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Chapter 23: Digital Corporate Communication & Visual Communication:

Status of Research and Theoretical Advancements

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Introduction

Particularly during the last decade, information and communication technology (ICT) advancements have brought a number of opportunities to people and organizations, including possibilities to utilise other forms of communicative expressions beyond words. A "visual turn" (Machin, 2014), which essentially underlines the increasing role of images and visual elements in people's daily lives, has taken place thanks to the development of visual apps and high-definition cameras installed on smartphones, ready to capture the world around the phone's owner. Visual communication - that is, communication based on images - is currently the preferred form of communication among young adults and teenagers who use visual content to convey stories, emotions, and ideas to others (Baron, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2018). Organizations have exponentially increased their offering of digital visual contents beyond traditional product advertisements as a way to convey stories and emotions that can be easily shared via digital devices. Effective visual communication can create a competitive position for organizations and companies in their digital corporate communications. While opportunities to leverage digital visual content for corporate communication have increased, professionals are still faced with challenges related to the planning of visual content production (Zerfass et al., 2017).

This chapter deals with the phenomenon of the 'visual turn' (Machin, 2014) in digital corporate communication, and offers an overview of the most important findings related to digital visual communication research. The chapter also introduces the reader to a newly developed theoretical framework: the *Four Realms of Digital Visual Experience*. This theoretical framework is an interdisciplinary theoretical effort addressing the changes in the digital media ecosystem and in digital consumer behaviors and expectations. The framework integrates elements of visual content production with existing knowledge about visual communication and experiential marketing. The chapter also discusses drawbacks and challenges related to organizational efforts in addressing the visual turn. It then concludes with an illustrative example of the applicability of the proposed framework and includes the authors' reflections on its limits and suggestions for further research avenues.

Definitions of the topic and previous studies

Visual communication is defined as a form of communication which is conveyed through the use of visual aids and contents, such as photographs, drawings, charts, figures and symbols (Thelander, 2018*)*. Much of visual communication today is about moving images, which can include a broad variety of media (e.g., film, television, games) and genres (e.g., documentary or fiction, real life or animation). Primarily, research on visual communication has focused on the aesthetics of static and moving images, their impact on consumers (e.g., in the form of emotions, attitudes, opinions, values, beliefs, knowledge, and behaviors), and their potential for application in conveying different messages. Together with verbal and non-verbal communications, visual communication is commonly used in corporate communication for different purposes such as enhancing an organization's identity or culture by using visual symbols, marketing and advertising products and brands (Wiesenberg & Vercic, 2021), and even in public advocacy campaigns for social causes (Chouliaraki, 2012).

Images are a very powerful means to convey a message as they do not require a person to know any specific language or to read text. Images enhance comprehensibility and clarity of a message, thus increasing the informative power of the written or verbal content. Images are strong memory devices. For this, viewers can easily recall them and experience emotional reactions that are held in a person's brain (Domke et al., 2002). They can convey organizational messages in an engaging and informative manner, as they help publics to develop a deep elaboration of the communication content (Philips, 2017). They allow for a story to emerge as a result of "an on-going sense-making effort through which identities, relations and actions assume shape and significance" (Gabriel, 2012, p. 4). In certain ways, visual contents speak multiple voices to multiple people, and can thus be very powerful devices for corporate communication.

Despite the relevance of visual contents in corporate communication, the field has lagged behind other disciplines' theorizing efforts on visual communication (Göransson & Fagerholm, 2018; Wiesenberg & Vercic, 2021). Overall, four major perspectives have emerged in the study of visual

communication: a) a rhetorical perspective focusing on studying visual content production as well as the meaning-making process, b) a semantic perspective focusing on the features of images and the cultural elements they represent, c) a pragmatic perspective focusing on investigating the features of images and how these communicate messages in implicit and symbolic ways, and d) a visual strategy perspective focusing on the strategies of the organizations' visual communication (Göransson & Fagerholm, 2018; Wiesenberg & Vercic, 2021).

While there is already a wide body of literature on visual communication from linguistics, semiotics, and cultural studies, primarily focusing on the consumption, perception, and recipients' co-creation of meanings (Wiesenberg & Vercic, 2021), limited are, however, the studies addressing visual content production, and, according to Fahmy et al. (2014), most of our stock of knowledge in this area is based on visual journalism (photojournalism, citizen journalism, bloggers) and mass communication in general.

