

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**END-OF-LIFE CARE IN CHINESE
MEDIA: A CASE STUDY OF
HOSPICE DOCUMENTARIES AT
ZHEJIANG COMMUNICATION
UNIVERSITY**

GE GUANGHE

Thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Communication and Media Studies)

Faculty of Communication and Media Studies

September 2025

ABSTRACT

Hospice care alleviates suffering for patients and families, enhances quality of life and death, and fosters respect and comfort in their final moments. Hospice documentaries, as a critical medium for public engagement with end-of-life issues, offer nuanced insights into the emotional and personal dimensions of palliative care but remain underexplored in educational contexts - particularly regarding how student-led production practices at institutions like Zhejiang Communication University (ZCMU) navigate narrative construction, ethical dilemmas, and alignment with cultural values. This video production practice encompasses student documentary projects, institutional collaborations with healthcare organizations, filming and editing, and academic exploration of narrative and ethical dynamics. "End-of-life Care" Documentaries refer to a genre of student-faculty collaborative works centered on hospice themes, with the study primarily analyzing production processes and ethical concerns, alongside supplementary exploration of content and stakeholder impacts. This study addresses a key gap: the lack of systematic research on student and faculty collaborative production of "end-of-life care" documentaries within Chinese educational settings, with a focus on their narrative strategies, stakeholder impacts, and adherence to social sensitivities. Guided by Narrative Theory (to dissect storytelling structures shaping cultural attitudes toward death), cultural theories (to explore alignment between production practices and societal values), and Uses and Gratifications Theory (to examine how audiences engage with and derive meaning from these narratives), this qualitative study examines ZCMU's student-faculty documentary projects, which collaborate with healthcare institutions to document hospice care. It pursues four core objectives: (1) analyzing the filming and production processes of these student-led documentaries; (2) investigating how they disseminate information about terminal illness treatment; (3) identifying their role in supporting patients, families, and healthcare professionals; and (4) exploring how production practices align with social values and cultural sensitivity. This analysis-based study employs in-depth interviews with 15 informants-including ZCMU documentary students, faculty mentors, and collaborating healthcare professionals-to explore the dynamics of student-led hospice documentary production. The study finds that these documentaries effectively educate the public, provide emotional support to stakeholders, and enhance healthcare workers' professional development through narrative strategies that humanize end-of-life experiences and bridge knowledge gaps. However, production is constrained by cultural taboos around death, ethical tensions between authenticity and privacy, and resource limitations. This study contributes to scholarship by: (1) unpacking the pedagogical and practical dynamics of student-led hospice documentary production in China; (2) demonstrating how Narrative Theory can illuminate the role of storytelling in mediating cultural attitudes toward death; and (3) offering insights for enhancing the educational and social impact of media-based initiatives in palliative care advocacy. Future research should explore long-term effects on public policy and the integration of new media to expand reach.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Firstly, I wish to thank God for giving me the opportunity to embark on my PhD and for completing this long and challenging journey successfully. My gratitude and thanks go to my supervisor Dr. Shazleen Mohamed, and co-supervisor, Dr. Muhammad Nurhafiz Hassim. Thank you for the support, patience and ideas in assisting me with this project. I also would like to express my gratitude to the staff of the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, for providing the facilities, knowledge and assistance. My appreciation goes to the participants of my research, who shared their valuable insights and experiences with me. Special thanks to my friends for helping me with this project. Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my beloved country, China, for inspiring me to pursue my academic dreams and aspirations. This piece of victory is also dedicated to myself, for overcoming the difficulties and challenges along the way.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CONFIRMATION BY PANEL OF EXAMINERS	ii
AUTHOR'S DECLARATION	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	xii
LIST OF FIGURES	xiii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background of Research of Zhejiang Communication University Hospice Care Video Production Practice	3
1.3 Problem Statement	6
1.4 Research Objectives	8
1.5 Scope and Rationale of the Study	8
1.5.2 Rationale for Scope and Case Selection	11
1.5.3 Specific Informants, Delimitations and Reflexivity	13
1.6 Significance of the Study	14
1.6.1 Academic Contribution to Documentary Film Scholarship	15
1.6.2 Enhancing Palliative Care Awareness	16
1.6.3 Tailored Services for Diverse Needs	16
1.6.4 Empowering Healthcare Professionals	17
1.6.5 Influencing Ethical Policy Formulation	18
1.6.6 Addressing Challenges in Documentary Filmmaking	19
1.6.7 Guiding the Filming of Hospice Care Documentary	20
1.7 Summary	21
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	23
2.1 Introduction	23
2.2 Conceptualization and Theoretical Guiding	24

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

With the development of the economic level and the advancement of science and technology, the Chinese people have gained unprecedented enjoyment on both the material and spiritual levels (Brown & Berzina-Cerenkova, 2018). However, while the quality of life of the Chinese people is certainly improving, the quality of death has received very little attention in China. The Quality of Death Index 2021, a global indicator of the level and accessibility of end-of-life care across 81 nations, assigns China a score of 40.8 on a 100-point scale, placing it 53rd in the ranking. Although hospice care demand is increasing, the progress remains slow. This suggests that the quality of death is still a marginalised issue in China that must be given more attention and coverage. It subsequently highlights the significance to explore the level of acceptance and influencing factors associated with hospice care (Finkelstein et al., 2022).

According to the National Cancer Institute (NCI), hospice care, also known as palliative care, is a specialised form of medical care that focuses on providing support and comfort to individuals with life-limiting illnesses and their families. Hospice care is specialised care provided by members of the hospice team (including physicians, nurses, home health aides, social workers, clergy, counsellors, and trained volunteers) who are committed to supporting the medical, psychological, and spiritual needs of patients (National Cancer Institute at the National Institute of Health (USA), 2018). The comprehensive healthcare service focuses on the pain and problems of the dying patient's death process by providing a comfortable medical environment, warm interpersonal relationships, and strong spiritual support that will help them complete the final journey of life while giving comfort and care to the family (Yu et al., 2022). Hospice focuses on quality of life rather than length of life. It provides humane and compassionate care to patients in the final stages of incurable diseases so that they can live a full and comfortable life (Mehta, 2023). The philosophy of hospice care is to accept death as the final stage of life, to affirm life, and to neither hasten nor postpone death. Modern hospice began with the mid-20th century work of Dr. Cecily Saunders