

Research on the Image-Based Life of Elderly Through Art Therapy

Ziwen Ni^{1, *}, Xinyue Hu²

¹ Northwest University, Xi'an 710000, China

² Wuhan Institute of Technology, Wuhan 430000, China

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the impact of video art on the improvement of the quality of life of the elderly in their later years, on their sense of well-being and mental health, and then on the formation of an Art therapy effect. With the development of digital technology and smartphones, video has become an important part of the daily life of the elderly, enriching their daily life and becoming a form of enhancing the quality of life and happiness of the elderly, and the Art therapy effect it brings has attracted widespread attention. Starting from the theoretical basis of image creation and dissemination and Art therapy, this paper analyzes in detail the content of the image life of the elderly, the dilemmas faced by the elderly in the digital era, the methods of solving them, as well as the role of Art therapy brought about and its practical approach to be studied.

KEYWORDS

Art Therapy; New Media Interaction Design; Ageing; Mental Health; Video Life.

1. INTRODUCTION

Global population aging has become one of the most significant social trends of the 21st century. According to the World Health Organization, the global population of people aged 65 and above is expected to exceed 700 million in 2023, a structural shift that poses serious challenges to the socio-economic, healthcare and pension service systems, and also creates higher demands on the quality of life and mental health of the elderly. Against this backdrop, how to build an inclusive and sustainable elderly care model has become an urgent social issue. With the innovation of digital technology, smart aging is gradually becoming a global trend. The integration of technologies such as mobile media, smart home and telemedicine into the lives of the elderly has significantly improved the efficiency of health management and the quality of emotional accompaniment, creating a more convenient and diversified lifestyle for the elderly. However, on the other side of technological empowerment is a significant *digital divide*: the complexity of interface design, differences in individual learning ability and cybersecurity risks have led to multiple barriers to the acceptance and experience of older people in the use of technology. This contradiction highlights the urgency of age-friendly technology education and product design, and the only way to ensure that the elderly enjoy the digital dividend equally is through customized learning courses and safety protection systems.

Amidst real challenges and technological opportunities, the combination of Art therapy and video life provides an innovative path for the aging problem. As a low-threshold and highly participatory medium, video art, through mobile media platforms (e.g. Wechat, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, etc.), not only helps the elderly to master digital skills and rebuild their social connections, but also, with its unique therapy properties, becomes an effective tool for emotional expression and psychological adjustment. The process of image creation and sharing can not only alleviate loneliness and enhance

self-worth, but also promote intergenerational communication and social integration. This study focuses on the synergistic effect of Art therapy and digital technology, aiming to explore how they can work together to improve the quality of life of the elderly, and provide a reference for strategies that combine humanistic care and technological feasibility to address the challenges of aging.

2. DEVELOPMENT AND APPLICATION OF ART THERAPY

The therapy effect of artistic activities on the human mind has been known since ancient times. Ancient Greek philosophers explored the *purifying* function of music, while the practice of psychotherapy in the 18th century laid the foundation for the systematization of art therapy. 1922, Hans Prinzhorn revealed for the first time the deep connection between artistic creation and the spiritual world through his *Pictures of the Mentally Ill*, whose analysis of the works of the mentally ill not only pioneered the path of combining art and psychology, but also gave art a healing academic legitimacy. Van Gogh's *Portrait of Dr. Gachet*, for example, is not only a visual expression of depression, but also a classic example of artistic therapy, confirming the potential of art as a medium of psychotherapy - self-understanding, acceptance, and salvation through creativity.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the psychoanalytic school promoted the independence of art therapy. In 1942, British artist Adrian Hill proposed the concept of *art therapy* and applied it to the psychological rehabilitation of soldiers in the Second World War, marking the shift from individual practice to social intervention. In 1958, Margaret Nannenberg established the definition and framework of art therapy in the United States, promoting it to become an important branch of the field of psychology. Since then, art therapy has continued to expand in terms of method and technology: from traditional painting, sculpture, and theater to digital media such as film and television, virtual reality, etc. The target of therapy has also expanded from mental illness patients to the general population, covering multiple dimensions such as trauma repair, stress relief, and self-exploration. In the context of an aging society, art therapy has been given new practical value. Older people record their lives and share their stories through image creation (e.g., photography, short videos), which not only enriches their daily experience but also rebuilds their self-worth and sense of belonging to society in the process of creation. Taking painting as an example, the free expression of color and composition can release repressed emotions; through poetry or music, older people can reconstruct memories and emotional narratives. These forms of art do not require specialized skills but can effectively stimulate creativity and promote intergenerational communication and social integration. Research has found that art therapy can significantly alleviate loneliness and cognitive decline among older adults, and its core lies in *process orientation* rather than *perfection of results*—creation itself is the transformation and sublimation of psychological trauma.

