

Spectacularization and Platform Visibility: A Content Analysis of AI-Generated Short Videos on Bilibili

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Abstract

Generative AI is reshaping short-video production and expanding the range of experiences that can be visually represented. Drawing on 60 AI-generated short videos on Bilibili, this study combines content analysis with the walkthrough method to examine spectacularized representation and platform visibility. The findings show that AI-generated short videos largely retain established genres and narrative structures, while using generative techniques to reorganize everyday rules governing bodies, life, space-time, technology, and environments. This process is conceptualized as the “visual reconfiguration of the rules of reality.” Platform visibility is further shaped through AI-related labels, search and recommendation pathways, and thematic or competition pages. The study argues that AI-generated short videos move from making non-everyday experiences viewable to making them visible on platforms, with media spectacle emerging through the interaction of generative technology, content expression, and platform organization.

Keywords

Generative AI; AI-Generated Short Videos; Media Spectacle; Platform Visibility; Bilibili

1. Introduction

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping short-video production by making scenes, characters, and situations that are costly or difficult to film increasingly producible through text-to-image, image-to-video, and multimodal generation tools. On platforms such as Bilibili, AI-generated short videos have expanded beyond technical demonstrations into science fiction, suspense, fantasy, and everyday emotional narratives.

More importantly, generative AI expands what audiovisual media can represent. Bodies, forms of life, space-time relations, technological systems, and environments

can be reorganized in ways that depart from ordinary experience. Yet being generated does not automatically make such content visible. AI-generated videos must also be identified, connected, and organized through titles, tags, search results, recommendations, and thematic pages. Their circulation therefore involves two related processes: making non-ordinary experiences viewable and making these contents visible within platform environments.

This study examines 60 AI-generated short videos on Bilibili through content analysis and the walkthrough method. It conceptualizes spectacularization as a visual reconfiguration of the rules of reality and investigates how content-level representation intersects with platform organization. Two research questions guide the analysis:

RQ1: How do AI-generated short videos on Bilibili transform non-ordinary experiences into viewable audiovisual content, and what types and combinations of spectacularized representation emerge?

RQ2: How are AI-generated short videos identified, connected, and continuously encountered on Bilibili, and what role does the platform play in shaping their visibility?

Through these questions, the study seeks to explain how media spectacle in AI-generated short videos emerges through the interaction between content expression and platform organization.

2. Literature review

Research on AI-generated short videos has expanded from technical applications to creator practices and platformized production. Lyu et al. (2024) show that generative AI is used across scripting, image generation, voice processing, animation, and editing, often through combinations of multiple tools. Tang et al. (2026) further identify practices such as imitation of viral formats, content testing, account operation, and scaled production, suggesting that AI-assisted creation is increasingly intertwined with platform traffic logics and creator labor.

A second strand focuses on narrative and audiovisual form. Wang (2026) argues that visual imperfections, abrupt narrative shifts, and stylistic hybridity in “AI absurdist dramas” can become distinctive aesthetic features. Chen (2026) emphasizes the growing importance of atmosphere, sensory intensity, and multimodal expression in AI micro-dramas, while Luo (2026) highlights the joint role of generative technologies, platform mechanisms, and short-form texts in shaping narrative and viewing contexts. Research on audience perception also suggests that the significance of AI-generated videos cannot be reduced to realism alone. Lü and Cui (2026), for example, describe a viewing process in which immersion may precede the evaluation of authenticity.

Platform environments have likewise become central to understanding AI-generated video. Zhou and Li (2026) link low production barriers, traffic

incentives, recommendation systems, and audience feedback, while Tang et al. (2026) and Luo (2026) similarly show that AI content production and reception are embedded in platform structures. At the theoretical level, Kellner's (2003) concept of media spectacle provides a useful framework for examining how mediated forms organize extraordinary and attention-oriented experiences. Li (2015) situates this approach as a shift from broad social critique toward more concrete analyses of media culture, while Liu (2022) shows how short-video visibility is shaped by technological, commercial, and platform forces.

Existing studies therefore provide important insights into production practices, audiovisual aesthetics, audience perception, and platform dynamics, but these strands remain relatively disconnected. Less attention has been paid to how non-ordinary experiences involving bodies, life, space-time, technology, and environments are concretely organized into viewable audiovisual forms, or to how such content becomes identifiable and continuously accessible within platform interfaces. This study addresses these gaps by combining content analysis with the walkthrough method, linking the viewability of non-ordinary experience to its platform visibility on Bilibili.

