GIFTS

Research-Evaluate-Create: Developing Multicultural Perspectives and Approaches for Strategic Visual Communication

Janis Teruggi Page, University of Illinois at Chicago

Overview of the Assignment, Including the Rationale

This project builds visual and multicultural communication proficiencies in students of public relations. It serves as a final project for a visual communication course that taught visual literacy, ethics, theory, and strategic communication practices including multicultural and global communication—guided by the textbook *Visual Communication Insights and Strategies* (Page & Duffy, 2022). This assignment's main purpose is to inspire PR students to create purposeful and ethical visual communication.

The assignment tasks students to select and research a developing country in order to strategize appropriate visual messaging. In many developing countries, poverty, literacy, environmental issues, and sanitation conditions impact what personal hygiene and health lifestyle products are needed and valued, and how their benefits can or should be communicated. Students also apply the principles of visual rhetoric, semiotics, metaphors, narratives, symbolic fantasies, and/or gestalt design principles (see key terms and definitions in Appendix B) through the creation of a design rough with elements that signify or refer to culturally meaningful ideas and symbols. For their chosen country, this final project activity challenges students to develop culturally relevant brand messaging for a personal hygiene or health lifestyle product that addresses social and

environmental responsibility.

Student Learning Goals

1) Understand that cultural awareness and intelligence is needed for multicultural PR visual communication with global publics.

2) Diagnose the strategy for appropriate visual communication by researching cultural dimensions and the societal, environmental, and economic profiles of developing countries.

3) Gain insights on how to position and visually communicate socially responsible initiatives, services, and products within developing countries.

4) Demonstrate knowledge of how visual theory can guide pictorial messaging.

5) Confidently simulate a client presentation.

Connection to Public Relations Practice and/or Theory

The global public relations markets expected to grow from $103 billion in 2022 to $149 billion by 2026 (BRC, 2022). This expected growth is due to post-COVID-19 business recovery and adjustments to continued operational challenges. A rising need to gain competitive advantages is driving the PR market and bringing new challenges to PR professionals working for global agencies, MNCs, or NGOs. The strategic communicator must develop an understanding of a foreign market's unique dynamics and cultural characteristics. It is critical for PR students to develop multicultural awareness, knowledge, and sensibilities to build their visual literacy and competencies in this important field.

Research also suggests that MNCs will have a smoother road if they "stress the social role of the organization and . . . emphasize an active but intelligent involvement in changing and improving societal conditions" (de Brooks & Waymer, 2009, p. 31). The Edelman Trust Barometer (2022), conducted with 36,000+ respondents in 28 countries, reports that societal leadership is now a core business function. The

other institutions it tracks—government, media, and the nonprofit community—have steadily declined in public trust. It also finds the quality of information is the most powerful trust builder, with trust in business specifically increasing in many developing countries.

The theory of cultural intelligence, defined as the ability to comprehend different beliefs, practices, attitudes, and behaviors in a country or market and apply that knowledge to attain one's goals (Page & Parnell, 2021), guides students, as future global PR practitioners, to learn and adapt to the cultural norms and expectations of the countries where their clients or organizations operate.

Evidence of Learning Outcomes/Assessment

This final project has been assigned to a 400-level class, Public Relations Visual Communications. Learning outcomes are evidenced through students' initial workshopping their challenges with each other, presenting early stages of their projects to the class for brainstorming, and presenting their final projects for peer engagement, critique, and discussion.

Students have researched the following countries: Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Paraguay, Hungary, Albania, Croatia, Malaysia, Philippines, Fiji, India, Mozambique, Rwanda, Panama, Morocco, and Trinidad & Tobago, providing culturally relevant and socially responsible product ideas and visual messaging. For example, to help Malaysians take part in combating effects of climate change and reduce landfill waste, reusable paper towels carried four culturally relevant designs: star with moon (religion), top-spinners and kick ball (popular traditional games) and rainforests (land characteristics). To address period poverty in Hungary, eco-friendly reusable pads are introduced into a country where heavy taxes are imposed on feminine hygiene products. To combat plastic waste in Albania, a visual message uses pathos and moral appeals to encourage consumers to use biodegradable bamboo toothbrushes.

