

Empathy Expression in Beauty Teaching Short Videos from Bilibili during Group Communication Era from the Perspective of Role Theory

Pei Pei

Communication University of China, Nanjing, Nanjing 211172, Jiangsu, China

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Abstract: In the era of group communication, beauty teaching, as a kind of network interaction narrative, presents the empathetic expression of beauty bloggers through practical, transactional and common aesthetic methods: The cognition of the needs of themselves and the audiences, the understanding and empathy of the audience's appearance anxiety, and the timely solution to the foreseen problems through various makeup techniques, strategies and products, are used to construct the audience's desire for beauty and guide them to follow and imitate. The purpose is to attract the audience and arouse their emotions with the help of empathy expression used in the role play, so as to obtain attention and support. With this driving force, beauty teaching videos have gradually developed into a delayed interactive communication mode jointly constructed by beauty bloggers and audiences, in which bloggers seek attention by creating makeup, while audiences satisfy aesthetic needs by imitating bloggers.

Keywords: role theory, beauty teaching short video, empathy

1. Introduction

The concept of "role" was first proposed by American social psychologist George Mead in the theory of symbolic interaction, and further completed by sociologist Goffman in the theory of "parody", which borrowed the meaning of actors playing specific characters on stage following the script. It reflects the situational behavior pattern that individuals play according to their social status and the expectations of others in daily life.[1] The concept of empathy was first proposed by German philosopher Herder in the 19th century in the field of aesthetics, and has been gradually applied in the field of sociology and psychology. Empathy is to "understand the thoughts and emotions of others"[1]. Individuals can have the same emotional expression as others through mirror reflection, and feel the other person's feelings, so as to share the same feelings and achieve emotional "consistency" of both parties. [2]

The era of group communication is an era in which the group communication behavior is non-institutionalized, non-centralized and lacking of management. [3]The beauty short videos created by bloggers meet the audience's needs of image construction, identity and aesthetic appreciation. Many beauty bloggers create personalized beauty teaching videos from different angles, evoking the audience's empathy experience with empathetic expression. From the perspective of role theory in sociology, this paper will comprehensively analyze the role interpretation and empathy expression of beauty bloggers in beauty teaching short videos from the website of Bilibili in the era of group communication.

2. The characteristics of beauty teaching short videos from Bilibili in the era of group communication

Bilibili (www.bilibili.com) is an online video community constructed through the mode of social interaction. With people's rapid growth of interest in beauty and skin care, the beauty teaching short videos of Bilibili can be roughly divided into three categories according to the contents: imitation makeup teaching, daily makeup teaching and product introduction. In the short videos of imitation makeup teaching, beauty bloggers arrange their performance combining the techniques of special effect makeup, the use of products, and the process of applying makeup, and shorten the length of the finished videos by means of fast forward, editing and splicing. The imitation figures include characters from animations, movies, TV drama, celebrities, and cosplay for specific festivals, such as Halloween, and natural elements like the four seasons. Daily makeup teaching short videos focus on the explanation and teaching display of the bloggers, sharing the skills of local makeup, or the overall evaluation and introduction of a certain type of makeup, such as: morning commute makeup, dating makeup, teenager/girl makeup, etc. Product promotion videos include foundation liquid, eyeshadow, lipstick, contouring, perfume and so on, each category can also be subdivided further. This kind of beauty short video combines the characteristics of cosmetics, skin types, recommended skills and techniques together, and has the spreading effect of network sales.

3. The empathy expression of the roles in the beauty teaching short videos

Psychologists believe that “empathy is an important means and test standard to realize role transformation and role-playing. Only through empathy can we achieve role playing at the cognitive and emotional levels. In turn, whether we can achieve successful role playing depends on the level of empathy.”[4] According to the different fields of psychological activities in which empathy occurs in the process of beauty teaching, the empathy expression of bloggers can be divided into four types: emotional empathy, cognitive empathy, anticipated empathy and aesthetic empathy.

3.1 Emotional empathy

Individuals experience the internal emotions of others, and express the same emotions themselves. Emotion has an important impact on meaning understanding and communication effect, it is contagious, cumulative, instructive and social[5]. Bloggers usually use language descriptions to stimulate the imagination of the audiences, thus generating emotions similar to those of bloggers. Some bloggers appear in front of the camera without makeup and describe themselves as “plain, pale looking without makeup”. Some bloggers ask the question at the beginning of the video: “Why does the same lipstick presents different color effects on different people”. They put themselves into the roles of ordinary audiences, to observe, to feel, to understand, and at the same time, to express with confused questions, anxious words, and doubts to tell the audiences that they have experienced the the same feelings.

When the emotionally appealing bloggers act according to the their designed scripts, they will establish a virtual relationship with the audiences through personal experience and role play. Some bloggers play the role of a motivated and anxious teacher for their students in the short videos, often using the catchphrase like: “I don’t believe that I can’t teach you to..... Come on, you need to follow me step by step..... I’ve told you to ignore it.....” Etc.. They use their lines to try to show a variety of emotions such as “surprise”, “excitement”, “anxiety” and so on, to stimulate and awaken the audiences’ emotional experience and promote emotional empathy.

