Visual Politics and Kansei: A Prelude on Social Media Visual Framing towards Political Participation

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Abstract

Images have the power to influence people's emotions, and social movement processes heavily rely on visual interpretation of events to forward their goals and objectives. When it comes to social movements, photos and images are often utilized as a tool to spread ideas, pique interest, and build support and certainty. The way images contribute to the development and dynamics of social movement and civic engagement have undergone significant changes in today's world of intertwined mobile devices and social networks. This article is the result of a thorough analysis of previous works on the subject of image persuasiveness and the power of media to sway public opinion through visual cues. The authors feel that it is critical to understand how consumers react to visuals in marketing and manufacturing contexts in order to get knowledge and a detailed understanding of how photographs help to encourage civic involvement among viewers in social movement settings. Finally, this work suggests Kansei engineering as a tool to study how emotions are evoked by images as well as a workable way to quantify image components that have the power to influence public opinion and stir up social movements.

Keywords: Visual Framing, Social Movement, Political Communication, Social Media, Kansei Engineering.

Introduction

Since the development of photography up until the present, people have had the opportunity to express their own opinions and see the world from many different perspectives. In visuals, science and art are combined to create a representation of a scene or a person. Each visual storyteller has their own thoughts and methods for capturing a specific quantity of the world to describe what they have seen and witnessed.

In the context of a social movement, visuals may be used to spread a message, arouse sentiment, or garner support. Social movement processes heavily rely on visual perception of events to support their goals and objectives. In the contemporary world, we have observed a growing interest in this phenomenon (Leung, 2009). Different academic fields address the

visual dimensions of conflict, from media scholars examining how social movement organisers use mass media to the framing of protests in private as well as public news channels. The visual memory, in which social movements penetrate the hearts and minds of the populace through iconic images, is the area of study for historians. Social psychologists have looked into whether or not these images have an impact on those who see protests and whether there may be a tendency to join them. Scholars of movement pictures are faced with significant shifts in the manner in which images contribute to the creation and dynamics of social movements in the age of mobile devices and social networking sites. Anthropologists examine how social movement collectives build meaning through visuals (Mattoni & Teune, 2014). Understanding what motivates users to join and share information with others in such environments is crucial since sharing of images and content contributions is considered as important to the evolution of social movements.

The number of social computing communities and online platforms, where users can share information in various ways, has grown significantly in recent years (Nov et al., 2009). When compared to traditional media, the use of digital photography and social media has changed how information is shared. Along with the creation and advancement of digital cameras, the sharing of photographs on social media has expanded. This trend will continue to grow as the market for smartphones with image-capturing capabilities expands quickly. However, this study aims to investigate and offer a basic knowledge of how people's emotions are triggered by images. It also offers a workable method that might be used to quantify the qualities of images that influence people's emotions.

User Generated Content, Images and The Media
Civic engagement and user-generated content have attracted a lot of attention lately. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are a few examples of social media sites that have contributed to the creation of a web of connections based on blogs and personalised networks where people can publish their own thoughts on their own sites, post photos or videos, and create communities around interests in common (Leung, 2009). Understanding how society interprets and processes visual data appears essential in the current democratic society of the twenty-first century, when the Internet and social media are the primary means of news distribution. The overwhelming force of the Internet, which affords the public advantages in terms of freedom of information sharing at speeds previously inconceivable, has "challenged" mainstream media, which was once a major source of information. People now rely more on online platforms for their news and information.

Citizen journalism is a well-known type of user-generated content on Web 2.0 (Leung, 2009). It is the act of an individual or group of individuals actively participating in the gathering, reporting, analysing, and distributing of news and information. The gatekeeper function and the line separating sender and receiver are both erased in citizen journalism. These initiatives will therefore strengthen the public's ability to express their views and raise their voices.

Researchers in the fields of sociology, communication, and media have researched visual persuasion with an emphasis on issues connected to advertising. In his book Visual Persuasion: The Role of Images in Advertising, Messaris (1996) outlined three key functions of images in advertising. These functions are to evoke emotions by simulating a real person or object, to provide photographic evidence that an event actually occurred, and to create an implicit connection between the thing being shown and other things. The characteristics of pictorial stimuli suggest that images can be used effectively to incorporate expectations into a message. If this is accurate, there should be several ramifications for both news producers

and advertisers (Cope et al., 2005). Understanding how consumers respond to images in a marketing context may help researchers better understand how images can impact viewers' civic engagement in a social movement.

