

Contents, Forms, and Functions of Interpersonal Pictorial Messages in Online and Mobile Communication

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Abstract

In mediated, interpersonal communication both written language (e.g. letter, e-mail, texting/SMS) and spoken language (e.g. land line telephone call, mobile telephone call) have been for a long time the dominant communication codes. Recently visual communication - especially via digital photographs - becomes more pervasive: Digital cameras and camera phones reduce expenses and efforts of photographing in everyday situations. They provide more options to take, archive and distribute digital photographs anytime anywhere. E-mail attachments and MMS mobile phone messages are the most popular forms of interpersonal visual communication. Online photo albums, mobile weblogs and photoblogs are further examples of the visualization or photographization of online and mobile communication.

Which contents, forms, and functions do have interpersonal pictorial messages? Which motifs are popular? How are pictorial message elements combined with textual elements? What are typical reasons for the production of visual messages? Between which communication partners are they exchanged? To answer the above questions a corpus of authentic pictorial messages was built. Also the visual communication patterns of more than 150 students and their communication partners were surveyed using a questionnaire. The presentation showcases and interprets selected pictorial messages and summarizes the results of the survey. Based on a content analysis, a typology of pictorial e-mail and mobile phone messages is introduced. Differences and communalities between interpersonal pictorial online, mobile and offline communication are discussed.

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