting the mother-in-law preparing breakfast early in the morning and the daughter-in-law returning home from work and exchanging greetings, the drama clearly defines the relationships between mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, and spouses. Even in the absence of complex background information, audiences are able to quickly understand character identities and interaction patterns.

Although these works focus on different family forms, they all rely on the universality of family relationships to achieve the rapid transmission of relational information, significantly reducing the cognitive cost for audiences. This is a key reason why family themes have become a central choice for low-threshold narration in micro-dramas.

The reduction of cognitive and interpretive thresholds further extends to the emotional level. As the most fundamental social unit and the one closest to everyday life, the family carries emotional experiences and conflict patterns that are widely shared. This gives emotional expression in family micro-dramas a high degree of predictability, a characteristic that is common across different family-themed micro-dramas and constitutes an important support for low-threshold narration. Family conflicts are typically accompanied by emotions such as anger, grievance, endurance, or reconciliation—emotions that are highly recognisable in real-life experience. During viewing, audiences are able to quickly empathise with characters' emotional states and relate them to their own family experiences. For this reason, even within a highly limited narrative span, family micro-dramas are able to rapidly evoke emotional resonance, allowing audiences to enter the story at an emotional level and further reinforcing the 'low threshold' nature of their narration.

The narrative advantages of family-themed content essentially derive from shared cognitive, value-based, and emotional consensus surrounding family relationships in everyday life. This consensus provides audiences with a direct and convenient entry point into the story, enabling them to rapidly form an overall judgement of character relationships, the nature of conflicts, and emotional trajectories within micro-drama narratives where information is highly limited. Such 'low-threshold' narration is not an incidental advantage of individual works, but a common characteristic shared by a wide range of family-themed micro-dramas. From

reconstituted and original families to single-parent families, geographically separated families, and multigenerational households, micro-dramas depicting diverse family forms all leverage this advantage to quickly attract audiences and enhance dissemination effectiveness in platformized media environments. At the same time, this low-threshold narrative structure lays a solid foundation for subsequent emotional expression and narrative progression. This constitutes a core reason why family-themed micro-dramas are able to stand out amid intense market competition and achieve large-scale dissemination advantages.

Emotional Compression and the Rapid Completion of Narrative: Three Family Micro-Dramas as Case Studies

The term ‘emotional compression’ in this study refers to a narrative strategy in which micro-dramas concentrate on core emotional conflicts within a short duration, enabling audiences to quickly generate clear emotional responses. In family-themed micro-dramas, narrative development often does not pursue complex plot elaboration. Instead, emotional conflicts are foregrounded through strategies of emotional compression, allowing audiences to form clear judgements within a limited timeframe. Compared with television dramas that require extended narrative build-up, such works place greater emphasis on immediate responses during the viewing process. Whether audiences are able to quickly understand character relationships, assess emotional positions, and respond affectively often determines whether a work continues to be watched and circulated.

Midsummer Fendler Rose presents a relatively typical mode of ‘low conflict’ narration. The drama rarely features intense confrontation or dramatic plot reversals; instead, narrative progression relies primarily on emotional details drawn from everyday life, such as companionship, care, concern expressed through silence, and the repeated presentation of domestic scenes. These elements are not complex in themselves and do not require additional information integration by audiences. During viewing, however, audiences are usually able to quickly perceive the emotional states between characters and, on this basis, understand the general direction of narrative development. The portrayal of trauma within original families is not concentrated in a single dramatic event but dispersed across multiple emotional responses. Audiences tend to form an overall judgement of character relationships through their perception of emotional changes rather than through deductive analysis of plot logic. When such emotional judgements gradually stabilise, the narrative has already been understood in the course of viewing.

The narrative rhythm of *Hi Mom* is noticeably faster, exhibiting the characteristics of ‘fast-paced conflict.’ Plot development frequently begins with conflict, forming emotional circuits through rapid reactions and outcomes. Situations of unfair treatment within the family, oppression in kinship relations, and the subsequent resistance and relational adjustment are all presented within a short period. This narrative configuration allows audiences to quickly assess character positions and emotional trajectories without waiting for extensive build-up. Here, the historical setting of the 1980s does not increase the difficulty of comprehension; on the contrary, familiar everyday objects, social contexts, and collective memory help audiences enter the narrative situation rapidly. During viewing, audiences often confirm their understanding of the storyline through emotional responses such as feelings of release, satisfaction, or softening, rather than relying on detailed analysis of causal plot relations.

After Flash Marriage: My Elderly Spouse Is a Tycoon demonstrates a narrative pattern characterised by a ‘single emotional orientation,’ concentrating emotional focus on middle-aged and elderly family relationships. A large proportion of the plot revolves around experiences of neglect, marginalisation, and eventual recognition. Although the characters’ situations are relatively singular, the emotional orientation is clear. Audiences are able to quickly identify the positions of key characters within family relationships at an early stage of viewing and to generate sympathy or identification with their experiences. As the narrative progresses, emotional responses are continuously reinforced, including anger toward unfair treatment, affirmation of supportive behaviour, and expectations regarding the restoration of family relationships. Even where the plot involves conspicuous dramatization, such elements do not undermine audience comprehension; instead, they enhance the viewing experience at the emotional level. For many viewers, once emotional judgement is established, the story itself is perceived as having already been ‘clearly told.’

A comparison of the three works shows that, despite differences in thematic focus, target audiences, and narrative styles, they share similar narrative characteristics. All three compress the time allocated to plot development and place narrative emphasis on emotional presentation and affective judgement. During viewing, audiences don’t need to wait for the story to unfold fully in order to form an overall understanding of characters and events through emotional response. Under these conditions, comprehension is not a delayed outcome but emerges simultaneously with emotional reaction in the course of viewing.

