

A Study on the Loop Aesthetics of Short-Form Animation and the Psychological Effects of Repetitive Playback

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Abstract

The rapid proliferation of short-form content has shifted contemporary video consumption from a narrative-centered mode to a sensory- and affect-oriented paradigm. Central to this transformation is the loop structure in short-form animation, which operates in close alignment with platform-specific technological environments and algorithmic logics. Rather than functioning as simple repetition, the infinite loop emerges as a strategic aesthetic form produced through the convergence of algorithmic efficiency and post-continuity visual culture. By suspending narrative resolution, loop-based animation reduces the cognitive burden of interpretation and instead generates psychological immersion and affective resonance through rhythmic audiovisual repetition. This study positions short-form animation not merely as lightweight entertainment, but as an emergent media form that actively organizes perception, affect, and sensibility in the digital age.

Keyword : Sensory Spatial Experience, Immersive Media Art, Exhibition Content, Ecological Theory of Perception, Sensory Integration

1. Introduction

The rapid proliferation of digital platforms in the 21st century has fundamentally transformed the format of video content and the viewing structure of its audience. Short-form content, popularized through Netflix, YouTube, TikTok, and others, goes beyond simply reducing video runtime. It is reshaping viewer engagement through the discontinuity of sensory stimulation and the rhythmic nature of affective responses. Particularly, the smartphone-centric mobile viewing environment maximizes mobility and accessibility, establishing a snack culture where short, intense content is consumed anytime, anywhere. Within this environment, short-form animation is breaking free from traditional narrative structures with clear beginnings, middles, and ends, instead building its own unique aesthetic form that induces visual immersion and psychological satisfaction within a brief timeframe.

The core aesthetic feature of short-form animation highlighted in this study is precisely the loop-a

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* This paper was supported by Sunchon National University Glocal University Project Fund in 2025

Received(September 19, 2025), Review Result(1st: October 14, 2025), Accepted(December 12, 2025), Published(December 31, 2025)



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structure of infinite repetition with ambiguous beginnings and endings. The algorithms of short-form platforms like TikTok treat whether users rewatch content as a core metric for evaluating its value. This incentivizes creators to produce loop-based content that remains engaging even with repeated exposure, fostering addictive viewing. In this context, the concept of post-continuity is employed to describe an aesthetic regime that departs from classical continuity editing not by fragmentation alone, but by prioritizing affective immediacy and sensory rhythm over narrative coherence. Unlike earlier montage or experimental film traditions that sought critical distance or intellectual rupture, post-continuity in short-form animation operates within platform-driven environments that normalize repetition and perpetual presentness.

However, existing animation and video content research has primarily focused on narrative structures or visual character representations, leaving relatively little discussion on the aesthetics of repetition created by the unique temporality of short-form content and its psychological effects on audiences. Repetition in short-form animation is not merely a technical function but a powerful psychological mechanism that captures the viewer's attention and leads them into a state of flow. The repetitive rhythm and visual patterns provide the audience with a hypnotic immersion, eliciting physical and sensory responses before any logical interpretation of the narrative.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how the loop format of short-form animation has established itself as a new aesthetic form within the digital platform environment and to identify the psychological effects this repetitive playback structure has on viewers. It examines the aesthetic characteristics of looped videos with deconstructed narratives and analyzes how repetitive audiovisual stimuli induce psychological immersion in the audience. By conceptualizing short-form animation as an affective machine-one that systematically produces and modulates bodily sensation through algorithmic repetition-this study distinguishes its analytical framework from earlier image theories and positions loop aesthetics as a defining visual logic of contemporary platform-based media.

2. Platform Environment and Short-Form Animation

The modern media environment has rapidly shifted from a PC-based web environment to a smartphone-centric mobile environment, bringing fundamental changes to content consumption patterns. The spread of Snack Culture-enjoying content anytime, anywhere, in short bursts-has dramatically shortened the running time of video content. Within this trend, short-form videos under one minute have emerged as the mainstream content format [1]. Leading platforms like TikTok, YouTube Shorts, and

Instagram Reels are changing the paradigm of media consumption by prominently featuring short-form services optimized for the vertical interface of mobile devices.

