

Short Video: The Opportunity of Documentary Transformation

Fengyi Huang*

School of Communication, Soochow University, Suzhou 215325, Jiangsu Province, China

*Corresponding author: Fengyi Huang, 8207558@qq.com

Abstract: The era of omni media is arriving, due to the rise in popularity of short video platforms such as Tik Tok and Kwai. When audiences' interests are constantly changing, documentary production is bringing in a new possibility for reform. This article uses the documentary "At thirty, a man should be independent" as an example to discuss transition thinking and effective development methods in the new media culture, with the aim of contributing to the transformation of promotion channels and innovation of new era documentaries.

Keywords: Documentary; Short video; New Media; Tik Tok

Publication date: June 2021; **Online publication:** June 30, 2021

1. Introduction

Since 2018, new traffic platforms, especially Tik Tok, Kwai and Bili bili, have come a long way in terms of user scale and usage time. through ways of in-depth creation of fascinating content and experience in the users' circle, having their commercial value significantly improving. As of September 2020, the number of daily active users of Tik Tok in China exceeded 600 million, also this platform has the largest number of college students of more than 23 million college student users even before June 2020, according to the "Video Social Productivity Report" released by Ocean Engine. Therefore, in the new era, short videos have become the most important activity. As a result, they serve as not just a new medium for the general public to access information, but also as new sites for shaping national identity. New media platforms develop rapidly against the backdrop of a rapidly growing internet, having great advantages over traditional models and limiting the traditional media's living environment. Given this situation, the traditional media has turned to decline, documentary in particular, whereby with the continuous change of the audiences, the documentary transformation is imminent. The short video documentary "At thirty, A man should be independent" achieved excellent results through its integration and improvement on the Tik Tok platform, proving the feasibility of this transformation. Catering to market demands and raising audience expectations have become a major strategy for completing effective documentary transformation, with the video's lengthy content getting streamlined.

2. Reasons of Traditional TV Documentary Market Declining

The author conducted a research on traditional TV documentary based on comparative analysis and data analysis, and found that its loss of audiences, weakened information spreading effects and shrinking market share still remains out there. There are three main reasons for its decline and the following is an analysis of the specific reasons.

2.1. Changes in communication channels under the omni media environment

After the rise of the Internet and social media, established institutional barriers of traditional mass media, such as newspapers, radio, television, Internet, etc., have been weakened, and the clear socialized division of labor system in which professional media organizations, like newspaper offices, radio and television stations, news agencies and websites, duty performance have been completely disoriented. Instead, Omni medias' integrated application with text, audio, video, image and other media forms are coming ^[2]. Furthermore, the new media appearance not only gradually makes the physical appearance unimportant and spreads information without boundaries, but also provides audiences with more diverse experiences featuring interaction and sharing ^[3].

The short video platform created in this environment covers a wide range of communication channels. Regardless of the type of video, the most compelling feature is that its video length is short, which is perfectly in accordance with the appealing visual characteristics of the audiences who can watch small parts at any time. On the other hand, the viewers have to focus on spending longer time to watch the traditional TV documentaries at a fixed time. As traditional media was the major mean for people to obtain various information in the past, CCTV-9 became the main channel for the public to watch documentaries with the help of other satellite televisions, whereas its traditional properties also undermine its own development. For instance, the duration of each episode is at least half an hour and only broadcast at a fixed time. If wanted it can be played back, but if the audiences are eager to watch the latest episode with passion, their desires can only be satisfied at the next consistent time after a fixed period of waiting, with the audiences' sense of instant desire being greatly diminished. In addition, bloggers spend less time to expend on the production of new media, interesting short video, thus their content update frequency is faster.

At the same time, if the audiences want to master the comprehensive first-hand information appeal to them quickly, they just need to search on a variety of platforms such as short video platforms, Weibo, WeChat, etc., which is an easy and convenient way. Since all contents are made according to their own ideas, the broadcast method of traditional media adopted by CCTV-9 represents unilateral output and traditional linear transmission pattern. The TV station is unable to master the trend of public opinion and further adjust the theme of the next show in time according to the audiences' preference due to a lack of the instant feedback from society and audiences, which results in their loss of audiences and the shrinking of the market.

