

Micro-Short Audiovisual Forms and Their Narrative Structures

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This paper introduces micro-short audiovisual forms—very brief videos ranging from a few seconds to several minutes, commonly distributed via TikTok, Instagram or other social media. These forms are defined not only by duration but by distinct formal and narrative qualities shaped by mobile viewing habits and platform algorithms. Integrating concepts from film and media studies, the analysis draws on classical narratology (e.g., plot, character, presented world) and postclassical approaches, including cognitive and transmedial narratology. A five-part typology is proposed: Nomads (standalone units), Chains (linear sequences), Mosaics (nonlinear thematic clusters), Excerpts (remixes), and Satellites (paratextual extensions). Micro-shorts are presented as narratively connected elements within broader media ecosystems, redefining modes of storytelling and engagement in the digital economy of attention.

KEYWORDS: short film, short video, social media, TikTok, audiovisual culture, streaming, platform studies

A survey of monographs and papers on the history of cinema reveals a clear tendency to focus almost exclusively on feature-length productions. Shorter works, if addressed at all, are typically considered within the frameworks of avant-garde and experimental cinema or documentary filmmaking—genres that historically occupy a marginal position in relation to mainstream feature films. These shorter forms are also discussed in the context of filmmakers on early stages of their careers, for whom such projects often constitute an initial phase of artistic exploration. Occasionally, such works are examined with reference to the prehistory of cinema, encompassing optical toys and early film experiments that predate the emergence of classical narrative cinema. The resulting disparities in scholarly attention, including a lack of terminological precision and robust analytical tools for engaging with short films, have motivated the present study.[1]

While contemporary film classifications generally distinguish between three categories—feature-length films, medium-length films (often referred to as featurttes), and short films—recent developments in audiovisual media point to the emergence of works that fall significantly below these established thresholds in terms of duration. These works are characterised not only by their brevity but also by their distinct narrative structures, genre hybridity and circulation across various

Introduction

[1] The complex reasons for this state require further reflection and will not be discussed in this paper.

media, particularly social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat. I will elaborate on this further in the paragraphs that follow. Accordingly, I propose expanding the existing typology by introducing a fourth category: *micro-short audiovisual forms*, or *micro-shorts*, which are most often referred to as *short videos* in the academic literature. They are defined by three primary characteristics: (1) a temporal span ranging from a few seconds to several minutes; (2) dissemination through networked digital environments that foster qualities such as interactivity, ephemerality, and hypertextuality; and (3) formal features including intermediality, conciseness, and modularity. In the paper, I will deliberately avoid using existing terms such as *short videos*, as my aim is to approach the phenomenon from a broader analytical perspective—one that encompasses a wide range of audiovisual and multimedia practices, including not only social media streaming content, but also website-based formats. Both the definition and the range of values proposed here have been shaped by a combination of existing scholarly literature and my own research.

A critical survey of the academic literature further reveals that micro-short audiovisual forms remain largely on the periphery of the field of narratology, both structural and postmedia, including Poland. Monographs in the fields tend to treat micro-shorts as a secondary concern.[2] Within the broader and increasingly interdisciplinary landscape of media studies, despite its engagement with issues spanning technology, law, ethics, education,[3] and psychology, there remains a notable absence of analytical frameworks derived from film studies, particularly narratological ones. This study seeks to address that lacuna. Hence, I will begin by characterizing what I define as micro-short audiovisual forms, and then I will propose a typology based on narrative structures. Rather than examining micro-shorts as autonomous works, I will approach them as elements within broader networks of meaning, forming connections with other materials. Due to restrictions on the length of this text, I will not conduct a narratological analysis of micro-shorts in relation to other accompanying media, such as audio tracks and photos or textual and graphical elements of apps' interfaces.

[2] See: *Narratologia transmedialna: Teorie, praktyki, wyzwania*, ed. K. Kaczmarczyk, Universitas, Kraków 2017; J. Ostaszewski, *Historia narracji filmowej*, Universitas, Kraków 2018; *Stories: Screen Narrative in the Digital Era*, eds. I. Christie, A. van den Oever, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2018; D. Punday, *Playing at Narratology: Digital Media as Narrative Theory*, The Ohio State University, Columbus 2019. Although all of these books were published several years ago, none of them directly addresses the issue discussed here, even though such forms were already present at the time. The relatively small number of recent publications on transmedial narratology suggests

that the field is no longer a major focus of scholarly interest. Instead, a noticeable shift can be observed toward research on platform-based and immersive forms of storytelling.

[3] I expand the notion of historical educational and entertainment practices in micro-shorts in the following paper: P. Sołodki, *Mikrohistorie, mikrome- traże i mikrodokumenty: O skomplikowanych relacjach historii i form lapidarnych w audiowizualnej kulturze cyfrowej*, "Images. The International Journal of European Film, Performing Arts and Audiovisual Communication" 2025, vol. 38, no. 47, pp. 9–24.

