



RESEARCH ARTICLE

IMPACT OF CGTN DOCUMENTARIES ON FOREIGNERS PERCEPTION OF CHINA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of CGTN documentary story telling technique on educated foreigners in China guided by the narrative theory. Foreign postgraduate students from 14 nations answer questions regarding the content packaging and presentation of CGTN and how it frames their perception of China. They have previously been exposed to western and local media content in their countries about China. The findings of this research indicate that although use of cultural properties and people's interviews appeal to the audiences emotions, there are other factors that contribute significantly to the foreigner's perception of China. The study also affirms documentary use, as a powerful perception change tool however, there is need for CGTN to find more ways to engage foreigners since a significant number prefer other channels.

INTRODUCTION

Focalization of a story is a key aspect in relaying messages aimed at influencing perception. The way in which an audiovisual story is structured for TV and online broadcasting is very important. The choice text, shots taken, VO, SFX and VFX play a crucial role and shaping the perception of the viewer. These salient factors affect the viewers reasoning and assigning meaning to what they see. "In analyzing filmic narrative, we need to rethink the established conventions of narrative. For example, the process of editing is crucial in constructing the narrative sequence of a film, whose individual shots are rarely filmed in sequence." (Fulton 2005, p97.). The western media commands a significant market share globally and has a style of presenting which sets the agenda in the global arena. The stories they broadcast carry a significant impact of a nation's image and reputation. The western media portrayal of PRC mostly focuses on the negative side. China is the world's second largest economy and leading in many key industries however, this is not the angle taken by the western media. China embarked on a global reach strategy using the media as one of the channels to present its stories in a different viewpoint. CGTN-9 is an English documentary channel in PRC that seeks to help foreigners to better understand the nation's history to the present, culture and endowment. CGTN programming comprises of various genres of documentaries. The content is geared towards educating foreigners about China from a development perspective.

Background Information: During PRC's economic reform phase in 1978 through to the 90s the nation received negative image representation by the western media. In 1990s government began working on creating a positive perception

overseas through the use of the media. The notion "peaceful rise" was recommended at the 16th Congress of the CCP in 2002 China. This sought to improve the nation's understanding by the use subtle aspects such as culture and moving away from the economic perspective. Various international media outlets have been established globally and online to disseminate this agenda. CGTN-9 is an International English Documentary TV channel in China that broadcasts simultaneously on various online and mobile platforms. It was launched by CCTV on December 2016 remodeled to keep up with the trends in media convergence and revised programming to help foreigners better understand China. It was formerly known as CCTV-9, which was established in 2000. According to a report by the China daily in April 2017, there are over 600,000 foreigners living in China. To improve the international population understanding of the nation, CGTN broadcasts in English since the other local channels broadcast in mandarin. The channel also broadcast simultaneously on online and mobile platforms to meet the audience needs since PRC is a highly technologically developed nation.

TV Content Control and Ethics: China TV channels are state owned. They raise their revenue from Advertisements however; those in foreign land receive government injection. The SAPPFT is an executive branch under the State Council of the People's Republic of China. It directly supervises government-owned organizations such as n CGTN, China Radio International, as well as other film and television studios and non-business organizations. Content aired on CGTN platforms must adhere to the laws of the land. Journalism ethics in the PRC are based on Karl Marx's morality code. The main focus is placed on serving the people. Content aired must

therefore support the Communist party principles and also help in shaping the correct agenda among the people.

CGTN China Storytelling Technique through Documentary: John Grierson coined the term documentary in 1926 in his article where he reviewed the film *Moana* by Robert Flaherty. In 1932 he wrote an article titled *First Principles of Documentary* where he argued that content “taken from the raw” can be more actual than one which is acted fiction. He further added that the “original” actor and “original” scene represent the modern world better than the fiction ones. Grierson believed that the filmmaker has obligation help the society through the film’s potential. CGTN China uses documentaries to immerse the viewers in a real feel of the nation’s history, present and culture. The structure of a documentary appeals more to the emotion. Long form documentaries take time to create because of the human immersion aspect. The filmmakers first interact and learn the subjects to give the viewer a real feel of the story. Neuroeconomist Paul Zak has established the impact of storytelling on the brain's chemistry, increasing levels of cortisol and oxytocin respectively making us more likely to respond to the situation.

