

Visual argumentation in TED (influential videos from expert speakers)

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Abstract: One of the areas where argumentation and visual argumentation can be applied, is public speaking. Sharing ideas in front of smaller or bigger groups of people has happened for centuries and this is also the main concept behind TED, which has become one of the biggest platforms for public speaking worldwide nowadays. The visual elements in a TED talk can play a very significant role in the success of a presentation. I have chosen to analyze 10 TED talks which contain different forms of visual argumentation and which can be categorized as particularly influential. On the basis of my research I have divided the visual images used in TED talks into 8 categories. I have also listed 10 functions of visual images in TED talks. The topic about the significance and the effect of visual arguments in TED presentations have not been an object of research in academic publications yet.

Key words: argumentation, video, image, speech, TED, visual, presentation.

Introduction

One of the areas where argumentation and visual argumentation can be applied, is public speaking. Sharing ideas in front of smaller or bigger groups of people has happened for centuries and this is also the main concept behind TED - one of the biggest platforms for public speaking worldwide nowadays. Visual images and visual arguments are widely used in various ways in many TED presentations. The functions and forms of visual images in TED have specific communicative and technical manifestations.

For the past 11 years, more than 2200 presentations have been posted online and I have analysed 10 of them. These 10 presentations which contain visual arguments, have been the object of my research. Visualization is an integral part of the text. The functions of visual arguments are to illustrate and prove the statements in different stages of this work and research.

There is not just one way to use visual arguments in a TED talk. Such arguments come in surprisingly many different forms – photographs, videos, cartoons, charts, satellite images, objects on the stage etc. However, not all slides, containing images, are visual arguments.

Theoretical observations about visual argumentation

Visual argumentation is one of the basic argumentative methods used in the TED presentations. The usage of visual images helps for the better visualization of ideas and theses. Visual argumentation in TED is a diverse and high-quality method of argumentation.

The idea that there could be visual arguments was not popular until the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century [1]. The rhetorical aspect of visual arguments has been questioned, and arguments have traditionally been thought of as verbal phenomena. However, the narratives we formulate for ourselves from visual images can easily shape our attitudes, this meaning that visual arguments can persuade. We should bear in mind that just as not all influences that result in changes of behavior count as persuasion, visual or otherwise, so not all cases of persuasion count as arguments.

There are a few reasons for the usage of verbal arguments [2]. They are permanent (in the meaning that they can last for hundreds of years), and one can communicate visually with much more force and immediacy than verbal communication allows. That is so because

visual communication can be more efficient than verbal communication and because the audience of visual argumentation does not need to be literate and competent to understand it. For these reasons, visual argumentation is included in many TED presentations.

Corpus and object of study

For the past 11 years, more than 2200 presentations have been posted online and I have analysed 10 of them. As an object of my thesis, I have chosen 10 TED of these presentations, which I have categorized as particularly influential and which contain visual arguments.

The aim of this research is to explore the usage of visual images and visual argumentation in TED presentations. The aim includes also a review of types and functions, as well as their application in the presentations.

The sources of visual arguments that I have come across in the presentation can be divided into three main categories. The first category consists of images and videos that contain scientific data, such as charts presenting statistics, satellite images, and photographs from researches and experiments. In the second category, there are photographs, videos and cartoons made by the speaker or his team. The third kind of visual arguments are images that the speaker does not own, but has used, because they illustrate a certain idea well.

My work is based on two basic groups of presentations that I find persuasive. In the first group, there are the “popular” videos. I have chosen five TED talks, which are uploaded online and are in “The most popular talks of all time” category on www.ted.com. These videos have reached the widest audience so that is what makes them influential. However, not all of these talks contain visual arguments – such arguments are not always necessary for a good speech.

The five talks with many views, which I have worked on, are: *Your body language shapes who you are* (Amy Cuddy); *The best stats you’ve ever seen* (Hans Rosling); *How to spot a liar* (Pamela Meyer); *Looks aren’t everything. Believe me, I’m a model* (Cameron Russel) and *The power of vulnerability* (Brené Brown).

The second group of videos I have worked on is based on presentations of TED Prize winners. The aim of the annual TED Prize is to help a person or an organization to spread a valuable idea. The winner makes a presentation before their project has started or soon after it has started since they are always looking for support and want more people to get involved.

The five talks of TED Prize winners I have worked on are *Teach every child about food* (Jamie Oliver); *Build a school in the cloud* (Sugata Mitra); *My wish: Use art to turn the world inside out* (JR); *Hunting for Peru’s lost civilizations – with satellites* (Sarah Parcak) and *Everyone around you has a story the world needs to hear* (David Isay).

