

Research on the Application of AIGC Imaging in Elderly Well-being in Different Cultural Fields

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Abstract

With the deepening of China's aging society, smart elderly care has become an important way to promote high-quality development of the aging industry. The all-round popularization of digital life has highlighted the digital barriers faced by the elderly population. This article explores the positive impact of AIGC images on the social status and emotional value of the elderly population in the process of integrating into digital life in different cultural fields in the East and the West through cross-cultural research methods and social change research perspectives. Through in-depth analysis of the characteristics of AIGC images, such as the reproduction of over time dimensions, expression of over spatial dimensions, dissemination of over cultural dimensions, and creation of over artistic dimensions, the article focuses on the restoration, reproduction, reconstruction, and creation of diverse values in AIGC images. The article explores the three levels of self psychological reconstruction, community relationship reconstruction, and market subject reproduction for the elderly population to achieve their own well-being. Research suggests that AIGC imaging provides new possibilities and technological pathways for the integration of elderly people into digital life in different cultural contexts. It also offers a new implementation field for the positive psychological construction of smart living among the elderly population, and provides new references for AIGC imaging product design and market development.

Keywords: cross-cultural design; elderly well-being; AIGC imaging; caring design; intelligent old-age care

Introduction

According to the latest data released by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, as of the end of 2024, the population aged 60 and above reached 310.31 million, accounting for 22% of the total national population. China has entered a moderately aging society, and the degree of population aging continues to deepen [1]. It is estimated that by 2035, the elderly population in China will exceed 400 million, accounting for over 30% of the total population, marking the country's entry into a severe ag-

ing phase [2]. The strategy of active aging and intelligent elderly care have emerged as crucial avenues for propelling the high-quality development of China's aging-related endeavors.

As of June 2024, the number of internet users aged 60 and above constituted 14.3% of China's total internet population, with over 43% of the elderly spending more than four hours online daily [3]. However, concurrently, the contradiction between the elderly population and digital life is gradually emerging, with the digital barriers faced by the elderly becoming more pronounced. While focusing on the exploration of using technological power for active aging and intelligent elderly care, the mental health issues of the elderly have also been placed on the agenda. The "14th Five-Year Plan for Healthy Aging" issued by the Chinese government in 2022 points out that "the health status of the elderly in our country is not optimistic, and mental health issues associated with aging are becoming increasingly prominent" [4].

The production method of AIGC, which utilizes artificial intelligence technology to automatically generate content, offers new avenues and possibilities for the elderly population to better integrate into the digital society. AIGC imagery has become a significant means and pathway for the elderly to deeply engage in digital life.

Imaging, AIGC Imaging, and Eastern and Western Imaging within the Cultural Context

Regarding Imaging

Image is the material representation of human visual perception. "Image art" specifically refers to art forms that primarily utilize images or visual content as their medium, encompassing but not limited to photography, film, video art, and digital art based on images [5]. This represents the current fundamental interpretation of the concept of visual art within the academic community. The imagery discussed in this article is not confined to the realm of art, but rather broadly encompasses popular and linguistic visual representations.

Over a century of historical experience has demonstrated that the rise and development of visual culture have overcome barriers in linguistic communication, enabling smoother interactions among individuals of different social strata and nationalities. Through the continual collision and conflict between heterogeneous Eastern and Western cultures, integration, reconstruction, fusion, and innovation have occurred, thereby propelling the process of globalization. This visual culture, with its unique advantages of inclusiveness, contemporaneity, and openness, has impacted traditional culture and transformed modern life [6].

AIGC Imaging

AIGC imagery refers to images or visual content that are automatically generated through artificial intelligence algorithms and technologies, encompassing but not limited to AIGC photography, film, video art, and image-based AIGC digital content.

Although AIGC imagery is generated based on artificial intelligence algorithms, the foundation of these algorithms stems from the objectively represented world of imagery. The "genetic sequence" of these images is rooted in the logic formed by viewing methods of different imaging cultures. As John Berger states in "Ways of Seeing": "Images are reproduced or duplicated landscapes. Each image embodies a method of viewing" [7].

