

## EDITORIAL

**BENGT JOHANSSON**

University of Gothenburg

**DARREN LILLEKER**

Bournemouth University

**ANASTASIA VENETI**

Bournemouth University

**ORLA VIGSÖ**

University of Gothenburg

### ABSTRACT

*This article sets out the scope for the Journal of Visual Political Communication, the growing body of research in this field and introduces some of the key debates which are discussed by the essays in this special relaunch edition. The brief discussion firstly introduces power and symbolism, and who is represented and empowered through visual political communication. Secondly, the role of visuals in diplomacy and international relations. Thirdly, how visuals give a sense of proximity and closeness, exploring the role of photojournalists. Fourthly, the use of visuals for strategic impression management by political actors and the notion of authenticity. Fifthly, the role that user-generated visuals play within political communication. And, sixthly, the debates around computer-assisted, automated and artificial intelligence as tools for the analysis of visuals. The article gives insights into some of the important strands of research, debates which the journal seeks to explore.*

This special edition of the *Journal of Visual Political Communication* symbolizes the new direction of the journal. We have taken a slow evolution away from the early days of being *The Poster* to focus some of the current and highly pertinent themes which are at the heart of debates in the field of political

### KEYWORDS

visuals  
politics  
visual communication  
research  
key debates  
relaunch

communication. Political communication has always had a strongly visual component. The early research on wartime propaganda by Carl Hovland and his colleagues included the study of film and posters and their juxtaposition with text to create the maximum persuasive effect (see e.g. Hovland 1948). The visual appearance of candidates became the subject of intense debate following frequently debated research that demonstrated the differential effects on audiences of exposure to televisual imagery of radio audio (for a debate see Druckman 2003). Research has grown exponentially exploring the myriad uses of visuals for political purposes.

The literature has especially burgeoned with the spread of digital communication technologies. Communication within these environments encompasses the use of poster-style images but has broadened the notion of political communication. Images of politicians dressed casually in informal settings is at the core of questions around the communication of authenticity (e.g. Sonnevend and Steiert 2022). The culture of creating, sharing and the influential role of memes, meanwhile, draws in debates about innovative methods of persuasive communication which can be produced by any campaigner, activist or minimally tech-savvy citizen (Russmann and Veneti 2022). Such debates are ones we seek to explore through the articles published in this journal, as well as broader perspectives. Our scope for visual political communication extends from the billboard poster to the campaign meme; to the set piece performance on a global stage to the informal and off-guard snapshot; to the official portrait of a leader to graffiti on a wall and everything in between. We will publish studies of the production of visuals, their spread and dissemination and their impact on the cognition and behaviour of their audiences. We are also interested in advancements in methodologies. To reflect the advances in the production and dissemination of visual political communication we need to explore the extent that traditional methods are still appropriate and what new methods can be developed to aid a better understanding of these phenomenon. Similarly the effects research needs to develop innovative ways to understand what captures the attention of audiences, but also how different visuals impact on the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of their various audiences. This relaunch special edition attempts to capture the mission that, as sketched out above, we have set out for the journal.

Giorgia Aiello highlights the notions of power and symbolism which have always been present in visual communication. Her piece highlights how visuals award power to some while disempowering others. Her essay raises questions about representation and misrepresentation, inclusion and exclusion; placing the notions of power which are central to politics at the heart of debates on the construction of visual political communication.

Roland Bleiker takes us on a tour of the field of visuals as a form of diplomacy and a tool of international relations. The essay highlights the representation of inter-nation relations, their peoples and the role imagery plays in defining values, nation brands and the homogeneity and diversity of national cultures.

Jenni Mäenpää focuses on how images give us insights into far off lands and context, they give the distant often very close proximity, build bridges between peoples. The essay explores this through the work of the photojournalist, a figure who moves between lands and communities not only providing rich insights to audiences but also giving a voice to those towards which they point their lenses. We also learn about the challenges the photojournalist faces when dealing with editorial decisions and harsh economics of the corporate media.

1.  
2.  
3.  
4.  
5.  
6.  
7.  
8.  
9.  
10.  
11.  
12.  
13.  
14.  
15.  
16.  
17.  
18.  
19.  
20.  
21.  
22.  
23.  
24.  
25.  
26.  
27.  
28.  
29.  
30.  
31.  
32.  
33.  
34.  
35.  
36.  
37.  
38.  
39.  
40.  
41.  
42.  
43.  
44.  
45.  
46.  
47.  
48.  
49.  
50.  
51.  
52.

