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Visual Storytelling in the AI Era: A Study of the Uketsu Channel's Narrative Graphic Design on YouTube

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ABSTRACT
This study concludes that artificial intelligence (AI) plays a transformative role in enhancing visual storytelling on YouTube, particularly through the case of the Uketsu channel. The integration of AI-generated visual elements—such as atmospheric illustrations, narrative-driven diagrams, and memory-based imagery—not only supports narrative immersion but also deepens emotional engagement with the audience. The use of niche AI tools like Kakashi, as explored in one of Uketsu's most-viewed videos, reveals how personalized and emotionally resonant visuals can amplify horror storytelling. Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of balancing human creativity with AI assistance to maintain originality and ethical integrity in digital content creation. While AI tools offer efficiency and personalization, creators must navigate challenges such as potential loss of artistic authenticity and overdependence on automated systems. Ultimately, this study offers insights into the evolving dynamics of narrative graphic design in the AI era, where technology serves not just as a tool but as an active participant in shaping audience experiences.

1. Introduction

Additionally, public perception of AI-generated imagery can be heavily influenced by social media dynamics(Nugroho et al., 2024)(Chandra & Mutiara, 2022). For instance, in one of Uketsu's videos, an AI-generated image of an empty lot was perceived as frightening by many viewers on Twitter—not due to its actual content, but because a popular illustrator commented on its eerie nature. This demonstrates how visual storytelling can be shaped by algorithms, influencers, and audience psychology.

The development of artificial intelligence (AI) has brought transformational possibilities to various creative fields, including visual storytelling and graphic design(Rodriguez, 2024). On platforms like YouTube, where visual appeal and narrative depth are key factors for audience retention, the integration of AI in content creation processes has redefined how stories are conveyed and experienced(Lyu et al., 2024) . Channels that focus on strong narrative elements, particularly in niche genres such as horror and mystery, increasingly utilize sophisticated visuals to capture viewers' attention.

Globally, Japan is recognized as one of the countries that is responsive and proactive in adopting AI advancements, even before the COVID-19 pandemic era. Through initiatives like "Society 5.0," the Japanese government has promoted the integration of AI into various sectors, including the creative industries and digital media. These efforts aim not only to enhance production efficiency but also to support creativity and innovation in delivering content to the public(Tung, 2023). Japan's positive

approach to AI opens significant opportunities for local content creators to incorporate this technology into their production processes, including on platforms like YouTube.

Uketsu, a Japanese storyteller known for gripping narratives and striking visuals, represents the trend of leveraging AI-based art and enhanced visuals in storytelling(Osone et al., 2021). This research explores the contributions of AI technology, including generative images(Chandra et al., 2025), visual effects, and automated editing, to the narrative strength of channels like Uketsu, even though there is no specific evidence of AI tools being used by Uketsu.

The discussion also covers ethical challenges, including concerns about authenticity and originality in an era where AI-generated visuals can dominate the creative landscape. In Japan, despite the generally positive reception of AI, challenges include concerns about AI's impact on creative sector jobs, the risk of cultural homogenization, and issues of personal data protection(川上皓平 et al., 2019). The Japanese public's response is generally pragmatic, with many creative and academic circles advocating for clear regulations to govern AI use in a way that supports human creativity without neglecting ethical values(Dirksen & Takahashi, 2020). This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how AI-supported visual storytelling affects audience engagement on YouTube(Orak & Turan, 2024), using Uketsu as a case study. Specifically, the research highlights audience engagement in Japan, known for its high interest in visual narratives with distinctive aesthetics. Japanese audiences show positive appreciation for visual innovations that enhance storytelling experiences, including the use of AI elements to enrich the imagination and atmosphere of stories. Their engagement is reflected in view counts, comments, and loyalty to channels like Uketsu that combine modern technology with local cultural values.

2. Research Method

This study applies a qualitative content analysis approach based on visual communication theory and audience engagement frameworks. Ten videos from the Uketsu YouTube channel were selected based on the following criteria: (1) minimum 1 million views, (2) emphasis on AI-enhanced visuals, and (3) narrative relevance to themes of memory and horror. Each video was coded thematically using NVivo software to identify visual motifs, narrative structures, and emotional responses from audience comments.

