Proceedings of ICADSS 2026 Symposium: Contemporary Visual Arts, AI Creativity, and Interactive Media: Theory and Practice
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.BJ38192

Exploring the Formation Mechanism of Hit AIGC Motion Comics: A Case Study of Wan Yao Tu Lu Zhuan

Xiaochen Zhao

School of Art, Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology, Nanjing, China
2032900787@qq.com

Abstract. With the iterative application of AIGC cross-modal technology, AI motion comics have gradually grown into an emerging category in the vertical-screen digital audiovisual field, yet problems such as homogenization, insufficient user retention, and a low hit rate have become increasingly apparent. Technology can improve content production efficiency, but it cannot directly answer why an AI motion comic can sustain audience attention. On this basis, this paper takes Wan Yao Tu Lu Zhuan as a case and adopts a combination of case analysis, content analysis, and public data analysis to examine the formation process of its hit status from four dimensions: gratification narrative, technological empowerment, platform recommendation, and user dissemination. The study finds that the synergy of high-density gratification narrative, differentiated Chinese-style visual expression, a positive algorithmic traffic cycle, and cross-platform word-of-mouth dissemination constitutes the core driving force behind the work's long-term breakthrough beyond its original audience circle.

Keywords: AIGC, AI motion comics, Wan Yao Tu Lu Zhuan, hit formation mechanism, visual narrative

1. Introduction

In recent years, generative artificial intelligence has rapidly entered film, television, and animation production. From text-to-image and image-to-video to character generation and dynamic special effects, AIGC has continuously lowered the threshold for producing audiovisual content, and AI motion comics have thus become one of the fastest-growing types of content on short-video platforms. In 2026, the production capacity of the AI motion comic industry expanded rapidly. DataEye data show that in the first half of the year alone, more than 220,000 AI motion comics were newly launched on the Douyin platform, yet the hit rate was below 0.5% [1]. A large number of works have become similar in character design, narrative formulas, and visual styles; some works can be launched quickly but struggle to form sustained viewing and discussion.

This raises a noteworthy question: after AI has made content production increasingly easy, is the decisive factor for an AI motion comic to become a genuine hit still "technology"? Judging from current industry phenomena, technology seems to have solved the problem of "whether it can be made quickly" but not the problem of "why audiences are willing to keep watching." For motion comics, what audiences ultimately encounter is still story, characters, and visuals; in the short-video

© 2026 The Authors. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.BJ38192

communication environment, whether a work can gain broader attention is also affected by factors such as platform recommendation, user comments, and secondary dissemination. Therefore, the hit success of an AI motion comic is more likely the result of multiple factors working together, and this is the basic starting point of this paper for understanding the hit phenomenon of AIGC motion comics.

Wan Yao Tu Lu Zhuan provides a rather representative case for observing this question. Set against a background of Eastern zhiguai (strange tales) and a xuanhuan fantasy world, the work differentiates itself amid the widespread homogenization of AI motion comics through elements of strange beasts from the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, a Chinese-style visual aesthetic, and a heroine image with no romance subplot that emphasizes personal growth. According to public reports, as the first AI motion comic on Hongguo to exceed 100 million in popularity, it has accumulated more than 6 billion views across nine seasons [2]. On this basis, taking *Wan Yao Tu Lu Zhuan* as a case and adopting a combination of case analysis, content analysis, and public data analysis, this paper analyzes the formation mechanism of its hit status from four dimensions—gratification narrative, technological innovation, platform recommendation, and user dissemination—examining the highlight moments in the first 10 episodes, the visual design, and public data on plays, favorites, and reservations.

This study does not attempt to generalize a single case into a universal formula for the success of all AI motion comics. Instead, through a close reading of a specific work, it seeks to further illustrate that after AIGC has become a common production tool, what truly determines whether a work can build lasting influence lies more in how creators use AI to achieve content expression, and in how the content is continuously amplified through the joint participation of the platform and users.

