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The visual environment as a directorial tool: The art of location in children's video content

Volodymyr Kozachuk*

Bachelor, director, showrunner at Smile Family channel
Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts
01601, 36 Yevhen Konovalets Str., Kyiv, Ukraine
https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3787-8816

Abstract. In the contemporary media landscape, children's video content is one of the leading tools for development, education, and entertainment, while the visual environment acquired the status of an independent language of communication. Despite the widespread presence of children's media products on digital platforms, directorial principles of location design for young audiences remained insufficiently explored in the Ukrainian cultural and artistic context. The study aimed to analyse the role of the visual environment as a directorial tool in the production of children's video content for digital platforms, using the channels Smile Family and Smile Family Spanish as case studies. The research was based on a review and analysis aof theoretical sources in the fields of perception psychology, colour theory, film language, and semiotics. To examine practical material, methods of visual-structural frame analysis, spatial composition, symbolism, and the organisation of visual elements in locations were applied. The study systematised key directorial techniques for creating visually appealing, emotionally expressive, and narratively coherent environments for child audiences. The research identified typical models for using colour as an emotional and narrative device, principles of symmetrical and asymmetrical composition, techniques for filling space with symbolically charged objects, and the role of editing dynamics in shaping perception. Successful case studies illustrated how a thoughtfully designed location functioned not as a background but as an active participant in the interaction, influencing the rhythm, emotional tone, and narrative structure. The applied methods – analysis of sources in perception psychology, colour theory, and semiotics, along with visual-structural frame analysis – integrated both academic approaches and practical tools for directors and producers. The results contributed to the advancement of directing methods, artistic design, and visual planning in the creation of children's media content for digital platforms

Keywords: composition; visual dramaturgy; scenography; colour psychology; stylistic design; media perception; aesthetics of digital content

INTRODUCTION

The growing popularity of video platforms among young audiences worldwide has transformed screen space into a key environment for shaping emotional, cognitive, and social experiences. Given the daily engagement of children with visual narratives on platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Netflix, it becomes increasingly necessary to reassess the role of spatial direction, viewing it not solely as a means of aesthetic expression but also as a significant factor in fostering educational outcomes and supporting cognitive and socio-emotional development. Despite the relevance of this issue, the artistic organisation of locations in children's content remains largely unexplored in both international and Ukrainian academic discourse.

In this context, the study by M. Fan & W. Cai (2022) demonstrated that a creative visual environment, which provides emotional comfort and interactive opportunities, significantly stimulates children's creativity and cognitive activity. The study emphasised the role of nonverbal ambient cues, such as colour,

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*Corresponding author

lighting, and spatial arrangements, in early childhood media that support children's engagement and learning. Their findings suggested that when children are exposed to thoughtfully designed visual environments, their capacity for imaginative play and focused attention increases, which positively influences cognitive development. Similarly, Y. Xu & S. Wu (2022) addressed the role of symbolic spatial harmony in children's media. The research revealed that visually balanced compositions, achieved through the careful arrangement of shapes, colours, and objects, enhance children's emotional sensitivity and improve their ability to retain information. By highlighting the importance of semiotic design elements, such as icons, metaphors, and symbolic objects, the study argued that these elements act as essential mediators of meaning that aid young viewers in decoding complex narratives. This semiotic approach underscored how children do not simply consume media passively but actively interpret visual cues to construct perception.

