

## The importance of visual communication in the field of Data Journalism

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### **Abstract**

*While attempting to convey a message or idea, it's usually easier and more effective to do so face-to-face than on paper or via email. This might seem so because written or audio communication has certain limitations that could mess up your message or result in misunderstanding or miscommunication. That is when multimedia technology comes in picture. Audiovisual communication breaks down the traditional barriers of written communication to attain the result of the audience understanding the message easily, resulting in better discussion in business, education and personal applications; as well as mass communication and journalism.*

*In the past, journalists had one responsibility: reporting the news. But today news stories disseminate as the incidents unfold, from multiple sources. Thus, gathering, filtering and visualizing events has a growing value. Huge amounts of data are available, but exploiting them is not an easy task. Data journalism can be defined as a journalism specially in which numerical data is used in the production and distribution of information.*

*This research paper investigates the characteristics of data journalism and the essential visual tools and their importance in the field of data journalism.*

**Key Words:** *Data Journalism, Data-Driven Journalism, Visual Tools, Visual Communication, Multimedia*

### **Introduction**

Data Journalism simply does not mean journalism done with data. Data also does not mean just numbers on a spreadsheet. **Data journalism** is "a way of enhancing reporting and news writing with proper application and examination of statistics in order to provide a deeper insight into a news story and to highlight relevant data". One trend in the digital era of journalism has been to spread information to the public via interactive online content through data visualization tools such as tables, graphs, maps, info graphics, micro sites, and visual worlds. The in-depth examination of such data sets can lead to more concrete results and observations regarding timely topics of interest. In addition, data journalism may reveal hidden issues that seemingly were not a priority in the news coverage". (Antonopoulos & Karyotakis, 2020)

Data is often the source of data journalism, or it can often be an instrument with which the story is told—or at times, it can be both. Like any source, it should be treated with skepticism; and like any medium or tool, we should be conscious of how it can shape and restrict the stories that are created with it.

### **Importance of Data Journalism**

Today news stories are flowing in as they happen, from multiple sources, eye-witnesses, blogs and are filtered through a huge network of social connections, being ranked, commented and more often than not: ignored. This is why the importance of data journalism has been recognized. Gathering, filtering and visualizing has seen a growing value in journalism. In the field of journalism, little points of information that are often not relevant in a single instance become massively important when viewed from the right angle. This is where the importance of visual aids in the form of data analysis comes into existence.

The value of data journalism can be compared in the first place with the value of traditional journalism. The need to be informed of events that take place all over the world in a real time has been satisfied by the journalists, who inform the public. Additionally, the problem includes, apart from distance, other

issues as for example complicated information and facts concerning politics and economy, that are important for the citizens to know but they are difficult to understand.

Once again, the journalist has the role of publishing all this information in a simple way. (Lesage & Hackett, 2014) (Kalatzi & Bratsa, 2018)

The work of journalists shifts its main focus from being the first ones to report to being the onestelling us what a certain development might actually mean by using the visual tools with data analysis. The range of topics can be far and wide like financial crisis, the economics behind the products we use, the misuse of funds or political blunders, election results, etc. All this can be presented in a compelling data visualization which leaves little room to argue with the true nature of the news story

This is why journalists should see data as an opportunity to make their stories relevant and newsworthy. For example, subject of unemployment and how it affects people based on their age, gender, education can be presented in the form of info graphics. Using data transforms something abstract into something everyone can understand and relate to. Personalized calculators can be created to help people to make decisions, be it buying a car, a house, deciding on an education or professional path in life or keeping a hard check on costs to keep out of debt. They can examine the dynamics of a complicated situation like riots or political debates, show the flaws and help everyone to see possible solutions to complex problems.

There is a promise in visualization which excites newsrooms, making them look for a new type of reporter. For freelancers proficiency with data provides a route to new offerings and stable pay, too. Instead of hiring journalists to immediately fill make low-value content, effective use of data could pave a way for interactive packages, where spending a week on solving one question is the only way to do it. This is how the face of journalism and the future of journalists evolve.

### **Why does Visual Communication matter?**

Data journalism is an umbrella term which encompasses set of tools, techniques and approaches to storytelling. It can include everything from traditional computer-assisted reporting to the most technologically forefront data visualization and news applications. The one common goal is a journalistic one: providing honest information and analysis to help inform the public all about important issues of the day.

Despite the growing interest in data journalism in newsrooms and its more recent emergence as an academic discipline, there is a need for systematic research on the state-of-the-art and current data journalism-related practices in newsrooms. (Heravi & Mirko, 2020)

Visual communication in the simplest form is a way of communicating an idea with the aid of visual tools. Visual communication, which is based on the use of visual elements, such as drawings, illustrations and electronic images, certainly has made it simpler for the author to explain information that is important to the reader. Similarly without the help of any visual means, any reader tends to take time or even fails to digest facts, which is essentially why visual learning is replacing the traditional methods of textbooks and whiteboards in many educational institutes.

