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Audience Perceptions and Engagement with Micro Drama: A Qualitative Case Study in Bangkok, Thailand

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Abstract

As short-form, mobile-first narratives continue to grow in popularity, particularly on platforms such as TikTok, Facebook Reels, and YouTube Shorts, understanding audience experiences becomes essential for grasping broader shifts in digital media consumption. This qualitative study aims to explore how audiences in Bangkok, Thailand, perceive and engage with micro drama content within contemporary digital media environments. Using a qualitative case study approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with twelve participants who regularly watched micro dramas. Thematic analysis was performed to analyze the interview data. The findings revealed five key dimensions of audience engagement: emotional resonance, convenience and integration into daily routines, algorithmically driven exposure, interactive participation, and appreciation of visual and narrative techniques. These insights demonstrate that micro dramas are not only compelling due to their condensed storytelling but also because they align with fast-paced urban lifestyles and platform-driven viewing patterns. The study contributes to emerging literature on short-form digital narratives by situating audience behaviors within local sociocultural contexts and offers implications for policymakers, content creators, and future researchers seeking to understand the evolving dynamics of digital storytelling.

Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital media ecosystems has transformed the ways audiences discover, consume, and interact with audiovisual content (Kallinikos & Mariátegui, 2011; Yusnaini et al., 2025). Among the most significant developments in contemporary media consumption is the rise of micro dramas—short-form, serialized narratives typically ranging from a few seconds to several minutes per episode, designed for mobile-first platforms such as TikTok, Facebook Reels, and YouTube Shorts. These productions are characterized by condensed

storytelling, intense emotional appeal, and the use of visual and narrative hooks that capture attention within highly competitive online environments. Micro dramas not only entertain but also reflect cultural values, social norms, and contemporary lifestyles, creating a unique intersection of media, identity, and social engagement (Chen, 2025; Monroe, 2025; Xu, 2025).

According to Scanlon (2025), micro dramas are set to achieve $11 billion in global revenues in 2025, with most of that revenue coming from China. The U.S. records the biggest revenues internationally, accounting for around 8.6%, with the likes of the U.K, Japan, South Korea and Thailand accounting for smaller portions, as adoption of mini dramas continues to grow. Micro dramas have gained substantial popularity, particularly among younger audiences and urban communities with high digital connectivity. Additionally, the widespread adoption of smartphones and social media platforms has facilitated the rapid dissemination of short-form content, making micro dramas an accessible and influential medium for diverse audiences. Unlike traditional television or film content, micro dramas are consumed in highly fragmented time frames, often between daily activities, and social media algorithms influence both exposure and popularity. As a result, audience engagement extends beyond passive viewership to include commenting, sharing, and other interactive behaviors, which shape both the content and its reception (Chen, 2025; Monroe, 2025; Xu, 2025).

Despite the growing prevalence of micro dramas, research on how audiences perceive and engage with this content remains limited. Most studies on digital media focus on influencer culture, viral content, or interactive media practices, yet micro dramas represent a hybrid narrative form that blends traditional storytelling techniques with the participatory features of contemporary digital platforms. Investigating how audiences interpret these narratives, emotionally respond to characters, and participate in online interactions is crucial to understanding evolving media literacies, cultural preferences, and engagement practices in the digital era. Therefore, this study aims to explore how audiences in Bangkok, Thailand, perceive and engage with micro drama content within contemporary digital media environments. By examining local viewers' interpretations, engagement behaviors, and contextual influences, this research seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how micro dramas shape—and are shaped by—the dynamic interactions between digital storytelling and audience participation in contemporary media landscapes. By addressing this gap, the study contributes to both scholarly knowledge and practical understanding of contemporary media consumption. It highlights the ways short-form narrative content functions as a site of cultural expression, emotional engagement, and interactive participation, offering insights for media producers, digital marketers, and content creators seeking to design compelling narratives for evolving audiences. Furthermore, it enriches academic discourse on digital media by situating audience behavior within local sociocultural contexts, demonstrating how regional media environments influence engagement practices and preferences.

Research Objective

This study aims to explore how audiences in Bangkok, Thailand, perceive and engage with micro drama content within contemporary digital media environments.

Literature Review

Micro Drama and Short-Form Digital Storytelling

Micro dramas are a unique type of short-form digital tale that has emerged as a result of the rapid growth of mobile-first platforms, which has changed modern storytelling techniques. In order to stand out in fiercely competitive online spaces, micro dramas are usually distinguished by their incredibly little episodes, serialized formats, and emotionally charged narratives (Chen, 2025; Xu, 2025). Unlike traditional television or film narratives, micro dramas rely on condensed plot development, visual hooks, and cliff-hangers to sustain audience interest across fragmented viewing moments. Xu (2025) conceptualized micro dramas as a product of media fusion in the post-film era, arguing that they represent both a narrative and industrial transformation shaped by platform economies and mobile consumption habits. Similarly, Chen (2025) emphasized that micro dramas mirror everyday social experiences while adapting narrative techniques to algorithm-driven distribution systems.

