

What Is Visual Journalism?

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What IS Visual Journalism? It isn't just television of course. But it's not only online pie charts and graphs and representations of data. Visual journalism is about using technology to make news more interactive, more exciting and creative, and make users more involved.

This article by Polis intern Arnuradha Santhanam.

The BBC set up its new “visual journalism” unit in 2012, which combined its existing TV and online graphic departments into one multiplatform team. It was set up with the aim to provide cross-platform connectivity and content both in the UK and worldwide.

Amanda Farnsworth, a former editor at BBC TV News and an alumna of the London School of Economics, was appointed the head of the Visual Journalism unit when it was set up. She calls visual journalism new lingo, new jargon that is ‘floating around in the ether’.



News is no longer just about providing information to the masses, says Farnsworth. It is about getting users' attention, drawing them in and holding their interest with increasingly interactive experiences. The BBC did this with the Olympics, the events surrounding Oscar Pistorius in 2012, and several other significant events.

With the internet becoming progressively more significant in our lives, and attention spans waning, journalists need to inform readers and users in fewer words and significantly less time. Visual journalism, in Farnsworth's words, is for those who prefer news ‘snacks’, quick snippets of information that tell them what they want to know, as opposed to in-depth analysis, or ‘meals’.

It isn't just about images but moving 3D models, quizzes, surveys, and newer, brighter ways of not only presenting data to the public but getting them involved in it, making the reader a part of the story instead of just a consumer of information.

With users becoming more involved, they are more likely to share news, which then draws in far larger audiences than before and makes the news itself more accessible, both in terms of general demographics and in the knowledge it provides.

Ms. Farnsworth says being a journalist is no longer just about critical analysis alone – one must find a way to marry technical know-how to editorial knowledge. You need a nose for news and data skills to back it up.

Although technology, and specifically, the internet, has become as ubiquitous as it has, are individual ‘journalists’ who post online phasing out the news corporation? “No,” says Farnsworth, “while I really welcome everyone becoming a journalist, there are certain things only a professional journalist can do. When you have to confirm a news item, or verify certain information, a journalist can do that with a phone call, and have access to resources a

citizen journalist might not. It is this that differentiates them. I do welcome citizen journalists, though.”

For more information on the increasing relevance of interactive journalism and what visual journalism is really about, (and some cats!) read about Amanda Farnsworth’s [Polis lecture](#) on the Polis blog later this week.

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