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Symbolic image in public communication of Thu Dau Mot University

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ABSTRACT

Symbolic images stand for more than simply what appears before the eyes. They represent a deeper meaning behind the image – something. The symbolic images in public communications, and techniques of their application as an instrument of forming desired ideological models within social consciousness, as well as consider principles of social psychology that enable successful application of communication technologies to a target audience by appealing to their image thinking. Applied methods of the research are: sociocultural, historical, and content analysis, this article focuses on analyzing the significance of symbol image in public communication strategies and its impacts on brand building, trust establishment, and fostering a positive interactive environment with the public. Based on lessons drawn from practical public communication activities of Thu Dau Mot University, the article proposes additional measures to enhance the effectiveness of the unit's communication and their potential application to specific cases, contributing to the development of the field of public communication.

Keywords: *symbolic image, Thu Dau Mot University, public communication*

1. Introduction

The technological revolution of Industry 4.0 has driven rapid development in media and public relations, connecting the values of organizations, businesses, and individuals with society. In this context, public communication has become an inseparable part of connecting activities and transmitting information to the public, aimed at maintaining the perception, trust, and brand credibility in their minds.

Thu Dau Mot University is a public institution within the higher education system of Vietnam, steadily making strong advancements in university rankings to demonstrate its educational and training capabilities, scientific research endeavors, and a commitment to achieving financial autonomy as part of its development strategy. Through research, the author provides insights into the role of symbolic image in public communication, emphasizing the necessity and significance of effectively utilizing symbolic images in public communication to establish and maintain relationships with the public, community, and society.

2. Overview of symbol and symbolic image in Public Communication

2.1. The Concept of Symbol

The term "symbol" has its roots in the ancient languages of Europe (known as "symbol" in Greek and "symbol" in Latin). Originating from the practical usage in various scientific fields, the term has acquired versatile shades of meaning.

According to the Vietnamese Dictionary published by the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences and the Institute of Linguistics, "A symbol has two meanings: 1) A representative image. The dove symbolizes peace. 2) A form of cognition higher than sensation, giving us mental images of an object that remains after the impact of the object on our senses has ceased" [Hoang Phe 1995].

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2000) defines a "symbol" as "a person, object, or event that represents something general or a particular situation" [Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 2000].

The Symbol Dictionary by J.E. Cirlot (1971) explains that "what is called a symbol is something that a group of people agree on having more than one meaning, representing more than just itself" [J.E. Cirlot 1971].

From these various definitions, we can observe that "symbol" is a term with a rich and diverse connotation, subject to specific interpretation based on different contexts, or having a more overarching nature. To put it in the words of Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, a symbol is "Intrinsic to itself, it breaks predefined boundaries. It is like a flying arrow that is not flying, standing still while simultaneously becoming ethereal, evident yet elusive" [Jean Chevalier & Alain Gheerbrant 1997].

2.2. Public Communication

Public communication is the process of transmitting information, opinions, messages, and interactions between organizations, individuals, or groups and the public or their target audience. The primary goal of public communication is to foster understanding, build a brand, create an image, establish interaction, and influence the target audience [Dean C. Barnlund 1964].

Public communication is not merely about conveying information in a straightforward manner; it involves understanding the recipients of the message, tailoring messages for specific public audiences, and creating a positive communication experience. This encompasses the use of various communication channels such as radio, television, social media, websites, seminars, and other mediums to ensure that the message reaches the right target and generates the desired impact.

Public communication also involves managing the image, reputation, and trust of an organization or an individual. It plays a crucial role in establishing positive relationships with the public, managing communication crises, and building a strong and resilient brand.

In summary, public communication is an interactive process that involves transmitting information, creating an image with the ability to interact and influence the public or the target audience, while also managing the image and reputation of an organization or an individual.

2.3. Symbolic images in Public Communication

From the two concepts of symbol and public communication, we can understand that symbolic images in public communication are symbol abstracted through visual images to convey messages, meanings, or ideas in an intuitive, impactful, and quick manner, transcending the limitations of written and spoken language. These symbols are used to transmit information, opinions, messages, and interactions between organizations, individuals, or groups and the public or their target audience.

Symbolic images can encompass elements such as symbolic images, charts, icons, emblems, drawings, or any image with the ability to represent specific meanings or aspects of the desired message. Thanks to their visual nature and rapid impact, symbolic images are often utilized to illustrate the connection between complex ideas or to generate curiosity and attention from message recipients.

In the field of public relations, the use of symbolic images is a vital component of communication strategies. By combining images and text to create profound messages and powerful impressions, symbolic images convey core values and establish a unique brand identity in the minds of the public.

