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Research on Visual Culture Communication in the Image Era: Postprint

Authors: Huang Botao, Li Qi

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of the image era, image-based communication has propelled the development of visual culture. Visual culture communication has now become the most dynamic mode in the development of contemporary communication media, exerting a subtle influence on all aspects of people's lives. This paper, integrating the contemporary context and approaching from the perspective of communication studies, based on the theories and methods of cultural communication in the image era and visual symbols, explores and analyzes the social issues confronted in the current image era.

Full Text

Preamble

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Authors: Huang Botao, Li Qi

With the further development and refinement of big data, cloud computing, quantum information, artificial intelligence, 5G, and the Internet of Things, the dissemination and utilization of information have become more immediate and convenient than ever before. In contemporary society, human eyes have never been so busy and fatigued. The proliferation of visual communication drives the development of visual culture, which is subtly influencing every aspect of people's lives. As elite culture and mass culture increasingly merge, new forms of communication between electronic media and the online world have accelerated the arrival of the image era [2].

1.2 Media and Communication: The Development of Imaging Technology

In the image era, it is necessary to distinguish between the direct and indirect meanings of images. As a form of dynamic imagery, film and television provide direct visual experiences through picture recognition; however, comprehending their indirect meanings requires treating the entire image as a holistic entity that can only be grasped within the context of specific continuous frames [3]. As Professor Wang Yuechuan of Peking University's Chinese Department notes, "In a certain sense, the image surpasses text and the image surpasses meaning; yet it cannot be higher than or deeper than meaning [4]." From the perspective of imaging technology development, film and television as an art of visual narration cannot lack narrative, nor can they eliminate spectacle. While narrative film and television continue to exist and develop, they are accompanied by technological advances in the media era that enable more diversified channels of dissemination. For instance, as imaging technology matures, people can now enjoy unprecedented dynamic imagery and experience immersive realism; moreover, various special effects can be applied to images through technical processing, profoundly influencing people's consciousness and behavior through this image culture.

1.3 Aesthetics and Habits: The Demands of Mass Culture

The proposal and continuous development of semiotics theory have provided effective theoretical support for the formation and evolution of the image era. Visual culture is transmitted through symbols, which carry meaning and have gradually become the primary vehicle and manifestation of meaning in the visual age context. Broadly speaking, most things can be regarded as symbols, which constitutes a defining characteristic of the image era's context. In the past, both image symbols and linguistic symbols faced challenges from the power of communication, as intellectuals were adept at using text and textual influence once dominated. However, as times progressed, people's reading habits have shifted from "seeing pictures" to "reading pictures." During the process of reading text, "reading" as an act treats words as abstract symbolic expressions, allowing readers to think, comprehend, and ultimately interpret the meaning that communicators intend to convey. Compared to traditional text, images possess more vivid and intuitive characteristics that deepen impressions of things and offer greater universality. Consequently, the aesthetic center of visual culture has gradually shifted from text to images. Because people prefer to quickly filter through massive amounts of information to select the most intuitive and suitable visual content, this has elevated their aesthetic demands and further promoted the development of the image era, allowing images to satisfy requirements unattainable in daily life and fostering a certain dependency on visual media.

3. Visual Crisis Triggered by the Image Era

Human observation of images cannot be separated from vision itself. Images not only attract people's eyes but also determine the very mode of visual engagement. The act of viewing cancels space and time, dissolves the body, and constructs the viewing subject as an instantaneous, visually-constructed entity [9]. In the image era environment, instantaneous viewing has become the norm when browsing networks, a process in which people may be unaware of their own loss and concealment of identity in the moment attention shifts, leading to the atrophy of critical thinking.

