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THE COMPARISON OF VISUAL AND WRITTEN NEWS: EMOTIONAL IMPACT OR ACCURACY AND OBJECTIVITY

Abstract

In the information age we live in, alongside written news, the impact and significance of visual news is undeniable. More specifically, when it comes to visuals, their power has never been as influential and rapidly disseminated as it is today. Mobile devices provide instant access to news coverage of local and global events, and these events are usually presented in some visual form. This research reveals how written and visual news influence audiences and, at the same time, highlights the differences and advantages between them. From another perspective, it analyzes how news images and videos affect people's emotions, psychology, and attitudes.

According to academic research, visual news typically has a stronger emotional impact, while written news aligns more closely with the ideals of accuracy and objectivity in traditional journalism, although both formats can be used for different purposes. Online and print news sources use visual elements such as photos, photo galleries, or video materials to capture the audience's attention and make content more appealing and readable. In particular, emotionally impactful news images spread very quickly through traditional and social media and often reach a global audience within minutes.

Keywords: Journalism, Visual Literacy, News, Traditional Media, Storytelling

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Introduction

The 21st century can be called the century of news flow, and in this abundance of information, people prefer not only written news but often visual news as well. The reason is that visual news creates an immediate impact thanks to its ability to be understood quickly and to establish strong emotional connections. However, written news requires more depth and provides details, allowing for more thorough analysis and understanding. In general, the most effective news content combines the strengths of both media formats by integrating visual and written elements.

Visual news (television broadcasts, video clips, infographics, or social media videos) instantly captures attention and creates an emotional and immediate impact. It is especially effective in breaking news situations (such as natural disasters, protests, or accidents). In such cases, the audience can quickly grasp the context without the need for additional reading.

Written news (articles, reports, blogs, or newspapers), on the other hand, requires some time and focus to read and understand. Therefore, it is not as strong in creating instant emotional impact or attracting immediate attention. It is also considered less effective for quickly reaching a wide audience in terms of real-time updates. However, both formats undeniably require accuracy and correctness.

Unlike traditional media, social media sometimes prioritizes speed over accuracy; this includes live broadcasts or social media videos shared without full verification. As a result, the lack of prior fact-checking leads to the spread of fake visual news.

In general, journalists who write news are expected to put aside their own emotions and present all sides of an event clearly and without bias. Text creates a more suitable environment for complex analysis, multi-dimensional perspectives, and detailed explanations. This ensures a deeper and more objective understanding of the topic. Unlike the immediate

impact created by visual materials, text allows information to be evaluated in a more thoughtful and controlled manner.

Reading news creates less emotional impact compared to watching it in a video. The main reason is the absence of disturbing imagery. This distance allows the information to be processed more rationally and with less emotional influence.

“A picture is worth a thousand words.” - this is a cliché, but it is true, because sometimes a single image can be more powerful than any words can convey.

Photojournalists have long used this visual power to bring the world’s most important stories to the public, stories filled with heavy emotions about war zones, natural disasters, and historic moments. Today, creative individuals use this same method to convey feelings, build connection, and make their work truly resonate.

Visual storytelling ensures clear communication, inspires action, and creates moments that remain in the audience’s memory.

Analıs

Research indicates that visual journalists must analyze images, approach them critically, and prioritize objectivity before publishing them. In general, compared to written stories, visuals convey ideas in a more comprehensible and impactful manner. Photos and videos often create a feeling of “witnessing the event,” which naturally makes them appear more convincing and reliable to the audience.

According to the analysis by Margarida Alpuim and Katja Ehrenberg titled “Why Images Are So Powerful and What Matters When Choosing Them,” people tend to remember information presented in the form of images and visuals more than information presented in text. This is called the Picture Superiority Effect, and the reason is as follows:

Images allow the brain to process information through both visual and verbal channels, which increases the ease of recalling the information.

(Alpuim & Ehrenberg, 2023) Compared to text, images have more unique and distinct visual characteristics. Images create stronger, more impactful, and more engaging reactions, which helps strengthen memory.

When selecting a picture for a written news story or article, it is not appropriate to leave this decision to the last moment. Treating the image as a secondary matter stems from unprofessionalism. Journalists and editors must be very sensitive and careful in their use of images.

The easy recall of information is extremely important for journalism because news helps people understand the world and make informed decisions - and both of these processes rely partly on memory. Therefore, journalists sometimes use graphics and infographics to present information that may otherwise be less accessible.