2.2. The audiences and their spiritual needs have changed over time.

According to the report of the Communist Party's 19th National Congress, the main contradiction in our society has been transformed into an acute imbalance between people's growing needs for a better life as well as uneven and inadequate development. This means that young people have higher spiritual needs, with increasing social pressure, whereby people are more willing to engage in entertaining, autonomous and selective activities apart on the spare time.

However, through observation and research, it is not difficult to find that TV documentaries have always used a rigorous and serious style. Although this is an indispensable part of the documentaries, it inevitably gives people a condescending feeling, which not only conflicts with the appealing visuals of the current audiences, but even will make the audiences' spirit tenser and increase their psychological burden. Thus, the rapid development of new media, has the precise direction of big data which has guided more young people to willing spend their time on short video platforms such as Tik Tok as a way to relax themselves.

According to statistics, the ratings of CCTV-9 basically increased with age and educational levels, which shows that its audience is mainly middle-aged elderly groups and high-level professionals but very

few young viewers. In this context, under the circumstance of the shift of audience groups, traditional news media have to face the challenge of the declining market.

2.3. Deep-rooted institutional barriers

The traditional media in China practically belongs to national institutions and are strictly controlled by government agencies. China Central Television is also known as ‘China’s news and public opinion institutions, as well as ideological and cultural battleground.’ Unlike traditional media, the Internet is viewed as a bottom-up, new culture movement, in which the market is the driving factor and the enterprise is the initiator. Therefore, short video documentaries on the internet will fit in well with market demand and will be closer to the hearts of audiences. However, traditional documentaries have not broken through the original fundamental model in terms of concepts and mechanisms, and their slow rate of innovation can’t keep up with the output of new media, resulting in the original market and the input-output ratio continuing to drop. This demonstrates the importance of media convergence ^[4].

3. Reasons for the Rise of Short Video Platforms like Tik Tok

According to the data report released by Tik Tok in January 2020, Tik Tok’s daily active users have reached 400 million, and the average time that Tik Tok users spend watching videos per day is 76 minutes. From these data, we can see that Tik Tok is a highly flexible, active platform with huge traffic and great development potential. Compared with traditional media, there are three major reasons for its vast market gain:

3.1. Tik Tok is very convenient and sustainable

Different from traditional TV media, watching short videos on the Tik Tok does not require too much technical content. The viewers can watch it anytime and anywhere just after registering with their mobile phones, which is not restricted by time and place. Meanwhile, because of its part-by-part feature, users can selectively watch various videos based on their own time and energy, and can even fast forward or swipe away without having to finish the whole video. Moreover, big data will also conduct independent analysis and calculations based on each audience’s likes and collections to push the targeted, partial video works to the suitable audience, thereby enhancing users’ addiction. In addition, Tik Tok integrates the characteristic of the sustainable development of Weibo, where likes are equivalent to collections to facilitate the next search and topic attributes are introduced, which not only facilitates the promotion of video creators, but also makes it easier to search for a certain topic when they want to know more about it. There is also a newly launched “series” function that gives short videos the character of a TV series, allowing the audience to unconsciously increase their usage time and further increase user addiction. Therefore, short video platforms such as Tik Tok have obvious advantages in mass communication.

3.2. New type of inverted pyramid propagation structure

The inverted pyramid structure is a structural form in which news facts are written in sequence according to the value of news. It ranks the facts in descending order of their importance or the audience’s concern, just like an inverted pyramid or an inverted triangle, hence its name. Similarly, we can extend it to the field of documentary, where during the push process of Tik Tok video, the sender of the video will use the most attractive sentence or the summary of this video as copywriting, so that the audience can clearly understand the video content at a glance and then choose to check it out or skip it directly. This integrated and improved inverted pyramid structure not only saves the audience’s time, but also arouses the audience’s interest in watching and mobilizes the audiences’ enthusiasm. For instance, the first part of the video named “*At thirty, A man should be independent*” released on December 1, 2019, whose copywriting is “*#At thirty, A man*

should be independent Documentary part one, how is the former chairman of the student council now? The first batch of 30-year-old post-90s,” got 1.114 million likes. The content of the video is clear at a glance while creating suspense and arousing audiences’ interests.