1. Philippe De Vries explores the key debates around impression manage-  
 2. ment and the centrality of the strategic use of imagery for the communi-  
 3. cation or perhaps manipulation, of citizen perceptions. The visual here is a  
 4. construct, a piece of strategic political communication. The essay raises ques-  
 5. tions regarding the impact of the range of images produced by politicians on  
 6. their perceived credibility and their appropriateness as representatives.

7. Franziska Marquart firstly highlights the audio-visual turn in political  
 8. communication, in particular accelerated by emergence of TikTok as a social  
 9. phenomenon. The essay then moves on to discuss the opportunities that such  
 10. forms of largely user-generated content tell us about society in the digital age.  
 11. The debate raises questions about what we can learn holistically about the  
 12. psychology of the citizen as they become key players within visual political  
 13. communication.

14. Erik Bucy explores the computational analysis of images, discussing the  
 15. breakthroughs in technology that supports the big data approach to the detec-  
 16. tion of the content of images as well as the challenges to perfecting a task the  
 17. human eye does in nanoseconds. The essay also highlights, as other essays do,  
 18. of the importance of drawing on the insights, skills and expertise that are the  
 19. heart of other disciplines.

20. The essays offer snapshots of the way the discipline of visual political  
 21. communication has grown and developed and offer important pointers for  
 22. future research. We hope that cumulatively they capture the imagination of  
 23. the visual and audience research community and act as inspiration for the  
 24. further growth of our rich and diverse discipline.

25. Bengt Johansson

26. Darren Lilleker

27. Anastasia Veneti

28. Orla Vigsö

## 30. REFERENCES

31. Druckman, J. N. (2003), 'The power of television images: The first Kennedy-  
 32. Nixon debate revisited', *Journal of Politics*, 65:2, pp. 559–71.  
 33. Hovland, C. I. (1948), 'Social communication', *Proceedings of the American*  
 34. *Philosophical Society*, 92:5, pp. 371–75.  
 35. Russmann, U. and Veneti, A. (2022), 'Image as data and visual methods', in  
 36. A. Ceron (ed.), *Elgar Encyclopedia of Technology and Politics*, Cheltenham:  
 37. Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 90–94.  
 38. Sonnevend, J. and Steiert, O. (2022), 'The power of predictability: How Angela  
 39. Merkel constructed her authenticity on Instagram', *New Media & Society*,  
 40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221138472>.

## 43. CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

44. Bengt Johansson is professor of journalism, media and communication at the  
 45. University of Gothenburg. His research focuses on media, power and democ-  
 46. racy in the context of political communication and crisis/risk communication.

47. Contact: University of Gothenburg, 405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden.

48. E-mail: [bengt.johansson@jmg.gu.se](mailto:bengt.johansson@jmg.gu.se)

49.  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8980-1677>

Dr Darren Lilleker is professor in political communication in the Faculty of Media & Communication, Bournemouth University and convenor of the Centre for Politics & Media Research.

Contact: Bournemouth University, Fern Barrow, Poole BH12 5BB, UK.  
E-mail: dlilleker@bournemouth.ac.uk

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0403-8121>

Anastasia Veneti is associate professor at the Faculty of Media and Communication, Bournemouth University (United Kingdom). Her research lays at the intersection of media and politics, including political communication, digital political campaigning, media framing, protests and social movements, visual communication and photojournalism.

Contact: Bournemouth University, Fern Barrow, Poole BH12 5BB, UK.  
E-mail: aveneti@bournemouth.ac.uk

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6449-9830>

Orla Vigsö is professor in media studies at the University of Gothenburg. His research includes political studies, language, and rhetoric with areas such as public relations and organizational communication.

Contact: University of Gothenburg, 405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden.  
E-mail: Orla.vigso@jmg.gu.se

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2724-6081>

Bengt Johansson, Darren Lilleker, Anastasia Veneti and Orla Vigsö have asserted their right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the authors of this work in the format that was submitted to Intellect Ltd.

---

1.  
2.  
3.  
4.  
5.  
6.  
7.  
8.  
9.  
10.  
11.  
12.  
13.  
14.  
15.  
16.  
17.  
18.  
19.  
20.  
21.  
22.  
23.  
24.  
25.  
26.  
27.  
28.  
29.  
30.  
31.  
32.  
33.  
34.  
35.  
36.  
37.  
38.  
39.  
40.  
41.  
42.  
43.  
44.  
45.  
46.  
47.  
48.  
49.  
50.  
51.  
52.