

# *An Analysis of the Communication Representation of Plog in the Era of Visual Culture*

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**Abstract:** We are currently in an era of visual culture where "reading images" has become the mainstream, and Plog, an information communication method with images as the main expression form, just conforms to this trend. Based on the background of the visual culture era, this study takes Plog as the research object to explore its communication representations. It is found that as a more optimized communication method than Vlog, Plog is widely favored by the audience with the advantages of simplicity, ease of operation and self-presentation, boosted by capital. However, as a product of the digital age, Plog inevitably exacerbates the audience's aesthetic fatigue of homogeneous content and fragmented thinking, and content creators are easily lost in the construction of personal personas. It is necessary to avoid these three major problems in the future.

## **1. Introduction**

Visual communication, as the earliest form of information exchange and communication for human beings, is an innate instinctive communication activity. Although the emergence of writing heralds the beginning of the civilized age, human beings have never abandoned "visual communication" based on images when using abstract symbols such as language and writing for information dissemination. As the American scholar Daniel Bell put it: "Currently, visual concepts, sounds and scenes, especially the latter, organize aesthetics and command the audience." With the social development and technological progress, the forms of visual expression have become increasingly diverse, and the arrival of the "image reading era" has become an indisputable fact. In particular, the development of digital media in the late 20th century has extended visual communication to unlimited fields, making the collection, processing, transmission, reception and reproduction of visual information quite simple. Plog, as a product of the digital age, is the most typical representative of visual communication.

The advent of the digital age has led to the decentralization of media communication rights, and ordinary people can spread their personal voices through self-media platforms. Since then, a large number of self-media creators have emerged. To increase their influence on platforms, these creators have actively explored various communication methods and narrative techniques, and Vlog was just a product of that time. With first-person narration and daily life recording, Vlog brings an immersive experience to the audience and satisfies the public's voyeuristic desire. It rose rapidly for a time, making video platforms a new outlet in the media industry and widely welcomed by users.

However, with the large-scale development of Vlog, the market competition among vloggers has become increasingly fierce. The real life scenes shot by vloggers in an unscripted and non-fictional mode are no longer favored by the audience due to the lack of appreciation and interest. For this reason, a number of scripted and exquisitely produced Vlogs have emerged, which to a certain extent reversed the situation of Vlog being neglected. But the current cultural soil for Vlog creation in China is relatively poor, with similar themes and increasingly formulaic styles. Moreover, it is not easy for Vlogs to attract long-term attention from users without hot spots, highlights and beauty filters. In addition, the trend of scripted and refined Vlogs makes the shooting and recording of Vlogs deviate from the original intention of simple production and real recording, and vloggers on various platforms have left the field one after another.

Against this background, Plog, a new form of communication, came into being. Plog has two interpretations: Picture Blog and Photo Blog. It takes photos as the main communication carrier and decorates them with text, expressions, symbols, stickers and other elements to convey emotions and meanings, becoming an important discourse for constructing individual emotionality, intervention and expressiveness, which together constitute the prominent textual characteristics of Plog. Therefore, it is more appropriate to understand Plog as "Picture Blog". Compared with Vlog, both Plog and Vlog record personal daily life from a first-person perspective, which fully conforms to the mobile, social, narrative and fragmented reading habits of users in the digital age. However, Plog has more prominent self-presentation features. Plog creators spread information with images as the carrier and conduct a series of post-processing such as color grading, reorganization and beautification of images, bringing people subjective enjoyment of beauty and visual impact, which is more in line with the reading needs of the image reading era. On the other hand, Plog is more in line with the fast reading habits of the audience in an accelerated society. Although the duration of Vlogs is short, watching a rambling and unfocused Vlog will waste the audience's precious time and exacerbate individual time anxiety. In contrast, Plog avoids this shortcoming well. With images as the main expression form, the audience can browse the image content they are interested in by sliding their fingers left and right, with stronger autonomy, convenience and speed. In addition, the cooperation of text, stickers, lines and other forms in the images enables the audience to quickly understand the creator's intention, fully meeting the audience's reading needs.