The video titled “【科学ホラーミステリー】変なAI ([Science Horror Mystery] Strange AI)” was chosen as a representative case study due to its rich visual content and use of the Kakashi AI engine. Secondary sources such as interviews, press releases, Reddit discussions, and academic articles were used to triangulate findings and identify ethical, emotional, and symbolic functions of AI in storytelling.

Uketsu's use of visual storytelling also aligns with contemporary perspectives on how AI reshapes narrative design. AI applications like 'Kakashi' construct stories not merely through illustration but through memory-driven visuals. Kakashi, for instance, is theorized to generate images based on the memories of a deceased child named Aika, which deeply enhances the emotional immersion of the audience.

This study employs a qualitative approach with a content analysis methodology (Grover et al., 2022). The research involves selecting ten popular videos from the Uketsu YouTube channel that feature strong visual storytelling elements. One of the main video clips analyzed is titled "【科学ホラーミステリー】変なAI ([Science Horror Mystery] Strange AI)," which has garnered 9.5 million views within a year. This video was chosen for its complex visual narrative elements, making it relevant for examining AI's contribution to storytelling strength. These videos are analyzed based on the use of illustrations, atmospheric backgrounds, animations, and visual enhancements that may be influenced by AI. The primary focus is on identifying how these visuals enhance narrative immersion and audience engagement.

In addition to video analysis, the study also examines relevant secondary sources, including interviews, media articles, and public information on AI trends in content creation. The focus is directed towards identifying patterns in visual design choices that indicate AI integration or automated tools, albeit indirectly. Furthermore, ethical considerations such as originality, authenticity, and the potential over-reliance on machine-generated visuals are critically examined.

3. Results and Discussion

The analysis reveals that Uketsu's visual storytelling strategy heavily relies on atmospheric illustrations and dynamic diagrams that complement the narrative structure. Specifically, this study focuses on one of Uketsu's video clips titled "【科学ホラーミステリー】変なAI ([Science Horror Mystery] Strange AI)." This video demonstrates how visual elements such as AI illustrations, scientific diagrams, and atmospheric effects are used to enhance the horror mystery theme. Interestingly, the video also showcases how Uketsu, as a Japanese citizen, expresses enthusiasm for AI developments in the digital world. One example is Uketsu's response to the presence of AI chatbots in Japan, such as AI Kakashi, which is incorporated into the video's narrative. With over 9.5 million views within a year, this video highlights the high appeal of personalized visuals and the relevance of the AI theme, thereby supporting the viewers' narrative experience.

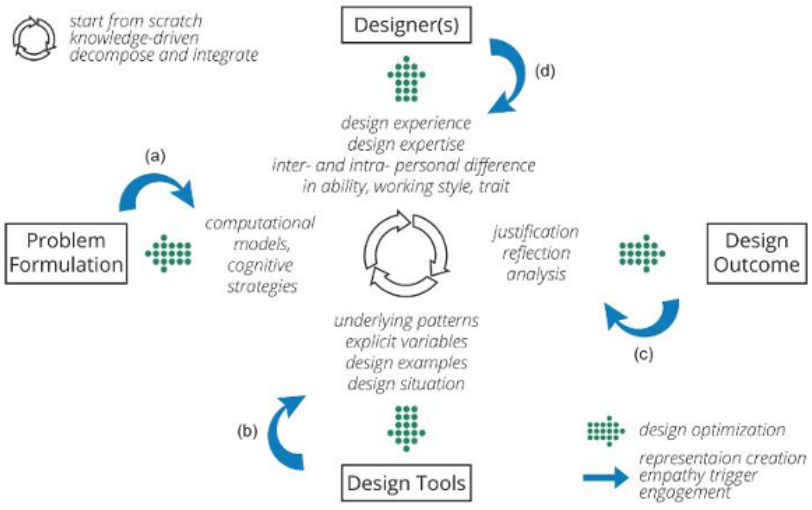
3.1. Result

Furthermore, the study finds a compelling contrast between major AI platforms like DALL-E and niche AI like Kakashi. While the former excels in visual diversity, it often lacks emotional depth. Kakashi, on the other hand, captivates viewers due to its perceived personal connection and emotional narrative—traits that are central to successful horror storytelling.

