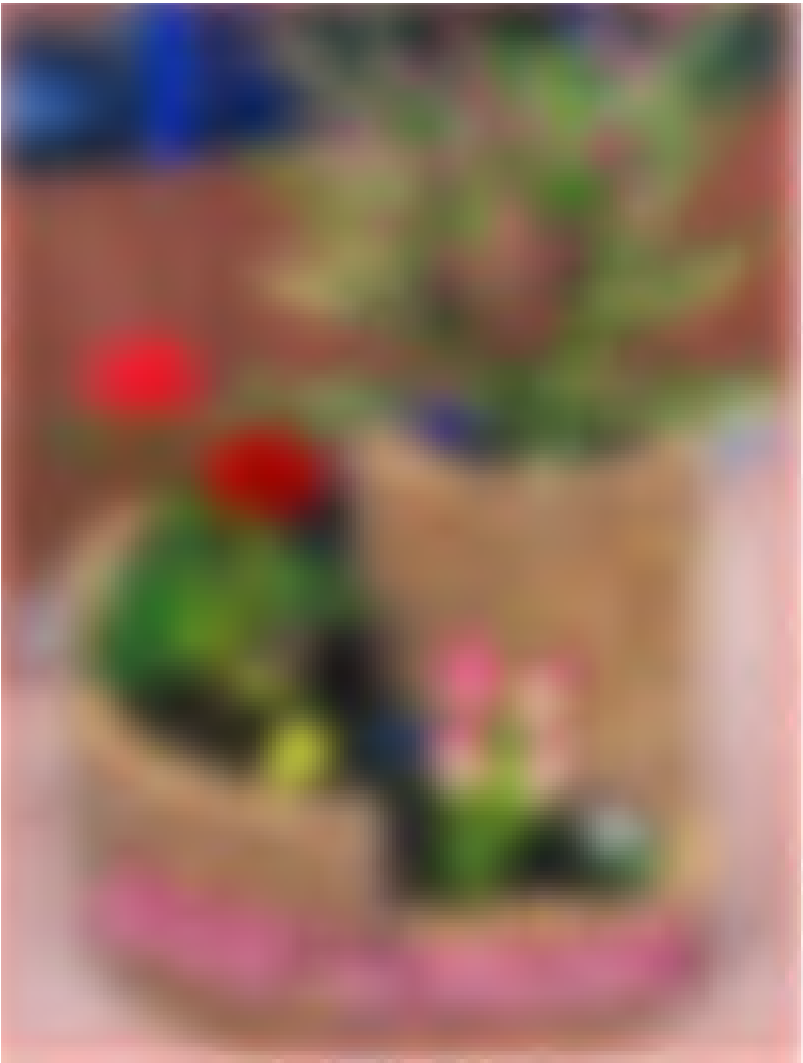


GOOD MORNING or

The Phatic Hypersublime
of 50 SMS Graphics



002 20 KB ↓

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GOOD MORNING or

The Phatic Hypersublime
of 50 SMS Graphics

0 KB ON DIGITAL GREETINGS
AND NETWORKS OF
CONSIDERATION

59 KB MEDIA

5.02 MB CACHE

5.02 MB COLOPHON

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ON DIGITAL GREETINGS AND NETWORKS OF CONSIDERATION

When asked about their familiarity with the “Good Morning Image”, the average youth audience tends to respond in two ways. There are those who have never seen them or engaged with them, expressing confusion about the concept. Conversely, those who have engaged with such images almost always seem to know them a bit too well. These responses, often distinguished along lines of ethnicity and national origin, offer a glimpse into a vast networked subculture of instant message greeting graphics. These networks are most commonly housed in family group chats, with their senders often belonging to an older age group.



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Characterized by their saccharine content and the spam-like quality through which they can be sent, these images have emerged as sardonic artifacts for the youth populations on their receiving end, proliferating on meme accounts and social media networks with an implicit sense of irony. Yet, for the grandparents, aunts and uncles who send them, these overly-positive messages seem to constitute a significant digital portion of their day-to-day lives.

This generational and cultural divide lends itself to an exploration of widely circulated imagery that is largely deemed as negligible due to its colloquial nature, but nonetheless serves as a crucial affective medium in contemporary communications. The practice can be viewed through the unique perspectives of the image itself and the sociotechnical networks that it is exchanged through, but can be further contextualized with an integrated analysis that suits the mutually constitutive relationship between the two.

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Understanding the circulation of a positive affect amongst elderly demographics by way of instant messaging graphics requires a critical approach towards both content and medium, synthesizing their ubiquitous colloquial imagery and the digital communication networks through which they are exchanged.



