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Research on Online Dissemination Strategies for Documentaries in the New Media Era (Postprint)

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Abstract

Documentaries have consistently constituted the most pivotal cultural symbols within China's cultural communication framework. Through documentary dissemination, it becomes possible not only to more effectively promote the domestic propagation of traditional national culture, but also to more accurately facilitate the external transmission of cultural values. With the rapid development of internet-based new media, the production modalities and communication channels of documentaries have undergone profound transformations. Consequently, intensifying research on the online communication of documentaries in the new media era has emerged as a critical scholarly imperative. This study examines several domestically successful documentaries from recent years as case studies to analyze the application and development of online communication strategies for documentaries within new media contexts, thereby offering theoretical reference points for the future refinement of documentary online communication systems.

Full Text

Research on Network Communication Strategies for Documentaries in the New Media Era

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Abstract: Documentaries have always constituted the most important cultural symbol in China's cultural communication system. Through documentary dissemination, we can not only better promote the domestic spread of traditional national culture, but also accurately communicate cultural values abroad. With the rapid development of internet-based new media, the production forms and communication channels of documentaries have undergone profound changes. Strengthening research on the network communication of documentaries in the new media era has become an important issue. This paper focuses on several

domestically successful documentaries in recent years as case studies to analyze the application and development of network communication strategies for documentaries in the new media context, thereby providing theoretical reference for improving future documentary network communication systems.

Keywords: documentary; network communication strategy; communication transformation; new communication characteristics; communication optimization

In today's increasingly diversified cultural communication landscape, documentaries have become the most important cultural communication medium after television and film. Major streaming platforms such as iQIYI and Bilibili have established their own online documentary platforms and produce documentary content. Currently, Bilibili's documentary user base has exceeded 90 million, and its 2021 documentary production plan announced the release of 30 new documentaries throughout the year, including social and humanities documentaries like *Little Youth*, food documentaries like *Strange Foods*, and science documentaries like *Star Killers*. However, the current domestic documentary communication model does not achieve ideal communication effects. The content production and communication channels of documentaries remain greatly restricted. Especially in the new media communication era, the development of new media such as mobile phones and mobile clients has challenged the traditional documentary communication model that primarily relied on television media. It is essential to strengthen the establishment and improvement of the network communication system for documentaries. This paper focuses on elaborating the current characteristics of domestic documentary communication in the new media era and actively explores how to strengthen the application of documentary network communication strategies.

1. Transformation of Documentary Communication Modes in the New Media Era

Currently, with the rapid development and popularization of internet technology, the internet has profoundly changed people's information reception and communication habits. By the end of 2020, China's internet user population had reached 989 million, nearly one billion, with a domestic internet penetration rate as high as 70.4%. The number of mobile internet users in China also reached 986 million. This demonstrates that network media has become the primary information communication medium for people. Its communication characteristics of interactivity, immediacy, and efficiency in information dissemination have directly impacted documentary communication models, giving rise to new forms such as micro-documentaries. The internet has driven the transformation of traditional documentary communication models. Documentary network communication channels have gradually expanded. In 2008, China's first documentary vertical portal website was established. Subsequently, major portals such as Sohu, NetEase, Tencent, and Phoenix Network have launched their own documentary channels, utilizing their internet platform resources to attract a

large number of excellent documentary resources, forming portal documentary channels with vast documentary collections. In addition, with the rise of new media platforms such as video websites and social networking sites, these platforms have gradually strengthened their own network documentary communication systems and produced documentary works. Furthermore, many new media platforms have actively promoted the development of micro-documentaries with the internet as the communication channel, continuously broadening the communication scope of documentaries through new media channels.

2. New Characteristics of Documentary Communication in the New Media Era

As new media such as internet social media become increasingly involved in documentary communication, documentary communication in the new media environment has exhibited some new characteristics.

2.1 Increasing Diversification and Convenience of Documentary Communication Channels

In the era when television was the main communication medium, people generally needed to watch specific documentary channels at fixed times, with broadcast schedules being fixed and unable to meet the personalized viewing needs of most audiences. However, in the new media era where network media serves as the primary communication platform, an increasing number of documentary resources can be found through online searches. Audiences can independently choose viewing platforms and channels through video websites, Baidu Cloud, portal documentary channels, and other means, and can freely select specific documentaries for on-demand viewing according to personal needs at any time. Additionally, people can interact with other netizens about viewing experiences through online forum platforms such as Douban and Zhihu, and can also select new documentaries of interest based on recommendations from others in these forums. Through these increasingly convenient communication channels, the communication effectiveness of documentaries can be effectively enhanced.