Artificial Intelligence has revolutionized the perspectives of artists and designers in their work. Generative algorithms and machine learning have enabled artists to explore new forms of expression and artistic design that were previously unattainable. Designers can leverage data-driven insights to create more personalized and interactive artworks using AI-powered tools.

Moreover, the influence of AI on design and art extends beyond the creative process itself. According to Smith and Jacoby's 2019 study, AI-based systems have streamlined design workflows, simplifying tasks such as image recognition, pattern analysis, and color selection (Rani et al., 2023). The design idea framework utilizing AI technology, developed by Liao, Hansen, and Cao, aims to enhance designers' efficiency, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Framework for Design Ideas Through Artificial Intelligence Technology (Source: Liao, Hansen & Chai, 2020)



In design, Artificial Intelligence is utilized to represent creativity, evoke empathy, and engage individuals with the design. By harnessing AI capabilities in design and art, professionals can create visually stunning, meaningful, and engaging works that cater to individual preferences and foster deeper connections with the audience (Liao et al., 2020).

AI tools not only facilitate the creative process but also ensure that the resulting designs align more closely with the preferences and interests of the target audience. By leveraging AI technology, YouTube creators can produce content that is more relevant and engaging, ultimately enhancing audience engagement and overall content performance.

Table 2. Uketsu visual storytelling flowchart with AI support (Source: individual)

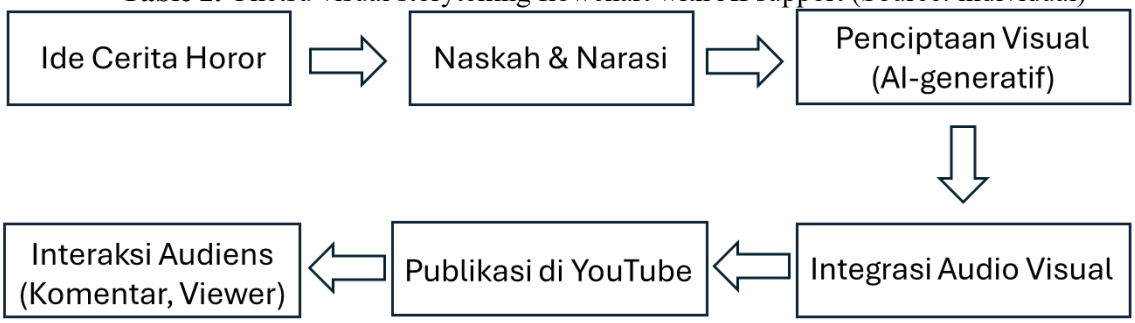


Table 2. compares the emotional resonance, visual diversity, and narrative utility of Kakashi versus DALL·E. Kakashi emphasizes memory-based imagery, while DALL·E generates wide-ranging but less emotionally anchored visuals. (Source: individual)

AI Tool	Visual Diversity	Emotional Depth	Narrative Contribution
Kakashi	Moderate (Memory-focused)	High (Personalized recall)	Central (Acts as character)
DALL·E	High (Diverse prompts)	Low to Moderate	Supportive (Background aesthetics)

3.2. Discussion

AI as a Medium of Visual Storytelling

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) in graphic design has significantly transformed the way YouTube creators produce and personalize content. Three years ago, Japan had already begun to adopt AI technologies on a broad scale, although full integration had not yet been achieved (Dirksen & Takahashi, 2020). By 2022, the country demonstrated substantial progress in various AI-related sectors, including robotics, manufacturing, and data analytics. The Japanese government has also supported AI development through a range of pro-innovation initiatives and policies. These advancements extend into the realm of social media content creation, particularly within video-based platforms such as YouTube. A notable example is the Uketsu Channel (https://www.youtube.com/@uketsu/videos), which reflects the application of AI-enhanced storytelling in Japanese digital media culture.

Figure. 1 Uketsu trying search engine AI Kakashi (Source:YouTube)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has evolved beyond being merely a tool in the design process; it now functions as a visual medium with narrative capacity. In the context of the Uketsu YouTube channel, AI is employed to generate illustrations that do not merely support atmosphere but also convey story elements through emotionally charged visual forms. As demonstrated in one of Uketsu's most-discussed videos, an AI-generated image—described as *"not a photo, but made by AI… yet many people found it frightening"—elicited a strong emotional reaction among viewers. This illustrates how AI-generated images can act as emotional and interpretive triggers, rather than mere visual documentation* (Uketsu, 00:03–00:15). A notable example is the integration of the Kakashi AI in the video "[Science Horror Mystery] Strange AI/【科学ホラーミステリー】変なAI ", which produces depictions of an empty lot based on emotionally negative prompts such as "scary" or "sad." These images are not just supplementary; they constitute an essential part of the narrative structure, fostering psychological tension and viewer engagement.

