THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DOCUMENTARY AND FICTION FILMS

October 2023

Some of the earliest films created before the 1900s were known as "actuality films" because they filmed small clips of genuine "actual" happenings, such as a boat coming up to a pier or employees leaving a workplace. So, in basic terms, the early films were documentaries, sometimes known as newsreels. Since the 1960s, big movies based on science fiction have been successful in attracting a huge audience. Science fiction films first emerged in the silent cinema period. The first attempts were short films of 1 to 2 minutes in length, filmed in black and white but occasionally with color tinting. These had a technical theme and were frequently intended to be amusing.

The film Nanook of the North, directed by American Robert Flaherty (1922), is regarded as the first "original" documentary and follows a genuine Eskimo family. John Grierson, a Scottish-born filmmaker, used the term "documentary" for the first time in 1926 to refer to a non-fiction movie. Cinéma Vérité and Direct Cinema (the 1950s–1970s): improved filmmaking techniques arose to record more "spontaneous" occurrences as a result of improved technology and lighter camera equipment (Fuller et al 2023). 1960s–1990s: The importance of television as a platform for documentary filmmaking grows, with a focus on journalistic and instructional content (e.g., Ken Burns' Civil War series, 1990). With the aid of hits like Fahrenheit 911, SuperSize Me, and An Inconvenient Truth, documentaries are now enjoying a surge in appeal.

A Trip to the Moon, a 1902 film by Georges Méliès, is arguably the most well-known of the early fictitious films. Film genres like comedy or Western have been developed and are still being introduced as a method to further categorize narrative films since they have advanced so much since their inception. Among other cinematic aspects, lighting and camera movement have grown in significance in these movies. The screenplays for tales go into great depth to retain a feeling of reality; these films rarely stray from the preset behaviors and plot lines of the traditional form of screenplay composition. Actors must convey conversation and movement convincingly to convince the viewer that the movie is a true story.

The most obvious contrast between the two is a documentary is a film or video that examines a topic, event or person using facts, whereas a fiction film uses fictitious plots, locations, and actors. The narrative films are another name for fiction films.

According to Grin, 2022, the objective of a documentary film is well-defined and distinct from the objective of a fiction film. While the latter's primary goal is to delight, the Oxford English Dictionary notes specifically that documentaries are designed to "record reality, usually for the benefit of instruction, learning, or preserving the public's historical record."

Below is a comparison of some of the distinguishing characteristics between documentaries and fiction films

Subject matter- Documentary films strive to show true events, people, locations, and issues in a non-fictional and factual way, frequently employing interviews, archive videos, and real-life footage to communicate information. Meanwhile, writers, directors, and actors create fictional films by inventing characters, events, and settings. However, fictional films may be inspired by real-life incidents or ideas.

Creative liberties -Documentaries aim for accuracy and impartiality, but a few might continue to incorporate editing, footage selection, as well as prejudice in presentation, which can affect the audience's perception, unlike fiction films, which are explicitly designed for artistic expression and take creative liberties for the sake of the storytelling, which can include dramatic exaggeration, special effects, and fictional elements.

Production techniques- Real places, interviews, and candid films are frequently used in documentaries. Reenactments may be used sparingly for demonstrative purposes, but Fiction Films employ staged scenes, written dialogue, actors, and controlled locations to create the intended fictitious world.

Narrative and Non-Narrative - Documentaries sometimes use a non-narrative or semi-narrative style, with the tale unfolding through real-life occurrences, interviews, or observational videos. The filmmaker has to record and convey reality. In fiction films, the narrative is constructed using characters, plot arcs, and storytelling strategies. The written tale might be wholly fictitious or based on true events with artistic embellishments.

Audience expectations - Documentaries are expected to inform, educate, or give a new viewpoint on current events. They frequently engage audiences on an academic and factual level, whereas fiction films strive to entertain, fascinate, and emotionally engage viewers via plot, character development, and artistic features.

Types – Documentaries are subdivided into these main types expository documentaries, poetic-style documentaries, observational documentaries, participatory documentaries, reflexive documentaries, and performative documentaries (Grin,2022) while fiction films are divided into the following genres Action, horror, science fiction, thriller, adventure, film noir, mystery, action/adventure, drama, space opera, chick flick, dark fantasy, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction, blade runner, urban fantasy, psychological thriller, action thriller, high fantasy, historical drama, sword and sorcery and conspiracy fiction

Purpose/Point of view/approach- Documentaries document key social and cultural occurrences to educate us about these individuals, events, places, institutions, and issues. Documentary filmmakers hope to deepen our awareness of, interest in, and sympathy for subjects by doing so. They may believe that by providing us with informal education, they would be able to help us live our lives more fully and wisely. People can gain cultural insight into what society could be and how it is currently through fiction. The primary goal of fiction is to amuse and inspire everyone. Fiction transports us to fantastical realms and exposes us to characters that grow, change, and evolve. It allows us to see aspects of people's lives that we wouldn't have been able to otherwise witness

Budget - According to estimates from the film industry, the average budget per completed minute of commercially filmed documentary ranges from $1,500 to $4,500. However, depending on the intricacy of the production process and post-production, this might vary greatly. (Gayirah, 2022). That brings it to $180,000 for a 60-minute documentary. Meanwhile, a low-budget fiction picture can cost around $30 million, but a high-budget movie with cutting-edge visual effects can cost millions of dollars. Hollywood films often have costs ranging from $100 million to $200 million, implying that they are more sophisticated and time-consuming than other films (Matt, 2022). Documentaries have a lower budget than fiction films.

