

On the Application of Creative Techniques in Television Specials in the Era of Media Convergence: Postprint

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Abstract

The advent of the convergence media era has transformed audience viewing habits. To adapt to audience preferences, documentaries and special programs have begun experimenting with new models, gradually shifting toward the brisk, concise, and succinct style characteristic of short videos. Although contemporary special programs exhibit diverse styles and formal innovations, content remains paramount. Effectively executing creative conception, topic selection and planning, suspense construction, on-location shooting techniques, and other elements for special programs under this context is crucial for guaranteeing their quality and appeal. Consequently, television media must intensify their emphasis on the production workflow of special programs, utilizing innovative creative technologies to leverage the distinctive advantages of television media and thereby manifest the market position of the television industry amidst media convergence.

Full Text

Preamble

The integration of network and digital technologies has brought tremendous changes to traditional media. As the main force of traditional media, television must re-examine itself and seek new development paths to keep pace with the era of media convergence.

As an important genre, television documentaries should integrate new creative technologies in their design, combining traditional culture with excellent elements to present documentaries to the public in the most perfect form. By enriching their connotation, documentary content becomes more substantial, thereby enhancing the aesthetic value of programs.

1. Analysis of Television Documentary Forms and Aesthetic Value

As a form of television art, television documentaries have specific themes, focusing on news events, figures, or social phenomena from different angles for reporting and analysis. Compared with news works, they offer deeper exploration. For instance, CCTV's 'Stay True to Our Original Aspiration and Continue Moving Forward' series presented Chinese stories of the Chinese nation's dream-chasing journey since the 18th Party Congress, sparking widespread public discussion and intense viewership. Such positive documentaries help stabilize public sentiment, with themes and culture that online documentaries cannot match. Television documentaries possess ideological advantages, and technicians should emphasize continuity between program themes and content during creation, enabling programs to reflect deeper connotations of themes, elevate audience aesthetic standards, and broaden the documentary market.

Visual rhythm in television documentaries comprises camera movement, picture editing, and video effects. Camera movement includes internal and external motion; internal motion refers to techniques like pushing, pulling, panning, and tilting. Since television images are not static, whether in stationary or moving states, they rely on the camera's spatial-temporal movement to drive changes in shot scales. Documentaries require editing numerous clips, necessitating special effects techniques achieved through narration, sound effects, and music to ensure consistency in theme, content, and style, creating clear narrative threads and rhythm that drive audience emotions.

A crucial prerequisite for television documentaries is the theme, which determines program quality. Unlike national media like CCTV, local traditional television stations lack support in funding, technology, and talent, making documentary quality difficult to guarantee. Homogenized themes cause audience aesthetic fatigue and prevent works from effectively realizing their value. Faced with this situation, we should leverage technological advantages of the media convergence era, starting with program themes to deeply root them in the mass base and attract audience attention and resonance.

In terms of theme positioning, we can select recent news events that have caused social sensation or content that demonstrates social development status, allowing people to gain positive energy inspiration while paying attention, extending ideological and cultural spirit, and extracting valuable content to enrich documentaries. When themes are sufficiently attractive to audiences, their thoughts and emotions will be influenced as the program develops.

For instance, the television documentary 'Crossing 4,000 Kilometers to See You: The Unbroken Tibetan-Han Bond Across Time and Space' produced by the author begins directly with the scene of Sun Yueliang, a cadre who assisted Tibet, reuniting with his old Tibetan colleague after 12 years. Sun Yueliang served three years in Lhünzhub County, Tibet with dedication and responsibility, accomplishing many practical and beneficial deeds that powerfully promoted local

economic and social development, while forging deep emotional bonds with local colleagues. However, due to long-term oxygen deficiency, Sun Yueliang developed motor neuron disease after his tenure, becoming an ALS patient. Upon hearing the news, his old Tibetan friends traveled four thousand kilometers to visit him in the hospital, and the two embraced and wept bitterly when they met. In this scene, the camera intervened from an observer's perspective, maintaining considerable restraint without excessive rendering or subjective emotional insertion. The use of long shots also presented the subject's state and emotions with more naturalness, increasing authenticity and giving audiences more possibilities for self-judgment and understanding. In the scene of bitter weeping, the protagonist Sun Yueliang could not conceal his sorrow, but already unable to speak or move, he could only emit a cry that pierced the sky. At this moment, our camera went against the conventional approach in news shooting of moving close to the subject and using close-up shots to directly capture the tragic crying, instead deliberately moving the camera far away outside the hospital room door, presenting an observational perspective through the ward window watching the two people embracing and weeping. This implicitly reveals through the change of perspective that human grief is sometimes not mutually understood, and this calm camera treatment instead presents a more resolute and sorrowful atmosphere. Similarly, in the segment where another colleague in Tibet who could not visit wrote a letter entrusted to the reporter for Sun Yueliang, a dual-window approach was adopted, making the emotional exchange between the two parties seem distanceless and making the story in the picture more infectious.

To make the documentary more detailed and impactful, the reporter not only followed Sun Yueliang's current situation multiple times but also specially traveled to the plateau, enduring altitude sickness, to interview many old friends and colleagues who had worked with Sun Yueliang. Before interviews, the reporter deliberately played videos of Sun Yueliang's current situation, and under tremendous visual impact, almost everyone shed tears, thus capturing these deeply moving scenes that effectively touched audiences. This work successively won awards including the National Radio and Television Administration's 'Excellent Program for Promoting Socialist Core Values Themed Original Online Audio-Visual Programs,' First Prize for Best Work in the National City and County Television Stations Recommendation Activity 'Television Documentary,' and First Prize for Online Audio-Visual Programs from the Provincial Radio and Television Bureau.