Visual Framing

The concept of visual framing has been subject to diverse interpretations by scholars. Entman's (1993) widely accepted definition of framing has been applied to visual framing as well. Visual framing pertains to the deliberate selection and emphasis of perceived reality through visual stimuli to advance a specific problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment evaluation. Coleman (2009) expanded upon this definition by characterizing visual framing as the process of selectively highlighting certain aspects of perceived reality through visual communication, rendering them more salient, meaningful, and memorable, with the aim of visually promoting specific attributions, interpretations, or evaluations of the issue or item described.

The concept in question is consistent with the description provided by Gamson & Modigliani (1989), who posit that visual frames represent highlighted pictorial configurations that organize and imbue select aspects of an issue with meaning, thereby visually conveying its "central organizing idea". Geise (2017) further argues that visual framing devices are the most basic, meaningful, and coherent visual elements within a picture, which contribute to the overall composition of visual frames and, in turn, shape the viewer's conceptual understanding of the issue. When combined in a coherent manner, these visual framing devices serve to create a visual media frame that presents and visually communicates the "central organizing idea" of the issue.

Geise (2017) has pointed out that visual representations share two fundamental characteristics, regardless of their diverse forms. The first is that they convey meaning through a visually cohesive and all-encompassing manner that typically adheres to representative and associative logics. The second characteristic is that they are intertwined with social contexts. This latter commonality is especially relevant in the context of framing theory, which has long emphasized the interplay between media frames and the individual characteristics of recipients in the construction of meaning. Thus, the second characteristic is of particular importance in framing research, as visual frames are activated through informational cues that individuals employ to develop their subjective perception and interpretation of social reality.

The present study incorporates the four levels of visual framing proposed by Rodriguez & Dimitrova (2011), which include visual as denotative, visual as semiotic stylistic, visual as connotative system, and visual as ideological representation. This conceptual framework can be applied to analyze any visual medium or the perceptions of viewers towards visual content. The first level of visual framing is denotation, which was introduced by Barthes (1964) and is characterized by a literal or analogic meaning. According to Panofsky (1955), this level pertains to the "natural element of a subject" and involves questioning "who and what is portrayed in the visual". Additionally, Messaris (1996) describes this level as pertaining to the analogical and indexical nature of an image. The connotative level is another level discussed in this study, which pertains to the implicit layer of an image. At this level, people and objects not only refer to specific individuals, things, or places but also to the ideas or concepts that are embedded within them. In this context, visuals are analyzed as signs, and their relationship with other signs is observed.

Visual Media and Activism

Current research on social movements has identified social media platforms as the preferred means of information dissemination for social movement organizations, with little reliance on mainstream media (Basu & De, 2016). The multimodal nature of social media makes it an ideal platform for disseminating ideologies and information to a wide audience. Some studies on the use of social media investigate the textual and visual framing of messages to better understand their effectiveness in disseminating information (Khazraee & Novak, 2018). In addition, scholars have examined the factors that elicit emotions in response to different media. Advertisers and news editors have utilized a variety of media, such as sound, images, films, and written passages, to elicit emotional responses from media users and motivate them to take action. These different media forms have become key choices for media users seeking to attract and engage audiences, as well as evoke emotional responses and promote behavioral change.

Meanwhile, a multitude of studies have investigated the impact of images on emotions (Krause & Bucy, 2018). Newhagen (1998) delved into how photographs that elicit negative emotions such as anger, distress and disgust trigger specific negative emotional responses associated with motivational mechanisms. The activation of such motivational systems affects how users retrieve information, hence, emotions induced by images can affect the determination of messages (Brantner et al., 2011). Images can not only elicit emotions but also influence future behavior such as engagement in activism. Owing to their emotional impact, exposure to images in close association with key figures involved in certain issues may motivate individuals to take part in various causes, including political and social movements.

Theoretical Perspectives : Semiotic & Photo Persuasiveness

In order to properly explore the role that images and photographs play in social movement contexts, it is important to examine semiotics, the theoretical groundwork for visual communication. According to Harrison (2003) semiotics is often defined as the "science of signs," and in order for a sign to exist, meanings or contents must be made evident through various modes of expression or representation. These representations could take the shape of pictures, design graphics, or other visual media.