2. Literature review

In recent years, research related to "AI motion comics, AIGC micro-dramas, and the generative audiovisual industry" has mainly revolved around four directions: innovation in creation paradigms, transformation of communication logic, industrial iteration, and copyright ethics. Studies show that AIGC relies on cross-modal technology to reconstruct the full-process production system of motion comics, breaking professional creation barriers, achieving low-cost and large-scale output, and broadening the boundaries of visual aesthetics, yet widespread technical shortcomings such as image distortion and thin narratives remain [3]. On this basis, related industry research points out that algorithms have reshaped the personalized interactive communication mode of vertical-screen content, while the industry has fallen into traffic-oriented homogeneous involution; existing analyses mostly confuse the audiovisual differences between AI motion comics and live-action short dramas and lack a full-chain logical breakdown of hit content [4, 5]. Copyright literature focuses on industry pain points such as training-data infringement, unclear work ownership, and the difficulty of obtaining evidence for AI-modified content, with countermeasures leaning toward macro-level legislation and failing to integrate content production and traffic logic in a comprehensive analysis [6]. Existing achievements cover industry, technology, and legal aspects, but fail to integrate the multidimensional elements of creation, algorithms, audiences, and compliance through specific cases to systematically sort out the complete logic of how AI motion comic hits are generated. In summary, existing research has discussed AI motion comics from the perspectives of technology, industry, communication, and copyright, but case studies of individual hit works remain relatively scarce, especially lacking analysis of the linkage among narrative, visuals, platform distribution, and user dissemination.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.BJ38192

3. Analysis and results

3.1. Dimension one: gratification narrative — immersive gratification built on high-density conflict

At present, most AI motion comics on the market cluster around sweet-romance and rebirth formulas, with gratification remaining at the level of shallow melodramatic conflict, thin plots, and fragmented worldviews; series generally lose audiences within one or two seasons [3]. The core competitiveness of short-video motion comics lies in continuously delivering emotional stimulation. *Wan Yao Tu Lu Zhuan* has constructed a mature gratification narrative model: a desperate opening, high-frequency conflict, dense plot twists, and a protagonist whose actions break traditional formulas, continuously capturing audience attention through escalating conflicts.

3.1.1. Empirical statistics of conflict density and plot turning points

Table 1. Statistics of highlight moments in the first 10 episodes of Wan Yao Tu Lu Zhuan

Episode	Duration	Timestamps of Highlights	Types of Highlights	Number of Highlights
Episode 1	02:32	00:47/02:07	Flashback to identity, counterattack	2
Episode 2	02:18	01:09/02:09	Conflict, breakthrough	2
Episode 3	01:54	00:02/00:40/01:03/01:33/01:44	Twist, growth, growth, twist, growth	5
Episode 4	02:47	00:49/02:42	Growth, counterattack	2
Episode 5	02:09	00:51/01:52	Twist, suspense	2
Episode 6	02:10	01:10/01:16/01:18/01:37/01:59	Conflict, confrontation, confrontation, confrontation, breakthrough	5
Episode 7	02:28	00:00-02:28	Kill	1
Episode 8	01:12	00:25/00:51/01:01	Growth, confrontation, twist	3
Episode 9	02:05	01:31/01:36	Foreshadowing, flashback	2
Episode 10	02:21	01:06	Suspense	1

This study selected the first 10 episodes as samples and counted a total of 25 valid highlight moments, averaging about 2-3 per episode, covering types such as growth, twist, confrontation, breakthrough, and suspense, presenting an overall high density of highlights (see Table 1). Unlike the more straightforward leveling-up mode of some AI motion comics, the gratification of this work is built on "the cost of choices." The opening plot of beheading Pei Changqing creates moral controversy and breaks the formula that "the heroine must be kind and saintly." The protagonist Jiang Yuchu is decisive and resolute, has no romance subplot, and focuses on self-growth, matching contemporary audiences' fatigue with industrialized saccharine romance and their pursuit of independent strong-heroine narratives.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.BJ38192