Methodology

This article will refer to research addressing contemporary cinema and the changes resulting from its digitalisation,[4] economic and socio-cultural issues, particularly in relation to digital capitalism and the peak culture,[5] modes of media production and distribution,[6] social media in relation to the use of audiovisual forms[7] and studies referring strictly to short audiovisual forms[8] which were used for creating the definition of micro-shorts and the proposed range of values. The final section on typologies is based on texts by theorists addressing issues of brevity, seriality, hypertextuality and interactivity.[9] The foundation for initiating narratological approach towards the narratives of micro-short audiovisual forms lies in the achievements of postclassical narratology, including cognitive narratology and its derivative, transmedial narratology.[10] All of these works form the basis of my research.

The article employs a qualitative, interpretive approach combining close reading and narratological interpretation. A purposive sample of the chosen micro-shorts was selected from TikTok, Instagram, Face-

[4] See: N. Rombes, *Cinema in the Digital Age*, Wallflower Press, London and New York 2009.

[5] See: N. Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2017.

[6] Ibidem.

[7] P. Väliaho, *Solitary Screens: On the Recurrence and Consumption of Images*, [in:] *Compact Cinematics: The Moving Image in the Age of Bit-Sized Media*, eds. P. Hesselberth, M. Poulaki, Bloomsbury, London 2017.

[8] See: P. Hesselberth, M. Poulaki, *Introduction: Screen | Capture | Attention*, [in:] *Compact Cinematics...*; M. Hendrykowski, *Short: Male formy filmowe*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2020; D.B.V. Kaye, J. Zeng, P. Wikstrom, *TikTok: Creativity and Culture in Short Video*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2022; I. Laskari, *(Extra) Short Film Study: An Emerging Narrative Practice within Global Community*, "Open Journal of Animation, Film and Interactive Media in Education and Culture" 2022, vol. 3, no. 2; K. Jachymek, U. Sawicka, Ł. Juda, *O krótkich formach medialnych w (cyber)kulturze*, "Kultura Współczesna" 2024, no. 2(127), pp. 10–15.

[9] See: J. Feuer, *Narrative Form in American Network Television*, [in:] *High Theory, Low Culture: Analyzing Popular Television and Film*, ed. C. McCabe, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1986; T. Gunning, *Non-Continuity, Continuity, Discontinuity: A Theory of Genres in Early Film*, [in:] *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. T. Elsaesser, British Film Institute, London 1990; I. Loewe, *Gatunki paratekstowe w komunikacji medialnej*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2007; R.W. Kluszczyński, *Sztuka interaktywna: Od dzieła-instrumentu do interaktyw-*

nego spektaklu, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa 2010; S. Gaudenzi, *The Living Documentary: From Representing Reality to Co-Creating Reality in Digital Interactive Documentary*, a thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Goldsmiths (Centre for Cultural Studies), University of London, London 2013.

[10] Classical narratological concepts within film studies drew on literary theories developed by: G. Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1990; E.R. Branigan, *Point of View in the Cinema: A Theory of Narration and Subjectivity in Classical Film*, Mouton Publishers, Berlin 1984; M. Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 4th ed., University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2017; D. Bordwell, *Convention, Construction, and Cinematic Vision*, [in:] *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, eds. D. Bordwell, N. Carroll, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 1996; D. Herman, *Introduction: Narratologies*, [in:] *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*, ed. D. Herman, Ohio State University Press, Columbus 1997; A. Nünning, *Narratology or Narratologies? Taking Stock of Recent Developments, Critique and Modest Proposals for Future Usages of the Term*, [in:] *What Is Narratology? Questions and Answers Regarding the Status of a Theory*, eds. T. Kindt, H.-H. Müller, De Gruyter, Berlin 2003; M.-L. Ryan, *Introduction*, [in:] *Narrative across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, ed. eadem, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln 2004; H. Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York University Press, New York 2006.

book, YouTube and web-based hypertextual video projects. This was mostly due to location and language requirements for installing and using the apps and works. Criteria included the length of the individual material, placement within media platforms, and language (English or Polish). After the materials had been selected, they were categorised into the five-type typology. In the analysis, I will adapt categories developed within the framework of classical narratology—such as *character*, *event*, *plot*, and *presented world*—as well as concepts central to postclassical narratology, including *transmediality*.

This study is limited by its reliance on a qualitative sample and interpretive methods. While the typology provides analytical clarity and is applicable to globally accessible platforms, it does not capture the full diversity of micro-short forms across different digital spaces.^[11] Future research could incorporate sentiment analysis or engagement metrics to map viewer interaction patterns. Comparative studies between regions (e.g. Chinese vs. American platforms) and interdisciplinary analyses that merge narratology with platform studies or data science could further enhance understanding of micro-short storytelling in algorithmically structured media ecologies. Additionally, the walkthrough method might be employed to analyse how users engage with micro-shorts within the interface logic and cultural protocols of specific platforms.

