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Critical Visual Analysis

Yiwei Liu[1,a,†], Kun Ning[2,b,*,†]

[1]Shanghai International Studies University Bilingual School, Shanghai, 200093, China
[2]Software Animation College, Jiangxi Science and Technology Normal University, Nanchang, 330052, China
a. yiweiliu.84@gmail.com, b. 15020440115@xs.hnit.edu.cn
[*]corresponding author
[†]These authors contributed equally.

Abstract: The paper explained the use of critical visual analysis for understanding and contextualizing the images as well as applied the theories of visual consumption and social semiotics to analyze certain visual materials. Furthermore, this study examined the visual representations of refugees and immigrants who faced atrocities at the time of the partition of the Subcontinent along with the Mongol leader who was responsible for the largest empire in history. The research aimed at answering the question related to the significance of visual communication and critical visual analysis for comprehending those visuals. The paper used qualitative methods of research to answer the research question. Critical visual analysis helps not only in describing the physical features of the images but also in interpreting the notion and meaning behind the visuals. In today's technologically advanced world, visuals have gained prominence in the aspects of advertisement and meaning explanation. Therefore, critical visual analysis is paramount in this era.

Keywords: Critical Visual Analysis, Visual Consumption, Social Semiotics, Interpretation and Description

1. Introduction

Critical visual analysis is characterized as an important ability to take a functioning position in investigating the utilization of visual modes and other semiotic frameworks in social and political settings. In this way, critical visual analysis focuses on the power relations enlightened by visual creation and perception [1]. Guided by the theoretical framework of visual consumption and social semiotics, the paper intends to precisely investigate the notions behind various illustrations.

According to Jonathan E. Schroeder, visual consumption can be defined as not simply visual-oriented client behaviors like watching records, travelling, or window-shopping, yet additionally, a hypothetical way to the apertures of utilization, insight, and tradition, as well as the way in which pictures are taken care of by research to identify the customer behaviors. Furthermore, visual consumption is a vital characteristic of an economy that consists of memorable experiences for customers and is coordinated around consideration. In this computerized and technological era, pictures are intended to catch attention and construct names of the brands, spread awareness among customers and plan effective items [2]. On the other hand, according to Jewitt & Oyama, visual social semiotics view all images, portraits, and visuals as having been created to carry out explicit activities

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and study the hints given in the texts [3]. The structuralist semiotic way to deal with portrayal has been commonly keen on dismantling texts to distinguish codes and sets of decisions that are settled upon inside a given social framework and permit the individuals from a similar culture to see each other by connecting similar implications with similar signs. The primary point of social semiotics is to take a look at the way in which printed methodologies are sent to convey particular inferences and connections. Dismantling a text in a particular image in a deliberate way is a method to reveal its ramifications for critical analysis [3]. This paper combines the theories mentioned above to answer the following question: how critical visual analysis serves as an interdisciplinary method for understanding and contextualizing images?

1.1. Research Methods

This paper used online documents, research papers, journal articles, and videos to conduct the research. Qualitative research methodology is used in this paper as the data are obtained from online resources and are non-numerical. Moreover, the theoretical framework used to analyze the images consists of visual consumption and social semiotics. The theory of visual consumption by Jonathan Schroeder helped in comprehending how visual images influence consumers' behavior and what is the significance of portraits in understanding various meanings in a particular cultural system [2]. On the other hand, the theory of social semiotics delineates that there is a meaning and idea behind a particular image and visual text, therefore, critical visual analysis is paramount to understanding the meanings being conveyed in an image [3]. These theories facilitated this research and aided the critical visual analysis of various images. This research not only conveys the meaning of the critical visual analysis but also applies the two theories to critically analyze certain visuals related to the atrocities faced by Indians at the time of partition and that of the leader of the largest empire in history.

2. Critical Visual Analysis as a Comprehensive Technique for Interpreting Images

It is crucial to investigate and scrutinize photos one operates for investigation as well as displays. Visuals ought to be assessed like various sources, inclusive of journals, books, and articles, to find out their reliability, quality, and felicitousness. Images ought to be probed and assessed on numerous tiers. Visual analysis is a crucial measure in appraising a photo and comprehending its meaning. Also, it is essential to contemplate textual records given with the photo, the source and unique context of the photo, and the technical quality of the image [4]. In other words, in order to effectuate the analysis and evaluation of a particular image, content analysis, visual analysis, knowledge of contextual information, image source, and technical quality are paramount.

