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Research Article

The Effectiveness of Multimedia Presentations in Corporate Communication: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Multimedia presentations have become central to corporate communication—used in investor briefings, internal training, marketing pitches, and leadership messaging. This study investigates the perceived effectiveness of multimedia presentations in corporate communication from the perspectives of communication managers, presenters, and audience members within large and medium-sized organisations. Drawing on Media Richness Theory, Cognitive Load Theory, Dual Coding Theory, Mayer's Multimedia Learning, Elaboration Likelihood Model, and Social Presence Theory, the study employs a qualitative, multiple-case, phenomenological approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews (n = 30), focus groups (4 groups), and document analysis of 20 corporate presentations across industries. Thematic analysis identified five central themes: clarity and comprehension, engagement and retention, emotional and persuasive impact, accessibility and inclusivity, and constraints and unintended effects. Findings suggest that well-designed multimedia presentations enhance attention, comprehension, and persuasion, but their effectiveness depends on cognitive design, presenter skill, organisational culture, and audience characteristics. The study provides theoretical integration, practical design recommendations, and directions for future research.

Keywords: corporate communication, enhance attention, comprehension, qualitative research.

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1. Introduction

In contemporary corporate environments, multimedia presentations—combining text, images, audio, video, animations, and interactive elements—are ubiquitous (Mayer, 2009; Duarte, 2010). Corporations deploy multimedia across multiple communicative functions: investor relations, employee onboarding and training, sales pitches, internal town halls, and crisis communication. Proponents argue that multimedia improves clarity, retention, and persuasion (Mayer, 2009; Paivio, 1991). Critics point to overuse of effects, cognitive overload, and poor design that undermine message transfer (Kosslyn, 2007; Sweller, 1988). Despite broad adoption, systematic qualitative research on how corporate stakeholders perceive multimedia’s effectiveness—especially in naturalistic corporate settings—remains limited. This study addresses that gap by exploring stakeholder experiences and perspectives to develop a nuanced, practice-oriented understanding.

1.1 Research Objectives and Questions

The primary objective is to examine how multimedia presentations affect corporate communication effectiveness from multiple stakeholder perspectives. Research questions:

- How do corporate communicators and audiences perceive the effectiveness of multimedia presentations in achieving communicative goals?

- What cognitive and social processes mediate multimedia effectiveness in corporate settings?
- What design, presenter, and organisational factors facilitate or inhibit effectiveness?
- What ethical and accessibility considerations arise with multimedia use?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Multimedia Learning and Cognition

Mayer’s Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning posits that meaningful learning occurs when words and pictures are presented in ways that manage cognitive load and foster active processing (Mayer, 2009). Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1991) argues that verbal and visual systems process complementary information, improving recall when both are engaged. Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988) warns against extraneous processing caused by poor design or irrelevant animations.

2.2 Media Richness and Social Presence

Media Richness Theory suggests richer media (those enabling immediate feedback, multiple cues, and personalisation) are better for complex, equivocal tasks (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Multimedia presentations are considered richer than text-only channels due to multiple cues (visual, audio) and potential interactivity (Dennis & Kinney, 1998). Social Presence Theory (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976) emphasises a feeling of “being with others”; multimedia elements (video of presenter, live Q&A) can increase social presence and trust.

2.3 Persuasion and Processing Routes

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) offers a framework for how multimedia can persuade via central (argument quality) or peripheral (production quality, imagery) routes. High-involvement audiences may focus on arguments; low-involvement audiences may rely on aesthetic cues.

2.4 Design, Aesthetics, and Usability

Design research emphasises clarity, information hierarchy, and the avoidance of ornamentation that distracts from substantive content (Kosslyn, 2007; Tufte, 2003). Usability principles (Nielsen, 1993) translated to slide design suggest legibility, consistent layouts, and minimal text per slide.

2.5 Organisational Communication Contexts

Corporate communication differs from classroom or mass media contexts: stakeholders often have vested interests, time constraints, and established interpretive frames (Cornelissen, 2017). Power dynamics, culture, and institutional narratives shape how multimedia messages are produced and received.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study synthesises six complementary theories to form a comprehensive theoretical framework suitable for examining multimedia effectiveness in corporate communication.

