

# Research on Visual Symbol Selection in Musical Promotion in the New Media Environment

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**Abstract:** In the new media era, musical promotion faces challenges of visual symbol homogenization and limited audience reach. This study examines how visual symbols are selected and perceived across platforms. Combining semiotic analysis, audience surveys, and case comparisons, the research identifies the core logic of audience-adapted, content-anchored, and media-specific symbol construction. Findings reveal that differentiated, narrative-driven, and interactive visual symbols significantly improve recognition, emotional resonance, and ticket conversion rates. The study provides a systematic framework linking symbol design to communication efficacy and offers practical strategies for cultural marketing in the performing arts.

**Keywords:** New Media Environment; Musical Promotion; Visual Symbols; Semiotics; Communication Strategies; Audience Perception

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background and Origin

The iteration of digital technology has deeply reshaped the ecology of cultural communication. New media forms such as social media and short-video platforms have broken the temporal and spatial barriers of traditional promotion channels, making information communication characterized by fragmentation, interactivity, and visual priority. Against this background, while the musical industry has experienced rapid box office growth and the expansion of a young audience base, its promotion strategies are under significant transformation pressure. Traditional program introductions and celebrity stills can no longer effectively reach and attract potential audiences in the massive information flow, and promotional materials urgently need to complete narration and emotional transmission within seconds. Visual symbols, with their intuitiveness,

ambiguity, and emotional evocation ability, have become the core carrier for crossing cultural differences and achieving efficient communication[1]. The dynamic practice of movie posters[2] and the innovative application of visual symbols in traditional culture[3, 4] both demonstrate that visual design adapted to the new media context can greatly enhance the attractiveness and communication power of content. Therefore, exploring how musicals systematically select and construct visual symbols in new media promotion to accurately convey the core of the play, connect diverse audiences, and shape brand memory has become a key practical issue driving the sustainable development of the industry.

This study focuses on the selection mechanism and communication efficiency of visual symbols in musical promotional materials in the new media environment. The research content is clearly defined in the core visual carriers such as official promotional posters, dynamic videos, and social media images of musicals, systematically analyzing the composition rules, ideographic logic, and audience cognitive process of symbol elements such as color, graphics, text, and character modeling. The establishment of this scope aims to strip away complex communication phenomena and deeply analyze the specific operation of visual symbols as meaning carriers and emotional catalysts in the new media context. From a theoretical perspective, introducing visual symbol research into the field of musical communication can supplement the limitations of existing theories that mostly focus on narration, music, or marketing channels[5]. By exploring how symbols carry the theme, emotional tone, and cultural connotation of the play, and examining the diverse interpretations of the audience based on their own experience and social context[6], this study can reveal the complex mechanism of meaning flow and negotiation in the new media field, thereby deepening the theoretical understanding of the cross-media

communication and reception process of musicals. In practical significance, the research conclusions can provide direct guidance for the optimization of musical promotion. Through semiotic analysis of successful and inadequate cases[1,7], visual symbol strategies that better fit the aesthetic habits and cultural psychology of the target audience can be summarized. This helps promoters transcend subjective experience, carry out more accurate visual encoding, and improve the attractiveness, recognition, and meaning transmission efficiency of promotional materials, ultimately effectively guiding the audience to pay attention, understand, and enter the theater in the fierce cultural consumption market, achieving a dual enhancement of artistic value and market benefits. The study comprehensively uses literature research, content analysis, and in-depth survey methods, integrating case studies and audience feedback from representative musicals to ground the analysis in practical evidence.

## 2. Conceptual Framework and Current Applications

### 2.1 Core Concepts and Interrelationships

New media is a communication form that relies on digital technology, network technology, and mobile communication technology to provide users with information and entertainment services through channels such as the Internet. Its core characteristics are interactivity, immediacy, multimedia integration, and decentralization. Visual symbols are a symbol system that uses visual elements such as images, colors, forms, and compositions as carriers to carry and transmit specific meanings. Their constituent elements mainly include images, colors, text, and layout. From the perspective of semiotics, the operation of visual symbols follows the logic of encoding and decoding: designers inject meaning into the combination of visual elements, and the audience interprets them based on their knowledge background and aesthetic experience, which may generate multiple meanings consistent with, negotiated with, or even oppositional to the encoding intent[1,4,6]. Musical promotion is a systematic activity centered on a specific play, which transmits information about the artistic value, narrative core, and performance experience of the play to the target audience through integrated communication strategies and visual means. Its

core appeal transcends simple information notification, focusing more on constructing the play's unique artistic personality and emotional resonance[8,9]. In the new media environment, these three constitute an interactive system with visual symbols as the conversion hub: new media provides the channel, musicals are the content body, and visual symbols become the key bridge transforming abstract artistic connotations into widely disseminated, easily interpretable perceptual forms[3,5]. Figure 1 illustrates the framework of visual symbol composition. Figure 2 depicts the logical relationship among new media, visual symbols, and musical promotion.

