A Study on the Aesthetic Characteristics of Documentary Films in the Internet Communication Environment

Zheyu Shi [1, a, *], Lingyu Li [1, b]

[1] Beijing Normal University School of Arts and Media

[a, *] 11112021039@bnu.edu.cn, [b] 674226016@qq.com

Abstract. The advent of the Internet era leads to the combination between the new media channel and the film and television art including documentaries, which greatly effects the online and offline features of the film and television art. Thereinto, the Internet communication leads to the transmutation of documentaries in many dimensions. In the paper, the aesthetic features of documentaries in the Internet communication are systematically combed and theoretically analyzed from authenticity, delicacy, inclusiveness, popularity and innovation. And, it is tried to provide a kind of thinking for the Internet communication and the popular acceptance of documentaries through the combing, the analysis and the research.

Key words: Documentary Internet New media Aesthetics.

1. Introduction

"Aesthetics is a special form of human understanding of the world, referring to the formation of a non-utilitarian, image-based and emotional relationship between people and the world (society and nature). Aesthetics is the understanding, perception and judgment of the existence of the world in terms of reason and emotion, subjectivity and objectivity. Aesthetics is also a combination of 'examine' and 'beauty'.In this phrase, 'examine' is a verb, indicating that someone is 'examining' and there is a subject involved.At the same time, there must be 'beauty' for people to examine, that is, the aesthetic object or target.Aesthetic phenomena are based on the aesthetic relationship between people and the world, and are phenomena in the aesthetic relationship.Beauty belongs to people, and aesthetic phenomena belong to people." [1]

For the aesthetic of documentary, the aesthetic subject and the aesthetic object are also "live and let live" in the aesthetic process.In the media environment of Internet communication, the aesthetic characteristics of documentary films are both inherited and changed compared to traditional media documentary films.We can briefly summarize the aesthetic characteristics of Internet-distributed documentary films from the aspects of 'truth', 'refinement', 'tolerance', 'vulgarity' and 'newness'.

2. Authenticity

The issue of authenticity is the core issue of all art styles, including film and television art. Whether an art style or a work of art can truly reflect reality or express one's inner feelings is an important criterion for judging its success.Some experts have pointed out that TV authenticity is a kind of 'multiple-assumed authenticity', that is, from the 'real' of life to the 'real' accepted by TV viewers, which goes through 'multiple assumptions' - on the one hand, it includes the assumptions of creative means, the creator's assumptions and the recipient's assumptions, on the other hand, it also includes 'artistic assumptions' and 'non-artistic assumptions'. They are intertwined and permeate, resulting in the complexity and specificity of 'truth'. [2]

As we all know, 'Authenticity' is the primary principle of documentary film creation.Although the objective authenticity pursued by documentary film creation is an ideal state that is difficult to fully achieve, its unremitting pursuit still has positive significance.The 'genuine' of the material does not necessarily mean that the final content and information transmitted to the audience by the documentary will not be misinterpreted and misunderstood.For the creation of documentary films on the Internet platform, if the issue of 'Authenticity' cannot be well solved, it is entirely possible for documentary films to become 'a copy of a copy', 'a shadow of a shadow' and 'a three-layered art form'.

2.1 The issue of restoring historical authenticity

As Italian historian Benedetto Croce said, 'all history is contemporary history'.History and reality have a very close relationship, and history is the reality of the past, while reality will eventually become the history of the future.From the perspective of historical narrative and historical writing, because historical writers are always in a backward state on the time axis, the historical background and political and economic foundation they are in often have great differences from the time of the historical events. Due to the additional purposes and differences in interpretation methods that exist in the process of historical restoration, this can make the historical truth under the possibility of being obscured, rewritten or misunderstood.

In order to make the documentary become the "spokesperson of human history",[3] for its creation, it is an extremely ideal but almost impossible state to approach the historical truth infinitely.Therefore, relative truth becomes a feasible choice to consider.In order to achieve the restoration of the reality of the material world, under the premise of relatively clear basic historical view and concept of truth, it is necessary to consider specific implementation methods, that is, how to find the relevant content that can express the theme and theme of the work in the complex and confusing shooting materials, and strive for objectivity, truthfulness, rigor, and accuracy in the expression method.

