Research on the formation mechanism of online exhibition failure in the pre-epidemic era

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Abstract: Since the outbreak of the coronavirus epidemic, more and more art exhibitions have been presented in the form of online exhibitions.However, although online exhibitions have appeared with the help of virtual reality and other technologies before the outbreak, their advantages such as convenience and reproducibility have not enabled the online exhibitions to play the expected effect. In this paper, participatory observation and in-depth interview are adopted to analyze the observations and interviews at the exhibition site, and believes that although online exhibitions use technical means to reproduce the offline environment and exhibits, they are limited by the gathering in the offline environment. Perceptual factors such as "sense of ritual", sense of identity, and emotional interaction are difficult to be aroused by technical means, so they failed to play their due role in the pre-epidemic era.
Keywords: Online exhibition; Embodied communication; Communication ritual view

1 Introduction

With the outbreak of the coronavirus epidemic nationwide in 2020,offline art exhibitions have been postponed or changed to online forms due to the influence of policies and other factors. As a result, digital art exhibitions have become one of the main ways for audiences to appreciate works of art. However, we have noticed that in the pre-epidemic era, such digital art exhibition platform had already appeared, but mostly used for international exchanges, while the development of domestic online exhibitions was slow and did not play its due effect. In this regard, we have the following thoughts:Why did the offline exhibitions not have the expected effect in the pre-epidemic era? Has the ultimate goal of online exhibitions been achieved? What are the reasons for its failure? What are the mechanisms that affect the functioning of the cause?

2 Review

2.1 Literature review of online exhibitions

The issue of online exhibitions and their effects has aroused joint research from multiple perspectives in academic circles at home and abroad. Domestic scholars such as Zhu Changqiao and Gong Jinhong published the article "Gaze or Forget: Research on Audience Behavior of

Temporary Exhibitions of Guangdong Provincial Museum" in 2017, using temporary exhibitions as the scene to conduct more detailed research on audience behavior. It shows that the audience's impression and evaluation of the exhibition depends on the time they stay in front of the exhibits, the number of exhibits that attract them, and their viewing behavior. Scholar Fu Lihai published in 2022 "The Challenges and Countermeasures of Digital Technology to the Content Production of the Cultural Industry" in more detail from the aspects of technology and content production to the challenges and solutions brought by digital technology to the content production of the cultural industry. According to his research, too much emphasis on digital technology and ignoring the particularity of culture has led to problems such as rough and random content production, dwarfed value judgment standards, and increased ideological risks. Digital technology should be used patiently and long-term to present the connotation of cultural products.

2.2 Literature review of embodied communication

The concept of embodiment was first systematically discussed in French philosopher Merleau Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception,and it is mainly manifested as subjectivity,which is very helpful for us to understand embodied as an idea. In the virtual environment of online exhibitions, embodied communication, as an emerging concept formed by the combination of mobile Internet and virtual reality, has been widely discussed and researched by the academic circle. Domestic scholars Yu Fasheng and Zhang Yue believed in "Immersive Communication: Sensory Resonance, Image Restoration, and On-site Participation" in 2020 that through the interaction of the senses inside and outside, and the superimposition of physiological and psychological elements, users can achieve an immersive resonance experience, thereby continuously enhance the subjectivity and centrality of people. It provides a technical empowerment perspective for exploring the mechanism of online exhibitions. Domestic scholars Liu Hailong and Shu Kairong proposed in "The Body Concept of Embodiedness and Communication Research——Perspectives of Perceptual Phenomenology and Cognitive Science" published in 2019 that "to understand the embodiment of the communication process, it is necessary to affirm that the body is The Materialistic Position in the Flow and Reception of Information", showing the importance of embodiment in the process of communication.

However, these studies have examined the audience's behavior in offline exhibitions and the improvement of online exhibitions compared to the offline exhibitions,but they have ignored the reasons why online exhibitions have lost their effectiveness compared to the pre-epidemic era.

