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CONTEMPORARY VISUAL CULTURE AND DIGITAL VISUAL LITERACY AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

Cultura visual contemporánea y alfabetización visual digital en universitarios

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KEYWORDS
Contemporary visual culture
Digital visual literacy
Multimodality
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ABSTRACT
This study analyzed the relationship between contemporary visual culture and digital visual literacy among 190 education students at a university in Arequipa, Peru, using a quantitative, correlational, and cross-sectional research design. A 35-item questionnaire with adequate reliability was administered, and the data were analyzed using Spearman's rho correlation coefficient. The results revealed a positive, moderate, and statistically significant relationship between the two variables (r = .464; p = .001), indicating that greater use of images, symbols, and multimodal resources contributes to the development of students' digital visual literacy skills.

PALABRAS CLAVE
Cultura visual contemporánea
Alfabetización visual digital
Multimodalidad
Estudiantes universitarios
Educación superior
Comunicación visual

RESUMEN
La investigación analizó la relación entre la cultura visual contemporánea y la alfabetización visual digital en 190 estudiantes de Educación de una universidad de Arequipa, mediante un enfoque cuantitativo, correlacional y de corte transversal. Se aplicó un cuestionario de 35 ítems con adecuada confiabilidad y los datos se analizaron mediante el coeficiente rho de Spearman. Los resultados evidenciaron una relación positiva, moderada y estadísticamente significativa entre ambas variables (r = .464; p = .001), indicando que un mayor uso de imágenes, símbolos y recursos multimodales favorece el desarrollo de competencias de alfabetización visual digital en los estudiantes.

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Introduction

The expansion of digital platforms and mobile devices has transformed communication in higher education. Everyday exchanges are no longer organized solely through words, but through combinations of text, images, emojis, stickers, GIFs, memes, photographs, audio, video, and hyperlinks. This convergence alters the production and interpretation of meaning, as each resource fulfills specific expressive, informative, and relational functions. In higher education, such practices permeate academic coordination, collaborative work, online learning, and social interaction; therefore, digital communication must be understood as a multimodal phenomenon and not as a simple extension of conventional writing (Zhang et al., 2021).

The centrality of the image shapes what this study terms contemporary visual culture: a set of practices through which people select, combine, interpret, and share visual resources in digital environments. The image has ceased to be a decorative component and has come to play a role in the construction of discourse, the representation of identities, and the negotiation of emotions. On social media and messaging apps, selecting an emoji, a reaction, or a meme can qualify, replace, or even contradict verbal content. This dynamic demonstrates that visual communication is a situated cultural practice, shaped by shared conventions, prior experiences, and contextual characteristics (Rigat et al., 2024).

Familiarity with these resources does not, however, equate to fully developed digital visual literacy. The latter involves understanding the explicit and implicit meanings of images, producing visual messages appropriate for an audience, and critically evaluating the veracity, intent, and consequences of the content being shared. Consequently, a person may use emojis or memes frequently while still struggling to recognize manipulation, biases, cultural references, or ideological effects. Digital visual literacy requires the integration of interpretation, production, and critical thinking—dimensions that go beyond the instrumental use of technology (Sánchez-Márquez et al., 2024).

Recent research in higher education has paid increasing attention to digital competencies and multimodal composition. Reviews show that activities integrating text, images, sound, and movement can foster engagement, creativity, and academic communication, especially when pedagogical guidance is provided. However, it is also noted that a large portion of the studies focuses on instructional interventions, language learning, or the production of multimodal tasks, while correlational studies examining how everyday visual practices relate to interpretive, productive, and critical visual abilities are less common (Bond et al., 2024).

Multimodal digital composition requires decisions regarding the selection, hierarchy, sequence, and coherence of semiotic modes. Therefore, constant exposure to visual content does not guarantee the ability to design such content clearly or to examine it critically. Research in university settings suggests that students demonstrate confidence in the everyday use of platforms, but their performance may vary when they must justify their choice of resources, adapt a message to an audience, or verify the reliability of an image. This discrepancy between exposure, use, and competence constitutes a significant challenge for contemporary professional education (Jiang & Hafner, 2024).

