

MASTERCOM
Politehnica Graduate Student Journal of Communication
Politehnica University Timișoara
Faculty of Communication Sciences
Communication, Public Relations and Digital Media
VOLUME 9, ISSUE 1, 2024

Comparative Study of the Impact of the Visual Message Used in University Promotion

Cristina Lavinia Măciucă

Abstract: *In the competitive landscape of higher education, effective university promotion is essential for attracting and retaining students. This paper explores the importance of visual messages in university promotion, emphasising the role of photography and other visual media in shaping perceptions and influencing decisions. Visual messages, through photographs, videos, and graphics, provide a compelling and immediate way to communicate the university's culture, environment, and values. They engage prospective students emotionally, helping them envision themselves within the campus community. The study highlights how visual content can enhance marketing strategies, boost social media presence, and enrich promotional materials, ultimately creating a powerful narrative that sets the university apart. By analysing case studies and current practices, this paper demonstrates that well-crafted visual messages are vital for building a strong, attractive, and relatable university brand.*

Keywords: *visual message, higher education, university promotion*

1. Introduction

Photography plays a crucial role in university branding, helping to create an attractive and coherent visual identity. High-quality images can highlight campus, facilities, student life and academic events, attracting new students and sponsors. They also reinforce a sense of community and pride among students and alumni. Well-crafted photography can convey the values and culture of the university, helping to differentiate it in a competitive educational landscape. In addition, authentic and relevant images can increase engagement on social media platforms and other communication channels.

In today's social context, it is easy to say that online marketing has taken off and many businesses and companies have moved the majority of their campaigns to promote their services or goods online. How many times have you come across an advertisement that brings a product to your attention? Think of the latest smartphone you bought, the sports team you follow, the clothing stores you frequent. Think about how these offers reached you. Everyone has promoted a product online that you like and that has persuaded you to buy, whether it is ads generated on the Google page or email promoting new products or unmissable offer.

Online marketing has cornered the retail market because it's handy, easy to access, without putting the shopper on the road or causing the inconvenience of standing in endless queues in shops.

Marketing is an essential part of selling a product or service. The use of photography is important, both for a large successful company and for local ones looking to make a name for themselves. A good photo can bring some gains that we could never have thought of, because with it, we can attract the attention of new buyers, highlight certain qualities of the product or service provided, thus we manage to convince the consumer that the product of our company should be bought. Photography plays an important role in advertising and marketing because it can succeed in convincing the consumer to use certain services

or to buy certain products. We live in an age where photography is the best way to sell a product or service.

For many of us, it is obvious that photography attracts attention much more easily than simple text. An impactful or interesting image can pique interest and make a marketing campaign stand out in the crowd of available information. Especially in this age of social media. Every social media application focuses on presenting a photo accompanied by a short text in order to attract consumers' attention more easily.

It is true that photos can convey emotions and also tell a story in a much more effective way than the text itself. The saying that a photo can describe a feeling more efficiently and better than a text is very true. They can create emotional bonds with the target audience and influence their behaviour in a much stronger way.

A study by John Medina, shows that people generally remember 10% of what they read once 72 hours have passed. But if the information is accompanied by a picture, people tend to remember 65% of the information within 3 days. So, it is proven that higher quality images help branding and marketing messages. Furthermore, it is clear that simple text will not have the same impact on the consumer, as they do not spend more than a few seconds on content that does not pique their interest.

Moreover, photos help build and strengthen brand identity. They can help us convey our values and brand promise in a visual and memorable way. So, posting photos that contain similar colours and patterns is necessary because shoppers will think of your brand. In marketing, this phenomenon is called brand association. In this way, we manage to build our brand identity.

Also, using good quality photos helps us to present our products or services in a way that is concrete and pleasing to the consumer's eye, giving potential customers a clearer understanding of what the brand offers. More, let's not forget that authentic and relevant photos can help build customer trust in the brand and what it stands for. They can

illustrate the quality of products or services. The more we use our authentic and distinctive photos, the more our products or services stand out to the buyer, so that the brand is able to differentiate itself from the competition and establish its own distinctive visual identity.

Last but not least, photos can boost audience interaction and engagement on social platforms and other online channels. An interesting image or one that is meant to elicit laughter from internet users can encourage sharing or engagement, thereby extending the reach of your marketing campaign.