3.2 Cognitive empathy

Individuals take insight into and understand the internal experience of others, and express their similar experiences in a intellectual way. This kind of role play makes it easier for bloggers to sensitively discover and capture the more delicate, real and profound needs of the audiences, narrowing the distance between bloggers and audiences. This kind of bloggers will convey the message of “I know what you want, let me tell you”, through direct dialogues with the audiences in the video. Many bloggers put themselves in the same position as the general audiences, expressing the messages like “I have tried for as long as you to find the best method/product for myself”, “I put on makeup fast because I have practiced many times, if you follow my method, and practice a few times, you will be able to as well”.

Bloggers accurately perceive the needs of the audiences, experience the emotions of the audience, and always maintain an active emotional investment to meet the needs of the audiences, so that the audiences can feel inspired and touched, and form a positive attitude and emotional experience. In this kind of communication, with equality in the network virtual world, and no direct economic benefits for bloggers, the audiences will trust and love the bloggers more because of the bloggers’ sincerity, caring and non-trade relationship, and gradually transfer their own emotions into the communication.

3.3 Anticipated empathy

Individuals anticipate the emotional response of others in specific situations, and use appropriate language to express their emotions by means of comfort, persuasion, questioning and other ways to convey emotions, and then influence the audiences. Some beauty bloggers take the audiences’ daily role by posting some unsuccessful makeup videos or defective makeup pictures, and guide the audiences to “not believing too much of the flawless makeup, without the beauty function of smart phone camera, we are all the same”. When facing the new learners of makeup, bloggers will also directly speak to the audiences: “Please stop saying you can’t do it, you need to practice!” In addition, some beauty bloggers create for themselves an image of a violent tempered and impatient person, playing the role of a teacher in a middle school classroom, pointing out the fake beauty makeup knowledge and sharing their own makeup experiences with a critical and questioning tone, and passing on the information to the audiences that “it is not your fault, you were just misled”.

Some beauty products assessment bloggers take themselves into the audiences’ perspective, often point out at the beginning of the videos that “these products for test are of my own purchase, there is absolutely no advertising”, or “the products are sent by the brand to me for trial evaluation”. And in the video they make statement that they are in a neutral position by expressing both the advantages and disadvantages of the products, and the potential suitable group, recommending the audiences to choose according to their own situation carefully. Since the information from others is connected with emotional memory, when the audiences observe the specific emotional state of the bloggers for some products or beauty phenomena,

the memory is triggered, and the emotional reaction will follow.

3.4 Aesthetic empathy

Aesthetic empathy includes the emotional involvement, the concentration on a certain work of art in order to understand its true meaning, as well as imagining and feeling the experience of others. There is a special kind of full-makeup teaching video on Bilibili, which focus on the aesthetic empathy in the expression of empathy, emphasizing immersive appreciation and feeling the atmosphere. This kind of beauty videos usually presents the main keynote like makeup trial, color testing, product evaluation, situation display and so on, with the time duration of no more than one minute. They focus more from the perspective of product promotion or immersive performance, with the goal to arouse the audiences' resonance for the use of some cosmetics or their aesthetic empathy, or try to make commercial recommendation and advertisement in a speechless way. In the communication process of this kind of short videos, which weakens the beauty teaching process and emphasizes the display of results, both the bloggers and the audiences realize the "self-pleasing" emotion from the characters, that is, to please themselves and satisfy themselves.

Many bloggers choose to use the half-face cover. In the picture, the left or right half of the blogger's face appears with no makeup, while the other half of the face presents with the full makeup effect, attracting the audiences' attention with prominent visual contrast. The bloggers choose to cosplay different roles, and presenting either sad or joyful experiences of the characters through facial expressions, eye contact, actions, and background music, expressing the common passion of both the players and the role; The audiences appreciate the videos from the outsiders' point of view, having personal feelings for the role played by the bloggers, and extend this emotional feelings to the bloggers.

4. Conclusion

"Understanding" must rely on "empathy", which requires the bloggers to have emotional commonality with people who needs daily makeup. Bloggers need to empathize with the public first, understand the audiences' needs for the communication of beauty content, and then transfer the audiences' emotions into their own mind. The emotions of the bloggers can influence the emotions of the audiences, and similar emotional experiences can elevate the involvement of the audiences. Therefore, the bloggers needs to control their real emotions in the short video works, put themselves into the positions of appropriate roles, and always express while thinking whether they can empathize with the audiences and arouse the emotional resonance of the audiences.

In the empathizing process, emotional infection and sharing coexist and interact with each other. The positive emotions revealed by the bloggers when introducing and sharing a makeup technique or recommending a product will infect the audiences and stimulate their emotional imitation and behavior imitation. After imitation learning, some of the audiences will spontaneously share the same highly emotional expression in the their personal social network, influence others, and finally form the herding effect and convergence effect. In the era of group communication, many "opinion leaders" of the same beauty category have been born, constantly creating popular elements of beauty.

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