Problem Statement: China is the world’s second largest economic superpower and continues to take the lead in key industries globally. With its great accomplishments, there is still some existing skepticism by other nations due to the western media representation. To counter this, China embarked on a going out policy that seeks to soften its image to the foreign publics using media as one of the tools. CGTN is China’s international TV channel in PRC with online and mobile presence that seeks to help foreigners best understand the nation. The western media holds a great deal global influence but CGTN has rolled out more bureaus to counter the negative publicity through documentaries that tell the Chinese story. Is CGTN winning perception of foreign publics in China? This study investigates the Impact of documentary story telling on the foreign publics in China.

Purpose Statement: The purpose of this study is to investigate the Impact of CGTN documentary story telling on the foreign publics perception of China. The study also looks into how the change of perception leads the viewer to embrace or agree with the content viewed.

Research Objective

1. To find out if CGTN film documentaries affect perception
2. To find out how CGTN documentaries affect perception
3. Find out the impact of CGTN film documentary story telling on foreign publics
4. Find out the how CGTN film documentaries content play a role in framing a nation’s image.

Research Questions

- ⌋ What is the link between CGTN documentary programming and foreigners perception about China?
- ⌋ Does CGTN content selection and arrangement affect the foreigners in China?

- ⌋ How does CGTN documentary appeal to the foreigners in China?
- ⌋ What is the impact of CGTN programs China’s image?

Significance of The Study: There is limited literature on documentary effects. This study contributes to the bank of information. It also serves provides information on how media content creators can use documentaries to shape perceptions. The way in which a story is organized plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions. China is an economic giant with projects of continued growth as innovations continue to spring from the nation. It is still faced by the problem of negative portrayal which maybe a hindrance in its global reach out. It is therefore important China tells its story to the world and counter the negative portrayal. Although China has established many media centers globally, it still faces competition from the well-established western media. China has devised a new story telling technique to reach to the audiences since the perception of the nation set in the global arena is very important in its cooperation and development in various sectors with other nations. It is therefore important to establish the impact of the existing Chinese media channel on the foreign publics

Limitations of The Study: This research has limitations. While this study provided significant and relevant findings, when evaluating the results, the reader should consider a number of limitations. Time constraint was a major setback.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction: This study chapter first explains the impact of documentaries story telling on the viewers’ perception through the narrative theory. The history and development of this field of study is also discussed and its application in filmmaking. The chapter also introduces the research questions and justifies them from studies done before and finally present the need for further research due to lack of literature that can be directly applied to solve the problem area.

Theoretical Framework: Narrative theory posits that humans participate as storytellers and as observers of stories. This theory further asserts that stories are more convincing than arguments. The narrative paradigm basically details how human beings are able to make sense of complex information through narratives. Narrative theory concept is used in the film industry by filmmakers to document the people’s daily life aspects such as culture, development or other aspects and story tell in way that the viewers easily understand and regard as reality. Narrative theory discovery dates back to early works of Aristotle who emphasized the importance of a story structure and alignment of segments in a beginning to end orderly manner. Prop (1958) advanced the idea by explaining that there are diverse structures are created for narrations in different genres. Chatman (1978) brings in a new perspective and argues that a story structure either gives pre-eminence to a certain event and ignores others. His argument posits that content creators intentionally arrange their stories with a projected goal. Fisher (1984) states human beings approach the social world through stories and make decisions or act within the narrative framework. According to him it is not only the audience are not only viewers but also play an important role in assigning meaning to the narratives. As cognitive scientists Antonio Damasio (1994, 1999) have explained, emotions and

feelings are play an important role in decision-making. Branigan (2013) argues that a film is arranged in a systematic manner that is meant to evoke emotions of the spectator with regards to a particular event. This means that documentary creators actualize their change on the audiences by creating messages with emotions appeal that will to the viewers which can be done through SFX, VFX texts, narrations or images.

Application in Documentaries: Fulton (2005) explains how film technical production effects influence the viewing audiences. She categorizes the effects in to six areas as discussed below.