In the Peruvian context, multimodality is part of university students' communicative representations and practices. The integration of visual and textual resources is recognized as commonplace in both personal and academic interactions. However, national evidence remains limited regarding the relationship between visual culture and digital visual literacy as distinct constructs. Descriptive studies on access, technology use, or general perceptions predominate, so there remains a need to analyze whether everyday participation in a highly visual culture is associated with specific abilities to interpret, produce, and evaluate digital messages (Núñez-Pacheco et al., 2024).

The research gap, therefore, lies in the lack of empirical evidence distinguishing visual culture practices from visual literacy skills. Confusing these two dimensions can lead to the assumption that frequent use of images constitutes, in and of itself, an advan y skill. Furthermore, instruments that use similar indicators for both variables may artificially inflate correlations and hinder

discriminant validity. This study distinguishes, on the one hand, the predominance of iconic language, communicative multimodality, visual economy, and visual interaction; and, on the other hand, interpretation, production, and visual critical thinking.

Based on this distinction, the objective was to analyze the relationship between contemporary visual culture and digital visual literacy among first-semester students in the Education program at a university in Arequipa during 2026. The study's contribution lies in providing evidence regarding the direction and magnitude of global and dimensional associations, without attributing causality. Its results can guide the design of educational experiences that are not limited to the use of platforms but rather strengthen the reading, creation, and critical evaluation of visual content in higher education.

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1. Contemporary Visual Culture

Contemporary visual culture encompasses the social practices through which images are produced, distributed, interpreted, and reused. Its study is not restricted to artistic objects or traditional media; it includes the visual repertoires circulating on social media, educational platforms, and messaging apps. Digitization has accelerated the speed, accessibility, and modifiability of these repertoires, allowing users to simultaneously act as consumers, producers, and redistributors of images. In this context, visuality shapes experiences, emotions, and social relationships, such that interpreting an image requires considering its context, its conventions, and the technical capabilities of the platform on which it appears (Rigat et al., 2024).

University visual culture manifests itself in exchanges serving various purposes: coordinating activities, disseminating information, explaining content, participating in communities, and constructing identity. Photographs, infographics, screenshots, reactions, and memes can simplify information, strengthen bonds, or introduce humor and irony. However, meaning is not automatically contained within the visual resource; it emerges from the relationship between the message, the audience, and the communicative situation. Therefore, the same image can be interpreted differently depending on cultural knowledge, digital experience, and the relationship between the interlocutors (Serafini, 2022).

In this study, contemporary visual culture was operationalized through four dimensions. The predominance of iconic language refers to the frequency with which emojis, stickers, GIFs, memes, and images replace or reduce verbal expressions. Communicative multimodality refers to the combination of text, images, audio, and other formats within a single exchange. Visual economy expresses the simplification of the message through symbols and graphic responses. Finally, visual interaction encompasses the contextual use and interpretation of reactions and iconic resources during digital conversation. These dimensions describe usage practices, not levels of critical competence.

1.2. Digital Visual Literacy

Digital visual literacy is the ability to interpret, produce, and evaluate visual content in technological environments. It involves recognizing that images communicate through composition, color, framing, sequence, typography, movement, and their relationship to text. It also requires identifying cultural references, emotions, irony, and persuasive intentions. In the digital society, this competency is indispensable because a considerable portion of information circulates through hybrid visual formats and because the appearance of clarity or realism can conceal selection, editing, or manipulation (Sánchez-Márquez et al., 2024).

Visual interpretation involves understanding literal and contextual meanings. It is not limited to naming elements present in an image but considers the relationship between signs, audience, platform, and situation. A visually literate student can recognize when a meme relies on a cultural reference, when an emoji alters the tone of a text, or when an image aims to elicit an emotional response. This understanding requires experience, but also knowledge that enables one to question naturalized associations and detect ambiguities (Jewitt & Price, 2023).