In his book Introducing Social Semiotics, Leeuwen (2005) makes the case that social semiotics is not a "pure" theory or a standalone discipline. It only comes into its own when applied to particular situations and issues, and it always necessitates thorough immersion in a variety of subjects in addition to semiotic concepts and techniques as a whole. The narrative of semiotic resources, what can be said and done with images and other visual methods of communication, and how the things people say and do with images can be perceived are all part of social semiotics of visual communication (Jewitt & Oyama, 2004).

Additionally, Cope et al (2005) make an argument on the underlying issue regarding how graphic images from war zones influence public opinion about American military campaigns and their participation in combat operations. Text alone is unable to convey the effects of images on viewers' attitudes, which are powerful. The introduction of a photograph in a news context would drastically change how consumers felt about the presented issue. The nature of pictorial stimuli suggests that images could be efficiently used to incorporate expectations into a message. Furthermore, according to Cope et al. (2005), if this were the case, there would be numerous ramifications for both news providers and advertising. It is argued that if researchers understand how customers respond to images in a marketing setting, they could learn how images affect viewers and participants in social movements.

Kansei Engineering and Visual Politics

As Cope et al (2005) suggests, text alone is unable to fully convey the effects of images on viewers' attitudes and emotions, highlighting the potential of images to be used as an efficient tool to incorporate expectations into a message, with implications for news providers and advertising. By understanding how consumers respond to images in a marketing setting, researchers can learn how images affect viewers and participants in social movements, making the intersection of Kansei engineering and visual politics crucial to understanding and designing effective political campaign materials.

Kansei engineering, also known as "affective engineering," is a methodology that aims to understand and predict human emotions and preferences in order to design products and services that better meet the needs and desires of consumers (Hussin & Lokman, 2011) . Visual politics, on the other hand, refers to the ways in which visual images and symbols are used to convey political messages and influence public opinion. The intersection of Kansei engineering and visual politics is particularly relevant in the context of political campaigns, where visual images and symbols are used to appeal to the emotions of voters. Past literatures suggests that Kansei engineering can be used to analyze the emotional impact of political campaign materials such as posters, advertisements, and social media posts. For example, Kansei engineering techniques such as the semantic differential method and the affective word list method can be used to analyze the emotional associations that voters have with political campaign materials (Schütte et al., 2004).

In addition, Kansei engineering can be used to design political campaign materials that are more effective at evoking desired emotions. For example, research has shown that using certain colors, shapes, and images can evoke specific emotions such as trust, fear, or hope. By understanding the emotional impact of visual political messages, Kansei engineering can help political campaigns to be more effective at influencing public opinion.

Moreover, visual politics also has a crucial role in shaping the way people perceive reality and how they see the world, Kansei engineering can help to understand how visual politics could shape people's emotions and how they react to certain images or symbols. Overall, the intersection of Kansei engineering and visual politics can provide valuable insights into the emotional impact of visual political messages.

Proposed Future Work

In contemporary society, the successful visualization of social issues holds great importance, particularly in the realm of social media, where individuals or organizations may aim to attract or sway audiences toward their cause or ideology. Visuals hold a greater influence in framing compared to text-based messages, as they require less cognitive effort and fewer learned skills to process. This makes visuals an effective tool of persuasion, as they are often perceived as objective truths, despite being a selective representation of reality (Jungblut & Zakareviciute, 2017). The author suggest using the Kansei Engineering technique to investigate and look at the relationship between social movement involvement and online photographs (posted on social media sites). Kansei Engineering is considered suitable since the technique may turn a consumer's hazy mental image of a product into a precise design. Since the purpose of Kansei Engineering has been to understand how a person feels about particular sights or presentations, it has become possible to translate and embed perceptual and emotional elements into product design features.

Kansei Engineering has historically been employed to evaluate images in terms of marketing and consumerism. The ultimate purpose of consumer imaging, according to earlier research, is to produce emotionally gratifying visuals. A further study that examines people's emotions when viewing images that depict or in some way present elements of social movement and civic engagement is crucial and made possible through Kansei Engineering, as suggested by the term "Kansei imaging," which suggests affective response by consumers may be influenced by the choice of picture used in relation to a product (Oicherman et al., 2009). However, social media and picture sharing are connected today, making it essential to understand the emotional components of images that influence users to engage in social movement through social media Kansei Engineering should be able to explain the phenomenon of visuals associated to social movements and civic involvement, such as feminism, or anti-war movements, if it could be utilised to comprehend how specific images are able to generate emotions in consumer consumers.

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