Framework for Visual Sign Composition

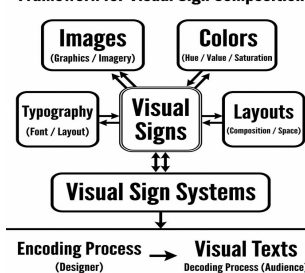


Figure 1. Visual Symbol Composition

### Framework

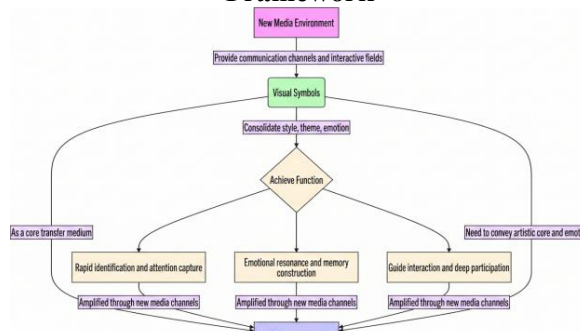


Figure 2. Logical Relationship Among New Media, Visual Symbols and Musical Promotion

### 2.2 Visual Symbol Application and Audience Preferences

In new media platforms, the visual symbols relied on by musical promotion have formed a relatively fixed type system. Character posters, as the most classic form, cover almost all social platforms. Short video clips have become the fastest-growing symbol type, dominating video platforms such as Douyin and Bilibili, achieving rapid traffic diversion through highlight plots or arias. Dynamic emoticons and fan-created content are active on platforms with strong community attributes like Weibo and Xiaohongshu, enhancing interactivity and viral

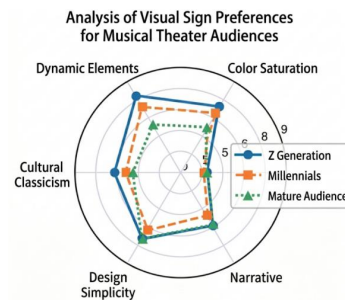
dissemination. Table 1 summarizes the main types of visual symbols, their primary covered platforms, and estimated usage frequencies. The application of these visual symbols presents overall characteristics of platform specificity and content fragmentation. Current promotion practice indicates that the selection of visual symbols is highly dependent on platform characteristics, and an integrated visual language system for cross-platform collaboration has not yet been fully formed[10]. The phenomenon of symbol homogenization is prominent: a large amount of promotional material tends to use similarly styled stills layouts, identical font designs, and high-saturation color palettes, resulting in a lack of distinctiveness in the visual identity of different plays. Promotional content often stays at the level of displaying actor images or scene clips, failing to reveal the thematic depth or emotional conflict of the work. As illustrated in Figure 3, audience visual symbol preferences vary markedly by age group and gender. Audience preference differences further complicate symbol selection. Based on age and platform usage habits, the audience can be divided into Generation Z (18-25 years old), Millennials (26-40 years old), and Mature Audiences (over 41 years old). Generation Z prefers dynamic, highly saturated visual symbols with subcultural or internet meme elements; Millennials lean towards narrative-driven, design-conscious symbols or beloved actors themselves; mature audiences favor classic stills and visual symbols that embody artistic texture[2,5,11]. Gender differences also influence preferences: female audiences are more sensitive to emotional aspects of color, costume details, and character emotional interaction symbols, while some studies indicate male audiences are more focused on stage scale and symbol design with a sense of power or technology[7]. These differentiated preferences indicate that visual symbols are by no means isolated aesthetic expressions but a communication bridge connecting the work with the cultural psychology of specific circles.

