

Narrative Book Design for the Phenomenon of “Pan-Labeling”

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Abstract: These days, social media platforms are constantly expanding, and young people are spending a lot of time on them. Youth now frequently identify themselves with identity tags in an attempt to find peers and improve their sense of belonging, influenced by internet culture phenomena such as horoscopes and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). This strengthens their cognitive rigidity over time, and gives rise to "pan-labeling." Since there is a lot of heated social debate surrounding the "pan-labeling" phenomena, concept books provide a vehicle for transferring such contentious discourse from social media platforms into book form. This conversation is transformed into visual components that are interwoven throughout the book's structure through text, images, and narrative arrangement. To understand the underlying reasons for the "over-labeling" phenomenon, multi-perspective storytelling is used. Concept books differ from traditional publications by seeking novel forms that fully embody a book's individuality and depth. This paper explores the design of concept books, integrating narrative book design to examine the social topic of “pan-labeling.” It enables readers to understand this phenomenon while gaining deeper insight into concept books as its medium.

Keywords: Pan-Labeling; Social Media; MBTI; Identity Tags; Narrative Book

1. Introduction

Today, the internet has become a crucial platform for interpersonal communication, and posting daily updates online has become a common habit among contemporary Chinese youth. Among these practices, the use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is gradually replacing the previous 12 astrological types, becoming an important identity label for Chinese youth on the internet [1]. For example, extroverted and introverted. The former is the

kind of person who is thought of as being quiet, introverted, and not very enthusiastic in their day-to-day activities, whereas the latter is the kind of person who is vivacious and emotionally outgoing. These identification labels have an almost infinite number of Internet phrases. Unquestionably, "labeling" can rapidly enhance a person's or object's cognitive abilities, but when done improperly, it can result in cognitive bias and solidification. In order to perform a practical study on the issue of "pan-labeling," this paper uses narrative conceptual book design as a vehicle.

2. Labeling Theory and Concept Books

Labeling is defined as a piece of paper that indicates the name, price, and purpose of an item. Labeling, on the other hand, refers to the cognitive phenomenon of grouping specific events or people into a fixed category.

2.1 Traceability of Label Definitions

People frequently use labels to simplify and lessen the complexity and uncertainty of information when confronted with it, as well as their own recollections and prior experiences. When something is labeled, the parts that don't fit the label's criteria are readily overlooked, and the only way that people can understand it is by using the label's stereotype. The issue known as "pan-labeling" can readily result from the overuse of labels or "labeling." This will, in part, result in the development of a single, firmly established cognitive framework that is unsuitable for comprehending and evaluating things.

Social label theory emphasizes how societal environments, by defining or stereotyping individuals as deviants, can trigger a series of deviant behaviors [2]. When an individual is labeled as a deviant, he/she can never escape the role of a deviant. For instance, when someone is called "Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD)" by others. Over time, the person starts to exhibit conscious withdrawal behaviors in social

settings that align with the label's expectations, even to the point of unknowingly reinforcing the identity, because they think they are so phobic. Sociologist and anthropologist Walter Gove explains this as "a profound and frequently irreversible socialization process" whereby the labelled individual acquires an inferior status and develops a deviant worldview [3]. Labels once only existed as objective descriptions, but as the act of "labeling" has become more generalized, it has strayed from the basic intent behind its definition.

2.2 Identity in the Age of Labeling

Identity label as a compound noun, formed by the combination of identity and label, is a symbolization process through simple and easy-to-understand "sharp words" after extensive discussion of social events or subjects of events, and gives them special meanings, so as to show people's insights and views on the events themselves [4]. At the same time, identity labeling also includes how people connect with social groups in order to understand their own identity and social standing as well as the significance and worth of their own lives. Identity fragmentation and tagging have become significant symbols in today's postmodern culture. Social networking sites have emerged as a crucial forum for identity exploration and self-expression, particularly among young people.

As of December 16, 2023, 31.2817 million MBTI-related subjects have gained real-time popularity on the Xiaohongshu app, which is China's equivalent of Instagram, over the previous 180 days. According to a recent study, several scholars have started to concentrate on the significance of MBTI personality types in online social interactions [5]. The MBTI personality test is the source of this nomenclature, which uses letters in descriptions. Using the labels "Extroverted" and "Introverted," the test divides people into discrete groups. People can find out which group they fall into by completing the assessment. With China's economic, cultural, and social development, social pressure among Chinese youth is also increasing [6]. To alleviate stress, people look for communities on social media platforms that have similar identification labels in order to reduce stress. People can freely and unreservedly communicate their fears, uncertainties, and past experiences in these gatherings. In a fast-paced,

high-pressure culture, this self-categorization technique does in fact aid in identity formation and comfort. Long-term dependence on identity labels for self-definition, however, runs the risk of imposing constraints that the individual has placed on themselves.

2.3 The Narrative Nature of Conceptual Book Design

The phenomenon of "pan-labeling" is a hot topic in modern society and is the subject of heated social debate. Through multi-perspective narratives, conceptual books provide a means of interpreting the underlying causes of this phenomenon. We convert divisive social media debate into books by incorporating these storylines into the book's structure through the use of text, visuals, and layout approaches. Concept books resonate with specific teenage demographics while factually articulating the detrimental effects of "pan-labeling."