Results

General Remarks

First and foremost, I would like to clarify the reasons for introducing the term *micro-short audiovisual forms*, especially given the existing terminology such as *short videos* or *compact cinematics*.^[12] However, categorizing these forms strictly as either *cinematics/film* or *video* seems too reductive. As Ryszard W. Kluszczyński^[13] notes, “the mobility and nomadic nature of video post-images have transferred them into the realm of numerous dispositifs that accompany us in everyday life.” On the other hand, Nicholas Rombes notes, “Films exist as films, but also as trailers, clips, video games, flash animations, novelisations, mash-ups and DVD chapters available to be «played» in multiple sequences. The film’s director is becoming an afterthought, someone who creates «content» that is made available in different mediums and across multiple platforms.”^[14] Given that the semantic fields of *film* and *video* now overlap in numerous ways, I will avoid terms that refer exclusively to one medium and instead employ the broader category of *audiovisual forms*. This approach will allow me to refer to specific traditions where necessary while also examining these works

[11] One of these digital spaces is VR/AR/MR content, which I have not included within the scope of this research.

[12] See: D.B.V. Kaye, J. Zeng, P. Wikstrom, op. cit.; P. Hesselberth, M. Poulaki, op. cit.

[13] R.W. Kluszczyński, *Sztuka wideo—od rozproszonej autonomii do rozproszonej wszechobecności*.

Wprowadzenie do historii i estetyki sztuki wideo, [in:] *Wideo w sztukach wizualnych*, eds. R.W. Kluszczyński, T. Załuski, Wydawnictwo UŁ and Galeria Labirynt, Łódź 2018, p. 26, translated into English by the author.

[14] N. Rombes, op. cit., p. 139.

within a wider context of audiovisuality. In particular, I intend to adopt the postmedia perspective, which is defined by the inability to draw clear demarcation lines between different media, and considers this characteristic fundamental to contemporary culture.[15]

The term *micro-short audiovisual forms* may initially seem internally inconsistent: it simultaneously broadens the scope of the phenomenon by replacing the term *film* with *audiovisual forms*, while narrowing it by incorporating the concept of “shortness” (referring to duration), a concept rooted in cinematic tradition. However, I would like to emphasize that this designation does not refer solely to the duration of a given piece of material but also introduces a range of additional contexts. Each established format has developed and realised its full narrative potential within a specific mode of production, distribution, and exhibition. As a rule, feature-length films have evolved within the framework of theatrical screenings, medium-length films in the context of linear TV, and short films have matured in alternative screening spaces such as schools, workplaces or homes. Each of these formats has its own specificity, albeit one evolving over time, fundamentally heterogeneous, and often present in areas characteristic of other formats, as seen in feature-length films broadcast on linear TV or short actualities screened in cinemas. Micro-shorts, in contrast, are primarily created and disseminated with small smartphone screens in mind—networked “solitary screens”[16]—and function outside the production and reception strategies characteristic of traditional feature-length, medium-length, or short films.

The running time I propose for micro-shorts results from a compromise negotiated among four key actors. The first are platform owners, who define the operational rules of algorithms. The second are external companies, including advertisers, who determine the frequency of ad placements. The third group consists of content creators, who—within the constraints set by their creative vision and algorithms—choose a specific duration, shaping the platform’s library and influencing other creators’ practices. The fourth group is the audience, whose reception practices affect further modifications of the materials.[17] These four entities are interconnected through institutional, technological, economic, and semantic dependencies. The hierarchical influence structure, where the first two entities drive a top-down approach while the latter two represent a bottom-up influence, is subject to shifts and alters relationship dynamics. A key part of this process is the continuous adjustment of algorithmic components to new circumstances—such as permitted duration—which is why I cautiously define the range of micro-shorts as a potentially evolving category.

Among the most popular micro-short formats in 2025 in Western countries are Instagram Stories, with a maximum length of 60 seconds

[15] See: P. Celiński, *Postmedia: Cyfrowy kod i baza danych*, Wydawnictwo UMCS, Lublin 2013.

[16] P.Väliaho, op. cit.

[17] N. Srnicek, op. cit., pp. 40–48.

per clip, Facebook Reels, initially capped at 60 seconds and extended to 90 seconds in March 2023, and Snapchat Snaps, where six consecutive Snaps can total up to 60 seconds per day. YouTube Shorts, initially limited to one minute, were extended to three minutes in October 2024. The duration of TikToks has undergone multiple changes; starting in 2016 with a range of 3 to 15 seconds, it reached 10 minutes in 2022 and is still expanding.[18] These examples do not exhaust the spectrum of micro-shorts but establish a reference range for other similar forms, including Chinese apps such as Kuaishou, Weishi, Meipai, Miaopai, and Vskit, and US-based ones like Vine, Likee, and Rizzle, as well as numerous web-based projects.

As a complementary note, it is worth adding that other forms that I include within the scope of micro-shorts can have shorter or longer duration. GIF-arts may last approximately one second, while individual videos embedded in various hypertextual web-based projects can span dozens of minutes, and in rare cases, even exceed that length. Scholar Debbie Danielpour,[19] in her analysis of *short-form scripted serial drama* distributed on streaming platforms such as YouTube, Vimeo and Netflix, identifies even 15 minutes as the maximum length of a single instalment. Even if the actual durations of micro-shorts were to span a range from one second to more than a dozen minutes, the most common duration—as previously noted—would typically fall between a few seconds and a few minutes.