The phrase “A picture speaks a thousand words” might go amiss in the field of journalism; yet when a news story is presented with a picture or a video it seems more honest and authentic.

Similarly the use of other visual aids like tables, graphs, info graphics, maps, etc. can never go unnoticed in a news story. For example, in the covid crisis, the numerical data of the ones affected, the numeric data/pie charts depicting the deaths in the city seemed more accurate other than the normal audio-visual technique of news telling. Graphs which include pie charts, line charts, bar charts, etc. explain different quantities which help in understanding the statistical data even better than the verbal format. One more example of a visual tool can be maps. They are usually helpful to handout important information relating to the geographical areas of that particular news story. Infographics, images or diagrams usually come in handy while explaining essential information which generally does not show in just the photograph.

These essential visual tools help in not just making the audience aware about the relevant pieces of the

news story but also throw an impact on the audience. They grab the attention of the audience and make the stories more engaging in terms of sharing information.

### Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the true nature of data journalism
2. To examine the different visual tools and aids used in data journalism
3. To understand the importance of visual communication in data journalism

### Research Methodology

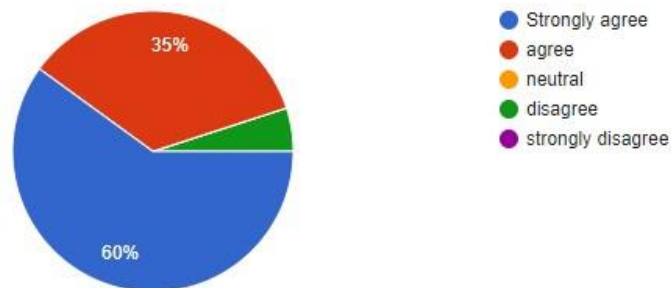
To understand the importance of visual communication in data journalism, the researcher has done a descriptive study based on purposive sampling. Descriptive study usually analyses the “what” of the research problem. Similarly, this research has tried to understand the characteristics of data visualization and its effective use in journalism. For this, the researcher has used the tool of questionnaires distributed among the group of students of journalism; both bachelors and masters. The purpose of this sampling is to evaluate the effectiveness of visual aids and understand their importance both from the producer/audience perspective.

The secondary sources of this study involve different research papers, articles and books which have examined the field the data journalism and its effects in the society.

### Findings and Analysis

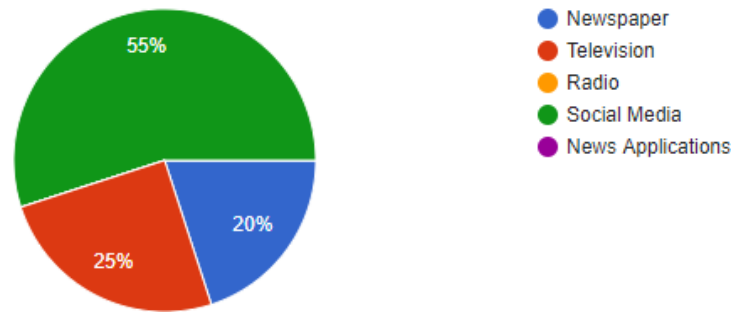
Do you think use of pie chart, bar graphs etc. makes the news easier to understand especially when data is presented

20 responses



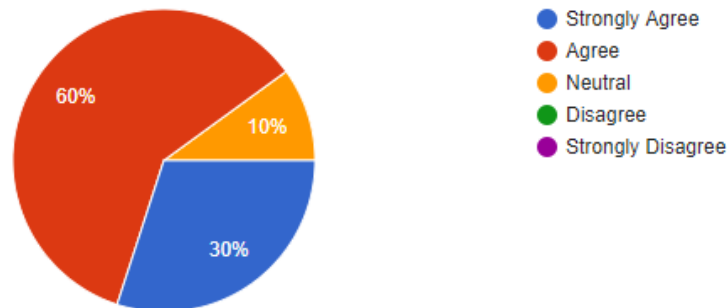
How do you consume news?