Another example is the television documentary 'Love Connects Deep in the Mountains' produced by the author, which selected Wang Chunhua, a female entrepreneur with relatively high local attention, who has been involved with silk since age 15 and has deep cultivation in the industry for over 50 years, enjoying high national reputation. In 2020, China's comprehensive poverty alleviation year, the theme of industrial poverty alleviation was established. The entire film uses visual language to document Wang Chunhua's arrangement of poverty alleviation work in the Dayao Mountains of Guangxi, Wumeng Mountains of Yunnan, and Daliang Mountains of Sichuan within a single day, introducing

her story of helping these regions escape poverty through industrial poverty alleviation. The reporter also traveled to these locations for on-site filming, documenting how Wang Chunhua and her silk industry entered impoverished mountainous areas to help residents escape poverty. Despite her advanced age, Wang Chunhua remains undaunted by hardship, using her dedication to warm hearts and promote rebirth in poor areas. This theme is distinct and closely integrated with actual life. After the documentary aired, it generated strong social response and won the National Ninth Women's Theme Excellent Television Works Award.

3.2.1 Picture Production

Picture production is a crucial step in ensuring television documentary quality and presentation effects. Several points require attention during creation:

- (1) Ensure rationalization of program recording workflows, requiring standardized camera usage, clear picture content during shooting, improved picture accuracy, and guaranteed content vitality. As an important medium for information transmission, documentaries must shoulder certain missions, bringing visual effects to audiences and adding vitality to programs. External rhythm has sensory effects on visual and auditory elements of television documentaries, promoting regular changes in audience psychological emotions.
- (2) Commentary writing. Commentary must effectively elaborate the creative theme and content of television documentaries without fixed templates. It should coordinate with television shots—sometimes supplementing shots, sometimes refining themes. Content should be simple yet grand, explanatory, attractive, and have compelling commentary effects that enhance story resonance. When matching commentary, attention should also be paid to leaving blank spaces; when shots are sufficiently explanatory, commentary becomes superfluous.
- (3) Music as narrative participation in scoring. Music in television documentaries often appears in fragmented forms, such as opening and ending accompaniment, serving to open and conclude the narrative and set emotional tones for the entire documentary. When music plays, audiences will guess the general direction of the story according to the rhythm and feel the emotional tone of the documentary. During narration, music can grasp rhythm, highlight themes, and express emotions. Formally, scoring includes instrumental melodies and songs. Music sources come through two channels: selecting music segments from the internet or commissioning composers to write original music. Regardless of whether there are lyrics or which source is used, music serves to better express themes and emotions. It is important to note that music should not steal the show or make a preemptive impact.

Special attention is also required for post-processing of time-lapse photography

materials. Time-lapse photography is a popular shooting technique in recent years, with time-lapse footage suitable for showcasing scenes or reflecting time passage, a technique favored by many photographers. Time-lapse photography materials are composed of numerous photos to form dynamic images. When creating time-lapse photography, attention should be paid to adjusting basic parameters like color and exposure between images to be consistent. Software like LRTimelapse can achieve flicker removal processing, making light and shadow transitions gentle and smooth. If the shot material has significant shaking, special effects processing like the Warp Stabilizer in Premiere software can be used to achieve picture stabilization, ensuring a good viewing experience.

3.2.2 Post-Production

Post-production is a crucial creative focus that cannot be overlooked, serving as an effective method and means to enhance documentary quality. Several aspects require attention:

- (1) Scientific application of montage techniques. In program editing and post-production, expand the space and intensity of secondary creation, presenting content through richer and more diverse film and television language expressions. When necessary, use special effects to enrich shot connotations. Reflect story threads through visual elements and shot changes according to television documentary creation processes, optimizing creative methods.
- (2) Grasp the rhythm of television documentaries to guide audience emotional ups and downs. Apply technical effects and image processing in post-production to reflect program ideas and cultural content. Comprehensively use techniques like slow motion and speed ramping to highlight certain picture details with emphasis and focus, presenting more details to audiences. In shot assembly, incorporate directorial thinking to consciously guide audience visual focus, thereby triggering or guiding audience thinking directions and content.
- (3) Establish emotional tones through post-production color grading. Color is an extremely visually appealing element, making post-production color grading crucial for documentaries. During editing or even when planning documentaries, establish the overall tonal style according to content first. After editing completion, enter the post-production color grading process. Color grading should be divided into primary color correction and secondary color grading. Primary color correction mainly adjusts accurate white balance, exposure, and other basic parameters for all shots, while secondary color grading is stylized color grading—making stylized attempts and explorations on the basis of correct colors to find a color expression suitable for the documentary's theme content and spiritual essence.[2]

3.2.3 Strengthening Media Convergence to Enhance Brand Competitiveness

Nowadays, media convergence development has become an inevitable trend in the media industry. Relying on new media as a carrier for television documentaries expands promotional efforts. On one hand, television documentaries can be publicized through television stations and also played on online platforms to attract internet audiences. The technological advantages of new media are also reflected in the fact that online platforms are not constrained by time and space, allowing people to watch desired programs anytime and anywhere, with series documentaries available for on-demand viewing. Television media can establish interactive sections for netizens on online platforms, communicate and interact with netizens, and improve programs through online feedback to enhance program quality.

In summary, in the era of media convergence, new media is closer to audiences' actual lives, media communication methods are also changing, and television documentaries should adapt to the development trends of the times to enhance their aesthetic value. Innovate themes and production concepts, apply creative techniques to film picture production and post-production, select materials close to real life and innovate themes to trigger audience emotional resonance, and improve program ratings.

References

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