

VISUAL COMMUNICATION: COMMUNICATION CRADLE STILL IN VOGUE

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Abstract

This study is partly expository and partly empirical. It exposes the genesis of visual communication tracing it to the biblical record of creation, through the days of the early man and the early civilizations of the world to the present generation. The second part of study empirically investigates the place of visual communication in this generation through survey research method. The study was framed on the uses and gratifications theory of Mass Communication. It was discovered in the study that people now prefer to send and receive information through pictorial signals than textual signals. In line with this discovery, it was recommended that, for effective communication purposes, communication materials should essentially contain enough pictorial components.

Keywords: visual, communication, cradle, pictorial, vogue.

Introduction

Visual communication signals pertain to communication materials that appeal to the sense of vision — the eye. However, for the purpose of this paper, we are particularly concerned with the pictorial forms as opposed to the textual forms of communication signal. These include the pictures on the pages of newspapers, magazines and other print communication materials, the video records, films and television pictures. The study is in two parts. The first part of this study is expository and deals with the genesis of visual communication tracing it to the biblical record of creation and the various ancient civilizations. The second part is empirical and aimed at examining the current state of pictorial communication signal in the present generation. The fact that people today often decry the seeming “death of reading culture” may largely be

linked to crave for visual communication signal by the present generation. The study was anchored on the uses and gratifications theory of Mass Communication. The theory by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch was deemed appropriate for the study seeing that it has to do with people's inclination towards different media formats and why.

Statement of Problem

Communication is a vital aspect of the human society. Since creation, communication has been practised in varied forms and symbols the Worldover. Communication has continued to witness evolution particularly with the advent of technological devices in today's World. From visual to pictorial, pictorial to verbal, verbal to print, print to audio/visual (broadcast). The situation where, these days, people sit glued to television screen, some other times to smart phone screen, watching film and other things is what agitated the researcher's mind. This study was aimed at investigating the seeming proclivity of people of the present generation to visual communication signal than otherwise.

Objectives of Study

The central objective of this study is to find out whether people, these days, prefer receiving information through visual communication form than otherwise.

Specific Objectives The research seeks to

1. find out what part of a piece of communication attracts the public most to it.
2. determine the choice of the public between text and pictorial (visual) communication.

Research Questions

1. Which part of a piece of communication material attracts the public most to it?

2. Which form of communication, text or pictorial (visual) is preferred by the public?

Literature Review:

Expository Overview

God at creation said "Let there be light" as recorded in Genesis 1 verse 3. At that instance, the only way it could have been observed that then there was light was by the effect of visual communication. This prime position of visual communication has continued to hold sway in human society.

Studies have revealed that during the Stone Age the early man communicated through pictorial drawings on cave Walls. From this idea of communication evolved varied graphic symbols in different civilizations in efforts to transmit ideas or messages from person to person. The Sumerians of Western Asia developed and used the Cuneiform around 3000 and 2000 BC; the Egyptian Empire developed the Hieroglyph around 3100 BC. Agbo and Ukozor (2000, p.17) record that by 4000 BC the Egyptians used the hieroglyphic symbols to record accounts of wars, as well as ideas and deeds of important leaders. Variations of these forms of communication symbols have existed and can be still found in use in certain places. The 26 letter English alphabets we use today in communicating in written English language are derived from such ancient forms of communication symbols. Apart from presenting ideas in visual form, graphic symbols give communication ideas permanence (Nnadiukwu, 2020, pp. 1-26).

Then came printing press Johann Gutenberg (1400 –1456 AD) invented movable type (the letter character). With type, words are composed to form sentences and present ideas. Gutenberg thus gave a kick to ease idea composition in print. This was followed by the invention of off-set lithography that is printing via transfer from a surface (plate) to paper. The

invention was made by Robert Barclay an English man in 1875. The coming of the off-set printing process further eased print production=§o, mass production of print communication materials blossomed. Today, print communication has even become easier due to advancements in information and communication technology (ICT). Computer generated type matter has revolutionized printing beyond imagination (Ukonu, 2007, pp. 12-29).

Print communication is basically visual communication system but can be classed away from pictorial communication which primarily is targeted at viewers. It is no longer arguable that today communication signals that are pictorial in nature have reduced other forms of communication to a subordinate status.