In digital corporate communication research, visual social semiotics functions of images have gained traction among researchers interested in identifying those elements that can increase engagement and overall experience with digital content (Maier et al., 2019). Research shows that high-quality visual content can increase social media visibility and stimulate consumers' engagement (Kujur & Singh, 2020) and that both high-quality content and image purposes (informative, entertaining and remunerative) impact on consumer engagement and affect consumer-brand relationships. Online images positively or negatively affect the level of digital engagement in terms of users' liking and sharing processes (Domke et al., 2002). The presence of image-based content with specific visual features such as colorfulness, the presence of a human face, the image source and resolution and professional quality, and the image-text fit have a positive effect on users' engagement in both Facebook and Twitter (Li & Xie, 2000). Similarly, Romney and Johnson (2020) investigated what types of images could affect audience engagement by analysing nearly 2000 images shared by Sports Network on Instagram. They found that images, including narrative or meta-communicative messages using graphics and multimedia elements, generated higher engagement shown by an increasing number of likes and shares. Users'

intention to purchase and to share visual content with their own network of friends was also found to be affected by the presence of human beings and salient brands and products in the digital images in Valentini et al.'s (2018) study on Instagram users. Focusing on the use of visual metaphor, Peterson (2019) found that visual structure, object intimacy, informational loci, and illustration style positively impacted the participation and engagement of consumers, as these visual features reinforce digital experiences of games like puzzles to be solved by viewers. Image narrativity, intended as the ability of an image to tell a story, and dynamism, which is related to the degree of movement an image can evoke, were also found to positively affect digital users' emotions and their digital visual engagement attitude (Murtarelli et al., 2021).

What is changing?

Images have historically been used in corporate communication via traditional owned media (internal magazine, newsletter, poster) or paid media (commercial advertisements in newspapers, television, billboards, etc.). With the increasing digitalization of media and the increasing use and consumption of digital content, today most images circulate virally on the web. Not only that, the type, form, and genre of content circulating in the digital media ecosystem has dramatically changed and is continuously changed as ICT evolves. In 2021, 70% of digital content was made of visual elements, such as photos, images, drawings, sketches etc (Khoja, 2021). This trend is reflected in the growing popularity of visual social media such as Instagram, Pinterest, Tiktok, YouTube or Tumblr and has been intensified by the increasing use of visual elements in digital communications by both people and organizations.

Digitalization has also impacted consumer and stakeholder expectations and their digital behaviors, inducing scholars to speak about a visual turn in communication. Consumers and stakeholders communicate more and more via images, and new visual cultures are emerging as well as new ways of using visual content to digitally communicate with networks of friends, fans, followers has emerged (Machin, 2014). Phone memes have become common visual elements of written messages in the digital sphere, often ridiculing, satirizing or overly emphasizing some characteristics of an image and

transposing those from one context to another. To these, emoticons, or textual portrayals of someone's mood, have emerged as new visual symbols communicating personal feelings. Additionally, stakeholders expect to receive visual content from organizations that is engaging, meaningful and tells a relevant story. Experiencing it is now equal to seeing it. People do not need to travel anymore to see the "La Gioconda" painting by Leonardo da Vinci, they can experience it online, and via digital media they can have a whole tour of The Louvre Museum in Paris. Similarly, many once live experiences are now virtually possible through the powerful use of digital visual content that enhance virtual realities (Cho et al., 2002; Yung et al., 2021). All in all, digital images have altered the dynamics of people's relationships and how they experience and memorialise social and organizational lives (Davison et al., 2015).

Müller (2008) speaks about three major communication shifts driven by technological developments: the rise of amateur visual productions, the global dissemination of visuals, and their de-contextualisation. He states: "While visual production structures were once confined to professionals, and reception processes happened more or less in the private sphere, today the inverse is true – production is privatised, while dissemination is globalised" (Müller, 2008, p. 102). Visual content production, once primarily an activity carried out by professionals, is now more and more a user-generated activity. The spread of smartphone cameras, drawing apps and digital media have empowered digital publics' creativity and interest in creating, publishing and distributing visual content. Digital media have become thus the *loci* of visual content production and distribution, and above all, they have empowered digital publics to easily access information and exert their power by making their voices heard and to obtain control and influence over content and market processes (Li, 2018), including those related to visual content. The digital media ecosystem is thus populated by many visual stories that are transcended by mass-produced images, some of which assume iconic status. Yet, because there are as many consumers as producers, it is not always simple to judge the authenticity of visual content circulating on the web, recognising the source of the digital visual content, and understanding if alterations or manipulations of the original content were made.

