

## PHOTOGRAPHY AS A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

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### Absztrakt

#### A FÉNYKÉPEZÉS, MINT KOMMUNIKÁCIÓS ESZKÖZ

Egy kép többet ér ezer szónál. A következőkben a fényképezés kommunikációban betöltött szerepét vizsgáljuk meg az alábbi szempontok alapján: 1) Írás kontra fényképezés, 2) Tájkép versus portré, 3) Képkészítés közbeni effektek, 4) Képkészítés utáni effektek, 5) Professzionális és profi fotózás, 6) Fotózsjurnalizmus.

**Kulcsszavak:** fényképezés, kommunikáció

**Diszciplína:** médiatudomány, kommunikációtudomány

### Abstract

A picture worth a thousand words. In the following, we will examine the role of photography in communication-based on the following aspects: 1) Writing vs Photography, 2) Landscape vs Portrait, 3) Influences while taking a picture, 4) Influences after taking a picture, 5) Unprofessional vs Professional Photography, 6) Photo-journalism.

**Keywords:** photography, communication

**Disciplines:** Media, Communication

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Communication is „a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior (Webster, 2020).” This complex procedure needs at least one sender, message, and recipient. To be able to decode the message successfully the participants need similar cultural situations and base knowledge about the content of the message. Our emotions, the medium used to communicate, and even our location can alter the meaning or the understanding of the message too. In the job market, good communication skills can give us enormous advantages. In our everyday life, we use four kinds of communication: verbal, non-verbal, written, and visual. In this essay, we will focus on a very important and interesting part of visual communication (Indeed, 2020; Skills, 2020).

Nowadays society needs to „see to believe” that’s why photography is such an important factor in the much-mentioned communication. The toolbox of psychology and warfare also includes photography. A picture can give us a literal view about a topic because of which sometimes we don’t even need more explanation about it. Photos can capture events, people, or even emotions. As we can hear a lot: A picture worth a thousand words. The most interesting thing is that by taking pictures we can tell stories. In the following, we will examine the role of photography in communication-based on the following aspects:

- Writing vs Photography
- Landscape vs Portrait
- Influences while taking a picture
- Influences after taking a picture
- Unprofessional vs Professional Photography
- Photojournalism

### **Writing vs Photography**

„For photographers, the ideal book of photographs would contain just pictures – no text at all” photographer Robert Adams once wrote (quoted by O’Hagan, 2010). But are the photographs have such power? If yes, why pictures need words?

Scientific researches show that the human mind tends to remember more of the pictures than the words. „One theory of the mechanism underlying superior picture memory is that pictures automatically engage multiple representations and associations with other knowledge about the world, thus encouraging a more elaborate encoding than occurs with words (Grady et al, 1998).” However, there are some pieces of information like abstract concepts and ideas which we remember better with words. For example: If we see a picture of a rainbow we won’t remember the exact order of the colors, but with some word tricks we can easily remember it (Hills, 2015).

When we are creating something we aim to grab attention. A lot of people when they check a website, an article, or a blog, etc. and they see there are only really long well-written paragraphs, tend to leave the

page and not even start to read it. That's why we need images. Good photography at the beginning of our story can capture the attention and give our writing higher readability. The higher the readability is, the more chance that somebody will actually read it (Gabe, 2015; Pollard 2012).

In some cases, a picture can tell the story better than the written words. A picture can convey more information or even represent better what we want to say. With written words, we hope that we described the surroundings or the facial expressions, etc. enough so others can imagine what we

wrote just as we see it before ourselves but it does not always succeed. For example, there is a picture (see: Picture 1) in the 'Ghana – photo report book' about how a school looks like in a cocoa community. We can write paragraphs about how the building is partially open, because of the weather and that even the walls of the school are used for educational purposes because they painted alphabets or the map of Ghana, etc. on them. Or we can tell it with a picture that will connect our audience more to what we want to say (Gabe, 2015; Mező, 2020; Pollard, 2012).