In 2022, the representative product of AIGC was released [8], marking the advent of the AIGC era, and new technologies represented by AIGC rapidly entered real life. Notably, the Chinese AI startup DeepSeek officially released the DeepSeek-R1 model on January 20, 2025, and simultaneously made the model weights open-source. Due to its low cost and performance comparable to that of OpenAI, it shocked Silicon Valley [9]. Within a mere month, on January 27, 2025, the DeepSeek application ascended to the pinnacle of the free app download rankings in both the Apple App Store in China and the United States, surpassing ChatGPT in the latter's download charts.

Currently, the technological rivalry among nations is predominantly focused on the new generation of artificial intelligence represented by AIGC. Within academia, the potential and imaginative scope of AIGC are being infinitely expanded. The research areas of AIGC large models have also extended from algorithmic technology to the cultural domain, aiming to endow algorithms with more

human attributes and elements.

Eastern and Western Imagery within the Cultural Field

According to Bourdieu's definition, a field refers to an objective network or configuration of relations, in which positions are objectively defined. He posits the field as a relatively independent social space, and its independence serves as the foundation for distinguishing and sustaining different fields [10]. Within the same cultural sphere, individuals develop shared values, cognitive patterns, and behavioral habits, which are constrained by unified cultural norms and ideologies [11]. To elaborate, due to differences in cultural contexts, Eastern and Western imagery manifest distinct appearances and characteristics, thereby giving rise to diverse imaging cultures. With the advancement of globalization, Eastern and Western imaging cultures are undergoing mutual influence and integration, culminating in a more diverse and enriched visual cultural landscape.

Chinese image viewing is a system of expression based on introspection, manifested externally, moving from the inside out. It leans towards conveying meaning and emphasizes the creation of imagery. From an etymological perspective, the original pictographic characters of Chinese characters inherently possess the gene of "image". In the past, private "statues" in China were mostly commemorative scenes, emphasizing privacy and possessing a strong sense of intimacy. Moreover, "I think, therefore I am", imbued them with a profound sense of ritual. In terms of content, Chinese image culture, influenced by Confucianism, often focuses on themes related to family, society, and the state in its images. Formally, Chinese image culture emphasizes conveying deep artistic concepts and symbolic meanings through visuals. Simultaneously, Chinese images attract international audiences by integrating traditional culture with modern technology, placing greater emphasis on localized expression in the process of globalization.

The Western concept of image viewing is based on the examination of external objects, with a rational approach to observing the subject, favoring realism, moving from the external to the internal, and emphasizing the portrayal of images. In the past, Western images were mostly empirical records of real-life situations and daily life scenes, placing greater emphasis on presence and immediacy. This "presence" is not only an objective requirement for authenticity but also represents a viewing attitude in Western image culture. In terms of content, Western culture emphasizes individual expression and freedom, often manifesting in the focus on individual emotions, psychology, and rights in images. Formally, Western image culture stresses precise depiction and scientific observation of reality, tending to attract viewers through strong visual impact and detailed representation. Simultaneously, Western images play a central role in advertising, shaping the developed Western consumer culture due to their strong openness and display nature. "I shoot, therefore I exist". Consequently, Western cultural circles excel in focusing events through images.

Analysis of AIGC Image Features Returning to the Original Intent

During its development, imagery has integrated and collided with various technologies, evolving into a vast discourse system and an ecosystem of image culture. Whether it is traditional photography or modern AIGC technology, imagery has always been a crucial tool for humans to understand the world, express themselves, and connect with one another. Imagery has become a significant aspect of contemporary digital life, with AIGC imagery emerging as one of the fundamental contents and methods of future digital living.

The Ultra-Temporal Reconstruction of AIGC Imaging

Unlike the representational authenticity of traditional imagery, AIGC imagery exists within an imagined realm of reality, enabling representations that transcend the temporal dimension. AIGC imagery can be omnipresent, freely traversing through time, allowing historical timelines to be reordered, exhibiting characteristics of 'reverse chronology' or even 'anachrony'. It can undergo both 'retrograde growth' and 'autogenous growth', coexisting with history and synchronizing with the past to become 'reality'.