Within this platform environment, short-form animation is redefined not merely as a condensed version of existing animations, but as a new visual grammar that aligns with the sensory desires of the mobile-native generation. Short-form animation adopts the smartphone's 9:16 vertical aspect ratio as its default format, providing viewers with an immersive, full-screen experience. It prioritizes visual impact and immediate engagement over narrative completeness [2]. This leads to a format with high content density, delivering compressed information and emotion in fleeting moments rather than following traditional narrative structures.

The production and consumption of short-form animation operate within the technological apparatus known as the Platform Dispositif. Applied to the digital environment, the platform dispositif refers to a structure where auto-play, algorithmic curation, and user interface (UI) combine to arrange and coordinate the viewer's sensory experience in specific ways. Platforms like Netflix or TikTok automatically play content pre-selected by algorithms before users even choose a video, sparing viewers the effort of active exploration while keeping them immersed in a continuous viewing flow.

The core driving force of short-form platforms lies in the shift from the Social Graph to the Content Graph. While early models like Facebook or Instagram built feeds based on friend or following relationships, short-form platforms like TikTok strictly follow AI algorithms that recommend content based on users' interests and reaction data [3]. These recommendation algorithms prioritize key metrics like individual video watch time, likes, comments, and crucially, whether a video is re-watched.

The platform's technical conditions directly influence the aesthetic format of short-form animation. Videos on short-form platforms inherently adopt an auto-loop system, automatically restarting after completion. This is designed to allow videos to loop endlessly without user intervention, serving as a strategic mechanism to increase time spent on the platform. In this environment, animation creators actively incorporate loop-based structures to be selected by the algorithm-structures that remain engaging even with repeated viewing, amplifying pleasure with each replay [4].

Thus, temporality in short-form animation is not linear but manifests as a present moment where beginning and end interlock in perpetual circulation. This is less a logical time for grasping narrative causality and more a sensory time where visual rhythms and auditory beats repeat, inducing physical responses. Short-form content presupposes the user's habit of hyper reading—that is, the attitude of quickly scanning information and responding sensorially [5]. Loop videos, played repeatedly, capture this dispersed attention, creating powerful moments of immersion. Consequently, within the platform

environment, short-form animation functions not merely as a tool for conveying narrative, but as an affect machine that stimulates and modulates the viewer's senses and affect.

3. Analysis of the Loop Aesthetics in Short-Form Animation

In short-form animation, the loop functions as the most powerful aesthetic device for deconstructing the linear narrative structure of traditional film grammar-the beginning, development, climax, and resolution. Short-form content faces the challenge of capturing viewers' attention within a minute or less due to the platform's technological environment. This reinforces the characteristic of post-continuity, which prioritizes sensory stimulation and the immediacy of affect over narrative causality [6]. On platforms such as TikTok and YouTube Shorts, this post-continuity logic is materialized through auto-loop playback systems, where videos restart seamlessly without a perceptible endpoint, encouraging uninterrupted sensory engagement rather than narrative closure. Digital video reorganizes perceptual structures through fragmented gazes and chains of excessive sensory stimulation rather than logical spacetime connections; the loop in short-form animation exemplifies this characteristic in its most extreme form.

[Table 1] Short-form Animation Based on Visual Aesthetics

Classification	Cinema/Long-form	Short-Form Animation Analysis
Time Structure	Linearity	The structure of the eternal present, where beginning and end interlock in infinite recurrence
Editing Principles	Continuity	Discontinuous editing that prioritizes sensory stimulation and rhythm over narrative causality
Image Density	Narrative Focus	The aesthetics of excess, compressing and exploding visual information within a short timeframe
Recipient response	Interpretation	A sensory action that physically responds and reacts immediately, prior to logic
Technical foundation	Screening	A continuous flow through autoplay and looping

[Table 1] shows that loop-type animation, by adopting a structure where the beginning and end interlock to form an infinite recurrence, constructs an eternal present rather than a narrative time flowing from past to future. Instead of the resolution provided by a narrative ending, it traps the viewer within an endless rhythm, suspending the process of meaning interpretation and inducing physical reactions. This structure is frequently employed by short-form animation creators who intentionally design transitional frames-such as cyclical character motion or beat-synchronized visual resets-to ensure that the

final frame visually and rhythmically reconnects with the opening frame, making the loop imperceptible during repeated playback. Short-form animation employs a strategy that nullifies narrative linearity and infinitely amplifies sensory tension through a cyclical structure where the conclusion reconnects to the starting point [7].