Audience Engagement in Digital Media Environments

Audience engagement in digital media has increasingly shifted from passive consumption toward interactive and participatory practices. Prior studies have shown that digital platforms enable audiences to like, comment, share, and circulate content, thereby shaping visibility and meaning-making processes (Shi, 2020; Yusnaini et al., 2025). In mobile-first environments, engagement is often embedded within fragmented daily routines, allowing audiences to consume content in short intervals while commuting or multitasking (Tai & Alivi, 2025). Alzubi (2023) further noted that digital media consumption patterns blur the boundaries between intentional viewing and habitual scrolling, particularly in urban contexts where time scarcity influences media choices. These shifts suggest that engagement is not solely determined by content preference but also by structural features of digital ecosystems.

Algorithmic Influence and Platform Mediation

A growing body of research highlights the critical role of algorithms in shaping media exposure, consumption continuity, and audience behavior. Recommendation systems determine what content users encounter, often promoting repetitive exposure and sustained viewing without deliberate search (Hödl & Myrach, 2023; Hastuti et al., 2025). In the context of micro dramas, algorithmic curation amplifies serialized viewing by automatically sequencing episodes and prioritizing viral content (Chen, 2025; Monroe, 2025). Serttaş et al. (2025) argued that algorithm-driven content environments may subtly influence user perspectives and engagement patterns, raising questions about autonomy and agency. However, audiences may also perceive algorithmic mediation as convenient and efficient, particularly within fast-scrolling, mobile-centered platforms (Xu, 2025).

Emotional Resonance and Cultural Context

Despite their brevity, micro dramas have been found to elicit strong emotional responses through relatable narratives and culturally familiar themes. Li (2024) demonstrated that micro dramas on platforms such as Douyin shape users' cultural identity and social behavior by reflecting everyday experiences and moral dilemmas. Chen (2025) similarly observed that emotional immediacy and narrative compression are key strategies enabling micro dramas to sustain audience attachment. These findings suggest that emotional engagement in short-form narratives may depend more on cultural resonance and narrative efficiency than on duration. Situating audience engagement

within local sociocultural contexts is therefore essential, as media practices are shaped by regional norms, urban lifestyles, and platform usage patterns (Kallinikos & Mariátegui, 2011; Yusnaini et al., 2025).

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore how audiences in Bangkok perceive and engage with micro drama content within contemporary digital media environments. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate because the research aimed to capture participants' interpretive experiences, emotional responses, and patterns of engagement—elements that require in-depth and context-rich exploration rather than numerical measurement. By focusing on subjective meanings and personal encounters with digital media, the study sought to provide nuanced insights into how viewers interact with short-form narrative content distributed across mobile-first platforms.

A qualitative case study strategy was used to examine micro drama consumption within the specific sociocultural setting of Bangkok. This approach allowed for a detailed investigation of local audience behaviors and interpretations, acknowledging that digital media practices are shaped by cultural norms, urban lifestyles, and the technological environment. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that those included had meaningful and recent exposure to micro dramas. To participate, individuals needed to be residents of Bangkok, active users of platforms such as TikTok, Facebook Reels, or YouTube Shorts, and viewers of micro dramas at least twice within the preceding month. This sampling strategy enabled the study to engage participants who were genuinely familiar with the format and could articulate their perceptions and engagement habits. A total of 12 participants were recruited, representing diverse backgrounds in age, gender, occupation, and media habits. This number was sufficient to capture a range of perspectives while ensuring analytic depth, aligning with established qualitative research guidance that saturation is typically reached within 9 to 17 interviews (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). This variation ensured a broad understanding of how different audience groups perceive and interact with micro drama content.

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted either face-to-face or via online video calls, depending on each participant's availability and preference. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to guide the conversation around key topics while also accommodating unanticipated insights that emerged during interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. The study adhered to ethical standards for social science research in Thailand. Participants were provided with clear explanations of the research objectives, procedures, and their rights—including the right to withdraw without consequence. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and participation was entirely voluntary, with no associated physical, medical, or psychological risks. To protect privacy, all identifying information was removed, and responses were reported in aggregated or pseudonymized form. In accordance with Thailand Science Research and Innovation (TSRI) No. 3(3), the study qualified for ethical exemption, as it involved non-sensitive interview data from adult participants (Phuangsuwan et al., 2024; Limna et al., 2025). Nevertheless, ethical safeguards were maintained throughout the research process to ensure confidentiality and respect for all participants.