A cursory reflection on the attitude of people these days to communication materials will vividly support the above submission. Today, you can hardly get people's attention to any piece of writing if there is no pictorial component in that material. If there is, you are sure to get most people's attention. At the News Stand, the alluring factors that call the attention of readers to newspapers include, majorly, picture. Studies have attested to the fact that most readers, simply glance through the pictorial content of the papers reading only the captions and outlines for more information about pictures from first page to the last. Examples of such studies include work entitled **Impact of Images in Print Media** by Cope Jay, Fifiick Andeelynn, Holl Douglas and others.

Review of Empirical Studies

A study entitled **Photograph Framing Influence on Newspaper Readers** was done in 2018 Onyejelem T. E. established that pictures are important in newspaper communication. Again, a student project work conducted at Owerri North LGA of Imo State, Nigeria on Influence of Photographs on

Newspaper Readers found much in that same direction. The situation has become so glaring that one doubts the appropriateness of the expression “picture complement of story” which is one of the Ways we teach students that pictures are used in mass communication. It appears that it is better to change that narrative now to “text complement of picture”. One strongly feels that it is the picture that readers now look for before the text.

Pictorial communication began its dominance over other forms of communication with the advent of cinematography around the late 19th century. This followed the successful demonstration of a prototype of the kinoscope - a device which enable one person at a time to view moving pictures. The work was done by the Edison Company in USA (www.americaslibrary.gov/jb/gilded/jb-gilded_kinetscp). This received further impetus with the invention of the first video camera in 1918 by John Logie Baird. This made the production of motion picture easier and, in combination with its convenience of reception through electronic channels, the attention of mass media audience shifted from print to pictorial communication.

When subsequently through synergistic but independent technological discoveries by Edmond Begueral, Edwin Berlin, Vladmir Kosma Zworykin etc and the eventual invention of the electronic television by Philo Taylor Farnsworth in 1927 (Okoye, 2008), pictorial communication got onto the fast lane and has continued to take a pride of place among communication forms. This became more the case with the coming of colour television in 1953.

The synergy between video technology and television technology brought in a hybrid known as video film. The video film, going by the attitude of the youths today, has almost collected whatever was left of people’s attention to other media forms. When in the year 1986 Professor Sylvanus Ekwelie was admonishing students at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka for not reading

their books, he described the generation then as the age of 'videos'. He obviously referenced the rate at which cinematography, video and television messages had claimed the attention of the youths.

As at the time Prof. Ekwelie was admonishing students, you would not visit a university student's room without finding copies of novels and plays he or she had read. Today, the situation has drastically changed. You may not find up to one quarter of the students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria (and I guess it is the same in other countries of the World), who can tell you the title of any novel let alone reading one.

This has even extended to affecting readership of anything in print including textbooks. It was this attitude of the current generation towards reading that led Professor Nnanyelugo Qkoro, one time Dean Faculty of Art UNN to observe ". . .if you have any information to hide, put it in a book" Professor Okoro was speaking in a Keynote Address he delivered at an International Multidisciplinary Conference organised by the Department of Mass Communication, Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu, Nigeria between 6* and 8'1' June, 2018. To buttress Okoro's point, in schools where the lecturers are allowed to sell textbooks to students, it has been observed that some students would pay for a book but would not bother to collect it. If you happen to visit student's rooms in their homes, what you are sure to find are piles of home video discs. Some even have them on memory cards which they play on their smart phones. This brings us to the rave of the moment – the smart phone and pictorial communication.

The situation has further worsened with the coming of smart phones. This communication device that is pioneered by the International Business Machines (IBM)-made phone in 1992, was then called Simon Personal Communicator. It showed a revolution in communication. Communication by

smart phone became popular after the Apple Company, another US based company, on June 14, 2015 launched the Iphone. This was around 15 years after the first smart phone was made by IBM. Other electronic manufacturing companies have since joined the race. Ownership of a smart phone today, is the beginning of meaningful social existence.

The smart phone presents pictorial communication images to users in the most convenient manner 24 hours a day and 7 days a Week (24/7). There is no limit to what people can be seen on smart phones via social media platforms – Facebook, Instagram, Blog, Twitter, Togoo, WhatsApp etc. At present, the smart phone is presenting problems. This is because people now suffer addiction to it such that it has led to some parents losing attention to the children and family responsibilities as they can hardly stay away from their smart phones. Attention to smart phones is known to have caused accidents; broken relationships and marriages while parental care suffers largely. A more intractable problem which the smart phone and social media have not brought is the issue of opening the practice of journalism to just anyone interested (citizen journalism). It is now an all comers affair. The principles, ethics and to a large extent, the laws guiding the practice of journalism now suffer as a result. That is why the cry against fake news is common. It is also why the law of defamation of character has been intimidated to silence.

