

On the Key Points for Mastering Production Details in TV Documentaries (Postprint)

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Abstract

Among the numerous television programs encompassing diverse genres, content, and forms of expression, the TV documentary represents a highly significant artistic genre and mode of presentation. Its professionalism and depth yield audiovisual experiences and psychological impacts for audiences that other television program formats cannot rival. The production of TV documentaries is a complex process, and the producer's ability to properly manage the details throughout this process—particularly in theme highlighting and character portrayal—directly determines the quality of the final work. Accordingly, this paper examines the detailed content of TV documentaries, first introducing the importance of attention to detail in the production process, then briefly analyzing currently overlooked detail-related issues in documentary production, and finally elaborating on the key points for mastering production details. This work serves as a reference for communication among relevant professionals.

Full Text

Preamble

A Brief Discussion on Key Points for Grasping Details in TV Documentary Production

Abstract: Among the numerous television programs with diverse genres, content, and forms of expression, TV documentaries represent an extremely important artistic genre and form. Their professionalism and depth create audiovisual experiences and psychological impact that other television program forms cannot match. Producing a TV documentary is a complex process, and whether producers can grasp the details throughout production—particularly in terms of theme highlighting and character portrayal—directly determines the quality of the documentary. Based on this, this paper begins with the detailed content of TV documentaries, first introducing the importance of grasping details in

the production process, then briefly analyzing the detail-related issues currently overlooked in TV documentary production, and finally elaborating on the key points for grasping details in TV documentary production. This paper serves as a reference for relevant professionals.

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With the vigorous development of the radio, television, and media industry, a wide variety of television programs have blossomed, creating fierce market competition.

2.1 Can Enrich TV Documentary Content

TV documentaries target different audiences based on their subject matter. For instance, documentaries on current political affairs attract older viewers and those engaged in news or political work; documentaries focusing on advanced technology interest scientific research personnel; and documentaries introducing local customs and cultures of certain places have broader audiences. Therefore, during the production process, producers must consider the psychological appeals of the target audience according to the subject matter, grasp the program details, enrich the content, and make the documentary's connotation more appealing to viewers [2]. In TV documentary production, regardless of the program's subject matter, format, or content, details are an indispensable component. Upon careful examination, any outstanding and widely acclaimed TV documentary reveals meticulous attention to detail during production. Only when details are fully presented can the ideological connotation that the documentary aims to express be perfectly delivered.

2.2 Can Three-Dimensionally Portray Character Personalities

After completing a television program, producers are most concerned about its ratings, and TV documentaries are no exception. If a documentary introduces characters through plain, straightforward narration, it cannot attract audiences, and its ratings will be unsatisfactory. To capture viewers' attention, documentaries must approach character portrayal from the details, making characters more substantial and their personalities more distinctive, thereby creating works that move people's hearts. Good details are not a burden for TV documentaries; rather, meticulous attention to detail can significantly enhance program effects and deepen audience impressions.

1. Current Stage Detail Issues Overlooked in TV Documentary Production

The production process of TV documentaries is complex, involving numerous technical fields such as scripting, filming, recording, and editing. Regardless of the subject matter, TV documentaries cannot neglect the grasp of details, whether the production length is long or short. Only by mastering every detail in the production process, polishing the quality of the work, and striving for excellence can producers create truly moving works. At the current stage, examining mainstream works in the TV documentary market reveals that a considerable portion contains various detail problems. Increasingly, TV documentaries rely excessively on scientific technology during production while neglecting the grasp of details, resulting in works with strong visual impact that cannot withstand deep scrutiny [1]. In TV documentary production, script creation must first pay attention to detail grasping; secondly, character portrayal during filming, as well as post-production music and narration, must all begin with details to polish the work. These are urgent deficiencies that need to be addressed in current TV documentary production.

2.3 Can Create a Good Atmosphere

Environmental rendering plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of TV documentaries. A good environmental atmosphere can increase the emotional richness of documentaries and enhance their infectiousness [3]. The launch of TV documentaries aims not only to achieve high ratings but also to unfold a three-dimensional picture for audiences from a certain perspective and reach thematic consensus with viewers. Therefore, during production, emphasizing detail grasping can create a good environmental atmosphere, highlight character emotions, and evoke emotional resonance among audiences.