**Table 1. Application Types and Frequency of Visual Symbols**

Visual Symbol Type	Main Covered Platform	Estimated Usage Frequency Ratio
Character/Plot Theme Posters	WeChat Official Account, Weibo	~35%
Short Video Clips (Trailers/Highlights)	Douyin, Bilibili, WeChat Channel	~30%

Dynamic Emoticons/GIFs	Weibo, Fan Communities	~15%
Fan-Created Images/Videos	Xiaohongshu, Weibo, Lofter	~10%
Geometric Main Visual/Dynamic Posters	Weibo, Brand Official Website	~5%
Melody Visualization Dynamic Effects	Brand Promotional Videos	~5%

Note\*: The usage frequency ratio is an estimated value based on industry observation, reflecting relative usage popularity, not precise statistical data.



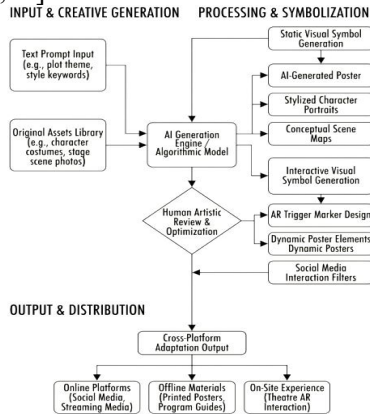
**Figure 3. Musical Audience Visual Symbol Preference Analysis**

**2.3 Technology Adaptation and Existing Limitations**

Currently, new media technologies provide multiple paths for symbol creation. Taking AI-generated posters as an example, its application has moved from conceptual exploration into preliminary practice, allowing algorithms to batch-generate stylized main visual images, but the symbols produced sometimes lack unique emotional warmth and narrative depth[6]. The production process for such AI-generated visual symbols is outlined in Figure 4. AR interactive symbols, while not yet widely applied, focus on extending experience by triggering immersive content through mobile devices. Under technological empowerment, the innovative forms of visual symbols are mainly reflected in dynamism, personalization, and cross-media narrative, with the creative process shifting towards a collaborative model of "intelligent tool-assisted generation-team artistic optimization-cross-platform adaptive publishing" [12].

Nonetheless, the application of technology still faces significant limitations: excessive pursuit of technical virtuosity may cause symbols to disconnect from the core dramatic connotations of the play, and the fragmentation of tools and shortage of interdisciplinary professionals constrain the systematic release of technological potential. Furthermore, the generally low degree

of fit between visual symbols and the core of the play, along with insufficient cross-platform symbol adaptability, constitute major obstacles. Static, information-overloaded images are easily ignored in the information flow, while symbols lacking dynamic and immersive design struggle to trigger interaction and sharing in mainstream media[3,13].



**Figure 4. AI-Generated Visual Symbol Production Process**

**3. Symbol Selection Logic**

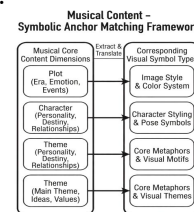
**3.1 Audience Adaptation Logic**

In the cross-circle communication of musicals, the selection logic of visual symbols must be rooted in the precise deconstruction of audience portraits. Groups of different ages, interests, and media usage habits show significant differences in their preferences and interpretations of promotional symbols. For example, the "fan circle," centered on young digital natives, focuses its interests intensely on specific actors or IPs, with media usage deeply embedded in social media and short-video platforms. For this group, promotional visual symbols need to emphasize idol close-ups, high-saturation colors, and dynamic elements with "meme" cultural characteristics to match their needs for instant interaction and emotional projection. Conversely, the "classic circle" composed of traditional theater audiences or high-intellectual groups is relatively more mature in age, with interests leaning more towards the art itself and historical and cultural depth. Existing research on visual symbols in traditional opera and film posters supports this differentiation: studies on Cantonese opera dynamic posters[3] and Sichuan opera visual symbols[4] emphasize how cultural metaphors and classic aesthetics resonate with mature audiences, while research on movie poster dynamic design[2] highlights

the appeal of high-impact, fast-paced visuals for younger demographics. For mature audiences, promotional symbols should lean towards using stills with classic aesthetic composition, symbolic designs containing cultural metaphors, and calm color tones. The core logic of symbol selection lies in reverse derivation and encoding based on the audience's cognitive schema and media contact scenarios[10]. Promoters need to transform abstract audience portraits into specific visual grammar, making symbols precisely triggering cultural consensus and emotional resonance within the circle.