3.1 Media Richness Theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986)

Media richness provides a situational lens: complex strategic messages (e.g., earnings guidance) require richer media. Multimedia presentations are conceptualised as a continuum of richness—slides with presenter video + live Q&A > slides + audio recording > static slide deck.

3.2 Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning & Cognitive Load (Mayer, 2009; Sweller, 1988)

These theories explain how multimedia design affects information processing: intrinsic load (topic complexity), extraneous load (poor design), and germane load (effortful processing that supports learning). Effective multimedia minimises extraneous load and manages intrinsic load through segmentation, signalling, and pre-training.

3.3 Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1991)

Dual coding informs the selection of visuals that complement verbal content rather than duplicate it, leveraging separate cognitive channels for enhanced recall.

3.4 Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986)

ELM explains persuasion differences: when audiences are motivated and able to process centrally, argument quality matters; when not, peripheral cues like imagery, presenter charisma, and production values drive persuasion.

3.5 Social Presence and Trust (Short et al., 1976; Gefen & Straub, 2004)

In corporate contexts, trust is crucial. Multimedia that increases social presence (e.g., live video, spontaneous Q&A) can

enhance perceived authenticity and trustworthiness.

3.6 Integrated Framework (This Study)

Combining the above, this framework posits that effectiveness is a product of (a) media richness appropriate to message complexity, (b) cognitive design minimising extraneous load and leveraging dual channels, (c) persuasive dynamics moderated by audience involvement, and (d) social presence/trust effects mediated by presenter behaviour and organisational credibility. Moderators include organisational culture, audience characteristics (expertise, time), accessibility constraints, and technological reliability.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design: Multiple-Case Phenomenological Approach

Given the exploratory aim—to understand lived experiences and meanings attached to multimedia presentations—a qualitative, phenomenological approach was chosen, embedded in a multiple-case study design across organisations (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995). Phenomenology uncovers participants' perceptions; a case study enables cross-context comparison.

4.2 Research Sites and Sampling

Purposive sampling targeted medium and large organisations across finance, manufacturing, IT, and consumer goods sectors within a single country (to control for macro-cultural variance). Selection criteria: organisations using multimedia for investor communication, internal training, or

marketing; willingness to share presentations and permit interviews.

Participants: 30 interviewees (10 communication managers, 10 presenters/executives, 10 audience members/recipients). Four focus groups of 6–8 participants each were conducted with mixed roles (e.g., employees who routinely attend presentations). Presentation artefacts: 20 corporate multimedia presentations (slides, recordings) were collected for document analysis and to ground interview prompts.

4.3 Data Collection Methods

4.3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews (45–75 minutes) explored experiences with multimedia presentations: design practices, perceived impacts, success stories, failures, accessibility, and ethical concerns. An interview guide included open-ended questions and prompts. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

4.3.2 Focus Groups

Focus groups probed shared norms and collective perceptions. Each session lasted 90 minutes and used stimulus materials (short clips from corporate presentations) to stimulate discussion.

4.3.3 Document and Artefact Analysis

The 20 presentations were analysed for design features (text density, use of visuals, multimedia elements), rhetorical strategies, and alignment with stated communicative goals. Metadata (audience size, delivery mode) was recorded.

4.3.4 Observations (Optional / Opportunistic)

Where feasible, the researcher observed live presentations (n = 6) and took field notes on presenter-audience interactions and technological issues.

4.4 Data Analysis

4.4.1 Thematic Analysis

An inductive-deductive thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke (2006). Initial coding was open, generating descriptive codes (e.g., “too much animation,” “increased retention,” “visual metaphors”), followed by axial coding to develop themes aligned with the theoretical framework (e.g., cognitive fit, engagement). NVivo (or manual coding) was used to manage data.

4.4.2 Triangulation

Findings from interviews, focus groups, and artefact analysis were triangulated to corroborate themes and identify divergences.