Furthermore, R. Liu *et al.* (2022) conducted an eye-tracking study involving 110 child participants to investigate the effects of spatial organisation in immersive 360° video content. The results confirmed that visual cues, such a directional arrows, highlighted areas, and textual annotations, significantly enhanced children's visual focus and comprehension of the content. This study provided empirical evidence that spatial structuring within video frames is fundamental in development of children's visual language skills and support of deeper cognitive engagement. The ability to guide viewers' attention in such immersive environments is particularly relevant in digital media, where visual overload can otherwise hinder learning. S. Pourbagher *et al.* (2021) further explored the impact of colour palettes in educational media, emphasising the importance of harmonious and consistent colour usage. Their research showed that carefully selected colour schemes reduce cognitive load, create a calm and attractive atmosphere, and positively influence mood and cognitive functions, thereby supporting learning effectiveness and emphasising the need for careful selection of colour palettes in design of educational content. Building on these notions, A. Bortolotti *et al.* (2025) used eye-tracking technology to provide empirical evidence on how specific hues capture visual attention and shape gaze fixation patterns. Their research highlighted that certain colours not only attract attention more effectively but also evoke emotional responses that deepen engagement with the media. By demonstrating a direct link between colour selection and viewer involvement, this study reinforces the idea that colour is not merely an aesthetic choice but a strategic tool in visual storytelling for children.

In the context of international research, the Ukrainian cultural and developmental context is essential. O. Litichenko & D. Masteruk (2023) conducted a study of preschool children in Ukraine, revealing that colour functions as a primary expressive tool in early childhood artistic activity. Their findings indicated that children's colour preferences are influenced by both individual emotional motivations and the gradual internalisation of gender stereotypes. This dual influence shapes how children use colour for self-expression and has substantial implications for designing visual media that respects and nurtures diverse identities. Moreover, A. Turubarova *et al.* (2025) examined how colour affects the psycho-emotional state across different age groups of Ukrainian children. The research demonstrated that younger children tend to respond more impulsively to warm colours such as reds and orange, which can stimulate energy and excitement. In contrast, older children prefer colder and more muted shades, reflecting a developmental shift towards emotional regulation and calmness. These findings underscored the importance of age-appropriate colour design in children's media to ensure that visual environments are both engaging and supportive of emotional well-being. Given the visual patterns identified in the use of space, colour, and symbolism in children's video content, the study aimed to analyse how directorial approaches to shaping the visual environment correlate with the characteristics of the children's audience's perception of the plot, based on available scientific sources and examples of media production.

The study was conducted based on a qualitative analysis of children's video content published on the YouTube channels "Smile Family Spanish" and "Smile Family". Nine videos with over 100 million views during the period 2021-2025 were selected for analysis. The videos were chosen according to the following criteria: the presence of a distinct visual environment (both interior and exterior); active use of space in dramaturgy; involvement of colour symbolism and props as narrative elements; participation of the author of the research in the creation of these videos as director, showrunner, script developer, and actor. Among the videos analysed were "Slava and Max pretend play hot vs cold challenge", "Sasha and Anya doing shopping in toy store and play in pop-it & simple dimple room", "Arina plays hide and seek in a cardboard challenge", "Pretend play Barbie & Ken and pink vs blue colour challenge", "Slava pretend play doing morning routine from the to do list", "Dana participates in rich vs poor vs Giga rich playhouse decorating competition", "Slava and Max play huge maze challenge", "Dana and Danny – best school story challenge black vs pink with friends", "Funny challenges in playhouse for kids". The study employed a review-based analytical approach to specialised literature in perception psychology, colour theory, cinematic language, and media direction. Additionally, methods of visual-structural analysis were applied to frames, spatial layouts, and symbolic visual elements within real-world children's media environments.

THE VISUAL ENVIRONMENT AS A COMPONENT OF CHILDREN'S NARRATIVE INTERACTION

The visual environment in children's video content is not merely a background element but a dynamic narrative component that significantly influences perception, emotional response, and the material comprehension. According to J. Piaget & B. Inhelder (1969), children under the age of 6-7 perceived reality primarily through imagery rather than logical-abstract forms. Consequently, visual images, colour, spatial arrangements, and frame dynamics become the primary tools for children's exploration of the world. E.H. Erikson (1950), in theories of personality development, emphasised the role of predictability and environmental stability in establishing a basic sense of trust. From this perspective, a well-structured visual environment contributes to a child's sense of confidence, emotional well-being, and psychological security. This concept is illustrated in the Smile Family video "Pretend play Barbie & Ken and pink vs blue colour challenge" (Fig. 1), where the location was designed around a bright contrast between two worlds – the pink "Barbie" space and the blue "Ken" zone. The left side of the room reflects Barbie's style: a pink background, fluffy carpet, toy furniture, and accessories that recreate a doll-like atmosphere. The right side represents Ken's world: a blue background, surfboard, inflatable toys, and a poster of Ken in a beach style, evoking a sense of relaxation and adventure. The division between the two zones is emphasised by vivid colours and thematic character posters. This contrast makes the space interactive: the child can "travel" from Barbie's room into Ken's world, encouraging imagination and engagement. The visual setting functions as a nonverbal code – recognisable without the need for explanation – thus enhancing the viewer's trust and comfort through spatial and emotional consistency.