Reasons why visualıty is stronger and more impactful

The strength of visualıty is explained by its ability to influence emotions more quickly and effectively than words. In other words, people can process an image in the blink of an eye. A study has shown that people can recognize an image in just 12–13 milliseconds.

Research on how the human brain processes visual information introduces several realistic assumptions and debates. According to scientists, visual stimuli are received by photoreceptors, special eye cells that convert light into electrical signals, and these signals are then sent to the brain. The brain processes these signals, and recognition of objects or other stimuli occurs by comparing visual inputs with previously stored information. For example, people can even identify highly simplified cartoon figures as the intended animal.

Based on individual experiences and perspectives, it can be said that neural processing plays a key role here. For instance, an image of a tiger may evoke feelings of power and excitement for some people, while for others it may evoke fear. Similarly, the images of objects belonging to one culture or community may be understood as intended only by individuals who recognize those concepts. Cultural backgrounds, especially subcultures and shared mental frameworks which play a significant role. A photo of distributing sacrificial meat may be interpreted as an act of charity and Islamic tradition in one community, while another community may view it as an act of brutality.

Figure 1. In Azerbaijan, infections have decreased



Source: Bizim.Media, (2021)

For example, this photo is perceived individually. For some people, it represents survival from COVID-19 and safety; for others, it evokes fear and psychological distress.

In general, people may choose not to read an article or news story, or may decide not to listen to the radio, but they cannot simply ignore the images or videos that are published.

Comparison of negatively framed images with positive visuals

Numerous studies show that negative visual stimuli—such as images of violence and fear, trigger stronger emotional reactions than images depicting joy or love. At the same time, negative images can lead to post-traumatic stress, not only for people who have experienced similar situations, but also for audiences who follow events through the news, as well as for the journalists who report them.

Considering the dominance and speed of social media in news dissemination, traditional media approaches differ to some extent in this regard. Journalists publishing on social media platforms rely heavily on images to convey their stories. Therefore, the frequent and rapid publishing demands of news websites and social

media platforms leave media professionals with limited time to make important decisions about image selection.

In reality, the amount of time journalists and editors allocate to choosing images for their stories often does not match the level of impact these images have on the audience.

Publishing images together with written news provides clearer meaning and increases the perceived accuracy of the information. However, photos and visuals must be selected very carefully; otherwise, they may mislead the audience.

When Is Visual Literacy Required

(Geise, Panke, & Heck, 2025) If journalists who disseminate visual information are required to be objective and neutral, then the audience is also expected to approach visuals with clarity and awareness. When audiences view images blindly or without objectivity, it can lead to worse outcomes. Misinterpretation essentially means misinformation. In short, the audience is required to:

- Think critically
- Interpret visual materials

- Analyze the meaning behind images
- Evaluate images and their sources
- Effectively Using Images and Visual Media

The photo taken on June 8, 1972, is popularly known as the “Napalm Girl” or “The Horror of War.” It shows 9-year-old Phan Thi Kim Phuc, a naked girl, running toward the camera after mistakenly escaping a South Vietnamese napalm attack on the village of Trảng Bàng, which was intended for North Vietnamese forces. The photograph, taken by photographer Nick Ut, is not only one of the most iconic images of the Vietnam War but also symbolizes the devastating impact of war on innocent victims. From this, it can be concluded that a single photo can sometimes replace a lengthy text, and understanding or interpreting that photo is not particularly difficult.

The photo is captioned: “Napalm Girl” or “The Horror of War.”

The photo, famous worldwide in 1972, gained renewed relevance 53 years later—but in a different way. In 2025, Kim Phuc Phan Thi, the “Napalm Girl,” was awarded the Randolph’s Pearl S. Buck Prize.

In classical journalism, there is always a discussion of “hot” and “cold” news, analyzing the principle of their replacement. In fact, this

approach can also be applied to visual news. Visual news or stories can be divided into two categories: hot visuals and cold visuals, along with their interplay. After a photo or infographic is published, it initially functions as a hot visual. Over time, it becomes a cold visual, but research and attention surrounding it do not stop. When the topic resurfaces, the previously cold visual becomes hot again.

For example, on September 27, 2020, during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War between Armenia and Azerbaijan, various photos, such as images of children harmed by Armenian terrorist actions spread quickly to both local and international audiences. We can take a slightly different approach to these photos. These emotionally powerful images, which have a strong impact on the audience, can also be classified according to journalistic standards as hot or cold visual news.