In the physically time-constrained short-form environment, looped animation inevitably aims for high content density to encourage repeated playback. On TikTok and Reels, creators often compress multiple visual events, transformations, or micro-surprises into a few seconds, knowing that repeated exposure will gradually reveal layered details to viewers. Unlike live-action footage, short-form animation allows frame-by-frame manipulation, actively employing non-realistic expressions-such as unrealistic metamorphosis, exaggerated movements, and vibrant colors-to maximize visual spectacle [8].

The core of loop aesthetics lies in visual pleasure that remains engaging even with repetition. To achieve this, animations either densely pack information within the frame or construct multi-layered compositions that reveal new details with each replay. This practice corresponds with widely observed user behaviors on short-form platforms, where viewers voluntarily rewatch looped animations not to follow a story, but to re-experience rhythm, decode visual density, or synchronize bodily responses with audiovisual patterns. In this sense, the loop in short-form animation is not a means to conceal a weak narrative, but a sophisticated aesthetic strategy to explode the visual information condensed into a brief moment.

Loop animations induce physical synchronization in viewers through the 'rhythm' created by the combination of visual images and auditory beats. Short-form content functions as a neuro-image where the flow of sensation and the rhythm of affect take center stage over narrative comprehension. Repetitive loops commonly used in short-form animation-such as endlessly bouncing characters, cyclical dance motions, or beat-aligned transformations-produce hypnotic or calming effects similar to ASMR-like sensory regulation, eliciting bodily responses prior to cognitive interpretation [9]. This affective experience is further amplified when combined with the platform's interface.

Digital short-form animation exists not solely as video but is consumed integrated with the platform's UI (User Interface) - the smartphone's vertical frame, the comment section at the bottom, the like button on the right. Many loop-based animations actively incorporate or visually respond to platform UI elements-for example, synchronizing character motion with background music loops or aligning repetitive gestures with on-screen interaction zones-thereby reinforcing the resonance between loop aesthetics and the platform's technical environment. Consequently, the loop transcends mere repetition, forming an affective event space where the platform's technical environment resonates with the viewer's physical

rhythm.

4. The Psychological Effects of Repetitive Playback

The loop structure, a core format of short-form animation, functions as a powerful mechanism that induces and sustains a special psychological state called flow, going beyond simply reaffirming the same visual information to viewers. Flow refers to an optimal experience where the agent becomes deeply absorbed in the activity itself, forgetting the passage of time or even self-awareness. The loop in short-form animation technically and aesthetically structures the conditions for this flow. While conventional video content releases viewer tension and attention upon narrative conclusion, loop-based animation adopts a cyclical structure where beginning and end are intricately interlocked [10]. This structure prevents attention drifting off-screen by eliminating visual discontinuity, exerting an Attention Capture effect that continuously confines attention within the frame.

The hypnotic effect formed by the repetition of visual rhythms and auditory beats in this process causes viewers to unconsciously rewatch the video dozens of times, resulting in an experience where their sense of physical time disappears or becomes distorted. Notably, prior studies indicate that among the components of short-form animation, the visual attractiveness of characters or backgrounds acts as the factor most significantly influencing immersion. The loop structure continuously stimulates the viewer's visual pleasure by repeatedly exposing these attractive visual elements in short cycles, progressively intensifying the depth of immersion.

Furthermore, repetitive playback bypasses the logical interpretation process of grasping narrative causality, eliciting an immediate affective response that directly appeals to bodily sensations and the nervous system. Short-form content exhibits the characteristics of a neuro-image, where neural responses to audiovisual stimuli take precedence over the cognitive processes required to understand complex narratives. Repeating loop videos induce physical entrainment through regular visual patterns and auditory rhythms before the viewer's brain processes and judges the meaning of the information. This operates on a mechanism similar to the sensory pleasure provided by ASMR or rhythm games, offering modern individuals, weary from complex narrative interpretation and information processing, the psychological stability and immediate dopamine reward that predictable repetition provides.