In the traditional realm of imagery, photographers serve as "interpreters of culture and witnesses to the world", echoing the assertion of August Sander: "Through his lens, a photographer can capture the visage of his era" [12]. In AIGC imagery, by recreating historical events and contextual backgrounds, viewers are transported back to the past, allowing them to "experience" pivotal moments

in history firsthand. On the other hand, bolstered by new technologies, AIGC imagery employs a deep language to supplant superficial expressions. (In photographs), photographers, akin to poets, “perceive the essence of things” [13]. AIGC images, imbued with the essence of “life”, can be read and disseminated without the necessity of re-establishing a coding system, dancing freely on the musical staff of time. AIGC images directly break the “curse” of humanity’s fear of the passage of time. The Chinese philosopher Confucius expressed his sentiment with the phrase “Time flows like this river, day and night alike”, while Zhuangzi lamented with the metaphor “a white steed passing through a crevice”. For the elderly, there are poetic expressions such as “The setting sun is infinitely beautiful, but it is only nearing dusk”, all expressing a profound sense of powerlessness in the face of time’s relentless march. In the West, French writer Louis-X-Herbert emphasized the powerful and merciless nature of time in a pessimistic manner: “Time is a great teacher, but unfortunately, it kills all its pupils”.

In the realm of AIGC imagery, individuals coexist with the past and remain in the presence of history. This is particularly true for the elderly, who can relive bygone eras and rectify regrets from certain periods of their lives, reigniting the passion and dreams of their youth. When real-life scenarios resonate with AIGC imagery at a certain juncture, “a fleeting dream” ceases to be a mere illusion and becomes a tangible, “real” existence that transcends reality. Through the interplay between AIGC and other technologies, fictional reality and actual reality merge, with the authentic self intertwined with the avatared self, and real and virtual individuals accompanying each other [14].

AIGC imagery offers limitless possibilities within the temporal dimension of “dream creation” and “dream fulfillment” for the elderly population. It can facilitate individual recollection and “rebirth”, as well as the evolution and “reshaping” of social roles. The timeline transforms into a “web of time”, transcending the two-dimensional plane to exhibit three-dimensional and multidimensional representations, culminating in a reemergence beyond the temporal dimension.

Hyperspatial Dimensional Representation of AIGC Imaging

As ‘5G’ and ‘6G’ emerge as slogans for network technology operators, and mobile terminals, represented by smartphones, evolve into the ‘fifth media’, the era of ‘zero’ information distance has arrived [15]. For AIGC imagery, the significance of this physical space extends beyond the mere distance of dissemination. AIGC imagery constructs a “novel” digital interface system that, beyond the confines of traditional image encoding, increasingly blurs the boundaries between virtuality and reality. The images crafted by AIGC more accurately reflect the authentic expression of subject emotions. Within this digital interface system, traditional physical spatial boundaries are non-existent; space is disrupted or “reset”, with multiple spaces overlapping and being reconstructed. Virtual spaces exist beyond visual range, and even “negative spaces” of spatial traversal may emerge. The expression of hyperspatial dimensions allows AIGC imagery to transcend the three realms and exist beyond the five elements, endowing it with a broader scope of expression and scenarios. Simultaneously, this expression of hyperspatial dimensions is not haphazard. “Within the realm of the digital interface, the digital media environments formed by different cultural groups do not entirely supplant their original linguistic symbol systems; rather, they co-construct with them” [16].

The hyperspatial expression of AIGC imagery not only represents a degree of freedom within physical space but also serves as an extension of the psychological realm for the elderly towards “poetry and distant horizons”. The future world driven by AIGC will be a form where real and virtual landscapes coexist, and the fictionalized realities will become a part of the actual world and influence society [17]. For the majority of elderly individuals, their actual physical mobility has diminished their expectations for long-distance travel. However, their yearning and desire for distant places have not diminished with age; rather, they have intensified due to the anxiety associated with the “critical” length of their remaining life. The coexistence of “realistic and virtual scenes” in the “distant” landscapes constructed by AIGC imagery greatly enriches the “experiences” of the elderly population. The reconstruction of their psychological and real-world spaces, where “every scene speaks of emotion”, fosters empathy and sympathy, providing significant psychological satisfaction.

The Transcultural Dimensions of AIGC Imaging

Currently, the existence in imagery has become the norm of contemporary life. This is not only a result of the “materialization” of humans by imagery, but also an inescapable reality that must be confronted. In this sense, the advent of image culture heralds a revolution of global significance [18]. Visual imagery appeals to the figurative mode of vision, and the attribute of image culture as an “international language” endows AIGC imagery with an inherent characteristic of cross-cultural dimensional communication.