Sound: Fulton describes sound as an important aspect of story telling helps to give continuity between two scenes or show a sudden change of location or mood. She expounds that sound tracks can be used to mark change in mood or location and a soothing orchestral instrumental is used to bring emotions.

Character: Any in a film is carefully selected to communicate a certain message. Their tone, attitude, dressing and the words they say are to convey specific message. Fulton expresses film characters as individualists who center all the attention only on them.

Focalisation: Focalization refers to the angle from which the narration is told. Through the dialogues, camera angles and the ambience, the story takes the intended perspective aimed at shaping the audiences view. The film makers accentuate focalization through visual techniques, set designs and camera placement.

Cohesion: In documentary, patching up different pieces aimed at communicating a certain idea creates logic. The way in which the pieces are arranged draws the audience into different places, times and events seamlessly. This immerses the viewer into the experience. *mise en sc`ene*, is one of the common techniques used as a story cohesive.

Editing: Editing is a crucial part of documentary shaping. This involves arranging the different scenes shot in different places and time into a logical sequence. The editor also selects the angle the story takes by filtering the content and using what they deem as important. The information the editor retains makes the story they further add effects to focalize the story.

Camera techniques: Camera shots convey meanings. The use of various shots unconsciously triggers a feeling in the mind of the viewer. Film makers often use this to saliently convey messages. A shaky shot in a scene for instance may tell the viewer that the subject is on the move or in a crisis. Like wise a low angle shot be used to suggest that the subject is superior to the other.

Research Gap: There are numerous studies illustrating the effect of narrative theories. The effect of the theory in the documentaries how it can be used to shape perception of a country's image has not been clearly illustrated. This study seeks to address this area and contribute to the development of narrative theory and its uses.

Conceptual Framework: Cohn (2013) explains that the sequential arrangement of a story has the ability to raise the audiences empathy. The Conceptual framework in this study

asserts that once a message is identified, the filmmakers focalize by use of salient techniques that appeal to emotions. The channel communicates the agenda aimed to change perception but the viewer cannot directly recognize.



Cognitive appeal model through Documentaries

CGTN documentaries are created to help foreigners and overseas audiences to get a real feel of the Chinese way of life. The selection of content, story-telling technique, subjects used, arrangement of shots and the effects added is primarily to help improve the image of China. Narrative theorists study how stories help get in touch with reality and also how people assign meanings to the descriptions.

RESEARCH METHODS

This segment gives an overview of how this study was carried out, detailing techniques used as well as reviewing the legitimacy and credibility of the processes. Palys, T. (2008). Purposive sampling is used as well a mix of other qualitative and quantitative techniques. Purposive sampling was applied as the feasibility and effectiveness of the research study was reliant upon the participation of a specific sampling group. Purposive sampling is described as the selection of respondents based on preselected criteria relevant to a particular research question (Bryman, 2004). According to Patton (2002), purposive sampling is used to obtain a sample that typifies the phenomenon under investigation and achieves maximum variance. The researcher selected 14 postgraduate students foreign students from different countries studying at Hebei University. The selected sample size is well aware of the CGTN since they reside in China. Subsequently structured questionnaires were issued to investigate what aspects of CGTN content programming appeals to their impression of China.

Primary Data: The reason for incorporating Qualitative interviews is that it brings in first-hand experiences and fresh information (H. Rubin & S. Rubin (1995, 1). Even if the interviewer wasn't physically present when an event took place, he or she can recreate those events using imagination when he or she hears an account of what happened years ago. If the interview is performed according to the guideline, the information can be authentically shared with public through various mediums.

Quality Controls: To ensure validity, the questionnaire will be interpreted according to the objectives of the study. The study will be ethically moderated through obtaining true information from sources and acknowledging them, references will be shown at the end of the study. The respondents' answers will have to be genuine without any bias.