Currently, art therapy is deeply integrated with digital technology. Social media platforms provide low-barrier channels for older adults to create and share, while virtual reality technology enhances therapy through immersive experiences. In the future, interdisciplinary collaboration will be key: the combination of psychology, medicine, and digital technology will promote the precise and personalized application of art therapy in the elderly population. The development of this field is not only about individual mental health but also about the humanistic and sustainable development of an aging society.

3. CHARACTERISTICS AND PROBLEMS OF ELDERLY PEOPLE'S IMAGE LIFE

(1) Characteristics of Elderly People's Image Life

In modern society, the importance of images has become increasingly prominent, and it has become an indispensable part of our lives. Especially in the use of social media and the consumption of digital content, the status of images is particularly prominent. We can see that social media platforms such as Weibo, Rednote, Bilibili, Instagram, Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), YouTube and TikTok are dominated by image and video content, attracting a large number of users, and have become the main daily communication, life-sharing and self-expression channels. These platforms make full use of the interactivity and visual appeal of images, making them one of the most popular forms of information.

In the image life of the elderly, they have their own unique way of interacting with image technology. Older people mainly use images to record and review the beautiful moments of their lives, and they are more inclined to focus their lenses on traditional festivals, family gatherings, important personal moments, or the beauty of their daily lives. These images taken by seniors themselves are not only precious memories, but also a unique way to reminisce with loved ones about shared experiences. For example, the photos and videos taken by an elderly person on his 80th birthday, which preserve the happy moments of the time, become valuable materials to look back on in the future. Secondly, the elderly also like to forward some news videos related to national events, through which they discuss national policies with old friends and look forward to the future development path. In addition, the elderly also like to develop photos into physical photos. They prefer to hold them in their hands and watch these works that carry the fun of life, and they can also communicate with their friends and relatives through physical photos.

(2) Problems of Older Adults' Image Life

The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed the smartphone from a basic communication tool to an intelligent terminal integrating socialization, entertainment and payment, and image creation and sharing have become an important part of the daily life of older adults. However, the acceleration of technology iteration and the lag of age-appropriate design have led to multiple structural challenges for the elderly while enjoying digital convenience.

The first issue is related to the technical operation and physiological limitations. Older adults generally have technical adaptation barriers. Complex cell phone interfaces and complicated functional options (e.g., editing software such as Meitu Xiu Xiu and Cutting) conflict with their cognitive habits, leading to frequent operational errors - problems such as focus deviation and overexposure reduce the sense of creative accomplishment and even trigger frustration. This conflict is further exacerbated by the decline of physiological functions: reduced eyesight makes it difficult to recognize text and icons on the screen, and reduced manual dexterity leads to inaccurate touch control. More importantly, prolonged use of cell phones may lead to vision fatigue, cervical spine strain and other health problems, while excessive reliance on short video platforms may crowd out offline socializing and exercise time, forming a vicious cycle of *digital addiction* and *reality alienation*.

Secondly, intergenerational gap and psychological pressure, the technological gap is not only reflected in the use of tools, but also generates intergenerational cultural faults. The interaction logic that the younger generation is used to (e.g., sliding menu, gesture operation) is full of unfamiliarity to the elderly, and this cognitive difference is easily misinterpreted as *lack of ability*, which in turn gives rise to self-denial. Some older people avoid trying new technologies for fear of operational errors, gradually disconnecting from the mainstream of society, and creating a sense of loneliness and anxiety. What's more, the risks of false advertisements and online fraud lurking in short video platforms are even more threatening due to the lack of digital literacy among the elderly, further weakening their confidence in online participation.

