

Problematics of critical climate practices on Instagram

This theoretical paper discusses the problematics of communicating critical climate practices on Instagram. Climate practices are critical in nature as they illuminate *a) ecologically harmful social and economic structures* or *b) positive agency and emancipation in combating climate change*. The starting point of this paper is a previous empirical article by the author, which identified six climate practices identified on Finnish ecological Instagram accounts: *detaching, reforming, transilluminating, persevering, caring and consolidating* (Uusitalo 2020).

The paper discusses the problematics of communicating critical climate practices from the viewpoint of aesthetics. Aesthetics refers to both the functions and affordances of the platform and the tropes and practices developed by its users (Leaver, Highfield, Abidin 2021, 39). Aesthetics are considered here from three viewpoints 1) visual forms, 2) platform vernacular and 3) the ecological impact of Instagram.

Firstly, the visual forms of Instagram restrict and enable communicating climate practices. The myriad visual forms presented on Instagram accounts all contribute to the presentation of experiences, identities and communication (Leaver, Highfield, Abidin 2021, 41), and climate practices alike are represented through the existing visual forms of Instagram. This may lead to a normalization of visual imagery related to climate practices.

Secondly, the platform vernacular of Instagram steers the representations of climate practices. For instance, the creation of situations for their Instagrammability is predominant in Instagram content in relation to other platforms (Leaver, Highfield, Abidin 2021, 65). Furthermore, the commercialized nature of communication may involve taking part in the marketing mechanisms of Instagram and thus lead to the commodification of communication. This in turn may limit the potential and scale of critical communication on climate issues on Instagram.

The third problematic of Instagram aesthetics in relation to climate practices is the carbon footprint of creating and powering the digital media hardware of Instagram (See Taffel 2019, 19). Digitally communicated practices demand energy and inevitably produce CO₂ emissions. Posting about climate practices on Instagram means taking advantage of the communicative infrastructures which are partly the culprits of the climate crisis. This restricts the critical potential of climate practices on the very material level of carbon emissions.

Key words: *climate crisis, Instagram, climate practices, platforms, visual communication*

References

Leaver, Tama, Highfield, Time & Abidin, Crystal (2020.) *Instagram*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Taffel, Sy (2019). *Digital Media Ecologies: Entanglements of Content, Code and Hardware*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Uusitalo, Niina (2020.) "Unveiling Unseen Climate Practices on Instagram", *Novos Olhares : Revista de Estudos Sobre Práticas de Recepção a Produtos Mediáticos*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2020, 120–29, doi:10.11606/issn.2238-7714.no.2020.171996.120–129.