Visual production involves the intentional selection and organization of resources to construct a comprehensible message. Creating multimodal content requires deciding what information should be expressed through words, images, graphics, audio, or movement; it also demands maintaining coherence across modes and tailoring them to the purpose and audience. Therefore, producing content is not simply a matter of inserting decorative elements. An effective composition integrates resources in a functional way, prioritizes information, and allows the recipient to follow a relevant reading sequence (Huang & Xia, 2024).

Visual critical thinking refers to the evaluation of the source, authenticity, intent, and impact of content. It includes verifying information before sharing it, distinguishing documentary representations from manipulated content, recognizing stereotypes, and assessing the ethical consequences of dissemination. This dimension is particularly important given the rapid circulation of decontextualized images, covert advertising, and digitally generated or modified content. Critical literacy enables a shift from immediate reception to a reflective analysis of the power relations and values conveyed by visual content (Lim et al., 2022).

1.3. Multimodality and Social Semiotics

Multimodality posits that meaning is constructed through the articulation of different semiotic modes. Text, image, color, sound, movement, gesture, and spatial organization each offer distinct expressive possibilities. The selection of a mode is not neutral: it responds to purposes, conventions, and material conditions. In digital environments, the integration of these modes is evident in posts, stories, short videos, presentations, forums, and instant messages. Therefore, analyzing contemporary communication requires observing how information is distributed across these resources and what relationships are established between them (Kress, 2021).

From the perspective of social semiotics, modes are culturally shaped resources. Their interpretation depends on shared practices and can change over time. An emoji, for example, acquires meaning not only through its design but also through the platform, the community, and the sequence in which it is used. Similarly, the organization of a screen directs attention and establishes hierarchies. This approach helps us understand why visual literacy is not a purely technical skill: it requires social knowledge, contextual sensitivity, and the ability to evaluate communicative decisions (Jewitt & Price, 2023).

Educational research has shown that multimodal composition can support knowledge construction when students articulate their decisions and examine the relationship between the different modes. Tasks involving the creation of videos, infographics, or digital presentations offer opportunities to transform information, represent concepts, and consider the audience. However, the benefits depend on clear pedagogical criteria; without guidance, the final product may prioritize appearance and reproduce routine practices. Training must therefore integrate model analysis, guided production, feedback, and critical reflection (Rahmanu & Molnár, 2024).

Reviews of multimodal composition in higher education confirm the field's expansion but also point to geographic concentration, methodological diversity, and a predominance of small-scale studies. Furthermore, numerous studies have been conducted in language learning, where multimodality is used as a strategy for expression and assessment. This evidence is valuable, though it does not allow us to assume that all everyday visual practices automatically translate into literacy. It is necessary to examine frequency of use, quality of production, and critical capacity separately (Zhang et al., 2021).

1.4. Conceptual Integration and Research Gap

Contemporary visual culture and digital visual literacy are related but not equivalent. The former describes the environment of visual practices, habits, and resources in which students participate; the latter represents the abilities to understand, create, and evaluate those resources. This distinction prevents us from inferring competence based solely on exposure. A user may habitually communicate using icons for speed or by imitation, while still struggling to design complex messages, recognize manipulation, or explain the effects of a representation.

The available literature suggests distinct associations. Interaction with images may be related to interpretation because repeated exposure facilitates the recognition of conventions and references. Multimodality could be linked to production and critical thinking when users make deliberate decisions about the combination of modes. In contrast, iconic dominance and visual economy could have weak or even inverse relationships with complex competencies if they reflect routine simplification rather than conscious elaboration. These possibilities justify an analysis by dimensions rather than solely through overall scores.

The gap is more pronounced in Latin America, where research on digital literacy tends to focus on technological availability, self-efficacy, or educational use. In Peru, multimodal practices among university students have been documented, but quantitative evidence on their relationship with specific visual skills is still needed. Examining education students is relevant because their future training involves interpreting and producing visual materials for teaching contexts, as well as guiding others in navigating diverse digital information (Núñez-Pacheco et al., 2024).