3.1.2. Narrative pacing and user retention

Compact storytelling translates directly into high user retention data: a large number of audience comments attest to the sustained emotional stimulation brought by the narrative, such as "watched seven seasons in one go, can't find a substitute," "rarely see a xuanhuan heroine who doesn't do romance and focuses on her career," "every episode has a twist, I can't bear to swipe away," and "the pacing and contrast—epic when it should be, and the comedy doesn't hold back either." Traditional long-form animation often spends substantial length establishing its worldview, whereas *Wan Yao Tu Lu Zhuan* adopts an instant-feedback narrative mechanism—slay demons, gain cultivation, learn divine abilities, encounter stronger opponents—forming a closed-loop reward system. Unit-style demon side plots are paired with long-range foreshadowing such as the main storyline's family injustice case and the human-demon balance, balancing instant highlights with long-term suspense and achieving a balance between short-term emotional stimulation and long-term motivation to keep following. At the same time, the work combines xuanhuan leveling-up with an independent female narrative, broadening its potential audience. The first season surpassed 3.38 million favorites, the work has been updated through nine seasons, and the platform's positive interaction rate reached 99.82% [7], reflecting relatively strong user stickiness to a certain extent.

3.2. Dimension two: technological innovation — AIGC empowers visual expression and restructures motion comic production logic

Live-action cinematography excels at nuanced character emotion but struggles to realize fantasy spectacles and comes at high cost; AI-generated shots excel at all kinds of fantasy-effect grand scenes with low cost and high output, but tend toward formulaic camerawork and weaker character detail and emotional expressiveness [8].

The differentiated advantages of *Wan Yao Tu Lu Zhuan* are reflected at two levels: innovation in visual presentation and innovation in the industrialized production model. AI generation technology has enabled the work to effectively overcome the live-action filming limitations of short dramas and the high-cost bottleneck of traditional animation, forming a unique visual system of Eastern zhiguai fantasy.

In audiovisual shot design, the work builds a complete set of dynamic camera language adapted to the xuanhuan genre, breaking the perspective limitations of live-action filming. Magic-battle scenes adopt diversified dynamic camera movements such as high-speed push-pull, orbiting follow shots, low-altitude dives, and panoramic overhead views, switching focal length and speed in real time to match the fighting rhythm; close combat uses macro close-ups to capture the details of spell collisions, while group battles in secret realms deploy ultra-wide panoramic shots to unfold the grand battle, combining fast and slow shots to intensify combat tension. The work also innovatively applies shot effects such as ink-wash dissolve transitions, light-and-shadow crossfades, and spatial blurring to achieve seamless switching between scenes, moves, and illusions.

In special effects design, the work uses AI-generated particles, lighting, and spatial effects to strengthen the fantasy visuals. Basic spells mostly employ Chinese-style elements such as ink-wash particles, spiritual energy, and runes, while high-level duels enhance the sense of power through changes in lighting, particles, and space; dynamic effects such as clouds, rosy light, and barriers in secret-realm scenes also enrich the layering of the settings. Compared with the relatively monotonous effects of some fantasy short dramas, the work's visual completeness and recognizability are improved (see Figure 1).

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.BJ38192



Figure 1. Fantasy scenes and visual effects of Wan Yao Tu Lu Zhuan

In character design, compared with the tragic heroine of fated doomed love in *Da Tian Peng* and the sweet, coddled darling heroine of *Zan Jia Jian Zong Tuan Chong Xiao Shi Mei*, Jiang Yuchu differs from the soft, sweet-romance-type images common in similar works; her persona—no CP, career-focused, emphasizing independent growth—has high recognizability. The styling design integrates a minimalist Chinese classical aesthetic: clothing textures and hair ornaments match the character's demon-clan and rebirth settings, and the elegant yet sharp color scheme combines aesthetic Chinese-style texture with the aura of a strong character (see Figure 2). Paired with the core setting of "a male soul in a female body," the character's expressions and demeanor form a unique contrast—sharp, decisive eyes; a neat, valiant bearing; crisp, fierce fighting moves—relying throughout on her own strength to break through and survive.