3. Research Methods

This study combines content analysis with the walkthrough method to examine AI-generated short videos on Bilibili from two complementary levels: audiovisual content and platform presentation. Because AI-generated short videos encompass a wide range of formats, including tutorials, technical demonstrations, reviews, and experimental videos, the study focuses specifically on narrative works containing identifiable characters, events, plots, or storylines.

3.1. Sampling and Data Collection

Bilibili was selected as the research site because it has developed an active ecology of AI-based video creation, including both independently published works and platform-organized AI-related competitions and submission campaigns. These multiple sources provided a relatively concentrated yet diverse pool of AI-generated videos for sampling.

The initial pool consisted of 290 candidate videos collected through AI-related keyword searches, creator-profile expansion, and works associated with AI-themed competitions and campaigns. Videos were included only when they met two criteria: (1) generative AI was clearly involved in audiovisual production, and (2) the video contained identifiable narrative elements, such as characters, events, plots, or storylines. These judgments were made on the basis of titles, descriptions, tags, competition information, creator statements, and direct viewing of the videos. Tutorials, tool reviews, technical demonstrations, production-process videos, interviews, analytical videos, and works without clear

narrative content were excluded.

To avoid overrepresentation by highly productive creators or individual series, the number of videos from the same creator or continuous series was limited during sample construction. Publicly available metrics, including views, likes, and comments, were recorded as contextual information but were not used as fixed thresholds for inclusion. The final sample consisted of 60 AI-generated short videos, including both competition-related works and independently published videos, so as to preserve variation in source and content type.

3.2. Content Analysis

The 60 videos were manually coded using a coding scheme developed through preliminary observation and pilot coding. The scheme included six dimensions: genre, dominant emotion, narrative structure, visual style, the role of AI in the video, and spectacle features. The first four dimensions describe the videos' basic content characteristics, while the role of AI distinguishes whether AI functions primarily as a production technique, an explicit production marker, or a mechanism central to the story.

The six spectacle categories were not predetermined by media spectacle theory. Instead, they were derived from recurring patterns identified during preliminary observation and pilot coding: technological/AI alienation, spatiotemporal disruption, bodily/life abnormality, supernatural agency, extreme social rules, and disaster/apocalyptic environments. These categories correspond to disruptions in technological relations, temporal and spatial order, the boundaries of body and life, forms of agency, social rules, and survival environments. Each category was coded dichotomously (0/1), and a single video could receive multiple spectacle codes. Media spectacle theory was therefore used as an interpretive framework for understanding how such departures from ordinary experience are transformed into viewable media forms, rather than as a predefined coding taxonomy.

Spectacle Variable	Agreement Rate	Cohen's κ
Technological/AI Alienation	91.7%	0.800
Spatiotemporal Disruption	100.0%	1.000
Bodily/Life Abnormality	83.3%	0.429
Supernatural Agency	91.7%	0.625
Extreme Social Rules	83.3%	0.429
Disaster/Apocalyptic Environments	83.3%	0.571
Overall Percentage Agreement	88.9%	—

Table 1. Intercoder Agreement Results

To assess intercoder reliability, the operational definitions and coding boundaries of the six spectacle variables were refined after pilot coding. Twenty percent of the sample (12 videos) was then independently coded by two coders using the same coding manual. Cohen's κ values ranged from .429 to 1.000, and the overall percentage agreement was 88.9%. Disagreements in boundary cases were reviewed

according to the finalized operational definitions before the final coding was established.

Following coding, frequencies and percentages were used to summarize the distributions of genre, emotion, narrative structure, visual style, and spectacle features. Co-occurrence among the six spectacle variables was also examined to identify recurring combinations. Representative cases were subsequently used to illustrate how different forms of spectacularization operate within specific narratives.

3.3. Walkthrough Method

The walkthrough method was used to complement content analysis by examining the user-visible interfaces and browsing paths through which AI-generated short videos are encountered on Bilibili. The walkthrough was conducted on September 15, 2026, using the desktop Bilibili application. Because the researcher's regular account had previously been used to search for and watch AI-generated videos, a newly created account with no prior relevant search or viewing history was used to reduce the influence of existing personalization.

The walkthrough began from the platform homepage. Searches were conducted using terms such as "AI short drama" and "AI-generated short video," after which the observation proceeded through search-result pages, selected video pages, related-recommendation sections, and subsequent recommended videos. AI-related competition and thematic pages were also examined to observe how dispersed works were grouped, displayed, and made available for further browsing.

