A History of Communications:

The Influence of Visuals

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ABSTRACT

Visual communication was examined via a historical analysis in the context of researching historical events. The history of imagery in communication was analyzed in order to identify trends and phenomena that grew into modern visual communication. Historical uses of imagery proved to be more effective than text alone, and therefore fueled a shift toward visuals in mass communication. As new specialities within communication increased, the possibilities for their combination increased as well. Many practices began to intercombine and complexify the field. Due to its accessibility, visual communication continues to climb in relevance in many forms, especially social media. Visual communication has grown exponentially as a field and as a practice due to its historical events and trends, intercombinance of specialties, and its general accessibility to the general public.

INTRODUCTION

Communications is a diverse field of work, oftentimes being used as an umbrella term for multitude of other specialties. Beyond that, many subtopics within the area are relatively new genres of communications. A crucial aspect of mass communicating involves visual communication,which can include photos, videos, animations, models, graphs, infographics, cartoons and maps. Sonja Foss Ph.D. studied communications at Northwestern University. In her journal article titled, "Visual Imagery as Communication," she voices her disapproval surrounding the lack of the representation of visual concepts in the study of communications. She describes imagery as, "surprisingly absent from the communication field." She goes on to

state that visual imagery is critical to communicating, and should be better expressed to the public (Foss).

Communications as a conceptual practice is largely underestimated (Kane). The implementation of visual imagery and information was historically integral to the effectiveness of various attempts at mass communication, and new strides are continuing to be made. This begs the question, to what extent did historical progress with visual communication shape the modern mass communications that we experience today, and which of these phenomena have affected modern visual communication?

In order to explore that concept in depth, this paper has been strategically organized. Due to length, it has been organized into eight sections: abstract, introduction, synthesis matrix, context and relevance, discussion and the reflection. These are all indicated by the small caps headings. Occasionally, subsections were necessary, which are denoted by the italicized subheadings.

SYNTHESIS MATRIX

	Visuals in Communication	Visual Learners	Early Visual Communicators	Early Visual Communications Efforts
A Complete History of Communication 2020	This article serves as a summary of a portion of the history of communications.			
"Atrocity Propaganda" 2014				This defines the term which describes most of the WWII posters.
Bernays, Edward L			Bernay's publication describes his own	

			techniques and practices.
Dunn 1992		Dunn speaks on the importance of integrating imagery and visuals into the classroom.	
"Edward Bernays" 1970			This article also describes the family and upbringing of Bernays.
Foss 1992	Foss both describes the field, as well as its pertinence to society.		
Gilakjani 2011		Gilakjani describes the portions of students that prefer to learn with visuals.	
Horne 2018			Horne describes the horrific and racially charged posters printed during WWII.
Kane 2016	Kane describes the underestimation of visuals in communication.		
"Master of American Propaganda"			This article describes the groups that came about in WWI.
Posters 1970			This is a source that simply provided images of posters from WWII.
Rendell 2016			Rendell both describes the posters from WWII, and also explains their deeper meanings.

Rudiger				This research compiles data and descriptions about propaganda in WWII.
Wallman			Wallman details the Lucky Strike campaigns done by Bernays.	
Wilson, Laurie 1996			Wilson spoke on her negative opinions of early land ventures.	
Wilson, Robert 2019			Wilson describes the ventures and techniques of PT Barnum.	

CONTEXT AND RELEVANCE

The power of visual learning. With the planet containing billions of learners, it can be hard to create campaigns that are easily digestible to everyone. Of those billions, most people's preferred learning styles can be boiled down to the three basics, or a combination of the three. These staple learning styles are; auditory, visual, and kinesthetic. These learning styles relate to the consumption of information via hearing/listening, viewing/observing and touch/physicality, respectively. Iranian scholar, Abbas Pourhossein Gilakjani, published a paper covering these styles, and their implications. In his publication, he details that comprehension of the multiple learning styles can increase learner success. Specifically, he describes visual learners as learners who "think in pictures and learn best in visual images" (Gilakjani).

Not only do learning styles involving imagery and visuals exist, but they're also decently common. According to Rita Dunn, and Kenneth Dunn, co-authors of a book outlining the importance of modifying lessons for student's preferred styles, it is predicted that 40 percent of

school age children identify with the visual learning style, while only 20 to 30 percent resonate with auditory learning (Dunn). With just under half of a population learning best via images and visuals, a large group of learners are left out of standardized learning (in schools and otherwise), due to standard classes revolving around textbooks.

Imagery and the power that the field holds in the human mind are integral to the development of visual communication. These developments are detailed chronologically in the following discussion section. This brings the exploration of communications to the next section, where a many sources were utilized in order to reach conclusions surrounding visual communication.