## 2. Construction paths of Plog communication

Similar to the construction path of the "Vlog boom", Plog was first known to the public due to the promotion of celebrities, leading the public to imitate it one after another. But the fundamental reason why it has developed to this day and the trend of national participation far exceeds that of Vlog is that Plog not only satisfies Ploggers' desire for information expression with simple operation and self-presentation, but also conforms to the audience's demand for fragmented, efficient and interesting content acquisition in the digital age.

### 2.1 Boost from capital operation

In 1940, Lazarsfeld first proposed the term "opinion leader" in "The People's Choice"[1]. He believed that some people often provide information, opinions or suggestions for others and can exert personal influence on them, so he called this group of people "opinion leaders". With the prosperity of the Internet, especially the wide application of social platforms, online opinion leaders have emerged and played an important role. Generally speaking, online opinion leaders have a large fan base and can guide public opinion and influence online audiences. Looking at Plog, it was also the use of Plog by some celebrities at its birth that made their fans follow in large numbers. Coupled with Plog's own advantages, it has gradually attracted more and more people to use it. Smelling the

users' preference for use, platforms have also begun to consciously divert traffic for Plog through topics. For example, related topics such as "#Ouyang Nana shares daily Plog", "#Zhou Yutong's Plog in a foreign land" and "#Wang Bingbing releases Plog to bid farewell to 2022" have frequently appeared on hot search lists. In 2019, the Weibo account @plogger launched the topic activity "#Plog Renaissance Plan#", which attracted a large number of netizens to share their Plogs with the topic on Weibo, with a huge response. Later, it even set off a "LOMO" wave. Eventually, Plog began to become popular rapidly through repeated topic marketing.

The booming development of Plog has gradually attracted the attention of academia and industry. Academic research on Plog has increased, and the natural fit between Plog and advertising marketing tonality has further boosted the prosperity of Plog. The main content of Plog is the recording and sharing of daily life such as clothing, food, shopping and scenery, and Ploggers will directly mark and highlight the content, pictures or items they want to emphasize most in the images with labels, text, paintings and so on. For advertisers, this is an excellent place for product promotion. Advertisers cooperate with Ploggers to place their products directly in the images shared by Ploggers, and express their experience of use or praise for the products through supporting text or images. To a certain extent, they can make the products more known with the influence of Ploggers, and even stimulate the audience's desire to buy and increase product sales. Therefore, the celebrity effect has promoted the rise of Plog, and the entry of capital has truly boosted the booming development of Plog.

## 2.2 Simplicity and ease of operation

As Paul Levinson said: "The performance of all media will eventually become more and more humanized." [2] In this era of rapid development and accelerated pace of life, people are more willing to choose efficient and convenient media forms to meet their needs for content dissemination and information acquisition. The reason why Vlog was popular with the public at first is also that creators only need to shoot with mobile phones, with simple operation and easy to get started. However, with the continuous increase of vloggers, the competition in the Vlog industry has entered a white-hot stage. To gain the audience's attention, Vlog has started a trend of scripted and exquisite shooting - the use of complex equipment such as flip screen cameras and octopus tripods has become increasingly frequent. Since many ordinary Vlog lovers cannot compete with head bloggers with a large number of fans and excellent professional skills, they have taken the initiative to leave the field and switch to other areas, and the popularity of Vlog has gradually faded. In contrast, Plog is simple to operate, with static images as the final presentation form, low requirements for shooting equipment configuration, low communication costs and low production thresholds, which has gradually gained wider public participation and a broader radiation range.

In terms of operation steps, Plog only requires three steps: taking photos, making and sharing. Compared with Vlog, which requires certain skills in video conception, shooting, editing and post-production, users only need to add personalized materials such as text, expressions, filters and stickers to the daily photos taken according to their personal wishes, with high tolerance and low threshold. In terms of operation difficulty, although the final presented photos of Plog are diverse and complex, they only rely on fast photo editing software on mobile terminals. Users only need to import the photos they have taken and use one-click retouching or click the desired material template according to their personal preferences, which is simple and convenient.