The uniqueness of AI as a narrative medium lies in its ability to generate visual representations derived from affective input or even personal memory data. In the case of Kakashi AI, audiences have speculated that the recurring images reflect the memories of a deceased child, transforming the AI into a narrative subject that embodies trauma and identity. This suggests that AI does not merely enhance visual aesthetics, but also extends storytelling into emotional and existential dimensions.

Thus, Uketsu's approach to visual storytelling demonstrates that AI can serve not only as a generative design tool but also as an active visual agent contributing to meaning-making within a narrative. This opens up new possibilities for designers and content creators to construct visual narratives that are immersive, deeply personal, and emotionally resonant.

AI as a Representation of Memory and Identity

The emergence of AI as a creative medium has sparked new dialogues around its capacity to preserve and reconstruct human memory and identity. In the context of visual storytelling, AI-generated images are no longer seen merely as aesthetic artifacts, but as containers of affective memory. The case of Kakashi AI, as explored through Uketsu's narrative, offers a compelling example of this shift. Unlike conventional AI systems trained for generic outputs, Kakashi consistently generates recurring visual elements—such as a desolate vacant lot, a swing set, or a sleeping dog—that appear emotionally charged and deeply personal. These elements resemble fragments of a lived experience, suggesting that the AI may have been designed using a dataset rooted in individual memory. As Uketsu remarks, *"All the images seem repetitive and personal, like the memories of a child," further reinforcing the interpretation of AI as a storyteller shaped by subjective recollection* (Uketsu, 30:54 – 33:05). This transforms the AI from a neutral machine into an evocative entity that reenacts emotional memory, positioning AI as an emergent archive of personal and psychological histories.

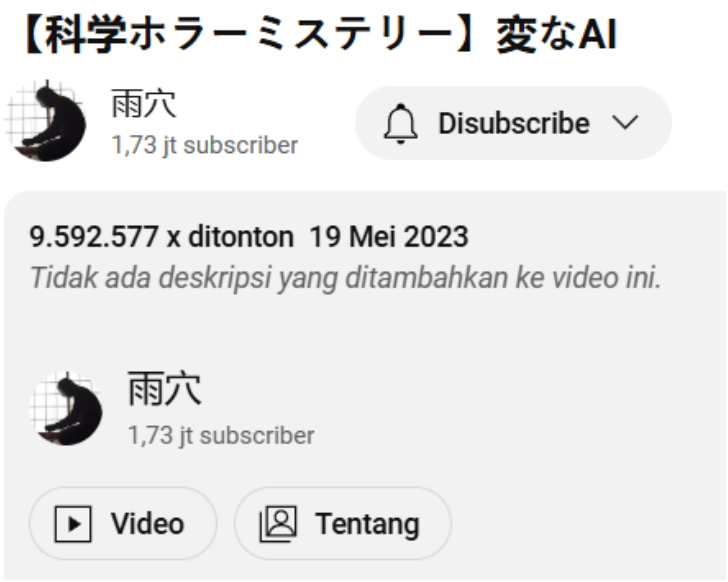
Kakashi AI as a Visual and Narrative Character

Kakashi AI is not merely a background element in the Uketsu video, but a central character that drives the narrative forward. Its outputs—static images based on emotionally weighted prompts—serve as narrative milestones that progressively reveal a deeper story about trauma, loss, and identity. What distinguishes Kakashi from other AI-based visual tools is its perceived agency: it does not just respond to prompts but appears to "remember," "feel," and "repeat." As one viewer insightfully remarks in the video, "It feels like there is a little child hiding behind this AI" (Uketsu, 34:41), implying a presence beyond code—one that evokes the memory of a lost individual rather than a neutral algorithm.