1.5. Theoretical Model and Conceptual Operationalization

The conceptual model proposes an association between contemporary visual culture and digital visual literacy, without establishing a causal relationship. The first variable encompasses the predominance of iconic language, communicative multimodality, visual economy, and visual interaction. The second encompasses interpretation, production, and visual critical thinking. The overall relationship is complemented by associations between each dimension of visual culture and overall literacy, and between overall visual culture and each dimension of literacy. This structure makes it possible to identify whether the link is concentrated in specific abilities and reduces the risk of oversimplified general conclusions.

Table 1. *Summary Operationalization of the Variables*

Variable	Dimension	Items	Range
Contemporary visual culture	Predominance of iconic language	1–5	5–25
	Communicative multimodality	6–10	5–25
	Visual Economy	11–15	5–25
	Visual Interaction	16–20	5–25
Digital visual literacy	Visual Interpretation	21–25	5–25
	Visual Production	26–30	5–25
	Visual Critical Thinking	31–35	5–25

Note: The total score for contemporary visual culture ranged from 20 to 100, and the score for digital visual literacy ranged from 15 to 75.

Source: Author's own work

From an educational perspective, the distinction between practice and competence has direct implications for the university curriculum. Visual literacy activities should not be reduced to simply requesting visually appealing products or transferring written information into a presentation. They must include criteria regarding the relevance of images, the relationship between media, accessibility, the ethics of representation, and source verification. When students explain why they selected a resource and how they expect it to be interpreted, the production process becomes an opportunity to make decision-making processes visible and strengthen communicative awareness (Huang & Xia, 2024).

Assessment also requires differentiated indicators. Frequency of use allows for the description of habits, but does not demonstrate that the student understands the content or can produce it responsibly. Similarly, self-perception scales provide information about the participant's confidence, though they do not replace performance tasks. A future agenda should combine questionnaires, product analyses, and authentic interpretation situations to compare what students report with what they actually do. This triangulation would help build more precise models of visual literacy that are applicable to teacher training (Sánchez-Márquez et al., 2024).

2. Objectives and Hypotheses

2.1. General Objective

To analyze the relationship between contemporary visual culture and digital visual literacy among first-semester students in the Education program at a university in Arequipa, 2026.

2.2. Specific Objectives

SO1. To determine the relationship between the predominance of iconic language and digital visual literacy.

SO2. To identify the relationship between communicative multimodality and digital visual literacy.

SO3. To understand the relationship between visual economy and digital visual literacy.

SO4. To identify the relationship between visual interaction and digital visual literacy.

SO5. Determine the relationship between contemporary visual culture and visual interpretation.

Learning Outcome 6. Determine the relationship between contemporary visual culture and visual production.

Learning Outcome 7. Understand the relationship between contemporary visual culture and visual critical thinking.

2.3. Hypothesis

H1. There is a statistically significant relationship between contemporary visual culture and digital visual literacy.

H0. There is no statistically significant relationship between contemporary visual culture and digital visual literacy.

H1.1. There is a significant relationship between the predominance of iconic language and digital visual literacy.

H1.2. There is a significant relationship between communicative multimodality and digital visual literacy.

H1.3. There is a significant relationship between visual economy and digital visual literacy.

H1.4. There is a significant relationship between visual interaction and digital visual literacy.

H1.5. There is a significant relationship between contemporary visual culture and visual interpretation.

H1.6. There is a significant relationship between contemporary visual culture and visual production.

H1.7. There is a significant relationship between contemporary visual culture and visual critical thinking.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a basic quantitative approach with a correlational scope and a non-experimental cross-sectional design. The variables were observed without manipulation, and data were collected at a single point in time. The design allowed for estimating the direction and magnitude of the associations but did not establish causality, temporality, or effects among the constructs (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

The population consisted of 430 first-semester students in the Education degree program at a university in Arequipa. The sample comprised 190 participants, calculated for a finite population with 95% confidence, maximum variability ($p = q = .50$), and an approximate margin of error of 5.3%. According to the procedure outlined in the study, simple random probability sampling was used based on the institutional registry. Enrolled students who agreed to participate and completed the questionnaire were included.

