VISUAL COMMUNICATION
IN PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGNS

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 Summary

This paper identifying the key components of effective campaigns inside PR and marketing landscape by describing the evidence for the power of visual communication.

Visual communication has many advantages and arguably the most important on is the ability to process information faster. It's essential for connecting with audiences today, therefore PR campaigns strategy has to be elegant and well executed to capture and keep viewers' attention or communicate quality and capability by using technologies to craft successful modern PR language. The fact that we live in a visual society and social media and mobile communication boost all types of visuals is clearly observable and broadly recognised by communication managers around the Europe.

With the average human attention span calculated at 8 seconds, marketers are finding it increasingly hard to grab the attention of their audiences. This short attention span combined with the plethora of content created makes public relations' and marketing practitioners an extraordinary challenge. Therefore, it isn't a surprise that more and more marketers are turning towards visual communication in their professional efforts.

Visual communication has many advantages and arguably the most important on is the ability to process information faster. In fact, humans process visuals 60,000 times faster than plain text[1] One caveat to this is that it may not always be the correct information. That's because visuals are more open to interpretation than plain text.

Although conveying the correct information is important for the marketing, and in particular public relations, the main objective is to increase consumers or audiences attention. And, since with 94% more views on articles with visual content, there are no doubt those visuals is the way forward for communication participants.

So what would be visual fluency and how to get it? Before unveiling potential ideas in modern visual communication we need to unveil the set of following data:[2]

- 63% of the world's consumers are kinesthetic (they are "do-ers" who prefer hands-on learning that includes visual and audio information, as opposed to data presented only in writing).
- The human attention span is now 8 seconds.
- Visuals are processed 60 K faster than text (meaning a visual is worth 60.000 words).
- 40% of people respond better to visual information than written text.
- Colour visuals increase readership by 80%.
- One minute of video is more powerful than 1.8 million words.
- Multimedia adds feelings to facts.
- Smart phones have created multimedia experts.
- Visual IQ is the fastest rising form of IQ.
- 84% of communications will be visual by 2018.

By definition visual communication graphically represents information to efficiently and effectively create meaning. When necessary, limited text is used. It can encompass a diverse array of visual media, including interactivity, iconography, animation, illustration, graphic design, typography, data visualization. It also explores the idea that a visual message[3] accompanying text has a greater power to inform, educate, or persuade a person or audience.

With the online video marketing boom and the rise of quick and easy sharing via social media channels, visual communication has emerged as the primary way to engage with today's audiences. The speed with which visuals are being embraced is dizzying: by January 2017, Venngag[4], was reporting that, in a survey of more than 300 marketers, 53% said that visual material was a part of 91–100% of their published content. But there's still a problem.

Many marketers aren't choosing the most effective application of visual content. 35% of participants in that survey said they most often used stock images, and no surprise — fewer than 8% said those photos inspired high engagement. The takeaway? The quality of your assets can make or break a campaign. Customers today won't settle for just any visual; they want a mixture of quality and authenticity that communicates why any brand is worth paying attention to.

Creating an attention means to minimize text

The primer step to creating an attention — grabbing visual asset is minimizing text. Smart visual content slashes through all of the filler and gets straight to the point. Such assets are also more shareable since social media users can digest and disseminate them quickly. The good news is, despite ever-waning focus, visuals manage to keep human's attention for much longer than eight seconds.

We not only watch an average of 8.4 minutes of YouTube every day, but two-thirds of video marketing clip viewers are still watching after 30 seconds — a significant attention span boost. Interactive campaigns

increased the time that viewers spent watching pre-roll ads by 44 seconds, and interactive video resulted in a staggering 591% increase in user activity as compared to standard pre-video ads.

Marketers have already jumped on board the visual communication revolution, and it's changed how many of them interact with their audiences. But those working in PR are trailing behind, and there's never been a more important time to catch up.

Just 42% of press releases included multimedia in 2015. That's a 14% increase from 2013, but it's far from enough when you consider how effective visuals are.

Press releases see a 1.4x increase in views when images are added, and an impressive 2.8x bump when they include video. No wonder, then, that 68% of the 100 most-viewed press releases in 2015 included multimedia. Visuals make these releases more shareable and more likely to be picked up by the press.

No press release can be effective without a target audience in mind. PR practitioners will have a diverse array of media at their fingertips, from infographics and motion graphics to VR and interactive experiences. But they need to know what types of media their audience is most likely to consume. For instance, millennial audiences prefer social media-friendly visuals in bite-sized chunks. You also have to optimize your media by device based on your target demographic. While baby boomers and Gen-Xers still prefer desktops and laptops, 25% of millennials primarily use mobile for content engagement. Yet six in 10 members of both groups share content on Facebook, so social media optimization is a must.

Second and most relevant step lead into
— incorporate at least two different types of media

The more images you include in your press release, the more engagement it'll get. In fact, releases with six images saw 2.4x more views than releases with only text. Those that included video performed even better.[5]

A diverse array of media is more essential than ever for a successful press release. When you add not just images but motion graphics, videos, charts and links to interactive experiences, audiences can choose how they prefer to interact with the information, and will often end up engaging on multiple platforms.