2.3 Literature review of communication ritual view

After the theory of communication ritual view was proposed by James W. Carey in the 1980s, it has attracted great attention from scholars at home and abroad, and has achieved many research results. Chinese scholar Yu Guanzhen proposed in "Art Exhibitions from the Perspective of Communication Rituals" published in 2020 that art exhibitions should be viewed from the perspective of communication rituals. The holding of art exhibitions maintains the common understanding of society, and people's behaviors and thoughts are exchanged here. There is some

coordination in the process. The audience gains a sense of intimacy with each other, thus forming a group identity. Foreign scholar Carol Duncan pointed out in "Civilized Rituals in Public Art Museums" published in 1995 that art museums are often compared with ceremonial places, and that art museums are places of belief that represent a certain social order, while Palaces, churches, temples and other places are precisely the sacred places that reflect the highest social order and people's spiritual beliefs. Their research shows that rituals are a necessary means to form collective consciousness and emotions, and then integrate society. At the same time, foreign scholar Eric Rosenbuhler believed in "Ritual Communication: From Daily Conversation to Mediation Ritual" published in 1998 that "among all the designs for maintaining social order, ritual communication is the most gentle and useful."

However, these research did not study the failure of online exhibitions from the perspective of the pre-epidemic era, and therefore did not answer the question about the main mechanism of online exhibitions.

2.4 Questions Raised

Therefore,starting from the communication ritual view theory, this paper tries to answer the following questions: Why did online exhibition fail to play its due role in the pre-pandemic era? What are the mechanisms that influence the function of online exhibitions in the pre-pandemic era? How did these mechanisms affect the ineffectiveness of online exhibitions?

3 Research methods and data analysis

3.1 Research Methods

This paper adopts two research methods, participant observation and in-depth interview, to try to answer the above questions.Considering that the reasons for the failure of online exhibitions need to be compared and analyzed with the variable of offline exhibitions, this article will adopt a participatory observation method to participate in existing offline exhibitions and analyze the exhibition design, atmosphere, visitor attitude, and purpose from multiple dimensions. The main work at this stage is to collect and sort out basic information about the observation of the exhibition. The interviews will start in December 2022 and end in February 2023. The interviewees firstly included the curatorial team and on-site exhibitors, and secondly, more research samples were collected through information exchange. The interviews were conducted via WeChat text interviews and one-on-one face-to-face interviews. The basic information of the respondents is shown in the table 1.

Table 1 Basic information of the respondents

Respondents	Age	Occupation	Relevant job contact or not	Number of offline exhibitions participated	Number of online exhibition participation	Satisfaction with online exhibitions
A	20	Student	N/A	10-20	1- 10	General
B	22	Student	Book-fair Volunteer	20-30	1- 10	General
C	35	Curator	Day Job	Not counted	30 to 40	Average
D	42	Curator	Day Job	Not counted	20-30	Unsatisfied
E	28	Showroom owner	Day Job	Not counted	30 to 40	Unsatisfied
F	26	Freelancer	N/A	20-30	1- 10	Satisfied
G	29	Designer	Showroom VI design	50 to 60	10-20	Average

4 Analyze and discuss

In this study, the participative observation method and in-depth interview method are used to analyze the audience who have participated in offline exhibition and online exhibition from the perspective of exhibition behavior, emotion, purpose and other dimensions.

4.1 Real experience and emotions of offline exhibition attendance are difficult to be generated online

In this research,through the method of participatory observation, we found that in the initial stage of curating most exhibitions, curators and authors have made a rough plan for the exhibition routes of the exhibition halls, that is, the viewing sequence of the exhibitors is theoretically determined and guided by the ideal route and stop key points. Generally, most curators will design the exhibition route as a multi-center series of "entrance---sub-exhibition area---sub-exhibition main area-sub-exhibition area---sub-exhibition main area---exit" according to the exhibition theme, exhibit selection and other factors. The single or multiple core exhibits in each sub-exhibition area will be designed as one or a group of stopping points to attract visitors to stay in concentration while reflecting the theme of the exhibition area. It is also conducive to the audience to "punch in" as a souvenir, providing the ideal emotional enfranchisement for the exhibition at the planning level, bringing the sense of experience to the exhibitors as much as possible and looking forward to obtaining more emotional identification; Then connect each sub-exhibition area through a brief transition route, so as to form a relatively complete exhibition route. The online exhibition takes the scene as an "exhibition area". Since it is not limited by the real environment, the tour sequence of the entire online exhibition may be non-linear. The audience can click on different scenes at any time to skip the exhibition according to their preferences. It is difficult to summarize the specific exhibition route. At the same time, under the premise that the reproduction