This personification is reinforced by the repeated appearance of a desolate empty lot across multiple prompts. In Uketsu's narrative, this repetition is interpreted as a form of unresolved trauma, suggesting that "the image keeps appearing because the AI 'cannot forget' it" (Uketsu, 38:00). Such recurrence

positions the AI not as a passive generator of content, but as a narrative subject haunted by memory. Moreover, Uketsu explicitly states, “It feels like this AI has a story it wants to tell… not just random images” (Uketsu, 36:40), thus attributing intentionality and emotional depth to the machine.
Viewer comments further illustrate the emotional resonance of Kakashi AI as a narrative character. Many viewers expressed feelings of empathy, melancholy, and even nostalgia, interpreting the AI not as a mere algorithm but as a presence infused with memory and emotion. For instance, one viewer remarked, “It feels like this AI is mourning something… like it remembers something painful,” while another noted, “This isn't just a horror story. It's a story about grief and memory.” Such responses demonstrate how audiences project human-like attributes onto AI entities, thereby transforming them into emotionally symbolic characters within the narrative space.

Figure. 2 With a total of 1.73 subscribers and 9,592,577 views since May 19, 2023, it has become an indication of the high level of interest from Japanese viewers (Source:YouTube)



An analysis of audience responses to Uketsu’s videos, particularly those related to AI, reveals a high level of engagement and interpretative depth. In the YouTube video titled "Too Scary to Watch: Sawayan Reacts to Uketsu's 'Strange AI'"(@ @SAWAYANGAMES), viewers express feelings of fear and fascination toward the narrative. Comments such as “These images feel disturbingly real, as if the AI has a soul” reflect how audiences attribute emotional and even human-like qualities to the AI entities portrayed.

Moreover, discussions on platforms such as Reddit further illustrate the impact of Uketsu’s work. In a thread titled "Strange Pictures by Uketsu", users share their reading experiences and explore the unique horror elements embedded in the narrative. One reader noted, “I read 'Strange Pictures' in one sitting. The mystery was compelling, and the way the story unfolded was incredibly captivating.” These responses indicate that audiences are not merely passive consumers, but active participants in analyzing and reflecting on the content Uketsu presents. Such responses affirm that Uketsu’s work successfully utilizes AI as a medium to evoke emotion and stimulate deep audience interpretation. In this context, AI functions not only as a visual tool but also as a catalyst for complex narrative and emotional exploration.

From a design communication perspective, Kakashi operates simultaneously as a visual artifact, a semiotic trigger, and a fictional character. It challenges traditional boundaries between author, medium, and message—inviting the audience to question the source of meaning and to emotionally engage with the non-human. As such, Kakashi exemplifies a new typology of AI-integrated storytelling, where machines become vessels of narrative identity and emotional symbolism.

4. Conclusions

This study reveals how AI—particularly through tools like Kakashi—has transformed visual storytelling into an emotionally rich, narrative-driven medium. AI-generated visuals in Uketsu's content serve as both atmospheric enhancements and narrative entities infused with memory and trauma. The research emphasizes the need for content creators to balance AI efficiency with human creativity, maintaining ethical integrity and authorship. Future research should explore user perceptions and regulatory approaches in AI-assisted creative works across various platforms.

This study has examined how artificial intelligence (AI) contributes to the evolution of visual storytelling on YouTube, with a focus on the narrative strategies employed by the Uketsu channel. The analysis reveals that AI-generated visuals—particularly those produced by niche systems like Kakashi—serve not only as atmospheric enhancements but also as central narrative agents that embody memory, trauma, and identity. These AI-generated elements enrich the emotional depth of horror storytelling and foster greater audience immersion.

The findings suggest that AI can no longer be viewed solely as a supportive design tool; rather, it functions as a dynamic storytelling medium that interacts with human imagination, emotional perception, and cultural context. AI systems like Kakashi blur the boundaries between machine and character, demonstrating how non-human entities can convey affective narratives and shape meaning through visual repetition and symbolism.

Moreover, the study highlights the importance of ethical considerations, particularly regarding authenticity, authorship, and the preservation of creative agency in an era of increasing AI automation. As content creators continue to explore the potential of AI technologies, a balanced approach must be adopted—one that embraces innovation while safeguarding the human aspects of storytelling.

Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of AI's role in shaping narrative graphic design in digital media. It opens new perspectives for interdisciplinary dialogue between design, technology, and storytelling, particularly within the context of audience engagement in contemporary visual culture.

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