**3.2 Content Anchoring Logic**

The core of the content anchoring logic is to establish an accurate mapping from the core connotation of the work to visual symbols. This process requires promoters to deeply deconstruct the plot context, character style, and thematic core of the musical, and extract the most representative visual elements for encoding. The historical background and emotional tone created by the plot directly determine the choice of color system and image style. The personality traits and fate trajectory of characters are externalized through specific styling symbols, postures, or iconic objects. The thematic core, as the soul of the work, needs to be transformed into a metaphorical core visual motif, such as using a broken mirror to symbolize a split personality or intertwined ropes to metaphorize complex character relationships[5]. Scholars have noted that geometric visual symbols in brand design achieve recognition through simplicity and universality[14], and a similar principle applies to musicals: highly condensed geometric or abstract symbols can effectively carry the thematic essence when anchored to the narrative core. Constructing a content-symbol anchoring framework aims to systematize this extraction and matching process, ensuring that each visual element carries a clear narrative or emotional function, ultimately conveying the unique attributes of the work efficiently to the target audience.



**Figure 5. Musical Content-Symbol Anchoring Matching Framework**

Figure 5 provides the matching framework for content-symbol anchoring. The visual symbols of historical musicals, for instance, cannot adopt an overly entertaining style; the signifier and signified must remain tightly coupled to prevent audience misinterpretation[9].

### 3.3 Media Adaptation Logic

In the new media environment, the selection of visual symbols must follow the media adaptation logic, i.e., adjusting the form transformation and communication focus of core visual elements based on the presentation rules of different platforms. Short-video platforms like Douyin require "strong impact, fast pace," with symbol selection tending towards high-saturation colors, dynamic text effects, clip editing of plot conflicts, and iconic character facial close-ups. Social graphic platforms like Weibo and Xiaohongshu operate under the rule of "aesthetic creation and in-depth interpretation," where visual symbols need to display exquisite

composition and stylized color grading, focusing on high-definition stills and visual details containing cultural metaphors. Live broadcast platforms emphasize "real-time interaction and sense of presence," with symbols serving immersive experiences such as dynamic background panels and virtual props[13]. Research on virtual fashion visual symbol communication[6] demonstrates that cross-platform symbol adaptation requires maintaining the stability of the symbol's signified while flexibly transforming the signifier. Similarly, studies on sports event posters[7] reveal how core symbols are re-contextualized for different media channels to maximize engagement. Table 2 details the visual symbol adaptation requirements for different new media platforms. The transformation of symbols across different platforms is essentially a shift in emphasis from "instant stimulation" to "sustained savoring" for the same core image.

**Table 2. Visual Symbol Adaptation Requirements for Different Platforms**

Platform Type	Typical Platforms	Visual Symbol Adaptation Requirements	Case Reference (Musical Promotion)
Short-video Platform	Douyin, Kuaishou, Video Channel	Size/Format: Primarily vertical screen (9:16); Style: High contrast, fast-paced editing, strong visual impact; Duration: 15-60 seconds; Core Logic: The first 3 seconds are critical, symbols must have independent narrative and emotional detonation power.	Use the most intense aria clip from the play, paired with dynamic lyric subtitles and character close-up transitions, to quickly present the core conflict.
Social Graphic Platform	Weibo, Xiaohongshu, Moments	Size/Format: Square (1:1) or horizontal (4:3/16:9) images are both suitable, high-definition quality; Style: Exquisite composition, unified color grading, rich in beauty and "internet appeal"; Duration: Long-term retention, relies on multiple exposures; Core Logic: Symbols need to carry aesthetic value and cultural connotation, triggering deep interaction.	Release a series of character promotional stills, using a unified retro film filter, paired with character inner monologue-style captions to create a sense of story.
Live Broadcast Platform	Douyin Live, WeChat Video Channel Live	Size/Format: Centered on the live broadcast screen, dynamic graphic layers can be overlaid; Style: Authentic, immediate, highly interactive; Duration: 1-3 hours; Core Logic: Symbols serve real-time communication and live experience, enhancing immersion and intimacy.	Lead actors live broadcast a backstage tour, with the camera focusing on exquisite physical props and costume details, and use virtual "reward props" as play symbols.