One conclusion would be that photos often form the basis of successful campaigns. As mentioned earlier, people nowadays tend not to give so much time to things or information that are not useful to them. So, if in less than a few seconds, your brand's product or service fails to capture attention, you have hardly created an effective promotional campaign. In order to create a successful one, we need to use relevant, high-quality photos, which should also be accompanied by a short text that encompasses all the details and qualities of the product or service offered by the brand.

2. Results

The following pages demonstrate how photography can influence the decisions of prospective candidates when selecting their desired university. This study is based on information provided by the Politehnica University of Timisoara.

Politehnica University Timisoara (UPT) is a technical higher education institution in Timisoara, Romania, founded in 1920. In 2011, it was ranked in Romania's top category of advanced research and education universities, and in 2018 SCImago Institutions Rankings ranked it third out of 25 ranked universities in Romania. It consists of 10 faculties, most of which are technical.



Fig. 1 - Politehnica University website

The use of this photo is to promote the new registration session that will take place from 01.06. to 10.07.2024. The smoke behind the photo suggests that the future is uncertain, someone could even say mysterious. It is not easy to choose your future at 18, 19 years old. Many of us at these ages are fearful, but also hopeful. The two teenagers take us with the thought that we have to go ahead and dispel this mystery. The faces of the two, give the impression that the two are self-confident, even smug about what is to come. Also, the colour of the font (neon green), we can't say is used by chance. This colour suggests the idea of boldness. That we need to have an ounce of courage, to take risks in order to have a better future. Moreover, the message conveyed in turn underlines that we need to take our destiny into our own hands, for a better future.

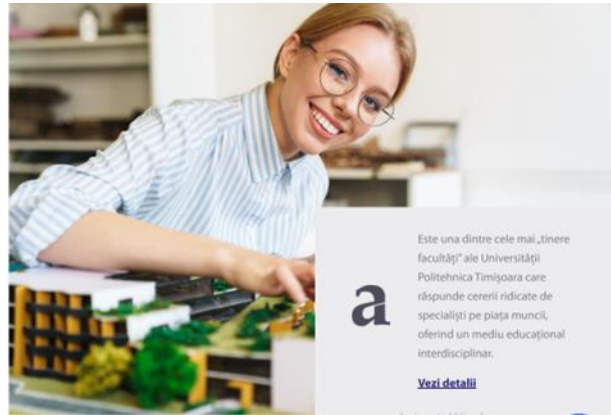


Fig. 2 - Faculty of Architecture - Politehnica University website

For the general presentation of the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, the PR department has decided to use a photo quite suggestive for the faculty they represent. The story the photo tells is as follows: a young student, confident in her own abilities, creates a model of her next urban design project. Also, her posture and the way she is dressed indirectly suggest that the faculty needs capable, development-oriented, dreamy people, but at the same time basic, disciplined people who want to accumulate as much valuable information as possible in order to build a better future, both for the student and for society. Moreover, it is gratifying that they chose to use a girl to present this faculty. Thus, the idea is conveyed that we have long since overcome prejudices and that a woman can be a successful architectural engineer, that the boundaries and prejudices that a woman cannot become an outstanding engineer in the field of architecture have been shattered.



Fig. 3 - Politehnica University – Faculty of Computer Science

To showcase the educational packages provided by the Faculty of Computer Science, the photography used plays on the idea that a woman can become an excellent IT engineer, that not only men are good at programming, but also the female gender. Also at the heart of a successful career are years of practice and note-taking. We can say that the use of sticky notes in photography is no accident. Her smile suggests that choosing this career leads to a path of success and achievement, but it will not be without its obstacles. Moreover, the text used emphasises that the faculty's professors have the best and new knowledge, so that at the end of the degree program you become a successful programming engineer.