References

BRC (Business Research Company) (2022). Public Relations Global
    Market Report 2022. https://www.thebusinessresearchcompany.
    com/report/public-relations-global-market-report

de Brooks, K. P., & Waymer, D. (2009). Public relations and strategic
    issues management challenges in Venezuela: A discourse analysis
    of Crystallex International Corporation in Las Cristinas. *Public
    Relations Review, 35*(1), 31-39. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.
    pubrev.2008.11.002

Page, J. T. & Duffy, M. (2022). *Visual communication insights and
    strategies*. Wiley   .

Page, J. T. & Parnell, L. J. (2021). *Introduction to public relations:
    Strategic, digital, and socially responsible communications*. Sage.

Edelman. (2022). *2022 Edelman Trust Barometer*. https://www.edelman.
    com/trust/2022-trust-barometer

Appendix A

ASSIGNMENT

**Research-Evaluate-Create: Developing Multicultural Perspectives and
Strategies for Public Relations Visual Communications**

Instructions: You are a researcher with a strategic communication
agency and your client is a hypothetical (not an existing) U.S.-based
multinational corporation that manufactures personal hygiene and health
products (shampoos, deodorants, lotions, fragrances, feminine products,
tissues, drinking water solutions, healthier foods, etc.) that are socially
and environmentally responsible. You must research and strategize a PR

visual messaging campaign to introduce one of its new products (you must imagine one) to a developing nation. Don't worry about your product being in competition with already existing products – that's not the point. The point is to study a country's culture and embed that culture into your product and the way you visually communicate it.

There are 4 deliverables:
    A. Memo to the Account Executive
    B. Creative Brief
    C. Rough Concept Design
    D. Class Presentation with PowerPoint

Step One, RESEARCH
    1. Search for the Wikipedia page "Developing Country" and scroll down to find a list of *developing* countries. Choose a country.
    2. Then search for the Hofstede Insights "Country Comparison" page and enter your country's name to find its cultural dimension values.
    3. For further research, search for "The World Factbook-CIA." Once you select your country, explore the "People and Society" link in the lower left-hand contents bar. Do further research as necessary.

Step Two, EVALUATE
Report your findings to the Account Executive in a Memo. Besides identifying the country and the product, the memo must *specifically reference* your research (Hofstede's cultural dimensions and any additional research) to justify your recommendations for the product and visual messaging. As this is both a professional and academic document, it must include a *minimum of 5* in-text citations and an end reference list. Required length: 350-400 words. *(Instructors: if applicable, require students to also include X number of key terms, highlighted, from their study of visual theory/design concepts See list of Key Terms at end, drawn*

from the Page & Duffy textbook.)

For your creative team, complete the following **Creative Brief** guided by the country's cultural dimensions and any insights obtained from the World Factbook and any other sources.

Creative Brief

Country:

Summary of its cultural dimensions, noting the most significant:

Product:

The challenge: (Answer: What is the need?)

The solution: (Answer: How and why will you successfully meet the challenge?)

The audience: (Answer: Who will your messaging target?)

The intention: (Answer: What does the audience need to understand/feel?)

The specifics: (Answer: How should the visual message look and function?)

Step Three: CREATE

To help guide the creative team, make a **Rough Concept Design** that follows your brief. It should be either a single frame or a short multiple-frame storyboard.

FINAL PRESENTATION:

Build a PowerPoint presentation directed to your hypothetical client (to be delivered in the classroom or in a voice narrated PPT exported to video). In this presentation, you will summarize your findings, present your creative brief, and display and explain your design rough—noting the visual theory and design principles that guided it. The presentation must fall between *(Instructors: determine online or in person and length parameters considering class size and any time constraints).*