This affective response suggests that short-form animation functions not merely as disposable time-killing content, but as a sensory medium that resonates with viewers' physical rhythms and satisfies emotional fulfillment. Particularly, animations combining positive appeal with non-realistic expression

heighten viewer affinity while eliminating the cognitive burden or uncanny valley effect that realistic depictions can induce. This significantly reduces visual fatigue from repeated viewing and operates as a key mechanism that strengthens an addictive viewing experience, allowing viewers to surrender to the video's rhythm without resistance.

Furthermore, the looping nature of short-form animation powerfully stimulates the imitation instinct, transforming viewers from passive observers into active participants. The short, repetitive video structure grants viewers a sense of self-efficacy, enabling them to easily learn and mimic the content's movements, dances, or production techniques. Repeated playback automates the rehearsal process by continuously displaying the learning subject without additional manipulation. This forms the psychological foundation for the spread of challenge and meme cultures popular on platforms like TikTok and Reels [11].

Rhythms and movements internalized through looped playback lead viewers beyond mere observation to performative participation-creating and sharing videos themselves. In other words, loops transcend simple viewing repetition; they combine with the social desire to confirm belonging and connection within networks by imitating others' actions and reproducing them with one's own body. Users become active participants in play culture by repeatedly learning the original text through looped videos and reproducing it through variations. Consequently, the repetitive playback of short-form animations provides a psychological driving force that extends beyond individual immersion and affective satisfaction, evolving into collective play and cultural reproduction. This establishes it as a core operating principle of digital play culture.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the loop structure-a core aesthetic of short-form animation rapidly emerging in the digital platform environment-and its psychological effects through repeated playback from multiple perspectives. The findings confirm that the loop in short-form animation does not signify mere technical repetition of footage or a lack of narrative. Rather, it represents an aesthetic practice of post-continuity born from the convergence of the digital native generation's perceptual mode and the technical conditions of the platform. Where traditional animation pursued narrative completeness within a linear conception of time-beginning, development, climax, and resolution-short-form animation constructs an eternal present through a cyclical structure where beginning and end interlock in infinite recurrence. It prioritizes sensory rhythm and visual spectacle over narrative causality.

On a psychological level, repeated playback functions as a powerful mechanism providing viewers with experiences of immersion Flow and affect. Among the components of short-form animation, its captivating visual elements and sense of rhythm capture the viewer's attention with each repetition, bypassing the logical interpretation of the narrative and eliciting immediate physical and sensory responses. This repeated viewing reduces the burden of information processing and provides emotional satisfaction, such as psychological comfort or dopamine reward that induce an immersive state that encourages voluntary reply. At the same time, these affective responses should be understood as tendencies rather than fixed outcomes, as the intensity and nature of immersion may differ depending on individual viewing habits, media literacy, and psychological predispositions.

Moreover, this loop aesthetics is inextricably linked to the platform's algorithm and interface environment. Short-form platforms like TikTok and Reels treat user viewing duration and repeat playback as core metrics for content value assessment. This drives creators to produce loop-based videos with high 'content density' within a short timeframe. Moreover, the loop structure extends the act of viewing beyond mere consumption. It becomes the foundation for meme and challenge cultures where viewers mimic and reproduce dances or movements, transforming viewing into a realm of performative participation. However, the cultural meanings and participatory dynamics generated by loop aesthetics may vary across platforms, regional contexts, and audience groups, suggesting that their social impact cannot be assumed to be uniform.

In conclusion, short-form animation is establishing a distinct aesthetic system centered on sensation and affect, one that cannot be fully captured by existing narrative-centric video grammar. This study contributes by reframing brevity and repetition not as limitations but as defining aesthetic principles of contemporary short-form media. Rather than proposing a universal model of audience experience, this research offers a theoretical baseline for understanding loop aesthetics within platform-driven media environments. Future research should therefore pursue comparative and cross-cultural investigations, examining how loop-based aesthetics are differently perceived across age groups, cultural contexts, and platform-specific norms, as well as how emerging technologies such as AI may further transform loop generation and reception patterns.

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