

LSE Research Festival Workshops: Penny Hilton on representing research on film

This Michaelmas Term LSE Research Festival ran a series of workshops encouraging researchers to use visual representation to communicate research. In the first of a series of interviews involving the practitioners of these workshops, Penny Hilton, course leader for the MA in Graphic Moving Image from University of the Arts London, talks us through her workshop on using film to communicate social science research.



What unique benefit do you think film gives to the communication of social science research?

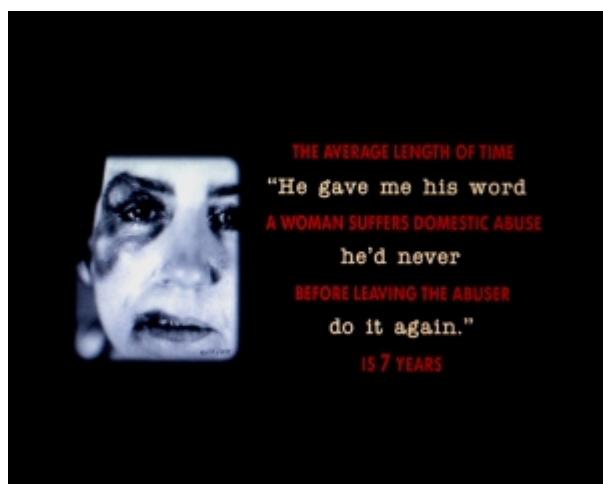
We know that the brain finds it easier to process information presented as images rather than as words or numbers. In general an image brings a wealth of opportunity beyond the written word, assuming the reader is time starved. It gives an opportunity to show something succinctly and, as with all good graphic design, get to the heart of the story

Movement, or at least changing images allow us to illustrate the story and get to the core facts with emotion, more than a static image can. The narrative is able to be released at a controlled rate, which opens up many options such as metaphor, juxtaposition, intrigue, humour and drama which all can have an effect on impact and delivery.



What are your main dos and don'ts for researchers attempting to use film in their research?

- Keep it simple. I know it sounds obvious but one high impact story told well is far better than cramming in a load of confusing information. You can always direct your viewer to a link for the full story.
- Do allow plenty of read time on captions.
- Do think about typography. Use only one or, maximum, two fonts.
- Don't have your text too small. Think how the film will be viewed: on a smart phone, tablet or even the cinema. This film about domestic violence (below left) I designed for cinema, and would not have worked on a smaller screen.



Do you have a particular favourite film that engages with the social sciences? Why is this your perfect example?

A film from 2008 I never tire of watching is 'The Girl Effect' (above right), which launched the excellent movement by the same name. The website of which is <http://www.girleffect.org>. The film can be viewed here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WlvmE4_KMNw

It works because it demands attention, and completely engages us in that you have to fill in the blanks yourself or miss the point. It's based on strong design using a simple, minimum colour palette. It is well written, beautifully crafted in pacing and audio, and even manages to include humour. It is of course a subject after my own heart as I am interested in the subject of equality and humanitarian issues in general.

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