Figure 2. Character design of Jiang Yuchu in Wan Yao Tu Lu Zhuan

In demon design, the work draws heavily on the prototypes of strange beasts from the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, processed with Chinese-style fantasy treatment. Demons of different levels differ in body size, texture, lighting, and movement: low-level lesser demons are agile and fierce, with clear textures of fur, scales, and wings and highly aggressive postures; high-level great demons and ancient strange beasts have majestic bodies with highly imposing proportions, carrying exclusive demonic-aura lighting, rune patterns, and presence effects, with details such as horns, scales, tails, and wings finely crafted. The combination of traditional strange-beast prototypes and AIGC visual generation gives the demon images strong Eastern zhiguai recognizability, and combined with dynamic effects—demonic aura flowing, afterimages flickering, and power shocks rippling as the demons move—in group demon battles the forms, effects, and movement layers of different demons are distinct: busy yet not chaotic.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.BJ38192

AIGC technology reduces repetitive work in character modeling, demon design, and effects rendering, lowering the production cost and cycle of fantasy visual content. That the work can keep updating across multiple seasons also reflects, to a certain extent, the efficiency advantage of AI motion comics in continuous content production.

3.3. Dimension three: platform recommendation algorithms driving the traffic cycle

In 2026, China's domestic AI motion comic industry presents a landscape of exploding production capacity and polarized quality. DataEye monitoring data show that in the first half of 2026, as many as 221,900 AI motion comics were newly launched on the Douyin platform, yet the hit rate was below 0.5% [1]. *Wan Yao Tu Lu Zhuan* has adapted well to the communication mechanisms of short-video and motion comic platforms, continuously expanding the work's exposure. According to related reports, the first eight seasons of the work accumulated over 6 billion views, the eighth season broke through 100 million in popularity on its first day, and after reservations opened for the ninth season, reservations exceeded 3.8 million, making it the first motion comic on Hongguo to exceed 100 million in popularity [2].

After its launch, the work has long ranked at the top of Hongguo's motion comic fantasy charts and has repeatedly appeared on Douyin's trending anime charts. Chart exposure brings more plays and interactions, while high completion rates, likes, and other indicators help the work gain further recommendations, thus forming a traffic cycle of "exposure—plays—interaction—re-exposure." Data show that related short-video commentary and mashup clips have accumulated over 570 million views, a discussion rate of 92%, and more than 8 million follow-up bookmarks [9], continuously funneling traffic to the full episodes. High completion rates and interaction indicators usually favor the work's traffic push.

In addition, *Wan Yao Tu Lu Zhuan* maintains a fairly stable seasonal update rhythm: the ninth season launched on July 19, 2026, and the tenth season followed on August 8. A high update frequency continuously supplies the platform with new content on the one hand, and on the other repeatedly reactivates existing audiences' follow-up viewing and interaction, extending the work's popularity.

3.4. Dimension four: user-initiated dissemination — cross-circle fission through the social ecosystem

Beyond platform recommendation, user-initiated dissemination is an important driving force for the work to expand its influence, consistent with the content communication characteristics of the new media era. In the Douyin comment sections and motion comic communities, viewers actively post responses, sort out the plot, and start discussions around the persona and storyline of "a rational, career-minded strong heroine without romantic obsessions" and "life-and-death choices from the very start." Jiang Yuchu's survival choices have also generated both supportive and questioning views; the opposing opinions spark large volumes of comment interaction, further boosting the content's weight. Viewers spontaneously wait for updates and flood the screen with barrage comments urging new episodes, forming a strong community atmosphere and continuously expanding influence.

In terms of dissemination paths, the work has formed a cross-platform chain of "Hongguo full episodes—Douyin clips and commentary—image-and-text discussions on Xiaohongshu and Weibo." Short videos attract general users, while image-and-text platforms carry character

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.BJ38192

compendiums, plot analyses, and sharing of iconic scenes, gradually helping the work break through its original audience circle.