## 4. Communication Efficiency Analysis

### 4.1 Reach and Cognitive Efficiency

Reach efficiency measures the breadth and precision of visual symbols covering the target audience. Short-video platforms can quickly spark topics and achieve massive exposure, while social platforms have higher matching degree between users and musical interest tags, resulting in more precise coverage efficiency. This difference reveals that the design of visual

symbols needs to consider the communication characteristics of platforms, strengthening their appeal and sense of identity for specific cultural consumer groups while pursuing broad visibility. Cognitive efficiency evaluation focuses on the audience's understanding and internalization degree. Highly recognizable main visual symbols can quickly attract attention; information memorability tests whether core information is accurately retained; brand association relevance evaluates whether symbols can successfully evoke a stable association with

a specific musical brand. Data from audience surveys (Table 3) shows that a well-designed symbol system integrating the core cultural

elements of the play performs better in all cognitive aspects[5, 15].

**Table 3. Cognitive Efficiency Evaluation Indexes**

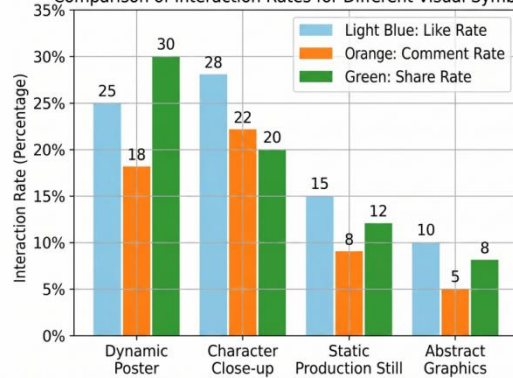
Cognitive Dimension	Evaluation Index Description	Average Score (5-point scale)
Symbol Recognition	Ease with which core visual symbols in promotional materials are quickly identified and remembered.	4.2
Core Information Memory	Accuracy of the audience's memory regarding the plot, theme, style, and other information represented by the symbols.	3.8
Brand Association Relevance	Directness with which seeing the symbol triggers association with a specific musical brand or production company.	3.5

**4.2 Interactive and Conversion Efficiency**

Interactive efficiency analysis focuses on the actual effect of visual symbols in stimulating audience participation behaviors. Tracking statistics show that dynamic poster clips containing narrative suspense perform outstandingly in repost rates, while symbols highlighting actors' emotional close-ups or exquisite costume details tend to get more likes and comment interactions. Secondary creation behaviors, such as memes based on poster elements and fan art, are concentrated on highly recognizable and malleable character symbols or iconic visual elements[2, 4, 9] Composite visual symbols that integrate narrative, emotional tension, and artistic beauty are the most effective in enhancing the depth and breadth of audience participation (Figure 6). The conversion data in Table 4 further demonstrate that stylized character portraits and cultural integration symbols achieve higher ticket and merchandise conversion rates, respectively. The verification of conversion efficiency requires linking the communication effect of visual symbols to the ultimate commercial revenue. The study found that symbols with high recognition and

emotional resonance can effectively shorten the user's decision-making path and directly increase ticket purchase conversion rates. Symbols used in promotion that hold a core position in the play's world-building and can be systematically applied to derivative product design stimulate fans' desire to collect, thereby increasing the merchandise purchase rate and average transaction value. The commercial value of symbols lies in their construction of a recognizable and consumable "meaning system," transforming the audience's emotional identification into specific consumption behaviors.

Comparison of Interaction Rates for Different Visual Symbols



**Figure 6. Comparison of Interaction Rates of Different Visual Symbols**

**Table 4. Conversion Efficiency of Different Visual Symbol Types**

Visual Symbol Type	Main Characteristics and Communication Focus	Average Ticket Purchase Conversion Rate	Merchandise Purchase Rate
Stylized Character Portraits	Highlight the artistic image of lead actors, strengthen character identity and star effect.	4.2%	18.5%
Scene Symbols/ Concept Art	Showcase iconic stage scenes or core aesthetic concepts.	3.8%	22.1%
Abstract Geometric Graphics	Extract the core spirit of the play for abstract and stylized expression.	2.5%	12.3%
Cultural Integration Symbols	Re-creation integrating elements of traditional opera, regional culture, etc.	3.1%	25.6%