The observation focused on three aspects: how AI-related attributes were made identifiable through titles, descriptions, tags, and competition information; how individual videos were connected to subsequent content through search and recommendation interfaces; and how thematic or competition pages organized dispersed works into more concentrated content spaces. The walkthrough was limited to interface elements and browsing paths directly visible to users. It was not used to infer the internal weighting or operation of Bilibili's recommendation algorithm.

4. Findings

4.1. Visualizing Non-Everyday Experience: Spectacularized Representation in AI-Generated Short Videos

The 60 videos display considerable variation in genre, emotion, and visual style, while largely retaining established narrative conventions. Science fiction/dystopia (33.3%) and realistic/emotional narratives (31.7%) were the two most common genres, and linear narration accounted for more than half of the sample (56.7%). Realistic and stylized visual forms were both widely used. The overall distribution is presented in Table 2.

Analysis Dimension	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Genre	Science Fiction/Dystopia	20	33.3
	Realistic/Emotional	19	31.7
	Fantasy/Xuanhuan	9	15.0
	Suspense/Horror/Zhiguai	7	11.7
	Apocalyptic/Disaster	3	5.0
	Absurd/Comedy	2	3.3
Dominant Emotion	Warmth/Healing	16	26.7
	Sadness/Bitterness	11	18.3
	Oppression/Loneliness	11	18.3
	Shock/Excitement	10	16.7
	Absurdity/Humor	7	11.7
	Fear/Anxiety	5	8.3
Narrative Structure	Linear Chronological Narrative	34	56.7
	Suspense-Driven Narrative	10	16.7
	Twist Revelation	7	11.7
	Weak-Plot/Atmospheric Narrative	5	8.3
	Memory/Flashback	3	5.0
	Loop/Temporal Dislocation	1	1.7
Visual Style	Realistic	33	55.0
	Stylized	25	41.7
	Hybrid	2	3.3

Table 2. Distribution of Major Content Characteristics in AI-Generated Short Videos on Bilibili (N = 60)

These patterns suggest that generative AI does not necessarily produce a distinct technological narrative mode. Realistic emotional stories were almost as common as science-fictional ones, and most videos continued to rely on familiar storytelling structures. For instance, 0.99 places a technological mechanism at the center of its narrative, whereas *My Father Through My Eyes* is organized primarily around family relationships and memory. Being generated by AI, therefore, does not necessarily mean being about AI. Rather, generative technology appears to expand the representational capacity of existing genres, characters, settings, and events.



Figure 1. Screenshot from 0.99 (left); **Figure 2.** Screenshot from Dad Through My Eyes (right)

This distinction is also important for understanding spectacularization. As Table 3 shows, 25 of the 60 videos (41.7%) contained none of the six spectacle features identified in the coding scheme, while another 19 videos contained only one. AI generation, in other words, does not automatically produce spectacle. Spectacularization emerges only when generative capacity is used to reorganize ordinary rules governing bodies, life, space-time, technology, social order, or environments.

Analysis Dimension	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Spectacle Feature Type			
Spectacle Feature Type	Bodily/Life Abnormality	19	31.7
	Technological/AI Alienation	15	25.0
	Spatiotemporal Disruption	10	16.7
	Supernatural Agency	6	10.0
	Disaster/Apocalyptic Environments	4	6.7
	Extreme Social Rules	3	5.0
Number of Spectacle Features in a Single Video			
Number of Spectacle Features in a Single Video	0 features	25	41.7
	1 feature	19	31.7
	2 features	10	16.7
	3 features	6	10.0

Table 3. Spectacle Features and Feature Counts in AI-Generated Short Videos (N = 60)

Note.: The six spectacle features were independently coded as binary variables (0/1), and a single video could contain multiple features. Percentages in the feature-type section therefore do not sum to 100%. The feature-count section is calculated at the video level.

Among the six categories, bodily/life abnormality was the most frequent (31.7%), followed by technological/AI alienation (25.0%) and spatiotemporal disruption (16.7%). This pattern suggests that spectacle was more often produced by altering the basic conditions of characters and story worlds than by relying simply on futuristic settings or visual effects. Bodies could exceed ordinary biological limits, life and death could be redefined, temporal and spatial continuity could be disrupted, and technology could shift from an everyday tool to a force that reshapes perception or social relations. Spectacle therefore operates primarily through changes to the internal rules of represented reality rather than through visual intensity alone.

These disruptions also appeared in combination. The most frequent pairing was spatiotemporal disruption with bodily/life abnormality, which occurred seven times. Other recurring combinations linked technological/AI alienation with spatiotemporal or bodily disruption, and bodily/life abnormality with supernatural agency or apocalyptic environments. Such combinations extend the departure from ordinary experience beyond a single character or event to the broader logic of the story world.