Figure 1. A room split into a pink Barbie half and a blue Ken half
Source: Pretend play Barbie & Ken and pink vs blue colour challenge (2023)

H. Gardner (1983), in a theory of multiple intelligences, identified "visual-spatial intelligence" as a core cognitive domain responsible for spatial reasoning, visual memory, and the ability to interpret visual information. This underscores the importance of structuring children's content not only with visual appeal but also in a way that fosters spatial imagination, analytical skills, and creative thinking. Modern educational theories emphasise the significance of a well-designed environment in fostering cognitive and creative capacities. Visually complex environments can either stimulate or overwhelm perception, rendering the balance between detail and simplicity essential for educational effectiveness. L. Terreni (2019) argued that early childhood spaces acted as expressive "third teachers," where aesthetic decisions about layout, colour, lighting, and cultural symbolism shaped social-emotional climate and support learning and well-being. The environment was expected to be not only safe and aesthetically pleasing but also functionally organised to support various types of learning activities. The presence of defined zones for play, learning, and rest enhanced independence, focus, and intrinsic motivation. Visual organisation, including object placement, colour use, lighting, and visual cues, directly affects how a child navigates the space, absorbs information, and engages with surroundings. J.S. Bruner (1966), G. Kress & T. van Leeuwen (2020) conceptualised visual environment as a distinct language with its grammar and structure. Children, from an early age, learned to "read" spatial arrangements, colour symbolism, forms, and character interactions. This process contributed not only to cognitive skill development but also to imagination, critical thinking, and the capacity for creative interpretation. A signature feature of many scenes is the use of a single material as the dominant visual element. For example, in Smile Family's cardboard room and cardboard prison, the entire location, including walls, props, and furniture, was made of cardboard, as illustrated in Figure 2. This technique immerses the viewer in a playful, "detached reality" – familiar yet imagined. Such solutions serve both practical and artistic functions: they reduce sensory overload while creating an original and vivid visual space.

Figure 2. Cardboard location
Source: Slava pretend play doing morning routine from the to do list (2021), Arina plays hide and seek in a cardboard challenge (2024)

Set designers, responsible for the use of colour, materials and forms to build stylistically unified and aesthetically expressive objects, are central in creating cohesive visual language. Frequently, visual environments are built around a dominant material – for example, fully cardboard interiors (classrooms, prisons, rooms) or fur-covered learning spaces. This approach both enhances the sense of "alternate reality" and reduces visual clutter, optimising perception.

COLOUR, SYMMETRY, AND OBJECTIVITY USED IN CHILDREN'S VIDEO CONTENT

Colour is a fundamental component in shaping the visual language, designed for children. According to C.J. Boyatzis & R. Varghese (1994), colours consistently evoked specific emotional reactions in children – for example, red was linked to activity, blue to tranquillity, and green to a sense of safety. Thoughtfully selected colour schemes in educational media were found to influence both attention and emotional involvement. S. Özdemir *et al.* (2023) found that preschoolers with autism spectrum disorder and typically developing peers exhibited significantly longer gaze fixations on faces, and particularly on eyes, during 3D animations compared to standard video, across varying levels of social interaction. This suggests that richer visual environments (such as 3D animations) amplify social attention and may offer enhanced engagement opportunities for children with neurodiverse profiles.