3.3. Use and gratification: disseminating audience self-expression and close-to-people interaction

According to D. McGuire’s summary of the different characteristics of viewers’ gratification after “using” TV, four basic types of “use and gratification theory” are summarized: psychological transformation needs, interpersonal relationship needs, self-confirmation needs and environment monitoring needs [5].

As far as Tik Tok is concerned, its massive short videos contain all aspects of content suitable for all age groups and are more entertaining than TV programs, which can help people release tension. The convenient and quick comment and likes function enhance the interaction, and the audiences can freely comment on the video content within the scope of rules, express their feelings, also have a subtle relationship with the video creators as well as the documentary protagonists, which is similar to acquaintances and friends. Moreover, the setting of the comment area and likes, on the one hand, motivates some viewers in the comment area to actively participate in the comments in order to get a higher number of likes, and on the other hand, it is to affirm the video creators and let them adjust the video content depending on the number of likes, and such interaction is conducive to achieving a virtuous circle.

Furthermore, the commentaries in the documentary have become fundamental opinions for leaders. Regardless of whether they are correct or not, the comment area will also evaluate the video content, and provide the audience with a reference frame for self-evaluation and on this basis, they can coordinate their own ideas and behaviors, further satisfying the self-confirmation of the audiences. Not to mention its content, the corresponding hot spots of the video enable the audiences to better obtain information directly or indirectly related to their own lives, thereby satisfying environmental monitoring.

4. Thinking and Enlightenment of “*At thirty, A man should be independent*”

“*At thirty, A man should be independent*” is a collection of documentaries released by the blogger called “Li Chengyuan Nearby” on Tik Tok’s short video platform on December 1, 2019. The program aims to locate significant or ordinary people from the university’s past, and to inspire people through a contrast of the past and present. While filming, the show is broadcast weekly and is still being updated. Li Chengyuan, who graduated from Capital Normal University’s School of Arts, is the host of Light Media and a talk show writer. Li Chengyuan’s successful transformation from the front to the back also reveals the self-actualization needs of the new generation of media professionals he represents. They also prioritize the requirements of present audiences and reflect the big era through small personalities, which serves as both an image of common people and an epitaph for the past [6].

Since the new media environment is becoming more diversified and the way of transmission is changing, the benign integration of “*At thirty, A man should be independent*” as a documentary and new media short video platform makes us see the feasibility of the transformation. The author summarizes the following thoughts and enlightenment from the above best practice:

4.1. Inheriting the spirit of traditional documentary

Although the average length of a single episode is only about one minute and 45 seconds, “*At thirty, A man should be independent*” still belongs to the documentary category, and we can classify it into the category of micro documentary. The connotation and extension of the spirit of the documentary are very high, and its core is the maintenance of real images and the pursuit of the value of “people,” which is the most important value of “*At thirty, A man should be independent*”- the true record of all life states.

Besides, the protagonist of “*At thirty, A man should be independent*” is to symbolize the people who

are usually seen around the audiences. The audiences can see themselves from them. Watching their videos is like listening to an old friend, which is conducive to the interweaving of personal destiny and stimulates the formation of an emotional community. For example, the video released on February 23, 2020: “#At thirty, A man should be independent, did your best friend disappear afterwards? Hearty chitchats in the reunion during the Spring Festival. Take good care of yourself and go out less recently,” by quoting past pictures and present chatting videos and other methods explain the increasingly distant relationship between friends, which effectively gives the audiences’ closer experience and makes the audiences to sigh the passage of time. Additionally, the netizens in the comment area said they were deeply touched.

As can be seen, media integration does not imply that all of traditional media’s advantages must be abandoned; rather, it means starting with the initial advantages of traditional media, exerting its impact, and then expanding into other markets and developing a new brand image.

