

"The Medium is the Message": Exploring the Influential Role of Slow Variety Shows

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Abstract: "The Medium is the Message", first proposed by Marshall McLuhan, as another theory in communication science with an extraordinary vision, provides a new perspective for understanding the impact of slow variety shows on the emotional role of audiences in research. In recent years, slow variety shows such as "Welcome Back To Sound" and "Life to Live" have spurred on and won wide attention from audiences. In this paper, we will take the second season of "Welcome Back To Sound" as an example and analyse the influence of slow variety shows on audiences' emotions from the perspective of "The Medium is the Message". Specifically, it takes sound as the entrance, "massaging" the audience's sensory system from visual presentation, discourse and aesthetic performance, thus causing emotional resonance and reawakening the audience's aspiration and pursuit of a better life. It is worth noting that while enjoying the "media massage" of slow variety shows, we also need to be wary of the excessive consumption of audience emotions by commercial capital and new media.

1. Introduction

Modern society is an "accelerated" society, and people's life is getting faster and faster. When facing the pressure of study and work, they need to constantly adjust their pace to follow the development of the times. However, when individuals are unable to adapt to the accelerated society, negative emotions such as anxiety and panic will grow in response. On the other hand, in order to adapt to the social trend and improve the ratings, the variety channels mostly focus on the pursuit of entertainment and other fast programs, while ignoring the psychological needs of some audiences who do not adapt to the "accelerated" society. Fortunately, in recent years, a large number of slow variety shows such as "Life to Live", "Hello Life" and "Welcome Back To Sound" have started to flood into the audience's vision, alleviating the pressure and sense of anxiety brought by the previous fast variety shows to the audience. Its appearance meets the emotional needs of the audience, and has become an important way to relieve its negative emotions and comfort the tired mind.

The second season of "Welcome Back To Sound" features a live radio broadcast with guests as the main line, which brings spiritual companionship to audiences by colliding with them in equal dialogue. It is very popular among audiences, ranking first in the comprehensive index of online variety shows on the first day of its premiere, and is often listed in the hot search lists of Weibo and Zhihu since its launch; its total cumulative audience ship on all platforms exceeds 600 million, winning the crown and far surpassing the second place. Therefore, this paper will take the second season

of "Welcome Back To Sound" as the research object to explore whether slow variety shows can truly massage audiences' emotions and soothe them, and how they actually "massage" audiences, so as to provide some thoughts for the subsequent development of slow variety shows.

2. Media massage and slow variety show

The term "The Medium is the Message" was first coined by Marshall McLuhan in his book "The Medium is the Message". The influence of the media involves all aspects of the state, society, and life in different dimensions, and has far-reaching effects and significant changes on them. According to McLuhan[1], the media provides us with a variety of content and information, just like a masseuse massaging our muscles. Scholars have since made similar points, such as Baran and others who have stated that "the new media form massages our experience of ourselves and society[2], and this influence is ultimately more important than the content of the particular message it conveys"; and Norman D.[3], who argues that the Internet has changed the human medium by "massaging" approach to altering the human central nervous system. All of the above arguments provide ample evidence that the medium affects audiences on a physical and mental emotional level[4], and causes changes in their perceptions. The importance of the medium in delivering a message is not limited by the specific content of the communication, but more meaningfully by its role in influencing the consciousness

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and cognitive level of the audience. This means that the audience uses the medium as if they were experiencing a massage service from the medium, i.e., they are immersed in an illusory sense of satisfaction or imaginary wellbeing.

In addition, McLuhan's theoretical view that "the medium is the massage" is beyond the gaze of the times and the significance of the medium, and in today's booming era of slow variety shows, it is presented in the best possible way, providing a new perspective for interpreting the influence of slow variety shows on audience emotions. Unlike previous competitive variety shows, which were full of speed and tension, slow variety shows focus on the audience's inner needs, often focusing on topics such as people's livelihood and culture, and using them to develop emotional content with thoughtful guidance. It pays more attention to the real needs of contemporary people, i.e. spiritual healing and emotional comfort, and generally uses documentary means to reproduce the real appearance of the guests' trivial life and capture the delicate and rich emotional changes in the guests' reality, so that the audience can put themselves into the role of the program and have emotional resonance. This has a high suitability with the mechanism of "The Medium is the Massage".