Typology of Narrative Structures

As I mentioned before, in this section, I propose a classification that refers to narrative structures. This concept was drawn from several established typologies, including Tom Gunning's categorization of early cinema into discontinuous, continuous, and those exceeding the category of continuity[20]; Jane Feuer's distinctions drawn in television seriality between episodic series and continuing serials[21]; Ryszard W. Kluszczyński's organisational models in interactive art, such as archives, labyrinths, and rhizomes[22]; Iwona Loewe's typologies of paratextual genres[23]; and Sandra Gaudenzi's classification of interactive documentaries, especially the mosaics type.[24] Each of these typological proposals contextualizes the classification challenges posed by forms characterised by short duration, seriality, hypertextuality,

[18] However, while TikTok's maximum video length has increased, it has not led to a proportional shift in content duration. In 2023, the average TikTok video duration ranged from 35 to 49 seconds, while in 2024, it fluctuated between 37 and 55 seconds, depending on the creator's follower count. See: Statista, *Average TikTok Video Length in 2023 and 2024, by Number of Followers*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1372569/tiktok-video-duration-by-number-of-views/> (accessed: 5.01.2026).

[19] D. Danielpour, *The Short-Form Scripted Serial Drama: The Novice Showrunner's New Opportunity*, [in:] *The Palgrave Handbook of Screenwriting Studies*, eds. R. Davies, P. Russo, C. Tieber, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2023.

[20] T. Gunning, op. cit.

[21] J. Feuer, op. cit.

[22] R.W. Kluszczyński, op. cit.

[23] I. Loewe, op. cit.

[24] S. Gaudenzi, op. cit.

and interactivity—phenomena that are directly related to the topic of this paper. Moreover, they offer theoretical tools that, while rooted in distinct disciplinary contexts, enable a more nuanced understanding and categorization of micro-short forms.

I would therefore like to propose five types of micro-short audiovisual forms, classified in relation to the narrative structures they create. Therefore, I will refer not only to their internal structures but also to the structures they compose together with other micro-shorts. To name them, I draw on a metaphorical framework that reflects the inherently meandering and transformative character of concise formats:

- **Nomads**—micro-shorts as autonomous units, without narrative links to other texts;
- **Chains**—micro-shorts arranged in linear, cause-and-effect sequences;
- **Mosaics**—micro-shorts arranged in a nonlinear manner, primarily through thematic relations;
- **Excerpts**—micro-shorts as recontextualised fragments of a central, pre-existing text;
- **Satellites**—micro-shorts as units associated with a central text but not constituting its parts.

Nomads

The first category—Nomads—may seem as the least represented among audiovisual micro-short formats, primarily due to the difficulty of identifying such content within the vast digital landscape. Characterised by their brevity and lack of narrative continuity with other micro-shorts, nomadic forms remain autonomous in terms of storytelling. Devoid of sequential development or causal logic, they operate outside the conventions of classical narrative structure. While they may incorporate isolated narrative elements, such as characters or plots, their primary emphasis lies in aesthetic impact and affective intensity—often relying on surprise, visual novelty, or symbolic condensation.

Examples include works of GIF art^[25] such as Carla Gannis's *The Garden of Emoji Delights. Triptych Animation* (2014)—a visually elaborate GIF artwork reinterpreting Hieronymus Bosch's iconic painting, or *Limbo* (2018) by Bill Domonkos, based on death masks of famous historical figures in the Laurence Hutton Collection of Life and Death Masks from the Princeton University. The works resist narrative continuity and function as standalone lexias—digital pieces of work. Similar traits are observable in micro-shorts created for competitions or festivals where narrative cohesion across entries is not a requirement. The *Patria Nostra* contest^[26] (2015–), for instance, invites Polish

[25] See: R. Bomba, *Postmedialne obiegi animacji*, [in:] *Poza ekranem filmowym: Postmedialne konteksty animacji*, eds. M. Bobrowski, R. Bomba, Wydawnictwo UMCS, Lublin 2021.

[26] *Patria Nostra*, konkurs-patrianostra.pl (accessed: 5.01.2026).

and diaspora youth to produce 60-second films on historical topics. Though presented side by side on the project's official website, these entries remain autonomous in authorship, structure, and thematic approach. Likewise, works submitted to the *One Minutes Film Festival*[27] in Gdańsk—a Polish iteration of the Dutch *The One Minutes* initiative—are later presented online on the festival's Facebook page, not as part of the presented series, but as stand-alone works. Though clustered within the same digital interface, these works lack narrative “hooks” that would link them in a cohesive chain.

Additionally, the category of Nomads also encompasses the vast array of algorithmically marginalised or non-indexed micro-shorts residing in the so-called Invisible Web.[28] These works—often found in obscure corners of platforms such as YouTube or TikTok—may garner minimal viewership and remain largely excluded from algorithmic recommendation systems. Despite being often publicly accessible, their isolation effectively renders them invisible within mainstream digital circuits, posing methodological challenges for researchers.

