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Analysis of the Influence of Virtual Idol on Movie Marketing Path

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Abstract: The advent of digital technology has precipitated the emergence of virtual idols as a novel phenomenon within the domains of entertainment and marketing. The breakthrough of digital technology pushes the virtual idol industry into the 3.0 era. These idols are the product of sophisticated computer-generated imagery (CGI) techniques, encompassing three-dimensional animation, motion capture and artificial intelligence (AI)-generated characters. They have effectively transformed the manner in which films engage with audiences, facilitating more immersive and interactive promotional strategies. The burgeoning popularity and technological sophistication within this domain indicate that virtual idols are not merely ephemeral trends, but rather, pivotal catalysts for the evolution of entertainment in the future. The present study employed a mixed-method approach, integrating both qualitative content analysis of marketing campaigns and quantitative surveys to assess audience perceptions. The findings indicate that virtual idols have a substantial impact on brand awareness and audience engagement, thereby generating new opportunities for digital storytelling in the context of film marketing.

Keywords: virtual Idol, movie, marketing.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary digital era, the entertainment industry is undergoing a paradigm shift, driven by technological advancements that reshape the marketing and consumption of films. A significant development in this shift is the rise of virtual icons, which are digital characters created using state-of-the-art computer-generated imagery (CGI) technologies such as three-dimensional animation, motion capture and artificial intelligence (AI). These virtual icons have found applications not only in the domain of entertainment but also in digital marketing, where they have been instrumental in driving the evolution of film promotion. Prominent examples of virtual icons such as Hatsune Miku and Trip Love have become increasingly prominent in the entertainment industry, assisting brands and film studios in the creation of interactive, immersive and personalized marketing campaigns. As virtual idols continue to garner popularity, they are being integrated into film marketing strategies with a view to enhancing audience satisfaction. Based on the above background this paper adopts the case study method to analyses virtual idols and illustrate the impact of virtual idols on film marketing.

The role of virtual idols in marketing and entertainment has become a topic of increasing academic interest, with several studies highlighting the potential of virtual idols to reshape how brands interact with consumers [1]. Virtual idols have the unique ability to create stronger emotional connections with fans because they interact with audiences on an ongoing basis. In contrast to the temporal

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constraints and variability of human influences, virtual idols are not subject to the limitations of age or availability, thereby ensuring a higher degree of reliability and consistency in promotional campaigns. Moreover, the capacity to engage with audiences through personalized content has been demonstrated to enhance brand loyalty and audience engagement [2]. For instance, virtual icons can perform live streaming concerts, participate in online question-and-answer sessions, and share behind-the-scenes content, thereby creating a sense of intimacy and connection that is difficult to achieve using traditional marketing methods.

Some studies explore the increasing integration of avatars in film marketing, highlighting the central role these digital avatars play in promotional strategies due to their capacity to capture attention and generate anticipation for upcoming film releases. The authors contend that virtual idols provide film studios with a novel approach to engaging with a younger, digitally sophisticated audience, whose preferences for interactive and immersive content align with the capabilities of avatars. Furthermore, the advent of avatars has resulted in a paradigm shift in how films are marketed, with a transition from conventional advertising methods to more integrated and experiential forms of promotion [3]. This transition is particularly pronounced in the utilization of social media platforms, where virtual icons are present not only in film trailers and advertisements, but also interact directly with fans, sharing personalized content and providing previews of film production.

Furthermore, some scholars explore the wider impact of virtual idols on the evolution of digital narratives, arguing that these digital incarnations allow for a new form of content creation that merges entertainment and branding [4]. By integrating virtual icons into cinematic narratives, studios can offer audiences an immersive experience that goes beyond the cinema. These virtual icons can be incorporated into video games, animated shorts, and online campaigns, thereby creating a transmedia experience that engages audiences long after their cinematic experience has concluded [5]. Furthermore, these avatars can facilitate the development of cross-platform marketing strategies that are more adaptable and accessible to global audiences.

In addition to the creative potential of virtual idols, some scholars discuss the emotional impact of virtual idols on consumers [6]. By creating a deeper emotional connection with viewers through consistent and meaningful interactions, virtual idols can drive consumer behaviors such as ticket purchases, merchandising and brand loyalty [7]. This emotional bond is a key factor in understanding the effectiveness of virtual idols as a marketing tool in the film industry. The ability to engender a sense of attachment and cultivate loyalty among fans is a formidable asset in the highly competitive realm of film promotion.