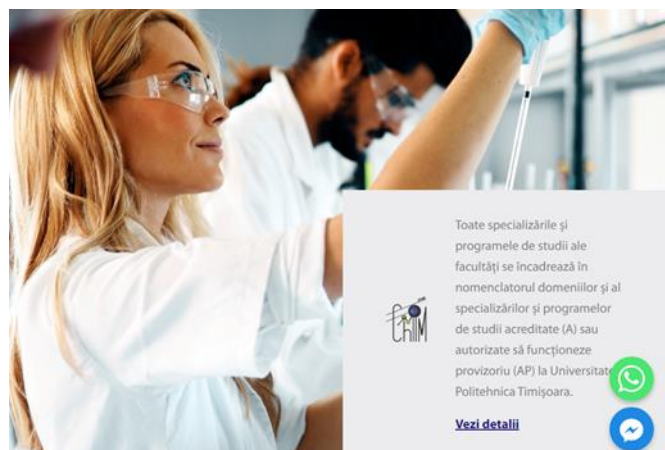


Fig. 4 – Politehnica University - Faculty of Chemical Engineering, Biotechnology and Environmental Protection

The Faculty of Chemical Engineering, Biotechnology and Environmental Protection uses a photograph for the overview, which suggests the importance of teamwork in becoming a successful chemist. The choice of the photo does not appear to be random. The image of a woman with blonde hair may be intended to challenge any stereotypes suggesting that women are less capable of understanding complex chemical concepts. Hair colour is not an indicator of intelligence, and the subject's smile emphasises her confidence in her abilities and knowledge.

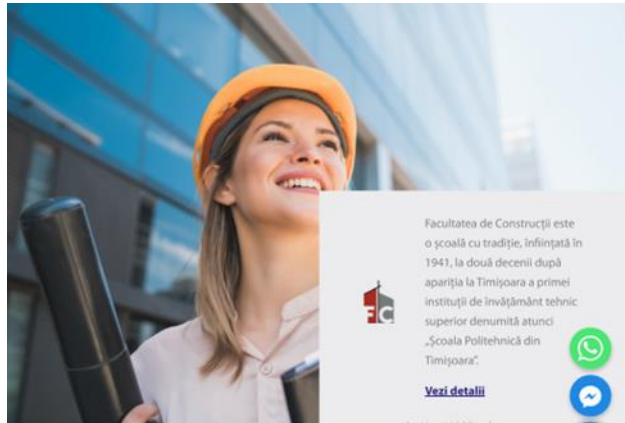


Fig. 5 – Politehnica University - Faculty of Civil Engineering

Like the other faculties that are part of the programs of the Politehnica University of Timisoara, the Faculty of Civil Engineering wants to get rid of the stereotypes imposed by the society of the past. The woman is capable of being an accomplished construction engineer. That thanks to the information made available through the educational packages available. Not only men, but also women are sure to become successful engineers, who can help us build a brighter and better future for mankind, they are the key to buildings, that they will help make buildings great and safe.

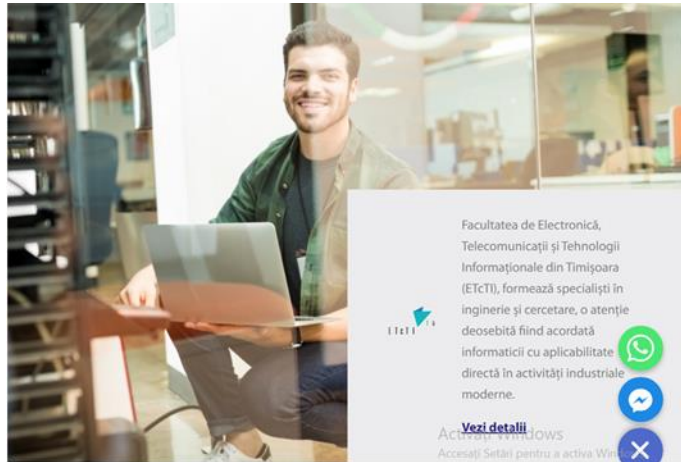


Fig. 6 – Politehnica University - Faculty of Electronics, Telecommunications and Informational Technologies

The photo used to promote the Faculty of Electronics, Telecommunications and Informational Technologies suggests that in the field of electronics and telecommunications, there is a need for people who are reliable, passionate about technology, we can say and curious to discover as much as possible in this field. We are also informed that most of the work is carried out in offices equipped with the necessary tools for the development of telecommunications and information technologies.