3. Narrative Intervention in Conceptual Book Design

The specifics of the linguocultural concept "book" among other mental constructs reflecting various spheres of human social existence is determined by its polyvalence, correlation with almost all areas of culture as the main source and carrier of socially and culturally significant information [7]. However, with the development of Internet technology, people's information acquisition has changed from relying on traditional media to network media. The Internet, as the fifth largest media after newspapers, magazines, radio and television, has an increasing role and influence [8]. People are no longer confined to traditional paper books as their sole source of knowledge and culture. Undeniably, the development of traditional books has become increasingly difficult to reverse its declining trend. However, this has also given rise to a large number of conceptual book design works. Concept book is an innovative book design form that is rooted in traditional books but has a strong breakthrough nature and pursues multiple ways to realize book content [9]. As a display of creativity and imagination, it is the exploration on one or several possible practices in researching future development of books in traditional sense [10]. Their emergence aligns with contemporary readers' aesthetic preferences and reading habits. Conceptual books are a new genre of

conventional books that suit the reading habits and aesthetic tastes of modern readers. As a novel approach to book design, concept books can use narrative intervention to successfully communicate information to readers, turning books into profoundly meaningful works.

3.1 The Conceptual Narrative of Book Design

Narrative, in short, is the act of telling a story. “Narrate” refers to the process of telling, while “story” denotes the existing events. Narrative is divided into two parts: story and discourse. A story possesses a fixed text and logical sequence, whereas discourse concerns how it is told—the manner of narration. In the 1980s, narrative concepts gradually permeated the design field. However, constrained by early social conditions and publishing limitations, book design remained largely confined to the beautification of book covers. It wasn't until later improvements in publishing and academic environments that book design concepts began to evolve. This shift encompassed updates in design thinking, reader demands, and heightened awareness among book designers. The inherent connection between a book's content and its physical medium grants books a distinct narrative advantage, making their engagement with narrative an inevitable progression.

3.2 The Narrative Logic of Conceptual Book Design

In literary works, authors primarily convey themes and plots to readers through textual information—a method equally applicable to conceptual book design. Designers communicate the narrative theme (content) to readers via design forms (media). In this process, the narrative theme and design form transform into the “discourse” component of narrative, with conceptual book design works using this ‘discourse’ to convey the “story.” In short, it is using “discourse” to tell a “story.”

The way the story is expressed and the reader's mental trip through the work are the main focus of narrative design, which pays closer attention to how people perceive and feel about the design. In order to build a relationship with the reader, the overarching structure of book design is built using narrative content, perspective, storyline, and medium. In order to accomplish this, designers must first define the narrative subject before integrating and organizing the book's materials, layout, and binding around it—a

process that turns intangible ideas into concrete objects. Readers then use the offered design work to self-interpret it, eventually unraveling the “story” it tells.

3.3 The Mapping of Narrativity in Conceptual Books

Conceptual book design, as a comprehensive information carrier, requires the construction of a complete narrative design system. However, past book designs often lacked holistic thinking, leaving readers' perception and interpretation of content confined to the visual level. By introducing narrative elements—including thematic focus, structural framework, and textual composition—into conceptual books and employing modern design techniques, the books achieve an integrated narrative effect, thereby conveying content more effectively to readers.

The “Sampled Life” series of conceptual books by graphic design master Nakajima Hideki comprises seven volumes housed within an A4-sized white box. Designer Nakajima Hideki integrates visual elements like musical scores and notes, employing printing techniques and text layout to create distinct reading experiences tailored to each book's content. For instance, black rectangles partially obscure musical scores, with the constantly shifting masked areas generating a rhythmic sensation. This arrangement of layout elements creates a powerful visual tension.

4. Narrative Strategies in Conceptual Book Design

Establishing the narrative theme sets the tone for conceptual book design, fundamentally determining the story's narrative logic and presentation style. Concept books differ from traditional publications not only in their innovative design and layout but also in their distinct interpretation of textual content. It is commonly held that form serves content. Compared to merely pursuing the artistic quality of a book's physical form, the themes and ideas conveyed through its content hold greater significance. The narrative theme reflects the work's perspective and ideology, determining the focus of its creation. It can be said that all design and layout decisions unfold from the establishment of the narrative theme. When defining the narrative theme around the “pan-labeling” phenomenon, it is necessary to gather and integrate information related to

labeling to ensure the theme is fully presented. Given that “pan-labeling” is a relatively abstract social issue, the final establishment of its theme requires theoretical support and practical research.