2.4 Can Highlight Themes and Deepen Program Connotation

During TV documentary production, neglecting detail portrayal inevitably prevents works from fully expressing the connotations that the themes intend to convey. Many excellent and widely acclaimed TV documentaries, when studied in depth regarding their content and production techniques, must have touched people's hearts through careful deliberation of details [4]. Although some detail issues may not attract attention, their role in TV documentaries is enormous and profoundly significant for theme expression and connotation revelation. Grasping key details during TV documentary production can highlight program themes and deepen work connotation.

3.1 Must Have the Ability to Discover Details

In TV documentary production, producers must fully understand audience psychology and have a keen sense of what interests viewers—they must possess the ability to discover details. In TV documentaries, creators cannot focus only on form and rely on technological means; instead, they should truly polish program content from the details. By nature, most TV documentaries are somewhat dry and dull, making it difficult to compete with film and television dramas with twisted plots and rich content for audience attraction. For a documentary lasting several minutes or even hours, if producers lack sharp vision and the ability to discover detail issues, audiences will not have enough patience to watch the work, and the educational significance of the program will cease to exist [5]. During TV documentary production, producers must carefully discover detail issues in the program, seize points of audience interest to develop expression, and depict some wonderful details to stimulate audience interest.

3.2 Must Strengthen Cooperation Between Departments

The production process of TV documentaries is complex and lengthy, involving numerous contents and personnel. Producing a TV documentary is far from a one-person job; it requires coordinated cooperation among staff from various departments. Different people have different expertise. During TV documentary production, each staff member's functions must be clarified, and only when everyone works with heart can program details be enriched. Therefore, TV documentary producers must strengthen cooperation between departments, actively accept staff opinions and suggestions on program details, deeply depict program details, enhance work expressiveness, and create cultural masterpieces.

For example, CCTV's cultural exploration program *National Treasure* integrates documentary and variety show creative techniques, using culture as the core, variety show as the shell, and documentary as the temperament to create an entirely new expression. Based on resources from China's cultural treasure trove, the program sorts out and summarizes cultural artifacts, interpreting the stories and history behind them. During the production of this TV cultural documentary, precisely because of its relatively novel creative approach, conflicts between documentary and variety show formats and contradictions between television programs and cultural relics protection required seamless cooperation, coordination, and collaboration among program directors, cinematographers, screenwriters, actors, and cultural relics protection experts to better restore the emotional and cultural connotations that artifacts embodied in their historical periods. Without the tacit cooperation among different cast members and national cultural relics protection personnel, this television program would inevitably fail to gain audience recognition in its detail portrayal.

3.3 Must Enrich Forms of Detail Expression

With the rapid development of economy and technology, internet technology has played an important role in television program production. During TV documentary production, when depicting details, producers should broaden their thinking and flexibly apply various technical means and forms of expression to enrich detail presentation. There are many forms of expressing details. In character documentaries, when shaping characters, producers can add photos, videos, and historical events of the main characters to make them more substantial. In event documentaries, when analyzing a particular event, producers can trace the historical background of the event and intersperse it throughout the program through narration to enhance work expressiveness. In humanities documentaries, when introducing local customs and cultures of a place, producers can add captivating background music in post-production to stimulate audience interest [6]. As China's technical means for producing television programs have become mature, TV documentary production can also expand thinking, enrich program detail expression forms, more three-dimensionally present the themes and ideas that authors want to express, and strengthen audiences' deep impressions of programs.

For example, CCTV's food documentary *A Bite of China* demonstrates rich forms of detail portrayal. This TV documentary centers on Chinese people's pursuit of food and a better life, profoundly displays various aspects of life, and has successfully gained widespread audience affection. Through in-depth analysis of the program's content and filming techniques, the use of diverse program expression forms to depict details, specific characters, and captivating stories enhances program expressiveness. The narration undertakes narrative functions, supplementary and strengthening functions, structural connection functions, and lyrical expression and sublimation functions, infecting audiences through delicate text, combined with displays of various food images. Natural sounds during food cooking are cleverly integrated with post-production music, telling the profound story of Chinese food culture. First, *A Bite of China* is China's first large-scale food documentary filmed with high-definition equipment, positioned as a "high-end food documentary." During the filming of the first season's seven episodes, the production team spent thirteen months collecting materials, with footage covering seventy different cultural regions across China. Through rich camera expressiveness, the program brought audiences a visual feast, comprehensively displaying the Chinese culture contained in food. Second, the production team invested tremendous effort in narration writing, reading, and matching with images. The narration creation mostly adopted short sentence forms, facilitating audience memory and being catchy, easily evoking emotional resonance and making audiences feel as if they were personally experiencing the food and understanding the flavors of life in cooking. Additionally, the program's music is highly attractive and distinctive, with themes such as "Laboring Through Spring, Summer, and Autumn," "The Art of Water and Fire," "From the Tip of the Tongue to the Heart," and "The Ordi-

nary Working People.” Each small feature has the most appropriate background music, greatly enhancing the program’ s charm.