2.2 Complete the transformation problem from real reality to artistic reality

The problem of transforming reality truth into artistic truth. Documentaries face the problems of both reality truth and artistic truth in their creation.Simply pursuing reality truth without considering artistic expression will make the final documentary works presented to the audience as dull and unappealing as a daybook.While overemphasizing its artistic truth and ignoring its revelation of the true nature of reality will blur the boundaries between documentary and TV series, making the final work lose its ontological attributes and lack aesthetic value."In recent years, some historical documentaries have been obsessed with digging graves and making mysteries under the pressure of ratings, resulting in the proliferation of scene reproduction, lacking historical data support and without clothing and props verification. They have turned serious historical documentaries into third-grade TV series. Scene reproduction is not a magic pill of Wang Daoshi in the novel 'A Dream of Red Mansions'. If it exceeds the boundaries and is used improperly, it will damage the aesthetic principles of documentary." [4] Although Professor Zhang Tongdao's viewpoint is proposed for historical documentaries, it also has positive reference significance for the creation of online documentaries.

In order to avoid the difficulty of realizing the dual truth of reality truth and artistic truth in the documentaries spread on the Internet platform, a more feasible approach is: first, to clarify that artistic truth comes from reality truth;secondly, the creator forms his own subjective experience

through the understanding and judgment of the reality existence, and then uses artistic language and form to express the author's true historical view and value judgment. Finally, from the perspective of artistic acceptance, the audience produces and experiences the sense of reality in artistic appreciation.

3. Exquisiteness

The documentary works spread on the refined Internet platform are fundamentally influenced by political, economic, cultural, and artistic factors, which ultimately form their own ultimate expression forms.Although among the many influencing factors of documentary films with Internet platform as the main communication channel, the influence of commercial or economic factors is more significant, this does not mean that the pursuit of commercial interests in documentary film production inevitably leads to negative value judgments such as simplicity, convenience, and cheapness.

On December 28, 1895, The Louis and Auguste Lumière showed the world's first four short films in Paris: "The Arrival of the Mail Train", "Employees Leaving the Lumière Factory", "Tables Turned on the Gardener", and "Baby's Lunch".Among them, "The Arrival of the Mail Train" and "Employees Leaving the Lumière Factory" have the characteristics of documentary films in the most primitive sense.However, "After 18 months, audiences were no longer interested in Lumiere's 'Cinematographe'. This kind of one-minute-long film, which was limited to subject selection, composition, and lighting, was purely a flat and straightforward way of expression, which led the film to a dead end." [5] However, through the observation of these documentary short films in this period, we can find that these so-called "documentaries" are more of a record of real life without any selection or exclusion. In these short films, it is impossible to read the subjective intentions or any artistic aesthetic pursuit of the creators.

Similarly, the popularity of smart phones has made APP functions such as "Meipai" and "WeChat Short Video" used by hundreds of millions of mobile phone users as materials for recording daily life and communicating with friends on social networks.From the perspective of image quality alone, the short videos of "Meipai" and "WeChat Short Video" are much more refined than the documentary short films such as "The Arrival of the Mail Train" and "Employees Leaving the Lumière Factory". So, does this kind of short video relying on the Internet for dissemination reach the level of "Exquisiteness"?The answer is obviously negative.The main body of "Meipai" and "WeChat Short Video" also simply records life, without integrating their own aesthetic emotions and artistic creation subjectivity into the short video, so although the picture is "refined", it is still fundamentally different from "Exquisiteness" or "Refinement".

"Exquisiteness is the law of the development of human aesthetic consciousness; exquisiteness is the law of the development of human art." [6] Throughout the history of the development of documentary films at home and abroad, we can observe that the development process of documentary films as a form of film and television art is the process of their creative methods and creative concepts becoming increasingly refined.Looking back at the short history of online video, we can also see that it has undergone a process of exquisiteness, with increasingly high-quality content and constantly improving ideological content.The development of online documentaries based on the intersection of documentary and the Internet in the new era and new media also has the aesthetic attributes of exquisiteness that are shared by both.