4.1 Establishing the Narrative Structure

After defining the narrative theme, the collected materials and information are organized and integrated to construct a comprehensive narrative framework. The narrative structure plays a particularly crucial role in the design phase, analogous to key frames in video cinematography that capture pivotal shifts in the narrative journey. Based on temporal and spatial divisions, narrative structures can be categorized into linear and non-linear forms. Linear narrative presents content in chronological order. This straightforward approach facilitates reader comprehension. Among these, chronological narration represents the most typical linear structure, progressing from beginning to end according to temporal sequence. It establishes a clear timeline for the plot, aiding readers in understanding the story's origins and development. Nonlinear narrative, however, differs from its linear counterpart by lacking a clear, linear timeline and disregarding the chronological progression of events. Instead, it follows the designer's intent, piecing together fragments of the narrative to tell the story in a more random and fragmented manner.

4.2 Visual Translation of Narrative Content

The final step in narrative design is visual translation—the process of transforming narrative content into visual form to complete the story's ultimate telling. Visual translation primarily relies on the narrative themes, structures, and plotlines established earlier.

Considering the elements of visual communication design and visual narrative forms, the visual translation in narrative design primarily relies on three forms: textual narrative, pictorial narrative, and color narrative. Textual narrative typically manifests in two forms: narrative design of individual characters and narrative design through the arrangement of multiple characters. Narrative design of individual characters refers to text that independently achieves a narrative presentation effect, serving as the thematic exposition of visual imagery within the design work. Multi-text narrative design engages readers in

the design's narrative activity through typographic arrangements, fostering interaction between text and viewer. Pictorial narrative offers the most direct expression of a book's theme, content, and plot. It visually translates established narrative themes and content into visual representations. Chromatic narrative employs color strategically to convey emotion and establish atmosphere.

5. “Stick or Peel?” Concept Book Design Practice

As analyzed earlier, establishing a narrative theme is fundamental to conceptual book design. Through research on topics like “pervasive labeling,” we identified identity labels carrying either positive or negative connotations. Surveys reveal that today's youth enthusiastically apply various identity labels to themselves, seeking psychological comfort from identity recognition. However, the widespread adoption of this behavior risks fostering “label dependency,” breeding lazy thinking and trapping individuals in the pitfalls of stereotypical thinking. Overreliance on labels can also bring about various negative consequences for both the individual and society. Therefore, the author will determine the narrative theme of this concept book—“Stick or Peel?”—from a relatively objective perspective. The purpose of this book is not to criticize the phenomenon of “labeling,” but to objectively present the impact that “labeling” has on people.

5.1 Narrative Structure of the Concept Book “Stick or Peel?”

In designing the book's narrative, curated texts must be selected, refined, and organized into a coherent logical sequence to effectively convey the content. This book adopts a linear, chronological narrative structure centered on the theme “Labels That Define My Life,” arranging the overall content accordingly.

The narrative structure unfolds around four key themes: “Entrapment,” “Consumption,” “Imprisonment,” and “Breakthrough.” Each theme features distinctive textual content and narrative techniques. The conclusion of one theme seamlessly transitions into the beginning of the next. “Entrapment” depicts “I” being overwhelmed by life's countless labels, with numerous “identity tags” saturating the scene—a metaphor for the ubiquitous labeling in online social media. “Exhaustion” shows “I” wearing

these identity tags while seeking like-minded individuals on digital platforms, only to sink into endless emotional turmoil in reality. 'Imprisonment' portrays "I" trapped by the profound emptiness stemming from these identity labels. Though fully aware of the dangers of over-reliance on labels, "I" still allow myself to be "trapped" within the shackles of these labels. The final scene, "Break," signifies "I" tearing off the shackles brought by identity labels. "I" no longer becomes overly immersed in identity labels but instead utilizes them appropriately.

5.2 Visual Translation of the Concept Book "Stick or Peel?"

The visual translation of the concept book "Stick or Peel?" employs two primary narrative forms. The first uses textual storytelling to articulate the book's theme. The second approach converts portions of text into imagery, supplemented by narrative text, creating a dual-track narrative expression of text and image. Additionally, color application is integrated throughout the narrative design to achieve artistic effects that enhance atmosphere and convey emotion.

In book design, textual narrative achieves the most direct information delivery. Extensive integration of text within the visuals allows readers to intuitively grasp the book's central theme. For typography, two primary font styles are employed: black typeface and rounded typeface. The harmonious arrangement of these two styles enhances the visual coordination of the layout. Simultaneously, distinct variations in font size and weight create a clear hierarchy and rhythmic flow within the design. Visual storytelling holds equal importance, encompassing all images and graphic elements within the book's pages. For this book's interior, we selected content related to "identity labels" to innovate visual symbols. For instance, key terms from "identity labels" were designed as 'shackles' imagery, metaphorically representing the "I" being bound. Through the judicious use of visual storytelling, the content is conveyed intuitively, allowing readers to grasp its deeper meaning.

6. Conclusion

Traditional paper books are having a harder time surviving the effects of the internet wave, but this has also made designers think more deeply about the medium. In recent years, concept

books have become more and more popular as creative works of design that represent advances in the design thinking of their creators. Designers' attention to detail and command of macro-narratives are further demonstrated by concept book designs that incorporate narrative intervention. The phenomenon of "pan-labeling" serves as the starting point for this study. It investigates the use of storytelling techniques in book design by incorporating pertinent narrative theories and illustrative references, providing new insights for the creative creation of idea books.

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