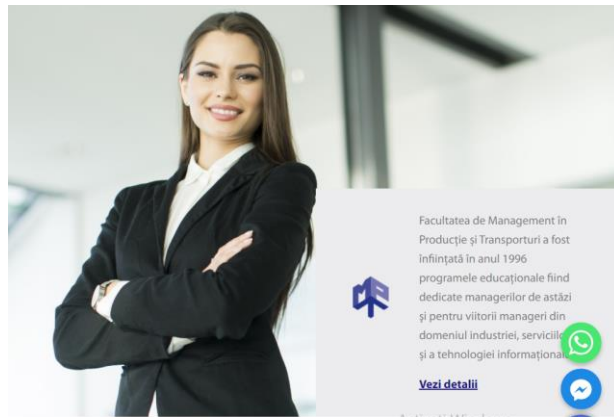


Fig. 7 – Politehnica University –
Faculty of Production and Transport Management

The Faculty of Production and Transport Management uses a photograph that appears somewhat general, not strongly indicating the specific faculty it is meant to represent. The image features a young woman who conveys self-confidence, punctuality (suggested by the visible watch), and professionalism, as she is dressed in office attire. This may imply that, with the knowledge gained during their studies, future candidates can succeed in the field of production and transport management. The woman's elegance could attract potential candidates to apply for the faculty's available majors. Although the faculty is relatively new, it is presented as a provider of highly skilled professionals to the labour market.

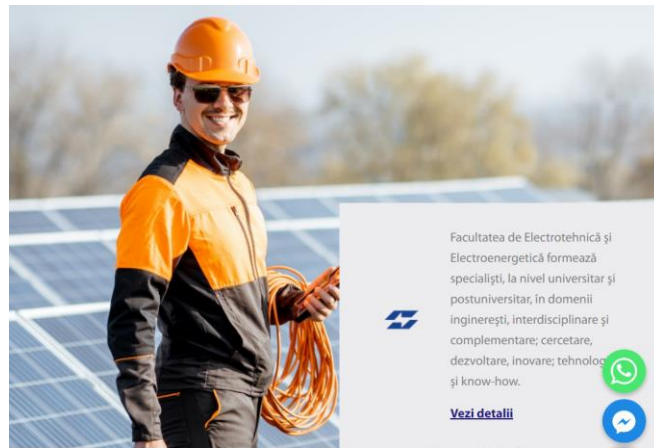


Fig. 8 – Politehnica University - Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Electrical Power Engineering

From the photo used by the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Electrical Power Engineering we can tell that they are looking for determined, hard-working students who are excited to enter the field. The man in the picture suggests the idea that safety comes first when talking about the electrical engineering profession. The photovoltaic panels in the background also convey the idea of transformation, that we are living in a time when there is a lot of emphasis on reusable and natural energy sources, so that we stop producing disasters that are slowly but surely leading to the destruction of the planet. The text that supports the image guarantees that the faculty trains specialists in research, development and innovation.

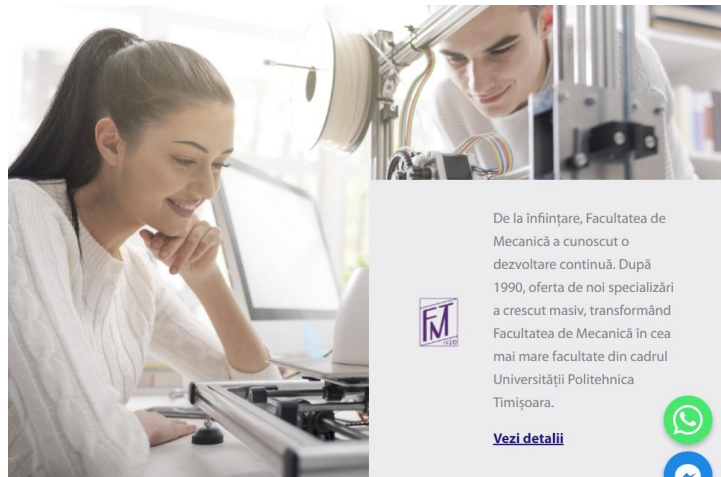


Fig. 9 – Politehnica University –
Faculty of Mechanical Engineering

The photograph used to present the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering suggests that mechanical engineering is no longer a field exclusive to men, highlighting that women are equally capable of understanding these concepts. The image conveys that passion for mechanics transcends gender. The way the two individuals engage with the instruments suggests dedication, passion, and a desire to master as much information as possible. Additionally, the photo implies that the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering is equipped with the necessary resources, and that the learning environment is supportive, with helpful colleagues.