**5. Optimization Strategy Construction**

**5.1 Precise Symbol Adaptation and Stratified**

**Reach**

The core of precise symbol adaptation lies in customizing and reconstructing the visual symbols of musicals based on the media

characteristics and user behavior patterns of new media platforms. Short-video platforms require high dynamism and strong recognition; social graphic platforms focus on aesthetic immersion and emotional resonance; live broadcast scenarios emphasize real-time interaction and a sense of presence, requiring extensible and interactive symbols. Cross-platform communication requires establishing a "core symbol asset library" to ensure consistency. This library contains immutable elements such as logos, standard colors, and core graphics, with differentiation achieved through a "symbol expression layer" that re-creates assets based on platform characteristics[1, 7, 11]. For the stratified audience, visual symbol strategies must be precisely constructed based on circle attributes. The core fan group has a deep

emotional connection to the play and is highly sensitive to figurative symbols such as character IP and iconic scenes[1]. For potential audiences, the visual strategy should lean towards stylized tones and abstract geometric graphics to construct a high-level aesthetic image and lower the cognitive threshold. For pan-entertainment users, communication relies on high-contrast colors, dynamic visual clips, and symbol combinations incorporating pop culture elements[7]. Table 5 shows the acceptance rates of various visual symbols among core fans, potential audiences, and pan-entertainment users. The sensitivity of the three groups to visual symbols presents a gradient difference, requiring dynamic proportioning of symbol combinations in promotional materials.

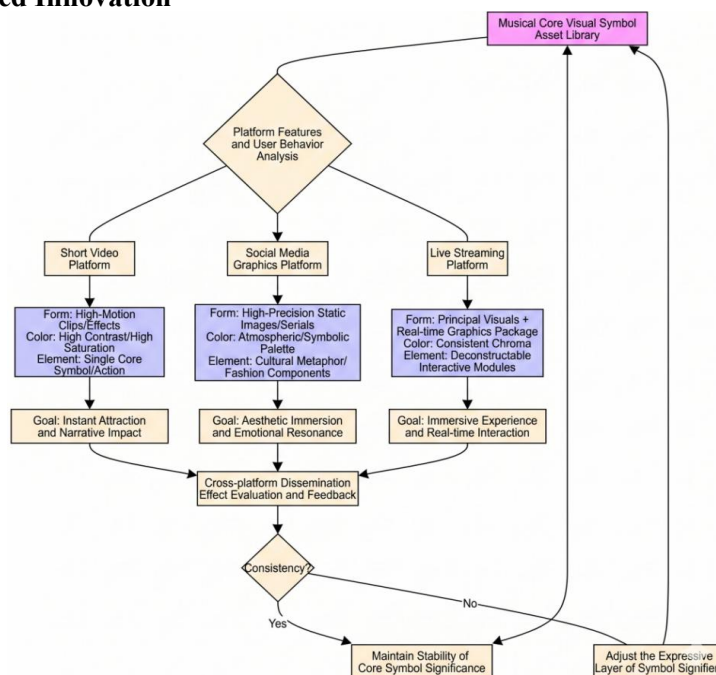
**Table 5. Audience Circle Symbol Preference**

Visual Symbol Type	Core Fan Acceptance Rate	Potential Audience Acceptance Rate	Pan-Entertainment User Acceptance Rate
Character IP (Lead Actor/Classic Character Image)	High (~85%)	Medium (~60%)	Low (~40%)
Iconic Scenes/Props	High (~80%)	Medium (~55%)	Low (~35%)
Stylized Tones (e.g., retro, dark)	Medium-High (~75%)	High (~70%)	Medium (~50%)
Abstract Geometric/Pattern Elements	Medium (~65%)	High (~75%)	Low (~30%)
High-Contrast Colors/Dynamic Vision	Low (~40%)	Medium (~50%)	High (~80%)
Pop Culture Integration Elements	Low (~30%)	Medium (~45%)	High (~75%)

Note: Acceptance rate percentages are theoretically estimated values based on typical communication scenarios, reflecting relative preference trends.

In new media communication, the efficacy of visual symbols depends on whether they can carry and transmit coherent meaning. It is necessary to promote the transformation of visual symbols from static "display objects" to dynamic "narrators."