Currently, the exploration of foreign cultures and cross-cultural exchanges among the elderly have gradually transitioned from being a mere “condiment” in their lives to becoming a “necessity.” The lyrics “The outside world is wonderful, yet also helpless” aptly reflect the desire of many elderly individuals for the “wonderfulness” of the outside world and their helplessness due to “not understanding.” In the context of AIGC imagery, the application of AIGC technology can break through the boundaries of language and culture. Through appropriate prompts and skilled human-machine interaction techniques, it can generate traditional cultural content in various language versions, enabling true global dissemination [19]. AIGC imagery not only breaks the boundaries of time and space but also those of culture. In today’s “flat world,” AIGC imagery with diverse cultural attributes, due to their uncensored nature, rapidly spreads along with the surging data streams. AIGC possesses stronger “human-like attributes” and creative potential, driving a new round of structural transformation in the social information environment and communication ecology [20]. The technological foundation of this transformation is grounded in the continuously emerging large model systems, while its content basis derives from text, cultural systems, and discourse frameworks.

On the other hand, the hypercultural dissemination of AIGC imagery facilitates cross-cultural communication and integration by breaking down cultural boundaries and showcasing diverse foreign cultures, thereby accelerating the breadth and depth of cultural amalgamation. The evolution of cultural integration has shifted from a two-dimensional approach to a networked one, evolving from pluralism towards homogenization. The rigid cultural confrontation between nations has transformed into soft infiltration, and cultural competition has evolved into a contest of soft power. The elderly population stands as the direct beneficiaries of this “cultural feast.” Gentle approaches are more suited to the physiological and psychological realities of the elderly, aligning with their psychological expectations regarding the cognition and demands of foreign cultures.

The Creation of AIGC Images in the Extra-Artistic Dimension

Photography, as a significant art form and mode of expression, constitutes an essential component of art history. In the early days of photography, photographers were more concerned with capturing images that resembled paintings, aspiring to place their photographs within the “palace of art.” However, Cartier-Bresson informed us that the debate over whether photography is an art form is no longer a topic worthy of discussion; rather, the “decisive moment” is the essence of photography [21]. The field of visual expression and its content have become increasingly diverse. For a considerable period, practitioners in the imaging industry were revered as professional artists.

With the advent of smartphones, the devices for capturing images have shifted from being specialized to being accessible to the general public. Imaging is no longer the exclusive domain of “professionals”; it has progressed further and further towards popularization and democratization, with the path becoming increasingly broad. Another significant impact of AIGC on the general populace is that technological empowerment has, to some extent, facilitated the democratization of artistic creation. AIGC has transformed artistic creation into a new pursuit for people’s existence, offering ordinary individuals the possibility of an “artistic existence” [22]. The creation of AIGC imagery that transcends the artistic dimension has, on one hand, ignited the passion for ‘creation’ among ordinary individuals. In a short span of time, an abundance of AIGC imagery works have emerged, making visual art more accessible and deeply ingrained in public life. On the other hand, it has also paved the way for ordinary people to engage in visual art creation. The influx of ingenious ideas and vast amounts of data training results have, in turn, nurtured professional visual art creation.

With the enhancement of AIGC, contemporary visual artists have largely achieved creative freedom. Scenes, sounds, and special effects that were once unachievable can now be realized with almost photorealistic precision through the power of technology [23]. Here, artistic talent and skill give way to personal experience and cultural aesthetics, with fresh ideas and creativity emerging as the pivotal factors. Anyone can become an artist, and everyone is an artist.

For the elderly population, their life experiences, emotional journeys, and work histories serve as a rich source of content for AIGC image creation. Their cultural heritage and aesthetic experiences form the artistic foundation of AIGC image creation. Through AIGC, the constraints of technique and expression are overcome, enabling the elderly to easily enter a state of free creation. In the process of creation, they affirm themselves, gaining positive psychological cues and a sense of value. AIGC image art creation establishes a smooth and open channel for the elderly to “reminisce about the past”.