Because anyone technically can be a producer, disseminator and consumer of digital images, individuals are continuously experiencing a stable stream of visual stimulations coming from different sources and media (Fausing, 2013; Rigutto, 2017). The challenge for communication professionals is, thus, 'standing out' from the crowd of digital images by creating authentic digital experiences that are engaging (Valentini et al., 2018). This means understanding what features of images suggest specific meanings and consequently how to create an architecture (Cohn, 2014; Schöning & Heidemann, 2018) of visual content that can enhance stakeholder engagement and generate some form of return on investment at the level of intangible and tangible assets.

What remains the same?

As a practice of communicating, visual communication is not new. Using images to tell a story and explain an event is the very essence of human communication. From the dawn of human beings, cavemen created visual content by drawing stories, animals and situations that they wanted to pass on to others as a learning lesson (Novak, 1975). Today, the production, dissemination and consumption of visual images has become more sophisticated, yet effortless, also due to ICT developments and an increased digitalization of our communication means.

Despite digitalization, much of the knowledge on visual aesthetics is still relevant for visual content circulating in digital media. Literature on visual semiotics has heavily contributed to the development of an architecture of visual content that can be applied to *digital* visual content. This architecture essentially contributes to a better understanding of images and their "semiotic resources, what can be said and done with images (and other visual means of communication) and how the things people say and do with images can be interpreted" (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001, p. 136), thus answering the question: How can organizations stand out visually from the large amount of digital content currently available in the digital media ecosystem?

The large, well-established body of visual semiotics work that has been studied and which has classified image-based features and their communicative functions offers relevant knowledge on the three main functions of images for digital visual content production too. Developed for analysing images in general, the *representational/ideational, interpersonal* and *compositional/textual functions* (Harrison, 2003; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996) have been specifically applied to analyse online and digital visual content as well, including moving images (e.g., Alkateeb, 2020; Elhamy, 2022; Maier, 2012; Maier et al., 2019; Murtarelli et al., 2021; Valentini et al., 2018). Briefly, the representational/ideational function is linked to the illustrated narrative with a specific emphasis on the sequential order of the represented objects and subjects and how they are presented in the image (Harrison, 2003; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001; Krees & Van Leeuwen, 1996). To recognize the representational function of an image, it is necessary to detect the presence of eventual vectors of motions or the relationship distance between what is represented. According to Krees and Van Leeuwen (1996), "when participants are connected by a vector, they are represented as doing something to or for each other …" (pp. 56-57). This function supports viewers in developing a better understanding of the meaning of a specific image (Aiello, 2006; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). The interpersonal function is about the relationship that an image enables between viewers and what is depicted. It refers to the presence of specific elements such as the direct or indirect gaze or the social distance between the represented subjects and the viewers (Harrison, 2013; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001; Krees & Van Leeuwen, 1996). This function offers a specific understanding of how an image can engage the viewers (Aiello, 2006; Harrison, 2003; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). The compositional/textual function is about the images' layout (Aiello, 2006; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001) and describes the compositional arrangement of visual elements such as the informational value, salience or resolution of the image. It shows which elements contribute to help a viewer make sense of a visual message (Harrison, 2003). Composition in visual content "is the equivalent of syntax in language—a set of rules that enable the signs of language (that is, words) to be arranged grammatically so that they make sense to the reader" (Harrison, 2003, p. 55). Each function requires the use of specific features for structuring the visual

content and that are synthesized in Table 1. Table 1 also illustrates what aspects need to be prioritized by communication managers in order to enhance specific image elements.

Table 1. Visual social semiotics functions of images, key features and implications for communication managers

Visual functions	Visual features	Description	How to apply
Representational /ideational	Narrativity	The image tells a story	To increase narrativity power, images should be constructed to include the presence of one or more actors, preferably while these are doing an action.
	Dynamism	The image evokes a perception of movement	To increase dynamism, images should stimulate an idea of change and/or movement by depicting, for example, individuals interacting with objects, or elements that communicates mobility or flow.
Interpersonal	Demand gaze	Subject represented in the picture is looking directly at the viewer	To have a person's face looking directly towards the viewer's eyes can create an effect of demand gaze
	Offer gaze	Actor represented in the picture is looking outside the picture or at someone or something within the image	The individual in the picture should look towards someone/something depicted in the image or else have its gaze not directed to the viewer