**5.2 Symbol Narrative Upgrade and Technology-Enabled Innovation**



**Figure 7. Musical Core Visual Symbol Asset Library & Cross-Platform Adaptation**

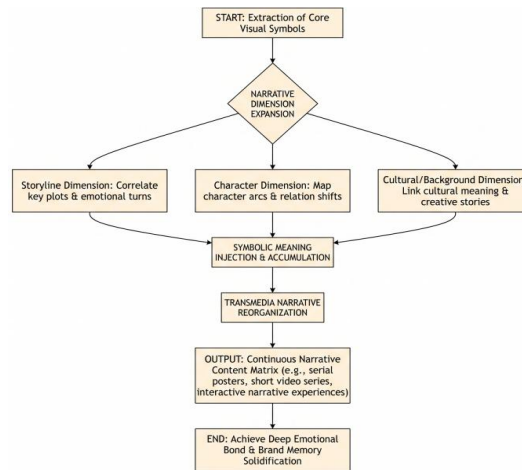


Figure 8. Symbol Narrative Upgrade Path

Table 6. Comparison Between Traditional and Technology-Enabled Visual Symbols

Comparison Dimension	Traditional Visual Symbols (e.g., static posters, logos)	Technology-Enabled Visual Symbols (e.g., AI dynamic posters, AR interactive logos)
Main Form	Flat, static, fixed	Dynamic, interactive, customizable
Exposure Increase	Relies on physical locations and traditional media placement, flat growth curve	Relies on social media fission and interactive experience, easy to form viral spread
User Participation	Passive viewing, short dwell time	Active interaction, immersive experience, high willingness to stay and share
Conversion Rate Promotion	One-way information transmission, long and lossy conversion path from cognition to purchase	Experience is promotion, shortens decision-making path, can directly embed purchase entry
Symbol Adaptability	Difficult to modify once published, cannot be adjusted for different audience groups	Can adjust symbol elements in real-time based on user data, achieving personalized adaptation
Narrative Extensibility	Limited narrative capacity, confined to the image itself	Can serve as a narrative entry point, linking more backstory, music clips, etc.

The core of this transformation lies in constructing a symbol narrative chain: around the core theme of the musical, using core visual symbols as narrative anchors to string together the plot's highlight clips, the characters' emotional arcs, and even behind-the-scenes creation stories[4,5]. As depicted in Figure 7, a core visual symbol asset library supports cross-platform adaptation. Figure 8 outlines the path for upgrading symbol narrative. This narrative construction places the symbol in a dynamic meaning-generation network, guiding the audience to gradually delve into the dramatic world. Technology-enabled innovation provides paths for customization and dynamism. Table 6 provides a comparison between traditional and technology-enabled visual symbols. AI can generate highly personalized main visual posters or dynamic icons by analyzing target audience data, achieving a leap from "one face for a thousand people" to "a thousand faces for a thousand people." Augmented reality technology transforms two-dimensional visual symbols into interactive, immersive narrative entry points, deepening the audience's understanding and

memory through multi-sensory participation. The core of this integration path is to use technology as a lever to amplify the emotional carrying and meaning transmission efficacy of visual symbols, making them a dynamic bridge connecting the artistic world of the play with the audience's perceptual experience[6,12].

6. Conclusion

This study reveals that the selection of visual symbols in musical promotion within the new media environment follows the dual logic of scene adaptation and meaning reconstruction. Highly recognizable symbols such as dynamic images and character close-ups are more suitable for instant communication on short-video platforms, aiming to quickly establish emotional connections; whereas static symbols carrying cultural metaphors and stylized designs have more space for in-depth interpretation in long-form graphic communities, serving the long-term construction of brand value. The core optimization path distilled from this research emphasizes that the selection of visual symbols must transcend simple formal transplantation

and shift towards deep embedding in the cultural context of the target platform. Promotion practice should reverse-engineer the symbol system based on the core task of the communication scenario, realizing a shift from "visual presentation" to "meaning dialogue." This principle has clear guiding value for industry practice, reminding creators to carefully balance the visual appeal of symbols with their stability of meaning in specific communities, thereby effectively conveying the complete artistic core of the musical in fragmented communication.

The study has limitations in sample coverage, primarily focusing on mainstream domestic commercial musicals promoted on new media platforms in recent years, with less attention to niche experimental plays and regional markets. Future research can expand into emerging technology scenarios such as metaverse spaces and AI-generated content, and systematically compare the cognitive differences of audiences in different cultural contexts to enhance the precision of international communication. Producers and promotion teams should establish a closed-loop workflow from core symbol extraction, cross-platform adaptation, to effect feedback evaluation, ensuring that visual communication, while pursuing innovative forms, effectively carries and transmits the play's artistic value and cultural connotation.

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