DISCUSSION

The acquisition of the primary colonies, 1585. Visual Communications has grown to be recognized as a very rapidly growing phenomenon (Kane). And it makes sense, considering where mass communication stemmed from. For example, one field within communications is public relations. This field can be traced back to the late 1500s, when Captain Arthur Barlowe returned from the harsh reality of Roanoke Island, and he raved to Sir Walter Raleigh about the apparent pulchritudinous nature of Roanoke. (Wilson, Laurie). In reality, the land was waterlogged, and therefore not optimal for settlement. It was later exposed that the claims were falsified and fundamentally corrupt, and it became clear that the initial voyagers' sole ambitions were to procure financial investments from those back in England. These publications only increased exponentially over time, to the extent that Virginia became very well known. This resulted in public backlash, and other publications- often anonymously- ridiculed their practices

of 'public relations.' This upsetting start to public relations and communications in the United States may have stunted the growth of such practices as visual communication.

Author Laurie J. Wilson, had rather negative opinions about the birth of public relations. In her publication she stated, "Utilization of publicity and press agentry to promote causes, tout land adventures, and raise funds is older than the nation itself" (Wilson, Laurie). Unfortunately, this was not the only time that the reputation of a communications field grew murky with corruption.

This nation was quite literally built upon these moral standards, as many other colonies and settlements followed Virginia's lead. The "Charter of Maryland" by Charles I in 1622 began the perpetuation of this standard for a long time to come. Many publications followed the suit of Charles' I edition. Hilton Head, NC is named after one of the early public relations' specialists, William Hilton. A myriad of additional narratives describe the apparent prosperous nature of the East coast. When misled Europeans sought a higher quality of life by traveling to this foreign land, they were unfortunately disappointed. These new settlers discovered a land ridden with pests, dangers, and illness (Wilson, Laurie). Whilst the colonies were founded upon ill morals (inaccurate depictions of colonized land), driven by the contagious ideals of imperialism of that era, public relations would grow to become a field that constructed positive images for all types of institutions, as well as maintained mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and the public.

PT Barnum, 1810-1891. The next mentionable development, and most significant to this topic was a revolution begun by PT Barnum. One of his first expenditures was the American Museum near Broadway, which he dedicated to all sorts of artifacts and performances which piqued his

interest. One of these artifacts was the fabricated remains of a 'mermaid'. After manufacturing an incredulous story which falsified the credibility of the supposed sea creature, he began to distribute posters. Robert Wilson, the author of Barnum's biography called *PT Barnum*, described these posters as, "beautiful" (Wilson, Robert). The aesthetically pleasing, whilst not accurate, posters drew in the interest of the press. Barnum quickly became known for supplementing his written advertising with imagery, and visual elements. This was a new practice and was largely popularized by Barnum.

Barnum did not see his fabrications as harmful, or even malicious. He was known to perpetuate honesty surrounding his somewhat immoral adventures. Being a man who was appreciative of the arts, he claimed his aim to be, "putting on glittering appearances… novel expedients, by which to suddenly arrest public attention, and to attract the public eye and ear" (Wilson, Robert). His era during the 1800s served as a catalyst for the recognition and acceptance of visuals within communications, and many relating fields. Wilson also writes, "In a period when… photography… and the newspaper were all making the world a smaller and more knowable place, people flocked to Barnum's museum…" (Wilson, Robert).

Living the duration of his life within the 1900s, Barnum embodies the cultural revolution surrounding, "... breaking social boundaries" (Wilson, Robert). His imagery, and concoctions of visual displays spoke to many, and he quickly became a known figure throughout the world. One might even argue that despite his tainted reputation, he was the American Dream personified (Wilson, Robert). The level of success that he reached is a massive testament to the power of imaginal communication on the perception of the public masses.

WWI 1914-1918. World War I was one of the first times that propaganda was used on such a large scale. One example of the visual communications that were going on would be the poster (*Posters).* George Creel, a journalist, brought together a team of visual communicators after finding out that the government might've been trying to censor some of the media during the war. He spearheaded this group containing, "advertising, graphic arts, and newspapers," specialists (*Master of American Propaganda).* Many groups similar to this were formed around this time, which fueled the movement of propaganda within the visual communications community. Atrocity propaganda is a specific avenue of the practice that is responsible for demonization of the designated enemy through visual distortions, or the distribution of facts ("Atrocity Propaganda"). Visual presentations of political opinions largely originated within this time period. Whilst not entirely positive, this was a large step in the journey of visual communications being accepted as a form of providing information.

Edward Bernays 1891-1995. Edward L. Bernays was an American publicist, who gave rise to public relations (a component of the communications field) as a profession. His life's work included convincing businesses to hire retired war veterans, and popularizing proper safety expectations for women in the workplace. Bernays was also an author with many publications, including *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, and *Public Relations* (*Edward Bernays).*

Edward Bernays, in his publication *Manipulating Public Opinion*, defined public opinion as, "the thought of a society at a given time toward a given object; broadly conceived, it is the power of the group to sway the larger public in its attitude" (Bernays, Edward L). Bernays saw his exploration of public opinion and relations as a somewhat psychological journey. He used his findings and experience to learn about how the human mind works (Bernays, Edward L). His

interest in the psychological processes of the human race was largely in part to his psychoanalyst

uncle, Sigmund Freud, and his findings ("Edward Bernays").