3. "The medium is the massage": the influence of the second season of "Welcome Back to Sound"

Unlike the warm tone of the first season, the second season of "Welcome Back To Sound" focuses more on "discovering" and "sharing" the beauty of life. In the current social environment, which is surrounded by such funeral culture as "bad" and "lying flat", the program team is brave enough to transcend the world, refusing to follow the trend, but based on the real life, looking for happy emotions in the complicated human condition, linking one warm story together. The show is based on the reality of life, looking for happy emotions among the complexities of human life, linking one warm story together to form a healing soft light, giving the audience spiritual comfort and making them enjoy the pleasant time in life.

In fact, the entertainment experience given to audiences by slow variety shows belongs to emotional experience. Scholar Jonathan Turner has proposed that emotional experience is mainly divided into three levels, namely, physical, cognitive and cultural. On this basis, scholars such as Luo K.J. and Zeng Y.G. [5] have jointly pointed out that the role of media massage is mainly realized through visual, discourse and aesthetics, and all information such as images, sounds, words and their combined forms are freely spread on the Internet and deeply integrated into people's daily life. Based on the above analysis [6], the following will analyse the emotional influence role of the second season of "Welcome Back To Sound" on the audience from three levels: visual massage, discourse massage and aesthetic massage, respectively.

3.1. Visual massage: immersive sensory experience

French thinker Debo pointed out that the visual age has arrived, and "vision with its priority and supremacy partially replaces the function of the tactile senses as the main experience of mass cognition of the world". In contemporary society [7], the proportion of visual culture in the mainstream media is gradually increasing, and slow variety shows, with their distinctive visual symbolic characteristics, occupy a precious place in the new cultural era. And by building a visual feast dominated by images and videos, it brings audiences an immersive sensory experience.

3.1.1. scene setting, to achieve "cinematic expression"

The radio station is located in a villa near the lake, with a beautiful geographical environment, and in order to create a warm and comfortable living environment, its overall warm tone home design, and two lovely cats as companions, lush greenery dotted in between, so that the audience deeply feel the comfort and warmth of the scene conveyed. In order for the guests to truly experience the daily work of the radio station, the radio station as a whole is divided into two independent spaces with different functions, namely the working area and the living area, in order to create a sense of ritual of commuting to and from work. First of all, the program team "frontloaded" the behind-the-scenes work of the radio station, so that listeners could better understand the whole process of radio production and feel the charm brought by radio. In addition, the program team transformed the living area into a leisure place, recording the various interactions and stories of the guests in the living area, presenting the audience with the warm details of the guests' lives, so that they can put themselves into the program, thus fulfilling the purpose of leading the audience to follow the guests and feel the good life together.

On the other hand, the program team made elaborate designs for lighting adaptation and colour matching to achieve the "cinematic expression" effect of the slow variety show. The program as a whole is mainly in warm colours, and with comfortable home design, visually presenting a quiet and warm atmosphere. For example, when receiving letters from the audience in the first phase, the program team cleverly chose a hot air balloon as the transport carrier. When the hot air balloon carrying letters from afar slowly floated and gradually landed in front of the members of the station, a wonderful atmosphere of the film picture and real life convergence was created, and under the backdrop of warm lighting, guests and audiences will not help but be immersed in it, deeply moved by the beautiful scene in front of them.