Practical Paths for AIGC Imaging Applications in the Elderly Population

In the process of integrating the elderly population into digital life, the construction and realization of diverse values such as restoration, reproduction, reconstruction, and creation in AIGC imagery serve as core elements. AIGC imagery offers new possibilities and technological pathways for the elderly to integrate into digital life across various cultural domains. It provides a new field for the active psychological construction of a wise life for the elderly and offers new references for the design and market development of AIGC imagery products.

Self-psychological Reconstruction of Elderly Population in AIGC Imaging

Emotional support and care are emerging forms of companionship in later life. Studies have found that engagement with new media demonstrates an empowering effect on healthy aging [24]. Experiencing sensory stimulation serves as a significant method of stress relief, particularly for individuals under immense pressure during periods of societal transformation, offering a relatively secure ‘stress relief valve’. ‘The ambitions and dreams of one’s youth can be demonstrated to the world through AI’ [25]. In January 2023, the generative AI company Metaphysic utilized technical tools such as Metaphysic Live in film production to achieve real-time hyper-realistic face replacement and de-aging driven by live actor performances, ultimately presenting a younger appearance of Tom Hanks in the movie [26]. The market application of age-friendly software provides an effective pathway for the elderly to “rediscover their lost youth” and find emotional solace. The digital space of the future will witness the coexistence of real and fictional landscapes, with the latter potentially becoming a part of reality. As the elderly strive to rejuvenate themselves, AIGC enables them to craft their own digital avatars. These avatars serve to unleash hidden and suppressed aspects of the self, showcase the multifaceted nature of humanity, and allow individuals to embark on diverse life experiences. While avatars are illusions of self-creation, they are not false; rather, they reflect the authentic depths of human nature [27].

AIGC imagery plays a pivotal role in the self-psychological construction of the elderly population. Specifically, the utilization of vintage photographs, family videos, or AIGC imagery assists the elderly in revisiting significant moments in their lives, thereby constructing a comprehensive narrative of their existence. By documenting the oral history of the elderly through imagery, their personal stories and familial memories are preserved. This process enhances the elderly’s sense of self-identity and value, alleviating the feelings of loss and loneliness associated with aging. The employment of AIGC to generate artistic imagery aids the elderly in exploring novel forms of creation, offering avenues for emotional catharsis and self-expression, thereby bolstering their self-confidence and creativity. Through AI-generated personalized motivational imagery, the elderly’s sense of self-efficacy and purpose is strengthened. The utilization of AI to create virtual cultural experiences fosters a deeper sense of cultural identity and pride among the elderly. Additionally, AI-generated personalized imagery stories or memoirs provide spiritual solace and emotional fulfillment, enhancing the elderly’s enjoyment of life and overall happiness.

AIGC imagery applied to the elderly population carries the historical memories of the elderly due to its ‘original intention of imagery’. Through a ‘hyper-realistic’ approach, by characterizing and de-aging, it opens up the ‘dream-making space’ of the elderly’s life experiences, enabling the elderly to construct their own psychological self.

Reconstruction of community relationships among the elderly population with AIGC imagery

Behaviorist psychologist Skinner posits that “culture is the set of conditions that shape and sustain the behavior of those who live within it. Culture is the soil and nourishment, and human behavior is governed by cultural customs. To alter behavior, one must first alter the environment” [28]. As the elderly population enters the digital realm, the first thing they must adapt to is the network ecological environment. Studies indicate that internet usage greatly aids the elderly in active aging, unleashing their inherent potential, and achieving a sense of purpose in old age. Furthermore, the use of the internet by the elderly aids in their fuller integration into modern digital society [29].

The virtual state presented by the Internet is not entirely separate from the real world; rather, it is an extension of the real world or even an embodiment of it. Corresponding to the real-life communities of the elderly population, the virtual communities centered around AIGC imagery are not mere replicas of the real communities, but rather the reconstruction of new community relationships. In Japan's eldercare service system, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare represents the construction of website platforms. The “places of interaction” under its official website allow community residents to gather online, plan activities together, and expand “creating life value” and “making friends” through communication. On social networks, the elderly utilize their accumulated knowledge and experience to interact with young people, which is of significant importance for promoting regional social participation [30].

