Effects of Editing Style on the Perceived Meaning: A Comparative Study Between Old and Young Egyptian Television Audiences

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ABSTRACT

Since 1980s, classic editing conventions have been modifying into new forms characterized mostly by quickly changing images. Within the Egyptian context, this study has examined the effects of those newer video editing styles on audiences’ perception of television. Six short videos edited following the conventions of those newer editing styles were presented to two sample groups of Egyptian audiences, these two groups of participants represented two generational audiences: elderly television audience (aged between 50 and 60 years old), and young television audience (aged between 18 and 22 years old). Data regarding the nature of the meanings constructed by different audiences were collected and compared. The results confirmed that those newer editing styles have produced a new generation of Egyptian spectators who interact with the television medium in a different way than previous generations.

Keywords: Editing Style, Egypt, Older & Younger TV Audience, Perception, Television

INTRODUCTION

Television programmes use editing as a process to communicate a great deal of information, affect the audience’s perception of the programme and increase dramatic intensity and the emotional response of the audience. However, the construction of meaning is affected not only by the editing of a television programme but also by the audience’s cognitive processes. Hence, it is important to examine both the editing structures and the cognitive processes of the audiences that are viewing the programme in order to understand how they construct meaning through editing. In fact, most of the previous relevant research conducted in Egypt was in the form of theoretical studies focusing generally on the editing style of such classic programmes as news segments, narrative drama and children’s programming. Those studies gave little regard to the audiences’ cognitive processes. The way the editing style of music videos affects the Egyptian audience’s reception remains a question with no answer till now.

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RESEARCH AIM

The aim of this study is to explore the power of television editing within the Egyptian context. This is achieved by determining how the more contemporary fast-inter cutting style used in such forms as music videos and commercials could affect the Egyptian audience’s perception and construction of meaning.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative methodology in order to examine the accuracy of its hypotheses and to achieve its aims. Six videos, as examples of the newer music video editing style, and two generations of viewers, as examples of different cognitive processing, are used to examine the impact of both editing and audience’s cognitive processes on the construction of meaning.

Editing cannot be defined simply as the joining of two separate shots of raw footage to construct reality because other factors in the editing process govern the construction. For example, an editor makes choices concerning the length of any individual shot to create a pace or rhythm. The relationship between adjacent shots creates a context. The consistency of action between neighbouring shots creates the narrative structure. Eisenstein, for example, used editing as a dialectical process to produce a third and separate meaning out of the original two meanings of juxtaposed shots. In contrast, Pudovkin believed that the synthesis of two shots produced a meaning that was the sum of the adjacent shots. His edited sequences, although symbolic, usually promoted the narrative structure (Giannetti, 2010).

The construction of meaning is currently being analyzed as a two-way relationship between the sender and the audience. Both entities in this relationship have an impact on the other (Vaughan, 1976). Hoijer (1989) conducted studies that revealed a close relationship between comprehension of television programmes and the thoughts these programmes provoked in the audience’s mind. Hoijer stated that previous knowledge is a prerequisite of an active processing of television discourse. These studies highlight the importance of what the viewer brings to the cinematic experience in terms of previous similar life experiences, memory, and cognitive processing.

Some researchers have supported the notion that as audience grow older they become more proficient at reading television codes such as editing and interpreting narrative structures (Anderson and Field, 1983; Collins, 1979, 1983; Collins et al, 1978; Cullingford, 1984; Husson, 1982; Palmer and MacNeil, 1991; and Rubin, 1989). This growing proficiency, in turn, leads to more effective information processing of programmes and better all round levels of comprehension. On the other hand, Pittman (1985: 34) distinguished between young and old television audience saying that the difference between these audiences is a communication gap because each generation processes information differently. The older generation requires that information take on a linear and logical form whereas the younger generation processes information in a nonlinear fashion. Moreover, and after Clifford et al. (1995) conducted their research, they suggested that prior viewing habits failed to differentiate between good or poor information acquisition and comprehension of the two police dramas viewed.

EDITING AND CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING

Lev Kuleshov was one of the first to experiment with the construction of meaning through editing. His often-cited experiment, coined the “Kuleshov effect”, juxtaposed a famous actor’s face with various images such as a plate of soup, a corpse in a coffin, and a little girl playing with a toy bear. When these shots were shown to audiences, the actor was praised for his acting, even though the expression on his face did not change between shots. Kuleshov discovered that the editing led the viewers to see subtle changes in the actor’s expression,
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