	Intimate distance	Head and face are only represented in the picture	Intimacy is created by portraying image elements that communicate closeness and proximity, such as a face or some facial elements
	Far personal distance	Actor is represented in the picture from the waist up (as a unit or in parts)	Images where individuals are represented from the waist up tend to communicate a less intimate, and yet still personal, feeling.
	Close social distance	The whole figure of the actor is represented in the picture	Full body representation of people communicates a less intimate feeling and more of a social/group level distance
	Frontal angle	Objects or subjects are presented frontally to the viewer	Individuals or objects should be shown frontally in the image
	Oblique angle	Objects or subjects are presented obliquely to the viewer	Individuals or objects should be shown diagonally or else be positioned so as to represent an imaginary diagonal line from one corner of the image to another.
	Vertical angle	Objects or subjects are presented from above to the viewer	Individuals or objects should be positioned in the image so as to create an imaginary vertical line from top down.
Compositional/Textual	Salience (Object/Subject)	Size of the objects or subjects represented within the image (quantity of	Elements that are big compared to the rest of the image elements communicate salience. Salience is also increased when there are a logo, products or other recognizable

		portion of the image occupied by them)	organizational elements (high salience situation) in the image.
	Modality	Resolution level of the image (if high or low)	Modality is modified by the image resolution. High resolution images are credible and are assimilated as a true photo depicting the reality as it is; if the resolution is low, the credibility and reliability of the image decreases as the image is perceived more as an illustration, a painting, or a drawing.
	Informative value	Where the object/subject is located in the picture (left, right, at the margin, at centre, in multiple positions within the same image)	The location or disposition of image elements, such as objects, logos, individuals and others affect the informative value of the image. Deciding if the presence of textual elements within the visual content should follow a left/right system, a top/bottom system or centre/margin system is dependent on the culture of viewers: For cultures characterized by a left-to-right reading system, the positioning of the main object/subject should be on the left. For cultures characterized by a right-to-left reading system, it is better to locate the object/subject on the right side of the image.

				Normally, elements located at the top of an image provide higher informative value as viewers tend to give more attention to this area compared to those at the bottom of the image. A central position of subjects/objects occupying a wider space including margins can offer higher informative value.

Source: own elaboration from Harrison, 2013; Krees & Van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001

In the next section, we move one step forward and present a theoretical framework which combines and integrates existing knowledge in visual semiotics, digital communication and experiential marketing into something that professionals can use to develop engaging digital experiences via digital visual content. The theoretical framework specifically addresses the following questions: What kind of experiences can visual content convey in digital media? What features of digital visual content can enhance these experiences?

The four realms of digital visual experience: A theoretical framework

Drawing on the literature of social semiotics and that of experiential marketing (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 1999; Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2013) we postulate that the most engaging images are those which can develop an imaginary around one or more experiences, which in our theoretical framework are called 'realms of digital visual experiences'. The *Four Realms of Digital Visual Experience* (4ReDiVE) framework can be considered a micro-range theory as it starts by observing and analysing the phenomenon of digital images and stakeholder engagement to develop specific propositions addressing visual content production aimed at virtual, online experiences that can be tested. The 4ReDiVE framework is theory-driven and substantiated by meta-empirical research. The 4ReDiVE main premises

are adopted from those developed by Pine and Gilmore (1998) and integrated with recent findings from social semiotics' image-based features studies. Similarly, as in the original conceptualization of experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), we propose to conceptualize digital visual experiences across two dimensions: participation and connection. Participation is one of the forms of online engagement; it is represented by a continuum from active to passive. At one end, active participation requires stakeholders to actively participate in content creation by providing their own visual content, for example by posting their online photos of the experience with the product/service or their own artcraft. At the other end, there is passive participation in which stakeholders are not involved in the co-creation or even creation of the visual content, but consume and share it with others in their social networks. Even if stakeholders are not participating in the content creation, they are not completely passive as they can still contribute to the success of visual content by engaging with the content in the form of liking, sharing and commenting. The second dimension is connection with the experience and the storyline illustrated by the image. This is essentially a mental relationship that is formed during the process of constructing, decoding and interpreting the message(s) of the image. On the one side of the dimension is absorption, and on the other side is immersion. Being part of the visual content, as a testimonial for example, or being the staging director behind the image, is a more immersing experience than watching, sharing or using others' images for own digital communication. These latter experiences belong to an absorbing engagement with the visual content, as viewers are connected with the image by its inner message.