The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis, following an inductive approach that allowed themes to emerge directly from participants' accounts. The analysis involved repeatedly reading the transcripts to develop familiarity with the data, generating initial codes that reflected meaningful segments of participants' responses, identifying patterns, and refining them into coherent themes. This iterative process enabled the researcher to capture recurring ideas, variations in audience experiences, and the contextual factors that shaped how micro dramas were interpreted and engaged with. Throughout the analysis, particular attention was given to emotional responses, motivations for viewing, modes of interaction, and the ways digital platforms influenced audience behaviors. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several measures were implemented. Triangulation was achieved by comparing insights across participants with diverse demographic backgrounds, helping to validate the consistency of emerging themes. Member checking was used by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected participants to confirm that their experiences were accurately represented. An audit trail was also maintained to document coding decisions and analytical reflections, supporting transparency throughout the research process.

Results

This study revealed insights from twelve participants residing in Bangkok, all of whom actively consume micro dramas on platforms such as TikTok, Facebook Reels, and YouTube Shorts. The respondents varied in age, occupation, and digital media routines, reflecting a broad spectrum of perspectives on short-form storytelling. Their stories demonstrated how micro dramas fit into the rhythms of urban life, elicit emotional engagement, and encourage interactive participation on algorithm-driven platforms.

Emotional Resonance and Relatability

Participants consistently described micro dramas as emotionally impactful despite their brief duration. Respondent 3 shared, "*Even with just one minute, I feel the drama immediately—it hits fast.*" Similarly, Respondent 7 noted, "*The stories feel like real situations people face, so it's easy to get emotionally attached.*" Moreover, respondent 2 emphasized the intensity of the genre, stating, "*They know how to trigger emotions quickly. Sometimes one short clip stays with me all day.*" Respondent 9 echoed this connection through relatability: "*I see parts of my own life in these mini stories, so they feel close to home.*"

Collectively, the respondents' reflections highlight that micro dramas succeed in delivering rapid emotional engagement because they compress relatable, everyday experiences into concise scenes. This emotional resonance serves as a powerful anchor that draws viewers into the narrative quickly and sustains their interest across multiple short episodes.

Convenience and Fit with Daily Routines

Participants repeatedly emphasized the convenience of micro dramas and their suitability for fast-paced lifestyles. Respondent 10 shared, "*I watch them between tasks—one episode is so short that it never feels like a commitment.*" Respondent 1 added, "*When I wait for the BTS or sit on the bus, I just scroll and micro dramas appear—it passes the time quickly.*" Respondent 11 explained the ease of multitasking: "*I watch them while*

cooking or doing chores. It's something you can follow without sitting down for long." Respondent 5 agreed, noting, "*Long series are tiring, but micro dramas fit into my schedule perfectly."*

This theme demonstrates that micro dramas have become a seamless part of daily routines because their ultra-short format adapts easily to fragmented urban time pockets. Their flexibility enhances consumption frequency and supports habitual viewing patterns among busy audiences.

Algorithmic Exposure and Platform Influence

Respondents described how recommendation systems significantly shaped their viewing habits. Respondent 6 said, "*I didn't search for them at first—TikTok kept showing them until I eventually started watching regularly."* Respondent 12 added, "*Once you finish one clip, the next one pops up instantly. It feels endless, so you keep watching."* Respondent 4 emphasized platform trends, stating, "*When something goes viral, it shows up on everyone's feed, so you feel like you should watch it too."* Respondent 8 noted, "*Sometimes the platform shows me a series from the middle, and I end up searching for the first episode because it catches my attention."*

Together, these insights reveal that platform algorithms play a decisive role in content discovery, continuity, and repeated exposure, often initiating micro drama consumption without deliberate intention from viewers. As a result, engagement is shaped as much by platform design as by personal preference.

Interactive Engagement and Social Participation

Beyond viewing, the respondents described actively participating through likes, comments, and sharing. Respondent 9 shared, "*If a story is good, I share it with my friends so we can talk about it later."* Respondent 4 stated, "*I read the comments every time—they're funny and make the episode even more enjoyable."* Respondent 2 added, "*Sometimes I comment on the videos, and the creators actually reply."* Respondent 7 emphasized the communal aspect: "*My friends and I send clips to each other. It's like we're watching the same show but separately."* Respondent 12 noted online trends: "*When everyone is talking about a micro drama series, I want to see what the hype is about."*

This theme illustrates that micro dramas foster social connectivity through interactive digital behaviors. Sharing, commenting, and responding to trends transform individual viewing into a collective activity, reinforcing engagement through social validation and community interaction.

