EFFECTIVE POSTER DESIGN FOR INFORMATION DISSEMINATION: THE ETHICS PROMOTION PROJECT IN TANZANIA

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Abstract
This article is written with an understanding that information communication posters are frequently prepared and used in all types of educational campaigns, but their planning, design and production rarely takes into consideration their effectiveness for the purpose they are prepared. The paper is thus aimed at discussing the essential and crucial design elements that when adhered to, can help in the production of posters that are audience or target group centered. The need for such information is even more critical in developing countries, where there are innumerable upcoming governmental, non-governmental and civil society organizations that are involved in educating people using printed visual materials. The paper presents and briefly discusses how ethics promotion information dissemination posters for Tanzania's civil service were planned designed and disseminated. This poster production project was organized and implemented through a collaborative initiative between the President's Office and the University of Dar es Salaam. The project's time span was from January 2004 to February 2005. The project involved untrained (in poster design) school going children, who were mostly teenagers. Subsequent to the well organized preliminary discussions and execution of the project, high quality posters were designed, produced and distributed to their intended sites. The paper makes some conclusions and recommendations.

Introduction

This article is written with an understanding that information communication posters are frequently prepared and used in all types of educational campaigns, but their planning, design and production rarely take into consideration their effectiveness for the purpose they are prepared. Incidentally, appropriate, well discussed and analyzed information on the key elements of design – and for this matter poster design is not readily available as complete whole. The need for such information is even more marked in developing countries, where there are innumerable upcoming governmental, non-governmental and civil society organizations that are involved in educating people using printed visual materials.

The theoretical analysis presented in the paper was of great help in guiding the whole process of planning, designing, production, proper distribution and placement of the posters. This discussion on design factors and procedures helped in facilitating very profitable, well

informed dialogue with stakeholders that included secondary school students - who did the designs. The discussions centered on analyzing what it takes to produce and disseminate appropriate audience-centered posters for effective education. The project involved untrained (in design) school going children, who were mostly teenagers. Subsequent to the well organized preliminary discussions and execution of the project, high quality posters were designed, produced and distributed to their intended sites.

Literature Review

Information accessibility and the continuous search for new knowledge are central to human action and change of attitudes and behavior. There are always reasons behind deliberate human actions and attitudes that in turn influence both individual and societal behavior. Arens (2002) rightly asserts "From our first cry at birth, our survival depends on our ability to inform others or persuade them to take some action. As we develop, we learn to listen and respond to others' messages" (Arens, 2002: 9)

The complexity of this problem that requires positively changing (transforming) peoples' attitudes, behavior and practices calls for the effective use of many complementary means of communicating with target audiences. The use of researched and properly planned mass media is here urgently called for. In brief mass media here refers to the use of things like television, the radio, drama, newspapers and books. It also includes the use of posters, charts, pamphlets, leaflets, etcetera. Frascara (1993) rightly observes; "Awareness that all communications can affect the knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of people calls for responsibility from those who are visually trained and have the capacity to deploy images in the public place". Now, while understanding the effective communicative powers of collaborative mass media, this project chooses to make its contribution toward sensitizing people through the use of posters.

What are posters? How do posters communicate information? How can posters be best designed and produced for effective information dissemination? For purposes of this discussion posters can be briefly defined as placards or sheets of paper or other material that have a message or information printed on one side for posting up on places like notice boards and street walls (Horn by, et. al., 1965). Large out door posters are normally referred to as billboards, with sizes of 10' x

20' or 305 cm x 610 cm (Tuckwell, 1992: 600). Tuckwell defines a poster as "A picture is a dominant advertisement (i.e, one with a minimum of copy)". Information on posters, such as those of announcements or specific campaign messages is usually directed towards reaching large groups of people or the public. Posters are a means of information communication. And communication in this case, can be understood as the successful transfer (and sharing) of information in the form of messages from a source through a medium or channel to an intended receiver (Jones and Salkeld, 1972). Communication is thus never a one way transfer of messages. It always involves a give and take sharing of information.