4.4.3 Trustworthiness

Credibility: prolonged engagement, member checks (summary of findings sent to a subset of participants), and triangulation. Transferability: thick description of contexts. Dependability: audit trail of coding decisions. Confirmability: reflexive memos documenting researcher bias and decisions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval was obtained from the researcher’s institutional review board. Participants gave informed consent;

corporate confidentiality was respected via anonymisation, and sensitive slides were redacted. Data stored securely; participants could withdraw at any time.

5. Findings (Themes and Interpretations)

5.1 Theme 1 — Clarity and Comprehension: Design Matters

Participants consistently reported that clear, simplified slides with meaningful visuals improved comprehension. Presentations that used signalling (headings, arrows), progressive disclosure (stepwise reveal), and succinct bulleting led to perceived higher clarity.

- Communication managers emphasised: “A slide should guide, not contain the whole speech.”
- Artefact analysis showed high-performing presentations used one main idea per slide, with 6–10 words per line and deliberate visual metaphors.

Interpretation: aligns with Mayer’s principles—reducing extraneous load and segmenting improves processing (Mayer, 2009).

5.2 Theme 2 — Engagement and Retention: Multimedia Increases Attention When Well-designed

Audience members reported increased attention for presentations employing short videos, storytelling, and meaningful imagery. However, animations for mere flourish often distract.

- Presenters noted: “Video clips help me show real customer use—

audiences remember those moments.”

- Focus groups reported that interactive polls and short Q&A breaks improved retention.

Interpretation: multimedia supports engagement via dual channels, but cognitive load and relevance determine retention.

5.3 Theme 3 — Emotion, Persuasion, and Credibility

Multimedia can elicit emotions—videos and images of customers, employees, or product demonstrations increased empathy and persuasion. High production quality enhanced perceived credibility, especially in investor presentations.

- Finance-sector participants highlighted the role of polished visuals in signalling competence to investors.
- Yet some practised cynicism: “Over-polished videos can seem like spin.”

Interpretation: ELM suggests peripheral cues (production quality) influence persuasion, particularly for low-involvement audiences. But for high-scrutiny audiences, argument quality remains crucial.

5.4 Theme 4 — Presenter Skill and Social Presence

Effective multimedia was not just design—it depended heavily on the presenter's skill. Presenters who used slides as prompts, maintained eye contact (in live settings), and framed visuals enhanced social presence and trust.

- Observations: presenters who read slides verbatim diminished impact; those who used slides as visual scaffolds achieved higher audience engagement.

Interpretation: media richness and social presence theories converge—media alone are insufficient without skilled human delivery.

5.5 Theme 5 — Accessibility, Inclusivity, and Ethical Considerations

Participants raised concerns about accessibility (captioning, colour contrast, screen-reader compatibility) and equity (remote audiences vs in-room attendees). Accessibility features were inconsistently applied.

- HR managers reported tension between time constraints and proper accessibility compliance.
- Ethical concerns: use of emotionally charged images without consent, or manipulative editing, was flagged.

Interpretation: organisations must balance persuasive aims with ethical responsibilities and legal accessibility standards.

5.6 Theme 6 — Constraints and Unintended Effects

Technical glitches, platform instability, and overreliance on slides were common inhibitors. Some participants reported “death by PowerPoint” fatigue when too many presentations followed the same dense format.

- Artefact analysis: 40% of presentations contained excessive text, 30% had unnecessary animation.

Interpretation: technical reliability and design discipline moderate multimedia effectiveness.

6. Discussion

6.1 Theoretical Integration

Findings support the integrated theoretical framework. Multimedia's effectiveness emerges from the fit among message complexity, media richness, cognitive design, presenter skill, and audience characteristics.

- **Media Richness:** Multimedia improved communication for complex and ambiguous topics when it enabled real-time interaction and multiple cues. For transactional messages (e.g., status updates), simpler media performed equally well.
- **Cognitive Design:** Mayer's principles were validated—signalling, segmenting, and redundancy avoidance improved comprehension.
- **Dual Coding:** Visuals paired with concise verbal explanations facilitated recall more than slides with dense text.
- **ELM & Persuasion:** Production quality and emotional visuals acted as peripheral cues, effective in some contexts but potentially undermining credibility with expert audiences.
- **Social Presence:** Presenter behaviours amplified multimedia effects, underscoring the human dimension of corporate communication.

