

ONLINE IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION STRATEGIES OF UNIVERSITY COUNSELORS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of digital transformation and the rapid development of new media communication, university counselors face new challenges in their online ideological and political education work. Traditional methods relying on one-way notifications, policy interpretations, and offline class meetings are no longer adequate to meet the visual, fragmented, interactive, and platform-based information reception habits of university students. Based on existing research on university counselors, new media, online ideological and political education, digital literacy, and communication innovation, this paper explores how visual communication design can be integrated into the online ideological and political education work of university counselors. The study argues that visual communication design is not merely a technical means of beautifying content, but a systematic approach that can enhance narrative expression, readability, emotional connection, platform branding, and student participation. Addressing the current problems in online ideological and political education, such as content homogenization, weak visual expression, insufficient platform operation, limited interactivity, and imperfect evaluation mechanisms, this paper proposes a communication strategy framework consisting of visual narrative, information visualization, platform branding, participatory design, and evaluation feedback. This research can provide practical reference for university counselors with art and design backgrounds to transform their professional advantages into effective educational outcomes.

Keywords: Visual communication design; University counselors; Online ideological and political education; New media communication; Visual narrative; Student development

1 INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital media has changed the environment in which university students acquire information, express opinions, construct relationships, and form value judgments. For university counselors, this change means that ideological and political education can no longer rely solely on traditional offline meetings, written notices, or administrative management. Currently, a large part of university students' daily lives takes place in digital spaces such as social media platforms, short video applications, class groups, online communities, and campus media accounts. Their attention is profoundly influenced by images, videos, visual symbols, interactive topics, personalized recommendations, and emotional narratives[1]. Therefore, the effectiveness of online ideological and political communication by university counselors depends not only on the accuracy of the educational content but also on whether this content can be perceived, understood, trusted, and accepted by students.

Existing research generally recognizes the importance of new media in the work of university counselors. Liu Zixuan believes that new media has become an important variable reshaping ideological and political work in universities, especially in terms of information integration, communication effectiveness, interactive mechanisms, and personalized guidance. Meanwhile, the study also points out that current online ideological and political work by university counselors still faces practical difficulties such as information overload, content homogenization, weak platform operation, fragmented educational content, and insufficient data collaboration[2]. Hu Shanshan also emphasizes that online ideological and political work by university counselors in the digital age can improve accuracy, interactivity, and collaborative efficiency, but it also faces problems such as insufficient digital literacy among counselors, limited communication channels, and an imperfect public opinion guidance mechanism[3].

However, existing research mostly focuses on new media tools, digital literacy, platform management, and public opinion governance, paying insufficient attention to the role of visual communication design as a professional method. This is particularly important for counselors with backgrounds in art design or visual communication. Such counselors are not only student affairs workers but can also become designers of educational communication content. They can transform abstract values into visible visual narratives, complex policies into easily readable infographics, and scattered student activities into recognizable educational brands. Therefore, this paper takes visual communication design as a research perspective to explore how it can empower university counselors' online ideological and political communication work.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Current research on online ideological and political education for university counselors can be roughly divided into four categories. The first category of research focuses on the value of online ideological and political work in the context of digitalization and new media. Scholars generally believe that new media has expanded the time and space for ideological and political education, shifting educational dissemination from one-way lectures to multi-way interactions. Gao Jingyuan points out that new media has broadened the channels for ideological and political education, enriched educational content, and improved work efficiency[4]. Through text, images, videos, micro-comics, micro-videos, and micro-party lessons, students can more intuitively experience educational content, thereby enhancing the vividness, approachability, attractiveness, and penetration of ideological and political education.

The second category of research focuses on improving the online ideological and political work capabilities of university counselors. Deng Anpeng and Wei Shu believe that university counselors face challenges such as a complex online information environment, the concealment of students' ideological dynamics, insufficient media literacy, and weak technical application capabilities[5]. They specifically point out that some counselors lack practical skills such as graphic design, video editing, and data statistics, making it difficult to produce and disseminate high-quality online ideological and political content. Li Xiaojian proposed that counselors should strengthen their data-driven capabilities, intelligent tool application capabilities, content production capabilities, interactive operation capabilities, and collaborative education capabilities, promoting a shift in working methods from experience-oriented to precise governance, and from one-way propaganda to circle-based dissemination[6].