It is worth noting that the hypertextual and non-linear nature of digital environments complicates the notion of complete narrative independence. Algorithms often suggest related content, and micro-shorts may be positioned adjacently within a given interface, encouraging associative navigation. Nonetheless, on the levels of narrative structure, authorship, visual style, and thematic development, these works preserve their autonomy. For example, micro-shorts featured on the mentioned *Patria Nostra* website or the *One Minutes* Facebook page exhibit a mosaic-like interface logic—a structure addressed in a subsequent section of this study—but remain disconnected in narrative terms.

In sum, while spatial adjacency or algorithmic sequencing may suggest interrelatedness, the defining criterion of the nomadic type remains the absence of narrative dependency. These micro-shorts function as self-contained media objects, shaped by platform logics, affective immediacy, and authorial singularity, rather than by coherent seriality or diegetic continuity.

Chains

The second category—Chains—encompasses micro-short formats grounded in serial narrativity, particularly those aligned with Jane Feuer's concept of the *continuing serial*, where narrative continuity is sustained across successive instalments. In this model, individual micro-shorts are interconnected through a cause-and-effect logic, enabling extended storytelling, character development, and the unfolding of complex plotlines over time. The architecture of digital platforms

[27] *Festiwal Filmów Jednominutowych*, <https://www.facebook.com/FestiwalFilmowJednominutowych> (accessed: 5.01.2026).

[28] The Invisible Web is the part of the internet that is not indexed by standard search engines and there-

fore does not appear in search results. See: J. Devine, F. Egger-Sider, *Going Beyond Google Again: Strategies for Using and Teaching the Invisible Web*, Neal-Schuman, Chicago 2014.

frequently reinforces this structure by promoting linear progression—usually forward-oriented—often through autoplay functions or recommendation algorithms.

This type of narrative configuration allows creators to construct intricate storyworlds across a large number of instalments, often making it impossible for audiences to engage with the complete corpus of a given series. Such structures can comprise dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of individual micro-shorts. Notable examples include certain Instagram Stories or Snapchat Snaps that evolve into temporally linear narratives.^[29] One pioneering instance is the project *Sickhouse* (dir. Hannah Macpherson, 2016), a hybrid narrative initially released via real-time Snapchat clips and later edited into a feature-length film—thereby exemplifying the interplay between ephemerality, platform logic, and transmedial storytelling. This category also includes scripted micro-series (also called micro-dramas)^[30] formats in which narrative arcs develop across episodes lasting from one to several minutes. These formats have emerged on platforms such as the now-defunct American app Quibi and on Chinese apps like ReelShort, GoodShort, ShortTV, and FlexTV. Representative examples include the 13-episode thriller *The Stranger* (dir. Veena Sud, Quibi, 2020), or the 89-episode Chinese-American series *Never Mess With An Heiress* (dir. undisclosed, ReelShort, 2024), which exemplify narrative continuity.

Unlike the Nomad type, which is defined by narrative autonomy, the Chain configuration is marked by intentional narrative consistency. This coherence is embedded at the production stage and sustained across episodes through certain narrative strategies: causal relationships between events, continuity in space and time, and the development of recurring characters. Individual micro-shorts often contain structural elements that facilitate narrative linkage—such as introductory segments, cliffhangers, or embedded calls to action (e.g., “Watch part 2”)—and may rely on platform-specific tools like autoplay to ensure seamless transitions. In some cases, the timing of content release is aligned with the chronology of the story, creating a real-time or near-real-time experience, as seen narrativised experiences in Instagram Stories. In others, release schedules are decoupled from narrative temporality, as with platform-managed series like those on ReelShort or Quibi. Despite their brevity, the instalments of the above-mentioned shows reproduce classical storytelling conventions: *The Stranger*, for instance, spans one hour of diegetic time across 13 few-minute-long episodes, each ending with a suspenseful cliffhanger. In *Never Mess With An Heiress*, each one-to-two-minute episode often depicts only a single

[29] L. Manovich, *Instagram as a Narrative Platform*, “First Monday” 2024, vol. 29, no. 3.

[30] The term ‘micro-series’ has emerged relatively recently, around year 2022, and as *duanju* (短剧) in simplified Chinese refers to productions available on Chinese and Chinese-American applications, which

makes strictly online series available to local and global markets. See: Z. Long, *Micro-Dramas Boom at Home and Overseas as Authorities Rein in Vulgar Content*, City News Service, 17.11.2023, <https://www.shine.cn/news/nation/2311172642/> (accessed: 5.01.2026).

scene or its fragment, with traditional narrative exposition compressed or omitted altogether. In the case of the shows, a quasi-cinematic flow is created, in which micro-shorts collectively approximate the classical storytelling—complete with acts, turning points, and heightened dramatic tension—but mediated by platform mechanics and social media aesthetics. Regarding many Instagram Stories, the structure is less organized, yet they may still include the mentioned components of the narrative. Ultimately, Chains' ability to compress complex plots into short, easily consumable segments exemplifies the convergence of traditional narrative forms with the spatial-temporal dynamics of mobile and platform-based media environments.