Picture 1.: A school of a cocoa community in Ghana. Source: Mező, 2020 – all rights reserved



As we can see so far photography can convey our messages more quickly even if somebody only sees the picture while browsing and don't stop to read, and probably we will remember to it more. But not forget that another advantage of the images that they are more shareable (Gabe, 2015). In social media, as everybody always posting pictures, with a good brand we can reach out globally to the people and share our stories with pictures. We just have to consider our target audience and choose our messages and photography tools based on them. Also, we have to consider the emotions we want to raise with our pictures. For example, if we want to convey happy feelings we might use brighter pictures with happy faces or any other elements that convey happiness on it.

Nowadays even writers are using pictures during the process of creating their book. For example, Tom McCarthy (writer of the novel *Remainder*; *Men in Space*; *C*) or Mary Gaitskill (author of *Two Girls*; *Fat and thin*; *Veronica*) reportedly go out for a walk from time to time while writing with a camera or a phone so later they can get inspiration from all the pictures they took while walking (Aperture, 2014).

We can now see that pictures really have power because they grab attention, tell a story/convey a message, can raise emotions, are more shareable and even writers get inspiration from them. These qualities make photography a strong element of communication. So why pictures need

text? In the world of electronic devices, the answer is simple: „Search engine robots do not understand images or videos (Freelance Writing, 2016).” Also as we already mention some concepts are better to be told by words or by a good combination of words and pictures.

### **Landscape vs Portrait**

If we speak about photography we need to discuss landscape and portrait photography. Landscape images are usually captured in a horizontal layout while portrait images are captured in a vertical layout. But how can we communicate with these two types of photography?

„Landscape photography is capturing an image that embodies the spirit of the outdoors.” The photographer wants the viewer to have the same emotion while he was standing there, to feel how incredible this place is. It is basically finding the soul of the place (Mansurov, 2020).

But how to communicate with the viewers by landscape photography? The most successful landscape photos raise emotions, make us want to visit the place, become nostalgic, or inspire something in us. Landscape photographers can show their own interpretation of the world through pictures. But sometimes it can be hard to find a narrative for it or to decide where to start (Ho, 2016).

Some landscape photographers travel far to find interesting images, but we don't necessarily have to travel for good

landscape pictures. A good piece of advice is, to begin with, quiet observation. After we observed closely what is around us we should decide what we want to communicate. It can be beauty or awe or any kind of emotion. If we know the field and our goals the working will be much easier and there is more chance that our message will get to our audience. What is our story? What emotions do we want to raise? Will our pictures be in harmony? Will we concentrate only on a part of the story or the whole? If it is only a part of it will our message still get to the viewers? These are the questions we need to ask before working (Fitzgibbon, 2020; Ho, 2016).

„The basic definition of portrait photography is photography of a person or group to capture the personality of the subjects using lighting, backgrounds, and posing (Beem, 2020).” It’s more personal. It needs interaction between the photographer and the subject. Even if the photographer has his/her own style the portrait is still about the subjects that’s why they need to communicate. With portrait photography, we capture interesting people to raise emotions in our audience with them (Prakash, 2020; Beem, 2020).

According to Prakash (2020), a good portrait photo needs four elements:

(1) The subjects want to be understood by the photographer and want to relate to him/her.

(2) The subjects have to have their own voice in their portrait.

(3) The photographer needs to respect the subject.

(4) The photographer and the subjects need to talk to get to know better the subject’s life.

In portrait photography, we need to use different angles because our subjects want to look good in the picture. Also, we need to create a mood while shooting to give back the personality of the subject (Beem, 2020).

Either we like to interact with people as portrait photographers or like to escape in nature for photography both ways we can create extraordinary images with really strong messages.

### **Influences while taking a picture**

We already talked a lot about the importance of pictures in communication. So from now on, we will see with which tools can we enhance the quality of our photos. The whole judgment of the picture can be depending on how we influence it while we taking it. A poorly took photograph will never communicate, or at least not with the same force, our message that a professional one would do. In some cases, a wrongly selected picture can even tell the opposite of what we want to express. So let’s see what we should consider before taking a picture.

