

The Portrayal of Urban Charm and Contemporary Atmosphere in the American Sitcom "Friends"

Yilin Gong

College of Computer Science and Technology, Harbin Engineering University, Harbin, Heilongjiang, 150001, China
isygong@qq.com

Abstract: This article takes the American sitcom "Friends" (1994-2004) as the research object, analyzing its urban background and contemporary atmosphere. "Friends" is an American sitcom set in New York, showcasing the urban charm and contemporary atmosphere of the 1990s. The series centers around the lives of six friends and presents their ten-year friendship, love, and career stories. Through these stories, the audience can feel the complexity and diversity of modern urban life. The actors in the play performed excellently, shaping unique character images. They represent different social classes and personality traits. These characters are vividly presented, allowing the audience to gain a deeper understanding of their inner world. Meanwhile, "Friends" also incorporates a large amount of urban elements and contemporary characteristics. The dialogue style in the drama is humorous and full of witty words and puns. The application of these language skills allows the audience to experience the ups and downs of life through laughter. In addition, "Friends" also reflected the reality of American society at that time, such as pop music, fashion trends, and social phenomena. These elements allowed the audience to better understand the cultural atmosphere of American society at that time.

Keywords: urban life, contemporary atmosphere, social phenomena, complexity, diversity

1. Introduction

The continuous development of internet technology has promoted rapid prosperity in various aspects of economy and culture, as well as the popularity of popular entertainment culture worldwide. As a representative of mass entertainment, film and television dramas have broken the limitations of space and region, causing a global carnival. As the earliest form of American film and television dramas to spread in China, American sitcoms are favored by American drama fans and English learning enthusiasts due to their simple plots, more daily dialogue, and lifestyle. The dissemination of American sitcoms in China has also provided new ideas for the creation of film and television works in China. Both "I Love My Family" and "Love Apartment", which are well-known to young people, are based on borrowing from American sitcoms.

There is a close relationship between situational comedy, urban atmosphere, and historical background. Situational comedy, as an art form that reflects social life, often incorporates the details of urban life and the historical background into the plot, presenting the style and values of the society at that time. Taking "Friends" as an example, the drama is set in New York City and showcases the prosperity and diversity of urban life in the 1990s in the United States through the life stories of six friends[1]. The dialogue style, character images, and cultural elements in the play are in line with the popular trends and values of American society at that time. While appreciating the plot, the audience can also feel the atmosphere of American cities and the characteristics of the times at that time. The creation of situational comedy is often influenced by the historical background, but also has a negative impact on the times. Situational comedy influences the audience's values and attitudes towards life by presenting social phenomena and character relationships. At the same time, situational comedy is also limited and influenced by the historical background, presenting the characteristics and cultural atmosphere of a specific era[2].

The American sitcom "Friends" describes the social background of America in the 1990s. During this period, American society underwent many changes, including economic prosperity, technological progress, and cultural diversity. At the same time, this period was also an important period for the development of the American television industry, and sitcom, as a popular genre, gained widespread development during this period[3]. In "Friends", we can see many aspects of American society at that

time. Firstly, the drama showcases the prosperity and diversity of urban life in the United States at that time, including fashion trends, popular culture, social activities, and more. Secondly, the drama also reflects the values and moral values of American society at that time, such as friendship, love, family, career, etc. In addition, the drama also showcased some social phenomena in American society at that time, such as gender equality, racial issues, homosexuality, etc. In short, as a classic American sitcom, "Friends" portrayed the social background and values of American society at that time[4]. At the same time, the play also became one of the important ways for the audience to understand American society at that time.