3.1.2. *Formatting author names and author affiliations*

Slow variety shows take "slow" as the core idea, advocating a slow-paced lifestyle and seeking the simplest wisdom of life and the beauty of nature. This also means that the production team needs to put more thought into the production process, producing higher quality episodes and more innovative forms of expression, thereby increasing the program's attention and ratings. This means that the postproduction of slow variety shows will use as many ways as possible to satisfy the audience's need for sensory stimulation, such as beautiful air settings, fancy special effects and animation. These elaborate audio-visual texts create a healing aesthetic for the audience, making them feel the concept of "slow life", which is exactly the idea that the program team wants to convey.

In the second season of "Welcome Back To Sound", many beautiful empty shots are skilfully interspersed, such as the panoramic view of the broadcasting station, its surroundings, the noisy and bustling night scene of the city, etc. These can not only reflect the passage of time, but also achieve the function of leaving white space and naturally changing scenes. In addition, the use of empty shots in the broadcast segment can better complement the aural singularity and increase the interest, and to a certain extent, slow down the tight editing pace of the program. On the other hand, the program also cleverly uses special effects such as punctuation and micro animation to bridge the emotional communication with the audience and achieve the effect of resonating with their emotions. In the recording of the program, the use of punctuation marks is more noteworthy, as they are visually flattened, three-dimensional, and tilted 20° in structure, giving the audience a mood as if they were listening to someone telling a story. What's more, after these words and symbols are "anthropomorphized", such as the blinking period and the running comma, the emotions they contain can be easily perceived by the audience, thus enabling them to have a clearer emotional experience. It is worth noting that the sketches in the program become the "lubricant" that connects the audience's emotions through the reorganization and secondary creation of partial and small objects, which adds more fun to the interactive scenes of the program. For example, when He G., the station manager of the radio station, goes out to greet the guests, he waves a pair of cute little wings behind his back, so that the audience can deeply feel his hospitality and enthusiasm, in order to unknowingly infect the audience's emotions.

As McLuhan said, "the medium is an extension of the person", the vivid visual images enable the audience to extend their sensory experience and follow the program's picture to appreciate the "human atmosphere" and beautiful ideas it conveys. With the "visual massage" of slow variety shows, audiences' negative emotions such as anxiety and depression caused by fastpacked life or tedious work are better relieved.

3.2. **Discourse message: storytelling resonates**

As a successful slow variety show, the second season of "Welcome Back To Sound" not only focuses on visual presentation and emphasizes "visual massage", but also attaches great importance to enriching the video content by using the power of narrative discourse and actively conveying optimistic values in storytelling. Walter Fisher said, "Everyone is a storyteller and a story listener, and the whole world we live in is actually made up of a series of 'stories'" [8]. The second season of "Welcome Back To Sound" adopts the narrative format of "celebrity reality show and live radio", and uses live radio as the main line of assignment, listening to every ordinary person's story in the form of telephone connection, and tasting the sorrows and sweetness of life together with the audience.

3.2.1. *Natural order is the main, tandem story time*

The development of storyline is often carried out in a certain order, and time or space change will affect the presentation of narrative content. The chronological order is the most obvious development order that the audience has the most contact with and can truly experience in their daily lives, such as sunrise and sunset, moonrise and moonset, spring and autumn, and other natural phenomena. Therefore, in order to enhance the audience's experience of the program's daily life, the second season of "Welcome Back To Sound" chooses to follow the natural chronological order in the overall narrative, and adopts the way of narrative to link the stories together. There is almost no artificial conflict and no fixed story line in the program, but rather large, large paragraphs of footage to record the daily lives and work of the four hosts and guests. On the basis of this, postediting and special effects are used to condense the day's content into a prescribed length program and present it in chronological order before the audience's eyes. When watching the program, audiences watch the program in chronological order, naturally bringing themselves into the program characters, experiencing the changes in the plot of the story together, feeling the emotional changes in the daily life of the program characters to achieve better synchronization with their emotions, and then enjoy a more complete emotional experience.