The third type of research focuses on innovation in the production and dissemination of online ideological and political content. Existing research suggests that student participation can be enhanced through short videos, online forums, WeChat official accounts, live broadcasts, H5 pages, scenario-based activities, digital humans, and virtual communities. Hu Shanshan proposed building integrated platforms such as short video case libraries, interactive H5 games, and virtual ideological and political communities to transform students' passive acceptance into active participation. Jin Shihui emphasized that diversified online ideological and political education platforms should focus on content quality and format diversity, guiding students to discuss national policies, social hotspots, and major events through articles, videos, comics, online lectures, and Q&A activities.

The fourth type of research focuses on online public opinion guidance and collaborative education mechanisms. Scholars generally believe that counselors should pay attention to changes in students' online emotions, respond promptly to online public opinion risks, guide students to express themselves rationally, and establish collaborative mechanisms among student affairs departments, publicity departments, psychological counseling centers, and student organizations. This type of research provides important support for understanding the organizational safeguards of online ideological and political work.

Although the aforementioned research has laid a certain foundation, significant shortcomings remain. Existing research often discusses which platforms counselors should use and what capabilities they should improve, but rarely delves into how visual design principles can be systematically applied to online ideological and political communication. For example, how do color, layout, font, symbols, image style, information hierarchy, visual narrative, and brand identity enhance students' acceptance of ideological and political content? How can counselors establish a consistent visual identity system for class culture, student development activities, extracurricular education, and online communities? These questions are highly relevant to visual communication design, but have not been fully explored in existing literature.

3 THE THEORETICAL LOGIC OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN'S INVOLVEMENT IN COUNSELOR WORK

Visual communication design is essentially the process of transforming information into visual meaning. Its value in the work of university counselors can be understood from three aspects.

First, visual communication design can enhance the readability of educational content. Ideological and political education often involves abstract concepts, policy documents, value guidance, moral norms, and development goals. If this content is presented solely through large blocks of text, students may feel a sense of distance, find it formal, or struggle to understand it. By using visual hierarchy, icons, diagrams, timelines, policy flowcharts, and comparison tables, counselors can reduce students' cognitive load and help them grasp key content more efficiently.

Second, visual communication design can enhance emotional connection. Students don't just react to the information itself; they are also influenced by the tone of the message, the visual atmosphere, the image style, the narrative context, and their sense of identity. A well-designed poster, a short video, or an online theme page can make educational content more relatable and relevant to students' lives. For example, career guidance can be presented as a career growth map, mental health education can be presented through healing illustrations, and stories of exemplary students can be presented through documentary-style visual narratives.

Third, visual communication design helps brand the counselor's work. Counselor work encompasses many aspects, including themed class meetings, special education programs, student competitions, volunteer services, mental health education, career planning, and online interactions. Without systematic design, these activities can easily appear fragmented. A unified visual identity system, including logos, color schemes, layout templates, column names, IP characters, and media styles, can integrate different activities into a recognizable educational brand, thereby enhancing students' memorability, participation, and sense of belonging[7].

Therefore, visual communication design cannot be simply understood as superficial decoration. It is a communication method that connects educational goals, student psychology, media platforms, and visual expression.

4 REAL-WORLD PROBLEMS IN ONLINE IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION COMMUNICATION BY UNIVERSITY COUNSELORS

Although many universities have established online ideological and political education platforms, some problems still exist in their actual operation.

First, content homogenization is quite common. Many WeChat public accounts and class media platforms publish content with similar themes, commonly including policy notices, holiday greetings, safety reminders, and stories of exemplary students. While this content is necessary, its presentation is often repetitive. Liu Zixuan points out that many ideological and political media accounts have similar themes and monotonous formats, lacking school-based characteristics and a student perspective, making it difficult to evoke deep resonance and sustained attention from students. From the perspective of visual communication design, a deeper problem lies in the lack of differentiated visual positioning. When all content uses similar templates, slogans, images, and formal language, students find it difficult to distinguish between different educational brands.