005 96 KB ↓

A breakdown of these graphics reveals them as essentially being compositions of text and imagery used to convey expressions of goodwill and recognition, acting as transmuted greeting cards. As revealed through Barry Shank's *A Token of My Affection*, greeting cards have historically functioned as emotional commodities, transforming relational labor into objects of exchange. ①

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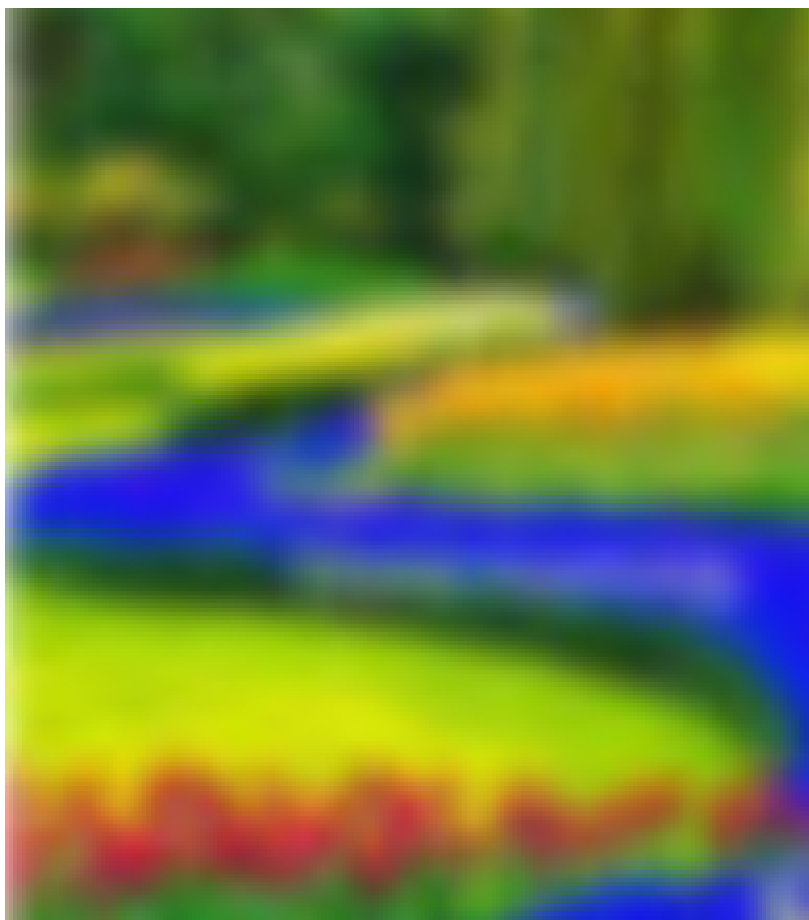
Through sustained reciprocal usage and expectations, they grew to become artifacts that composed a network and implicitly signified social relations without any direct communication. As a result, the imagery on the front cover or even the handwritten message on the inside did not need to say much; regardless of the explicit content, all cards embodied the same “objective need for connection”. ❶



008 151 KB ↓

In the mid-90s, the novel virtuality of the World Wide Web and the interconnectivity of the Internet saw the radical transformation of the greeting card and all communication at large. ❷ The digital evolution of the medium, more commonly known as the e-card, finds its origins in MIT researcher Judith Donath’s website, The Electric Postcard. ❸

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Donath's site offered customizable pairings of photos and brief messages that could be sent through email and displayed through a web page. The Electric Postcard used the virtuality and high-speed capabilities of the Internet to form communication networks with visuals at their core, taking a major first step towards contemporary forms of instant messaging. In her own words, Donath ascribed the unexpected popularity of the website to a single aspect: "[it] allowed people to keep in touch without having to actually say anything."

Towards the beginning of the 21st century, advanced digital technologies were increasingly making their way into the home and the web took on the role of a mass medium perpetuated by user creation and participation.

Focusing the visual products of this specific era, theorist Olia Lialina looked towards websites like Blingee.com to shed light on the cultural practices at play in the nascent stages of the Internet. 4



010 95 KB ↓

As an image-making tool that developed into a community over time, Blingee and similar resources became production grounds for the amateur Internet creator and resulted in the development of a broad language known as the “vernacular web”. 5

In its analysis of visual imagery characterized by non-professional design principles and interactions with digital technologies, the “vernacular web”, as used by Lialina and other Internet researchers, offers key insights into the circulation of the modern day “Good Morning” greeting card. However, through the intrinsic links to colonial and gendered histories regarding domestic work made by its Latin root vernaculus, this paper will try to shift away from this terminology. 6

Rather, the word colloquial will be used as a means to differentiate imagery produced outside the institutional design ecosystem

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without heavily relying on a Euro-patriarchal definitional framework.