Aesthetic Appeal and Rapid Storytelling Techniques

Participants praised the visual and narrative qualities of micro dramas. Respondent 2 stated, "*The visuals are bold and eye-catching—you get hooked instantly."* Respondent 8 emphasized efficient storytelling: "*There's no filler; every second pushes the story forward."* Respondent 5 observed stylistic coherence: "*They use the same tone and color style, so it's easy to recognize the series."* Respondent 11 remarked on production advancements: "*Some micro dramas now look like professional films, just shorter."* Respondent 1 added, "*The cliff-hangers are strong—they know exactly how to make you want the next episode."*

These perceptions reveal that strong visual aesthetics and rapid narrative pacing are key elements that sustain audience attention in competitive digital environments. The concise, high-impact storytelling style differentiates micro dramas from other digital content and enhances their addictive appeal.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that micro dramas held a distinctive position within Bangkok's contemporary digital media environment, functioning as emotionally resonant, convenient, algorithmically driven, socially interactive, and aesthetically compelling forms of short-form storytelling. These insights aligned with and extended previous research on digital video consumption, narrative engagement, and platform-mediated media practices.

First, although prior research often emphasizes the superficial or fleeting nature of short-form video consumption, participants in this study reported strong emotional attachment and narrative immersion, even within episodes lasting less than one minute. This finding was somewhat unexpected, as micro dramas are frequently assumed to prioritize speed and novelty over emotional depth. One possible explanation is that emotional engagement in micro dramas may not depend on narrative complexity but rather on strategic compression—the deliberate use of familiar social situations, exaggerated emotional cues, and rapid conflict escalation. In the Bangkok context, where audiences are accustomed to melodramatic elements in television and online storytelling, such narrative shortcuts may resonate more strongly than in other cultural settings. Thus, emotional intensity may be culturally mediated rather than merely a function of format length, extending Chen's (2025) and Li's (2024) arguments that micro dramas mirror everyday experiences.

Second, the integration of micro dramas into daily routines aligned with prior research on fragmented digital consumption. As noted in the introduction, micro dramas were consumed "in highly fragmented time frames, often between daily activities," positioning them as ideal content for urban environments defined by mobility and time scarcity. Participants' habits—watching during commutes, between tasks, or while multitasking—supported Alzubi's (2023), Tai and Alivi's (2025) and Yusnaini et al.'s (2025) observation that new media ecosystems encourage flexible, mobile-first content engagement. This study reinforced these arguments by showing how micro dramas seamlessly fit into the lived experiences of Bangkok audiences.

Third, participants' experiences with algorithmic exposure illustrated how platform design significantly shaped viewing behavior. The findings corroborated Chen's (2025), Monroe's (2025), and Xu's (2025) arguments that micro dramas were designed for mobile-first platforms that leveraged recommendation systems to maximize attention retention. Similarly, Hödl and Myrach (2023), Hastuti et al. (2025), and Serttaş et al. (2025) emphasized the role of digital platforms in restructuring video distribution and consumption, noting that algorithmic mediation played a critical role in determining what content audiences encountered. Participants' comments about automatic episode sequencing, viral trends, and unintended discovery illustrated that engagement was shaped not only by individual preference but also by algorithmic nudging and platform-driven visibility. This study therefore extended earlier research by demonstrating that algorithmic exposure was central to both content discovery and sustained narrative engagement.

Fourth, the interactive engagement observed in this study reflected broader shifts toward participatory media practices. Consistent with existing evidence that audience engagement "extends beyond passive viewership to include commenting, sharing, and other interactive behaviors," participants actively contributed to the micro drama ecosystem through digital interaction and peer circulation of content. These behaviors illustrated what Shi

(2020), Chen (2025), and Xu (2025) described as micro dramas' role within a "media fusion" environment, wherein audiences became co-participants in shaping visibility and discourse surrounding digital narratives. The findings therefore strengthened these claims by showing how interaction transformed individual viewing into a socially embedded practice.

Finally, participants' appreciation of the visual and stylistic qualities of micro dramas supported earlier research describing their reliance on strong aesthetic and narrative hooks. As highlighted in the introduction, micro dramas used "condensed storytelling" and striking visuals to attract and hold attention in fast-scrolling environments. Participants' admiration for cinematic visuals, consistent visual tone, and effective cliff-hangers aligned with Chen's (2025) and Xu's (2025) analysis of increasingly professionalized production techniques within the micro drama industry. The findings further demonstrated how these stylistic choices contributed to capturing attention and sustaining engagement across short episodes.

