

FACT AND FICTION IN DOCUMENTARY:
AUDIENCE PERCEPTION AND THE CHANGING GENRE OF DOCUMENTARY

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the disconnect between how a documentary consumer goes into a film thinking they are skeptical of the information; when they tend to have a skewed understanding of filmmaking and media literacy. An explanatory, experimental qualitative design was used. This involved collecting qualitative data through the use of focus groups and then expanding upon those data with in-depth interviews. In the first qualitative phase of the study, data was collected from volunteer participants from three different cities in Missouri. Three focus groups were conducted to recognize the volunteers' understanding of the distinctions between fact and fiction in documentary and to assess whether that relates to further word-of-mouth misinformation. The second qualitative phase was conducted as follow up to the focus groups. In this study, the researcher looked at how members of the first data study consume documentaries. She did this through one-on-one in-depth semi-structured interviews with two participants from each of the focus groups. The researcher then conducted a textual analysis of the transcribed material that came from the qualitative data collected in both the focus groups and the interviews. Ultimately addressing the question: how do audience members understand the difference between fact and fiction in documentary?