Second, visual expression skills are relatively weak. While some counselors recognize the importance of new media, their content remains at the level of policy paraphrasing or theoretical explanation. In many cases, images exist merely as decorative elements, without truly carrying any communicative significance. The relationship between text and images is loose, the layout lacks visual hierarchy, and the reading path is unclear, leading students to either not continue reading after clicking on the content or failing to develop emotional identification after reading.

Third, interactive design is insufficient. Many online ideological and political education posts still follow a one-way output logic. Students can read, like, or forward, but are rarely invited to participate in topic generation, visual co-creation, discussion voting, story submission, or project-based activities. This weakens students' sense of agency. Online ideological and political education should not only push correct information to students, but also create opportunities for students to express, reflect, and participate[8].

Fourth, platform operation lacks systematic planning. Some counselors primarily rely on WeChat groups or WeChat official accounts for their work, while short video platforms, online forums, H5 tools, and campus digital screens have not been fully integrated. Even when multiple platforms are used, they are often operated in a fragmented manner, lacking a unified communication strategy. Insufficient consideration is given to aspects such as platform branding, content pacing, visual consistency, user feedback, and data evaluation.

Fifth, the evaluation mechanism is not perfect. Current evaluations often focus on simple indicators such as readership, likes, comments, or reposts. These indicators can reflect the superficial effect of communication, but they cannot fully explain whether students truly understand the content, whether their attitudes have changed, or whether the communication supports student growth. Therefore, a more comprehensive evaluation system is needed.

5 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FRAMEWORK FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN

To address the above problems, this paper proposes a strategy framework consisting of five dimensions: visual narrative, information visualization, platform branding, participatory design, and feedback evaluation.

5.1 Strengthening Visual Narrative

Visual narrative refers to using images, scenes, characters, sequence, and emotional cues to tell educational stories. In counselors' online ideological and political work, many themes can be transformed from abstract preaching into storytelling. For example, instead of publishing a conceptual article about dedication, it's better to present the growth story of a student volunteer through a short video, unfolding according to the structure of "problem-action-growth-reflection." Instead of merely explaining professional ethics conceptually, it's better to design a series of visual case studies showcasing students' real learning experiences, internships, competitions, and social service experiences.

For art and design students, visual narratives can also be closely integrated with their professional identity. Counselors can encourage students to create posters, illustrations, short videos, visual diaries, and public service communication works on themes such as cultural confidence, mental health, career development, volunteer service, and campus civility. In this process, students are no longer passive recipients of ideological and political content, but co-creators of educational meaning.

5.2 Promoting Information Visualization

Information visualization is suitable for transforming complex content into clear, structured visual forms. Counselors often need to explain scholarship and financial aid policies, employment processes, mental health resources, safety regulations, academic warning systems, Party and Youth League development processes, and extracurricular credit requirements to students[9]. This content usually involves many steps, conditions, timelines, and responsible

departments. If presented only in long paragraphs of text, students are prone to misunderstanding or overlooking important information.

Therefore, counselors can use flowcharts, timelines, checklists, mind maps, comparison charts, and data panels. For example, career education can be designed as a four-year growth map, showcasing the process of freshman exploration, sophomore capacity building, junior internship preparation, and senior year job transition. Mental health education can be designed as emotion recognition maps and help-seeking path maps. Online public opinion guidance can be designed as fact-checking flowcharts to help students distinguish between facts, opinions, rumors, and emotional expressions.

5.3 Building a Branded Media Matrix

A media matrix refers to the collaborative use of multiple platforms. From a visual communication design perspective, a media matrix should not be merely a loose collection of accounts, but should have a unified identity and differentiated functional positioning. Counselors can build a branded online education system composed of WeChat official accounts, class groups, short video platforms, H5 pages, and offline poster exhibitions. Among these, WeChat official accounts are suitable for publishing system articles, class groups are suitable for instant reminders, short video platforms are suitable for emotional storytelling, H5 pages are suitable for interactive activities, and offline posters and exhibitions are suitable for enhancing campus visibility.