The third is the lack of systematic solutions. The current ageing-friendly transformation mostly stays on the surface design such as enlarging fonts and simplifying icons, failing to touch on the fundamental problems: firstly, technical education lacks pertinence, and most of the training courses

ignore the learning rhythm and cognitive characteristics of the elderly; secondly, the platform security mechanism is imperfect, and it fails to set up a content filtering and risk early warning system for the elderly users; and thirdly, the social support network is fragmented, and the family, the community and the enterprises have not yet formed a collaborative intervention mechanism. Third, the social support network is fragmented, and families, communities and enterprises have yet to form a coordinated intervention mechanism.

To solve the above dilemmas, it is necessary to build a multi-party collaborative ecosystem. Families should take the initiative to assume the responsibility of *digital feedback* and help the elderly cross the technological barriers through intergenerational interaction; enterprises should focus on *user experience* and develop software and hardware that meet the physiological characteristics of the elderly (e.g., voice assistance and one-click optimization), and strengthen platform content auditing; communities can organize online content filtering and risk warning systems; and communities can organize online content filtering and risk warning systems. The community can organize offline workshops, combining technical training with art therapy to improve digital skills while promoting mental health; and the policy level needs to promote legislation on ageing-friendly standards and encourage interdisciplinary research to optimize intervention strategies. Only through the deep integration of technological empowerment and humanistic care can we truly realize the vision of digital inclusion, which is to make the elderly happy and active.

4. IMAGING LIFE AND ART THERAPY FOR OLDER ADULTS

(1) Imaging Art and Self-Actualization

Self-actualization is complex in that it involves both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Intrinsic motivation stems from desires and interests within the individual, such as the satisfaction, challenge, or mind-flow experience felt when engaging in an activity. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is associated with desired external rewards, such as working not only because of one's passion and love for the job (intrinsic motivation), but also perhaps because of pay and job advancement (extrinsic motivation). While there is no absolute *good* or *bad* intrinsic and extrinsic motivation per se, intrinsic motivation tends to be viewed as more sustainable because it is closely related to an individual's core interests, strengths and values, and its rewards are more internalized. In contrast, extrinsic motivation may be less reliable because it relies on external factors beyond the individual's control.

Older adults who are externally motivated may be less inclined to complete the activity of making images during the therapy process, while those who are both intrinsically motivated and externally inspired are most likely to pursue therapy photography as an ongoing creative hobby. The art of video opens up new avenues of personal fulfillment possibilities for older adults. Older adults who engage in photography and video creation need to continually explore and learn new techniques and forms of expression, which not only helps to hone their thinking and hands-on skills, but also pushes them to revisit unfulfilled dreams from their youth. By displaying their works for the enjoyment of others, older adults can gain a sense of achievement and satisfaction, and feel their value and status in society. These activities not only make them feel the attention and recognition of society, but also help enhance their self-confidence and sense of belonging, thus realizing their self-worth.

(2) Image Communication and Emotional Communication

The popularization of new media platforms has provided a new channel of emotional communication and image sharing for the elderly. Mainstream social networking applications are not only an important tool for young people's daily communication, but also pave the way to the outside world for the elderly, and become an important platform for them to share their lives and express their inner feelings. Even for grandchildren who are thousands of miles away, or for old friends who have not met for years, a message or a photo can bring them closer to each other. This kind of instant

communication makes the elderly feel unprecedented convenience and warmth, and becomes an important way for them to integrate into digital life.

The communication function of image life is especially prominent in intergenerational communication. Through image creation and sharing, older people are able to show their daily lives to the younger generation, while the younger generation can help older people better adapt to the digital age by sharing fresh perspectives and technical knowledge. This interaction not only bridges the generation gap, but also promotes harmonious family relationships. The support of family members is crucial, as the younger generation should take the initiative to help their parents master new technologies and guide them to integrate into modern lifestyles; while the social level needs to provide more ageing-friendly training and services through policy guidance and corporate support, so that the elderly can truly enjoy the convenience and fun brought by new media. In addition, with the gradual narrowing of the social circle, the elderly have re-established their connection with society through new media platforms. They can share their interests, discuss interesting life stories, listen to others' stories, and even provide support and encouragement to their sick friends on the platform. This kind of emotional communication not only relieves the loneliness of the elderly, but also helps them maintain a positive and healthy mindset. As a low-threshold mode of expression, image communication provides opportunities for the elderly to show themselves and integrate into society, further enhancing their sense of social participation and belonging.

Overall, the new media platform provides a broad space for emotional communication and image sharing for the elderly. Through image communication, older people can not only reduce their sense of loneliness, but also enhance their mental health and social participation. We should actively support the use of new media platforms by the elderly to help them find their own fun and value in the world of technology, so as to realize a higher quality of life in their old age.