20 responses



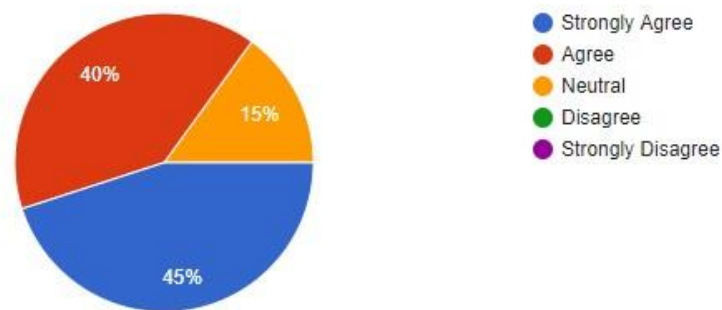
Do you think graphic content with numbers helps to enhance the news quality

20 responses



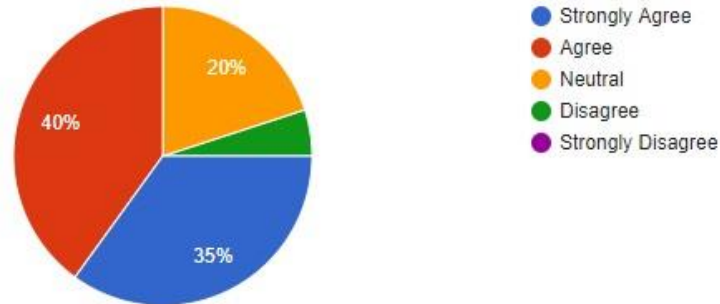
Do you think when it comes to quantitative data in the news, it is most effective when it is represented through the means of pie diagrams, bar graphs or similar visual aids

20 responses



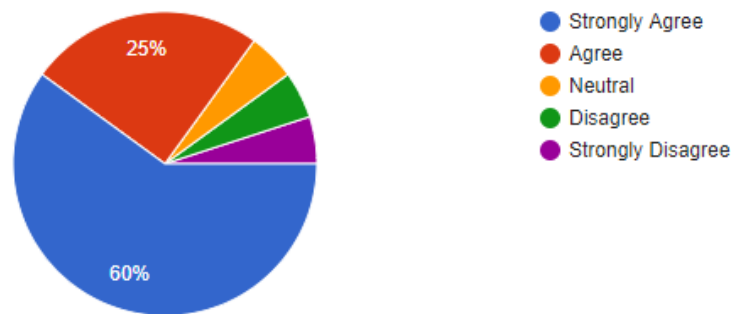
Do you think effective use of infographics, pie diagrams, bar graphs, maps and other visual aids is a useful in news presentation in the digital age

20 responses



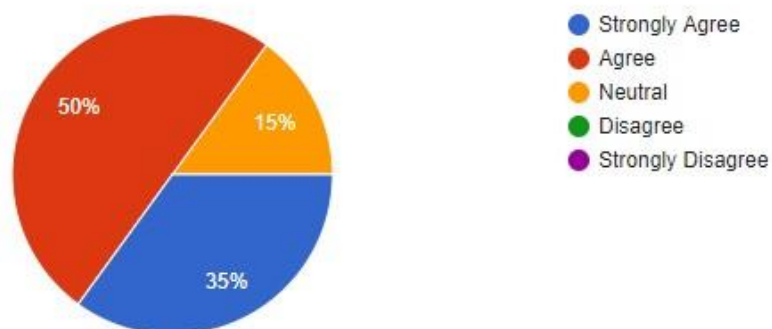
Colour scheme is equally important along with the visual aids in news stories

20 responses



Multimedia content; which includes the use of audio-visual aids in storytelling, will be the future of journalism

20 responses



## Inference & findings –

We collected 20 survey responses. From the survey we found that 60 percent people strongly agree and 35 percent people agree that, data presented using graphics (eg. Pie chart, bar graph) makes the news easy to understand. Color scheme and presentation of graphics is equally important. News quality can be enhanced by the effective use of graphics especially in data journalism. Today in the digital era when people are consuming news on social media, use of graphics in the means of visual communication is of utmost important, especially when the news is data driven like election results, corona pandemic etc. Data journalism gives authenticity, credibility and if presented with the help of visual communication then it further improves presentation and understanding!

## Conclusion & Scope of Study

Data-driven journalism is the future. Journalists not only need to be tech-savvy but also data-savvy. The challenges and opportunities presented by the digital revolution continue to disrupt journalism. In an age of information abundance, journalists and citizens alike all need better tools. As we fight with the consumption challenges presented by this increase of data, new publishing platforms are also empowering everyone to collect and share data digitally, turning it into relevant information. Around the world, the bond between data and journalism is growing stronger. In an age of big data, the increasing importance of data journalism lies in the capability of its users to provide context, clarity and especially find the truth in the expanding amount of digital content in the world. In the information age, journalists are needed more than ever to curate, verify, analyze and synthesize information and data. In that context, data journalism has abundant importance in society.

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