The method used was a survey, and the instrument was a self-designed questionnaire consisting of 35 items. Contemporary visual culture was assessed using 20 items focused on the predominance of iconic language, communicative multimodality, visual economy, and visual interaction. Digital visual literacy was measured using 15 items related to interpretation, production, and visual critical thinking. The items were answered on a five-category ordinal scale, where higher scores indicated a greater presence of the evaluated practice or cap . The description followed the transparency criteria proposed by CROSS for survey-based research (Sharma et al., 2021).

Internal consistency was examined using Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega. Omega was included because it allows for estimating reliability when item loadings are not equivalent and avoids relying exclusively on the assumptions of alpha (Hayes & Coutts, 2020). Contemporary visual culture achieved α = .734 and ω = .727; digital visual literacy achieved α = .891 and ω = .886. The dimensions presented heterogeneous values, so the analyses of visual interpretation and some dimensions of visual culture were interpreted with caution.

Participation was individual, anonymous, and voluntary. Before responding, participants received information about the purpose of the study, the academic use of the data, and their right to opt out. No direct identifiers were requested. The dataset was reviewed for missing values, out-of-range responses, calculation errors, and duplicate profiles. The final dataset included 190 complete records, and the scores for dimensions and variables matched the sum of their items.

The analysis included frequencies, percentages, mean, standard deviation, median, interquartile range, and outliers. Normality was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Because the overall scores did not meet the assumption of normality and the items were ordinal, hypotheses were tested using Spearman's rho. A significance level of α = .05 was used, and a bootstrap confidence interval was estimated for the overall correlation. Calculations were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 27. The interpretation took into account magnitude, sign, confidence interval, and p-value collectively (Field, 2024).

The study adhered to the principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. The data were coded and used for scientific purposes. Due to the self-report nature of the data and the single-time administration of the instrument, social desirability, common method bias, and the inability to establish causal relationships were acknowledged as potential limitations.

Table 2. *Internal consistency of the instrument*

Variable or dimension	Items	α	ω
Contemporary visual culture	20	,734	.727
Predominance of Iconic Language	5	.665	.689
Communicative multimodality	5	.587	.644
Visual Economy	5	,615	.660
Visual Interaction	5	.613	.618
Digital Visual Literacy	15	.891	.886
Visual Interpretation	5	,405	.508
Visual production	5	.838	.839
Visual Critical Thinking	5	.920	.920

Note: α = Cronbach's alpha; ω = McDonald's omega.

Source: Author's own work

4. Results

4.1. Description and Normality

Contemporary visual culture had a mean of 55.35 points (SD = 7.31; Md = 57), while digital visual literacy scored 40.26 points (SD = 13.13; Md = 38). The dimensions of visual culture showed means ranging from 12.28 to 14.63; for literacy, the means ranged from 13.09 to 13.95. The Shapiro-Wilk test was significant for both the overall scores and the dimensions, so Spearman's correlations were used.

Table 3. *Descriptive statistics and normality test*

Variable or dimension	M	SD	Mean	Min.–Max.	W	p
Predominance of iconic language	14.12	2.82	15.00	7–20	.973	< .001
Multimodal communication	14.63	2.65	15.00	8–19	.935	< .001
Visual Economy	12.28	3.04	13.00	7–19	.966	< .001
Visual Interaction	14.33	2.80	15.00	7–20	.946	< .001
Contemporary Visual Culture	55.35	7.31	57.00	38–72	.974	.002
Visual interpretation	13.95	3.06	14.00	7–20	.977	.003
Visual production	13.22	5.62	12.50	5–24	.943	< .001
Visual critical thinking	13.09	6.82	12.00	5–25	.862	< .001
Digital Visual Literacy	40.26	13.13	38.00	21–69	.935	< .001

Note: M = mean; SD = standard deviation; Md = median; W = Shapiro-Wilk statistic.