3.2.2. *storytelling narrative, using the voice to focus on social conditions*

Stories can move people's hearts because of their realistic and vivid contents, which can arouse readers' emotional resonance and rich associations. The second season of "Welcome Back To Sound" uses positive emotional orientation and positive values to stitch together people and objects scattered all over the world into a unified whole, presenting emotional tension to the audience. The show uses sound to describe stories and focus on social situations, while the letter reading segment and live radio broadcast provide a platform to

communicate with listeners, where they can talk about their troubles, seek advice and share the goodness. Through the interactive form of equal communication between guests and listeners, it gives listeners a unique sense of companionship in order to achieve the purpose of spiritual guidance. The topics of each broadcast come from millions of ordinary people, involving all aspects of work, study and life, such as a medical student who goes to the university hospital for treatment of haemorrhoids and is surrounded by his brothers and sisters; a workplace person who is overwhelmed by the fact that he is leading an employee older than himself for the first time.....

The second season of "Welcome Back To Sound" focuses on the ordinary life of every ordinary person, completing the storytelling in the narrative text and using stories to move people's hearts. Although these stories are short and lack of dramatic conflicts, they are all microcosms of social reality and are closely related to everyone's daily activities, making them easy for audiences to empathize with. Whether reading a fan mail or answering a call from an audience, the Radio Station guests listen carefully, think carefully, and then give sincere advice or practical suggestions to the fan or audience on the other end of the phone, encouraging them to face problems and resolve conflicts with a positive attitude. Specifically, in the face of the real life problems raised by the audience, the guests offered their advice and attitudes based on their own experiences and life experiences; in the face of the heart-warming stories shared by the audience, the guests turned into listeners or empathizers, immersing themselves in the kindness and warmth of the strangers in the stories together with them, and sincerely expecting that this goodness will be passed on. The audience gradually dissolves their confusion and anxiety in the company of their voices, and is cured by the guests' multidimensional interpretation and encouragement.

3.3. Aesthetic massage: a closer look at "the life you want to live"

Aesthetics is a subjective psychological activity, a process of appreciation of objects formed by people relying on the background of their own times, life experiences and other factors. Slow variety shows profoundly reflect people's aspirations for poetry and distant places, and are also a form of discovery and expression of everyday aesthetics and nostalgic aesthetics in modern society [9]. At the same time, it brings out the affluent emotions of modern life and satisfies people's beautiful desire to rebuild their spiritual world.

3.3.1. Experience the aesthetics of daily life and feel the fireworks

Every scene in daily life can be aestheticized, and aesthetic experiences and expressions can be seen everywhere. In the context of "everything is consumed", everyday life is often packaged commercially and

presented in a beautiful way, i.e. aesthetics has penetrated into every bit of daily life. The second season of "Welcome Back To Sound" is a typical example of transforming daily life into art. By focusing on the guests' daily lives, such as cooking, playing games, and working, the program tries to present the real beauty of life and give audiences a real sense of reality, so that they can have a psychological experience of the "desired life". The four resident guests in the program are friends for many years and get along naturally with each other, and there are also flying guests in each episode to help, so the guests form a comfortable atmosphere of "acquaintance social" in the process of interaction. A cup of hot hand ground coffee, two cute cats accompanying, the guests either sitting around the dining table chatting, or playing various games together, this scene of warmth presented in front of the audience, so that they feel a touch of companionship, a warmth in the thick smoke and fire. On the other hand, the audiences pay attention to and peep into the daily lives of the guests, and follow the ups and downs of their emotions as their situations change, such as the joy when old friends reunite, the happiness when playing games together, and the nervousness and apprehension when recording the broadcast. In the process of watching, the audience can communicate with the guests emotionally, travel back and forth between reality and virtual space, form a sensual perception of the aesthetics of daily life in the fusion of images, and search for peace and tranquillity in the thick smoke and fire.