To broadly characterize their content, instant messaging graphics are most easily recognized by their sentimentality, colloquial design sensibilities and collage-like layering of images and type. Their textual content can range from a simple greeting of a few words to flowery thematic prose and poetry. While some content-creation websites have begun stamping watermarks on their generated images, most graphics lack a clear provenance and generally circulate outside the periphery of copyright and reproduction law.

Perhaps one of the most remarkable qualities of this visual style is its ubiquity across many non-Western nations. Google searches reveal

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the same defined design conventions appear for greeting graphics in India, Latin America, Indonesia and various other countries. Through this, the elderly users who partake in the sending and receiving of these images are part of a growing global visual culture. 7

Across such vast visual arrays, motifs like sunset landscapes, kittens, and tea party spreads emerge as common subjects. Above all, flowers are perhaps the most prominent motif, often presented as zoomed-in backgrounds or smaller decorative components. Flower-choice lends itself a new layer of symbology: celebratory greetings tend to use roses or bouquets; certain cultures can value certain flowers, as seen through Taiwanese



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elderly who consider lotuses **7** as “the quint-essential Good Morning Image background”.

A 2022 study pertaining to the emotion-
al experience of digital flowers reveals that
social and cultural differences withstanding,
the overall reactions to such depictions are
defined by a universal sense of positivity. This
affective response can be traced to more bio-
logical roots, with flowers generating uplifting
sensory responses even through a digital
medium. **8** On a sociological level, photo-
graphs of flowers draw a relational response
from the viewer, evoking notions of caretaking
and nurture, and ultimately becoming transi-
tional objects that cultivate communication
and bonds between individuals.

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Apart from the primary subject matter, the ornamental choices present in greeting graphics are also foundational to the images' sense of charm. In her digital folklore reader, Lialina delves into the key visual aspects of colloquial digital design, denoting glitter as one of them. This "trademark of [contemporary] amateur aesthetics" 5 is evident across instant messaging graphics (see img. 8), made popular through the existence of generator sites entirely dedicated to creating ready-to-use glitter files. Through its static and animated forms, the shimmering ornament adds an instantaneous visual charm and value to otherwise plain images.

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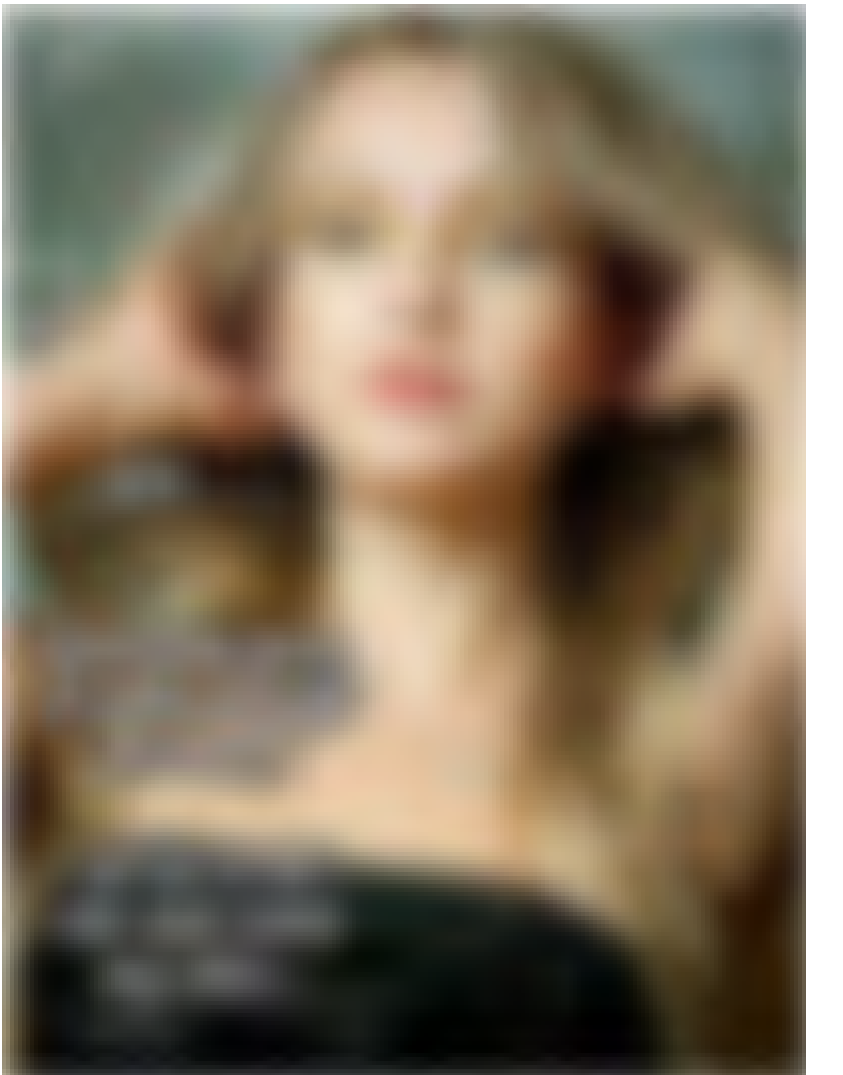