As just noted, communication involves many factors that, as a process, need to work well so as to make the dissemination of intended messages successful. In any communication process, there is always a source of the information to be conveyed. This source can be a person or groups of people who decide on the nature of the information to be communicated. The second stage is to determine the appropriate means or channel through which the information can be successfully and meaningfully conveyed to the target audience. Haynie, III and Peterson (1998:3) emphasize on successful communication by asserting: "The sending of messages alone, however, is not communication. Communication also requires understanding. The message must be received and understood for communication to occur. Feedback is the last element in the process of communication. It is observable behavior that demonstrates that understanding has occurred". It is therefore imperative that the chosen channel has to be that which enables the intended audience to easily receive and clearly understand the message without any misconceptions or misinterpretations. At the other end of the process there is the target audience that has to be well understood by the source of information so as to be in a better position to identify, prepare and use the most appropriate channels that will give the best communication results (Frascara, 1978). Communication "requires the response of others. Therefore, there must be a *sharing* (or correspondence) of meaning for communication to take place" (Bran, 2002). These factors need to be closely observed when preparing posters that can work well in sensitizing target populations concerning ethical behavior and good governance.

Emerging Issues in Poster Design

(i)   Design strategies

The design of posters always takes close consideration of key factors that can either enhance or limit efficient dissemination of information to target population. Posters, therefore, have to be designed and developed in forms and styles that could enhance their effective function. The production team need to start by carefully identifying and analyzing the theme of the information to be disseminated in relation to the targeted audience. Designers needed a thorough understanding of the audience. The audience's cultural setting and educational background have to be known. Student designers have to be conversant with the audiences' typical way of life, including their predominant fashions and styles in dressing, housing architecture and the nature of their household objects and utensils. They have to meaningfully grasp the cultural settings and backgrounds of end users including their educational levels. More importantly, the designers and the production team have to identify the most suitable dominant language to be used in creating poster text messages that would be easily and correctly understood by the entire audience. The production team needed to discus on and understand the ability of the audience in reading and understanding a combined language of text and illustrated visual images (pictures). Posters have to be designed with reference to the intended audience's level of text/pictorial language understanding. The use of images of alien objects or strange phrases would act as noise and interfere with the information communication process.

(ii)   Form and content in posters

Posters communicate information while being posted in public places. Because of the high costs involved in producing posters and billboards, it is not possible to distribute them to every member of the target population similar to what is done with leaflets and pamphlets. Resulting from cost deterrent reasons, all posters, big and small, have to be designed in ways that attract and hold the attention of intended readers. The streets of city and regional centers in Tanzania and the world over are always busy with pedestrians, motorists and cyclists speeding to and fro for reasons best known to them. Commercial products displayed in shops, supermarket windows and alongside streets do invitingly attract the attention of people, a thing that leaves the pedestrians with little chance of spotting and reading a poster posted on a street notice board or on the wall of a building. It is also

common to find cases when numerous posters from differing sources and serving different information communication objectives, posted on the same area or location and fiercely competing amongst themselves.

All successful posters, large and small, are created and produced with similar features and objectives. To communicate information effectively, posters always bank on their clear visibility, strong visual impression and attraction to the audience. A posted poster does not move to the audience. It is the busy target population that has to be attracted and moved closer to it for meaningful reading. For these reasons, all posters for the project have to be designed to be outstandingly impressive to stop and invite prospective target audiences. To maximize visibility and visual impression on speeding motorists, cyclists and busy pedestrians, large posters or billboards are always suspended high up along highways and on tall urban buildings.

But then what are these features that attract people to read posters? What are the characteristics that can make the reading of posters easy and meaningful? What are the factors that can fail an otherwise good poster? Why are posters considered to be dependable means of mass information dissemination? These questions and many others did necessitate discussions on form and content as observed in both small and large posters.

In the discussions, form in poster was defined as the arrangement of various parts of the whole poster image that in totality combine pictorial images, text, and the rest of the empty space around. Content refers to the substance or subject matter of the information as would be represented using pictorial images and text messages. In poster design, form and content are central to success as they do determine how best or how worst the subject matter of the information to be communicated has been presented. Good form makes the poster attractive and readable while well analyzed information, with precise theme and visual messages enables the reader to understand the information intended in the shortest possible time. In design, form and content do exist together and they are inseparable.

(iii) Color selection

Posters always rely heavily on attracting the target audience to stop and read the printed messages. Posters have to be visually attractive and impressive so as to win the attention of people passing by. This objective necessitated the student designers to use a form that would be eye catching and appealing to the human senses. To accomplish this objective, the designers have to use suitable and attractive colors. These have to be colors that would be relevant to the subject matter in question. Despite being inviting, the colors used have to be those that would easily and correctly be associated with the subject matter or content of the messages. In many communities colors are culture-bound. There are some colors, which are associated with certain events in society. For instance the color black being associated with death or mourning, the color white being linked with peace or the color red being identified with danger are common beliefs among some cultures across the world, (Jones and Salkled, 1972: 72). Hence designers and the entire production team need to ascertain themselves of whatever, cultural beliefs, functional associations and interpretations of colors that exist in the target population. Whatever the case, the chosen colors have to complement the combined pictorial and text images for easy reading and understanding. Colors would not be inhibitory to easy and meaningful communication. Colors have to complement pictorial and text images in enabling successful information dissemination.

