

Reading Response 3: Primary Research Methods

My research question is "how do new aged documentaries use fear-based appeals to influence the public's perception of social or political issues?". I plan on using multiple non-human subject methods, such as content analysis, textual analysis, visual analysis, and comparative analysis. These approaches will allow me to break down how documentaries use scare tactics to communicate fear through narrative, language, imagery, and structure. Using context analysis I plan on examining recurring themes, language, and structures documentaries such as "The Social Dilemma" and "Blackfish" use. I will concentrate on how often ideas are repeated, such as danger, urgency, or harm, and how they use these ideas to support the overall message of the film. I plan on using textual analysis to help me look closely at the narration, interviews, or written text used in different documentaries. This will help me portray how word choice, tone, and phrasing are used to change the viewer's emotions and thoughts on certain topics. I will use visual analysis to study the imagery, editing, color, and music used within different documentaries to create mood and emotion. Since creating fear relies heavily on how something is shown or portrayed, not just what's explicitly said" this method will be very useful. I may also use comparative analysis to look at the similarities and differences between multiple documentaries. By comparing documentaries I can identify how different filmmakers use fear to get their message across, even when the subjects are very different. The benefit of these non-human subject methods is that they allow for a detailed and completely objective analysis of the documentaries, focusing on how fear-based appeals are created by film-makers through visuals, text, and content. These methods provide clear insight into the techniques and strategies used without the need to interpret personal audience reactions. However, a limitation is that they do not capture how viewers may respond emotionally or cognitively to the fear-based appeals used by film-makers, meaning the effectiveness of these strategies in influencing public perception on certain issues cannot be fully assessed through non-human subject based analysis methods alone. Since my question focuses on how documentaries use fear tactics and not whether it works or how people feel respond to said tactics, I believe these methods will work best for my research. They allow me to break down the techniques and strategies that make fear a powerful tool in documentary filmmaking.