2.2 Expanding Audience Base for Documentaries in the New Media Era

In recent years, with the rapid development of 5G and other information technologies, China's internet infrastructure has been greatly improved, and the domestic internet user population has reached 1.011 billion, with internet penetration rates continuing to rise. Under this trend, the domestic media convergence trend has continuously strengthened, and the multi-media communication channels for documentaries have continuously expanded, causing the documentary audience to present an expanding trend. The audience has expanded from a group primarily consisting of television viewers to a broader range of internet audiences. As the documentary audience continues to expand, to gain audi-

ence support, documentary communication must be based on detailed audience analysis and aim to meet audience needs to innovate and optimize documentary content and communication channels.

2.3 Increasingly Prominent Personalized Needs of Audiences in Documentary Communication

Internet new media has accelerated the speed of information communication, making information exchange between people more convenient and efficient. The public can search for and watch their favorite documentaries through their preferred network communication media according to their own wishes. In the increasingly diversified environment of internet media communication, documentary network communication has gradually moved from mass communication to segmented communication. People independently choose documentaries and platforms according to their needs and personal preferences, rather than passively watching whatever television media broadcasts. With the help of convenient network communication, audiences' autonomy in the documentary communication process has become increasingly prominent, and their personalized demands for documentaries have become increasingly strong.

3. Optimization of Documentary Network Communication Strategies in the New Media Era

3.1 Improving the Content Communication Model for Documentaries in the New Media Era

3.1.1 Accurately Targeting Audiences and Innovating Documentary Content Production Mechanisms To expand the audience coverage of documentaries and enhance their network communication efficiency, it is essential to first optimize and innovate the documentary content production mechanism. With the development of younger online audiences, post-80s and post-90s generations have become the mainstream audience. The development of domestic documentaries must fully pay attention to the needs of young audiences. The reason why many domestic documentaries have “broken through” is that the production team firmly grasps the information needs of young audiences and uses this as an entry point to strengthen in-depth exploration of documentary content. For example, the cultural documentary *Every Treasure Tells a Story*, jointly produced by CCTV and other media, targets young audiences and adopts a more concise narrative strategy. In the narrative setting of the documentary content, it presents more down-to-earth and humane commentary methods. In terms of documentary narration, it pursues precision in word choice while also being literary and lyrical. It uses concise narrative language that young audiences can more easily accept to tell precious “treasure stories,” making cold cultural relics become warm, emotional, and able to “speak.” The production team also adjusts the duration and structure of documentaries according to the fragmented information consumption habits of young audiences, changing the

traditional “complete 建制” organizational structure of television documentaries and adopting a structure similar to internet short videos of about 5-10 minutes. This facilitates communication through short video platforms and social media, and better conforms to the fragmented information consumption habits of young audiences.

3.1.2 Strengthening Strict Content Control for Documentaries In the era of “pan-entertainment” on the internet, network communication of documentaries has shifted from a single cultural communication attribute to a combination of entertainment, commercial, and cultural characteristics. Especially as the audience becomes increasingly younger, typified documentaries that are close to life and have humorous content have gained more audience favor and popularity. However, one existing problem is that new media documentary content lacks strict gatekeeping, which can easily lead to the vulgarization and pan-entertainment development of documentary communication content, which is detrimental to the optimization of China’s documentary industry order. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen content gatekeeping for documentaries and strictly implement content supervision mechanisms for internet micro-documentaries and other types of documentaries. First, a classification system for documentary content should be established, and relevant policies and regulations should be improved to strictly implement classified supervision of documentary content. Second, industry supervision should be strengthened to enhance industry oversight of the content quality of documentaries and other online audio-visual programs.

3.2 Expanding Multi-Channel Communication Across Traditional and New Media

In the new media era, documentary communication should not only focus on network communication but should also leverage the trend of media convergence to strengthen integrated communication across old and new media. Specifically, although traditional media such as television have declined in communication power and market share, television remains mainstream media. It still has a relatively fixed audience base and plays an important role in documentary production and communication. Therefore, strengthening documentary network communication does not mean completely abandoning traditional media channels but should adopt a multi-media communication channel that integrates traditional and new media. For example, historical and cultural documentaries such as *Every Treasure Tells a Story* mainly became popular through communication on social network platforms. However, the production team did not abandon traditional television media communication platforms, still choosing CCTV’s documentary channel for broadcasting while simultaneously selecting more diverse internet platforms for network communication, including CCTV.com, iQIYI video website, and Bilibili video streaming site as network communication platforms for different online audience groups. The program was simultaneously launched on these network media platforms and achieved ex-