2. Virtual idols in film marketing

Digital technology has undergone rapid development in recent years, and the application of virtual idols is gradually becoming more prevalent in the field of film marketing. Virtual idols play an important role in shaping the image of a film, enhancing brand recognition and attracting audiences' interest. Furthermore, virtual idols also have a far-reaching impact on emotional resonance and box office promotion. The following discussion will explore the specific application of virtual idols in film marketing from three perspectives: character continuation, virtual spokespersons, and original virtual characters.

2.1. Character continuity: CGI technology and emotional resonance

One of the immediate applications of virtual idols is character continuity, especially in cases of an actor's death or incapacitation. A prime example of this is provided by Paul Walker in the film *Fast and Furious 7*, in which the director successfully resurrected the character of Brian O'Conner through the use of CGI technology. Despite Walker's demise in a 2013 car accident, his character, Brian

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O'Conner, interacted with other characters in the film through the use of advanced digital technology and facial capture technology. This technological feature not only exemplifies the boundaries of technological advancement but also evokes profound emotional resonance among audiences, particularly during the poignant farewell scene between the protagonist and Paul Walker's character. The use of CGI technology to resurrect Paul Walker's character not only ensured the preservation of the film's original emotional depth but also fostered a profound emotional connection between the audience and the film. This, in turn, led to a significant surge in global box office revenue for *Fast and Furious 7,* which ultimately amassed a staggering $3.7 billion [8]. This technological innovation has been demonstrated to elicit a profound emotional response among audiences, thereby enhancing the film's box office performance. Consequently, this case study serves as a paradigmatic example of the utilization of "virtual idol" technology in film marketing.

2.2. Virtual spokespersons: cross-dimensional endorsements and brand partnerships

The use of virtual idols as spokespersons for films is a recent development that has emerged as a significant instrument in facilitating brand collaborations and promoting cross-dimensional marketing initiatives. A case in point is the endorsement of the virtual singer Luo Tianyi in the Chinese film "*White Snake 2*: Green Snake Hijacking," a move that has been shown to reinvigorate the film's popularity. The inclusion of the virtual singer in *White Snake 2*: The Rise of the Green Snake, an animated film based on a traditional Chinese tale, brought the film to the attention of a significant number of young viewers, as she was chosen to sing the film's theme song. Luo Tianyi, the virtual idol, has garnered a substantial fan base through immersive fan interactions, online live streaming, and music productions. The popularity of her virtual persona has rendered her a pivotal spokesperson for the film's promotion. The adoption of an interdimensional endorsement format by the film makers has attracted a significant demographic of young viewers and utilized Luo Tianyi's virtual image for brand collaborations, thereby expanding the film's audience and enhancing box office revenue [9]. This interdimensional spokesperson model demonstrates the potential of virtual idols to not only augment the brand impact of a film but also to introduce an innovative promotional approach to traditional film marketing.

2.3. Original virtual characters: film IP and global distribution

Original virtual characters represent a significant component of film marketing strategies, often serving as the focal point for the development of their distinct virtual personas to facilitate global publicity initiatives. A prime illustration of this approach is Alita, the protagonist in *Alita: Battle Angel*. This character, entirely virtual in nature, engages real-world actors using CG technology. During the promotional phase of the film, Alita is positioned as the "virtual idol" of the production, a strategy that underscores her role as a central figure in the marketing campaign. Alita's virtual image is not only the core IP of the film, but also a key driver of the film's marketing, with her image spreading through various channels prior to the release of the film, including social media, brand partnerships and online activities, successfully attracting the attention of global audiences.

In the marketing strategy of *Alita: Battle Angel*, the image of the virtual character Alita was repeatedly used by the films' trailers, posters and derivative merchandise, thus establishing this virtual icon as a central symbol of the films' brand. Through the repeated exposure of the virtual character, the film was able to establish a more innovative and three-dimensional connection with the audience, thereby significantly increasing the film's market attention and topicality. The global promotion of Alita's character has also been shown to significantly boost the films' overseas box office performance [10]. This virtual idol global promotion model has been demonstrated to allow the film

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brand to gain more recognition and to enable it to create a deep emotional connection with consumers through the virtual image, thus expanding the film's market share.

3. The positive impact of virtual idols on film marketing

The advent of digital technology and artificial intelligence has precipitated the emergence of virtual idols in film marketing. These virtual entities have the capacity to transcend the conventional limitations of traditional marketing, namely those pertaining to time and space. Moreover, they have been shown to effectively enhance audience interest, mitigate the risk of star dependence, and promote the growth of box office and broadcast volume. The subsequent discussion will address the positive impact of virtual idols on film marketing from four perspectives: the ability to transcend time and space limitations, the capacity to attract audience interest, the mitigation of star dependence, and the enhancement of box office and broadcast volume.

