frontiers | Frontiers in Communication

TYPE Editorial
PUBLISHED 20 May 2024
DOI 10.3389/fcomm.2024.1426182

OPEN ACCESS

EDITED AND REVIEWED BY
Mirian Tavares,
University of Algarve, Portugal

*CORRESPONDENCE
Wibke Weber
webw@zhaw.ch

RECEIVED 30 April 2024
ACCEPTED 13 May 2024
PUBLISHED 20 May 2024

CITATION
Weber W (2024) Editorial: Insights in visual communication: 2022.
Front. Commun. 9:1426182.
doi: 10.3389/fcomm.2024.1426182

Editorial: Insights in visual communication: 2022

Wibke Weber*

School of Applied Linguistics, Zurich University of Applied Sciences, Winterthur, Switzerland

KEYWORDS

open-source intelligence (OSINT), data activism, mobile map design, environmental communication, climate change, distributed cognition, boundary objects

Editorial on the Research Topic
Insights in visual communication: 2022

In today's visually saturated world, where visual information overload is a constant source of struggle and new technologies offer ever new possibilities for visual communication, the importance of visual communication research cannot be overstated. Research in recent years has focused particularly on the evolving nature of new technologies and their impact on social practices and social dynamics. Digital technology has been a powerful catalyst for change in visual communication, revolutionizing it by making it more accessible, interactive, personalized, and global. Algorithms analyze user data to tailor visual content to specific audiences, increasing engagement and enabling real-time communication, allowing individuals and organizations to share updates, events, and experiences as they happen, fostering a sense of connection.

Along with these benefits, the technology has also brought some downsides: disinformation and manipulation of images; privacy concerns and copyright infringement; misuse and ethical concerns; loss of control; and the risk of a monoculture of visual content that limits the diversity of perspectives and voices. More than ever, research is needed to understand the complexities of visual communication in the digital age and to empower individuals to critically engage with visual media and artifacts. The technological impact on visual communication and the resulting changes are challenging researchers to rethink visual communication and research from unconventional perspectives. The authors of this Research Topic have taken up this challenge and share their valuable thoughts, insights, and opinions to shed light on uncharted research territory and future developments in visual communication.

Gutiérrez draws our attention to a phenomenon that has rarely been discussed in visual communication: How to make visible the invisible? In her *opinion article*, Gutiérrez discusses the expansion of data activism in the context of OSINT-based forensics. Open-source intelligence (OSINT) involves gathering data from various public sources and repurposing them to offer different perspectives on an event. It is about piecing together various elements to make the unseen visible, such as voices of disappeared individuals. By combining data from selfies, smartphone videos, social media platforms, surveillance cameras, satellite imagery, and news footage, a comprehensive picture of an event can be created. When combined with emotional elements, these tools can effectively reach new audiences, produce compelling evidence, and create significant impact. Based on her experience as a jury member of the San Sebastian International Film Festival 2022, where she assessed films that deal with invisibility, Gutiérrez shares with us eight reflections on the opportunities and challenges of making dispersed data a visual event.

San Cornelio et al. shed light on environmental communication, particularly on social media platforms such as Instagram, and how environmental communication activism can help provide new frames of understanding and promote social change and positive citizen action. Their *research article* demonstrates how activists and environmental influencers are reshaping the narratives surrounding the climate crisis by offering alternative perspectives. Using digital ethnography, visual narrative analysis, and in-depth interviews with digital activists, the study identifies key features of these emerging visual narratives: the use of positive visuals and content; first-person accounts that highlight the small actions that can be taken in our daily lives; and elements of popular culture such as memes to make sustainability more mainstream. Their insights from their research: Eco-influencers use different ways to address the environmental crisis than traditional activists, which can be interpreted as a broader cultural shift in communication strategies and signals a new approach to mobilizing audiences for environmental engagement.

Reichenbacher and Bartling discuss mobile apps as a tool for navigating modern digital life. They argue for adaptivity as a key feature of mobile maps because it not only promotes digital accessibility, positive user experiences, and inclusive design, but can also contribute to digital wellbeing. However, designing adaptive mobile maps can be challenging due to potential adaptivity issues such as misfit risk, cognitive disruption, unpredictability, lack of explanation, limited user control, and privacy concerns. Their *perspective article* provides an overview of recent developments in mobile cartography, focusing on research related to geographic information adequacy, the importance of mobile context, and principles of context-aware and adaptive map design. To support citizens in their everyday mobile activities with adaptive maps, Reichenbacher and Bartling suggest four research opportunities that can lead to digital wellbeing in an increasingly technologically mediated world.

Harvey also focuses on maps and map-like geovisualizations but emphasizes the role of visual objects as boundary objects in decision-making processes. In his *mini review*, he poses the question: "In heterogeneous situations, how can research enhance communication involving visual objects for problem solving through a consideration of social and cultural aspects?" According to Harvey, the concept of boundary objects, which originated in twentieth-century sociology, can provide insights and perspectives to better consider the social and cultural aspects of visual communication today. Using the example of cooperative design of maps, Harvey illustrates how the concept of boundary can enhance the production of meaning, facilitate decision making, and support agreement processes, thus leading to better solutions in visual communication. He advocates a renewed consideration of the boundary object concept to guide future AI-related research.

The articles in this Research Topic not only present original research but also reflect views and opinions on a particular area of visual communication and propose research directions. It is these personal insights and future perspectives that make this Research Topic so worth reading and inspiring.

Author contributions

WW: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

The author(s) declared that they were an editorial board member of Frontiers, at the time of submission. This had no impact on the peer review process and the final decision.

Publisher's note