Colour is one of the key elements of visual space in children's video content. Its impact extends to both the emotional spectrum and narrative structure. In children's perception, colour is associated with emotions, actions, safety, or danger – a mechanism actively utilised in directorial frame construction. Such principles underpin the use of colour coding, commonly employed across educational and entertainment media for children. A. Bortolotti *et al.* (2025) showed via eye-tracking that colours not only captured children's attention but also steered it toward relevant elements of the story. A key factor in the viewer's engagement with media is determined by the visual organisation of space – including colour schemes, spatial composition, symbolic objects, and other elements of visual language designed to attract attention, stimulate cognitive engagement, and create an emotionally supportive environment for children. A practical example of such visual structuring is present in the Smile Family video "Slava and Max pretend play hot VS cold challenge". In this video the visual environment is used as a key dramaturgical element. The space was intentionally divided into two zones – red and blue – reflecting the theme of the game and immediately highlighting which side was "hot" and which "cold". All props, furniture, and even small accessories were colour-coded accordingly. A clear visual structure was created, helping children orient within the game and focus on its rules. This is illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3. A space divided into blue and red zones
Source: Slava and Max pretend play hot VS cold challenge (2021)

Empirical evidence from classroom design, as demonstrated by P. Barrett *et al*. (2015), confirmed that environmental variables, such as colour, flexibility, light, and complexity, can explain up to 16% of the variation in pupils' learning outcomes. L. She *et al.* (2024) emphasised the importance of a harmonious colour palette in video-based learning: the eye-tracking study with 78 university students comparing no-colour, single-colour, and multi-colour cues demonstrated that moderate use of colour cues directed visual concentration, organised information, and enhanced retention and transfer, while both absence and excess of colour can increase cognitive load. These findings underline the dual role of colour in educational media, conveying emotional tone and reinforcing narrative clarity, without overwhelming the learner. Furthermore, E.B. Goldstein (2017) highlighted the role of colour in a child's sensory experience, affecting the formation of the emotional background of perception. J.W. Beentjes *et al*. (2001) demonstrated that even preschool-aged children (mean age ~5-6) could interpret visual formal features such as colour changes, cuts, zooms, dissolves, and split screens in televised content. Their findings demonstrated that these visual elements were actively decoded by children to infer shifts in time, perspective, mood, or significance – highlighting the dual role of colour not only in attracting attention but also in conveying emotional tone and narrative cues within children's video content.

Just as colour provides emotional and narrative orientation, the structural layout of the frame reinforces cognitive coherence. Among these, symmetry functions in children's content as a tool of visual alignment and supporting the comprehension of sequences. The organisation of space within the frame has a profound influence on the perception of structure, rhythm, and logic in video. Symmetry is often associated with harmony, stability, and order – all essential attributes of a child-friendly environment. P.J. Locher *et al*. (1998) empirically investigated how balance operates as a key organising principle in visual compositions. The study revealed that, when creating complex displays using various shapes, adult participants, regardless of artistic training, consistently aligned elements around the geometric centre of the image and achieved symmetric distribution of structural "weight". This demonstrates that balance functions as an intuitive anchor, structuring spatial layouts for coherence and perceptual harmony. Such findings align with foundational Gestalt concepts – similarity, proximity, closure, and symmetry – contributing to visual fluency and ease of comprehension. R.R. Behrens (1998) detailed the application of these Gestalt principles in design, such as symmetry, rhythmic repetition of forms, and balance, all contributing to the predictability necessary for children's perception. R. Arnheim (1974) considered these structures as components of "visual logic", which shapes a child's ability to navigate visual environments. Objects in the frame serve not only decorative but also deeply semantic functions. Their placement, shape, colour, and interaction with characters contribute to the construction of visual language. P. Messaris (1994) highlighted that images can trigger associative thinking, with objects functioning as signs, especially for children, whose verbal thinking has not yet become dominant.

