

An Analysis of Visual Communication Expressions of Digital Culture in Social Media Scenarios

Runzhuo Niu

School of Communication, Northwestern University, Evanston, USA

Abstract: Research on visual communication in social media and its impact on the creation of digital culture, identity performance, and public meaning-making. Instead of viewing visual expression as merely a way to share images, this paper builds a literature-based analytical system founded on new media studies, participatory culture, visual methodology and platform studies. The three levels of analysis are visual form, platform affordance and cultural interpretation. People use pictures, short videos, memes, self-portraits and other cultural symbols to attract attention and show their sense of self or take part in creating a sense of the collective. Memes are based on remixable visual systems for shared recognition; short videos generate a sense of immediacy through rhythm and audiovisual compression, and algorithms on platforms determine which visual styles are shown and spread culturally. Provide support for research in digital culture by connecting visual expression with user participation and platform-based dissemination.

Keywords: Visual communication, digital culture, social media, participatory culture, algorithmic curation, visual rhetoric.

1. Introduction

Digital technology and networks have changed how people create, spread and interpret cultural connotations in society. At present, many kinds of pictures, short videos, memes, emojis, and other interface-based visual forms are being used more and more often on social media to transmit information. Therefore, visual expressions are not only additions to written language but also one of the primary modes of creation and spread for digital culture. The screen is now a place where people observe society, present themselves and participate in culture.

With the development of visual communication, the form and significance of culture have been transformed. Images and short videos are also forms of information delivery. Composition, colour, rhythm, text-image relationships and platform dissemination all contribute to the social meaning produced. Memes, self-portraits and short videos can all be used to express emotions, social attitudes and group identities in compact visual forms. Therefore, the study of digital culture should consider how to make visual materials visible, spread and interpret them in platform environments, not only what these visual materials show.

Although some visual communication on social media has been driven by users and platform features, it is no longer confined to traditional broadcast media. Besides seeing the pictures, users can also share them, leave comments and create new works, etc., using the platform. These interactions provide social life for the visual materials beyond their initial production. At the same time, recommendation systems, interface design and visibility rules will affect which visual styles are more likely to be shown, spread and gain attention. Some research has given some support for new media, participation culture, social networks, memes, algorithmic mediation and digital photography. The above discussions are distributed at many places in the study. A full-featured system that considers the integration of visual forms, platform functions and cultural interpretation in a social media environment has not yet been developed. Therefore, this paper will study visual communication as a form of culture

rather than solely as a technical or aesthetic issue.

The three research problems are as follows. RQ1 What visual forms are used to express digital culture in the scenario of social media? RQ2 How do platform affordances such as likes, comments, sharing and algorithmic recommendations affect the circulation of visual meanings? RQ3 How do the visuals of social media participate in the performance of identity and collective cultural communication? The following is the organization of the rest of this paper. Section 2: Theoretical foundation and analytical framework. Section 3 examines the primary modes of communication for visuals on social media. Section 4: The effect of visual expression on identity performance and social relationships. Section 5 is the summary of the main contents and limitations of this paper.

2. Theoretical Basis and Analytical Framework

This paper is based on the work of others. Build an interpretive system based on previous research in new media, participatory culture, social network sites, visual methodology and algorithmic mediation. Therefore, this paper will investigate how visual forms, platform structures and cultural connotations are integrated in social media. The purpose is not to gather data from a particular platform, but rather to explore how visual communication can be employed to foster a culture of going digital at the theoretical level.

New media theory offers the first foundation for this system. Manovich believes that new media objects have been reduced to numbers and modules; thus, images, videos and other visual materials can be encoded, reproduced and combined in a digital environment [1]. Therefore, visual expressions on social media spread rapidly and are frequently adapted by others. Participation culture offers another support system. Jenkins thinks that the line between media producers and audiences is fading in convergence culture [2]. Users are not only consumers of visual content on social media but also its creators, spreaders and interpreters. Social network site theory further explains the platform context of visual expression. Social network sites have provided users with

profile systems, contact lists and displayed connections to link visual expression closely with identity presentation and social recognition [3].