Apart from their influence, the ten TED talks I have chosen have one more thing in common – they include slides, videos or both as a part of their argumentative strategy.

Research methods

The analysis is multifactorial. The research methods start with a focus on the visual arguments; then the depth of the research is reached slowly by analyzing the different types of visual argument and their functions in certain TED presentations and in TED presentations in general.

How persuasion works

Persuasion is likely to occur via either a central or a peripheral route and this is noticeable in the 10 TED talks explored in this chapter. The central route of persuasion means focusing on the arguments. In TED talks like *Your body language shapes who you are*, *The best stats*

you've ever seen and *How to spot a liar* visual images are used as visual arguments and they are the most convincing arguments in these talks. In other talks like *The power of vulnerability* and *Everyone around you has a story the world needs to hear* again we encounter the central route to persuasion, but in these cases the main arguments are not visual arguments although visual images are present.

Another popular way of persuasion is the peripheral route to persuasion – focusing on cues that trigger automatic acceptance without much thinking. This way of persuasion is also used in some TED talks. Central route processing often swiftly changes explicit attitudes. Peripheral route processing more slowly builds implicit attitudes. The usage of both ways of persuasion in one and the same speech makes the speech more likely to be persuasive than if only one of the routes is used.

Among the ingredients of persuasion explored by social psychologists are these four: the communicator, the message, how the message is communicated, and the audience. The argumentative power of the communicator, the message and how it is communicated can be influenced by visual arguments as seen in some TED talks. For example, the communicator's credibility (perceived expertise and trustworthiness) can be influenced by the clothing of the speaker as Cameron Russell proves in *Looks aren't everything. Believe me, I'm a model*.

A message can also become more persuasive if visual arguments trigger the peripheral route of persuasion. This is possible by sending an emotional message. Jamie Oliver does so in his talk *Teach every child about food* by showing videos and images of obese children and adults. These visual arguments are both reasonable and emotional. The emotional side of them will have big influence on a part of the audience and the reasonable side will influence other members of the audience.

The “effect of good feelings” is another peripheral way of persuasion. Messages become more persuasive through association with good feelings. In some TED talks, the speakers use visual images as jokes to make the audience feel good.

Good feelings often enhance persuasion, partly by enhancing positive thinking and partly by linking good feelings with the message. Messages can also be effective by evoking negative emotions, for example fear or disgust. The more frightened and vulnerable people feel, the more they respond. The effectiveness of fear-arousing communications is being applied in ads discouraging not only smoking but also risky sexual behaviours and drinking and driving. Again, it is Jamie Oliver who uses this kind of arguments in his 2010 speech. With images of coffins for obese people, unhealthy food, and children and adults who have health problems because of the food they eat, he triggers the audiences fear of death, diseases and obesity.

Results

As a result of my research, I have divided the visual images used in the 10 TED talks into 8 categories:

1. Photographs with/without text – this is one of the most commonly used types of visual images. The photographs can serve many different purposes.
2. Videos– videos are also widely used in many TED talks. In most cases, they are used as visual arguments.
3. Animations – animations are not regularly used in TED talks, but they be very useful for illustrating sound extracts that are not originally accompanied by any visual images.
4. Slides containing text – some slides used in the presentations do not contain any images, only text. Such slides normally emphasize on a certain word or a couple of words which are particularly important in a certain speech.
5. Demonstrations on stage – some visual arguments are not shown on a screen on the TED stage. They are brought physically on stage by the speaker.

6. Maps – maps are not shown in TED presentations regularly. Normally, they are used when the speaker wants to clarify which part of the world they are talking about and when this has particular importance for the purposes of the speech.

7. Satellite images – this kind of images are applicable only in a very limited number of TED talks. They can be used to prove the existence of an object.

8. Charts with statistics– this is a universal kind of visual arguments which can be applied in many TED talks. When accurate, statistics can be used as an undeniable proof.

TED talks feature visual images for different reasons. Some do not function as visual arguments at all. They have other functions. Often, one visual image has more than one function. I have listed 10 such functions:

1. Comical function – certain slides make the audience laugh and this is a desirable effect.
2. To form the frame of the talk – some slides are used to mark the beginning, subtopics, end, or other significant parts of a talk. This makes the talk appear well structured.
3. Visualisation – photographs are very often used to illustrate the words of the speaker. Thus, the audience gets to understand better what the speaker means.
4. To present data – slides that contain statistics and present data are a very powerful tool in visual argumentation. Such slides sum up the results from researches, present accurate and sometimes unexpected results.
5. Credibility - some visual arguments support statements that are hard to believe.
6. To make a statement – some slides are not used to give arguments, but only to make a statement. Thus, the speaker emphasizes on the statement as an important part of the speech.
7. To give a proof – some visual images function as arguments.
8. To give an explanation – visual images can explain how something is done/made, how something happens.
9. To attract the attention of the audience – a visual image is sometimes used to direct the attention of the members of the audience to the stage.
10. To give an emotionally based argument – some visual images and videos can give not only rational, but also emotionally based argument.