In the 1930s the Lucky Strike cigarette company was owned by George Washington Hill,

but it was immortalized by Bernays. Hill sought to increase the volume of women consuming his

product, and hired Bernays. After an analysis of the company and the public's opinion, it was

decided that the color of the cigarette packages held women back from purchasing Lucky Strikes

(Wallman). To the disappointment of Hill, green was the color of masculinity in the 1930s.

However, he refused to rebrand. After copious amounts of research, Bernays decided to hold a

Green Ball. He even enlisted the help of other companies, such as the Onondaga Silk Company.

Via his networking, he gained support from all sorts of fields including the fashion industry,

artists, psychologists, accessory manufacturers, and even the Color Fashion Bureau (Wallman).

By holding his Green Ball, he successfully integrated the color green into the feminine wardrobe,

and convinced the American women to purchase Hill's Lucky Strikes (Wallman).

Propaganda during WWII. When the Allied Powers fought the Axis Powers during World War

II, another battle was occurring behind the scenes. Dubbed "psychological soldiers" by

researcher Chris Rudiger, these propagandists promoted negative beliefs about their opponents

(Rudiger). These propagandists promoted racial stereotypes through posters in an attempt to

heighten patriotism within their countries. Germany was well-known during this time for

dramatizing traditionally Jewish features. Rudiger described the dehumanization of Jews on

these posters when he said, "Jews are depicted with big noses and are very ugly with hunched

backs. The propagandists tried to disgust people to bring out their inner hate for Jews" (Rudiger). These racially offensive displays went as far as making Jews seem animalistic and nonhuman.

Aside from the racially charged posters, imagerial propaganda also became a sort of subtle threatening technique. One infamous saying that originated during World War II was "Loose lips sink ships" in reference to any citizens considering being unfaithful to their country's government. There are numerous examples of posters from this time frame which utilize visuals in order to display patriotism or incite fear (Horne).

During World War II, the Office of War Information (IWO) was tasked with mass producing and spreading these posters- which were described as the office's "most striking legacy" (Rendell). A National Geographic article describes a poster, where a woman walking with her groceries is compared to the likes of a soldier bearing his gun. This analogy is meant to discourage women and wives from driving places, in order to save their resources for the war at hand (Rendell). By displaying this information visually, the message is received in a somewhat indirect manner. These visual posters were very effective at placing ideas into the heads of consumers and citizens, and were a major method of mass communication (Rendell).

FINDINGS

Many specialties in communications have become intertwined with each other. For example, while Bernays worked for Lucky Strike he was hired to improve the relationship between the public and the company. However, by doing so and feminizing the color green, he also incorporated marketing strategies (Wallman). This meant that Bernays was practicing both

marketing and public relations. His strategies also largely revolved around visual components, such as the Green Ball. Therefore, the visual component of his work is what brought together and blurred the lines between the previously distinctly separate practices.

Over the course of communications in history, visuals and imagery have become more and more relevant and necessary. From the aesthetic posters by PT Barnum to the visual propaganda involved in both World War I and World War II, the implementation of pictorial information has continued to become increasingly effective. Now, with the rise of social media, visuals have become a social currency. Visually pleasing graphics catered to each viewer cover most social media platforms, simply because text and written data is no longer the most effective method at communicating.

This rise in visual communications is due in part to the diminishing value of the written word. In about 130,000 B.C.E the first cave paintings were recorded. These were early methods of communication between humans, using visuals on cave walls. These existed before literacy and written communication. With literacy came communication via letter writings and the printing press, but photography began in the early 1800s. Photography evolved into television, the internet and social media. The era of the written word was somewhat short lived, as visuals returned and humans began communicating with imagery again.

Visual communication is the most accessible method of communication. The use of imagery or graphics represents the unification of a people that could not communicate via written words. Visuals transcend language boundaries, as it is understandable regardless of the language a person speaks.

Due to the inclusion of visuals in new fields of communication, the rise of the relevance of visuals, the return to visuals phenomenon, and the blatant accessibility of imagery, visual communications will only continue to become more and more predominant.

REFLECTION

As far as the intentionality of this research, the goal was to create a detailed historical timeline of the most major events and people in order to recognize certain phenomena. The research question was, to what extent did historical progress with visual communication shape the modern mass communications that we experience today, and which of these phenomena have affected modern visual communication? A historical analysis was conducted which brought light to inciting events, as well as the trends that they caused. Within the findings, this information was analyzed and traced to specific trends that influence modern visual communication.

My faculty mentor was Blaise Noto, from the communications department at Barton College. Throughout this process, we had frequent and regular meetings in order to access the progress of the project and interpret information. In addition, Mr. Noto provided me with countless resources when I struggled with finding academic sources. Therefore, Mr. Noto influenced my learning by introducing me to the history of communication, and assisting me in identifying phenomena that occur within the field.

This learning experience impacted me due to the scope of my research question. As an underclassman communications major, it felt necessary to delve into the past of my field and understand the trends that are now relevant. By researching and creating this historical analysis, I feel equipped with the knowledge to excel in communications.

As far as what may have gone differently, I can only say that I would've liked to have more time. There were many novel length biographies of key people that I would have benefitted from having the time to read them in their entirety. However, I also know that I will still take the time to do so in the future.

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