Chapter 6
Open Social-Shared Animated GIFs for Peer-to-Peer Teaching and Learning

ABSTRACT

In the open-shared teaching and learning space, the complexity of the shared learning contents vary. These range from stand-alone items and digital learning objects to full learning sequences and sets of resources. One humble object is the animated GIF, lightweight motion images used in graphical user interfaces (GUIs), expressive memes and commentary, emoticons, and other applications. Animated GIFs are fairly easy to create; they may be integrated into learning documents (handouts, slideshows, articles) and other objects, and it plays offline (and without the need for any downloadable player). This work involves an analysis of some available animated GIFs for education in social imagery collections. Based on findings, this work explores the viability of animated GIFs for various open-shared learning applications globally and some potential strategies and tactics, given real-world limits.

INTRODUCTION

In the apparent popular and public mindset, animated GIFs are lightweight motion images, used in memes, some emoticons, and text messages to accentuate particular points. Animated gifs are seen to add more emotion than text alone (Bourlai & Herring, 2014, as cited in Kimura-Thollander & Kumar, 2019, p. 1). On social media, they may serve as conversation starters (Jiang, Fiesler, & Brubaker, Nov. 2018, p. 80:7). Animated gifs used in online conversations may be seen to signal "effort and engagement in the conversation" with the selection of "the perfect GIFs to communicate not only these GIFs' evident meaning on the surface, but also personal common ground, such as 'inside jokes' or unique experiences specific to communication partners, and communal common ground such as a reference to a movie that they watched together or belonging to the same community" (Jiang, Fiesler, & Brubaker, Nov. 2018, p. 80:15). These have a reputation for being annoying because some run on an endless loop "forever," and the constant replay often at fairly high speeds can wear out patience quickly. And what little novelty or

surprise may have existed (in some rare cases) dissipates quickly. The general quality of public animated GIFs [in the "graphics interchange format" (GIF)] is not high. (GIFs themselves can be still/static or motion-based/animated.) They may have origins in clipart. Some may be derived from pixelated video snippets, run endlessly, with particular concepts applied to them. Some include words; most do not. Neither the inputs nor the resolution of animated GIFs indicate high quality per se.

At their most elemental, animated GIFs (here-on referred to in the lower case) are comprised of visual elements (shapes, lines, colors)…in some motion…over time…and sometimes inclusive of words and sometimes inclusive of sound.

An environmental scan of animated gifs listed as related to "education" or "educational" in the social-shared image space shows various visuals that serve a few basic functions:

- capture or drive attention;
- express an idea or sense of support (such as in public service messaging);
- communicate an emotion;
- share an aesthetic;
- sell a product (often digital animations from commercial third-party content providers);
- describe a phenomenon or phenomena;
- explain concepts;
- entertain, amuse, relax;
- elicit information;
- make a phenomena or dynamic memorable;
- reimagine a concept; and ultimately, rarely, even
- support teaching and learning (which requires complex combinations of some of the earlier purposes).

A majority of the works (decontextualized from their original contexts and seen in stand-alone ways) seem designed to capture or drive attention (the first bullet) and many fewer do any of the following in the "long tail" of observed purposes for the animated gifs.

This work involves the analysis of some two sets of collected social imagery from Google Images: "'animated gif' education" (958 images) collected on July 1, 2020, and "education and animated gifs" (886 images) collected on Aug. 23, 2020, for a total of 1,844 collected images excepting a few .pngs (portable network graphics) that slipped in or a few that were not found to be directly relevant. (Figures 1 and 2) The rationale for using the two imagesets collected on different days and with slightly different seeding terms is to see what might change with the differences in time of the social image captures and also the uses of different seeding terms.

This work involved the creation of a systematized method for analyzing the animated gifs in a bottom-up way based on various common dimensions or features of this motion visual form:

the focal objects, the focal characters (human, animal, robotic, and others), the general interpretations of meaning (of the visuals and animations together), the apparent objectives (of the creator), the visual aesthetics, the placement of the object on the continuum of originality-unoriginality, the relative height and width (in pixels), the numbers of moving parts, the complexity of the artificial lighting, the looping iterations (once, several, continuous), and the complete time length of the iteration/cycle/loop), and other factors. There is also a listing of the numbers of "stills" in this set.

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