Based on the above theories, this paper establishes an analytical system in three parts. The first is visual form, such as images, memes, short videos, self-portraits, emojis, typography, colour, composition and editing speed. The above factors can direct people's attention and arouse their interest. The second is platform affordance, and it includes likes, comments, shares, hashtags, recommendation systems and interface design. Therefore, the platform has increased the exposure and spread of these visual works. The third is cultural interpretation; under this heading are identity performance, emotional expression, community belonging and collective meaning-making. The three dimensions will be used to study the function of social media visuals as carriers of culture in the digital age.

The three steps of the analysis in this conceptual research design are as follows: First, some core theoretical concepts that help explain visual communication in the digital age need to be identified, such as new media objects, participatory culture, social network structures, memes, algorithmic mediation and visual methodology. The second is to connect the above ideas with the three types of analysis: visual form, platform affordance and cultural interpretation. The third is to use this framework to explain how social media visuals participate in attention organisation, identity performance and collective meaning construction. No new samples or unverified data need to be fabricated for this process. Therefore, it hopes to build an all-encompassing theoretical system based on the previous studies and offer support for follow-up experiments.

3. Visual Communication Mechanisms in Social Media

Visual communication in social media environments is carried out through several related ways. The first is memetic transmission. Internet memes are composed of well-known pictures, brief words and frequently repeated templates, and people copy or adapt the cultural connotations through imitation and modification [4]. Not only do they provide humour but also other purposes. Memes can also present social ideas, the public mood and community knowledge in a highly concentrated form. The Second Way is algorithmic transparency. Algorithms are not neutral technical tools. They participate in the selection, ranking and distribution of cultural works [5]. Users can edit the thumbnail, adjust colour contrast and editing speed, write captions and set the posting time of social media posts to improve the promotion effect of these posts in recommendation systems. As a result, the production of visuals is no longer unilateral. Cultural expression is determined by both the wishes of users and the platforms' systems that make certain contents more visible.

Memetic transmission serves to connect the creativity of individuals with collective recognition. A meme is generally spread through repetition and alteration simultaneously. Repetition can help the reader recognise the visual template better, and then various types of modifications will be made. At this time, the cultural connotations are not generated by a single creator but by a series of users who repeatedly interpret the same visual expression. Therefore, memes are suitable for expressing the emotions of the public, social criticism, etc. They are agents of both stability and change through

communication. A meme needs to be recognisable enough to be understood, but flexible enough to be used in various ways.

Algorithmically obscured are now the criteria for judging works. In the past, people did not know whether an image was good until it was released to the public. However, the creators of the content on social media are often aware of the platform's assessment beforehand. They may design the visual materials according to the rules of visibility, such as clarity, emotional impact, recognisability and quick readability. Algorithmic mediation will also limit the reach of a work after it has been published. It may also affect the production of the visual style before publication. Therefore, visual communication can be considered anticipatory because one must imagine the reactions of different audiences and the platform system to one's work.

The third is platform vernacular. Different platforms promote different visual behaviours through interface design, editing tools and display modes. Photography-centred platforms have promoted filters, square formats, curated colour palettes and everyday visual documentation [6]. The above tools can also carry out many other functions. They have also specified what kinds of visual styles are deemed good-looking, authentic or shareable in the environment of that particular platform. In terms of the methodology of sight, the meaning of an image cannot be derived solely from the sight itself. It is also shaped by where it appears, how it is shown, and what response the audience has [7].

Platform vernacular also shows that visual culture is not universal in a simple way. Pictures are in many languages, but their meaning may also differ based on where they appear. For example, the same selfie, meme or short video may be viewed differently when displayed on a profile page, in a public feed, as a story, or within a comment thread. Position of the interface, display time and interaction buttons will all change how users read the visual text. Therefore, platform vernacular should be regarded as a cultural grammar. It helps users create visual works and also directs the public in viewing these works.

The fourth is audiovisual compression in short videos. Online video platforms have fostered a culture of participation by allowing users to create, spread and respond to audio-visual content on a large scale [8]. Short videos are not static pictures but contain movement, sound, rhythm and other elements, thus providing people with a stronger sense of the present. Vertically oriented and continuously looping formats need to establish visual meaning in the first few seconds. Thus, the duration of perception has been shortened due to an increased speed of attention acquisition.