B.R. Robin (2008) emphasised that object-based content provide digital stories the power of identification, as children project themselves onto familiar items. This mechanism of identification through tangible and recognisable objects is especially relevant in visual media designed for early childhood audiences, where the boundary between play and narrative is often fluid. Familiar objects not only anchor attention but also serve as entry points into imaginative worlds, enhancing emotional resonance. Building on this, S.L. Calvert (2008), in an analysis of advertising strategies, highlighted the power of visual symbolism, particularly its potential to evoke meanings quickly and effectively without the need for verbal cues. In children's media, this symbolic shorthand becomes a substantial narrative element, compressing complex ideas into simple, visually intuitive forms. B. Block (2021) asserted that visual storytelling begins with space: colours, textures, and architectural features of the location define the mood of the scene. The perspective reinforces the idea that spatial design is not a neutral background but an active agent in constructing narrative meaning. When integrated with object-based and symbolic content, spatial elements can guide children's interpretation of events, moods, and character intentions.

For example, "Dana participates in rich vs poor vs Giga rich playhouse decorating competition" (2023) demonstrated how location zoning and set design can reveal the director's concept and visually convey the essence of the story. In the video, the space is divided into three distinct zones – representing a rich girl, a very rich girl, and a poor girl. Each area is carefully designed using visual cues such as furniture, textures, lighting, and colour palette to emphasise the social status of each character. G. Rose (2001) added that spatial interpretation can be used to demonstrate deeper meanings embedded in visual texts to children. In this context, a room with soft pastel tones may signal safety or comfort, while sharp angles and bold colours might suggest excitement or conflict. Thus, space becomes a semantic layer that children learn to read intuitively. In support of this, T.L. Childers & M.J. Houston (1984) showed that images are retained in memory more effectively than words – particularly among younger audiences. This finding underscored the importance of investing in rich, carefully composed visual environments, as they not only facilitate comprehension but also enhance long-term recall and emotional impact.

The study showed that colour, symmetry and objectivity are key tools in the visual environment of children's video content, influencing children's attention, emotional engagement and cognitive orientation. Colour is used both as an emotional and structural function, symmetry provides visual order, and familiar objects facilitate plot comprehension and character identification. Together, these tools create an accessible, logical, and emotionally rich environment that immerse children in the narrative.

MOTION DYNAMICS, EDITING, AND HYPERBOLE AS TOOLS OF IMAGINARY INTERACTION

In children's videos, both interior and exterior settings often reflect archetypal models: the "magical room", the "fairy-tale forest", or the "adventure city". These spatial concepts enhance narrative immersion and emotional engagement. A vivid example appears in "Slava and Max play huge maze challenge" (Fig. 4), where the location was styled as a vibrant, colourful maze, where the walls are covered with geometric patterns made of repeating stripes in pink, yellow, green, and blue. This artistic choice not only created a festive and dynamic atmosphere but also added complexity to navigation: the colours and patterns visually blend, requiring more focus from participants. The design creates brighter and more engaging appearance, turning the maze challenge into an adventure. Viewers experience a sense of immersion in a playful world, where simple tasks feel more exciting thanks to the visual intensity and contrast.

Figure 4. A play maze with walls decorated in colourful geometric patterns
Source: Slava and Max play huge maze challenge (2022)

Building on this, S. Field (2005) noted that each scene should contain a turning point, and in children's content, a change in location frequently fulfils this dramaturgical function. Moreover, as highlighted by P. Brook (1968), frame composition, motion dynamics, and spatial layout help children comprehend spatial and environmental relationships. The way a video is edited, including its rhythm, length of shots, and sequence of scenes, significantly influences how children comprehend the storyline. R. Smith *et al.* (1985) conducted pioneering research demonstrating that young children (ages 4-6) could accurately interpret montage – comprehending changes in time, perspective, and narrative structure through editing patterns in televised media. Their findings suggested that rhythmic cutting and sequence organisation in children's animation served as effective tools for conveying emotional shifts and pacing, laying a theoretical foundation for the concept of "musical montage" in children's media. This perspective is echoed by W. Murch (2001) defining editing as "thinking" rather than merely connecting elements.