Mosaics

The third category—Mosaics—comprises micro-short formats that collectively form expansive, modular projects composed of dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of individual instalments. Unlike Chains, these micro-shorts are not linked through linear causality. Instead, they are connected through shared themes, aesthetic coherence, recurrent internal structures, or a unified authorial vision. Each micro-short is narratively autonomous yet contributes to a broader discursive or representational field.

The user's engagement with such content is shaped primarily by platform interface design and algorithmic recommendation systems, which prioritize variables such as recency, popularity, or prior user behaviour. Consequently, navigation is typically nonlinear, and full consumption of all available materials is neither expected nor necessary. Viewers often encounter only a part of the entire body of work, and the order in which segments are accessed may vary significantly across individual experiences. This fragmented logic of access is emblematic of platforms such as TikTok or YouTube, where the content can be consumed either through algorithmically generated feeds (e.g., the For You Page on TikTok) or directly from creators' accounts.

Mosaic structures also underpin numerous interactive web-documentaries, in which viewers navigate freely among loosely connected short audiovisual units. A prominent example is the Polish web-doc *Szkoła Świat* (dir. Ewa Jarosz & Iga Łapińska, 2023),^[31] which explores life in the village of Chlebiotki through several-minute-long portraits of individual residents. Another is the now-defunct *{The And}* (dir. Nathan Phillips, Topaz Adizes, 2014),^[32] comprising intimate dialogues recorded between pairs of interlocutors, presented in short segments. Comparable structures are employed in micro-documentary projects distributed via streaming platforms and/or their dedicated websites, such as *One Minute Wonders* (2012), available through Vimeo and composed of 48 episodes; and the long-running *60 Sec Docs* (2018–),

[31] *Szkoła Świat*, <https://theschool.vnlab.org/intro> (accessed: 5.01.2026).

[32] *{The And}*, <https://www.theand.us> (accessed: 22.06.2025).

which now comprises over 1,300 episodes distributed across YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and Giphy.

In Mosaic-type formats, as in *Chains*, the prefix *micro-* refers solely to the duration of individual segments, not to the overall scale of the project. Despite the brevity of each unit, the cumulative length of these projects can extend to several hours, but unlike *Chains*, where missing a single micro-short may hinder narrative comprehension, the mosaic structure allows for partial and non-sequential engagement. Each micro-short possesses its own internal narrative logic, enabling independent interpretation. While skipping multiple segments may limit the depth of understanding—particularly in projects like *Szkoła Świat* or *60 Sec Docs*—the overarching thematic and rhetorical coherence typically remains intact. Aesthetic and structural consistency in Mosaic projects is often maintained through strong authorial or curatorial control. In *Szkoła Świat*, for instance, the directors oversaw all stages of production, ensuring a unified visual style and narrative approach across segments. The expansive *60 Sec Docs* project, developed by the California-based Indigenous Media studio, reflects a cohesive editorial strategy, despite its distribution across multiple algorithmic platforms.

Importantly, micro-shorts within mosaic structures operate on two interrelated levels. Firstly, as part of a coherent project, they build thematic and formal resonance through repetition and juxtaposition. Secondly, when distributed across algorithmically driven social media feeds, they enter into unpredictable relations with other content, generating emergent meanings beyond the scope of authorial intent. This dual logic—platform-structured modularity and algorithm-driven intertextuality—positions Mosaics as paradigmatic of contemporary digital storytelling practices.

Excerpts

The fourth type—Excerpts—refers to micro-shorts derived from the re-contextualization of pre-existing, longer-form media content. These may include film intros, selected scenes from television series, fragments of concerts, cut-scenes from video games, or humorous moments from livestreams. These fragments are often encountered within platform feeds, where they are detached from their original narrative context and repurposed to provoke emotional engagement and further interaction. The proportional relationship between the Excerpt and the original source text is secondary to the new contextual meaning it acquires through redistribution. What defines this form is not narrative autonomy, as in the case of *Nomads* and *Mosaics*, nor sequential coherence, as in *Chains*, but rather its capacity to generate new interpretive frames through juxtaposition and remixing. These Excerpts are re-edited and adapted to function within the logics of contemporary platform ecologies, particularly those characterised by brevity, immediacy, and algorithmic curation. Illustrative examples of this category are widespread across social media formats, including

TikToks, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts, also available on such platforms as Reddit, 9GAG, 4Chan, Tumblr, and countless others, like the Polish-specific Wykop.

A notable institutional example is the archival initiative of the Educational Film Studio (Wytwórnia Filmów Oświatowych) in Łódź, Poland, which has reformatted historical educational films—originally running several dozen minutes—into one- to two-minute TikToks, often accompanied by brief, updated commentary.^[33] This practice reflects broader tendencies to adapt legacy media to meet the aesthetic, temporal, and algorithmic expectations of today's platforms. Another significant case is the 2023 TikTok campaign celebrating the 25th anniversary of the series *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999–2007),^[34] which featured 25-second episodic recaps spanning all six seasons. These recaps, structured as audiovisual collages, distilled the essence of each episode into a brief, emotionally resonant form. A more conceptual example is the web-based work *Network Effect* (Jonathan Harris & Greg Mochmuth, 2015),^[35] which comprises 10,000 two-second clips sourced from YouTube, reorganised around a lexicon of the 100 most common human activities.