For example, this photo was taken and published in 2020. On October 11, 2020, as a result of a missile attack on Ganja by Armenian forces, Nilay lost both her father and mother. At that time, she was 1 year and 10 months old. Now, at the age of 7, she participated in the opening of the Ganja Memorial Complex alongside the country’s president. The content has regained relevance, and the previously cold visual news has become hot news again.

Figure 2 Nilay, who lost both parents during the 2020 Ganja terror attack



Figure 3. The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, and Nilay, who lost both parents in the Ganja terror attack



Source: (Qafqazinfo.az, 2025)

The power of politically oriented visuals, however, is different and often has a deeper impact. Such photos typically depict public dissatisfaction or controversial issues, show symbols of social movements, represent acts of opposition and power relations between authorities and protesters, capture moments of conflict, solidarity, and resistance, highlight socio-political struggles, and mobilize public opinion (Corrigall-Brown, 2012; Mattoni & Teune, 2014; Won et al., 2017).

The combined presentation of several visual elements can sometimes bring an entire story to life. For example, the assassination of the 35th U.S. President John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963, in Dealey Plaza, Dallas, Texas, can be reconstructed by combining various visual details: the footage of the assassination itself, the killing of the perpetrator, and the reactions of those nearby afterward.

In short, multiple photos or video scenes captured at the time of an event can be more impactful and emotional than written news.

However, visuals and photos do not always help in every story. For instance, a story about the prices of agricultural products may consist entirely of numbers. A newspaper might publish a photo of a farmer holding the corn he sent to market. While this does not harm the story, it does not add much either.

Written and Visual Code of Ethics

The core value of a code of ethics is establishing standards that demand professional conduct. An ethics code makes the media more accountable to the public and, as a result, increases public trust in the media. Codes also protect individuals, society, and media professionals themselves from pressures within the organizations they work for.

Standards required in written media also apply to visual news and stories:

Journalists must have the ability to think critically and independently;

They must remain impartial;

Generalizations should be clarified;

The meanings of words and expressions must be made clear;

Values and professional standards must be known;

The reliability of information sources must be evaluated;

Assumptions should be approached with skepticism and investigated.

Moreover, because visual news and stories—divided into positive and negative content—are particularly sensitive, several nuances arise. Publishing explicit photos of children subjected to sexual or physical violence, gruesome images of murder, blood, or other tragic events is unacceptable. Such photos and videos have a negative psychological impact on people and can cause trauma.

Therefore, adherence to a visual code of ethics that guides visual communication and expresses moral principles is required. These principles include honesty, accuracy, respect for subjects, and avoidance of manipulation or bias. Codes ensure that images are presented truthfully and responsibly, taking into account their impact on individuals and society. Specific examples include professional ethics codes for visual journalists and researchers' guidelines on treating subjects with dignity and obtaining informed consent.

The National Press Photographers Association (NPPA), which describes itself as the voice of visual journalists, is a professional organization that promotes the highest standards in visual journalism, recognizing both the public's need to be fully informed about societal events and their need to see themselves as part of the world we live in.

According to the Association, visual journalists operate as trusted representatives of the public: "Photographic and video images can reveal important truths, expose wrongdoing and negligence, inspire hope and understanding, and connect people from around the world through the language of visual literacy. At the same time, if photographs are taken carelessly or manipulated, they can cause serious harm".

Conclusion

Visual journalists must ensure that aesthetic approaches and emotional impact do not

overshadow the essence of an event or the accuracy of the news. Written journalists, on the other hand, should find ways to engage the audience emotionally while continuing to uphold objectivity and fidelity to facts.

Ultimately, both written and visual formats use specific methods of word choice or image selection to shape audience perception and emotional response. This demonstrates that achieving "pure objectivity" remains an ongoing challenge across all types of media.

Research indicates that both visual news and events, as well as written news stories, require the same fundamental principles: objectivity, neutrality, critical thinking, and freedom from manipulation.

As a result, visual news is shown to have greater potential for impact. Visual news and events:

Directly affect human emotions through images and sound.

Easily evoke emotional reactions (shock, compassion, anger, empathy).

Capture audience attention quickly.

However, visual content can also be prone to manipulation—images may be taken out of context, altering the true nature of an event.