This narrative mode is closely related to the platform environment. On short-video platforms, audiences may interrupt viewing at any moment, and whether content can evoke emotional response within a short time directly affects the likelihood of continued playback. Family micro-dramas simplify complex family relationships into clearly defined emotional positions, enabling audiences to make rapid judgements and thereby lowering the cost of comprehension. Narrative meaning no longer depends on complete exposition but is accomplished at the moment emotional judgement occurs. Accordingly, the narrative characteristics of family micro-dramas lie not in the novelty of plot itself, but in how emotional presentation enables audiences to form clear understanding within a limited timeframe. Emotional response plays a crucial role during viewing: it not only shapes audience experience, but also directly participates in the process through which narratives are understood and accepted.

Reception-Driven Narratives in a Platformized Context

The narrative practices of family micro-dramas can be understood as a form of reception-driven narration that is closely adapted to platform-based media environments. Rather than prioritising authorial expression or narrative complexity, this mode of storytelling is shaped by the dual constraints of audience reception conditions and platform dissemination logic. It reflects a broader transformation in contemporary narrative practices, in which meaning is increasingly oriented toward immediate comprehension and emotional response.

From the perspective of narrative logic, family micro-dramas depart from the traditional “plot-first” model and shift toward a “reception-first” mode of narration. Narrative effectiveness is no longer measured by coherence or completeness, but by the extent to which audiences can quickly understand content and generate emotional resonance. Family relationships function as a central narrative resource because they constitute a widely shared horizon of expectation. Drawing on everyday experience, audiences are able to bypass

extensive exposition and enter directly into core conflicts and emotional situations. This demonstrates how reception aesthetics operates in practice: meaning is not gradually constructed but rapidly activated through familiar cognitive and emotional frameworks.

At the same time, platform logic plays a decisive role in shaping narrative strategies. Algorithms prioritise metrics such as completion rates and interaction rates, compelling content to capture attention within a very limited timeframe. The strategies of low-threshold narration and emotional compression can therefore be understood as adaptive responses to this regulatory environment. While low-threshold narration reduces the likelihood of audience disengagement, emotional compression enhances immediacy and interaction. Together, these strategies maximise dissemination efficiency and align narrative design with platform evaluation mechanisms.

From a cultural perspective, family micro-dramas also construct a form of shared emotional space. By transforming private family experiences into publicly recognisable narratives, they enable audiences to experience a sense of identification and emotional validation. Issues such as intergenerational tension, in-law relations, and emotional marginalisation—often experienced individually but rarely articulated—are collectively represented and circulated. In this sense, emotional engagement in family micro-dramas functions not only as a narrative device but also as a mode of social connection in contemporary popular culture.

However, this reception-driven narrative model also reveals structural limitations. In adapting to the demands of rapid dissemination, family relationships and emotional conflicts are often simplified into binary oppositions, reducing the complexity of family ethics to singular emotional judgements. While such simplification enhances accessibility and circulation, it may also lead to increasing standardisation and narrative homogenisation. This tension between low comprehension cost and narrative depth points to a broader challenge for platform-based storytelling: how to balance efficiency with complexity in an environment structured by algorithmic visibility.

Overall, this study demonstrates that family micro-dramas provide a valuable case for understanding how narrative strategies are reshaped under platform conditions. By foregrounding reception processes and identifying low-threshold narration and emotional compression as key mechanisms, it extends the application of reception aesthetics to short-form audiovisual media and contributes to ongoing discussions of narrative transformation in platform-based cultural production.

Conclusion

This study examines how family micro-dramas are rapidly understood and emotionally engaged with by audiences under platform-based viewing conditions. Drawing on reception aesthetics, it focuses on how short duration and rapid circulation reshape processes of narrative comprehension and emotional response.

The findings show that the dissemination advantages of family micro-dramas derive from their alignment with audiences' everyday experiences and platform logic. Family relationships provide a low-threshold pathway to narrative comprehension: the recognisability of family roles reduces cognitive cost, shared ethical expectations simplify value judgement, and familiar emotional patterns facilitate rapid empathy. At the same time, strategies of emotional

compression concentrate complex social experiences into clearly defined affective conflicts, allowing comprehension and emotional response to occur simultaneously. In this process, emotional reaction functions not only as a viewing experience but also as an indicator of narrative understanding.

Across different thematic types, family micro-dramas exhibit a high degree of consistency in narrative form. Whether in urban, period, or middle-aged and elderly-focused stories, family relationships provide stable interpretive frameworks that enable audiences to maintain continuity of understanding in fast-paced viewing environments. This helps to explain the broad cross-generational appeal of family micro-dramas.

Theoretically, this study extends reception aesthetics to short-form audiovisual media by demonstrating how meaning is rapidly constructed through the interaction between audience experience and platform conditions. It introduces the concept of reception-driven narration to explain how narrative strategies are increasingly shaped by the demands of immediate comprehension and emotional engagement. In doing so, it shifts the analytical focus of micro-drama research from production and genre classification toward reception processes.

This study is based on qualitative textual analysis and does not incorporate empirical methods such as audience interviews, platform data analysis, or cross-platform comparison. While this approach enables a focused examination of narrative strategies, it remains limited in accounting for variations in actual viewing behaviour. Future research may integrate audience studies, algorithm analysis, and cross-regional comparison to further explore the reception and dissemination of micro-dramas.

Overall, family micro-dramas should be understood not merely as a thematic category, but as a narrative form that is structurally adapted to platform-based media environments. By mobilising familiar social experience and emotional judgement, they enable rapid meaning construction under conditions of limited narrative time. The study of family micro-dramas thus provides a useful entry point for understanding broader transformations in narrative practices and audience reception in contemporary platform culture.

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