3.1. Breakthrough time and space limitations and extend the marketing cycle

The heading of a subsection title must be 12-point bold with initial letters capitalized, Virtual idols have been shown to offer significant advantages over traditional celebrity endorsements [11]. One of their key benefits is their ability to transcend the limitations of time and space, thereby facilitating continuous participation in the marketing activities of a film [12]. Unlike their physical counterparts, virtual idols are not limited by geographic location or time and can promote a film at any time and in any place [13]. For instance, virtual idols can engage in film promotion and publicity on a 24-hour basis through various channels, including social media platforms, online activities, and virtual reality (VR) or augmented reality (AR) technologies. Consequently, the marketing cycle of a film can be significantly extended, thereby ensuring the sustained attention of the audience over an extended period and maintaining their interest and enthusiasm through the "presence" of the virtual idol across multiple temporal points. This phenomenon is particularly salient in the context of blockbuster films that are released globally, where virtual idols can facilitate the films' globalization [14]. Consequently, films can be marketed not only during the traditional release period but also by utilizing the digital nature of virtual icons to extend the promotional cycle of the film, thereby ensuring that the film's buzz persists for a considerable duration, extending months or even years after the release.

3.2. Attracting audience interest: secondary attributes and fan culture

The secondary attributes of virtual idols have been demonstrated to facilitate effective engagement with specific demographics, notably young people and enthusiasts of secondary cultures.; for example, the Japanese virtual idol Hatsune Miku, who, functioning not only as a virtual singer, but also as a brand with a presence on the Internet, has attracted a considerable number of secondary yuan fans. This phenomenon suggests that virtual idols are able to attract the interest of specific groups through their secondary character in film marketing, especially in specific genres such as animation and science fiction. For example, *White Snake 2*: The Rise of the Green Snake has successfully attracted the attention of a large number of young viewers through the virtual singer Luo Tianyi as the spokesperson of the film. The combination of virtual idol and film has been shown to establish a distinctive emotional bond among young viewers, thereby attracting the attention of secondary cultural enthusiasts [15]. This phenomenon suggests that virtual idols can not only attract potential viewers of a film but also promote the discussion and dissemination of the film through their unique fan culture.

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3.3. Reducing the risk of celebrity dependency and avoiding possible negative consequences for actors

In traditional film marketing, the image and behavior of a star have been shown to have a direct impact on the promotional effect and box office of a film. However, negative news or private life issues of a star may adversely affect film marketing. For example, certain stars have encountered public boycotts due to their inappropriate remarks or behavior, which in turn affects the box office performance of the films in which they participate. However, the emergence of virtual idols effectively circumvents this risk. As digital characters, virtual idols are not influenced by the behavior of individuals in the real world and can maintain a positive image. For instance, although virtual idols such as Luo Tianyi and Hatsune Miku have significant fan bases, the characters themselves have no negative news or other public problems from the individual stars. In the context of film marketing, the image of virtual idols is characterized by stability and reliability, thereby mitigating the risk of issues associated with actors potentially impacting the film's image. Consequently, virtual idols enhance the market stability of films and the controllability of film marketing.

3.4. Increase in box office and airtime

The utilization of virtual idols in the realm of film marketing has been demonstrated as a successful strategy for driving box office growth and airplay. The integration of virtual idols within the marketing campaigns of films has been shown to generate significant levels of attention during the promotional period, thereby stimulating audience interest and contributing to box office growth. Furthermore, the image of the virtual idol itself can become an integral component of the film's brand identity. Through continuous exposure to social platforms, fan interactions, and cross-platform collaborations, virtual idols have been observed to play a pivotal role in helping films to build a diverse audience base. A case study of *Alita: Battle Angel* reveals the efficacy of this strategy. The release of the film was accompanied by a multifaceted promotional campaign involving the virtual character Alita, encompassing traditional promotional channels such as film trailers and posters, as well as social media and online activities. This multifaceted publicity strategy resulted in a significant increase in the film's global awareness, ultimately contributing to its box office success. The unique marketing appeal of virtual idols played a crucial role in expanding the film's audience on a global scale, thereby enhancing its box office performance and airplay.

4. The risks and challenges of virtual idol marketing

Virtual idols have demonstrated significant advantages in film marketing; however, their applications are not without challenges and risks. The most prominent issues in virtual idol marketing at present are technological costs, moral and ethical issues, and differences in cultural acceptance. These factors may affect the widespread application and sustainable development of virtual idols to a certain extent. Future research should focus on cost-effective AI training algorithms and global ethical guidelines for virtual character development.