Video and motion graphics in particular have the potential to set your releases apart because, although they're highly popular with audiences, the video adoption rate in press releases remains very low, at just 2%. In short, incorporating diverse media communicates that your company is forward thinking and agile.

Types of media you can incorporate or link to: motion graphics, infographics, micro-narratives, interactive content, virtual reality (VR) or augmented reality (AR) experiences, videos, charts, graphs and tables, visual ebooks.

There's no point in creating great visual content if your audiences can't view it. It's essential that your visual communication is mobile- and social media-friendly. Write headlines and blurbs short enough to tweet and consider incorporating mini-infographics, motion graphics and GIFs, ideal for social sharing.

Video and data content materials provides the value, relevance and flexibility consumers need

Fortunately, it's easy to keep up with the changing landscape when you invest in cutting-edge forms of content, such as video marketing. In today's fast-paced world, video is one of the few types of online material that provides the value, relevance and flexibility consumers need, all while catering to the on-the-go lifestyle they want.

As one of the fastest growing and most in-demand forms of communication out there, video stands out as one thing all marketers should be using right now. Data is another factor that helps to determine whether visual communication is strong. Rob Brown: "The concept of what is newsworthy, is becoming very data driven: predictions about the number

of views a video will get are now important factors in deciding whether or not to produce the video in the first place."[6] What makes this decision increasingly easy is the fact that producing video content has become extremely cheap and easy. Everyone with a modern smartphone can shoot high quality videos now.

"With the combination of ubiquitous internet, apps for broadcast and devices to view and consume, we are now able to communicate using visual content in real time."

With media consumption trending towards shorter-form, media rich content, the way PR practitioners create, tell and package stories for brands needs to adapt to reflect the wants and needs of the audience.

For many public relations practitioners this means more imagery, videos, and graphics need to be used in support of the more traditional elements of public relations activity — taking an integrated, multimedia approach to communications — to generate favourable outcomes that align with their clients' business goals.

Public relation as part of Visual communication revolution

The results of the 11th edition of the European Communication Monitor (2017) offer valuable insights for all public relations professionals to consider, but especially those involved in the technology sector.

The ECM surveyed 3,378 communications professionals from 50 participating countries. It's the most detailed and comprehensive longitudinal study in the communications industry and those in PR shouldn't neglect the opportunity to glean insights into the challenges and opportunities facing PR profession both now and into the future. The study entitle *How strategic communication deals with the challenges of visualisation, social bots and hypermodernity*, presents several key learning's PR professionals need to think about in the future.[7]

The fact that we live in a visual society and social media and mobile communication boost all types of visuals is clearly observable and broadly recognised by communication managers.

However, 53.3 per cent of the surveyed professionals have low visual communication skills — compared to 12.1 per cent with high visual competencies. That is also true at the organisational level.

More than 80 per cent of the professionals have implemented standard guidelines for their visual communication. However, only 36.7 per cent have developed advanced guidelines and less than five per cent have advanced management processes for visual communication.

Picture 1. **Personal competencies of communication professionals are low in nearly all fields of visual communication — also in the areas of online videos and infographics**
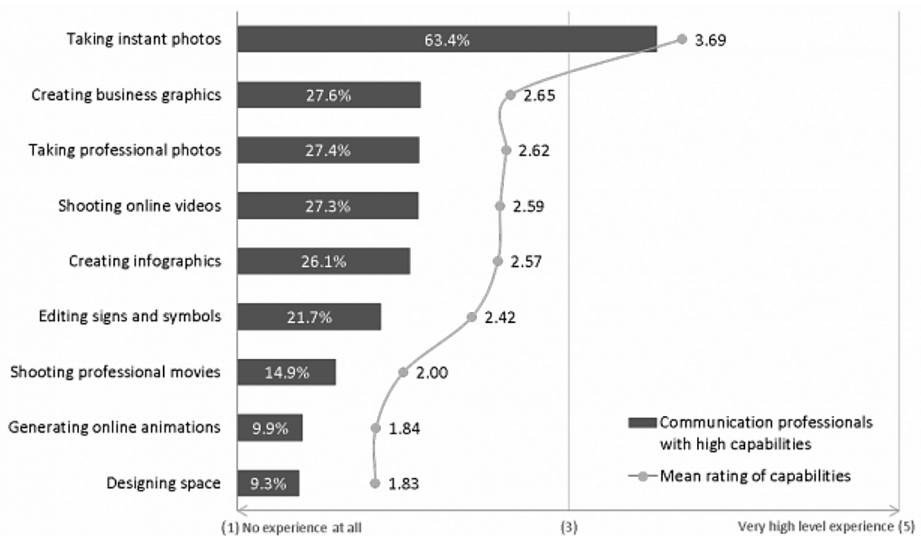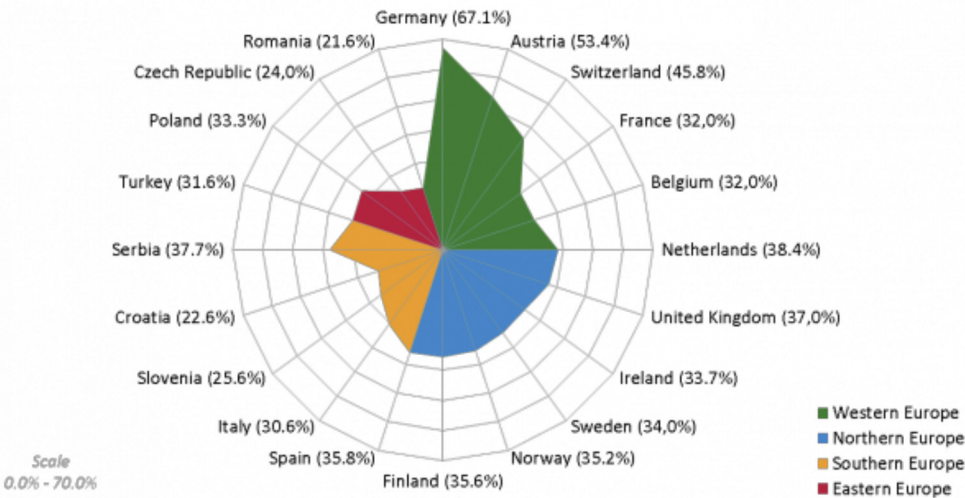