Actions and Dialogues - Documentaries may contain real-life footage while scripted language and actions are always included in fiction films ( Hasa, 2016).

Maclean 2021, the distinction between documentaries and feature films is a misunderstanding. He says that documentaries for example Lumiere's First Picture Shows and The Man with a Movie Camera despite having been mainly not staged and without distinct plots, tell tales and portray passion in the same way as a fiction film would. The editing alone in Man With the Movie Camera is outstanding, especially considering that it was 1929, and it is one of the earliest "documentaries" I have seen that is an experimental art film. Meanwhile, Lumiere's debut film, more than anything else, demonstrates experimentation with color manipulation, but it also blurs the borders between documentary and fiction cinema due to the occasional scripting of situations and non-scripted, improvised acting by some of the characters on screen.

Maclean 2021, In the same way, that this is true and widely accepted of feature films and the creators behind them, it might be helpful to remind viewers that extremely realistic-looking documentaries are not always the absolute universal truth but rather a filmmaker's perspective and idea of the world that they wish to express.

Friend, 2017 argues that we should reject the idea that fiction and nonfiction are sharply divided, with fiction films just asking viewers to imagine what is made up while nonfiction is an accurate reflection of the facts. Instead, we should consider fiction and non-fiction to be genres, which are groups of things that aren't necessary but do have an impact on how others perceive them. This strategy is criticized for making the difference too flimsy and conventional.

Friend claims that documentary filmmakers who produced various scenes that were staged during filming are subjected to public scorn and a storm of criticism. Some notable instances are Kirby Dick, who was chastised for providing false evidence in The Hunting Ground (2015), or Michael Moore, who received criticism for staging sequences and selective editing in Bowling for Columbine (2002).

In the twenty-first century, we are seeing the development of filmmakers who are outspokenly criticizing the traditional traits that define documentary and fiction styles. Documentary filmmakers are experimenting with the limits of categorization by openly embracing the subjective objectives and methods usually associated with fiction. The truthfulness of documentaries has been attempted to be tapped into by fiction filmmakers, with the docudrama subgenre as a result becoming prevalent in popular culture. The apparent distinctions in their defining qualities have been examined via research, which also examines the compelling evidence that fiction and documentary films are the results of comparable processes and intentions (Mhone, 2015).

Mhone, 2015 contends, however, that the documentary genre may also reflect human worlds and their subsequent subjective creation, without making a clear attempt to explain the social and historical world, incompleteness and ambiguity, remembrance, and impression. Staging events is a well-known technique employed in fiction, and when utilized in documentary, it embeds connections with artifice that contradict its veracity claim.

Sous Les Bombes (2007) by Philiphe Aractingi, The Thin Blue Line (1988) by Errol Morris, Fahreinheit 9/11 (2004) by Michael Moore, and Waltz with Bashir (2007) by Ari Folman are examples of films that blur the lines between fiction and documentary. For instance, Waltz with Bashir is a 2007 documentary concerning an Israeli soldier who battles to recall the Lebanon and Beirut conflict of 1982. By all standards, this movie should be classified as fiction because it uses only animation to depict a historical event, yet it was able to keep its position as a documentary.

The same mechanism produces both fiction and documentary films. Pre-production, production, and post-production are steps that both of them must take.

Documentaries are factual films that get their inspiration from actual events. They are representations of reality. The choices that artists and technologists make on who should hear what tale and why are incalculable. Documentaries sometimes focus on social, political, and economic topics, or they could spotlight a specific person or location (Rezaei, 2023). The most plausible representation of actual life in documentaries is without the use of plot manipulation. However, to produce a film, documentaries frequently need to modify the data. Topic selection, editing, and sound mixing are a few of them. The determination of how much manipulation is necessary for it to be successful can be a frequent challenge.

Including events in some sort of impact sequence is what distinguishes a narrative or fiction film from other types. The tale told and the method by which it is told, as well as the narration—often referred to as narrative discourse, distinguish narrative films from other types of films. Through a tale, which is a collection of portrayed events, people, and actions, the viewer creates a make-believe time, place, and situation. The drama or effect is created by adding material based on actual events or persons, which gives the illusion of greater reality. When fiction and documentary films combined to form one, they were known as docu-fiction and are classified as narrative films (Rezaei, 2023)

In documentaries, movement is the main character. It's not a scripted performance or a play. Handheld cameras could be the sole option for following a story. Perhaps the filmmaker may not know what is going to occur next. A documentary maker's profession involves a lot of exploration and astonishment. (Rezaei, 2023) Mini-climaxes that are thoughtfully planned and organized provide ebb and flow impacts to the unfolding events. As a result, the audience is guided through the scenes with a sense of beginning, middle, dramatic peak, and finish thanks to the directionality of all crucial aspects.