However, this generation may not bother so long as the eyes are fed with pictures and ideas not minding their veracity.

Test Study

To ascertain current public attitude towards different communication signals, an empirical study involving staff and students of the Institute of Management and Technology (IMT), Enugu was carried out. The respondents were made up of 150 staff and 250 students making a total of 400 as sample

representing a population of 1,051 members of staff and 8,837 students (HND 11 and ND 11, 2018/2019 Session). Those sampled were asked the following questions:

- a).What's your age?
 - b).Are you a member of staff { } or a student { } of IMT?; tick as is appropriate
 - c).Male { } or Female { }
2. What can you say attracts you most to a piece of communication? (a) Topic or Headline { } (b) Picture component { } (c) Colour { } Tick
 3. a. What would you choose in these cases; (a) A story of an event presented in text (b) The same story of an event presented in pictures (c) The same story presented in audio record/device?
b. Justify your choice in question 5 above
 4. When you visit a newspaper stand what are the factors that draw your attention to a particular paper? Rank the following in order of their influences on you as you decide which newspaper to pick; (a) Headlines (b) Pictures (c) Colour, (i.e cba, abc or bca)
 5. Would you say that people these days prefer information presented in pictures than in text? (a)Yes { } (b) No { } ,
 6. If your answer in 8 is yes, why and if no why
 7. What can you say about pictures in relation to communication?

Data Analysis

The method used in analyzing the data gathered in this study was table, frequency and simple percentage of the data of responses on the respective questions.

The questionnaire was issued to 400 sampled members of the study population. A total of 374 of them duly completed and returned their copies of the questionnaire. This analysis was therefore based on 374 respondents.

Table 1: Questionnaire distribution and return

	Number Distributed	Number Returned
Staff	100	96 (25%)
Students	300	278 (75%)
Total	400	374 (93.5%)

Source: Field work (2021)

Among those that returned the completed questionnaire were 96 (25%) members of staff and 278 (75%) students.

The staff members were aged between 35 and 64 while the students were aged between 19 and 31. Among the respondents 172 (48.7%) were males while 202 (51.3%) were females.

Table 2.

Respondents answer to question 4 which asked: "what can you say attracts you most to a piece of communication?"

Table 2: Respondents views on what attracts them most to a piece of communication 2a. Staff

Headline	Picture	Colour
75 (78.81%)	13 (13.6%)	8 (8.3%)

Source: Field work (2021)

2b. Students

Headline	Picture	Colour
152 (54.7%)	108 (38.8%)	18 (6.5%)

Source: Field work (2021)

Out of the 96 members of staff respondents, 75 (78.1%) choose 'A' which is topic or headline. Thirteen (13.6%) for 'B' which is picture. The remaining 8 (8.3%) opted for 'C' which is colour. For the students, out of the 278 students in the sample, 152 (54.7%) choose 'A' which is topic or headline. 108 (38.8%) choose 'B' which is picture while the remaining 18 (6.5%) opted for 'C' which is colour.

Table 3: Respondents answer to choice of communication form**Respondents' choice of communication form****3a. Staff**

Story of event in text	Story of event in pictures	Story of event in audio record device
51 (53.1%)	34(35.4%)	11 (11.5%)

Source: Field Work (Z021)

3b. Students

Story of event in text	Story of event in pictures	Story of event in audio record device
51 (18.3%)	184 (66.2%)	43 (15.5%)

Source: Field Work (2021)

As can be seen in the above tables, in response to question number 5 which asked "If I left to choose, which would you? Out of the 96 members of staff in the sample, 51 (53.1%) opted for 'A' which means 'a story of an event presented in text'. Thirty four (34) i.e 35.4% stood for 'B' which means 'the same story of an event presented in pictures'. The remaining eleven (11) 11.5% chose 'C' which means 'the same story of an event presented in audio record/device'. For the students, out of the 278 sampled, 51 (18.3%) ticked 'A' which means 'a story of an event presented in text'. One hundred and eighty four (184), 66.2 %, relected which means lithe same story presented in pictures. The rest 43 (15.5%) wanted 'C' which means 'the same story presented in audio record/device'. A significant thing to note here is that, while majority of the staff Who can be said to represent the older generation chose to have information presented to them in text (as can be seen in the fact that out of the 96 members of staff in the sample, 51 (53.1%) chose text, 34 (35.4%) pictures, and 11 (11.5%) audio record/device), represent the younger generation showed more interest in taking information through pictures. This can be seen in the fact that out of the 278 students, 184 (66.2%) chose 'pictures' While only 51 (18.3%) chose 'text and 43 (15 5%) 'audio record/device'.