Fig. 10 – Politehnica University –
Faculty of Communication Sciences

The Faculty of Communication Sciences uses a photograph that can be considered representative. The young lady in the image is dressed in office attire, suggesting a professional role that aligns with the field of communication. The photograph successfully conveys the image of a graduate from a communication sciences program, perhaps as a successful translator or interpreter attending a conference and interpreting speeches from foreign personalities.

However, there are aspects that could negatively impact the perception of the Politehnica University. Despite being a student of this university, there are elements that would cause hesitation if considering a different study program based solely on the information provided on the university's website.

One issue noted is that some of the photographs appear outdated. For instance, in Figure 11, the image depicts several students in a lecture or seminar, and it is clear that this is not a recent photo. The computer monitors in the image indicate that it was taken several years ago. This could be seen as a drawback for the faculty website, as it gives the impression of disinterest in keeping content up to date. It is important for websites to be regularly updated, both in terms of graphic content

and the information presented, to reflect current standards and attract prospective students.

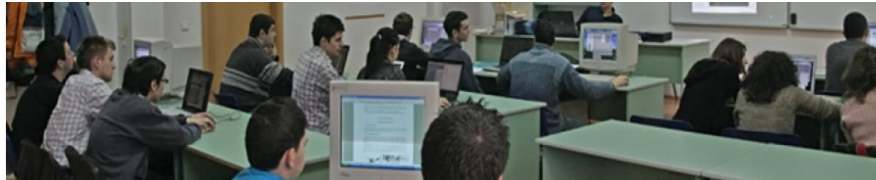


Fig. 11 – Politehnica University

Secondly, when viewing the site as a prospective visitor seeking information about the faculties, it becomes apparent that the photos used to represent the faculties do not feature images taken within the university. These images appear to be stock photos, sourced from platforms offering free or licensed images to avoid copyright issues. A more effective approach would have been to include photos featuring actual faculty students. This would help create a stronger sense of connection, making potential students feel as if they were already part of the university. Furthermore, real photos of students would communicate a greater commitment to the experience at the university, emphasising authenticity and engagement, which could better attract potential candidates.

Another issue with the images is the unfortunate placement of explanatory rectangles over the characters in the photos. This positioning often covers parts of their bodies or faces, detracting from the overall aesthetic and visual clarity. Proper pagination, graphic design, and the use of negative space are fundamental principles in design, and these basic mistakes suggest a lack of attention to detail. A more thoughtful layout would improve the professionalism and appeal of the website.

Lastly, the stock photos used lack a direct connection to the university. None of the images feature the actual buildings or campus of UPT, leading to a more generic message. These images could easily represent any institution in the Western world. Conducting photoshoots

on-site at the university's facilities would have added authenticity to the visual narrative, even if it required an additional investment.

In conclusion, photography plays a crucial role in university promotion, helping to create visually compelling content that highlights the strengths of the institution and fosters an emotional connection with prospective students. Photos of events, campus facilities, and student achievements provide an authentic glimpse into university life, helping prospective students envision themselves as part of the community. This visual storytelling is essential in a competitive educational landscape, where first impressions can significantly influence prospective students' decision-making.

Bibliography:

1. Baines P, Fill C. & Rosengren S. (2011). *Marketing*. Universitatea Oxford, New York.
2. Becker C. & Palmer S (2009). *Branding in Universities: Identity versus Image*. Universitatea de tehnologie Lulea.
3. Belostecinic I. (2019). *Brandingul în planificarea strategică de marketing*, Academia de studii economice din Moldova, Chișinău
4. Faye V. (2022). *6 reasons why your business should be using high-quality photography on social media*, accessed on 22.04.2024.
5. Ilieș, V. & Fărcaș, P. (2013). *Definirea principiilor de bază ale brandingului universitar în România*. Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai și Alexandru Ioan Cuza.
6. Niaa, 2020. *The importance of photography in marketing*, accessed on 14.04.2024.
7. Plant, E. *The importance of clear and professional Branding in 2024*, 12 January 2024, accessed on 10.04.2024.