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Professionalism of Appearance: A Study on the Relationship between Journalists' Appearance and TV News Value (Postprint)

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Abstract

The continuous evolution of visual communication in the new media era has intensified public aesthetic aspirations, profoundly impacting the journalism industry. Grounded in communication theory, this study employs questionnaire surveys and in-depth interviews to investigate the relationship between journalists' physical appearance and news value. The findings reveal that heterogeneous audience cohorts exhibit distinct preferences for journalists with varying appearance attributes, thereby influencing their evaluation of news value.

Full Text

Preamble

Professionalism of Appearance: A Study on the Relationship between Journalists' Appearance and TV News Value

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Abstract: The continuous development of visual communication in the new media era has intensified society's pursuit of beauty, profoundly affecting the news industry. Grounded in communication theory, this research employs questionnaire surveys and in-depth interviews to investigate the relationship between journalists' appearance and news value. The findings reveal that audiences exhibit preferences for journalists with different appearances, which subsequently influences their judgment of news value.

Key words: news value, phenomenology, reporter's appearance, visual communication

The rapid development of the new media era has solidified the position of visual information in communication, and anchors with favorable appearances have garnered widespread public attention online. In 2020, CCTV reporter Wang Bingbing's appearance on the program "Youth Study" immediately sparked intense discussion among netizens. Subsequently, the "May Fourth Youth Special Edition" hosted by CCTV anchor Long Yang and a 2023 program featuring Feng Lin from Fudan University similarly generated heated debates on new media social platforms. Some netizens even suggested that making these visually appealing journalists permanent fixtures would ensure sustained enthusiasm for learning and motivate audiences to actively engage with news information. These observations indicate that visual factors now constitute a significantly larger proportion of netizens' decision-making processes. Although many advocate against "appearanceism," arguing that natural appearance bears no positive correlation with personality or knowledge, daily observations reveal that TV news reporters' overall appearance substantially affects how others judge the value of news.

This raises several questions: Why does a journalist's appearance influence the audience's value judgment of news? Does a reporter's appearance and physique affect audience assessment of TV news value? What mental processes occur within the audience? What other factors shape audience judgments of newsworthiness?

2.1 A Review of the Phenomenon of Journalists' Appearance Affecting TV News Value

Audience judgment of news value has prompted multi-perspective research in academia. Regarding the aesthetic value of news and its relationship with information value, domestic scholar Sun Dehong published *Value Issues in News Aesthetic Communication* in 2008, demonstrating that aesthetic value intervenes between news subjects and objects, ensuring that facts and their communication texts can directly resonate with the subject's emotions, thereby achieving maximum communication effect. In 2002, Chen Huan discussed the impact of audience psychological needs on newsworthiness across six dimensions: curiosity, innovation, similarity, difference, fun, and beauty. Regarding aesthetic psychological needs, Chen argued that humans understand and create life according to aesthetic laws, consistently demonstrating a tendency to pursue beauty, which generates aesthetic psychology during information reception and enables information to produce aesthetic feelings in subjects. However, these studies overlook the relationship between the appearance image of television news transmitters and news value.

2.2 Literature Review of Journalists' Appearance Affecting TV News Value

2.2.1 A Review of Phenomenological Theory

Phenomenological theory was first proposed in Husserl's *Studies in Logic*, which advocated recognizing the fundamental relationship between phenomenon and essence, special and general, while clearly explaining the structure and laws of cognition itself. Gao Hongyan's 2002 work *Facing "Newsworthiness" Itself: A Phenomenological Methodology for News Value Theory Research Practice* decomposes the phenomenon of newsworthiness into two stages: "facing facts" and "facing cognition." In the "facing facts" stage, journalists identify portions of facts that align with their news intentions and evaluate target news value. In the "facing cognition" stage, news information emerges from the objectivity of facts, existing as a projection and reflection of our concepts, with objective factual information and subjective conceptual information forming a unified news form.

2.2.2 A Review of Visual Communication Theories

American visual communication expert Paul M. Lester divided visual theory into two categories: sensory theory and intuition theory. Sensory theory holds that images or media images consist of light and minimal other elements, while intuition theory focuses on people's associations of meaning in objects they perceive. Huang Jun's 2023 publication *Development Logic and Improvement Path of Short Video News in the Intelligent Media Era* emphasizes the sense of news scene based on short video news characteristics under visual communication, arguing that restoring real scenes can trigger audience empathy and improve communication effect. The combination of virtual and real VR news has transformed news dissemination from previous person-to-person communication to virtual communication between people and machines, allowing audiences to complete news dissemination tasks through multi-dimensional stimulation of "absence" and "presence," thereby stimulating deep emotional resonance. However, these studies did not examine audience value judgment and decision-making on news from the perspective of appearance, thus failing to address questions about the relationship between journalists' appearance and TV news value.