2.4. The Importance of Symbolic images in Public Communication

Symbolic images hold significant importance in public communication, aiding in conveying messages quickly, clearly, and powerfully. They establish connections with the audience, encourage interaction, and create strong impressions in their minds. This is manifested through several aspects:

Symbolic images have the ability to transmit messages more swiftly and clearly than spoken and written language. An symbolic image can convey an idea, emotion, or thought without the need for extensive verbal explanations.

Symbolic images have the power to stimulate emotions and create stronger impressions with the public. Public relations professionals adeptly use creatively unique symbolic

images to generate profound and unforgettable impressions in the minds of communities and societies about their messages.

Symbolic images can represent a brand, an organization, or a specific idea by immediately linking meaning and value to what the symbolic image represents.

Symbolic images help in quicker information assimilation compared to reading or processing text, as proven by the cognitive processing mechanisms of the human brain.

Symbolic images are considered a universal language, capable of transcending spatial-temporal limits, linguistic and cultural differences among various nations, in order to communicate messages of organizations, businesses, and individuals to the public.

Symbolic images stimulate audience curiosity and encourage them to engage in discussions or interact with the communicated content.

Symbolic images exhibit diversity in colors, shapes, and meanings, contributing to attraction and interaction in communication.

Symbolic images encourage the creative thinking of graphic designers and communication experts as they seek to visually and engagingly convey messages.

2.5. Symbolic images Used in Public Communication by Thu Dau Mot University

Logo

The logo of Thu Dau Mot University serves as the centerpiece of its brand and is prominently featured across various contexts in the organization's operations. The main visual of the logo draws inspiration from the image of blooming "Dầu" flowers, evoking a sense of aspiration and strong development for the university. The "Dầu" flower is emblematic of the history and culture of the Thu Dau Mot region, establishing a connection between the past and the present.



Figure 1. Thu Dau Mot University Logo (<http://www.tdmu.edu.vn> 2023)

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The logo layout is divided into two main sections: a horizontal block and a vertical block. The horizontal block contains the university's name in both Vietnamese and English, representing a resolute determination, steadfast will, and sustainability in the university's

goals and strategies. The vertical block combines the "Dầu" flower and a quill, symbolizing the fusion of knowledge and creativity in promoting the core values of the brand.

The primary color palette consists of deep blue combined with royal blue, creating a cool and refreshing harmony that enhances the sense of a dynamic yet wise higher education environment. The refined combination of deep blue and the stylized connection between the quill and the "Dầu" flower, along with the focal brand information, conveys confidence, a thirst for knowledge, and an urge to inspire the public's imagination towards the university's goals, vision, and mission.

Slogan

The slogan "Aspiration - Responsibility - Creativity" encapsulates the vision and core values of Thu Dau Mot University in guiding education and contributing to the community's development. The integration of knowledge, responsibility, and creativity shapes a comprehensive vision of the university's goals and strategies in building a positive learning and research environment. Specifically:



Figure 2. An Example of Slogan in Thu Dau Mot University's Communication Design (<http://www.tdmu.edu.vn> 2023)

Aspiration: are abstract statements or values and beliefs regarding future plans (educational or/and employment plans) made by young people, i.e. the educational level a student wishes to achieve. According to Marjoribanks (1998), aspirations are defined as idealistic values that do not necessarily reflect specific socio-economic realities that might be relevant in determining future mobility. In this study aspirations are defined similarly to Gorard et al. (2012) as ‘what an individual hopes will happen in the future’ (p. 13) in terms of staying on in full-time education after the age of 16.

Responsibility: This ethical value holds special significance, particularly in education. The commitment to responsibility creates an environment for holistic student development, contributing to the formation of a scholarly community with a sense of respect and high societal responsibility. Through the value of "Responsibility," the focus is on educating and encouraging students to excel not only in knowledge but also in social consciousness and the ability to fulfill social ethical duties.

Creativity: It signifies a spirit of originality, creative thinking, and innovative problem-solving approaches. Creativity not only pertains to developing new products and technologies but also aims at discovering and promoting innovation within the learning and research processes. Creativity is also an essential aspect that helps students develop flexible thinking and adaptive problem-solving skills in a dynamically changing work environment.

Communication Imagery

The communication imagery of Thu Dau Mot University encompasses various elements:

Logo: The logo plays an essential role in the public relations strategy of the university. It appears prominently on official documents, the website, banners, uniforms, gifts, packaging, products, and more.

Images of Academic Activities: Images from academic events such as seminars, workshops, research presentations, and lectures are utilized in communication materials to convey strong and impactful messages.

Campus Infrastructure and Learning Environment: The university's facilities, including classrooms, libraries, laboratories, campus areas, and recreational spaces, have been renovated and designed cohesively. The significant greenery and thematic landscapes create an open and harmonious environment, inspiring faculty, students, and others to share their experiences on social media platforms.

Interactions: Images of interactions between professors and students during their learning and research processes, social and voluntary activities, and community engagement projects reflect the university's societal vision.