Across these two dimensions, there are several middle points. A stakeholder experience with visual content is always a personal experience, thus the same image can technically produce different types of experiences. Yet, one type of experience may become dominant, representing one of the four realms in the 4ReDiVE framework. Digital corporate communicators can play around with image-based features to suggest specific experiences by also considering the level of participation and connection that they want to offer to their stakeholders. The four possible realms that are formed crossing participation with connections are: entertainment, aesthetic, educational and escapist (see Figure 1).

----INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE----

Entertainment realm is defined by visual contents whose experience is characterized by generating amusement among those who experience the image. Here, stakeholders are rather passive and absorbed with the visual content. Digital visual engagement is manifested in viewing, liking, sharing and re-posting visual content that has amused the viewer. An example is represented by online memes, images with humorous features, parodying real situations. The image of Bernie Sanders wearing mittens during the inauguration ceremony for the 46th President of the United States and shared in the digital environment is an example of an entertainment visual experience (Glenday, 2021). Memes are visual content with a primary function of entertainment, especially when they are used without any hidden intentions, but for conveying humorous vignettes and providing digital stakeholders the opportunity for escape from reality and living a fun moment (Milosavljević, 2020) . This is what happened with the Bernie Sanders meme: the picture of the senator donning mittens and a brown coat has been transposed and dropped into diverse situations, moments and contexts such as historical events, famous paintings, and movie and TV series scenes.

According to the visual social semiotics perspective, this realm is characterized by low narrativity and dynamism: visual elements are de-contextualised and made static to create an effect of hilarity in the digital users (Holm, 2021). They have low resolution and low informative value. Memes need to include simple and realistic visual elements to be easily interpreted by digital users (Barnes et al., 2021). In this realm, the represented object should occupy a large portion of the image to suggest an entertaining objective for digital viewers. The salience of the object should be high; objects should be in the foreground to attract the attention of the viewer and create a contrast between single visual elements and the background (Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2017). If subjects are included in the image, they are usually used in combination with objects and textual elements. The idea is to convey funny messages and keep the viewer detached from the visual content (Shifman, 2013). To plan visual content including a subject, three main features should be considered: a) the human gaze, b) the far distance between the subjects, and

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c) the perspective angle. As for the human gaze, this can be an 'offer gaze', when a human subject is used for emphasizing other elements in the images. Here the subject does not look directly at the viewer. As the aim of this realm is to entertain and surprise the viewer, the most effective perspective to represent an image is with oblique or vertical angles as these suggest different observing viewpoints of what is represented in the visual content without being directly immersed in the image.

Aesthetic realm suggests an immersive experience, with a rather passive participation. Here digital publics can immerse themselves in a situation by the simple act of mentally visualizing the scene/action through the help of visual content, without being physically part of it. An example could be participation in a virtual tour of a museum, or playing the part of an archaeologist and discovering new historical artifacts digitally. To enhance an aesthetic experience, high dynamism is key, and this can be expressed, for example, by using virtual reality technologies. The aesthetic realm requires high resolution-based visual content and a frontal angle perspective, as the involvement of digital publics is crucial and so their feelings of living the experience firsthand. The digital experience organizer does not provide a defined story, but visual elements are instrumental to suggest a specific task/experience. For this reason, narrativity is quite low, and visual content production should be less concerned about directing attention to specific visual elements and more to the overall visual experience. Single subjects, objects or textual elements are preferred visual elements. The visual content in this realm is characterised by low salience related to the objects; low informative value in relation to textual elements; far distance and 'offer gaze' when including human beings in the image. The success of this specific visual experience is obtained by harmonising different elements (graphics, humans, texts) in a unique visual experience.

Educational realm represents a form of experience that can generate some learning/new understanding for those involved. Digital publics become active and are absorbed with the visual content, for instance when the image tells a story prompting viewer's actions or informing the viewer about something that is not well known. Social advocacy campaigns that depict strong images illustrating, for example, women's genital mutilation or poor living conditions in some parts of the world can be very informative and generate an absorbing experience to some viewers. By imagining the experience of being

a woman under those circumstances, stakeholders develop mental and even emotional participation with the subject depicted in the image.