Table 4: Respondents on justification of their choice of communication form**4a. Staff**

Reasons by those who chose text:	Reasons by those who chose picture:
...text give more information; ...explain in more detail; ...is more durable; ... enable one go through anything,, and so on.	...picture attracts attention; ...is summarising in presentation of idea; etc
53.1%	46.9%

Source: Field Work (2021) 4b. Students

Reasons by those who chose picture:	
...picture attracts attention; ...believe in sight not story; ...don't have time to read; ...draws attention; ...more direct than reading; picture presents it all etc.	The rest of the students did not indicate reason for choice of text. Rather some of them, along with some staff, chose "the same story presented in audio record/device. Their reason, mainly, was that....it afforded the opportunity for one to be doing something else while listening and taking information.
184 or 66.2%	

Source: Field work (2021)

On question 3 which was "Justify your choice in 5 above", those who chose "story of an event presented in text" are in a slight majority among the staff (53.1%). They stated that they did so because texts give more detail; explain in more detail; is more enduring; can enable one go through any time; and so on. Those who chose "the same story of an event presented in pictures" among members of staff, (46.9%) stated that it was because pictures attract attention; are summarising in presentation of idea etc. For the students, the majority, 184 or 66.2 %, stated the following as their reasons for choosing pictures: Picture attracts attention, because We believe in sight not story; because people do not

have time to read; picture draws attention; people prefer picture because it is more direct than reading; most people do not like reading; pictures presents it all, and so on. The justification given by those who chose “the same story presented in audio record/device” by both staff members and students was that, summarily, it afforded the opportunity for one to be doing something else while listening and taking information.

Responses in questions on ranking of influences on reader

Table 5: Respondents ranking of the influences of (a) headline, (b) picture and (c) colour as factors that draw their attention to a newspaper. They were to rank them as cba, abc or bca.

5a. Staff

Abc	Cba	Bca	Total
81	Nil	Nil	81 (84.4%)
8, Erroneously ticked "B' {Picture}	7, Ticked 'C' {Colour} also in error		15 (15.6%)

Source: Field work (2021) **Sb.**

Students

Bca	Abc	cba	Total
11	18	6	135 (12.6%)
24-3, wrongly ticked	'A' =200	'B' =43	243 (87.4%)

Source: Field work (2021)

Question 4 asked the respondents to rank (a) headline, (b) picture and (c) colour according to their influence on them as factors that draw their attention to a newspaper. They were to rank them as cba, 'abc or bca. In response to this, 81 (84.4%) of the 96 staff members in the sample, ranked them as abc; no one ranked them as 'cba' or 'bca' while out of the remaining 15 (15.6%), 8 erroneously ticked 'B' and 7 others ticked 'A'. The students appeared more confused with this question. Out of the 278 students in the sample, only 35 (12.6%) ranked them correctly (bca = 11, abc = 18, and cba = 6). The rest, 243 (87.4%) erroneously ticked A = 200, B = 43.

Table 6: Respondents on whether they would say that these days people prefer information presented in picture than text.

6a: Staff

Options	Frequency	Percentage
'Yes'	93	96.9%
'No'	3	3.1%
Total	96	25.7%

Source: Field work (2021)

6b. Students

Options	Frequency	Percentage
'Yes'	265	95.3%
'No'	13	4.7%
Total	278	74.3%

Source: Field work (2021)

The tables on the question 5 which asked: "Would you say that these days people prefer information presented in picture than in text?" are explained thus: In response, 93 respondents or 96.9% out of 96 members of staff answered 'Yes' while only 3 (3.1%) answered 'No'. Out of the 278 students sampled, 265 (95.3%) answered 'Yes' to the question. Only 13 (4.7%) answered 'No'. This further buttresses the fact that pictorial communication commands the interest of the younger generation than any other. Note here, also, the shift among the staff members towards pictorial communication. Whereas on questions 4 and 5 the majority of them aligned with textual communication as revealed by the statistics, a majority of them, as reflected in question 8, answered 'Yes' just like the students.