Appendix B

Key Visual Theory Terms *(if required in Memo)*

METAPHOR (Page & Duffy, 2022, pp. 125, 126)
Target – topic of the metaphor
Source – how the metaphor is framed
    (Example: The wind (topic) is a lion (source) today.)
Analogies - similarities
Interactive theory of metaphor - metaphor as an aspect of language (The wind is a lion today)
Conceptual metaphor theory - metaphor based on concepts/thoughts + not words alone (Politics is a game)
Structural metaphor – abstract experience compared to simple experience (Life is a puzzle)
Orientational metaphors – metaphors organized in terms of spatial comparisons (Feeling up today)
Embodiment metaphors - metaphors using experiences of the body (That news is heavy)
Conduit metaphor - metaphors in which ideas are objects, expressions are containers for those objects, and communication is the sending of those containers (her feelings came through)

Synecdoche - use of a physical part of something to stand for the whole, or less commonly, the use of the whole to stand for a part

Metonym - uses a close association with a concept—and not a physical part of it

Personification - a physical object or entity is referred to or presented as a person, thereby suggesting human motivations, characteristics, and activities

Irony - a deliberate metaphorical expression that signifies an oppositional meaning—often implying sarcasm or seen as insulting. 2 types:

> **Hyperbole –** extreme exaggeration, often unrealistic or literally unbelievable, serving to emphasize an implied meaning
>
> **Litotes -** uses diminishment and negativity to gain positive attention toward something

Adjacent images - both target and source are present in some proximity to each other

Unified images - blends target and source into a single image

Implied images - compares two things that are not alike without showing one of those things

NARRATIVE (Page & Duffy, 2022, p. 153)

Narrative rationality - a capacity that humans inherently possess, allowing them to tell good from bad stories, moral from immoral stories, and acceptable from unacceptable stories

Narrative probability - the story's logical coherence

Narrative fidelity – the story's truthfulness

Form – *how* content is presented in spatial and temporal juxtapositions, and color and lighting

Content - *what* a story says through characters, actions, and settings

Myths - recurring stories containing beliefs and values that are significant, long lasting, and widely accepted as being true within a culture

Idealistic/moralistic myth - one of brotherhood, valuing human equality,

tolerance, charity, trustworthiness, community celebration, love, justice, and compassion

Materialistic myth - one of individual success, valuing entitlement, individualism, heroic achievement, persistence, initiative, self-reliance, pleasure, the entrepreneurial spirit, and success

Master analogue - a story's deep structure myth, whether idealistic/moralistic or materialistic

Archetype - original pattern; the basic building blocks of stories found in characters, situations, and symbols

Visual syntax - form (see definition of form)

Tropes - commonly recurring motifs in creative works

SEMIOTICS (Page & Duffy, 2022, p. 98)

Ideology – body of beliefs and representations promote the values and interests of dominant groups within society

Gestalt - meaning suggested by grouping elements to make sense of the whole

Signifier - the visual image itself

Signified - the meaning suggested by the visual image

Denotation - direct, specific, literal meaning

Connotation - meaning that is subjective, depended on interpretation/cultural knowledge

Icon - sign that conveys similarities to the object

Index - a sign that appears to have a factual connection with a missing object

Symbol - sign that associates with knowledge drawn from interpretation, and not through perceptions of similarity or factual connections

SYMBOLIC CONVERGENCE THEORY (Page & Duffy, 2022, p.184)

Fantasies - imaginative ideas with symbolic meanings

Fantasy Themes - shared imaginative ideas with symbolic meanings

Fantasy Type - a recurring fantasy theme

Convergence - sharing of the same emotions and embracing the same values

Rhetorical vision - a group consciousness; a collective, overall understanding; a worldview

Dramatis Personae - characters in real life, in a play, a movie, or any mediated product

Scene - physical or symbolic location (setting) of the action

Plotline - underlying reason for the actions taken, or the conflicts faced, by the major characters

Symbolic Cue - shorthand saying or image–recognized by participants– that stands for a more complete fantasy theme

Saga - oft-repeated telling of the achievements in the life of a person, group, community, organization, or nation

Chaining - when a story catches the attention of people in a group, they build on its meaning through their communication

Sanctioning Agent - bottom-line value that justifies the drama and legitimizes the rhetorical vision, or the course of action people take.

VISUAL RHETORIC (Page & Duffy, 2022, p.70)

Rhetoric - use of symbols in communication that's crafted to modify the perspective of the receiver

Ethos - trustworthiness, credibility

Logos - use of reasoning

Pathos - force or feelings