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More broadly, notions of shininess and luminosity play a significant role in such graphics, as seen with rays, lens flares, glows and various other renderings of light. Anthropological findings indicate that such depictions can represent the sacred qualities of the iconic content within an image. 9

This is most relevant in the case of religious imagery; a noteworthy subsection in the realm of messaging graphics. Whether through general iconography like the halo or more specific examples like the Hind darshan, an illustrated emanation of light is a common method for expressing the sanctity associated with the represented deity or symbol. 9 Through the layering of luminous graphics, such images adopt a pronounced visual and spiritual dimension for their senders and receivers to partake in.



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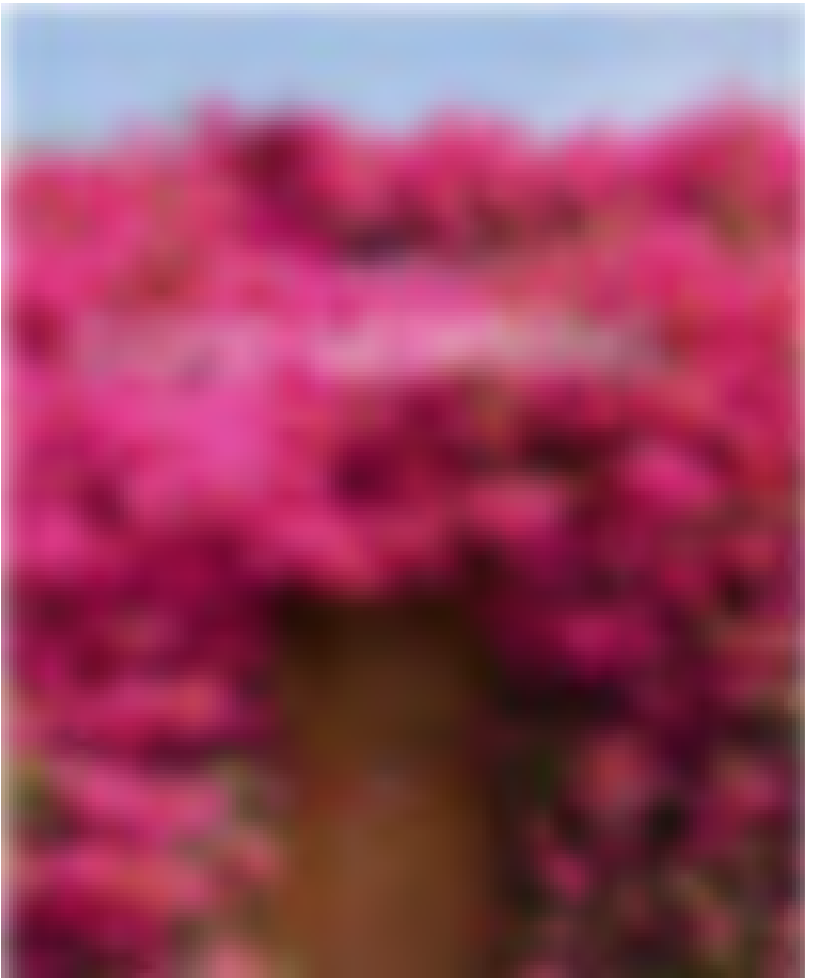


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While this visual culture is largely characterized by its ubiquity across ethno-linguistic subcultures, its digital format can allow for customizability along the lines of its varied audiences. When trying to reproduce specific cultural design conventions, the technological limits of image-making can force designers to be creative with their decisions.

In the case of several Hindu-themed graphics, double exclamation points were used in place of the traditional danda, which are used to punctuate Sanskrit phrases. Other graphics use strings of flower emojis to create digital garlands that are laid around deities in the same way as they would be on physical picture frames and idols. In all cases, the images themselves consist of layered themes and visual motifs, representing a nuanced symbology that generates a positive affect in their viewers.