Critical visual analysis propounds observers with an all-encompassing approach to comprehending and conceptualizing pictures [5]. By associating pictures with the traditional circumstances of intake, investigators benefit from an extra apprehension of how photographs incorporate explicit traditional norms and differences [5]. Also, Roland Barthes delineates in his work *Rhetoric of the Image* that the person seeing the image receives the perpetual message and the cultural message at the same time [6]. Furthermore, he propounds that the "confusion in reading" emerging from it is proportionate to the informative ability of the perception of the masses. Nonetheless, their messages are frequently naturalized by being related to a given perpetual item [3]. Therefore, in analyzing photos, it is vital to consider not only the cultural norms but also their perpetual characteristics [3]. Texts on the visuals are different from verbal scripts because they are conversational throughout traditional codes while additionally conveying intellectually particular interpretations [7].

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2.1. Theory of Visual Consumption

The research uses the principle of visual consumption to illustrate and contextualize the images used in various fields. In order to further illustrate the principle of visual consumption advancing critical visual strategies, the paper develops a relationship between critical visual analysis and contemporary branding campaigns by employing an analytical idea of consuming difference. Besides, the research analyzes and illustrates some images through the traditional techniques of evaluation, comparison and contrast, and inference. Furthermore, the role of identity in visual consumption is a foremost issue in this particular examination. To explore the concerns related to an identity consisting of gender, race, and sexual orientation, certain methods are also used in which marketing functions as an illustration in the social contexts of cultural difference [5].

2.2. Theory of Social Semiotics Contributing to Advancement of Critical Visual Analysis

According to Iedema, the emerging theory of social semiotics is advancing the field of critical visual analysis through an approach that “aims for both social and deconstructive significance” [3]. Like cultural research, social semiotics identifies representation as a popular exercise and this is a procedure extremely rooted in and tormented by current societal standards and influential frameworks [3]. Nevertheless, social semiotics focuses on the precise semiotic sources which might be mobilized in a given text. One of the principle goals of social semiotic analysis is "to provide useful descriptions of main compositional structures which have turn out to be established as conventions inside the path of the records of Western visible semiotics and to research how they're used to supply which means by using contemporary photograph-makers" [3].

3. Understanding the Significance of Images and the Ways to Analyze Them

3.1. Increasing Impact and Significance of Images

Due to the continuous advancement of technology, society is prominently dominated by visuals and it has become more convenient to produce and spread images. This notion of the rising effect of pictures is not quite as clear as one would think. Pictures can be pictures, yet one likewise can have perfect representations and pictures in people’s brains and dreams. Even composing on a page presents a picture including the sorts of typeface utilized and the surface of the paper whereupon it is printed might carry specific sorts of relationship to the reader. Therefore, an in-depth analysis of images through the description of visible features and interpretation of hidden meanings is paramount.

3.2. Comparative Analysis between Interpretation and Description

Though there are many ways to start an evaluation of an artwork, a picture, and a publication, however, maximum experts are of the notion that connotation initiates with elucidation. The foremost move in the critical visual analysis is to illustrate the picture, mentioning properties that it contains, such as attributes of constitution, shades, and colors [5]. A primary method of description necessitates positioning the portrait inside a particular genre in large part swayed by medium. Genre types are not completely disconnected, and it is frequently not feasible to intercept interpretation from trickling into description [5]. The fundamental elucidation of images calls for the declaration of shape, tone, style, medium, genre, alignment, and dimensions – the foundation of pictures [8]. Various ancient artworks related to apprehension is beneficial for identifying shape and type as well as drawing comparisons between various works [5]. The connection between denotation and connotation is complex, however, preferably, interpretations are deduced from descriptive information [5].

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3.3. Analyzing the Images

While doing critical visual analysis, one should first point out the properties and features of the image and then interpret and evaluate it. A valuable beginning stage for descriptive examination is to recognize and portray people, places, items, and events in a photo. Descriptive analysis of a photograph and an image requires the examination of its form, medium, style, and genre [5]. Form alludes to how the topic is introduced. Medium alludes to the type of substance used for an item and a picture, such as paper, canvas, wood, and bronze. Style demonstrates a similarity among different art objects from a craftsman, development, time, and topographical area and is perceived by a trademark treatment of topic and components. Genre indicates a particular kind and classification. Furthermore, in the descriptive analysis of a photograph, the comparison holds great significance. The principle of contrast is to point out the solitary properties of something by comparing it with something almost identical but altogether unique.

4. The Denotation of Various Images

4.1. Describing the Images

Barthes was influenced by Hjelmslev's idea of connotative semiotics and utilized the ideas of denotation and connotation. The analyst should understand what a picture portrays [9]. In Barthes' terms, denotation refers to the persons, places, and things people observe [9]. Nonetheless, it is evident that semiotic materials never simply denote something, however, they carry certain notions and values. Therefore, in order to analyze the images critically, digging deep into the individual elements and wider discourses is paramount. In this chapter, various images are critically analyzed by recognizing their forms, media, genres, and ideas behind.