Expanding on the role of editing, D. Bordwell & K. Thompson (2019) explained that editing serves as a method of constructing visual logic, which is essential for a coherent and comprehensible narrative. Similarly, B. Salt (1992) stressed the need for every editing transition to be motivated: even rapid shifts in shots must make sense to the child viewer. Further supporting this view, B. Tversky *et al.* (2002) underlined the importance of visually portraying causal relationships as a foundational component of narrative comprehension. Notably, the personalisation of visual rhythm and pacing is another essential aspect. N. Kucirkova & R. Flewitt (2018) demonstrated that when visual rhythm, pacing, and content are adapted to a child's unique traits – through adaptive sequencing, interactive pace controls, or user-centred editing – engagement increases and comprehension improves, highlighting the role of adaptive editing in children's video experiences. These findings were further reinforced by V. Shtets & O. Melnyk (2024), demonstrating that the technical and expressive tools of stop-motion animation significantly enhance emotional engagement and narrative comprehension, underscoring the communicative power of rhythmic and stylistic editing in audiovisual design for young audiences. In addition to rhythm and editing, a key stylistic feature in children's media content, especially in projects led by Volodymyr Kozachuk,

is the use of artistic hyperbole and fantastical elements. Oversized props such as a time machine, exaggerated vehicles, furry refrigerators, or paper supermarkets create imaginative yet recognisable worlds that engage a child's imagination. Despite their whimsical nature, these objects are functionally clear and based on familiar visual forms, making them easily comprehensible. An illustrative case was "Sasha and Anya doing shopping in toy store and play in pop-it & simple dimple room", where location is built around a hyperbolised visual element – the pop-it toy, which at the time of filming was a highly popular trend. In this case, the hyperbolisation exceeded the scope of a single prop: the art department transformed the entire space into a giant playable pop-it environment, with oversised colourful walls fully immersing the children in the toy's universe. These large-scale set pieces created striking "wow shots" that instantly captured attention (Fig. 5).

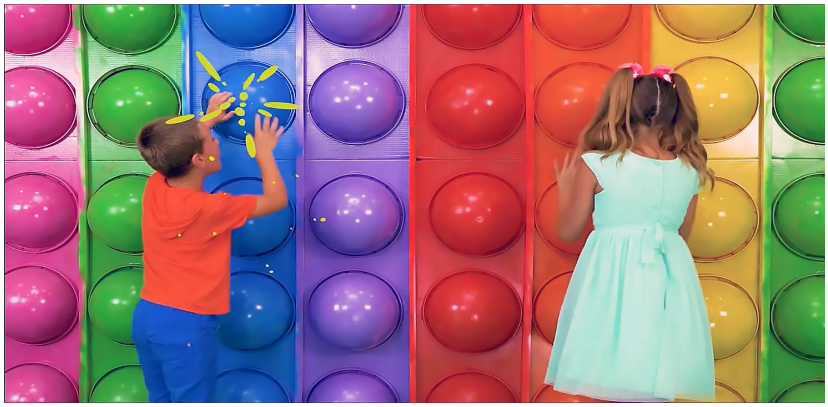

Figure 5. A full-scale play environment designed as giant pop-it walls
Source: Sasha and Anya doing shopping in toy store and play in pop-it & simple dimple room (2021)

This blend enhances emotional engagement and sparks curiosity – essential mechanisms for sustaining attention among young viewers. Hyperbole in authorial visual design serves not only aesthetic purposes but also functions as a substantial cognitive and emotional engagement drivers, rendering motion dynamics, editing, and exaggeration relevant elements in the construction of meaningful, immersive experiences in children's visual narratives.