2. The Reflection of New York City Background in Friends

2.1 Presentation of New York City's Geographic Location

New York City, as the epitome of finance, culture, and the arts in the United States, holds a rich history and cultural heritage. In the popular sitcom "Friends", this city exudes a unique charm and ambiance. The geographical location of New York City provides an abundance of background elements for the show's plot. Iconic structures such as Central Park, the Empire State Building, and Times Square frequently appear in the series, offering a vibrant and diverse urban landscape to the audience. These landmark buildings not only showcase the urban scenery of New York City but also symbolize the city's prosperity and vitality [5]. Moreover, the characters in "Friends" often traverse through the city, engaging in various social activities and embracing the prosperity and convenience that the city has to offer. Simultaneously, they also grapple with the challenges and stresses of urban life, including traffic congestion and exorbitant housing prices [6]. These geographically-related plotlines add a sense of realism and a deeper layer of life to the overall narrative. Figure 1 presents a visual representation of the backdrop of New York City in Friends. It showcases various landmarks and locations that are integral to the show's setting, further immersing the audience into the unique world of the hit sitcom.



Figure 1: New York City Background in "Friends"

Furthermore, the geographical location of New York City offers a wealth of social phenomena and topics for the plot. The characters in the drama often engage in discussions about social issues such as gender equality, racial issues, homosexuality, and more. These topics mirror the social realities and historical background of New York City during the show's era, adding depth and reflection to the plot.

In conclusion, "Friends" provides a realistic and multifaceted portrayal of urban life to the audience through its examination of the geographical location of New York City. The prosperity and vitality, pressures and challenges, as well as the social phenomena and topics of this iconic city are captured in the drama, allowing the audience to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of New York City's culture and lifestyle.

2.2 The Exhibition of New York City Urban Culture

The multiculturalism of New York City is vividly showcased in "Friends". The characters in the drama hail from diverse cultural backgrounds, including Jews, Italians, Africans, and more. Their unique cultural traditions, religious beliefs, dietary habits, and more are seamlessly woven into the narrative. This celebration of multiculturalism enriches the plot with diversity and vibrancy, echoing New York City's reputation as a beacon of openness and inclusivity in the global metropolis [7]. The integration of various cultures not only adds layers of complexity and interest to the storylines but also reflects the rich tapestry of New York's melting pot society.

The fashion culture of New York City is captured in full glory in "Friends". The characters in the drama often sport the latest fashion trends and accessories, offering a glimpse into the city's evolving fashion landscape during the show's era. Fashion culture is also woven into the plot, as the dates, parties, and social gatherings attended by the characters are often settings where fashion is paramount [8]. This integration of fashion elements lends a sense of authenticity to the storylines and enhances the audience's understanding of New York City's rich cultural heritage.

The social culture of New York City is also imbued in the pages of "Friends". The characters often engage in various social activities such as parties, dates, and weddings, offering a glimpse into the upper-class social life and etiquette of the city during the show's era [9]. These social gatherings not only add vibrancy and interactivity to the plot but also facilitate audience identification and emotional connection.

One of the most iconic settings in the show is the café called "Central Perk". This coffee shop culture is a distinctive feature of New York City, reflecting the lifestyle and social habits of young people at the time. In the café, the characters gather to chat, bond, and pass the time [10]. They sing, dance, and celebrate birthdays in this space, alluding to the rich tapestry of coffee shop culture.

Figure 2 depicts a scene from "Friends" where the characters attend a party. This image encapsulates the vibrant social scene and the city's penchant for gatherings that are an integral part of New York's social culture. The characters' interactions and hijinks at these gatherings are often humorous and relatable, adding humor and warmth to the show's narrative.

Through its examination of New York City's social culture, "Friends" offers a behind-the-scenes look into the city's social life and etiquette, allowing the audience to gain a deeper understanding of its rich cultural heritage.



Figure 2: Pictures of attending parties in "Friends"

In summary, "Friends" offers a vivid portrayal of urban life in New York City, showcasing its diverse culture, fashion trends, and social etiquette. This cultural diversity enriches the plot, adding layers of complexity and interest, while also immersing the audience in the city's rich cultural heritage. The integration of specific cultural elements, such as the iconic "Central Perk" coffee shop culture, offers a window into the lifestyle and social habits of young New Yorkers during the show's era. This authentic representation not only enhances the realism of the plot but also fosters emotional resonance with the audience. Figure 3 shows the scenes in the common coffee shops in "Friends", which reflects the vibrant coffee shop culture in this city and its indispensable role in the life of New York people.