(3) Solutions for Integrating Older Adults into Imaging Life

Creating a distraction-free environment for older adults is crucial in the art therapy process. For this reason, it is recommended that older people turn off the message alert function of their cell phones or turn on the flight mode when they are creating images to reduce external interference. Before carrying out image art therapy activities, the basic theory of art therapy and the concept of image life should be introduced to the elderly to help them understand the meaning and value of image creation. Subsequently, through simple training in the operation of cell phone software, the elderly can create images independently, so that they can freely carry out therapy activities.

While instructing the elderly in the use of cell phone software, it is crucial to guide them to master basic photography skills. Composition is the foundation of photography. Older people can learn methods such as the rule of thirds, symmetrical composition and diagonal composition to highlight the main subject of the picture and enhance the sense of hierarchy and space. The use of color allows older people to better express the theme and emotion, such as in the shooting of natural scenery with rich colors to show vitality, when shooting portraits, with the help of adjusting the color parameters to highlight the characteristics of the characters, cell phone photography, the selection and processing of the background is not to be ignored, the background should play a role in the effect of the subject, to prevent the background instead of the subject to become a focal point. You can change the focal length to defocus the background or adjust the shooting angle to highlight the subject, so that the picture is more concise and clear, the rest of the functions of cell phone photography, such as continuous shooting, HDR, night mode, but also for the elderly to create more creative opportunities, relying on the continuous shooting function to capture the exciting moments of the dynamic scene, but also with the help of the night mode to shoot the night's beautiful scenery.

The Internet provides a wealth of image materials and creative inspiration for the elderly, prompting the elderly to browse all kinds of videos, pictures and tutorials, from which they can learn from experience and enrich their creative materials, and inviting the elderly to participate in cell phone photography competitions or exchange activities to share practical tips and experience, which can

make their photography level higher. Through continuous learning and practice, the elderly will not only improve their photography skills, but will also realize the fun and value of their creations, thus integrating more smoothly into the image life and enjoying the benefits of art therapy.

5. APPLICATION AND PROGRAM CONCEPTUALIZATION OF IMAGE THERAPY ACTIVITIES FOR THE ELDERLY

(1) Perceptual Path of Image Therapy Activities for the Elderly

Cultivating a sense of therapy is a key first step in image therapy activities for the elderly. The key to art therapy is to use the creative process to achieve emotional expression and psychological therapy, rather than pursuing perfection or technical mastery in the artwork, art creation can break through the boundaries of language and help the elderly to pour out their emotions and experiences that are difficult to talk about. Art therapy uses the creative process to stimulate the non-verbal areas of the brain to assist individuals in processing pain or stress in depth. Compared to simply talking about past experiences, video art creation can help older people understand their own lives and emotions on a higher level, and the key to art therapy lies in the process of creation itself, not in the pursuit of a perfect result. This is not an art teaching course, nor does it aim at proficiency in specific skills. Rather, it is a way of familiarizing the elderly with various art forms and media, encouraging them to try and express themselves, and in the therapy process, the therapist's role is not to judge or explain the work, but to lead the elderly to observe their own creations and to dig out the meanings therein, which is a process that not only helps the elderly to take back control of their lives, but also provides a way to release their inner emotions. This process not only helps older people regain control of their lives, but also provides them with a way to release their inner emotions, which becomes an important pathway for acquiring positive coping skills.

The special thing about video art is that it can help older people reconstruct narratives and give their lives a different meaning. By relying on video creation, older people can transform traumatic or lost experiences into positive stories, which can be used to find the motivation to grow in the face of adversity. Elderly people can record their own stories through “filming their daily lives”, relying on visual presentation and emotional cognition to reshape their inner world. This kind of expression is especially suitable for those who are afraid to face their pain directly, because it opens up an indirect but meaningful way of communication. In image therapy activities, older people not only act as creators but also as protagonists of the narrative, and they can express their feelings, recall the past, share their stories, and even build relationships with others. The sharing and discussion of video works builds an interactive platform for the elderly, allowing them to experience understanding and support. This interaction not only strengthens their sense of social belonging, but also taps into their creativity and potential, and as an auxiliary worker, the therapist, with the help of visual analysis and verbal association, is able to grasp the inner world of the elderly in a more comprehensive way, and thus provide them with more targeted assistance.