This realm is characterised by the following visual social semiotics features: high informative value, high narrativity and high salience. Here the visual experience intends to convey a message, a story with a meaning that can become remarkable for the viewers and consequently need to be evidenced in the visual content. Furthermore, low dynamism, as the message or meaning are more easily understood if illustrated and presented in a static way; intimate distance and 'demand gaze' if human beings are included in the visual experience, are preferred features when helping viewers to better understand the message presented in the visual content. Finally, an educational realm is characterised by visual elements with low resolution, as the content should be more relevant than the form or graphical elements, and oblique and vertical angles to provide alternative viewpoints for attracting the attention of digital viewers.

The fourth realm is the *escapist* one and this is characterised by a viewer's high immersion in the visual content and active participation. Experiences where the viewer creates visual content and shares this with an online community, or even with companies if allowed, are examples of escapist experiences. Fashion companies such as the Finnish brand Marimekko have prompted their customers to showcase their creativity, for example with Marimekko products and textiles through the sharing of their own images on Instagram and Twitter (Pakarinen, 2018). This realm is created with visual features such as high narrativity and high dynamism, as digital publics are totally immersed in the digital setting of the story and are able to create a hypothetical development path for the story; high resolution, as the realm should be perceived as real by the digital users; frontal angle, which allows viewers to live the experience firsthand; intimate distance and 'demand gaze' of subjects involved in the content; high informative value, as the viewers should receive all the necessary visual clues for contributing to the creation of the digital experience; low salience of objects, to reduce the viewer's attention to single objects and prompt a whole scenario visual experience.

Between the four realms of experiences proposed, there can be several middle points, in part because the way images are interpreted is still a personal matter. Furthermore, as much of the current

visual experiences are digital, supported by digital media and technologies that can augment a reality, image-related features must take into consideration the evolving characteristics of the digital environment. As this chapter is being written, Facebook's Metaverse is an under-construction project of advanced virtual realities where images of all kinds are used to enhance a user's experience to a high level. Other emerging digital technologies and environments may offer different opportunities to enhance these experiences. Yet, we argue, the central image-based features proposed in 4ReDiVE are still relevant in the production and construction of visual content behind each digital experience. Adaptation of the visual content to the channel is a key because digital media affordances and technicalities are different, and can lead to different types of experiences. For instance, if the message is crafted with moving images, like in a Tiktok video, or with a simple image, like a photo in Instagram, certain image characteristics are more suitable than others. In the next section, some of the critical aspects related to visual communication are discussed before presenting an illustrative example of effective use of digital visual contents.

Critical examination

Along with the opportunities offered by digital visual communication, there are a number of drawbacks and challenges that must be accounted for. As more and more content is now produced and consumed by amateur publics through the use of digital apps, the credibility, authenticity and reliability of visual content circulating in the digital media ecosystem is questionable. Considering that visual content speaks to everyone and beyond any possible language barrier, thus rapidly impacting people's opinions, attitudes and behaviors, the presence and circulation of manipulated images in the digital media ecosystem can negatively impact how people think, feel and act upon issues, events, and even products, brands and organizations. The phenomenon of fake news and deepfake videos are, in fact, also enhanced by the spread of altered images. Deepfake videos are essentially hyper-realistic videos using face swaps that leave little trace of manipulation (Chawla, 2019). This kind of technology thus makes it increasingly difficult to distinguish between real and fake digital content (Westerlund, 2019). Coupled with the reach

and speed of social media, convincing deepfake videos can quickly reach millions of people and have negative impacts on their perceptions and even decisions.

Similarly, when images are de-contextualised and used to construct a new, altered scenario, they can become vehicles for misinformation and malinformation. As a case in point, widely used spoofs are essentially consumers' re-interpretation of iconic brands in an ironic manner (Fournier & Avery, 2011). If most spoofs are simply new expressions of consumer culture, at times they can turn into laudatory ways for branding an organization, but in others they can turn into subversive attempts by fakeholders (Luoma-aho, 2015). Sharing misappropriate brand identities or user manipulated images not only confuses digital publics but also satirises the original meanings of the visual content (Vicari et al., 2020). Even digital visual content is today more and more out of the control of organizations' message production (Berthon et al., 2008), and this is something that organizations cannot do much about.