In his essay "Film is Not Drama", Italian aesthete Ricciotto Canudo summarized the uniqueness of film art, which is also applicable to the online dissemination of documentary films today: "Film

should not be a diagram of any work, it should not be a series of words explained by pictures, nor a series of pictures explained by words. Film is born from the will of modern people, science, and art, in order to more strongly express life, and clarify the eternal meaning of life through various spaces and times." [7]

In the artistic creation of documentary films spread on the Internet platform, recording is the means and the Internet is the channel of dissemination, and only refined recording and dissemination can achieve artistic works.With the development of aesthetics, Internet documentaries in recent years have led audiences' tastes and thoughts with unique perspectives, in-depth content, and high-quality production standards, promoting the continuous transformation and development of Internet documentaries and embarking on a path of quality.

4. C.Inclusiveness

Documentaries have their own regularities in creation and typical characteristics in expression methods, but this definitely does not mean that they are necessarily in a self-restraining state in creation.Documentary films on the Internet communication platform embody an open and inclusive attitude at least in three levels: narrative voice, content selection, and creative methods.

4.1 Openness and inclusiveness in content selection in narrative voice

Looking at the increasingly rich and diverse narrative voice in documentary creation in recent years, significant changes have taken place in the final presentation of documentary features.Objective narration, subjective narration, and the poetics of culture narration are all included.

The poetics of culture is a cultural theory and critical method that emerged in the ideological circles of Europe and America in the 1980s.As a cultural trend, the basic theory of the poetics of culture is "intertextuality". Scholars point out that "history is full of discontinuities, and history is made up of discourses." [8] It emphasizes that "the subject intervenes and rewrites history." [9] Due to the high emphasis on the "intertextuality" of history in the poetics of culture, it believes that the formation of historical facts is composed of a variety of discourses from various sources.Research on the Ontology of History, the recognition of the rich sources and diversity of historical discourse narration lays a theoretical foundation for the subsequent emergence of new academic stars such as film history and psychological history.Introducing this concept into the creation of documentary films means recognizing that in addition to the traditional official historiography-based documentary films, the voices of the people and more diverse historical restoration methods should also be included in the narration of historical texts.Just like the diverse and complex "family history", "village history" and "city history" in literature, it is possible to show the details of major historical events, personalize the recollection, make creative interpretations, and provide personalized explanations.

4.2 Openness and inclusiveness in content selection

The new media era has brought countless individuals together online, and these individuals are divided into various audiences online and offline in different ways. Based on different ages, genders, occupations, regions, incomes, educational levels, and hobbies, niche communities have formed, which have different viewing needs for documentaries."In the traditional media environment, the lives of marginalized groups are often difficult to appear on the communication platform of mass media. Micro-documentaries turn the focus of attention to these subjects that originally have no

chance to appear in people's field of vision, making documentary topics more diverse and civilian."[10] Due to the freedom of length and investment in online documentaries, they have more possibilities and realities for artistic exploration. Creators can fully use this form to express a variety of themes, thus greatly avoiding the interference of ideological factors.

4.3 Openness and inclusiveness in creative methods

The arrival of the new media era has made the decisive factor in the creation of film and television art no longer a matter of technology but of concept, especially for the creation of documentary films.The diversity of creative techniques has become one of the distinctive features of documentary films.The openness and sharing of Internet documentaries have made personalized creation increasingly popular. Scenario reproduction, live-action acting, animation effects, and other creative techniques that have caused controversy in the traditional documentary creation field have never caused opposition in the creation of Internet documentaries. It seems that from the beginning, people have realized the unconventional genes and experimental attributes of Internet documentaries, and thus given them more tolerance.Compared with traditional documentaries, Internet documentaries often have more innovative ideas and exploratory spirit, and thus have more personalized creative characteristics.

5. Popularity

At the end of 2005, the online short film "A murder case caused by steamed bread" created by freelancer Hu Ge became popular throughout the network.This spoof short film, which lasts only 20 minutes, subverts the interpretation of Chen Kaige's film "The Promise".Its online viewership and topic popularity even far exceeded the film "The Promise" itself.Marked by "A murder case caused by steamed bread", grassroots culture's resistance to elite culture in the Internet context is fully launched.Today, as we re-examine the mainstream form of Internet culture, there is no doubt that the integration and coexistence of grassroots culture, popular culture, and mass culture have jointly occupied an absolute dominant position in the Internet ecosystem.