Documentaries typically cost less to create than fiction films. They frequently use tiny crews, single camera setups, and little to no hired performers; these expenses can be as little as a few thousand dollars. Although typically crude and imperfect, the findings are nevertheless useful. In a fiction film, the crucial components, including directors and top actors earning high salaries, may cost millions of dollars and take years to complete.

While fiction and documentary films have different goals and strategies, they do have certain things in common.

Storytelling - The goal of both documentary and fiction films is to create an engaging tale. While fiction films construct imaginary tales, documentaries concentrate on real-life events or issues. But in all situations, a compelling narrative is essential to holding the audience's attention.

Cinematography - Both kinds of films use cinematography to produce striking, aesthetically attractive sequences. Whether it's a documentary or a fiction picture, cinematographers employ camera angles, lighting, and composition to express facts and feelings.

Editing - Both genres place a high value on editing. It aids in pacing the story, creating tension, and spreading knowledge. While fiction films rely on actors and written scenarios, documentarians frequently use old videos, interviews, and reenactments.

Character development- The technique of developing fully realized, multidimensional personalities is known as character development. Characters should have backstories, dreams, and objectives just like actual people do, as these things influence how they interact with others and how they behave. Documentaries frequently concentrate on actual individuals, whereas fiction films generally use actors and scripts to create imaginary characters. Character development is crucial in both situations so that the viewer can relate to and comprehend the people being depicted (Roberts, 2023).

Sound design- Films that are either fiction or documentary must have sound. The speech, music, sound effects, and background noise all add to the mood and emotional impact of the movie. Ellis, 2021

Artistic expression - Filmmakers frequently employ their artistic talents to communicate their viewpoints, beliefs, or artistic ideas, whether they are working on fiction or documentary projects. The film's overall aesthetic, musical choices, and camera selection all display this artistic expression.

Emotion and engagement - Both kinds of films try to captivate and stir up the viewer's feelings. Films of fiction employ planned drama and character arcs to elicit empathy, whereas documentaries may use real-life tales to evoke belief.

Narrative structure - Even though the stories in documentaries are based on true occurrences, they frequently use an organized storytelling framework that is like to that of fiction movies. A primary conflict or theme must be developed, new characters or themes must be introduced, and a resolution or conclusion must be reached.

Audience impact - Both fiction and documentary films want to influence the viewer. Depending on their various objectives, they may serve to inform, amuse, spark discussion, or motivate action.

There are occasionally heated debates in the public concerning the propriety of using fictional tactics in documentary storytelling, especially on television. This was especially true for the so-called "docu-soaps" on television, but because of popular skepticism about the veracity of documentaries, several filmmakers came up with novel techniques. As a result, popular and professional ideas and practices about documentaries have altered. A stronger focus on the evaluation of the documentation of historical events has emerged in contemporary filmmaking techniques. They typically collect video and other visual data from a wide range of sources and analyze it. In overt attempts to reenact those occurrences, they are considered as proof (Ellis, 2021).

Understanding documentary authenticity as an ongoing negotiation between the filmmaker, institution, and viewers is made possible by a genre-based approach to the form. This is important because it shows that it is impossible to determine a documentary's veracity or fabrication only by looking at the script (Ellis, 2021). Instead, determining whether something is true depends on a compromise between opposing ideas and senses. Filmmakers prepare for possible responses to their work, while viewers carry their perceptions of what it's like to be filmed and preconceptions about the industry. Particularly in popular television and entertainment documentaries, there is a continual slipping between the tactics of fiction and the practice of recording in the broader field of documentary filmmaking. Different combinations of fictional approaches have been used in documentary practice at different times throughout its history to both create content and organize intelligible and interesting writings.

In fiction movies, we follow a character's journey via the plot's setting. We perceive events from their perspective and experience their fear when they are threatened, pain when they are harmed, and joy when they succeed. As readers or watchers, we are accustomed to these emotions. But the tendency we have to identify with characters is also a striking example of our capacity for empathy(Oatley, 2005).

Examining this identification process in fiction helps us understand the value of empathy in both appreciating literature and fostering relationships with individuals in our real-world surroundings. Fiction affects readers in ways that go beyond the words on the page or the pictures on the screen (Oatley, 2005). Reading books, watching films, or going to plays are not solitary pursuits; rather, they may teach us the skill of being human. There is evidence that these impacts, which come from our cognitive ability for empathy, have the potential to influence how we interact with our friends, family, and fellow citizens.

In conclusion, fiction films construct imaginary tales for entertainment or creative expression, whereas documentaries concentrate on presenting real-life issues factually or educationally. Their approaches to narrative, topics, and creative intentions are what set them apart. Documentaries come as the cheaper option to produce yet fiction films are preferred as they generate way more traffic and sell more. Fiction films can feel real even though they are based on stories while documentaries can still be entertaining even though they are based on facts.

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