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However, much like Shank's examination of greeting cards, these graphics are essentially digital artifacts that constitute a wider communication system. As such, the networks through which they are exchanged are also a key aspect of this affective circulation amongst the elderly.



028 100 KB ↓

that generates a positive affect in their viewers. However, much like Shank's examination of greeting cards, these graphics are essentially digital artifacts that constitute a wider communication system. As such, the networks through which they are exchanged are also

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a key aspect of this affective circulation amongst the elderly. For this demographic, the very act of image sharing has become a ritualistic component of their lives, largely in part to the technical ease that this mode of communication offers.

Pressing a single share button that sends a file to multiple users at once becomes far more preferable than typing out messages on a keyboard with many smaller buttons; a task that becomes further complicated for non-English users attempting transliteration. Moreover, the intimacy offered through private messaging applications is seen as an advantage over public platforms like Facebook, which also present a more complex navigational layout. 7



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An explanation for the prioritization of simpler communication methods can be seen through the unique relationship that the elderly have with digital technology. Many members of this demographic, especially those in non-Western countries, overstepped using personal computers and started their digital interactions in the last decade through the means of smartphones.

In India, a recent proliferation of wireless broadband access and affordable smartphones has enabled elderly citizens to become a new consumer demographic of this technology. When asked about the image sharing practice by The Wall Street Journal, user Kanwarjot Singh ascribed his habit to simply “feeling happy that people are remembering me.” **10** His compelling response signifies the more emotional network through which these graphics circulate; formulated by memories and efforts to compensate physical distance through digital bonds.





035 55 KB ↓

The sociable nature of these communications points to the larger role of the phatic communion in these networks, in which exchanges are primarily conducted for their social function as opposed to an informative function. In such cases, the images are entirely secondary to the circulation of a positive affect, with the emotional response being drawn from the social interaction itself.

Researcher James J. Hodge expands on the sonic manifestation of this idea in contemporary instant messaging networks, highlighting the notification of a message as a key driver of happiness between individuals. **11** In his examination of sociable media, he finds that the implied promise of social relation presented within a received notification taps into a latent human urge to seek connection. The very presence of a network, in its technological and sociological definitions, provides elderly

0 KB

people a mode of positive digital participation that can reduce the common sentiments of isolation and alienation experienced in these age groups. Much like the nuanced functionality of the physical greeting card and Donath's e-card, the instant messaging graphic can serve in a primarily phatic capacity; its content as merely a means to hold a social subtext that maintains relationships.



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Using separate frameworks to understand the instant messaging graphic reveals an inherent tension between the affective capacities of the network and the image. However, synthesizing the analyses provided through visual culture and network studies can resolve this binary by recognizing the mutually constitutive relationship between the two perspectives. In fact, Blingee.com and its combined modality as a tool, archive and community platform speaks to the integration of medium and message apparent in this realm.

Jennie Niemelä-Nyrhinen and Janne Sepänen's article on the phatic qualities of the photograph offers further insight into this mode, arguing that visually-driven sociable communication does not exist without a meaningful message. **12** Rather, a visual's material indexicality and the signifying function of its iconic content forms the basis for the social interaction in question. This concept manifests itself through the embodied sensory

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presence offered by floral pictures, and the thoughtful symbology embedded within the instant messaging graphic. Such components heighten the intimate sociability of phatic communication and allow its participants to maintain bonds despite a digitally-mediated distance. Essentially, the phatic network relies on its images to fundamentally exist.



044 56 KB ↓

Conversely, a technical approach can showcase the impact the network can have on its visual artifacts. The high speed capacities of the Internet and wireless broadband has made constant connection more possible than ever. This condition, described by Hodge as the state of “always being on”, **11** has effectively changed the temporal nature of greeting graphics. Evolving from their material origins as tokens reserved for celebratory occasions, the contemporary iteration of the greeting card can address its receiver at any point of day. This content-based shift from “Happy

0 KB

Birthday” to “Good Morning” can then be seen as a visual and textual outcome of rapidly advancing network technologies.

On a more material level, the expansive routes that an image travels in its circulation is often manifested directly through its evolving compressed quality. In some cases, greeting graphics can undergo a compression that nearly renders the image void of any meaningful content. In accordance with Hito Steyerl’s seminal essay, “one even doubts whether it could be called an image at all.” **13**

However, Steyerl’s examination demonstrates that the low material resolution of a graphic can actually speak of the emotional networks they traversed and the people that cared to use them as relational artifacts, creating ‘visual bonds’ similar to those ascribed by Dziga Vertov.



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Vertov's theory and Steyerl's attribution of the widely circulated image as a 'lumpen proletarian' **13** reveals the inherent politics of the instant messaging graphic. Their horizontal sharing economy proved to be a crucial source of care for the elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic and even provided a framework for mutual aid.