The popularization of the Internet has given rise to a distinct position for various forms of film and television art on the Internet, which is significantly different from traditional media."They all create virtual characters and situations that can establish instant spiritual connections with audiences." [11] Unlike the Frankfurt School's criticism of mass culture based on cultural conservatism, which sees mass culture as a means and tool for making money, mass culture itself is no longer subordinate to the nature of free creativity and aesthetic spiritual needs, but rather caters to the needs and tastes of the masses, and becomes vulgar and kitsch. In the reproduction process of cultural industrial products, the ruling class manipulates the public's consciousness.The popular culture and mass culture on the Internet are less likely to be dominated by mainstream media and the ruling class, and more likely to be created by hundreds of millions of netizens.

The documentary images on the Internet also have their own unique characteristics due to the grassroots, mass, and popular nature of Internet culture.Due to its still-developing nature, it is inevitable that it will inevitably carry the rough characteristics of the exploratory stage.

Some scholars have sharply criticized the documentary images with uneven quality on the Internet."A large number of low-cost or even zero-cost documentary images flood the Internet, lacking artistic quality, and even the most basic image language is chaotic. The spectacle of events is lacking in humanistic care; the events involved are mostly based on curiosity, attracting attention and arousing interest, satisfying a sense of sensory stimulation; or just recording fragments of life.

Some of these micro-videos impact people's moral bottom line, while others are boring images. These micro-videos without artistic creation even lack basic technical requirements, just satisfying the 'presence' of the shooter, like carving 'here you are' on tourist attractions everywhere. This is a kind of visual pollution." [12]

The above-mentioned bad phenomena still exist in a large number of documentary films spread on the Internet platform.However, we cannot deny the existence value of the vast majority of documentary films on the Internet platform.We should realize that these problems are yet to be solved and can eventually be solved in the development process.

6. innovativeness

Innovation is a gene rooted in the blood of the Internet. Once various art forms, cultural forms, business models, and communication methods are combined with the Internet, their forms and even essence will inevitably change, which is more drastic and rapid than any previous historical stage.

The continuous progress of technology provides new subject areas and communication channels for the artistic creation of documentaries, as well as new ideas and techniques for the production of documentaries.As the famous communication scholar Marshall McLuhan once said, "Technological progress has repeatedly reversed the characteristics of every situation. The era of automation will be an era of self-reliance." [13] For the new media era, the primary characteristic it brings is that the threshold for the production of documentaries has been greatly reduced, and everyone can make their own short documentary films.Various expression methods and creative means can be introduced into the creation of documentaries, especially the emerging "Micro Movies", which provide a good reference for the creation of documentaries. There are also quite a few Internet documentaries that actually use micro-films to shoot and produce.

Continuously   weed through the old to bring forth the new, constantly satisfying the viewing needs of the audience, and constantly drawing on the expression methods and technical skills of other art forms and media forms have become the inherent attributes and aesthetic requirements of documentaries on the Internet platform.With the development of the times, the creative concept of online documentaries is constantly updated.Creators gradually realize that documentary creation is not only about recording real events, but also about conveying deeper information and values through unique perspectives and deep thinking.Therefore, creators pay more attention to exploring and presenting real stories and emotions in life from multiple perspectives such as humanistic care, social phenomena, and natural environment.This kind of creative concept update makes online documentaries more thoughtful and entertaining.Secondly, the production technology of online documentaries has also been constantly upgraded.With the advancement of technology and the continuous development of film and television production technology, creators have gradually mastered more advanced shooting and editing techniques, which has greatly improved the quality of online documentaries.For example, the use of drones, virtual reality and other technologies to capture images has made the footage more shocking and realistic, bringing audiences a more ultimate audio-visual experience.

7. Summary

The Internet, as the most important communication medium and ecological environment of contemporary human society, has fundamentally changed the media environment of documentaries and the viewing demands of the vast number of film and television art appreciators. This influence

has played a role in various dimensions and forms, including documentaries and many other film and television art forms. For documentaries, the authenticity, inclusiveness, popularity, and innovativeness characteristics of their aesthetic attributes have undergone significant changes with the integration and interaction of the Internet and documentaries, which deserve attention and reflection.

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