Source: European Communication Monitor 2017

The topic of social bots is largely neglected by many communication professionals. Only one third (35.9%) follow the debate about social bots and 15.9% have no idea about the topic at all. Social bots are mainly seen as a threat for public debates and organisational reputation alike. 73.2% agree that social bots present ethical challenges, although four out of ten respondents do also see opportunities arising from them and 14.7% of the surveyed organisations (will) use social bots until 2018.

Picture 2. **Communication practitioners' attentiveness into to the debate about social bots**

*I have followed the debate about social bots*

Source: European Communication Monitor 2017.

A large majority of the surveyed professionals (71.5%) witness the cultural transformation towards a hyper modern culture in their country, characterised by a culture of hyper consumption, hyper change, and hyper individualism. Every second communicators (52.3%) confirms that this have already changed the communication between their organisation and stakeholders. Quality management and continuous improvement is less common in communication departments and marketing, compared to other organisational functions. If communication departments assess their activities at all, they focus predominantly on the performance or impact of messaging activities. Holistic benchmarking approaches against externally validated standards seem to be less relevant.

Whether the increase in popularity of video and visual content is a clear-cut change that will last, remains unclear. Yet the foundations of PR seem to be stable over time. The traditional value hierarchy of old media has not really changed and just reframed into new media. It is all

about embracing the opportunities that technology has to offer and use them to improve and strengthen communication (visual communication) strategy.

Picture 3. Quality management and continuous improvement is less common in communication departments, compared to other organisational functions
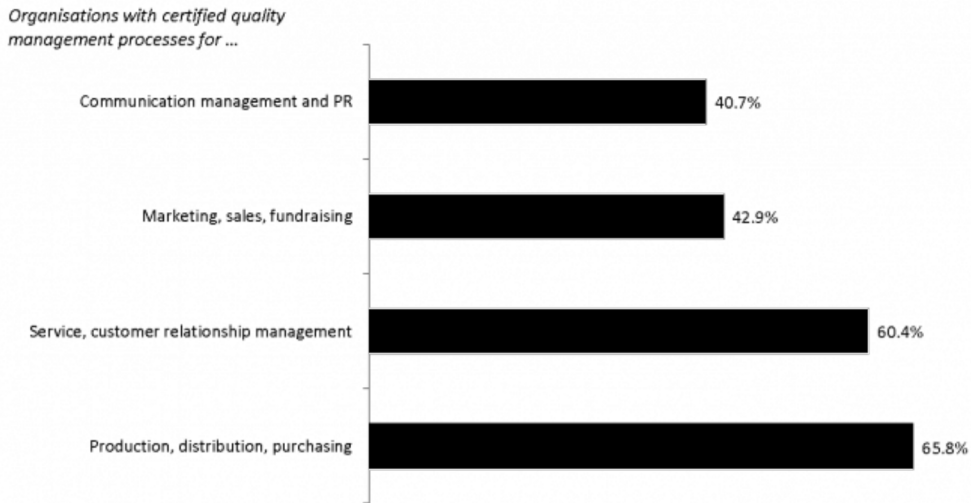
Source: European Communication Monitor 2017.

The expectation to consume media and access real-time information wherever we are, using our smartphones, requires new channels. Nevertheless, new media usually doesn't mean the end of older ones, and text will not die out, as long as PR practitioners adapt to the modern languages.

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[4] Internet: *venngage.com* — https://venngage.com/

[5] Internet: *forbes.com* — https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunicationscouncil/2017/06/30/press-release-makeover-putting-prs-to-work-in-your-visual-campaigns/#1764bc82a457

[6] Internet: *forbes.com* — https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunicationscouncil/2017/06/30/press-release-makeover-putting-prs-to-work-in-your-visual-campaigns/#1764bc82a457

[7] Internet: *Communication monitor 2017* — http://www.communicationmonitor.eu

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