of the exhibits cannot be completely restored, it may affect that some exhibits that need to be viewed in a special way cannot be displayed in the online environment, which in turn affects the exhibitors' understanding of the exhibits and their relationship with the theme of the exhibition.

In addition to the route designed by the curator and the author, the actual stopping point for the exhibitors - the core works that the author wants to convey, and the stopping point that the exhibitors are attracted to spontaneously - the works that the exhibitors endowed with emotional value . It is not difficult to see that in most exhibitions, the two key points for the audience to stop are: the works endowed with the highest emotional value by the author and the works spontaneously endowed by the exhibitors with the highest emotional value. They are generally located in the center of the exhibition area or occupy the area of the exhibition area. The largest area, transition and sign points such as the entrance and exit of the exhibition area, and random positions. In the above positions, compared with the average 20-40 seconds on the common exhibits, the time spent on the key exhibits will be relatively longer to an average of 72 seconds. If the exhibitors take pictures and interact in front of the exhibits, the duration It will be further extended to 2-4 minutes.

After observing the movements and performances of the exhibitors during the exhibition, it can be seen that the exhibitors have different facial expressions and emotional expressions during the interaction with the museum exhibits because of their emphasis on viewing the exhibits: when they first entered the exhibition area, Exhibitors generally focus on browsing the guide content, and randomly browse exhibits that tourists are interested in; while for some more famous or eye-catching exhibits, exhibitors often use their mobile phones to take pictures and post them on social media to gain satisfaction and attention, and represent that they have indeed "visited here"; some exhibitors have browsed the promotional materials of the exhibition in advance, and consciously and targetedly selected the core exhibits that meet their own interests in advance, so they will not follow the plan. Instead of viewing all the routes planned by the exhibitors, they will focus on and selectively "jump the exhibition", or stay in front of a certain exhibit for a longer period of time than other exhibits. In this process, such exhibitors Often, due to the satisfaction of personal needs such as displaying personal image, they are more excited and active than ordinary exhibitors, and this state may also affect other exhibitors in the same time and space. Oppositely, due to the free access of the audience, the limited recovery of the exhibits, the inability to observe the status of the audience and other factors, the online exhibition lacks a more realistic interaction with the exhibits and emotional feedback, as well as a sense of atmosphere and ritual brought by being in the same time and space with other audiences.

Therefore, generally speaking, in the process of curating offline exhibitions, it is easier to create an on-site atmosphere and a suitable viewing space for the audience in terms of route and space layout based on the needs of the exhibition theme, inspiration, and exhibit size on the basis of the venue, so that exhibitors can obtain an immersive sense of space and presence during the visit,which can be shown by the construction and display of personal image through social media dissemination.While the exhibitors are able to have more choices in terms of exhibits and viewing routes in the offline exhibition process than online, and the occurrence of the sense of detachment and jumping brought about by when the scene switching of the exhibition will diminished,due to the larger number and wider range of exhibits visible in the exhibitor's field of vision.

4.2 The emotional experience of "being present" can hardly be compensated by technical rationality

When we conducted further in-depth interviews and tried to obtain answers to questions such as "why offline exhibitions failed to achieve the expected results in the pre-epidemic era", we found that the "exhibition atmosphere", "exhibition experience", "immersion degree " and other related attitudes, the answers of the interviewees testify to our conjecture.