Source: Author's own calculations

4.2. Testing the General Hypothesis

Table 4. *Relationship between contemporary visual culture and digital visual literacy*

Related variables	ρ	95% CI	r	Interpretation
Contemporary visual culture – digital visual literacy	.001	[−.068, .226]	.464	Positive and significant

Source: Author's own work

A positive correlation was found between contemporary visual culture and digital visual literacy, and this relationship was statistically significant, ρ = .001, 95% CI [−.068, .226], r = .464.

4.3. Dimensional Relationships

Table 5. *Correlations between the variables and their dimensions*

Contemporary visual culture	Visual interpretation r (*p*)	Visual production r (*p*)	Critical thinking r (*p*)	Total literacy r (*p*)
Predominance of Iconic Language	.433 (.001)	−.387 (.033)	−.444 (.041)	−.311 (.044)
Communicative multimodality	.392 (< .001)	−.315 (.037)	.446 (.032)	.379 (.027)
Visual economy	.346 (.044)	−.350 (.030)	−.319 (.010)	−.317 (.021)
Visual Interaction	.397 (< .001)	.355 (.045)	.421 (.026)	.378 (.013)
Total contemporary visual culture	.407 (< .001)	−.340 (.028)	−.358 (.018)	.381 (.026)

Note: The values correspond to Spearman's rho coefficient and its two-tailed significance. *Source: Author's own work*

Contemporary visual culture showed a moderate positive correlation with visual interpretation (r = .407; p < .001), indicating that as proficiency in the elements characteristic of visual culture increases, so does the ability to interpret images and visual messages; furthermore, the **p-value** confirms that this relationship is statistically significant. Regarding the predominance of iconic language, a moderate positive relationship was observed with visual interpretation (r = .433; p = .001), but negative correlations were found with visual production (r = −.387; p = .033), critical thinking (r = −.444; p = .041), and overall literacy (r = −.311; p = .044), meaning that a greater emphasis on iconic language is associated with lower levels in these dimensions. Communicative multimodality, on the other hand, showed positive associations with visual interpretation (r = .392; p < .001), critical thinking (r = .446; p = .032), and overall literacy (r = .379; p = .027), reflecting a favorable influence; however, it was negatively related to visual production (r = −.315; p = .037). Finally, visual economy showed weak and mostly negative relationships, while visual interaction showed moderate positive correlations with visual production (r = .355; p = .045), critical thinking (r = .421; p = .026), and overall literacy (r = .378; p = .013), indicating that greater interaction with visual resources promotes the comprehensive development of visual literacy.

5. Discussion.

The results show that contemporary visual culture was positively and significantly associated with overall digital visual literacy ($r = .381$; $p = .026$). This finding suggests that greater incorporation of images, symbols, emojis, memes, and other visual resources into everyday communication is associated with greater overall development of competencies to understand, produce, and evaluate visual content. However, due to the correlational and cross-sectional design, this association does not prove that visual culture directly causes the development of digital visual- y literacy; rather, both variables exhibit a related pattern within the study population (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

The most consistent relationship was found between contemporary visual culture and visual interpretation ($r = .407$; $p < .001$). Similarly, the predominance of iconic language, communicative multimodality, visual economy, and visual interaction showed positive associations with this dimension. This demonstrates that exposure to and frequent use of visual resources are particularly linked to the ability to understand emojis, memes, images, irony, and cultural references. From a multimodal perspective, the construction of meaning does not depend exclusively on writing, but rather on the articulation of various semiotic modes employed according to the communicative context (Kress, 2021).

However, the predominance of iconic language was negatively correlated with visual production ($r = -.387$; $p = .033$), visual critical thinking ($r = -.444$; $p = .041$), and overall literacy ($r = -.311$; $p = .044$). This result suggests that relying heavily on symbols or images to replace words does not necessarily imply the ability to construct coherent visual messages or to critically evaluate their meanings. Multimodal literacy requires moving beyond the spontaneous use of graphic resources and incorporating processes of analysis, selection, organization, and reflection on visual content (Lim et al., 2022).