## 2.3 Achievement of self-presentation

With the development of the Internet and social media, it has become increasingly convenient for individuals to receive and express information, and the content presented on social media has

become increasingly diverse. The presentation of others' colorful lives has to a certain extent stimulated individuals' desire for self-expression. Plog has become a high-quality tool for users to meet their self-presentation needs with its advantages of personalized self-expression. Erving Goffman, an American sociologist, put forward the concept of "self-presentation" in his work "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life"[3]. He believed that during stage performances, performers will judge the current situation, understand social norms and the audience's expectations for the role, and strategically show the posture that individuals should show in line with social expectations through a series of impression management, so as to make the performance conform to the stage persona. Extending this to daily life, the self presented by people in daily life is also a self-performance. To realize the expected perception of oneself by others, individuals will show themselves strategically. Especially the anonymity of the network space provides convenience for individuals to modify themselves and thus present an ideal self. As a new way of self-expression in social networks, Plog just meets the purpose of users' self-presentation and self-construction. As the "front stage" of the performance, on the one hand, Ploggers selectively display their personal lives and conduct personalized secondary processing on them, which can present a high-quality and beautiful life state of individuals; on the other hand, the secondary processing of Plog can also reflect individuals' aesthetic and fashion accomplishment, satisfying individuals' psychological needs of self-presentation and the construction of ideal self. It is worth noting that with the launch of the function of setting sharing scope on social platforms, some Ploggers can selectively present content to friends, and even establish groups to publish different Plogs according to different groups, so as to create and deepen different personas among different groups of people.

In addition, the choice of decorative materials such as text, stickers and expressions outside Plog images can express the implied meaning of the images and enrich the connotation of the images. On the one hand, it satisfies the voyeuristic desire of Plog audiences; on the other hand, the addition of Plog decorations can expand the selection range of photos. The original "bad photos" that cannot accurately convey emotions and meanings with inconspicuous themes but interesting content, or blurred image quality but important information can convey emotions and meanings in an interesting and novel way after secondary processing, meeting the audience's pursuit of interest and appreciation.

### **3. Existing problems of Plog communication**

As a product of the digital age, although Plog conforms to the audience's demand for self-presentation and fragmented reading habits, the long-term influence of Plog will also lead to the audience's aesthetic fatigue, and content creators are easily lost in the "false persona" they create, making it difficult to accurately judge their self-worth.

#### **3.1 Aesthetic fatigue of homogeneous content**

As a product of the Internet age, Plog is faced with the same problem as other products developed in the digital age in its development process - algorithm recommendation will lead to the homogenization of Plog content received by the audience. On the one hand, the background of social media will collect users' usage data through algorithms and big data technology, and depict user portraits according to the data for personalized and customized information push. Although personalized recommendation technology can push information that meets users' tastes, long-term viewing of homogeneous content will lead users to fall into the information cocoon they weave themselves, eventually leading to the blockage of personal cognitive scope and the formation of unchangeable preconceptions. On the other hand, long-term viewing of homogeneous content will cause users to have aesthetic fatigue and lose interest in reading content that originally conforms to

their personal reading preferences. If the platform does not interfere with this problem and still maintains the promotion of homogeneous content, it is very likely to lead to the loss of platform users.

To avoid this problem, on the one hand, social media platforms need to improve the big data push mechanism, so that the media background can appropriately add recommendations for content in different fields while pushing information that meets the audience's reading preferences. On the other hand, media platforms should use the audience's psychology to recommend diverse information to the audience through diverse communication methods, so that users can have more diverse choices of content, and reasonably let the audience choose the content and communication forms they are interested in through the psychology of online audiences instead of leaving the right of choice to big data. For example, the Douyin short video platform has set up a mechanism for users to independently choose whether to turn off the platform's personalized recommendation.

