

Review of: "Visual Science Communication: The next generation scientific poster"

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The paper does an excellent job outlining visual communications approaches to science education, and the possibilities for these types of interactive posters are quite far-reaching. I would have liked there to be more and bigger images to truly review the design aspects of the practice-based case study discussed.

The arguments for visual and multimodal texts in educational contexts are well-supported, though somewhat lacking in nuance. For instance, the authors have failed to acknowledge the complexities involved in visual communications of this sort, such as access, accessibility, and cultural factors. Large interactive touchscreens require certain contexts that are far more likely to occur in specific educational settings (schools—well-funded ones at that—museums, fairs and festivals, conferences), so the “public” they are reaching is already primed to be receptive to the messaging. Accessibility can also be an issue, depending on context. Finally, visual design, as any communication mode, varies from culture to culture; Arabic cultures, for example, weight information layouts differently from Western cultures.

Given the contexts, I'd be more inclined to define this approach as science education rather than science communication. It's nitpicky and other reviewers and the authors may disagree. I'm also finding the word “interactive” vague, as it is now used for anything that involves digital media; since almost everything at this point is digital media, terming it interactive just for swipes and zooms is starting to lose its meaning. The app described is more haptic or responsive than interactive.

On a minor note, some of the writing is a tad awkward, which is understandable if the authors are working in a non-native language. It does not detract from the meaning or importance of the argument/case study, but it can be cleaned up for greater readability in terms of some phrasings and word choices (e.g., 1st paragraph in section 2.1, the phrase “at least” is used to indicate the last item in a list; it should be “lastly” or “finally”, as “at least” makes little sense here). If the journal uses copywriters, I'm sure this will be an easy clean-up job.

Overall, the paper is publishable, but I'd like to see greater depth in the understanding of education versus communication, more discussion of the types of audiences and contexts for these “interactive posters”, and consideration of visual comms that are not universal across languages, cultures, and contexts.