As we expected: the fact that offline exhibitions can attract more exhibitors and leave a sufficient impression on exhibitors is based on the actual advantages of offline exhibitions—being embodied. Compared with online exhibitions, offline exhibitions are more "humanistic": during the exhibition process, exhibitors, as the main body of the exhibition, are closely connected with the layout, installation, atmosphere, and works of the exhibition hall, and the emotional expression in the process of exhibition comes from the first perspective of everything, through visual observation, the initiative to establish contact with the scene in front of the exhibition; while online exhibitions do not have this feature---online exhibitions allow people's first perspective to intervene in the communication of the media, which greatly reduces its physicality and It is easy for visitors to feel confused about "whether I am watching the exhibition instead of watching the existing video" during the exhibition. As interviewee B said: "When I watch the online exhibition, I don't realize that the real thing is important to me. The impact of the artwork shows me the whole picture through the screen, but I think I am watching some kind of live broadcast." The online exhibition swallows the information and power that the works can convey in the medium, and the audience can feel The transmission of energy gradually disappears in the process of dissemination, which makes the connection between the visitors and the exhibition weakened to almost eliminated, and the theme of the exhibition becomes the works shown in the media, not the visitors themselves. The interviewee G also thinks: "During the online exhibition, what I feel is that each piece of work is near or far away, and I only need to click the mouse or shake the phone to do this. When I really want to see something clearly I can zoom in infinitely when making a work, to the extent that the naked eye cannot do it, but I can't feel the work, this is not something that can be done a piece of work by technology."

The view of communication rituals believes that communication is a process in which information is transmitted and released in space, and the view of communication rituals is a sacred ceremony that attracts people together with a group or common identity. "Ritual" is a bond that maintains social existence, and communication is not a superficial transmission of information, but a ritual activity that maintains social relations and social life. The exhibition itself can be regarded as a ritual behavior, viewing the exhibition is like participating in a ceremony, and the ultimate purpose is to gain a sense of identity and satisfaction. Viewing itself is to participate in an event full of ceremonies. Viewing the exhibition in an offline environment can give the audience a more complete and immersive visual and auditory experience than in an online virtual environment. However, due to the lack of on-site environment and onlookers, the online exhibition loses the effectiveness of ritual connection.

4.3 The sense of ritual and identity play an effective role in the offline exhibition

Through the method of participatory observation and in-depth interview, this study studied the failure phenomenon of online exhibition in the pre-epidemic era, explained the embodiment of offline exhibition to the failure of online exhibition, and tried to answer the reasons and formation mechanism of online exhibition failure in the pre-epidemic era: When people participate in the scene with a certain sense of atmosphere, they are more willing to get the real experience of the scene, rather than some displayed materials.When the exhibited objects are redistributed through the media, their own sense of presence will be weakened. For artworks, their artistic features cannot be accurately restored and displayed due to inherent defects in technology. On the one hand, it is difficult for audiences to fully appreciate them from all angles. To the same work of art, on the other hand, because the work of art exists independently of the scene environment, the interaction between the audience and the work of art does not have a strong connection. It cannot fully meet the audience's value needs in terms of aesthetics and education through online exhibitions. Therefore, it is not difficult to see why offline exhibitions failed in the pre-pandemic era.

5 Conclusion

In summary, this study proposes the mechanism of online exhibition failure in the pre-epidemic era, which reflects the limitations of online exhibition in terms of "presence" and "absence". On the other hand, it also provides a more theoretical perspective for digital art exhibition platform to play a greater role in China where the epidemic is becoming a regular occurrence. The discussion on the failure mechanism in the research process is conducive to the better development of the subsequent online exhibition platform. However, it is worth noting that this kind of failure phenomenon may lead to the limitation of art exhibition in cultural transmission and consumption due to the particularity of the environment. When offline communication and offline industry change to online development, the existing production and marketing structure and operation mode may be passively changed, especially the main disadvantages of online lack of interactive environment. When the offline exhibition is transformed into the online exhibition, the necessary real-time interaction of the audience and the necessary rendering of emotional needs such as empathy in the viewing process should be maintained, and humanistic care should be paid attention to, which is worthy of vigilance, reflection and in-depth study.

However, due to the diversity of exhibition types and the subjective diversity of audience, this study also has the problem that the research is relatively narrow and not common enough. In future studies, researchers of cultural industry and art management may need to pay more attention to the level of content production and expand the research and practice of content production and mass communication.

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