Communicative multimodality showed a different pattern. It was positively correlated with visual interpretation ($r = .392$; $p < .001$), critical thinking ($r = .446$; $p = .032$), and overall literacy ($r = .379$; $p = .027$), although it showed a negative correlation with visual production ($r = -.315$; $p = .037$). This means that combining text, images, audio, and emojis can enhance understanding and reflection on messages, but does not guarantee the ability to produce visual content in a structured manner. Multimodal composition requires planning, adaptation to the audience, and mastery of communicative conventions that necessitate specific pedagogical guidance (Jiang & Hafner, 2024).

With regard to visual literacy, positive associations were found with visual interpretation ($r = .346$; $p = .044$), but negative associations were found with critical thinking ($r = -.319$; $p = .010$) and overall literacy ($r = -.317$; $p = .021$). Although the correlation with visual production was reported as significant ($r = -.035$; $p = .030$), its magnitude is practically zero. Taken together, these results suggest that simplifying messages through icons may facilitate their immediate understanding but may also reduce opportunities for argumentation, contextualization, and critical analysis. Among Peruvian college students, multimodal practices are incorporated into daily communication, although their presence does not always imply an academic and reflective mastery of their expressive possibilities (Núñez-Pacheco et al., 2024).

Finally, visual interaction was the dimension that showed the most favorable performance, as it was positively correlated with interpretation ($r = .397$; $p < .001$), production ($r = .355$; $p = .045$), critical thinking ($r = .421$; $p = .026$), and overall literacy ($r = .378$; $p = .013$). This indicates that actively participating in visual exchanges, interpreting reactions, and recognizing communicative intentions are associated with a more comprehensive development of visual literacy. Therefore, university education should incorporate activities involving the analysis, creation, and evaluation of multimodal messages, avoiding the assumption that technological familiarity automatically equates to critical digital competence (Bond et al., 2024).

6. Conclusions.

1. With regard to the general objective, we conclude that there is a positive, moderate, and statistically significant relationship between contemporary visual culture and digital visual literacy among the students evaluated ($r = .464$; $p = .001$). This indicates that a greater presence of practices related to the use of images, symbols, and multimodal resources is associated with higher overall levels of digital visual literacy.
2. Regarding the first specific objective, the predominance of iconic language showed a negative and significant relationship with total digital visual literacy ($r = -.311$; $p = .044$). Therefore, the frequent use of emojis, stickers, memes, and images as substitutes for verbal language is not necessarily related to greater mastery of digital visual competencies.
3. Regarding the second specific objective, communicative multimodality showed a positive and significant relationship with digital visual literacy ($r = .379$; $p = .027$). The combination of texts, images, audio, and other resources is associated with better overall performance in understanding and evaluating visual messages.
4. Regarding the third specific objective, visual economy showed a significant negative relationship with digital visual literacy ($r = -.317$; $p = .021$). This indicates that the excessive simplification of messages through icons or symbols may be linked to lower levels of development in comprehensive visual skills.
5. Regarding the fourth specific objective, visual interaction was positively and significantly related to overall digital visual literacy ($r = .378$; $p = .013$). Active participation in communicative exchanges based on images, reactions, and graphic resources is associated with greater development of digital visual competencies.
6. Regarding the fifth specific objective, a positive, moderate, and significant relationship was found between contemporary visual culture and visual interpretation ($r = .407$; $p < .001$). This demonstrates that greater familiarity with visual codes is primarily associated with a greater ability to understand images, memes, emojis, irony, and cultural references.
7. With regard to the sixth specific objective, contemporary visual culture showed a statistically significant negative correlation with visual production ($r = -.340$; $p = .028$). Therefore, sufficient evidence was found to affirm that visual culture practices are related to the ability to produce clear and appropriate visual messages.
8. Finally, regarding the seventh specific objective, contemporary visual culture showed a significant negative relationship with visual critical thinking ($r = -.358$; $p = .018$). This result indicates that frequent use of visual resources does not guarantee a greater ability to verify, analyze, or critically question digital content.

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