VISUAL CUES, ATTENTION, AND INCLUSIVITY

Theoretical and empirical evidence, including eye-tracking research, demonstrates that structured visual environments (e.g., layout, colour cues, motion) embedded in children's educational video content effectively guide attention and enhance learning outcomes (van Gog & Scheiter, 2010). Eye-tracking research highlighted the importance of identifying boundary conditions for video design, including factors such as learner age, prior knowledge, and content type. Strategically placed visual cues were also noted to enhance focus and memory retention in multimedia learning environments. Eye-tracking technology identifies which video elements are most engaging, especially in immersive formats with panoramic views. R.A.J. de Belen *et al.* (2024) used computational vision and eye-tracking to analyse preschoolers' viewing patterns and found that specific visual attention patterns in video content can accurately predict the presence and symptom severity of autism spectrum disorder with up to 94.6% accuracy. Such research underscored that spatial layout, motion salience, and scene structure can significantly influence engagement and interpretation in children, suggesting a foundation for more inclusive and adaptive visual communication strategies in specialised media settings. This is particularly evident in a Smile Family video themed around the "Four elements" (Funny challenges in playhouse for kids, 2023), where the environment was visually segmented into four distinct zones – fire, water, air, and earth. Each space was designed with deliberate attention to colour, texture, object shape, and movement, enabling children to identify each element intuitively, even in the absence of verbal narration. This approach reflects the principle of visual self-sufficiency, wherein the spatial design itself becomes the primary conveyor of meaning. Such design choices are especially relevant in inclusive media environments, where linguistic or cognitive barriers may limit traditional forms of comprehension. By relying on sensory-rich, clearly differentiated visual cues, the video ensures broader accessibility and supports diverse viewing needs, including for children with limited language development or neurodivergent processing styles. A similar example is present in the Smile Family Spanish video "Dana and Danny – best school story challenge black vs pink with friends", where location was styled as a split environment: the left (black) zone evoked a gothic, mysterious atmosphere. The background included dark curtains that framed the setting, with a large pair of white wings mounted behind, providing a striking contrast. A human skeleton prop stood prominently in the centre, enhancing the eerie effect. On the black shelving unit,

various themed plush toys, robotic figures, and spooky decorations were carefully arranged, reinforcing the dark and dramatic tone. The overall design of this section emphasised theatricality and a slightly macabre mood, tailored to support the Halloween-inspired character performance (Fig. 6).

Figure 6. Dark-themed corner
Source: Dana and Danny – best school story challenge black vs pink with friends (2023)

The complexity of visual environments and the presence of character cues in video content significantly influence children's attention allocation, cognitive load, and learning outcomes. Meta-analyses and experimental research emphasised that instructor or character presence, combined with visually rich environments, affects both engagement and comprehension. For instance, M. Beege *et al.* (2023) demonstrated that visual and social cues, such as gestures, gaze direction, or facial expressions, moderated efficiency of instructional video reception. Similarly, J. Meier *et al.* (2023) demonstrated that under conditions of varying visual complexity, social cues in instructional videos helped guide learners' attention, reduced perceived cognitive overload, and enhanced learning outcomes. Additionally, studies on young children's emotional and cognitive development showed that visual cues and character interactions were substantial (Cavadini *et al.*, 2024). The grammar of visual design, as articulated by G. Kress & T. van Leeuwen (2020), provide a theoretical framework for determination of how visual elements operate as a cohesive language in children's media. Based on the theoretical analysis and practical cases (e.g., the Smile Family Spanish and Smile Family channels), the following recommendations are proposed for content creators in Table 1.

Table 1. Visual guidelines for children's video content

Principle	Implementation	Expected Effect
Visual environment as a character	Locations are crafted with meaningful details (colour, shape, texture) to support narrative and mood.	Builds an emotional atmosphere and strengthens storytelling.
Audience-specific colour palette	Colour schemes are selected according to age group: bright contrasts for preschoolers, soft tones for older children.	Enhances emotional resonance and age-appropriate engagement.
Symbolic use of objects	Props are chosen to convey symbolic meanings, e.g., plush toys for comfort or instruments for creativity.	Reinforces educational and emotional messages through visual cues.
Spatial focus through composition	Compositional techniques such as symmetry or diagonal lines are used to guide visual attention.	Directs focus on key actions and supports narrative coherence.
Interactive, multi-level location design	Locations include layered visuals, secret areas, and playful spatial features.	Stimulates imagination and encourages viewer engagement.
Testing with target audience	Visual solutions are piloted with small child focus groups prior to full production.	Ensures clarity, appeal, and developmental appropriateness of visual content.