Figure 3: Coffee shops commonly seen in "Friends"

3. The embodiment of fashion trends in "Friends"

3.1 Clothing matching

In "Friends", each character is distinctive in their clothing style, embodying not only their personalities and tastes but also reflecting the fashion trends and popular culture of the era. Rachel's vintage-inspired attire, Ross's dapper ties paired with cozy sweaters, and Chandler's understated elegance are all examples of the distinct clothing matching styles in the show. These characters' styles not only add depth to their personas but also offer a window into the evolving fashion trends and popular culture of the time.

Rachel's retro fashion was one of the popular trends at that time. In the drama, Rachel often wears retro style dresses, high heels, and accessories, showcasing her elegance and fashion sense. This retro and fashionable combination not only highlights Rachel's character characteristics, but also reflects people's love and pursuit of retro style at that time. Ross's tie and sweater combination is his unique style symbol. In the drama, Ross often wears ties of various colors and patterns, paired with sweaters and casual pants, showcasing his fashion taste and personality. This style of pairing was also loved and imitated by many men at that time, becoming a popular way of pairing. Chandler's concise style is a representative of his personal style. In the drama, Chandler often wears simple T-shirts, jeans, and sneakers, showcasing his simplicity and natural style. This pairing method was also loved and pursued by many young people at that time, becoming a popular casual pairing method. These unique clothing styles not only showcase the personalities and styles of the characters, but also reflect the fashion culture of New York City at that time. In "Friends", fashion culture is fully reflected, from clothing matching to fashion trends, all of which reflect people's pursuit and love for fashion at that time. These unique clothing styles also add a lot of color to the plot, allowing the audience to better understand and experience the fashion culture and trends of the time. Figure 4 shows the clothing combinations in "Friends".



Figure 4: Clothing combinations in "Friends"

In addition, the fashion trends in "Friends" also reflect the social and cultural background of the time. In the drama, the costumes and fashion trends of the characters are closely related to the social and cultural background of the time. For example, with the rise and development of the Internet, people have begun to pay more attention to comfortable and casual clothing, which is also reflected in "Friends". The characters in the drama often wear casual clothing, such as T-shirts, jeans, and sneakers, showcasing people's pursuit of comfort and casual wear at that time.

3.2 Fashion industry

The popular elements in "Friends" are seamlessly integrated and are intricately linked to the social and cultural context of the time. The show's characters wear fashionable denim jeans, T-shirts, and sports shoes, which were emblematic of the era's fashion trends and resonated with the audience's sense of style. These elements not only contribute to the show's vibrant aesthetic but also reflect the cultural zeitgeist of the 1990s and early 2000s, capturing the spirit of fashion and popular culture during that period. The characters' fashion choices mirror the evolving tastes and preferences of the time, offering a snapshot of the era's fashion trends and societal norms. This integration of popular culture elements into the show's narrative not only enriches its overall aesthetic but also strengthened the emotional

resonance of the audience and made them have a deeper understanding of the fashion and popular culture at that time.

Firstly, jeans were one of the most popular fashion items at the time. In "Friends", each character often wears jeans to showcase their personality and style. The popularity of jeans not only reflects people's pursuit of comfort and casual wear at that time, but also represents people's desire for freedom and individuality. In addition, the diversity and compatibility of jeans also provide people with more choices and space to showcase. Secondly, T-shirts were also one of the popular fashion items at that time. In the drama, each character often wears different styles and colors of T-shirts, showcasing their personality and style. The popularity of T-shirts not only reflects people's pursuit of comfort and casual wear at that time, but also represents people's pursuit of simple and practical consumption concepts. In addition, the diversity and compatibility of T-shirts also provide people with more choices and space to showcase. Finally, sports shoes were also one of the popular fashion items at that time. In the drama, each character often wears sneakers to showcase their personality and style. The popularity of sports shoes not only reflects people's pursuit of comfort and practicality at that time, but also represents people's emphasis on health and fitness. In addition, the diversity and compatibility of sports shoes also provide people with more choices and space to play.