One of the key elements of photography is composition. If we see two different pictures of the same thing, we will like more the one with a better composition.

Simply put, the composition is how we arrange the elements in our pictures. It will guide the eyes of our audience. To create great compositions a photographer needs to be acquainted with the following concepts: the rule of thirds, leading lines, clutter, contrasting colors, creative framing, cropping, knowing your focus, depth, symmetry, patterns, what's in the background, value, space, rhythm, balance, harmony, variety, etc. As we can see composition is a very complex element of photography and it's one of the most difficult things to learn. The photographer can communicate to us how he/she sees the world through it (Rueb, 2018; Ephotozine, 2014; SRL, 2012).

„Photography can be simply defined as painting with light (Werner, 2014).” A professional photographer must know how to use exposure in photography. For it, the most important camera settings are Shutter Speed, ISO, and Aperture. The balance of these three elements will make a perfectly exposed picture. Shutter Speed is the amount of time our camera needs to take a picture. It controls the brightness and stability of the picture. With fast shutter speed, we will get a steady but dark picture. With slow shutter speed, we will get a bright but (if held in hand) blurry picture. It captures or freezes a movement. Meanwhile, ISO controls the sensitivity of the camera. As well as the Shutter Speed, ISO can also control the brightness of the picture. High ISO-settings will create a bright picture but with bad quality. With

Low ISO-settings we can take a dark, high-quality photo. It's good to use ISO when there is no other way to brighten the picture. At last but not least, Aperture can give the depth of field to the picture. It is similar to how our pupils in the eyes work. Aperture is part of the lenses. It controls the brightness and the focused area of a picture. With a small aperture, we can take a dark picture with a large focused area. With a large aperture a bright picture with a small focused area will be taken (Cox, 2019a; Werner, 2014; Mayer, 2018). „By understanding how to expose an image properly, you will be able to capture photographs of the ideal brightness, including high levels of detail in both the shadows and highlight areas (Cox, 2019a).”

Photography is a two-dimensional medium, but still, good photographers try to trick our senses and make us feel we see something three-dimensional. Giving depth to a picture will catch more viewers' attention and will have a tremendous amount of impact on our pictures. Photographers want to invite us to the picture. They want us to feel like we are there, we are in the scene. Finding the right camera angle, layering the images (having a foreground), creating depth with focus or/and light and shadow, or framing our composition are just some examples of how can we create depth in our photography. The only thing that we have to take attention to have a balance between our

elements in the picture (Hildebrandt, 2019; Kelly, 2019; Prower, 2009).

„A skilled photographer can use sharpness to communicate. Sharpness is achieved with focus, aperture, and post-processing (Prower, 2009).” Focus is a very important aspect of photography because if we don’t pay enough attention to it our photos will be blurry even if we paid attention to the other camera settings. Focus can communicate as it draws our attention to a certain area of the picture. It will make a difference between the background and the subject. Finding our focus can be either easy or difficult, depending on the subject for example if it is moving or not. We distinguish two types of focus: automatic (when the camera system decides which elements will be in focus) and manual (when we decide which element will be in focus) (Cox, 2019b; Prower, 2009).

The above-mentioned tools' main purpose is to create a picture that will communicate our message in the best possible way. Generally, to master them we will need to practice a lot in a lot of different places. The important thing is to find our way, how we want to convey our vision of the world through photos, and raise the needed emotions with it.

### **Influences after taking a picture**

We now understand for sure how important to pay attention to how we make our picture to communicate our

story, but our work doesn’t stop with taking it. After we took our photo several post-production possibilities can correct or improve our picture. The importance of post-production is the same as the actual production (Guinnes, 2019). This is the part which can really feel like working as sometimes we can spend hours on the picture to make it perfect. “In some cases, it’s where the photo is made (Ozuna, 2020).” Some people think that only “fake” photographers (which isn’t even a thing) use post-production. So in this section, we would like to present how important post-production is during the work of a professional photographer.