However, many also began circulating graphics holding pseudoscientific remedies and explanations for the virus, demonstrating how networks of consideration could quickly turn into networks of disinformation for vulnerable demographics. **7**



047 79 KB ↓

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In India, current prime minister Narendra Modi has gone on record to admonish cabinet members for ignoring the “Good Morning” messages he sends on his eponymous app. 10 Modi, known for his Hindu nationalist rhetoric and implementation of digital communications to deepen his autocratic stronghold, illustrates that the seemingly simple greeting graphic does not exist in a political vacuum.

Furthermore, if a close visual reading of such images is to reveal the origins of a pleasurable affect and notions of care, then the overwhelming prevalence of girls and women as subject matter reveals the implicit gendered assumptions that are embedded 7 in these graphics.

In fact, the gendered nature of its immediate content and its overall attitudes of caretaking, ornamentation and frivolity can reveal why the greeting graphic is met with a wider cultural



048 223 KB ↓

0 KB



049 90 KB ↓

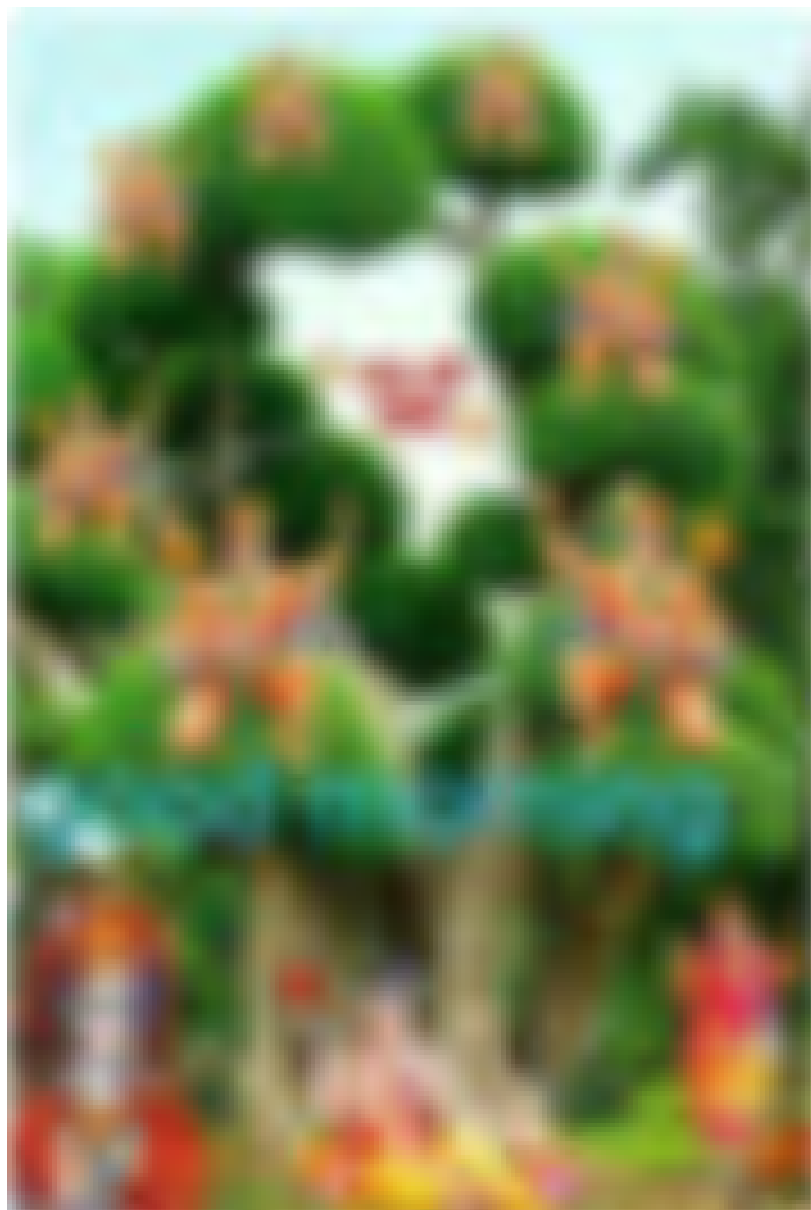
tendency to avoid critical engagement with that which is considered ‘non-serious’. Philosopher Robert Solomon, in his analysis of kitsch and sentimentality, theorizes that this notion of cultural inferiority stems from a perceived low criticality within such content itself. **14** In accordance with the definition of kitsch, instant messaging graphics present their content “as is”, preferring relatable depictions as opposed to imagined ones.