Additionally, communication materials such as brochures, posters, banners, television advertisements, website content, and social media posts play a crucial role in effectively conveying the university's messages and image to the public.

All these elements collectively contribute to a diverse and rich communication image of Thu Dau Mot University, effectively conveying its values, vision, and culture to the public.



Figure 3. An Example of Communication Image (<http://www.tdmu.edu.vn> 2023)

User Interface

Thu Dau Mot University's user interface is designed in a classical style. The layout comprises menus, banners, activity images, and extended utility blocks. The website's distinctive feature is the linked utility modules within the menu system, including schedules, digital learning resources, e-learning, assessments, all serving administration, education, research, and quality assurance functions.

The dominant color of the interface is deep blue, combined with shades of gray, black, and white, fostering a comfortable and friendly atmosphere for long-term user engagement. Additionally, deep blue serves as an ideal connection to the central symbolic image of the logo, enhancing brand recognition. [<http://www.tdmu.edu.vn> 2023].



Figure 4. An Example of User Interface (<http://www.tdmu.edu.vn> 2023)

3. The Value of Symbolic images in Public Communication of Thu Dau Mot University

Throughout its formation and development, Thu Dau Mot University has built a visually compelling image of its university brand across the following aspects, establishing a relatively strong connection:

Meaningful Connection: The university has successfully linked detailed visual symbols such as the school's color palette, the model of the "Dầu" flower in the central courtyard, office publications, open learning spaces, etc., to its core emblem (logo).

Appropriate Logo Design: The selection of an appropriate logo design effectively captures the defined criteria of the university's goals and development strategy.

Visual Representation of Slogan: The university has transformed its slogan into visual language, employing various layout forms in graphic communication products to create a visual impression of the core values of Thu Dau Mot University.

Cultural Identity and Creative Thinking: The communication team's cultural identity and creative thinking are evident in the design and application of symbolic images for public communication.

In summary, symbolic images in Thu Dau Mot University's public communication play a crucial role in message transmission, brand building, and creating an impression on the public. The integration of imagery, colors, meanings, and operational methods has aided the university in establishing its brand within the minds of the community.

4. Enhancing the Effectiveness of Symbolic images in Public Communication of Thu Dau Mot University

Apart from the achievements outlined above, the application of symbolic images in public communication still faces limitations that need to be overcome to enhance the communication effectiveness of the institution. Several measures to address these challenges and improve communication are as follows:

Unified Symbolic image System: Developing a unified symbolic image system based on graphic standards and communication strategy will help establish a strong and recognizable brand image.

User Interface Design: Designing a user-friendly and engaging user interface is crucial. Following the current trends in user interface design for websites, priority criteria include creativity, intuitiveness, simplicity, functionality, friendliness, and interactivity. Thus, the website should emphasize creative design and straightforward communication methods. Additionally, the website should offer various utility modules to optimize administration and customer information access. Given the university's student population of around 20,000, a dynamic website is pivotal for fostering positive interaction, two-way communication (between the university and the public), maintaining interaction frequency, and leaving a robust brand impression in the minds of students and the community.

Use of Highly Symbolic Images: Utilizing highly symbolic images to diversify content across different communication channels, such as representative images, visual aids for articles on the website, blogs, infographics, videos, and more. Establishing sharing features and linking links within these symbolic images ensures rapid dissemination on social media platforms.

Listening to Public Feedback: Continuously gathering feedback from the public regarding image or content usage helps understand how symbolic images are perceived and allows for reasonable adjustments to the communication strategy. Feedback can come in the form of comments or emotional reaction symbols.

Monitoring and Measurement: Employing tracking and measurement tools to determine the campaign's performance through the strength of symbolic images. Based on the collected data, the communication department can identify strengths and weaknesses, adjusting strategies and tactics to enhance public communication effectiveness, aligning with the communication strategy's objectives.

5. Conclusion

Symbolic images have demonstrated their crucial role in building a brand, establishing credibility, and conveying messages within the public communication strategy of Thu Dau Mot University. The utilization of the visual language of symbolic images in public communication has successfully forged a connection of ideas and credibility between the

brand and the community. Consequently, effective applications have been devised for specific cases within the communication strategy, contributing to enhancing the brand's reputation. The more powerful and positive these dimensions in the minds of the students, the more powerful and positive the symbolic images in public communication. For further development of this concept, the author recommends more researches related to symbolic image based on the dimensions described in this paper, for example, by exploring more indicators regarding each dimension that have not been explored to the fullest in this article. The exploration of indicator from student's perspective will enrich this concept so that it can be a useful reference for subsequent researches. In addition, the hypothesis testing research regarding the influences or effects on the symbolic image can involve the dimensions that exist in this study so the results of that research are more comprehensive.

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