2.3 Question Proposal

Therefore, this article draws upon phenomenological theory and visual communication theory to address the following questions: Is a journalist's appearance related to the newsworthiness of TV news? How does a journalist's appearance affect audience judgment of newsworthiness? What psychological changes occur in the audience? What other factors influence differences in audience news choices?

3 Research Methods

This study employs questionnaire surveys and interviews to address these questions.

3.1.1 Hypothesis Establishment

Based on the research questions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: The higher the audience rates a newscaster's appearance, the more interesting the news becomes.

H2: The higher the audience rates a newscast reporter's appearance, the closer the news feels.

To test these hypotheses, this study used questionnaires to sample the population.

3.1.2 Sampling Methods

This study selected young people as research subjects. With the rapid development of emerging media and the news industry's active adaptation, young people have become the primary followers of national development and social progress, as well as the main force participating in news topics. The study first conducted representative sampling of this group, selecting classes of freshman through senior students at a university in Zhengzhou to compile the overall sampling frame. Then, with a 95% confidence interval and 3% sampling error, the sampling frame underwent stratified multi-level sampling, selecting 400 students as the sample.

The survey's data collection, collation, and analysis were completed on May 4, 2023. The survey focused on open-ended and closed-ended topics, covering: (1) basic information confirmation including age and gender; (2) rating journalists' appearance; and (3) rating news interest and closeness. The questionnaire contained 22 questions, including 9 multiple-choice questions, 1 multi-select question, and 12 scale questions, distributed through a combination of online and offline methods including WeChat Moments, QQ Zone, Questionnaire Star Sample Bank, and offline channels.

3.2.1 Interview Outline Design

The interview covered: 1) Interviewees' basic perception of journalists' appearance and newsworthiness, including questions about age, news consumption habits, whether news content or anchors motivate attention, and whether appearance affects news value judgment. 2) Recognition of journalists' appearance and newsworthiness, exploring whether interviewees follow high-appearance journalists, whether good looks drive news attention, preferences for attractive journalists, mention of appearance in comments, preferences for male versus female journalists, motivations for appearance attention, news values prioritized

(timeliness, importance, prominence, proximity, interestingness, etc.), active versus passive news reception, and tendencies toward positive or negative comments.

During interviews, researchers avoided the four ethical issues highlighted by scholar Alan Bryman: (1) causing harm to participants; (2) failing to obtain informed consent; (3) violating participant privacy; and (4) deceiving participants. Interviewees could remain silent or withdraw if they encountered unwilling questions or dissatisfaction, and materials interviewees did not want publicized were excluded from the study.

3.2.2 Selection of Interviewees

This study interviewed 15 participants, including professional commentators (media practitioners), opinion leader commentators, grassroots commentators (ordinary netizens), and “not-well-known commentators” (anonymous netizens), with each interview lasting 50 minutes. Interviews began in May 2023 and concluded at the end of that month. Interviewees initially included people around the researcher who followed news, with additional participants recruited through commenters under the official Douyin@CCTV News account. Following the principle of maximum sampling in qualitative research, sample collection ended when the 15th interviewee provided sufficient content to answer research questions. Interviewees varied in age, occupation, and education background. Interviews were conducted via telephone, WeChat, and face-to-face, with results compiled into verbatim drafts processed by the author.

4 Research Findings and Discussion

Questionnaire surveys revealed that nearly 30% of audiences expressed strong concern about journalists' appearance when watching news, believing it indeed affects their attention to news content, while nearly 50% of respondents stated they “very much look forward to news being broadcast by good-looking reporters.” Analysis of 15 interviewees also found that 9 reported being unconsciously attracted to high-appearance journalists, leading to heightened attention to their news. From a subject-object dichotomy perspective, people as subjects maintain calm, objective views of the external object world. However, from a perceptual perspective, human perception of the world is dominated by sensation or subconsciousness. Human cognition and perception manifest through five forms: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. The visual system's high sensitivity makes humans instinctively generate visual attention, while psychological needs for beauty subtly affect people's choices. Similarly, when news is broadcast, audience attention is affected by journalists' appearance differences. Different audiences also demonstrate varying inclinations toward different appearances, showing clear understanding of these stable preferences.