4.2. Accept the new system

As far as reform and innovation are concerned, the transfer of communication channels also means that communicators must have some countermeasures. Through the comparison of ten years, “*At thirty, A man should be independent*” reflects the setbacks and fetters of young people in pursuit of their dreams. It describes the ups and downs of life and the current hot topic of “trying my best to be an ordinary person” with simple and straight language. For example, a former campus elder brother became a security guard after serving time in prison, a person who once ranked last in this class became a state-owned enterprise’s human resources specialist through continuous learning, and a gifted boy who went to the United States to study abroad abandoned everything and returned to China to create an animated film called “Jiang Ziye.” These brief episodes have condensed material, which not only caters to modern viewers’ viewing habits and the fragmented reading needs of mobile terminal groups in the new media period, but also greatly expands the influence and dissemination of documentaries.

Moreover, the creator adopts the way of broadcasting while shooting, which is conducive to follow the trending public opinion. For instance, the youngest nurse helping in Hubei Province during the epidemic, and the real life of the web celebrity socialite in WeChat circle of friends, all these ensure the immediacy of current events the maximization of communication effect also attracts the audiences with its short, exquisite and part-by-part content.

As a new media platform account, the intertextual effect of “*At thirty, A man should be independent*” has also been continuously strengthened. The intertextuality of online news narratives is embodied in the intertextuality generated by text, photos, animation, video, and other aspects of the same news, as well as intertextuality between text and text and text and background^[7]. As seen in the videos “What happened to the child who left home to seek his dreams?” released in episodes 12 and 16, both “The dark hour has passed before dawn” and “The dark hour has passed before dawn” are effectively about how adults persevere in the face of adversity after their dreams are shattered, despite the fact that the two pieces of content appear to be unrelated.

Tik Tok short videos have a life-like and personal tone, hence, “*At thirty, A man should be independent*” has also improved the previous production mode in terms of empathy and emotional mobilization—from a special group to the general public. For example, “*At thirty, A man should be independent*, a very hard-working student in the past #Ten billion TV shows plan# workplace @Tik Tok little assistant,” released on April 11, 2020, only narrates well-behaved female classmates, but it clearly reflects the stories of many people or ones around them, thereby evoking the emotion and warmth of the audiences’ hearts with small insights and narrowing the relationship between people through the “virtual communication” on the network platform.

From the video copy mentioned above, it can be seen that “*At thirty, A man should be independent*”

will bring the topic in every newly released video and @Tik Tok little assistant, which can further expand awareness to increase traffic and broaden the audiences. Meanwhile, its user addiction is further improved by labelling the episodes into a series.

5. Conclusion

According to Malesk's communication model, we can find that when the scene has changed, we need to act to achieve a sustainable development. Under the background of media integration, traditional TV documentaries are faced with not only challenges but also opportunities. Additionally, the successful transformation of "*At thirty, A man should be independent*" has provided a good model for other traditional medias. The digital transformation of television is not a simple physical fusion between old and new media, but a chemical fusion of mutual fusion and complement, common progress and development^[8]. In the final analysis, documentary is a subject of "recording" and take on more social responsibilities to stick to the purpose of "representing reality."

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Zhao M, 2020, Short Video Dissemination: A New Way to Build National Identity: Based on the Analysis of "CCTV News" Tik Tok Short Video. *News World*, (02): 80-84.
- [2] Zuo C, 2020, Talking about the Changes in the Role of Traditional News Producers on the Tik Tok Platform. *Audiovisual*, (12): 206-207.
- [3] Liu M, 2020, Innovative Exploration of Documentary in the Short Video Era: Taking "365 Stories of Chinese Dream" as an Example. *Youth Journalist*, (26): 89-90.
- [4] Meng Y, 2020, The Transformation and Development of Traditional Media and New Media. *Media Forum*, 3(23): 48-49.
- [5] Zhao Z, 2003, "Use and Satisfaction" under the Condition of Network Communication: A New View of Audience. *Contemporary Communication*, (01): 58-60.
- [6] Teng S, Liu W, Li W, 2020, The Subway Culture Communication Mode and Strategy Under the Vision of "Omnimedia + Scen": Based on the Analysis of Malesk Model. *China Editor*, (07): 19-23.
- [7] Peng L, 2017, News Narration and Text Characteristics in the New Media Era. *Editor's Friends*, (11): 57-60.
- [8] Luo X, 2020, The Dilemma and Countermeasures of TV Digital Transformation Under the Background of Media Integration. *Media Forum*, 3(23): 50-52.