Before we getting started, it is important to get to know our editing suite (Ozuna, 2020). If we are not comfortable with the editing program we are using it can take more time to finalize our picture. Also if we are new to post-production it’s recommended to first just think through how we are going to edit usually, because editing suites can be very expensive and we don’t want to spend a lot of money on something which we will never use (Ozuna, 2020).

After a good day of photography, we come home with a lot of materials so our first job is to select which pictures are good enough to start to work with them in the editing room (Guinnes, 2019).

When we decided which photos are good enough we can start the editing part. First, we can correct our exposure settings. Maybe we under- or overexposed while

shooting it. It may need to correct the color, the brightness, the contrast, etc. In some cases, we have the possibility to use presets or online photo editing services which can do some basic editing on their own. We can fix many things like crooked horizons, distortions, dust spots, blemishes, white balance, high dynamic range (HDR) settings, etc. We can use filters, apply any color toning or stylistic adjustments to improve our work. We can create one photo from two different pictures. Photography is an art form. We can express our artistic talents during post-production (Harmon, 2017; Berube, 2017; Guinness, 2019). „Post production allows you to adjust the image the camera captured to match what you saw with your eyes (Berube, 2017).”

The last thing is to export our final work to be able to share it, post it, print it, show it to our audience (Guinness, 2019).

### **Unprofessional VS Professional Photography**

As everybody has a camera on their phone and even the digital cameras are more affordable the number of pictures circulating on the internet (mostly thanks to social media) is enormous. But there are several things that make a difference between professional photographers and amateurs/hobbyists.

Some people say that being professional means that you make money from photography. But making money from

photos not necessarily means that our work is professional. Some talented amateur works are way better than some underwhelming professional ones. We need to conduct ourselves as professionals so others will think about us the same. Real professionals are dedicated to their work and don't mind giving some extra time on the photo to create a quality product (Bowers, 2006; Baggs, 2019; Ma, 2017).

Others opinion is that the difference is the mind-set. As Stephen King said: „Amateurs sit and wait for inspiration, the rest of us just get up and go to work (quoted by Baggs, 2019).” Waiting for inspiration is a luxury so instead of waiting if we don't have a job as a photographer we need to find projects (even when we are outside of periods of inspiration) and create deadlines for ourselves. Online photography competitions are good starters (Baggs, 2019).

Another difference between a professional and an unprofessional photographer that while maybe they have the same kind of camera, a professional photographer really knows his/her device and can bring out the most of it from the camera meanwhile the amateurs just know some basic camera options. Professionals are also always prepared for every situation thanks to their previous experiences (Ma, 2017).

In brief, the main differences between a professional and an amateur photographer are the experience, the dedication, and the ability to make a living from photography.



Also, we need to mention that hiring a real professional photographer might be expensive, but it is worth it for the quality of their work.

### **Photojournalism**

Now that we learned the very basics of how photography is powerful in communication, how to influence our photos during and after the shooting to communicate our messages better, and what the difference between a professional and an amateur photographer, it's time to move on to a special aspect of using photos for communication. It is photojournalism. „Photojournalism is a form of journalism which tells a news story through powerful photography which traditionally are black and white images (Art Term, 2013).”

We can find the roots of photojournalism in war photography, but the nowadays known modern photojournalism started in 1925 in Germany with the appearance of the first 35mm camera, the Leica. The invention of the 35mm Leica camera and the invention of the first commercial flashbulbs (in 1927) started the so-called „golden age” of photojournalism. The golden age lasted from 1930 to 1970. At this time technology and public interest were high enough there was a lot of space for photojournalism to develop itself. Several magazines started to work with photo reports like Life, The New York Daily News, Berliner Illustrate

Zeitung. We can find women leading figures in the field from that time, like Margaret Brouke-White who was the first woman photojournalist of the first Life cover. An interesting fact that because of the Great Depression lot of photo reporters decided to begin to cover the life of real people in hard times. Photography is driven by technology. For example, by 1990 most of the photographers made color pictures. Nowadays the importance of prints is pushed into the background thanks to the internet so photojournalism adapts and started to cover stories online with the same impact (Towne, 2020; Stewart, 2017; Collins, 2012a).