Although institutional accounts—such as those belonging to HBO (*The Sopranos*) or the Educational Film Studio—often provide links or explicit references to the full original content, e.g. “Watch the full film on our YouTube channel (link in the comments),” such practices are inconsistent across the platform landscape. In many cases, amateur accounts omit source attributions altogether, contributing to a deterritorialised circulation of fragments, detached from their original narrative frameworks. These Excerpts thus participate in a diffuse network of semantic and affective relations, connecting not only to their source texts but also to adjacent fragments, user-generated commentary, e.g., through stitches or captions, and unrelated content encountered within the same feed. On the other hand, *The Network Effect* project constitutes a particularly radical case: its fragments are presented entirely outside of their original context, with source anonymity serving a conceptual function—cognitive and perceptual oversaturation in the digital age. These fragments do not tell a story in the traditional sense; rather, they evoke moods, suggest patterns, and simulate the fragmented nature of contemporary attention economies. As such, it is difficult to speak of a traditional narrative structure here; the individual fragments serve not to tell a story or present an argument, but rather to evoke impressions and suggest overarching meanings.

[33] *TikTok*, Wytwórnia Filmów Oświatowych, www.tiktok.com/@wytworniafilmowlodz (accessed: 5.01.2026).

[34] *TikTok*, *The Sopranos*, <https://www.tiktok.com/@thesopranos> (accessed: 5.01.2026).

[35] *Network Effect*, <https://networkeffect.io> (accessed: 5.01.2026).

Satellites

The fifth type—Satellites—comprises micro-shorts that operate as paratextual audiovisual supplements or extensions to their central texts.^[36] Unlike Excerpts, which consist of decontextualised fragments extracted from existing works, Satellites contain entirely new content. These micro-shorts often expand the fictional universe, introduce new plot elements or characters, and sometimes even shift the tone, genre, or stylistic register of the central text. While some remain faithful to the original's narrative framework, others engage in deliberate subversion or reinterpretation.

Satellites can be produced within institutional frameworks, functioning as part of a larger promotional strategy, or emerge from grassroots practices, often associated with fan culture. An illustrative institutional example includes content released via the official Netflix Polska YouTube channel in relation to the Polish scripted comedy series *1670* (Netflix, 2023–).^[37] These micro-shorts feature characters from the show engaging with contemporary themes—such as choosing a youth slang word of the year, giving holiday gift advice, or offering “village tours” across the main setting. While maintaining the comedic tone of the original series, these Satellites also emulate platform-native aesthetics, aligning formally and visually with social media audiovisual forms to foster resonance within the algorithmic ecosystem. Moreover, they exhibit a closed internal narrative structure and can function autonomously, similar to works categorised under the nomadic and mosaic models. However, their defining feature lies in their relational dependence on the central text.

Within the typology proposed here, Satellites are paratextual in function: they supplement, extend, and mediate the viewer's relationship with the primary work. For instance, the mentioned Netflix Polska YouTube channel includes over 2,500 videos—more than 1,000 of which are trailers or teasers and could be classified as Excerpts. The remaining content—bloopers, behind-the-scenes clips, creator commentaries, fan reactions, and trivia—function more squarely as Satellites, enriching the source material through stylistic and diegetic elaboration. By circulating through official platforms, such micro-shorts are embedded within commercial frameworks aimed at maximizing user engagement and visibility. They serve both promotional and interpretive functions, providing additional access points to the transmedia narrative universe.

In contrast, non-institutionally produced micro-short Satellites—freed from the promotional imperatives of the central text—function as works that may comment on, parody, subversively transform, or enrich the central text through fan practices. Such works, together with

[36] A similarity can be observed here between this type of micro-shorts and paratexts in the sense proposed by Jonathan Gray. See: J. Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts*, New York University Press, New York 2010.

[37] *You Tube, Netflix Polska*, <https://www.youtube.com/@NetflixPolskaOfficial> (accessed: 5.01.2026).

Excerpts, often embody the principles of free culture as defined by Lawrence Lessig,^[38] as well as the convergent practices theorised by Henry Jenkins,^[39] operating within—and at times deliberately transgressing—the boundaries delineated by platforms’ terms and agreements and intellectual property law. Their production often involves aesthetic remixing and thematic transformation, potentially challenging narrative boundaries or platform norms.

Final Remarks

The five types outlined—Nomads, Chains, Mosaics, Excerpts, and Satellites—represent the foundational narrative and structural logics underpinning the micro-short format. The key theoretical lens unifying these categories is interconnectedness, understood here as the way in which individual micro-shorts link to one another and to broader textual, narrative, or platform-based structures. These micro-shorts often function as modular narrative units, forming dynamic constellations of content that are both produced and consumed in non-linear ways. As Pepita Hesselberth and Maria Poulaki suggest, audiences today are active prosumers or pro-ams, “who are invited to stitch together their own personalised cinematic «spectacles» by linking compact bits and short samples to other bits, chunks, and segments of moving images, sharing and collecting them in online platforms, blogs, social media archives, and profiles”.^[40] This practice is inherently tied to both the modification of viewers’ cognitive processes and the broader field of the so-called attention economy. This practice of cognitive stitching—partly familiar to television audiences as zapping—remains one of the most defining traits that sets micro-shorts apart from longer audiovisual forms.