AIGC imagery plays a pivotal role in rebuilding online virtual community relationships among the elderly population. Specifically, AIGC can generate virtual characters or scenes, facilitating social interaction within a virtual environment for the elderly, thereby reducing feelings of loneliness. AIGC produces personalized imagery content, enhancing their communication and sharing within the community. These photographs can serve as material for their narcissistic tendencies, providing a pretext and asset for social interaction, and serving as evidence of social participation [31]. AIGC can generate restorations of old photographs, family history videos, and the like, aiding the elderly in reminiscing about the past and strengthening emotional connections with family and friends. AIGC can produce images of traditional culture, facilitating the dissemination and sharing of cultural knowledge among the elderly within their communities. By generating educational videos, AIGC offers online learning opportunities for the elderly, promoting knowledge sharing within the community. Through the creation of virtual event scenes or the generation of event videos, AIGC assists the elderly in reflecting on and sharing their event experiences, enhancing community interaction. AIGC can produce straightforward technical training videos, enhancing their sense of participation within the community.

The AIGC imagery applied to the elderly population has broken down the social barriers among elderly individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, expanding the physical and cultural boundaries of their intelligent lifestyles. This has facilitated the reconstruction of community relationships, enabling the elderly to integrate into digital life.

Re-emergence of Market Players in the AIGC Imaging Market for the Elderly Population

As of September 2024, the monthly active user base of China's silver-haired population has reached 329 million, with an average monthly usage duration reaching a high of 129 hours, representing a year-on-year increase of 5.3%. Among these users, short videos account for the highest proportion of usage duration at 35.1%, ranking first and becoming the most preferred form of digital entertainment among the silver-haired population. This indicates that the digital economy is poised to embrace a significant ‘silver wave’ that cannot be overlooked. As the global aging trend intensifies, the elderly population is gradually emerging as a vital force in the consumer market.

The reemergence of the elderly population as a market force reflects society's concern over aging issues and the rise of the silver economy. This encompasses multiple domains, including product design, health services, cultural entertainment, educational training, financial services, marketing, technological innovation, and policy support. With the rapid development of the silver economy, businesses and governments need to pay closer attention to the needs of the elderly, offering age-appropriate, personalized, and high-quality products and services. Concurrently, promoting positive societal perception and respect for the elderly is imperative. This not only enhances the quality of life for the elderly but also provides new impetus for economic growth and sustainable social development.

The rich life experiences and expertise of the elderly population, coupled with their achievements and insights in specific fields of work, can be leveraged through AIGC to generate content tailored for the diverse educational scenarios of today. The participation of the elderly in creating AIGC visual content not only fulfills their sense of self-worth but also promotes re-employment, enabling them to earn a certain income, thereby enhancing the vitality of the entire market. This also reaffirms the elderly as key players in the market, extending the industrial structure. The new atmosphere within the industrial structure can inject new vitality into the development of the entire market economy, continuously creating new social value and fostering diverse possibilities.

Conclusion

This article is based on the increasingly severe aging trend in Chinese society, guided by the construction of active aging, with the goal of bridging the “digital divide” and enjoying digital life for the elderly population. Combining the analysis of images, AIGC images, and Eastern and Western images in different cultural fields, it comprehensively applies relevant theories of information sociology, design psychology, image communication, behavioral science, and aging science research. Through social change research methods and historical reconstruction method as the theoretical perspective, it analyzes the trend and field of the elderly population’s integration into digital life. By summarizing the characteristics of AIGC images, such as super temporal dimension reproduction, super spatial dimension expression, super cultural dimension dissemination, and super artistic dimension creation, AIGC images applied to the elderly population carry the historical memory of the elderly population due to their “original intention of the image”. Through role-playing and anti-aging, AIGC images have opened up the “dream space” of the elderly population’s life history and achieved their self psychological construction in a “surreal” way; AIGC images applied to the elderly population have broken down social barriers among elderly people from different cultural backgrounds due to their accessibility, expanded the physical and cultural boundaries of intelligent living for the elderly, and achieved the reconstruction of community relationships for the elderly to integrate into digital life; The participation of the elderly in creating AIGC images not only satisfies their self-worth realization, but also promotes their reemployment. It also realizes the representation of the elderly as market entities, extends the industrial structure, and continuously creates new social value.

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