Collectively, the findings illuminated how micro dramas operated at the intersection of emotional storytelling, platform-driven recommendation systems, fragmented viewing practices, and participatory digital cultures. This study contributed to the existing literature by situating these dynamics within the sociocultural context of Bangkok, where mobile-first engagement, fast-paced lifestyles, and strong digital connectivity intensified the appeal and uptake of micro dramas. By aligning empirical insights with established research, the discussion highlighted how micro dramas reflected broader evolutions in digital media consumption while also responding to localized patterns of behavior and preference. Theoretically, these findings challenge duration-based assumptions of narrative engagement by demonstrating that emotional resonance and immersion can be achieved through "emotional efficiency" in ultra-short digital storytelling. The study further extends platform theory by showing that audience engagement is negotiated rather than purely autonomous or algorithmically determined, shaped by habitual viewing and normalized algorithmic mediation. By situating these dynamics within Bangkok's sociocultural context, the research underscores the need for culturally grounded theories of short-form digital media that move beyond platform-centric or Western-focused models.

Conclusion

This study examined how audiences in Bangkok perceived and engaged with micro drama content within contemporary digital media environments. Drawing on the perspectives of 12 participants, the findings revealed that micro dramas operated as a multifaceted form of storytelling that captured attention through emotional resonance, convenience, algorithmic visibility, social interaction, and strong aesthetic appeal. Participants described micro dramas as highly relatable and emotionally impactful, reflecting everyday experiences and delivering narrative depth within extremely brief timeframes. Their short duration allowed viewers to integrate them seamlessly into fragmented daily routines, reinforcing the genre's suitability for fast-paced urban lifestyles. The study also highlighted the influential role of platform algorithms in shaping consumption patterns. Many participants encountered micro dramas not through intentional search but through recommendation systems that promoted continuous viewing. This algorithmic mediation, combined with social sharing and engagement features, transformed micro drama consumption from an individual act into a socially embedded practice. Furthermore, the

appeal of strong visual design and rapid storytelling techniques demonstrated how micro dramas leveraged professionalized production strategies to compete for attention in dense digital ecosystems. Overall, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of micro dramas as a hybrid media form that blends traditional narrative structures with the interactive and algorithmic affordances of modern platforms. By situating audience experiences within the local context of Bangkok, the study underscores how cultural preferences, urban routines, and platform architectures collectively shape emerging patterns of media engagement. These insights offer valuable implications for media producers, digital marketers, and platform designers seeking to create compelling short-form content that resonates with contemporary audiences.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can guide policymakers, industry practitioners, and academic researchers in strengthening the development and understanding of micro drama consumption within Thailand's evolving digital media landscape.

From a policy perspective, there is a need for frameworks that support the growth of local digital content ecosystems while ensuring responsible platform practices. Policymakers could encourage investment in creative industries by providing grants, training programs, or incubation schemes aimed at emerging micro drama creators. Since algorithms significantly shaped audience exposure in this study, regulatory bodies may consider guidelines promoting greater transparency in recommendation systems. Such measures can help ensure that content discovery processes remain fair, diverse, and aligned with public interest objectives, especially as short-form video platforms increasingly influence cultural consumption patterns.

From a practical standpoint, content creators, media producers, and digital marketers can draw on the study's findings to enhance engagement strategies. The strong emotional resonance and relatability identified suggest that creators should continue prioritizing everyday narratives, character-driven storytelling, and visually compelling formats. Producers may also benefit from designing content that fits seamlessly into short viewing intervals, aligning with the portable, on-the-go habits described by participants. Additionally, leveraging interactive features—such as comment prompts, episodic hooks, and shareable moments—can strengthen community-building around micro dramas and foster deeper audience participation. Platform managers and marketers can further refine content delivery strategies by optimizing for algorithmic visibility while maintaining ethical practices that avoid over-saturation or manipulation.

From an academic perspective, the study opens several avenues for further research. Future scholars may explore micro drama consumption across different age groups, regional contexts, or socioeconomic backgrounds to identify variations in engagement patterns. Comparative studies between Thailand and other countries could also deepen understanding of cultural influences on short-form storytelling. Moreover, given the significant impact of algorithms observed in this study, further research could examine how recommendation systems shape narrative preferences, media literacy, and user autonomy. Expanding methodological approaches—such as incorporating digital ethnography or platform analytics—would provide richer insights into the interplay between content creators, audiences, and platform infrastructures.

These recommendations highlight the importance of coordinated efforts among policymakers, practitioners, and researchers to support a more sustainable, creative, and critically informed micro drama ecosystem.

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