tremely high click-through rates upon release. On Bilibili, each episode's bullet comments reached tens of thousands, and discussion numbers in the comment section also set records for similar documentaries. Netizens exchanged ideas in real-time through bullet comments and comments, becoming independent communication subjects with autonomous agency. Many netizens also popularized cultural preservation knowledge in bullet comments based on video content and exchanged viewing experiences. This triggered widespread discussion of the documentary on social network platforms. The high popularity prompted mainstream media such as *People's Daily* to strengthen in-depth reporting on related topics of the documentary, laying a good foundation for the subsequent production and communication of the documentary series and creating certain word-of-mouth effects and brand value. By learning from the successful network communication experience of *Every Treasure Tells a Story*, it is essential to strengthen the application of diverse media channels including traditional media represented by television and new media represented by video websites to better expand the communication effects of documentaries.

3.3 Strengthening the Application of Social Communication Strategies for Documentaries in the New Media Environment

In the internet communication era where “traffic” is paramount, whoever can gather network traffic can occupy an active position in the internet communication environment. Utilizing internet social media for brand communication is also one of the most important network communication strategies in new media documentary communication. Generally, whether a documentary has achieved good communication effects on video websites can be measured by certain quantitative evaluation indicators, including the click-through rate of each episode on video websites, the number of comments, the number of forwards, etc. In addition, discussion popularity about documentary works on network social platforms and the number of times keywords appear in hot searches. The level of these quantitative traffic indicators demonstrates the network popularity of a documentary to a certain extent. Therefore, strengthening the application of social communication strategies for documentaries is particularly important. As a producer, opening an official program Weibo account on social platforms such as Weibo and releasing documentary trailers and various materials on the official account before the program goes live, and leveraging the forwarding by Weibo influencers and celebrities to conduct secondary communication of the work on social platforms. Through the forwarding and liking by Weibo influencers, it can serve the purpose of promoting the work and help more network audiences understand and recognize the work, which is beneficial for documentary communication. In addition, after the documentary is broadcast, the producer should also release relevant “discussion topics” on social platforms to promote documentary communication, increase popularity for the documentary work, and guide more audiences to watch the documentary, which helps achieve cultural communication of documentaries on a larger scale.

3.4 Actively Integrating Multi-Industry Media Resources to Expand Documentary Communication Effects

In the traditional media era, the main evaluation indicator for documentary communication effectiveness was television program ratings. However, in the new media era dominated by network media, documentaries can be communicated through multiple media platforms in parallel, and there is a relatively serious situation of audience diversion in documentary communication. In this environment, documentary communication must actively expand the boundaries of its communication field, strengthen the expansion of documentary communication scope in the new media environment, promote the construction of an “Internet +” documentary communication industry model, and strengthen the combination of factual documentaries with emerging industries such as internet social media and e-commerce. For example, *A Bite of China 2* became a title sponsor and marketing partner with Tmall. As a well-known domestic e-commerce platform, before *A Bite of China 2* was broadcast, Tmall used its professional food platform—“Tmall Food”—to conduct advance “shout-out” marketing, which not only helped the “Tongue” series documentaries generate communication heat but also helped the e-commerce platform form an e-commerce industry chain for “Tongue” peripheral products, achieving a double harvest of cultural communication benefits and super high economic benefits. In addition, internet platforms such as Tencent Video have also launched a “pan-documentary” production and communication model, launching new types of documentary works with a “documentary + internet platform” production and communication model such as *Where Are You From* and *Adventurous Life*. In view of this, future new media documentary communication should still be based on strengthening user portrait depiction, fully understanding the segmented needs of audiences on various media platforms, and on this basis, strengthen the expansion of documentary communication fields, strengthen cooperation with various industries such as culture, sports, and e-commerce, and better enhance documentary communication effects in the new era through integrating media resources.

In summary, as a unique form of cultural communication, documentaries still have their value and significance in the current context of increasingly diversified cultural communication. To adapt to the development characteristics of the new media era, documentary communication must strengthen the optimization and innovation of its communication system and build a more complete documentary communication system with the help of the internet. Among these, strengthening the optimization and implementation of network communication strategies for documentaries in the new media era is already an urgent task. If we cannot effectively promote the establishment and improvement of the documentary network communication system, it will not only directly affect the improvement of documentary communication efficiency but also affect the orderly progress of documentary cultural communication in China and the construction of the entire domestic documentary network communication ecology. Therefore, based on an understanding of relevant experiences, strengthening the establishment

and improvement of the documentary network communication strategy system is very necessary.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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