Case Study: The set of questions was asked to find out how CGTN programming affects impression of China. This study also sought to find out what aspects of CGTN's programming influence perceptions. Nationalities sampled include; Afghanistan, Indonesia, Iran, Pakistan, Zambia, Fiji, Sudan, Russia, Georgia, Congo, Mongolia, Nigeria, Egypt and Vietnam. This group is selected because the age group is more likely to be keener on culture and what is happening around them. The Chinese government has is using the media to soften its image globally. CGTN is the most famous English TV channel in China. Most of the foreigners in China are keen to understand the nation but on the other hand they have pre-existing information from their nation of origin media. The Chinese government has dedicated the CGTN media platforms to educate the foreigners about the people's way of life, development, history among other issues through documentary programming. The documentaries are done taking a cultural and development story telling angle.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Findings & Analysis: This chapter aims to show the relationship between research questions and theoretical framework in presenting the study findings and discussing these findings. The results are presented as suited by the aims of research and the research questions. This study also notes the other factors that influence foreigners' perception of China. From this study, the television is still an effective way of shaping perception out. 64% of the foreigners at Hebei watch CGTN while 36% do not watch the channel. Out of overseas students who watch, 67% watch on their television sets while 3% watch on their computers. 22% watch daily, 11% daily 11% once in two weeks and 56% monthly. This indicates the viewership level is still low despite the access to internet, smart devices and TV sets.

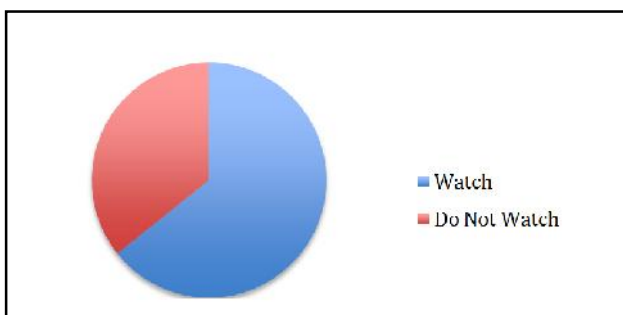


Figure 1. CGTN Viewership by Postgraduate foreigners at Hebei University

Establishing the link between CGTN documentary programming and foreigners perception about China: The study uses two questions to evaluate the connection between CGTN documentaries and foreigners perception. The first one asks why they watch the channel the second asks how CGTN documentaries appeal to them. 10% watch for lack of an

English alternative while 90% watch for edutainment purposes. The figure 2 below illustrates appealing factors.

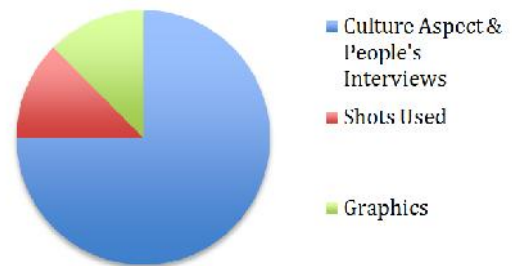


Figure 2. CGTN Documentaries appeal to foreigners

To find out if CGTN film documentaries affect perception: This research found out that the viewers are not aware of the salient effects of documentary on their perception. They are unaware of the different production techniques incorporated in story telling. What stands out to them is the cultural aspect and use of common people's interview gives them the notion of reality. They believe what they see because of the subjects without questioning the production as a filmmaker's tool of change. This therefore means that documentaries appeal to emotion and serve as a powerful tool of change. The combination of various production techniques successfully immerses the foreigner into China's life.

How CGTN film documentaries content play a role in framing a nation's image: To find out the impact of CGTN programs on China's image, the study asks the respondents about their impression of China before coming. All the respondents answer positively. The researcher further asks the kind of programming consumed in the foreigners country of origin to determine similarities in programming. Figure 3 below illustrates the findings.