The graphic’s proletarian aesthetics, due to its colloquial sensibilities and circulation amongst masses, are derided as unsubtle and superficial. Its assertion of sentimentality is continuously perceived as being weak, feminine and one-dimensional through its emotional expression. **14**

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Such masculinist and elitist distinctions between high and low culture keep the instant messaging graphic from being afforded critical consideration and go on to “further stigmatize cultural practices that are associated with stigmatized identities.” 7

In her book *Our Aesthetic Categories*, author Sianne Ngai outlines a new lexical classification for colloquial cultural items. 15 Through terms like “cute” or “interesting”, Ngai provides an alternative theoretical framework to process instant messaging graphics, beyond traditional choices like “beautiful” or “sublime”. She draws parallels between everyday aesthetics and the economic processes that define our contemporary era, designating “cute” artifacts as signifiers of hyper-commodification and modern day information saturation. 15



050 134 KB ↓

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Most notably, Ngai's work outlines a fundamental disconnect between critical attention and cultural prevalence. framework and similar theoretical overhauls can be a mode to reconsider these networks of consideration and the visuals that circulate through them. These methods, alongside an understanding of historical contexts and integrated analyses of content and medium, can give colloquial cultural items like instant messaging graphics their due critical attention.

Comprehensive academic acknowledgements can then open a vast subsection of visual culture and digital communication, and shed light on the varied members of the elderly demographics that engage with these networks and graphics. In doing so, the saccharine "Good Morning" picture sent back and forth between family group chats develops a meaningful aesthetic position and is recognized as a digital artifact reflective of the current technological and sociopolitical condition.

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0 KB

MEDIA

0 KB



001



002



Namasteji

Beautiful MORNING

Wonderful beauty of
the wonderful Nature

Dear friend ... Have
you a beautiful day
Enjoy with family

B. Anki

003



004

Good morning



005



006

454 KB

आपके आंगन में सदा खुशियां ऐसे
ही नृत्य करती और मुस्कुराती रहे

*Good
Morning*
Good Morning

मुस्कुराते रहो दिन को सुहाना
बनाते रहो ब्रह्मदत्त त्यागी हापुड़

007



सुप्रभात
दिल से नमस्कार जी 🙏

आपके जीवन का
हर पल मंगलमय हो..

008



009



010



011



012



013

1.67 MB



Good Night

आभार मानो इस मोबाइल का
जिसने हम अजनबियों को
दोस्ती का तोहफा दिया

014



015



016

1.98 MB

Good Morning.



017

2.07 MB



018

2.21 MB



019



020



021



022

2.79 MB



023



024

2.94 MB



025



026



027



028

3.24 MB





030



031



032

3.50 MB

Good
Morning

सुप्रभात

शुभ सकाळ

033

3.54 MB



034



035



036

3.76 MB



037



038

3.92 MB



039

4.02 MB



040



041



042



ठंड में हाथ काम नहीं करते
और...
घमंड में दिमाग काम नहीं
करता...
शुभ्रभात



044



045



046



047



048

Good Morning



049

4.90 MB



050

CACHE

5.02 MB



001 59 KB

Suprabhat

09/05/2023 12:24AM EST



004 71 KB

Good night everyone..

05/05/2023 09:33AM EST



002 20 KB

Good morning

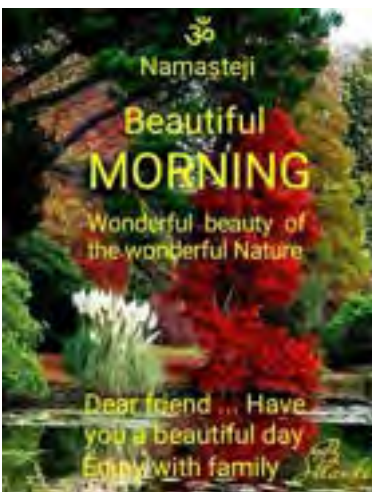
11/09/2022 10:32PM EST



005 71 KB

Morning view today

02/20/2023 06:22PM EST



003 143 KB

Suprabhat

10/19/2022 10:11PM EST



006 61 KB

Good morning Pune.

01/06/2023 07:55PM EST

5.02 MB



(007) 100 KB

Good Morning

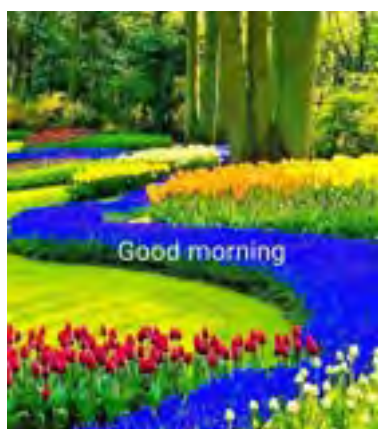
08/08/2023 12:13AM EST



(008) 151 KB

Suprabhat...

