

Questioning the Visual: Research Methods and the Problem of Perception

SIG VIS - Visualization, Images, and Sound

<http://www.asis.org/SIG/SIGVIS/>

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ABSTRACT

This panel examines the state of visually oriented research methods used within the domain of library and information science through a series of recently completed and in-progress studies. The nature of the research questions being asked within studies using visual research methods forms the core of this examination and this is further clarified through an assessment of how these methods have been put into practice within the research process.

KEYWORDS

Graphical elicitation, image indexing, image tagging, participant generated photographs, taxonomies, visual content, visual research methods, visualization

INTRODUCTION

Visual content can be examined from many points of view (e.g., intellectual, aesthetic, cognitive, social, etc.), and yet the rich research potential of information in this form has largely gone underappreciated within the domain of Library and Information Science. While social science research methods (e.g., grounded theory, ethnography, sensemaking, storytelling, etc.) are widely embraced and adopted within the domain of library and information science, their visual research methods have not seen an equal level of understanding or practice.

The primary focus of research surrounding visual materials within the library and information science domain to date has been on topics surrounding image indexing and retrieval. These have included studies of the terms applied to images through social tagging (Golbeck, Koepfler & Emmerling, 2011; Sun et al., 2011; Bar-Ilan, 2010; Rorissa, 2010; Stvilia & Jørgensen, 2010), image description (Zeng, 1999) and image indexing (Ménard, 2013; Ménard & Smithglass, 2012; Wang et al., 2011; Matusiak, 2008; Rorissa & Iyer, 2008; Choi & Rasmussen, 2003; Chen, 2001, Jørgensen, 1998; Fidel, 1997; Enser & McGregor, 1992). Image retrieval studies in the literature within the domain have generally consisted of those that examine automatic retrieval processes based on image content (Bordogna & Pagani 2010; Zachary, Iyengar &

Barhen, 2001) and those which rely on text-based methods (Westman, Laine-Hernandes & Oittinen, 2011; Greisdorf & O'Connor, 2002; Hastings, 1999). The possible benefit of combining these two methods has also been examined (Apostolova et al., 2013; Névéal et al. 2009; Jørgensen, 2003; Enser, 2000).

Recently several studies examining topics beyond the traditional focus of research have been noted within the LIS discipline. These have included studies which have examined how users search for images (Choi, 2010; Matusiak, 2006), how images are used to communicate information (Snyder, 2012), why images are used in practice (Beaudoin, 2014; McCay-Peet & Toms, 2009), users' image needs (Yoon & Chung, 2011) and an exploratory study of the impact of scholarly images (Kousha, Thelwall & Rezaie, 2010). In addition to these studies, focused on images and their users, are the studies employing visual methods within their research design. These include the use of graphical elicitation techniques (Copeland & Agosto, 2012), the use of participant generated photographs (Agosto & Hughes-Hassell, 2006) and videos (Chalfen & Rich, 2010), the use of photographs to examine immediate information space (Hartel & Thomson, 2011) and the impact of visual design on the perceived veracity of web content (Robins, Holmes, & Stanbury, 2010). The variation seen in these studies is suggestive of the potential richness provided through visually oriented research.

Through a series of presentations about visual research methods used in recently completed and current studies, this panel seeks to 1) examine the nature of the research questions within studies using visual research methods and, 2) clarify how these methods have been used in the research process. While various techniques can be used to provide answers to the questions surrounding information practices, this panel seeks to clarify how visual means have been used to record, interpret and reveal meanings behind the phenomena we study. In an increasingly visual world, an exploration of research methods that reflect this turn is clearly warranted.

PANELISTS

Panelists will explore the visual research methods they have employed through a series of short presentations. The studies they present are representative of the current state of visually oriented research within the domain of Library and Information Science and as such they help to illustrate the rich research potential of examining visual content, their users and methods.

1. Christine Marie Angel, St. John's University: Descriptive Tagging Practices by Library, Archive, and Museum
2. Joan E. Beaudoin, Wayne State University: Participant Generated Visual Content for Learning Digital Curation and Preservation
3. Andrea Copeland, Indiana University: Graphic Elicitation Techniques for Data Collection and Analysis
4. Jenna Hartel, University of Toronto: Photographs as "Excerpts" in the Work of Swan and Taylor
5. Elaine Ménard, McGill University: Taxonomy for Image Indexing
6. Brian O'Connor, University of North Texas: Photography as Photons in & Photons out
7. Diane Rasmussen Pennington, Ashford University: Substantiating the Insubstantial: Seeing Visual Data through Vines
8. Ali Shiri, University of Alberta: Researching Visual Vocabularies
9. Leslie Thomson, University of Toronto: Dual Informational Layers in Visual LIS Research

AUDIENCE AND OUTCOMES

All researchers and professionals whose main concern is the full spectrum of issues in library and information science (LIS) that apply to image creation, organization, storage, retrieval, semantics, and use would benefit from the panel's discussions. Also, members of the audience will have an opportunity to network and form future collaborative research teams based on their common interests.

STRUCTURE AND FORMAT

As the point of this panel is to bring attention to the myriad of ways that visual research methods can be applied within library and information science research, the panel will follow a modified Pecha Kucha format. Each speaker will have 5 minutes to present 15 slides (which automatically advance at 20 second intervals) on their research projects. The panel would take place as a single session during the main conference. At the end of the panel, presenters will have an opportunity to interact with attendees and receive feedback on their work.

PROPOSED TIMELINE

Maximum time proposed: 90 minutes.

The session would run according to the following timetable:

- Introduction: 10 minutes
- Pecha Kucha presentations: 55 minutes
- Interactive discussion: 25 minutes

CONTRIBUTION

This event would be of immediate relevance to SIG VIS - Visualization, Images, and Sound, and other chapters such as SIG Digital Libraries, SIG Arts and Humanities, SIG Information Needs, Seeking and Use, and SIG Education for Information Science. Students, professionals, and educators may also be interested in the opportunity to learn about the work being undertaken at peer institutions and contribute to the discussion.

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