Research has also emphasized the dark side of digital visual communication, meaning the ethical implications of suggesting questionable meanings via powerful images. Visual contents have historically been used by the propaganda machine in authoritative nation-states, for instance during Soviet Union and Marxist times (Mignemi, 1996; Ventrone, 2005), but today cyber attempts to attack public understanding and images of prominent leaders (Buscemi, 2017; Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020) as well as the use of images by terrorist organizations (Matusitz, 2021) are other distorted communication practices exploiting the power of images. Furthermore, visual content shared online has a certain impact on younger generations and when this promotes wrong, false or distorted myths, the implications on social relations and personal identity can be devastating. Visual contents often promoted in advertisements dealing with body image and body icon representations (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004), sexuality (Charteris et al, 2018) and depression or anxiety (Keles et al., 2020) can be highly controversial. Being aware of what kind of visual features can affect individuals' attitudes and behaviours such as liking, commenting on and sharing visual content in social media can help communication managers to avoid the production of content that negatively affects people's beliefs. Knowing how to identify deepfake videos and fake, manipulated images is also a very important skill set that organizations and communication professionals

must learn to be able to detect and respond to so they can protect the image of their own organization from cyberattacks. Knowing the basics of the visual social semiotic architecture in part can help in identifying real from manipulated images, for instance by looking at image resolution inconsistency in digitally manipulated faces (also known as affined face warpings) (Güera & Delp, 2018).

In the next section, an illustrative example of a case company addressing its consumers' visual needs by offering digital visual experiences across different digital media is presented and discussed. The case is analysed through the lens of the 4ReDiVE framework.

Illustrative case: Heineken®

Heineken Lager Beer, commonly known as Heineken®, is a 150-year-old Dutch brewery company specialising in beer and cider production. The company has over 300 brands and sells across over 190 countries (Heineken, 2021). The company has a massive presence in social media with 89 accounts including 19 Facebook pages, 42 Twitter handles, 17 Instagram accounts, 10 YouTube channels and one LinkedIn account (unmetric.com, 2021). Since 2009, the company has decided to invest in experiential communication and marketing in different digital media, including its official social media accounts for interacting with digital consumers and developing engaging online relationships with them. Heineken® has creatively employed different types and forms of visual contents that generate high levels of content engagement, which is why it has been chosen as an illustrative example to explore the applicability of the 4ReDiVE framework. In its social media pages, the company has repeatedly tried to create a realm of entertainment, as most of the visual imaginary proposed to its consumers and fans is heavily rooted in irony and humour. The company has widely used memes in its digital visual communication as some examples from its Twitter corporate international account show.

An example is the checked rectangular figure posted on January 7, 2022, that is made of 30 single squares[1]. Taking inspiration from the Wordless game, Heineken utilized similar visual structure to

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[1] The image is retrievable from
https://twitter.com/heineken/status/1479582879982268421?s=46&t=OOnoIbf2rkdTDO6qRF_Shw; image 2,
accessed on 21 September 2022

communicate its product in a funny manner. The top line of the image has a row of white squares, whereas the rest of squares are yellow gold, reminding the colour and shape of a beer. No human being is included in the image; no text is present to enrich the informative value of the image. The image is totally abstract and there is no visual element that could offer an idea of movement or that could narrate a scene. Similarly, in another Twitter image posted on October 7, 2021, depicting the neck part of a Heineken beer bottle[2], there is no movement and no human subject playing a narrative scene. Green is the dominant colour, and a vertical angle is suggested. The image also includes four symbols, a square, a tringle, a star, and an umbrella, recalling the tv show Squid Game. Text is minimal. The words "Easy choice" appear on the left bottom corner of the image, whereas on the right bottom corner, the company logo is visible.

In these two examples from Heineken's® Twitter account, the entertainment experience is conveyed through the use of visual content characterised by specific features such as low narrativity and dynamism, the absence of human beings, the use of oblique or vertical angles, and low informative value. Both images have been appreciated by digital viewers and generated an engaging effect as testified by the above-average number of likes and retweets and some of the users' comments (e.g., "Send six packs my way 🙏", "Genius", "Best beer. In the world").

The company has also used the realm of aesthetics in some specific initiatives, for instance in the Heineken® Experience. The Heineken® Experience is an attraction located at Heineken®'s first built brewery in Amsterdam's city centre. In 1988 the brewery closed down, and the historical building was transformed into an exhibition venue where visitors can learn more about the company, the brewing process, its innovations, projects and so on. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the attraction became virtual, offering an opportunity for people to experience a virtual self-guided tour of the Heineken® Experience. Looking at the visual elements employed in this virtual experience, it is possible to identify specific visual features, such as: high resolution for a satisfying overview of the location; high dynamism, as the digital viewer can actively move through the venue; low narrativity, as the tour is self-guided and

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[2] The image is retrievable from https://mobile.twitter.com/Heineken/status/1446145794172653568; image 2, accessed on 21 September 2022

there is no narrated story during the experience; low informative value, as textual elements are not included in the visual experience; and the absence of human beings during the tour, indicating a passive immersion. All these visual features contribute to increase a perception of an aesthetic experience while learning about Heineken®.