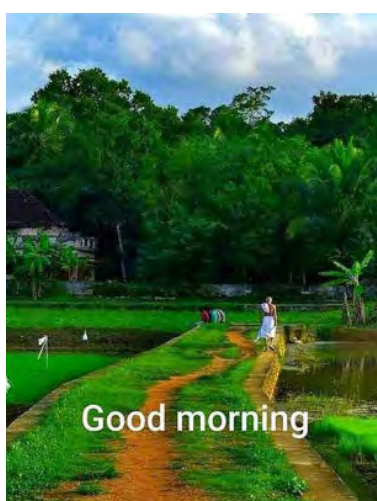
05/04/2023 02:15AM EST



(009) 121 KB

Good morning

06/01/2023 08:36AM EST



(010) 95 KB

Happy Holi

03/06/2023 02:00AM EST



(011) 47 KB

Many happy returns...

04/28/2023 12:24AM EST



(012) 51 KB

Shravan masi harsh manasi

07/18/2023 12:28AM EST

5.02 MB



013 51 KB
Good morning.
07/27/2023 11:26PM EST



014 74 KB
GM. Kiti sundar..!
12/04/2022 02:58AM EST



015 71 KB
Suprabhat.
09/05/2023 11:35PM EST



016 169 KB
Gm everyone
04/22/2023 10:45PM EST



017 90 KB
Good morning
11/03/2022 02:27AM EST



018 137 KB
good morning.
08/13/2023 10:15PM EST



019 169 KB

Gud morning

10/30/2022 11:34PM EST



022 46 KB

Happy morning!

12/13/2022 10:41PM EST



020 50 KB

GM

10/30/2022 11:34PM EST



023 39 KB

Suprabhat

04/01/2023 11:42PM EST



021 419 KB

Gm..apratim

10/30/2022 11:34PM EST



024 109 KB

Good morning..

06/15/2023 10:23PM EST



(025) 59 KB

Suprabhat!

01/07/2023 07:08PM EST



(028) 100 KB

Suprabhat..

11/30/2023 10:23PM EST



(026) 45 KB

Beautiful morning

01/07/2023 07:08PM EST



(029) 65 KB

GM.

01/04/2023 11:41PM EST



(027) 87 KB

Suprabhat...

08/15/2023 1:32AM EST



(030) 80 KB

Good morning.

05/29/2023 08:20PM EST

5.02 MB



031 50 KB

Thank you! Good morning.
11/30/2023 10:23PM EST



034 55 KB

Good morning, wah!
06/01/2023 01:01AM EST



032 50 KB

Good morning, happy spring
11/30/2023 10:23PM EST



035 55 KB

Apratim...
04/05/2023 11:51PM EST



033 42 KB

Suprabhat...
09/07/2023 11:03PM EST



036 106 KB

Good morning!
02/04/2023 11:51PM EST

5.02 MB



(037) 86 KB

Suprabhat shubh yatra
07/09/2023 10:43PM EST



(038) 71 KB

GM
09/19/2023 12:18AM EST



(039) 106 KB

Suprabhat. Beautiful flowers
02/10/2023 01:14AM EST



(040) 44 KB

GREAT morning!
02/10/2023 01:14AM EST



(041) 44 KB

Good evening all
05/15/2023 10:23PM EST



(042) 63 KB

Suprabhat. Apratim!
07/19/2023 12:04AM EST



043 75 KB

Good morning from terrace
03/31/2023 10:29PM EST



046 96 KB

Susandhya...
06/15/2023 09:02PM EST



044 75 KB

Shubh prabhat...
07/02/2023 12:26AM EST



047 96 KB

Happie morning
08/21/2023 12:21AM EST



045 75 KB

Shubh prabhat...
07/02/2023 12:26AM EST



048 96 KB

Gud morning!
05/01/2023 01:12AM EST

5.02 MB



(049) 90 KB

Good morning from sudatta
03/22/2023 01:23AM EST



(050) 90 KB

Good morning..Jai ram
08/06/2023 11:35PM EST

COLOPHON

IMAGES

All images have been compiled through Pinterest. As a way to explore an intersemiotic relationship between message and image, each search term used was a verbatim greeting text sent within my family group chat.

TYPEFACES

AUTHENTIC Sans and Times New Roman

WRITING AND DESIGN

Shravani Bagawde

Published
September 2023

5.02 MB