Source: compiled by the author

Application of these recommendations will contribute to the creation of visually rich and emotionally supportive content for children, enhancing its educational value and making the setting a true co-narrator of the story. In conclusion, the visual environment in children's video content is not a passive background but an active directorial element that enhances spatial sensitivity, associative thinking, creative imagination, and emotional involvement. The integration of space, colour, symbolism, and character interaction forms a coherent visual language that creates favourable conditions for learning and discovery in contemporary media culture.

CONCLUSIONS

The conducted study, based on the analysis of theoretical sources and practical case studies (particularly the Smile Family Spanish and Smile Family videos), has demonstrated that the visual environment is a key directorial tool in the creation of children's video content. The study determined that location serves not only a decorative function but also acts as a full-fledged means of influencing narrative perception, emotional immersion, and plot dynamics. The analysis demonstrated that colour choices, compositional symmetry or asymmetry, the semiotic load of objects, and editing dynamics are fundamental elements of the visual language that actively contribute to the dramaturgy. The study proved that cohesive spatial design, particularly through the use of a dominant material (e.g., cardboard or faux fur), enhances the emotional expressiveness of the scene and facilitates spatial perception for the child. Hyperbole and stylisation were emphasised, as the study confirmed that fantastical or exaggerated visual elements do not hinder comprehension. On the contrary, due to familiar shapes and colours, they stimulate cognitive activity and help sustain the viewer's attention. The study established that well-designed visual environments create conditions for the intuitive "reading" of meaning without the need for verbal explanation. Future research may further explore the interaction between visual environments and children's age-specific cognitive characteristics, as well as analyse the effectiveness of visual solutions in personalised media content with adaptive storytelling.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Візуальне середовище як режисерський інструмент: мистецтво локації в дитячому відеоконтенті

Володимир Козачук
Бакалавр, режисер, шоуранер на каналі Smile Family
Київський національний університет культури і мистецтв
01601, вул. Євгена Коновальця, 36, м. Київ, Україна
https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3787-8816

Анотація. У сучасному медіапросторі дитячий відеоконтент є одним із провідних інструментів розвитку, навчання й розваги, а візуальне середовище набуває статусу самостійної мови комунікації. Попри значне поширення дитячого медіапродукту в цифрових платформах, режисерські принципи формування локацій для дітей залишаються недостатньо вивченими в українському культурно-мистецькому контексті. Метою статті було проаналізувати роль візуального середовища як режисерського інструменту у створенні дитячого відеоконтенту для цифрових платформ, на прикладі каналів «Smile Family» та «Smile Family Spanish». Робота ґрунтувалася на огляді й аналізі теоретичних джерел у сфері психології сприйняття, теорії кольору, кіномови й семіотики. Для вивчення практичного матеріалу застосовувалися методи візуально-структурного аналізу кадрів, просторової композиції, символіки й організації візуальних елементів у локаціях. У результаті дослідження було систематизовано ключові режисерські прийоми створення візуально привабливого, емоційно виразного та сюжетно цілісного простору для дитячої аудиторії. Виявлено типові моделі використання кольору як емоційного та наративного інструменту, принципи симетричної та асиметричної композиції кадру, прийоми наповнення простору предметами з семіотичним навантаженням, а також роль монтажної динаміки у формуванні сприйняття. На прикладі успішних кейсів було продемонстровано, як грамотно спроєктована локація стає не тлом, а активним учасником взаємодії, що впливає на ритм, емоційний настрій і структуру оповіді. Застосовані методи – теоретичний аналіз джерел з психології сприйняття, теорії кольору, семіотики, а також візуально-структурний аналіз кадрів – дозволили інтегрувати як академічні підходи, так і практичні інструменти для режисерів та продюсерів. Отримані результати сприятимуть вдосконаленню методів режисури, художньої постановки й дизайну у процесі створення дитячого медіаконтенту для цифрових платформ

Ключові слова: композиція; візуальна драматургія; сценографія; психологія кольору; стилістичне оформлення; сприйняття медіа; естетика цифрового контенту