Heineken® has also been attentive in offering an educational experiential realm. The Legendary 7 campaign about sustainability via social media accompanied by user's participation via augmented reality is an example of an educational experience. The goal of this experience is to make digital users aware of the company's sustainability strategy to buy 50% of its main raw materials from sustainable resources (theheinekencompany.com, 2015). Strategically this was done by developing a virtual experience where consumers and fans can meet the farmers via an augmented reality smartphone app and hear the farmers' stories about producing high quality ingredients from different countries for Heineken® 3. By scanning the Heineken® label with their smartphones, viewers have access to visual content suggesting an educational experience. This experience requires active participation and absorption of participants, since they have to take concrete action - scanning through the use of their smartphones - to live the experience. By accessing the augmented reality platform, individuals can access content from different perspectives (oblique or vertical angles). They can visualise the farmers' stories and these are characterised by high informative value and high salience, and the company's logo and products on evidence. The Amsterdam experience has been communicated and promoted by using visual content also via Twitter[3].

Another example from the company's pool of digital experiential activities related to the last realm, the escapist one, is the use of virtual reality for internal communication and organizational matters. Since 2019 the company has been using virtual reality developed by the University of Beer located in Italy (https://www.universitadellabirra.it) for training and teaching purposes for its employees. Visual content are accessible via virtual reality, showing the production cycle of different beers, including the diverse phases and materials of production. The visual imaginary suggested in this experience prompts a

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[3] See for example, https://twitter.com/Heineken/status/1488105061431627785, accessed on 21 September 2022

deep immersion with the content and the use of gaming via a visual sensor increases employee

engagement. Through these, employees are virtually able to live all the production processes as

protagonists. The visual features of this experience are characterised by high dynamism, high resolution,

and high narrativity, as employees actively participate in the story narrated by the organization.

Conclusion and future directions

This chapter offers an overview of most of the significant changes in the way digital visual

corporate communication is and will be performed in the future. As more and more communication is

mediated, digitized and augmented, the role of visual elements has become more important than ever. The

increasing preoccupation and interest in visibility and visual elements in societies in general has radically

changed the interest of scholars in humanities and social sciences who have increasingly focused on

analyzing the use of visuals for organizational meaning construction (Meyer et al., 2013). A 'visual turn'

has been reported occurring even in corporate communication. Professionals across the world are calling

for more theoretical knowledge in understanding the architecture of visual content in order to better

strategize their digital corporate communication. As argued in this chapter, successful digital visual

communication are those capable of creating memorable digital visual experiences that provide economic

value in the form of intangible and tangible assets, such as reputation, brand loyalty, trust, increased sales,

and investments. Far from knowing whether this phase of visual turn will pass, this chapter calls for an

increased understanding of visual features for the planning and management of digital visual

communication.

After reviewing the main literature on social semiotics addressing image-based features, and

borrowing from experiential marketing literature, we proposed a theoretical framework, 4ReDiVE,

explaining what features of visual content can enhance digital experiences and what these may be.

4ReDiVE offers a theoretical framework to help professionals to create a specific architecture of images

around one or more realms of experiencing visual content. Hence, 4ReDiVE addresses the call for more

theory-driven work on visual content production specifically addressing corporate communication professionals' needs. The framework was developed inductively from the literature and used to analyse *a posteriori* the content production of a business company engaging with different visual content efforts. The illustrative example of Heineken® shows that 4ReDiVE is far from being a normative theory; companies are already engaging consciously or otherwise in the construction of memorable digital experiences through the use of visual content. Yet, to validate the framework further, empirical studies are needed. Future studies should, for example, measure the concrete effects of 4ReDiVE in relation to indicators such as engagement, reputation, customer satisfaction, word-of-mouth, and organization-stakeholder relationships across industries, contexts, and situations. Likewise, understanding when and how negative experiences with digital visual content form is another area underdeveloped and which deserves academic attention. In an increasingly visual society, we argue, understanding what experiences can be offered and what visual elements may enhance those experiences can help communication managers not just in their planning and execution of digital corporate communication but also in measuring the effects (positive or negative) they are able to create digitally.

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