3.4 Must Be Based on Audience’ s Real Life

Art originates from life. During TV documentary production, one cannot depart from the soil of real life and must be based on audiences’ actual lives to avoid creating works that are too highbrow to be appreciated. When depicting details, TV documentaries should use real events and life as the creative foundation, avoiding fabrication and invention that deviates from life reality. Particularly in TV documentary narration production, the subtle connection between details and real life must be grasped. On one hand, narration is crucial for enhancing TV documentary effects during the process of presenting characters or events. Narration should be delivered in an approachable tone without excessively pursuing ornate diction—the closer to audiences’ real life, the more touching it becomes. On the other hand, narration should not be too lengthy and consume audience patience; it should be concise and succinct, interspersed and intertwined with documentary images to embellish and echo the visuals, achieving perfect harmony [7].

For example, the medical news documentary *The World of Medicine*, jointly produced by Shanghai Media Group and Shanghai Municipal Health Commission, takes hospitals as the filming origin, focusing on major choices faced by both doctors and patients when confronting illness and life-and-death tests, and presenting a real world of human society. This TV documentary series has received rave reviews because its content is so close to our lives—all people experience birth, aging, illness, and death. How to face illness calmly and maintain an optimistic mindset is a life question that every viewer before the television must deeply contemplate. The production team’ s original intention in filming this documentary was “to see people’ s hearts.” Unlike the common “miraculous recovery” propaganda in the current media market, *The World of Medicine* presents the cruelest other side of facts—people want to save lives, but lives are not always savable. Chief director Zhou Quan said: “Our filming approach is based on mutual trust. We present not only the bright and beautiful side but also the unbearable, helpless, angry, and even resentful aspects, because this is what reality is.” It is precisely because the production team completely based the documentary on people’ s real lives that they presented the most authentic state of human society. In the first episode, the narration was read by one of the program’ s main characters—a young patient—using the most simple yet childlike language. Set against program images and background music, it was full of love for and awe of life. Such genuine emotion most touches people’ s hearts. In the program, the production team’ s portrayal of characters is also profound. Bone tumor patients endure great pain during treatment, but they do not lose their thirst for life. They also take photos, record videos, and play games like normal people. Such detail images closest to our real life presented before our eyes allow us to appreciate the preciousness and beauty of life.

3.5 Must Master Coherence Between Details

Within the short several minutes or hours of a TV documentary, details of various forms and diverse contents appear. How producers grasp key details and balance the relationships between details is crucial for program quality. TV documentaries strongly emphasize overall logical coherence. Because they generally analyze issues from a particular perspective, their program themes are distinct, and various program parts are tightly connected. During the process of depicting details, attention must be paid to coherence between details to maintain program integrity. For example, BBS' s natural history series *Blue Planet* pays great attention to coherence between program details [8]. *Blue Planet* is the first TV documentary in television history to comprehensively explore the ocean world, from tropical to polar regions, from shallow coastal beaches to the dark deep sea. The production team presents the mysterious appearances of thousands of wonderful animals and plants, composing a magnificent ocean epic. The fundamental reason for the success of this TV documentary series is its skillful grasp of details in filming, post-production editing, narration, and music, achieving a delicate balance and connecting different details coherently to create this monumental work that has won unanimous audience praise. For example, in the first episode “One Ocean,” many marine life images were filmed. Although these shots were extremely rich in material, without editing and logical detail organization, the images presented to audiences would inevitably be chaotic, and the documentary' s aesthetic and educational value would cease to exist. Through skillful narration, the production team sorted out the logical relationships among the numerous images, explaining the body structures and living habits of the filmed marine organisms in simple terms. With appropriate background music rendering, they unveiled the unknown mysteries of the ocean for audiences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, grasping details is crucial in TV documentary production. Although details in TV documentary production may seem inconspicuous at first glance, their role and impact on program quality are profound, and detail issues cannot be ignored. When polishing works, producers must have sharp vision, emphasize detail grasping, focus on environmental and atmospheric rendering, and highlight character traits. Simultaneously, they should strengthen comprehensive application of details to enhance TV documentary infectiousness, deepen program themes, and reveal their connotations. Details determine success or failure. Therefore, during TV documentary production, attention must be paid to detail portrayal to endow works with vigorous vitality.

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

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