The purpose of journalism as well as photojournalism is to inform the public about the world around them. Photography is a very good way to do that as the meaning of the pictures is universal, that's why there isn't any language barrier. A photograph can take a moment in time and convey it to the reader, that's what makes this medium so special. As noble as this goal is the problem that from the beginning of photojournalism is usually used by the government to represent a certain point of view or in extreme situations to misguide or to hide the reality (Struett, 2013; Jacobitz, 2020).

That leads us to the ethics of photojournalism. Photojournalist faces a lot of controversies in the field. Photographs need to be accurate, truthful, and faithful images. Photo manipulation isn't ethical as it can mislead the public about

the real situation. If a photographer is on the field alone and sees that someone is in trouble his/her first job is to try to help and not to document. Also, photographers should not influence the events for their photographs. Some even question the presence and importance of photojournalists on the field. They may take photos of people in need, but without them, we might not even know about what happens with others and won't feel the need to help them. This just shows how much power photography has as it can raise emotions and help us to get to know the world better (Bersak, 2006; Jackobitz, 2020; Struett, 2013; Theme, 2014).

As we can see in photojournalism showing the true self of the subject is very important. This raises an interesting question: How much can a photojournalist manipulate their photos during post-production? If a photojournalist follows the journalistic standard, either do not manipulate the picture during postproduction or just in a very little amount so the picture can show us exactly what the photographer saw. „Some global sharpening, density changes, and cropping are pretty much it. Anything else is going to compromise the integrity of the image and most likely get them fired” (Taylor, 2016).

Photojournalism is not only about making pictures. So what things we should realize before becoming a photojournalist? A photojournalist needs to be prepared before the groundwork, get to know the most about its subject. If we go out to the

field unprepared we don't get the real story. Also on the field, we need to ask more about the subject's background and write down every name. With names on it, our work will appear more legit. Objectivity is one of the most important things in photojournalism. We should never let our feeling and subjective opinion alter the objective reality. Photojournalism doesn't like posing. It tries to capture the scene naturally. Photojournalists need guts, as they will take pictures about things others afraid of or even enter dangerous places like war zones. Because of that they also need to protect themselves as well as their equipment. There are several insurance possibilities which can give us some protection. It's important to find our own personal style so with time people get to know us. We have to find interesting angles for the pictures and most importantly we must avoid the clichés. Even if we differ the light on the picture we should not make it too obvious. Photojournalists have to prepare for rejection and also that some of their work might get bad reception from the public. Also, we have to know our worth and try to find what stories can bring us money. But don't expect to become rich with photojournalism (Collins, 2012b; Jackobitz, 2020; Singh, 2019).

### **Summary**

In summary, photography is a powerful communication tool. It can tell a story or

convey our messages, basically it can tell what we can't say with words. Photography is also included in the toolbox of psychology and warfare. It can raise awareness and influence our emotions. By showing real life even in hard times people can start to help the subject of our images. It let us get to know our world better and we can travel to places thanks to them which we have never seen before. Either we prefer portraits or landscape photography both of them can represent our way of seeing the world around us. We can get inspiration from them in our work or in our everyday life too. Thanks to social media we can easily share our photos on the internet and it also connects us as we start conversations about a seen picture. With some dedication, everybody can become a professional photographer. If we are professionals it's important to be ethical and to make the best quality that we can. It depends on us how we prefer to influence our pictures before or/and after the shooting if we influence it at all. If we don't prefer to influence our picture at all maybe we should consider working as a photojournalist. It doesn't matter if photography is just our hobby or our profession the most important thing is to enjoy it because if we like what we are doing not only the quality of the picture and our mood will be better, but we can also communicate our messages toward the world a better way.

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