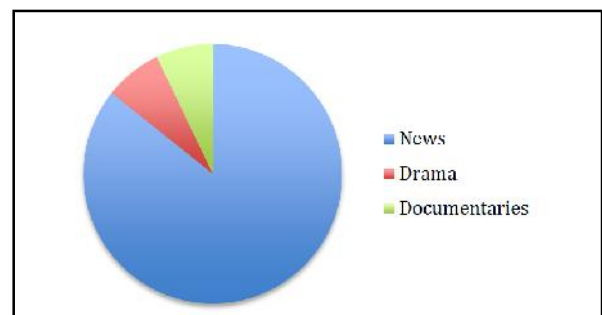


Figure 1. Program Format with Highest viewership from Foreigner's Country of origin

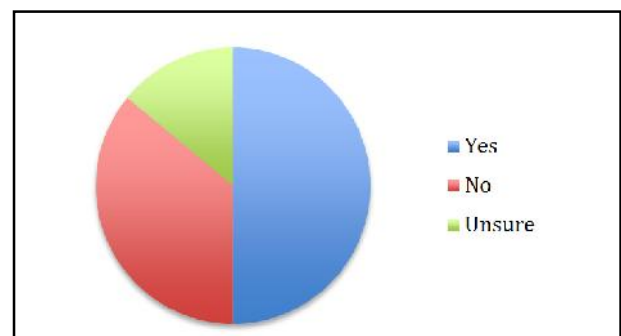


Figure 4. CGTN influence on Foreigners Knowledge of China

From this study, the viewers are not aware that the documentaries are used as a tool for change. The narrative structure appeals to the audience and makes them feel as if they are learning something new or being entertained as opposed to change of their beliefs. Figure 3 below indicates foreigners’ response on whether documentaries affect their perception of China after answering that the watch CGTN for edutainment purposes.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion: Through the use of documentaries on various media platforms and Channels, China is Successfully softening its image globally. The Chinese media policy further ensures that a positive image of the nation is portrayed. The findings of this research indicate that the documentary channel viewership is low amongst the foreigner. Some of the foreigners watch the channel due to lack of an English/French/Russian among other languages alternative within China. The study also shows that most of the foreigners occasionally watch the channel. This implies that the consume information from other sources. Despite the availability of Tv sets, smart gadgets and Internet access, overseas students barely access CGTN channels online. From the survey done, content widely viewed from their countries of origin is drama. This explains their apathy for the 24hour documentary channel. Although GGTN packages its content for foreign publics mainly, there is low viewership and allegiance. Documentary content aired has the ability to frame China’s image positively to foreigners at Hebei, however this has not been fully attained. There is need to entice the foreign publics to watch the station. This study found out that despite exposure to other foreign and western media negative narrative of China, the foreigners at Hebei University had a positive image of the nation. This means that there are other factors that affect perception other than documentary programming. Hanban institutes, social media platforms, CCTV outlets and testimonials are among factors that continue to expand China’s positive impression.

Conclusion

Documentary as a medium of change has proven successful. In China, drawing from the model of Hebei Students, this strategy is not effective. Bring the only English channel in China, foreigner have expectations that the channels informs them on current affairs as well as entertaining them through a variety of programs. Lack of this has led to desertion of the channel leaving it with little effect on the intended audiences. CGTN should reevaluate its audience needs and restructure for effective perception change. CGTN should also collaborate with local channels in various nations to improve China’s image that has been dented by the western media. A participatory approach in broadcasting wins audience loyalty and has a larger impact.

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Appedix 1 Research Questionnaire

Questionnaire

Documentaries and Cognitive Appeal

CGTN (China Global Television Network)

Please Tick (✓ where Appropriate

Gender: M F Nationality:.....

- 1.Do you watch CGTN?
. Yes No
- 2.On which broadcasting platform?
.TV .Computer .Mobile
- 3.How often do you watch CGTN?
 4.
Daily Weekly Once in 2weeks Monthly
- 5.Why do you watch CGTN?
 6.

Education Entertainment Information Lack of an English Channel alternative

7.What Story telling aspects compels you to watch the documentaries?

Culture Common People’s interviews Shots used Graphics and Sound effects

Is the TV programing in your country same as CGTN?

Yes No

8.What are the differences?

Story Telling angle Types of Programs Broadcasting platforms5

9.Which program has the largest viewership in your country?

News Drama Documentaries Commentaries

10.Which is the most influential media house in your country?

CGTN BBC CNN Local stations

online TV1

11.What was your perception of China before coming

Positive Negative

12.Does CGTN influence your knowledge of China? If yes, How

Yes No

.....
.....