4. Discussion

4.1. Flow experience and uses and gratifications: the underlying audience psychology of high-density gratification narrative

Csikszentmihalyi argued that when individuals are highly engaged in an activity and achieve a good match among goals, feedback, and challenges, they more easily enter a state of sustained concentration known as "flow" [10]. This perspective provides a theoretical basis for understanding why high-density highlights in short-video motion comics can sustain audience attention. The vertical-screen short-video medium naturally fits fragmented viewing scenarios; through content design featuring "strong conflict," "fast pacing," and "high-density highlights," it quickly captures users and improves 3-second retention, thereby winning the favor of both users and algorithms and entering larger traffic pools [11]. The closed-loop narrative of *Wan Yao Tu Lu Zhuan* matches the core requirement of flow—instant feedback: viewers witness the protagonist's leap in strength every few minutes, and clear growth goals continuously reduce cognitive fatigue; meanwhile, the series runs unit-based demon side plots in parallel with the long-term storyline of the family injustice case, achieving layered dual flows of "light entertainment—deep empathy."

The "uses and gratifications" research proposed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch emphasizes that audiences do not passively receive media content; rather, they actively choose media according to their own social and psychological needs and seek corresponding gratifications from its use [12]. Some scholars, in research on traffic culture, criticize assembly-line web-fiction short dramas for manufacturing brief emotional stimulation through shallow melodrama, with monotonous gratification and short life cycles [13]. *Wan Yao Tu Lu Zhuan*, relying on the zhiguai worldview of the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, builds its gratification on moral choices and survival games, balancing emotional release with narrative depth and breaking through the industry's "short-term traffic trap."

4.2. Media affordance and human-machine collaboration: AIGC restructuring the industrialized audiovisual production paradigm of motion comics

Domestic scholars have pointed out from the perspective of media affordance that while AI technology lowers the creation threshold of micro-dramas and expands the range of creators, it also brings new problems such as technological dependence and content homogenization [14]. This contradiction is also reflected in *Wan Yao Tu Lu Zhuan*: AIGC has expanded the generative space of fantasy visuals, but limitations remain in the stability of character movements and the expression of complex dynamics.

As seen from this case, AIGC motion comics are better suited to a human-machine collaborative production approach: AI mainly leverages its advantages in rapid generation, iteration, and effects production, while creators still need to control narrative, art style, and characterization. Problems in the work such as unstable limb details in high-speed fight shots and adaptation deviations in the dynamics of high-level demons also confirm the "disciplinary side" of media affordance theory: current cross-modal generation technology still has expressive limitations, technological affordance has objective boundaries, and optimizing human-machine collaboration remains a long-term issue

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.BJ38192

for the industry—technology has improved production efficiency but cannot fully replace human aesthetic judgment.

4.3. Algorithmic distribution and social word-of-mouth: a long-term traffic closed loop of two-way platform–audience interaction

In the traditional communication environment, "gatekeeping" was mainly performed by professional actors such as editors, whereas in the platform-based communication environment, algorithms have gradually become involved, playing an important role in information selection and "relevance" judgments and thus influencing which content users can see [15]. Therefore, the communication effect of an AI motion comic depends not only on the work itself but is also closely related to the platform's distribution mechanism, with completion rate, viewing duration, update frequency, and interaction data becoming the criteria for traffic allocation. *Wan Yao Tu Lu Zhuan* fits the algorithmic gatekeeping rules of Douyin and Hongguo: a 30-second opening conflict hook raises initial completion, the stable seasonal update rhythm continuously activates the algorithmic recommendation pool, new seasons gain the platform's traffic tilt for new releases, and dominating the fantasy charts forms a positive cycle.

However, platform recommendation can only provide exposure opportunities; whether the work can sustain longer-term dissemination also depends on whether users are willing to actively discuss and re-disseminate it. The case of *Wan Yao Tu Lu Zhuan* shows that quality content first generates viewing and interaction, the platform further expands exposure, and user word-of-mouth and cross-platform secondary creation in turn extend the work's popularity. It is thus clear that the hit success of AIGC motion comics is the joint result of content, technology, platforms, and audiences.

5. Conclusion

As an emerging form of the audiovisual industry empowered by generative artificial intelligence, AI motion comics are at a critical stage of business exploration and paradigm construction. Yet lower technical thresholds do not mean that good works will emerge naturally. The case of *Wan Yao Tu Lu Zhuan* also shows that AI can improve creative efficiency but cannot answer for creators the question of "what is worth expressing." As generation becomes easier, the technical advantages formed simply through refined visuals, grand effects, or even batch updates may soon be matched by new technologies. By contrast, questions such as why audiences love a character, why they are willing to follow season after season, and why they recommend the work to others after watching—seemingly plain questions—are actually closer to the core of content creation.