4.1 Sample Feature Description

In terms of gender, over 50% of samples were female and 45.42% were male. Regarding attention to journalists' appearance, most samples (87 respondents, 28.43%) were "very concerned." Concerning expectations for high-appearance journalists broadcasting news, most samples (142 respondents, 46.41%) were "very much looking forward to it." Among external factors of journalists, nearly 60% of samples selected "facial features" as most important.

4.2 Gender Affects Audience Attention to Reporter Appearance

Reporter appearance does not directly determine news value level, but gender factors affect people's perception of reporter appearance in news reports. Questionnaire data shows statistical differences in audience ratings of appearance for two female journalists versus two male journalists, though samples show gender factors in news value scoring. In female journalists' news reports, no phenomenon appears where higher appearance correlates with higher news value. However, among male journalists, a positive relationship exists between appearance and news value.

The questionnaire collected 306 valid responses. Descriptive analysis found average appearance scores for four journalists (two female, two male) were: Wang Bingbing 4.13, Tian Meng 3.49, Yang Guang 2.70, Li Chengchao 3.94, with Wang Bingbing scoring highest. The author conducted difference tests on appearance scores between the two female hosts, finding the data did not conform to normal distribution (S-W test significance level < 0.05), thus using paired sample Wilcoxon test. Difference analysis revealed statistically significant differences between the two female reporters, with Wang Bingbing's appearance score significantly higher than Tian Meng's. Similarly, difference testing between the two male hosts found their appearance scores also violated normal distribution, requiring paired sample Wilcoxon test, which revealed statistically significant differences, with Li Chengchao's appearance score significantly higher than Yang Guang's. Therefore, statistically significant differences exist in appearance scores across different journalists.

This study operationalized news value as news interest and news closeness. Descriptive analysis found interviewees rated news value for Wang Bingbing's broadcasts at 3.23 and Tian Meng's at 3.55. Thus, among female reporters, no phenomenon appears where better appearance yields higher news value. Interviewees rated news value for Yang Guang's broadcasts at 3.18 and Li Chengchao's at 3.71, preliminarily suggesting that for male reporters, higher appearance correlates with higher news value. Further Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant positive correlation between Yang Guang's appearance and news value ($r = 0.383$, $P < 0.05$) and between Li Chengchao's appearance and news value ($r = 0.554$, $P < 0.05$), confirming that male reporter appearance is directly proportional to news value—better appearance yields higher news value.

4.3 Appearance Level is Directly Proportional to News Closeness

Through in-depth interviews exploring whether journalists' appearance affects audience judgment of newsworthiness and whether audiences prefer good-looking female or male journalists, we found that appearance differences indeed garner varying audience attention, with different attitudes toward high-appearance female versus male journalists. Interviewee responses confirmed our observations: "I will definitely take a few more looks at beautiful people, especially ones with a decent occupation and background" (S1). "It may not be good, but I have to admit that I do pay further attention to what he broadcasts because of his good appearance" (S5). "Although I also like handsome male reporters, no one can refuse a beautiful sister. I prefer beautiful female reporters, just like I still can't refuse Wang Bingbing. I finish watching her news broadcasting on my mobile phone every time" (S3). "I feel like that even if a female reporter makes a little mistake in the news broadcast, I can still accept it. If the reporter is a male, I may feel that his professional ability is not strong, and the visual interference brought to me may be reduced" (S7).

Among 15 interview transcripts, 11 respondents preferred good-looking female journalists broadcasting news, expressing emotional support and tolerance for female journalists. Regarding male journalists, audiences tended to be stricter. This phenomenon may relate to women's historically disadvantaged position and changing status in contemporary society. Interviews revealed that audiences prefer good-looking journalists, especially high-appearance female journalists. Although this may somewhat distract from news content, it also prolongs audience attention to news. When good-looking male reporters broadcast news, audiences also pay more attention to the content itself, particularly when male and female reporters broadcast the same news—audiences find the female reporter's broadcast more interesting and closer to their own lives.

5 Summary and Reflection

This study theorizes the influence of journalists' appearance on TV news value through questionnaire surveys, attempting to answer whether journalists' appearance relates to TV news value. The findings indicate that higher audience ratings of journalists' appearance correlate with higher perceived news value.

This study reflects the development of the "appearance economy" in TV news while providing a basis for understanding the relationship between journalists' appearance and TV news value in contemporary Chinese TV news. Notably, the study also found that excessive pursuit of journalists' appearance can lead to depreciation of news value itself, warranting vigilance and reflection.

However, this study has limitations due to factors such as journalist gender. Future research in television journalism should examine how journalist gender factors impact TV news value.

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