3.3.2. Cleverly use nostalgic aesthetic strategies to awaken collective memory

Nostalgia is often considered an emotional experience that effectively enhances self-positivity, rediscovers a sense of belonging and becomes more attuned to the present by implicating certain things in real life with recalled scenes. According to Zhao J.R. [10], "nostalgia should be supplemented with the help of imagination, and it is aesthetic in nature." The appearance of artifacts and audio-visuals labelled with the times in slow variety shows can help people awaken long blurred memories, help audiences regain the fragments of memories from their growth process and find a sense of belonging through retrospection and re-enactment.

The second season of "Welcome Back To Sound" follows the trend of the times and perfectly integrates radio with new media technology, highlighting the unique value played by radio voices in terms of companionship and scene setting. In the program, nostalgic elements such as radio and letters are covered to reexperience the beauty of the early communication medium. In the case of radio, for example, the program team devoted itself to creating a professional radio station and showed in detail the entire radio process from reciting radio words, adapting equipment to answering phones, which fully met the aesthetic expectations of older audiences for radio nostalgia and evoked the audience's collective memory of the traditional radio era. In contrast, the "utopian" radio station has become a

spiritual repository for the audience, where they listen to the world, learn the wisdom of life, and reshape their broken self-image that has been dissolved by time and cut off by reality. When audiences listen to the radio, what they expect is not only the program itself, but also the nostalgic times in the depths of their memories, and they will be triggered by different life insights. "Nostalgia" is not only recalling the good old days, but also adding a "fan filter" to the former life, and relieving the anxiety of reality in the imaginative picture.

4. Reflection on the role of "media massage" in slow variety shows

Slow variety shows precisely grasp the pain points of audience's emotional needs, guiding people to slow down their pace, relieve their lives and find inner peace and tranquillity in an entertaining form. The second season of "Welcome Back To Sound", for example, has won widespread attention because it has created a healing "landscape world" and achieved the effect of media massage, not only bringing audiences a rich sensory experience, but also helping them to suppress the growth of negative emotions and provide spiritual solace in the slow paced storytelling. The program takes sound as the entrance, "massages" the audience's sensory system from different levels such as visual presentation, discourse strategy and aesthetic expression, enhances the audience's emotional experience, and at the same time triggers the audience to rethink and explore the concept of life and emotional relationship, reawakening their aspiration for a better life.

But there are two sides to everything. While we enjoy the "media massage" of slow variety shows, we also need to be wary of the excessive consumption of audience emotions by commercial capital and new media. Baudrillard once suggested that in today's consumerism, people focus on the "symbolic value" of things, and the concept of consumption has changed from focusing on goods to focusing on the self, focusing on their own psychological needs and emotional satisfaction. Therefore, in the context of consumerism, the reason why slow variety shows stand out among many variety shows is that they cater to modern people's emotional needs and consumption shift, and achieve "alternative satisfaction" for the audience. People often find it difficult to reach "poetry and distant places" due to various realistic factors, but slow variety shows create imaginary scenes for audiences through elaborate plots and a series of media symbolic designs, and provide audiences with "media massage" services, making them mentally enjoyable. However, the "utopian" life created by the program is after all a virtual appearance, but in essence, it is still a media content to gain the audience's attention and profit, which is the consumption of the audience's emotion. Driven by the market environment, in order to pursue higher ratings, slow variety shows are prone to symbolization, vulgarization, homogenization and other undesirable tendencies, which excessively consume the audience's emotions and are not conducive

to the benign and lasting development of slow variety shows.

5. Conclusion

In modern society, the number of people who use media content to obtain emotional satisfaction is increasing, and slow variety shows, as the mass media with the widest audience and the closest to life, have a profound influence on the values and consumption concepts they convey. Therefore, slow variety shows should be based on realistic issues, pay attention to the emotional needs of audiences, take up their media responsibilities with a positive attitude, achieve correct guidance of public opinion, and produce high level programs with profound values and cultural significance to meet the emotional needs of audiences, so that variety shows can move from "entertainment to death" to "entertainment to cure".

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