

## Pin & Tag: Using Pinterest to Learn about Visual Culture

### What is your idea?

In an online senior-level “Global Advertising” course students learn about how culture affects communication practices around the world. At the core of the curriculum is Hofstede’s “Cultural Dimensions” model, which provides students with a framework to understand and interpret visual messages (advertising) without necessarily understanding the language that is used in the copy. At the end of the semester, students develop their own global advertising campaign applying concepts learned in class.

The Pin & Tag assignment is used fairly early during the semester to help students learn Hofstede’s “Cultural Dimensions” model. The assignment uses the popular social media platform Pinterest to build a repository of ads from different countries that are tagged based on which of Hofstede’s cultural dimensions are reflected in the ad. After students pin and tag the ads they found, they review other students’ pins and discuss the content following a prompt that is aligned with Hofstede’s model.

### What are the goals?

Learning outcomes:

- To recognize Hofstede’s six dimensions reflected in visual messages (advertising) from around the world | Comprehension
- To categorize cultural dimensions as expressed in visual messages correctly | Analysis
- To synthesize multiple dimensions reflected in a visual message and explain how culture influences communication | Synthesis
- To critique the works of others using concepts learned in class | Evaluation

The big idea of this assignment in the context of the course is two-fold: 1) students learn how to recognize, categorize, and synthesize cultural dimensions in some of the most creative ads from around the world, and 2) they contribute to a multi-year repository of tagged work that can be searched by hashtag and used for inspiration as they work on their own global advertising campaigns (final project for the semester, which is a culturally relevant ad campaign in a different country). The same Pinterest board is used every time the course is taught, which adds to the richness of the repository as a learning and inspirational tool.

**How does it work?** Give a step-by-step rundown of how it is implemented and what happens (in and/or outside of the classroom).

1. Students read the chapter about Hofstede’s “Cultural Dimensions” model and watch the online lecture (this is an online course).
2. Students find a print ad or commercial from a different country in which they recognize one or more of Hofstede’s six dimensions of culture. A popular source for this is [adsoftheworld.com](http://adsoftheworld.com).
3. Students then write a 500-character description and analysis of the ad using concepts learned in class (Pinterest is limited to 500 characters).

Assignment Prompt for the Analysis:

- Description of the ad (what is depicted? who is the advertiser?)
  - Cultural analysis of the country in which the ad ran:
    - Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Describe your country using Hofstede's six cultural dimensions; cite the country score (p. 365-367)
    - Other cultural models. Please use additional communication models from your book to round out your country's cultural profile, such as: high-context v. low-context, dimensions of time, relationship with nature, etc. Advertising appeal, p. 276-293
4. Students pin their ad, along with their 500-character description and analysis to the course's Pinterest board.
  5. Students tag their pin with one or more of the following tag(s) indicating which cultural dimensions are reflected.
    - Uncertainty Avoidance: #ADPR438\_UAI
    - Masculinity: #ADPR438\_MAS
    - Femininity: #ADPR438\_FEM
    - Individualism: #ADPR438\_IND
    - Collectivism: #ADPR438\_COL
    - Long-term Orientation: #ADPR438\_LTO
    - Short-term Orientation: #ADPR438\_STO
    - Power Distance: #ADPR438\_PDI
    - Indulgence/Restraint: #ADPR438\_IVR
  6. After pinning and tagging their ad, it's time to view and comment on at least two other students' pins, discussing whether they see the dimension(s) they tagged the ad with and to what extent.
  7. Since this is an online course, students are expected to keep the Pinterest discussions going by monitoring and responding the discussions about their own pins as well as those they commented on.

### **How have students reacted? What are the take-aways for students?**

The Pin & Tag assignment has been one of my students' favorite assignments for several reasons:

- It uses a popular social media platform to let them practice an important concept learned in class early on
- They get exposed to some of the most creative ads from around the world that often serve as inspiration for their own ad campaign as the Pinterest board is searchable by hashtag
- Pinterest is easy to use and highly engaging; it takes them out of their usual Learning Management System for a while, which can get boring
- The focus is on visual learning as opposed to writing a "boring" paper (their words!)
- Students understand that the most successful ads are culturally relevant and they see the tools advertiser use to communicate with different audiences around the globe successfully
- Students consistently rate this assignment as "challenging" but not too difficult to lose interest

Student Comments:

- “I liked viewing other students’ work that covered other countries.”
- “I really like how we used Pinterest, Twitter and Facebook for our discussions instead of doing them on the discussion board like most classes.”
- “I liked how involved everyone was in the course. I loved the material and the way the professor had us learn the material was a fun and exciting way!”
- “How interactive it was.”
- “I liked the use of social media playing an integral part of this course. It was nice to be able to have a like-lecture discussion in an online class.”

The Instructor’s Viewpoint:

I developed this assignment to build a highly engaging online course that supports different learning styles. While it’s often easier to contain all learning in a single LMS, I have learned over the years that students appreciate when instructors meet them in their online space, which is dominated by social media. This assignment comes with a ready-to-use rubrics, which make is quick to grade and comment. Bonus: I can easily assess the extent to which students understand one of the core concepts of the course.