### 3.2 Obsession with persona construction

As a means for creators to present daily life, Plog creators often conduct secondary selection and re-presentation of the real situations they experience to construct corresponding personas on social platforms for better communication effects, and selectively display the content that meets personal and audience expectations[4]. However, this secondary creation actually destroys the authenticity, conceals the intention of Ploggers to avoid sharing the full picture of things, and is a "false persona" created in the network space. To maintain the "false persona", Ploggers must keep the style, topic and persona of each published Plog consistent. Therefore, based on the performative nature of self-presentation, the authenticity of Plog in social media has been dispelled. From the audience's perspective, satisfying their own voyeuristic desire and enjoying the pleasure brought by beautiful things is their pursuit of watching Plog, and the authenticity of Plog content is no longer important. Eventually, the public's indulgence in authenticity has contributed to Ploggers' creation of "false personas". For creators, long-term immersion in the satisfaction brought by the "false persona" will make them lose the accurate cognition of themselves and the objective judgment of their self-worth. For the audience, it is easy for them to regard the false persona created by creators as their real life in the true and false network, and produce a strong sense of gap in the comparison between themselves and others, thus affecting their normal life.

### 3.3 Aggravation of fragmented thinking

According to the 50th \*Statistical Report on Internet Development in China\* released by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), by June 2022, the scale of short video users in China reached 962 million, accounting for 91.5% of the total number of netizens. It can be seen that the way of obtaining information fragmentally has become the norm in the Internet age. The original complete information with internal logic has gradually become chaotic and disorderly information fragments with only results presented and no process interpretation with the development of various technologies and software development, which meets people's demand for information acquisition under the accelerated logic. In particular, Plog, which is characterized by straightforward and concise content expression and short reading time, is more in line with this trend, making more and more people like to share information in the form of images with Plog. In contrast, the form of text sharing needs to mobilize people's logical thinking ability and pay attention to the choice of words and sentences, which is not suitable for people's thinking habits in the fast-paced and fragmented era. In the long run, however, Plog's compliance with the audience's fragmented reading habits is likely to make the audience fall into the trap of fragmented thinking. The pleasure brought by the fragmented jump of images will dilute the meaning of images. The

visual stimulation of bright colors and cut-and-paste label graffiti will make people lose the appreciation of texts with rich humanistic connotations. Eventually, the audience will follow superficial, superficial, sensory and stimulating information, ignore the excavation of deep meanings, lose the ability of in-depth thinking, and have difficulty in maintaining attention for a long time. Therefore, in the future, while enjoying the visual pleasure brought by the "image reading era", we must guard against the negative effects caused by visual preference, correctly perceive and view the pursuit of vision, construct visual communication content with rich humanistic and scientific spirit, and avoid the situation of image hegemony and loss of thinking ability formed by technological convenience.

#### 4. Conclusion

Baudrillard believes that people consume symbols in the post-modern society[5]. The main production machine of the "spectacle" in contemporary society is the mass media, and the essence of the "spectacle" is the visual consumerist representation. The society people live in is becoming increasingly "visualized". The visual spectacle of modern society is reflected not only in many visual phenomena, but also in the visual life that people are accustomed to. Plog, as a product of the digital age, is the embodiment of the "visualization" of people's daily life, which caters to the current reading habits of the audience. Although Plog communication presents various problems at present, as a media product in line with the future development trend, Plog will certainly maximize advantages and minimize disadvantages, and draw a better blueprint in continuous innovation. Plog's development is closely linked to the evolution of visual culture and digital media, and its future innovation should focus on balancing visual expression and deep content, breaking the information cocoon and guiding users to rational self-presentation. This study provides a basic analysis framework for the research of Plog communication, but there are still limitations: the research only focuses on the general communication representation of Plog, and lacks empirical research on the communication effect of Plog in different age and occupational groups. In the follow-up research, empirical methods such as questionnaire survey and in-depth interview can be used to further explore the audience's perception and acceptance of Plog, and provide more targeted suggestions for the healthy development of Plog.

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