

“I Thought You Were a Girl”: How Images and GIFs can Influence Perception of Gender Online

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Research Question: *How does including visual media in online discourse influence the audience’s gender impression formation?*

Introduction & Rationale

- Prior work has shown the Internet is not as gender anonymous as thought¹
- Textual context clues frequently allow for gender identification²
- Platforms that require visual media for full inclusion have not been studied
- Visual media might obscure the textual context previously found
- The existence of visual primacy would have wide implications for platform designers and marginalized Internet users

Participants & Experimental Set-up

- Experimental set-up
- College-aged participants (18-24)
- Participants saw a combination of vignettes and visual media in a forum setting
- Four conditions:
 1. Text-only
 2. Text + images
 3. Text + GIFs
 4. Text + images + GIFS

Condition	Participants (n)	Male	Female	Average Age	Low Age	High Age
Text	9	6	3	19 (19.67)	18	21
Text + Image	13	7	6	20 (20.69)	19	23
Text + GIF	8	5	3	20 (20)	19	22
Text + Image + GIF	8	4	4	20 (20.29)	19	22
Total	38	22	16	20 (20.16)	18	23

- Participants read and responded to the posts as if they had randomly stumbled upon them
- Participants saw either 4 posts (condition 1) or 8 posts (conditions 2-4)

(1): So as some of you know, I've been going through a pretty rough break-up recently. Last night was the first night I had gone out in a while. I got super dressed up and went to a club with my friends. Over the course of the night, I met a girl and we danced a few times before hooking up right when the bar was getting ready to close. She ended up going to another club with her friends, but it was nice to have a hook- up to make me feel better about the break-up. Has anyone else had a good night recently?

(2): I got all dressed up for a night out last night. I wore dark colors, obviously, because it's more slimming and definitely more sheik. It ended up being a kind of a rough night when all was said and done but I had a pretty good time and looked good too! How was everyone's night last night?



Examples of text vignettes (1: written by male; 2: written by female) and paired masculine/feminine images

Experimental Materials

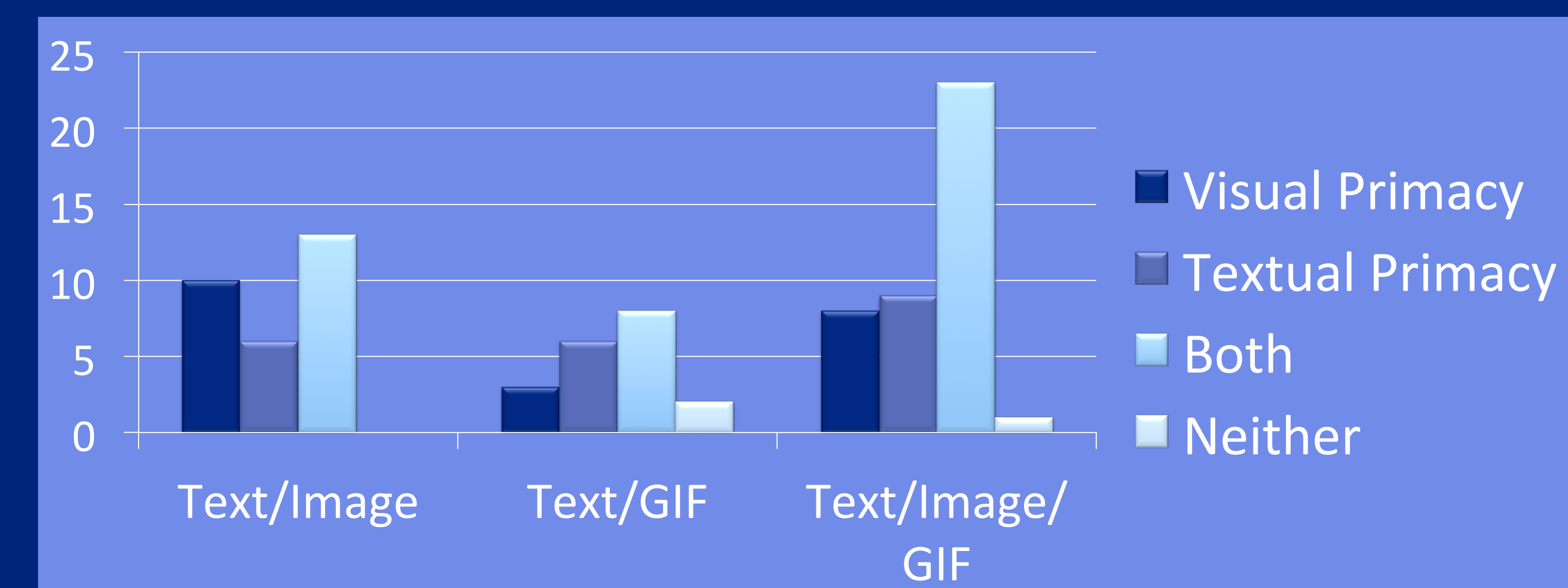
- Vignettes written by either male or female
- Images and GIFs rated either highly masculine or highly feminine by separate sample
- Conditions 2-4: visual media paired with the same vignette

Results & Discussion

- 276 total responses
- 100 posts inductively coded as gendered (36.2%)

	Text-only	Text + Image	Text + GIF	Text + Image + GIF
Gendered	11	29	19	41
Non-gendered	25	75	53	23

- Gendered posts coded as visually primed, textually primed, both, or neither



- Visual primacy was higher in conditions 2 and 4 than in condition 3
- Images is more likely to be perceived as being of its poster
- Image presence corroborated GIF presence, making GIF seem more relevant to the poster
- Large jump of “both” responses in condition 4
- Presence of multiple forms of media amplifies visual primacy

Conclusion

- Preliminary work found some evidence of existence of a visual primacy effect in online discourse
- Future work will utilize a larger sample and additional methods (post-survey, etc.) to fully investigate effect

References

1. Herring, S. (1994). Gender differences in computer-mediated communication: Bringing familiar baggage to the new frontier.
2. Koch, S. C., Mueller, B., Kruse, L., & Zumbach, J. (2005). Constructing gender in chat groups. Sex Roles, 53(1-2), 29–41. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-005-4276-7>