This brand can include a name, logo, color scheme, font style, content sections, visual templates, and a consistent tone of expression. For example, a counselor's studio could set up sections such as "One-Minute Policy Explanation," "Student Growth Stories," "Design for Good," "Psychological Healing Illustrations," and "Career Visual Guide." Each section should have a consistent visual template and communication purpose. This way, students can gradually become familiar with the platform's style and develop stable content expectations.

5.4 Encouraging Participatory Visual Co-Creation

The most effective online ideological and political communication should involve students. Visual communication design offers many possibilities for student participation. Counselors can organize students to participate in poster design competitions, disseminate public service short videos, conduct online exhibitions, create digital stories, and engage in visual topic challenges[10]. These activities can be integrated with extracurricular activities, class culture building, and professional studies.

These activities are particularly meaningful for art and design students because they combine professional practice with values education. For example, students can design visual works around local intangible cultural heritage, campus civility, anti-fraud propaganda, mental health care, or professional responsibility. Counselors can guide students to connect design expression with social responsibility, cultural identity, and personal growth. This approach transforms ideological and political education from external indoctrination into internalized creative practice.

5.5 Establishing a Feedback-Based Evaluation System

Evaluation should include both dissemination and educational indicators. Dissemination indicators can include readership rate, completion rate, sharing rate, comment quality, number of participants, and platform retention rate. Educational indicators can include students' understanding of core content, emotional response, value identification, behavioral changes, and willingness to participate in follow-up activities.

In practice, online data, short questionnaires, focus groups, reflection records, and portfolio evaluations can be combined. For visual co-creation activities, counselors should not only evaluate the final design but also focus on students' understanding of the theme, research process, teamwork, expression logic, and value reflection. This helps avoid reducing online ideological and political work to a competition for traffic and instead allows it to return to its fundamental goal of promoting student development.

6 IMPLEMENTATION PATH

Integrating visual communication design into university counselors' online ideological and political work can be advanced in four steps

First, conduct research on students' media behavior. Counselors should understand students' commonly used platforms, content preferences, visual style preferences, reading habits, and areas of interest. Research can be conducted through questionnaires, interviews, platform data, and daily communication[11]. The aim is to ensure that visual communication strategies are based on genuine student needs, not on educators' subjective assumptions.

Second, establish a content planning mechanism. Counselors can develop a semester-long communication calendar, connecting key educational themes with appropriate media formats. For example, at the beginning of the semester, the focus could be on adaptation and safety education; during the semester, academic support and mental health; and at graduation, career planning and social responsibility. Each theme should include visual materials, interactive tasks, and feedback mechanisms.

Third, establish collaborative production teams. Counselors do not need to complete all design tasks alone. They can collaborate with student leaders, student media teams, art and design students, professional course teachers, and the

school's publicity department. This collaborative model can improve design quality and cultivate students' media literacy and sense of responsibility.

Fourth, build a sustainable resource library. Counselors can gradually accumulate templates, icons, policy diagrams, activity posters, short video scripts, interview materials, student stories, and evaluation forms. A resource library can reduce duplication of work and improve the consistency of dissemination content.

7 CONCLUSION

From a visual communication design perspective, online ideological and political communication by university counselors should not be limited to simple information dissemination and platform usage, but should become a systematic educational communication process integrating visual narrative, information visualization, media branding, student participation, and evaluation feedback. For counselors with an art and design background, this research direction has strong professional relevance and practical value. It can help counselors transform subject knowledge into student development work, making ideological and political education more visible, understandable, attractive, and participatory. Future research could involve further empirical analysis, such as comparing changes in student engagement before and after visual design intervention, evaluating the actual effectiveness of branded counselor media platforms, or constructing online ideological and political visual communication models applicable to different student groups and different university contexts.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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