Platform infrastructures shape which narrative types dominate. TikTok, for example, privileges the Mosaic and Excerpt structure, as its algorithm thrives on modular, remixable content that can circulate independently yet resonate collectively. The unpredictability of what content appears next—whether it will engage with preceding or following clips, and whether it will maintain thematic, emotional, or ideological consistency with surrounding micro-shorts—fosters high engagement by oscillating between the familiar and the novel. Instagram Stories, in contrast, support Chain-based structures, promoting temporal and affective identification through ongoing narrative arcs presented in (almost) real time. Although digital platforms tend to favour specific narrative patterns, their feeds ultimately blend diverse storytelling forms. This variety—and the unpredictability of what appears next—plays a central role in the attention economy that governs platform-based media. The continuous stream of micro-shorts creates

[38] L. Lessig, *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity*, Penguin Press, New York 2004.

[39] H. Jenkins, op. cit.

[40] P. Hesselberth, M. Poulaki, op. cit., p. 6.

a dense and dynamic network of narrative fragments, requiring users to engage in modes of interpretation and meaning-making that differ from those used in traditional cinema.

A further layer of complexity arises from the presence of informational bubbles. These algorithmically reinforced environments often give rise to storyworlds^[41]—semantic frameworks that, while not strictly fictional in nature in this case, structure users' perception of reality through repeated exposure to particular narratives and representations. These constellations may include emotionally and ideologically charged portrayals of the world—such as conservative or liberal—shaped through selective algorithmic curation, defining the current composition of the feed. At the same time, platforms may strategically insert content from outside a given storyworld in order to modulate users' emotional engagement or adjust the content of the feed, often in ways that reinforce platform retention goals. Therefore, one final question is worth posing here: Is the frequently excessive consumption of micro-shorts shaped not only by platform-driven or sociotechnical factors, but also by narrative factors? More precisely, is it shaped by a tension between the unpredictability of upcoming content and the user's expectation of continuity across storylines, aesthetic modes or world-building strategies experienced in prior viewing sessions, and revealed in the mixture of the five types of narrative in the feed?

This paper introduces the term *micro-short audiovisual forms* as a conceptual framework that allows for identifying and analysing certain audiovisual content functioning within digital environments. Its aim is to describe the characteristics of these forms in terms of duration, formal structure, and media function, while also outlining a new research field within structural and transmedia narratology. Based on textual and formal analysis and theoretical reflection, the discussion of these forms leads to several broader conclusions.

Firstly, the typology proposed in this text is open and operational. It does not aspire to universal application, but instead offers a heuristic framework to support further research. The interconnectedness of micro-shorts is tied not only to their semantic layer, but also to the contexts of their production, dissemination, and reception. These contexts can change over time, as can the typology.

Secondly, micro-shorts present significant narratological challenges. Their analysis calls not only for a redefinition of classical narrative categories—such as plot, character, or diegesis—but also for the inclusion of tools from postmedia narratology and platform studies. It is also worth emphasizing that while some micro-shorts serve promotional purposes or reproduce institutional media strategies, others open

Discussion

[41] *Storyworlds Across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology*, eds. M.-L. Ryan, J.-N. Thon, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln 2014.

up space for alternative creative practices, often operating outside the logic of markets or intellectual property. This tension between institutional control and grassroots creativity constitutes a crucial dimension of the micro-short field. Hence, the types analysed here demonstrate that micro-shorts should not be viewed as “smaller versions” of longer audiovisual formats, but rather as a distinct cultural form requiring their own descriptive and analytical tools.

Thirdly, from a broader anthropological perspective, micro-shorts participate in ongoing transformations in how people living today construct and experience narratives about the world. The increasing presence of “small narratives”—ephemeral, fragmentary, nonlinear, and often lacking clear beginnings or endings—redefines not only modes of engagement with audiovisual culture but also the very processes of narrativizing reality. In this sense, interconnectedness as a central feature of micro-shorts takes on not only a structural but also an anthropological dimension: it reflects how contemporary cultural subjects experience reality as a network of connections, impulses, and micro-stories rather than as a coherent, unified narrative. This shift challenges researchers not only to rethink questions of form and medium, but also to reimagine cultural narrative frameworks that shape how individuals make sense of their experiences, histories, and identities.

In conclusion, this article contributes to the broader debate on the transformation of audiovisual practices in the age of the attention economy, narrative fragmentation, and algorithm-based production and consumption. Through the proposed categories and reflections, it aims to give a structure to a dynamic and complex phenomenon. I hope that the approach presented here will serve as a foundation for further analysis and discussion of micro-shorts within digital environments.

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