Representative cases illustrate this mechanism. In *Black Room*, technological mechanisms reshape the character's perception of reality; *Time Difference* disrupts temporal order; *Into the Trap* introduces supernatural agency into an otherwise familiar setting; and *Zombie Cleaner* combines bodily/life abnormality with an apocalyptic environment. Despite their different genres, these works share a common logic: spectacle emerges when normally stable rules are altered and transformed into directly perceivable audiovisual experience.



Figure 3. Screenshots from *Black Room*, *Time Difference*, *Into the Trap*, and *Zombie Cleaner*

Based on these findings, this study conceptualizes spectacularization in AI-generated short videos as a visual reconfiguration of the rules of reality. This does not mean abandoning recognizable reality altogether. Rather, familiar rules governing bodies, life, space-time, technology, and environments are selectively altered within otherwise intelligible narrative frameworks. Generative AI expands the technical possibility of representing conditions that are difficult or impossible to realize through conventional filming, while spectacle emerges only when this capacity is incorporated into narrative organization and used to restructure the rules through which reality is represented.

4.2. From Identification to Continued Browsing: Platform Visibility of AI-Generated Short Videos

The walkthrough shows that AI-generated short videos on Bilibili do not rely on a consistent platform-level label. Their AI-related identity is instead made visible largely through creator-provided elements such as titles, descriptions, tags, and competition information. These textual markers make a production process that may not be evident from the video itself recognizable to users. In this sense, AI functions not only as a production technology but also as a content identity through which otherwise diverse genres can be grouped and encountered. This also reinforces an important distinction in the sample: being AI-generated does not necessarily mean that AI is the subject of the story.

Once identified, AI-generated videos become connected through search results and related recommendations. Searches using terms such as “AI short drama” and “AI-generated short video” bring together works from different creators, while recommendation sections provide further routes into subsequent videos. The observed browsing paths contained both explicitly AI-labeled works and videos that were similar in genre or visual style, particularly science fiction, suspense, and dystopian content. AI-generated videos therefore appear not as a completely isolated category, but as content embedded within broader networks of genre and thematic similarity.

Competition and thematic pages provide an additional layer of organization by gathering otherwise dispersed works into more concentrated AI-related spaces. Through competition tracks, featured works, and participation or browsing entrances, such pages reinforce a shared AI-production identity across videos that differ substantially in genre and style. They therefore make AI-generated content easier to locate and continue browsing beyond a single video.

Platform visibility in this study should therefore be understood not simply as achieving higher view counts, but as gaining the conditions to be identified, connected, and repeatedly encountered within user browsing paths. These observations do not reveal how Bilibili's recommendation algorithm weights AI-related attributes or genre similarity; they show only how such connections are presented in user-visible interfaces. Viewed together with the previous section, the findings suggest a progression from making non-ordinary experiences viewable through generative media to making those contents visible within platform structures.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1. Discussion

The findings suggest that generative AI reshapes short-video production primarily by expanding representational capacity, rather than by replacing established narrative conventions. This distinction also separates being generated by AI from being about AI: generative technology provides new conditions for representation, while its narrative significance depends on how it is incorporated into specific stories.

From the perspective of media spectacle, spectacle is therefore not an automatic consequence of AI generation or visual novelty. It emerges when generative capacity is used to reorganize familiar rules governing bodies, life, space-time, technology, and environments. This study conceptualizes this process as the visual reconfiguration of the rules of reality. At the same time, such representational capacity becomes platform visibility only when content is made identifiable, connected, and continuously encounterable within platform structures. AI-generated short-video circulation can thus be understood as a movement from the viewability of non-ordinary experience to platform visibility.

5.2. Conclusion and Limitations

By combining content analysis with the walkthrough method, this study links the representational possibilities of generative AI with the platform conditions through which such content becomes visible. The findings show that AI-generated short videos do not constitute a wholly new narrative form; instead, their distinctiveness lies in the expanded capacity to visualize non-ordinary experiences and in the ways such content is subsequently organized within platform environments.

The study nevertheless has several limitations. Its sample is limited to 60 videos from Bilibili, and the six spectacle categories are empirically derived from this dataset. The walkthrough also captures only user-visible interfaces under a specific account condition and at a particular point in time, rather than the internal workings of Bilibili's recommendation algorithm. Future research could test these findings using larger datasets and cross-platform comparisons.

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