In addition, "Friends" also showcases the clothing and accessories of some fashion brands and designers. The emergence and popularity of these brands not only reflected people's pursuit and preference for fashion at that time, but also represented the development of the fashion industry and changes in fashion trends. The diversity and innovation of these brands also provide people with more choices and opportunities to play.

4. The embodiment of cultural elements in "Friends"

"Friends", a TV drama set in England, delights its audience with a rich tapestry of English language and culture. From everyday spoken language to slang, popular phrases, and cultural references and allusions, these linguistic elements present the language habits and characteristics of English society at that time. The various festival celebrations in the drama also reflect the cultural characteristics of English society, such as the ways in which important festivals like Christmas, New Year, and Halloween are celebrated, along with the traditional customs and cultural activities associated with these festivals.

Furthermore, the lifestyle and habits of the characters in the drama offer insights into the cultural elements of English society at that time. Their dietary habits, social etiquette, and entertainment activities are all representative of the cultural norms and values of the era. Additionally, the drama also touches upon some social phenomena in English society at that time, such as social class issues, popular trends, and cultural shifts.

Moreover, the values espoused in the play reflect the cultural characteristics of English society at that time. Freedom, equality, and individualism are among the values that are explored and championed in the show.

In summary, "Friends" offers a captivating portrayal of the cultural landscape and characteristics of English society at that time through its presentation of various cultural elements. The integration of these elements not only enriches the narrative but also immerses the audience in the rich tapestry of English culture.

5. Conclusion

With its irresistible allure, "Friends" exudes the urban charm and contemporary ambiance of the United States. By chronicling the life journeys of six friends in New York City, the sitcom masterfully evokes the triumphs and tribulations of modern urbanites. Additionally, the meticulous representation of fashion, culture, holiday celebrations, and other elements in the show offers a window into the cultural characteristics of American society during that era. This comedy not only delights its audience with humor but also showcases the rich tapestry of multiculturalism and American values. Through "Friends", we gain a glimpse into the vibrant urban life in the United States and experience the distinctive atmosphere of that era.

Acknowledgements

Jiangsu Tong Brand Professional Construction Project (Z215015002).

References

- [1] Hwang B H, Kim S .It pays to have friends [J].*Journal of Financial Economics*, 2009, 93(1):138-158.
- [2] Laar G G V, Hamburg J P V, Tas S W .Extrathymic AIRE-expressing cells: Friends or foes in autoimmunity and cancer [J].*Autoimmunity reviews*, 2022, 21(9):103141.
- [3] Wei Y, Ding C, Nan G, et al.Friends or foes? Strategic technology opening and adopting under competition between technological firms [J].*Information & management*, 2022, 59(3):1-15.
- [4] Badgwell B D .Multidisciplinary Care: How to Win Friends and Influence Your Colleagues to Provide Quality Goals-of-Care Discussions[J].*Annals of Surgical Oncology*, 2023, 30(13):7913-7914.
- [5] André Hajek, Knig H H .Frequency of contact with friends and relatives via internet and psychosocial factors in middle-aged and older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings from the German Ageing Survey [J].*International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, 2022, 37(1):1-10.
- [6] Diallo Safiétou, Patrick B, Anne M, et al.Liver transplantation due to fulminant hepatitis a in a traveller visiting friends and relatives in Comoros[J].*Journal of Travel Medicine*, 2023, 11(11):1-10.
- [7] Afanasiev V .Gazprom looks for 'friends of Russia'[J].*Upstream: The International Oil & Gas Newspaper*, 2022, 27(25):1-5.
- [8] Singh S, Christie N .Are business friends social too? Understanding information sharing in an Indian dairy cooperative through a relational sociology lens[J].*International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 2023, 43(1/2):67-88.
- [9] Liu Y .Research on the New Model of Aerobics Physical Education under the Background of Artificial Intelligence Era[J].*Mobile information systems*, 2021, 2021(10):1-7.
- [10] Litvak M L, Mitrofanov I G, Golovin D V, et al.Long-Period Variations of the Neutron Component of the Radiation Background in the Area of the International Space Station according to the Data of the BTN-Neutron Space Experiment[J].*Cosmic Research*, 2022, 60(3):174-184.