By cultivating therapy consciousness and reconstructing narratives, the image therapy activity builds a platform for the elderly to express their emotions and heal themselves psychologically. The activity not only relieves their sense of loneliness and psychological pressure, but also strengthens their sense of social participation and satisfaction with their lives, and by relying on image creation, the elderly can once again discover the beauty of life and find out the value and meaning of their own.

(2) Application Mechanisms of Imaging in Therapy Activities for the Elderly

As a kind of visual carrier, video art is rich in various therapy resources, which can effectively combine the daily life of the elderly with psychological therapy. Relying on video creation and experience, the elderly can learn self-confidence skills, control their emotions, enhance interpersonal relationships, and discover the intrinsic correlation between their own thoughts, feelings and behaviors. The universality of video art and the fact that it follows the trend of the times make it an

effective way for older people to explore themselves and promote their psychological well-being. Video categories such as short videos, photography and painting can also arouse older people's passion for creation, and utilize the sharing of technological processes, image content and creative themes to explore their therapy potential.

The application mechanism of video art in therapy activities for the elderly is mainly manifested in three aspects: video activates the cognitive ability of the elderly through visual presentation, promotes emotional catharsis and psychological stress reduction, photography helps the elderly to express their emotional state, and appreciation of beautiful images can evoke positive emotions, and video has a unique effectiveness in promoting social interaction. The sharing of video works by the older generation allows them to engage in creative exchanges with family, friends, and community members, and enhances their sense of belonging in terms of social participation. Such interactions not only reduce loneliness, but also support older adults to rebuild their social connections, and the art of video promotes older adults to realize their personal growth and self-worth through self-exploration and experiential therapy, and in the process of creation, older adults learn new skills, thus enhancing their mental health. During the creative process, older adults learn new skills that enhance their mental health and sense of well-being.

The application of video art in therapeutic activities for the elderly is not only in the areas of emotional management and self-exploration, but also in the enhancement of social interaction and life adaptation through creation and sharing. By adopting a scientific and reasonable activity design and by adapting to the actual needs and psychological characteristics of the elderly, video art can be used as an important way to promote the psychological health and social adaptation of the elderly.

(3) Future Trends and Challenges of Imaging Life

With the rapid advancement in technology, especially the introduction of cutting-edge technologies such as Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR), digital image therapy has become a new type of therapy, bringing unprecedented immersive and interactive experiences to the elderly. The use of this technology not only greatly enriches the lives of the elderly, but also provides them with a broader creative space and therapy possibilities. In the process of digital image therapy, we also need to face some challenges. Due to the lack of digital skills, older people may not be able to fully enjoy the convenience of digital image therapy. In order to solve this problem, we need to engage in interdisciplinary collaboration, inviting experts in the fields of technology development, healthcare, and art therapy to work together to provide more user-friendly and easy-to-use digital products and services for the elderly. We can demonstrate the effectiveness of digital image therapy in the elderly population through specific cases. Through digital painting or video production, older people can find emotional catharsis in their creations, which is not only a way to release pressure, but also enhances their self-efficacy and satisfaction, and improves their quality of life.

In February 2024, OpenAI, a famous artificial intelligence research center in the United States, released a video generation model called *Sora*. The model has the power to automatically generate a 60-second short video by simply receiving text commands. The launch of this innovative technology has undoubtedly revolutionized the field of video creation, and the emergence of the *Sora* model makes video creation no longer limited to professional film and television producers, but provides a new creation platform for the majority of ordinary users. Currently, OpenAI only provides access to *Sora* to specific groups of people, such as designers and filmmakers, in order to collect feedback on improving the model, but this initiative has already triggered widespread attention from all sectors of society. Whether it's producing videos that record personal life, instructional videos or advertising promos, the *Sora* model is expected to make video clip creation easy for more people in the future.

6. CONCLUSION

This study explores the intersection of art therapy and older adults' video life, aiming to reveal the application value of art therapy in older adults' mental health and quality of life enhancement. Through a detailed literature review and empirical analysis, this study systematically explores the development history, theoretical foundation, and specific practice of art therapy among older adults. The study shows that art therapy not only helps to maintain the mental health of older adults, but also enhances their sense of social participation and life satisfaction by providing creative self-expression.

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