Written news, in comparison, may lag slightly behind visual news in terms of immediacy, but it has advantages in accuracy and reaching a broader audience. Written news and events:

Give readers time to think and analyze information. Although emotional impact is lower, logical and intellectual impact is stronger. Are less susceptible to emotional manipulation, as the presentation of facts relies more on words and evidence than visual effect.

Differences in audience and purpose are reflected accordingly. Visual news is designed to reach a wide audience, convey information quickly, and elicit emotional responses. It is particularly effective on social media. Written news, however, is better suited for research, analysis, and forming opinions, and is chosen when a deeper explanation of scientific, political, or social context is required.

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VİZUAL VƏ YAZILI XƏBƏRLƏRİN MÜQAYİSƏSİ: EMOSİONAL TƏSİR, YOXSA DƏQİQLİK VƏ OBYEKTİVLİK

Xülasə

Yaşadığımız informasiya dövründə yazılı xəbərlərlə yanaşı, vizual xəbər istehsalının təsiri və əhəmiyyəti danılmazdır. Vizual görüntülərin gücü heç bir dövrdə indiki qədər təsirli və sürətlə yayılan olmamışdır. Mobil cihazlar yerli və global hadisələrin işıqlandırılmasına anında çıxış imkanı yaradır və bu xəbərlər adətən vizual formatda təqdim olunur. Bu tədqiqat yazılı və vizual xəbərlərin auditoriya üzərindəki təsir mexanizmlərini ortaya qoyur, eyni zamanda onlar arasındakı fərqləri və üstünlükləri vurğulayır. Məqalədə həmçinin xəbər görüntülərinin və videoların insanların emosional vəziyyətinə, psixologiyasına və sosial münasibətlərinə təsir formaları təhlil edilir.

Akademik araşdırmalar göstərir ki, vizual xəbərlər daha güclü emosional reaksiyalar doğurur; yazılı xəbərlər isə ənənəvi jurnalistikanın dəqiqlik və obyektivlik prinsiplərinə daha yaxın hesab olunur. Bununla belə, hər iki format müxtəlif məqsədlər üçün bir-birini tamamlayır. Onlayn və çap mediası auditoriyanın diqqətini cəlb etmək, məzmunu daha cəlbedici və oxunaqlı etmək üçün fotoşəkillər, fotoqalereyalar və video materiallardan geniş istifadə edir. Xüsusilə yüksək emosional təsirə malik xəbər fotoları ənənəvi və sosial media vasitəsilə sürətlə yayılaraq, bir neçə dəqiqə ərzində qlobal auditoriyaya çatmaq gücünə malikdir.

Açar sözlər: Jurnalistika, Vizual savadlılıq, Xəbər, Ənənəvi media, Storytelling (Hekayəçilik).

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СРАВНЕНИЕ ВИЗУАЛЬНЫХ И ПИСЬМЕННЫХ НОВОСТЕЙ: ЭМОЦИОНАЛЬНОЕ ВОЗДЕЙСТВИЕ ИЛИ ТОЧНОСТЬ И ОБЪЕКТИВНОСТЬ

Резюме

В эпоху информации, в которой мы живем, наряду с письменными новостями, влияние и значимость визуальных новостей неоспоримы. Более того, когда речь идет о визуальных эффектах, их сила никогда не была столь влиятельной и быстро распространяемой, как сегодня. Мобильные устройства обеспечивают мгновенный доступ к новостным репортажам о местных и глобальных событиях, и эти события обычно представлены в какой-либо визуальной форме. Данное исследование раскрывает, как письменные и визуальные новости влияют на аудиторию, и в то же время подчеркивает различия и преимущества между ними. С другой стороны, в работе анализируется, как новостные изображения и видео влияют на эмоции, психологию и отношение людей.

Согласно академическим исследованиям, визуальные новости обычно имеют более сильное эмоциональное воздействие, в то время как письменные новости больше соответствуют идеалам точности и объективности в традиционной журналистике, хотя оба формата могут использоваться для разных целей. Онлайн и печатные источники новостей используют визуальные элементы, такие как фотографии, фотогалереи или видеоматериалы, чтобы привлечь внимание аудитории и сделать контент более привлекательным и читабельным. В частности, эмоционально воздействующие новостные изображения очень быстро распространяются через традиционные и социальные сети и часто достигают мировой аудитории в течение нескольких минут.

Ключевые слова: Журналистика, Визуальная грамотность, Новости, Традиционные медиа, Сторителлинг