People in the image era receive daily bombardments of various images, a phenomenon that degrades visual perception, intensifies stimulation, and triggers what can be called a visual explosion. This visual crisis manifests in three primary aspects: First, declining cognitive capacity. In the traditional print-dominated era, people acquired information primarily through text. Unlike the straightforward nature of images, textual information required reading that exercised logical thinking and possessed inherent depth. Images, however, are simple and clear, requiring minimal reflection, which over time leads to an overall decline in cognitive abilities. Second, the diversity of visual culture makes information acquisition time-consuming and labor-intensive. Technological development has multiplied information platforms, and while people can access vast amounts of information through these channels, efficiently filtering for valuable key information has become increasingly important. Third, the authenticity of information conveyed by visual images has diminished. The popularity of image dissemination stems from its perceived authenticity and directness, yet with the development of various imaging technologies, the information received may not be genuinely authentic but rather "conceptual information" constructed by media. Consequently, the reliability and authenticity of visual images have faced growing skepticism, a matter worthy of serious consideration.

Currently, the characteristics of the visual culture era can be summarized as imagification and networking, with everyone existing in relationships of "watching" and "being watched." Network images possess richness, vividness, and timeliness, attracting broad audiences. However, due to the enormous netizen population and inadequate supervision during self-media operations, a series of negative social issues have emerged, including fraud, rumors, and cyber violence. This demands heightened vigilance and a re-examination of the relationship between images and viewers. Without improved media literacy and proper understanding of the visual crisis triggered by the image era, imagified existence and networked life may become people's nightmares.

4. Strategies for Resolving the Image Dilemma

The popularization of visual information benefits from technological advances, yet simultaneously creates image dilemmas. We must adopt a dialectical perspective when viewing visual images, actively reflect on the visual crisis, seek

ways to resolve these dilemmas, and strive to create a harmonious environment where text and images coexist.

4.1 Reconstructing Reading Culture

The development of the image era has gradually accustomed people to visual culture as a new primary mode of communication. Compared to traditional textual reading, image reading represents a form of shallow reading but has become the main aesthetic characteristic of modern society. Since we cannot change the important position of image culture in people's minds, the best way to reconstruct reading culture is to take such shallow and fragmented reading seriously and re-cultivate people's capacity for critical thinking. Although text has retreated to a secondary position in the image era, it must not abdicate its reading function and should maintain its ability to resist image hegemony.

4.2 Pursuing Deep Visual Culture

The image era is characterized by fast-food culture, fragmentation, and instantaneity, often leading people to deduce forms and patterns from surface appearances to understand information, symbols, and signification, rather than comprehending and communicating the original, authentic intentions behind images. People need to transcend surface appearances and enhance their media literacy by integrating visual literacy, information literacy, and technological literacy [10]. To resolve the image dilemma, we must disseminate deep visual culture. All cultures have vulgar and superficial aspects, and image culture is no exception. Therefore, to ensure images convey useful and positive information, we must excavate the connotations of image culture. As people use image culture to represent and reflect upon the world, the relationship between humans and images must be re-examined with the development of the image era. Deep visual culture demands greater attention to real life, reduced abuse of visual technological means, and a return to the authentic nature of images.

4.3 Establishing Correct Aesthetic Consciousness

Currently, visual culture communication through images has become a subjective demand of mass culture. While visual culture originally served people, it now dominates aesthetic standards. Therefore, people should view visual images rationally, enhance visual culture literacy, and establish correct aesthetic consciousness rather than allowing network images to control their aesthetic judgment. Learning to use new media is essential, as is fundamentally understanding images, strengthening the ability to discern image information, and actively participating in image creation and dissemination. This fosters greater autonomy and rational aesthetic capacity when facing images, preventing people from losing themselves in this era of visual image proliferation [11].

4.4 Rational Use of Visual Technology

Visual technology primarily encompasses image production, viewing, and dissemination. Contemporary society has witnessed qualitative advances in visual technology, creating new cultural landscapes. Therefore, when using and developing visual technology, people must adopt a rational attitude, acknowledge its effects, and reduce dependency. While visual technology development and innovation have promoted visual culture construction and improved aesthetic capacity, they have also caused people to gradually lose themselves and blur the boundaries between virtuality and reality while enjoying its benefits. Consequently, we must recognize the dual nature of visual technology, avoid excessive dependence, and enhance our ability to distinguish right from wrong.

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(Author Affiliation: School of Design Art and Media, Nanjing University of Science and Technology)

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