Audiovisual compression can also be used to explain why short videos are now very popular for expressing culture. Short videos need to integrate storytelling, gestures, sound, captions and editing rhythms in a short time. Compression is therefore more visually impactful but also more uniform. Creatively use well-known introductions, repeating sound patterns, subtitles and rapid cuts to catch people's attention frequently. Therefore, the short video communication mode is no longer limited to the propagation of traditional culture. Organize cultural expressions according to the temporal logic of platform viewing, and quickly capture and sustain attention through continuous sensory stimulation.

4. Identity Performance and Social Consequences

Visual communication on social media has changed how people express and learn identity. Identity is no longer based solely on written self-description. More and more are being created in the form of profile pictures, self-portraits, short videos, filters and other visuals. A typical case is a self-portrait. Although they are often regarded as symptoms of vanity, they are also social and technical behaviours that help people manage their own visibility, show that they exist in society, and communicate with others [9]. Identity performance on social media is thus both individualistic and relational. Users create a sense of self through design, and this self-concept is also influenced by expectations of others. A profile picture or selfie is also used to represent people. It is also an appeal for recognition, evaluation and communication. Likes and comments can affirm a user's selected self-image; otherwise, there may be no such affirmation and they will not change their visual presentation. Identity performance is thus an ongoing loop of feedback. Visual self-presentation is a negotiation between the desire of users to be seen and how the audience of a platform perceives this appearance. By angle, light, facial expression, background and digital filters, people create versions of themselves that they wish others to see and judge.

This visual agency is also accompanied by psychological and social pressure. Ubiquitous photography has changed the recording, memory and dissemination of daily life [10]. With the spread of mobile phones in recent years, many people are now more willing to post visually interesting life stories on social media. It does not mean that experience of life has vanished. Experience and representation are closely related now. Platform visibility may also reward highly polished and idealised images, encouraging users to compare themselves with a narrow standard of beauty, success and life.

The social pressure of visual sharing should not be attributed solely to individual psychology. It meets the requirements for exhibition and comparison in the regulations. When users repeatedly encounter polished images of bodies, lifestyles, travel, consumption and success, these images may be taken as informal standards for self-assessment. The problem is not that users edit pictures; for a long time now, there has been visual editing. A new problem has arisen: circulation on platforms is making certain edited styles seem normal, desirable and socially acceptable. It is no longer about preserving one's life and memory but about displaying one's daily life.

Visual communication is both a chance and a risk at the social level. On the one hand, images and short videos can help people and groups convey their experiences in ways that are not suitable for writing. Visual materials can promote a sense of community and stimulate emotions in the public. At the same time, the platform's functions may also intensify the phenomenon of visual echo chambers. If a recommendation system shows a user similar images, styles and opinions repeatedly, it may reinforce that user's existing tastes rather than presenting new ideas. Therefore, digital visual literacy should also encompass the ability to understand the conditions of the platform that determine whether an image is circulated online.

The above opportunities and risks show that digital visual literacy should be regarded as a core ability rather than a technical skill. Users need to learn how to read composition,

symbols and visual narratives; at the same time, they also need to understand how recommendation systems, interface design and interaction metrics affect what is presented to them. A visually literate user can interpret a picture and also knows why it has been shared and for whose benefit it was made to spread. The above extensions are required for studying digital culture in recent times on social media.

5. Conclusion

Based on the above literature, this paper will analyze the visual communication of digital culture in social media. Based on the above analysis, the visuals of social media are not to be treated merely as ornaments or basic carriers of information. They serve as cultural systems to guide attention, support the performance of identity and shape shared understandings. Distinguish among visual form, platform affordance and cultural interpretation in the framework; avoid treating social media images as isolated texts, and instead place them in the wider network of production, circulation, reception and evaluation. In light of the research questions, this paper holds that visual digital culture is manifested in memes, short videos, selfies, emojis and platform-specific visual styles. These forms spread through the platform's features of like, comment, repost, hashtag and algorithm recommendation. The cultural values of these works stem from the combination of visual forms, user participation and platform dissemination. Therefore, visual communication on social media is jointly driven by users, communities and computational infrastructure. The contribution of this paper is to connect visual communication studies with digital culture and platform studies. Provide a model for understanding the function of visuals on social media. However, this study is limited to the level of concepts and literature. In the future, some specific data from the platform, such as image posts, short videos, comments, and engagement indicators, will also be collected, and a combination of qualitative visual analysis and quantitative content analysis will be used to study the relationship among visual form, platform interaction and cultural impact further.

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