4.1. Technology costs

The creation and maintenance of virtual idols necessitate substantial technological investment, particularly with regard to the high costs associated with CGI technology, motion capture, and artificial intelligence (AI) generation. Despite the increasing global popularity of virtual idols, their development and maintenance require robust technical support and expertise. For instance, the creation of a virtual image, such as that of Paul Walker in *Fast & Furious 7*, necessitates the use of sophisticated motion capture technology, 3D modelling, and AI algorithms, which imposes a

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substantial financial burden on film studios and associated entities. Furthermore, the continuous updating and maintenance of virtual icons is a costly process, especially considering audience expectations and evolving technology. Film studios must continue to invest in order to maintain their virtual icons at the cutting-edge of technology. While virtual idols can generate revenue through prolonged utilization, the financial burden of upfront technological investment and its subsequent maintenance represents a significant challenge for many film studios.

4.2. Moral and ethical issues

The utilization of virtual icons gives rise to a number of moral and ethical questions, particularly in instances such as the employment of CGI technology to resurrect deceased actors in *Fast and Furious 7*. The resurrection of Paul Walker's avatar has given rise to extensive discourse surrounding the films' sequel and has also prompted inquiries from some viewers and ethicists. Despite the film's producers having obtained authorization from the Walker family, the question of whether it is permissible to continue to utilize the actor's avatar for marketing purposes after his death remains a contentious issue, particularly in the context of emotional marketing. Critics contend that this practice may constitute a violation of the personal dignity of the deceased actor and may even result in the commercialization of their image for financial gain. Furthermore, the question of whether the image and behavior of a virtual idol can be fully controlled by humans raises significant ethical concerns. For instance, in the event of a moral or social controversy arising in a film endorsed by a virtual idol, there is an urgent need for in-depth exploration by the film industry and the legal profession of the following questions. Firstly, how should the liability relationship between the virtual idol and the film be handled; and secondly, should the virtual idol's behaviors be subject to ethical constraints.

4.3. Differences in cultural acceptance

The market acceptance of virtual idols varies significantly across countries and regions, primarily due to cultural differences and consumer acceptance. Within certain cultures, such as Japan, virtual idols are popular because of their secondary attributes and cultural background, as evidenced by the significant success of Hatsune Miku in the Japanese market. Conversely, in Western countries and other regions, the acceptance of virtual idols is lower, and viewers exhibit a weaker sense of identification and emotional attachment to virtual images. For instance, in the European and American markets, the utilization of virtual idols is still in the exploratory stage, and viewers are more inclined to empathize with real stars rather than connect with virtual idols. This cultural difference impacts the promotion of virtual idols globally, necessitating the development of appropriate marketing strategies according to the cultural characteristics of different markets to ensure that virtual idols can gain wide acceptance and recognition. Conversely, the cultural idiosyncrasies surrounding virtual idols have the potential to engender substantial variations in their reception within the international market, thereby impacting the global box office performance of the film.

5. Conclusion

The advent of virtual idols in the realm of film marketing has undeniably precipitated a paradigm shift within the industry, heralding a new era of innovation. Through the utilization of advanced technological methodologies, virtual idols transcend the conventional constraints of time and space, thereby extending the marketing cycle. Moreover, these idols possess the capacity to garner a substantial demographic of young viewers, largely attributable to their distinctive secondary attributes. This phenomenon not only mitigates reliance on real actors but also reduces the risk of unfavorable star effects on film marketing. This paper uses the case study method to explore the specific

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application of virtual idols in film marketing from three aspects: character continuity, virtual spokespersons, and original virtual characters.

However, the marketing of virtual idols faces numerous challenges, particularly in relation to technological costs, ethical considerations, and cultural acceptance variations. The substantial technical expenses associated with the production and maintenance of virtual idols can impose a significant financial burden on film studios. Moral and ethical concerns, such as the virtual resurrection of a deceased actor, have the potential to provoke controversy among viewers regarding the actor's human dignity. In addition, creating virtual icons for film marketing also needs to take into account the cultural acceptance and cultural acceptance of each region.

In the future, the application of virtual idols in film marketing shows great potential. However, it is essential to optimize technology and develop industrial standards. As technology advances, the production cost of virtual idols may gradually decrease, and the growing popularity of this technology may encourage more film studios to explore its use. To ensure the long-term healthy development of virtual idol marketing, it is crucial to establish industry standards. This encompasses the establishment of ethical norms for the utilization of virtual idol images, the formulation of technical standards, and the conduction of cross-cultural acceptance studies. It is only with the presence of such norms and the backing of technical support that virtual idols can fulfil a more substantial role in film marketing, thereby becoming an instrumental tool for innovative marketing strategies within the film industry.

Virtual idols have considerable marketing potential. However, the question of how to balance technology, ethics and cultural differences is a significant issue for industry. As technology continues to develop, the application of virtual idols will become more sophisticated driving film marketing into a new era.

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