Table 7: Respondents on why they answered ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ to the question: “If your answer is yes, why and if no, why?”

7a. Staff

Reasons by those who answered ‘Yes’	Reasons by those who answered ‘No’
...preference for information through pictures; ...people are attracted to what they see; ...pictures tell the story more; and so on.	...picture without words don’t inform much; etc.

7b. Students

Reasons by those who answered ‘Yes’	Reasons by those who answered ‘No’
....picture attracts audience; draws attention to information; love taking information through watching; no time to read; prefers taking information through picture because seeing is believing; etc.at times picture do not arouse curiosity but good headline does; information presented in text is accurate; because text has evidence; and other similar reasons.

Question number 6 which was “If your answer in 8 is yes, why and if no, why?” the above tables present the responses. Out of the 96 staff members in the sample, those that answered ‘Yes’, did so because; ‘they have preference for information through pictures; people are attracted to what they see; pictures tell the story more; reading culture dying; poor reading habit; and so on. Those who answered ‘No’ gave, among other reasons that “pictures without words do not inform much” etc. The students have the following reasons for answering ‘Yes’ to the question: “picture attracts audience; draws attention to information; love taking information through watching; there is no time to read; prefer taking information through picture because seeing is believing; picture tell the story most before text; picture more direct in information delivery than text-“Y1 reading”; and so on. Those that answered ‘No’ have such reasons as: “at times picture does not arouse curiosity but

good headline does; information presented in text is accurate; because text has evidence; and other similar reasons.

Table 8: Respondents on what they can say about picture in relation to communication 8a. Staff

...picture summaries story: draws attention; .. gives more information; ...helps explain incident to those not there more than words; ...aids comprehension and retention; ...picture can misrepresent information etc.

8b. Students

...picture gives light to information;... picture speaks louder than words; ... picture communicates even to non- literates;picture gives more details and also gives credibility; ...picture portrays information but not in detailed view; ...picture can be used in absence of text to pass information; ... picture communicates story easily; ... picture helps with better interpretation of information; ... picture facilitates understanding of headline news; etc.

On question number 7 which was: “What can you say about picture in relation to communication?”, members of staff have these to say: “Picture summaries story; draws attention; gives more information; helps explain incident to those not there than words; aids comprehension and retention; from picture one can know What the story is all about; picture can misrepresent information.” Also, according to the students: Picture gives light to information; picture communicates even to non -literate; picture tells a story more than a thousand words; picture gives more detail and also gives credibility; picture attracts attention making for quest to find out more; picture portrays information but not in details; picture can be used in absence of text to pass information; picture more attractive and understandable than text; picture communicates story easily, picture is the best way to express something, picture facilitates understanding the headline news etc.

Findings

- 1). Nearly 97% (96.9%) of staff members in the sample answered 'Yes' to the question "Would you say that people these days prefer information presented in picture than in texts?"
- 2). Also, 95.3% of students in the sample answered 'Yes' to the question 'would you say that people these days prefer information presented in picture than texts?"
- 3). Over 66% (66.2%) of the students chose story of an event presented in picture instead of texts
- 4). Over fifty per cent of the staff chose the option stated in 3 above.
- 5). Preferences of the respondents weigh heavily in favour of pictorial communication than textual.

Conclusion

The findings of this study are in agreement with the findings of similar and earlier studies cited in the empirical studies reviewed earlier in this study. This is evidenced by 96.9 per cent of the sampled staff members answering 'Yes' to the question – "Would you say that these days people prefer information presented in picture than in text?" and 95.3% of the sampled students answering 'Yes' to the same question. On the question- "If left to choose, which would you -(a) a story of an event presented in text, (b) the same story of an event presented in picture, or (c) the same story presented in audio record/device, 66.2% of students chose "a story of an event presented in pictures".

Again going by the findings of the study, it is reasonable to conclude that the present generation prefers taking information through viewing (visual communication). The few who still prefer textual communication do so for reasons of the opportunity it offers one to read and take-in the information at their convenience (durability). The few who prefer taking information

through audio record or device do so because it affords them the opportunity to be doing something else while taking-in information. This situation portends a gloomier future for reading culture particularly with the ever advancing information and communication technology (ICT).

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