4.2. Analyzing the Images and Artwork Related to the Partition of India

When Cyril Radcliffe unjustly drew the map of the two countries documenting the partition, the Subcontinent envisioned pools of blood [10]. Punjab was set ablaze and the greatest migrations of history had commenced as a large number of Muslims began their excursions to West Pakistan and Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) while a large number of Sikhs and Hindus moved the other way. A large number never made it. Furthermore, what happened later on, particularly in Punjab – the focal point of brutality – was the worst kind of misfortune of its time. According to the theory of visual consumption by Jonathan Schoeder, society is now dominated by visuals and consumption is inherently visual, however, people still do not understand them or the information they are providing. However, artists like Paritosh Sen (1918-2008) understood the importance of visuals in human life and explained the atrocities faced by people during the migration and partition of India. He fostered visual language in Bengal by founding the Calcutta Group and introduced modernism to Indian art.

One colorful painting by Paritosh Sen (1918-2008) titled "Refugees" depicts the people who migrated from both sides and were poverty-stricken as well as homeless [11]. The canvas portrays the atrocities faced by the refugees during the time of partition of the Subcontinent. Impacted by impoverishment, starvation, and destructive effects of struggle, a faction of artists of the time dismissed the sentimentalism of the Bengal School of Art that portrayed "excellence" in all structures. They wanted to foster visuals that will assist in communicating the pain and atrocities faced by the people of urban areas. Some of them framed the Calcutta Group. Paritosh Sen was one of the establishing members. Through the theory of social semiotics, it is evident that like other works of Sen, this painting is also a myriad of emotions and strongly reflects the socio-political issues of India.

Tyeb Mehta's work *The Partition of India* (1925-2009) is filled with colors, however, it depicts anguish, grief, and miseries that are related to partition and separation [12]. Most of the works and

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paintings of Tyeb Mehta reflect violence, separation, deaths, and fractured forms because Tyeb's childhood was haunted by a memory of a slaughtered man, who was killed just below his house by a mob due to his Islamic belief. During the partition and migration, several Muslims were butchered in the same way by Sikhs and Hindus. Not only men but also women and children were brutally killed in the struggle of 1947. According to the theory of social semiosis, Mehta used visuals systematically to convey certain meanings and motion. He used flat planes of color in order to materialize space, matt surfaces, and portraits of grief. Through his work, he tried to give a calming effect even after highlighting violence.

4.3. Analyzing the Image of the Leader

Genghis Khan (1162-1227) was a Mongol leader who emerged from humble starting points to become the leader of the largest land empire of antiquity. Khan vanquished huge areas of Central Asia and China after uniting the nomadic tribes of the Mongolian plateau [13]. Moreover, Khan's descendants continued the conquest and expanded the territory to various distant spots such as Poland, Vietnam, Syria, and Korea. The Mongols ruled the range of 11 and 12 million adjoining square miles, a region about the size of Africa at their pinnacle [13]. Many people were brutally killed during the reign of Genghis Khan as well as throughout his intrusions. Nonetheless, he allowed religious freedom to his citizens, put an end to maltreatment, and promoted trade.

A portrait of Genghis Khan in the fourteenth century was authorized by his grandson, Kublai Khan [13]. The image indicates a resemblance to the works of several other artists. The idea behind this portrait is not to sketch the features of Genghis Khan but to portray him as a strong leader, although Genghis Khan is usually portrayed as a brutal emperor who slaughtered a great number of Asians and Europeans. However, according to the theory of visual consumption, individuals are greatly influenced by visuals. Therefore, Khan was considered a hero by the natives [14]. According to the theory of social semiosis, the eyes of Genghis Khan are saying that he was an intelligent and visionary leader. However, these meanings and ideas are not always certain because although Khan was a great strategist and organizer, he was known for using brutal tactics. Nonetheless, Khan was responsible for bringing law and civilization to the region and promoting religious freedom, supporting ethnic diversity, and studying various cultures and religions.

5. Conclusion

To cap it all, the paper is about the concept and application of critical visual analysis with the help of two theories, visual consumption and social semiotics. After explaining critical visual analysis, theories of visual consumption and social semiotics, the paper has critically analyzed the paintings of refugees who migrated from both sides of India due to the partition of the Subcontinent. Furthermore, one of the paintings highlighted the violence and brutality faced by the Muslims at the time of independence. Besides, an image of a renowned leader was also included in order to analyze the traits of that leader and common perceptions about him. This paper will prove to be helpful for the students of visual analysis and those who want to learn as well as understand critical visual analysis.

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