Conclusion

Visual argumentation is widely used in the platform for public speaking TED. Visual arguments play multiple different roles in the TED talks. Such arguments can take different forms. The TED presentations have turned into a new genre in communication and visual argumentation plays a significant role in achieving the goals of the speakers. Opportunities for the application of visual images as visual arguments in TED presentation and their combination with other elements of the presentations have been identified and analysed.

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Appendix 1

List of analyzed TED talks:

TED talk	Speaker	Total views as of March 2017	Date filmed
Your body language shapes who you are	Amy Cuddy	39,492,626	June 2012
Teach every child about food	Jamie Oliver	7,301,180	February 2010
The best stats you've ever seen	Hans Rosling	11,479,339	February 2006
Build a School in the Cloud	Sugata Mitra	2,773,809	February 2013
How to spot a liar	Pamela Meyer	15,543,693	July 2011
My wish: Use art to turn the world inside out	JR	2,560,330	March 2011
Looks aren't everything. Believe me, I'm a model.	Cameron Russell	17,658,325	October 2012
Hunting for Peru's lost civilizations – with satellites	Sarah Parcak	947,592	June 2016
Everyone around you has	David Isay	1,455,935	March 2015

a story the world needs to hear			
The power of vulnerability	Brené Brown	28,650,732	June 2010

Appendix 2

The TED Prize Winners

Year	Winner	Project name
2005	Bono	ONE.org
	Edward Burtynsky	THE GREENS
	Robert Fischell	Portable TMS
2006	Larry Brilliant	InSTEDD
	Jehane Noujaim	Pangea Day
	Cameron Sinclair	Open Architecture Network
2007	Bill Clinton	CHAI: Rwanda
	Edward O. Wilson	Encyclopedia of Life
	James Nachtwey	XDR-TB.org
2008	Neil Turok	AIMS: Next Einstein Initiative
	Dave Eggers	Once Upon a School
	Karen Armstrong	Charter for Compassion
2009	Sylvia Earle	Mission Blue
	Jill Tarter	SETILive
	José Antonio Abreu	Sistema Fellows Program
2010	Jamie Oliver	Food Revolution
2011	JR	INSIDE OUT
2012	City 2.0	The City 2.0
2013	Sugata Mitra	School in the Cloud
2014	Charmian Gooch	Global Witness
2015	David Isay	StoryCorps.me
2016	Sarah Parcak	GlobalXplorer
2017	Raj Panjabi	Community Health Academy

Appendix 3

The 25 most popular TED talk of all times as of March 2017

Name of the talk	Speaker	Total views as of March 2017
Do schools kill creativity?	Ken Robinson	43,840,091
Your body language shapes who you are	Amy Cuddy	39,492,939
How great leaders inspire action	Simon Sinek	30,942,139
The power of vulnerability	Brené Brown	28,650,892
10 things you didn't know about orgasm	Mary Roach	21,286,546
My stroke of insight	Jill Bolte Taylor	20,181,362
Why we do what we do	Tony Robbins	19,185,402

Looks aren't everything. Believe me, I'm a model.	Cameron Russell	17,658,382
The puzzle of motivation	Dan Pink	17,597,451
How to speak so that people want to listen	Julian Treasure	17,281,594
The power of introverts	Susan Cain	16,195,860
The thrilling potential of SixthSense technology	Pranav Mistry	15,547,556
How to spot a liar	Pamela Meyer	15,543,761
This is what happens when you reply to spam email	James Veitch	15,411,624
The happy secret to better work	Shawn Achor	15,038,223
How I held my breath for 17 minutes	David Blaine	14,007,995
The surprising science of happiness	Dan Gilbert	13,895,847
Underwater astonishments	David Gallo	13,499,093
The art of misdirection	Apollo Robbins	13,418,760
What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study on happiness	Robert Waldinger	13,290,993
How to make stress your friend	Kelly McGonigal	13,139,765
Brain magic	Keith Barry	12,536,451
Your elusive creative genius	Elizabeth Gilbert	12,427,592
The danger of a single story	Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie	11,833,187
The best stats you've ever seen	Hans Rosling	11,479,463

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