6.2 Practical Implications

Organisations should adopt design standards: one idea per slide, use of visuals that complement rather than duplicate text, mandatory captioning and high-contrast visuals, and rehearsal to ensure presenter-slide coordination. Training programs for presenters should focus on storytelling, slides as a scaffold, and handling Q&A. Technical rehearsals reduce glitch risks.

6.3 Managerial Recommendations

(Actionable)

- Develop a corporate slide-style guide grounded in multimedia learning principles.
- Implement mandatory accessibility checks (captioning, alt text).
- Train presenters in multimodal delivery (3–4 workshops per year).
- Use interactive elements (polls, Q&A) sparingly and strategically.
- Archive presentation analytics (views, engagement metrics) to inform iterative design.

7. Conclusion

Multimedia presentations, when purposefully designed and skillfully delivered, enhance corporate communication by improving clarity, engagement, and persuasive impact. However, their effectiveness is not automatic; it depends on alignment among message complexity, cognitive design, presenter competence, organisational culture, and attention to accessibility and ethics. Organisations seeking to leverage multimedia should adopt evidence-based design standards, invest in presenter training, and monitor both intended and unintended

effects. This study contributes an integrated theoretical framework and qualitative evidence to guide practice and future research.

7.1 Limitations

- Sample limited to organisations within one national context—cultural factors may limit transferability.
- Qualitative design yields depth but not statistical generalizability.
- Self-reported perceptions may be subject to hindsight bias; triangulation with behavioural metrics (eye-tracking, recall tests) would strengthen findings.

7.2 Future Research Directions

- Mixed-methods studies combining qualitative insights with experimental measures of retention and persuasion.
- Cross-cultural comparisons to explore how cultural communication norms affect multimedia reception.
- Longitudinal studies on how evolving platform technologies (AR/VR) alter effectiveness.
- Quantitative investigation of accessibility implementation and compliance impacts.

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Appendix: Research Methodology (Qualitative Instruments & Protocols)

A. Interview Guide (Semi-Structured) — Key Questions

1. Describe a recent multimedia presentation you gave or attended. What worked well? What did not?
2. How do you define “effective” in the context of corporate presentations?
3. How do you design/select visuals and multimedia elements? What principles guide your choices?
4. Have you encountered situations where multimedia backfired? Please explain.
5. How do you address accessibility (captions, alt-text, colour contrast)?
6. In what ways do organisational norms shape presentation design and delivery?
7. How do you assess the impact of a presentation (metrics or feedback)?

B. Focus Group Stimulus Prompts

- Short clips (60–90 seconds) from corporate presentations that vary in design quality. Ask participants to discuss emotional reaction, comprehension, credibility, and likely behavioural outcome.

C. Coding Framework (Sample)

1. Design and Cognitive Fit (codes: signalling, redundancy, segmentation)
2. Engagement and Attention (codes: storytelling, interactivity, boredom)
3. Persuasion and Credibility (codes: production quality, emotionality, trust)
4. Accessibility (codes: captioning, colour contrast, alt-text)
5. Constraints (codes: technical issues, time constraints)
6. Organisational Context (codes: norms, incentives, governance)

D. Practical Design Checklist (Summary for Practitioners)

- One main idea per slide.
- Minimal text—use visuals + concise bullets.
- Apply Mayer’s multimedia principles: signalling, segmenting, modality, coherence.
- Ensure accessibility: captions, contrast, readable fonts, alt-text.
- Rehearse presenter-slide coordination; avoid reading slides verbatim.
- Limit decorative animations—use motion to clarify, not distract.
- Include interactive elements for engagement, but keep them brief.
- Test technology and streaming quality before live events.
- Gather feedback and metrics (surveys, view duration) to iterate.
-