Of course, this paper selected only *Wan Yao Tu Lu Zhuan* as a single case, and the research materials mainly come from episode texts, public platform data, and user comments; the conclusions therefore remain limited. Future research may compare AI motion comics of different genres and expressive styles, and combine questionnaire surveys and other methods to further understand the viewing experiences and aesthetic preferences of different audiences.

How to preserve imagination, aesthetic judgment, and attention to human beings under new technological conditions may be more worth pondering than chasing the next technological update. This should also be the more enduring question left to creators after AIGC entered animation creation. It is hoped that AI motion comics can step out of the "instant-traffic food" mold and, in the balance between technological innovation and humanistic care, grow into fine works combining the heritage of Eastern aesthetics with the spirit of the times, so that technology truly serves the original creative aspiration of "telling China's stories well."

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.BJ38192

References

[1] The Paper. (2026, July 24). Behind the continuous loss of AI comic drama audiences: Template faces cause "physiological aversion," thousands of dramas with the same formula—who can still immerse themselves and release emotions? *36Kr*. https://36kr.com/p/3908248131000192

[2] Yingyi Dushu. (2026, July 16). Hongguo's first comic drama with over 100 million popularity is born: What makes "The Legend of Ten Thousand Demons" stand out? *Tencent News*. http://news.qq.com/rain/a/20260716A0B9EJ00

[3] Li, S. D., & Xie, X. Y. (2026). Research on the creation paradigm and industrial governance of AI comic dramas driven by artificial intelligence. *China Market*, (24), 69–72.

[4] Zheng, X. J., Liu, R. J., & Li, Y. X. (2025). Disruption and reinvention: AIGC's revolutionary approach to the micro-drama industry. *Journal of North University of China (Social Science Edition), 41*(4), 57–66.

[5] Zhou, J. D., & Zhou, Z. X. (2026). Technology iteration and content innovation: Research on the development path of the micro-drama industry. *China Radio & TV Academic Journal*, 1–5. https://link.cnki.net/urlid/11.1746.G2.20260703.1017.002

[6] Chen, L. L. (2026). AI generation and film copyright: Ownership, infringement determination, and institutional response. *Chinese Film Market*, (7), 39–44.

[7] Toutiao. (2026, July 24). Eighty-five cents for twenty thousand faces: The face collision dilemma of AI comic dramas and the only way out. *Toutiao*. http://m.toutiao.com/group/7665904565249638950/

[8] Shi, B., Zhang, H. M., & Xu, P. T. (2025). Research on the creation mode of vertical-screen micro-drama camera language driven by content generation technology. *Comparative Study of Cultural Innovation, 9*(27), 35–39.

[9] Daxiong Liao AI. (2026, July 3). What makes "The Legend of Ten Thousand Demons" push AI short dramas to a new height [Video]. *Douyin*. https://www.iesdouyin.com/share/video/7658238724643376427

[10] Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. Harper & Row.

[11] Zhang, X. L., Zhang, X., & Xu, M. Y. (2025). The manufacturing of instant gratification: How algorithmic narratives in micro-dramas engineer affective trigger efficacy. *New Media and Society*, (6), 327–343, 489–490.

[12] Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and gratifications research. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 37*(4), 509–523.

[13] Hu, Y. (2026). A multi-dimensional analysis of traffic logic in the digital cultural ecosystem. *China Literature and Art Criticism*, (2), 4–20, 124.

[14] Xia, Y. L., & Si, X. X. (2025). Technology empowerment and creative democratization: On the reshaping of AI technology's production affordances for micro-dramas. *New Media Research, 11*(24), 47–51.

[15] Gillespie, T. (2014). The relevance of algorithms. In T. Gillespie, P. J. Boczkowski, & K. A. Foot (Eds.), *Media technologies: Essays on communication, materiality, and society*. MIT Press.