(iv) Head lines

A design has to facilitate easy recognition of the poster even from a distance. Easy recognition here calls for the poster to strongly attract and impress the busy and rushing prospective reader. The headline or title of the poster is normally designed to do this initial grabbing of the attention of the audience, (Tuckwell, 1992: 206). Busy pedestrians along streets or speeding motorists (in the case of billboards) need to be able to clearly read the headline of a poster from a distance. In this project headlines have to be designed to allow for fast and easy reading. Reading that would give the audience enough key information to make him/her decide to stop or slow down for concentrated message analysis. To effectively serve this prime function, headlines have to be presented in large sized text or type in order to increase visibility and hence legibility and readability. Headlines carry the central theme of information to be communicated. They therefore required strong visual impression.

(v) Pictorial images and text messages

The headline, pictorial images, body copy (text message) and the empty space do, as a unified whole, form the life of the poster. The poster is created as a result of a well-balanced form of both pictorial and text messages that are printed on the space provided by the dimensions of a selected paper size. Pictorial images, whether drawn or photographic, do serve an important role in communicating the intended information. In this design project pictorial images were presented in large conspicuous sizes that would proportionally dominate the printed-paper space. The creation of pictorial images had to be thoroughly thought about for them to give an independently clear message. Through the pictorial images, the audience is anticipated to get a close to complete understanding of the intended information. The text messages are included to clarify and direct the human senses towards the right interpretation of the poster presentation. The pictorial images and text messages do concurrently supplement and complement one another in the combined role of information communication. So as to be effective, the pictorial images have to be believable. In the case of this project, pictorial images and text had to be presented in a style that clearly portrayed believable instances or happenings common to the target reader's lived experiences.

On the part of the body copy effective information dissemination was enhanced by careful selection and use of suitable text (type) sizes and meaningful colors. The text messages are summarized to make them very short and clear. They do not have to be unnecessarily too long since the intended audience does not normally have the patience and time to read long text messages. Differing colors and graded type sizes are used to divide the body copy into levels of importance. Color and size graded text are intended to lead the audience in reading the most important text messages first before moving on to the rest. Hence, body copy representing selected key messages are to be set in larger type sizes and printed in a color that would be more outstanding compared to the other text messages. In this project for example it was emphasized that the headlines had to remain more conspicuous, in color and type size, than the rest of the images in the posters.

Despite the good use of color and type sizes to aid easy reading, the selection of suitable kinds of letter (fonts) designs is important. There

are currently numerous kinds of letter designs in the market. These letter designs differ greatly from one another. There are some designs, which are easily and clearly read from a distance than others. Palatino and Helvetica are among those letter designs, which are more legible and readable from a distance and hence more frequently used in advertising and sign design projects. Thoughtful selections of letter (font) designs were thus done for the poster project to ensure clear distant readability of any posted poster.

(vi) The empty space

The empty (unprinted or white) space is equally decisive in appropriate poster design. A poster can either appear impressive or unattractive depending upon how the pictorial images and text are arranged on the paper space provided and how many empty areas are left out. When properly used, the empty space (generally referred to as white space) can help to hold together the pictorial and text messages. With thoughtful use of the empty space, the images and text appear to be properly arranged and held together in balance, while showing live communicative relationship among them. Empty space helps to create focus on what the designer wants the eye to see, (Tuckwell, 1992: 214). Empty space can give rise to an appearance of harmony and balance when the images and text are neither too crowded nor too scattered around the paper area. In this project, the pictorial images, text and the empty space were required to be creatively arranged such that they, as a whole, humbly and meaningful related to one another without forming a distorting and disturbing visual impression. Improper use of empty space could give rise to contradictions and noise rather than communicative harmony among the pictorial images and text.

(vii) Distribution

A poster can be a very dependable means of mass communication if it is well researched on and meaningfully designed through proper pre-testing. The advantages of a well-designed poster in information communication are much centered on its mode of distribution. For effective information dissemination, a poster needs to be distributed and posted at the right places at the right time so as to be seen, read and well understood by the target audience.

(viii) Placement

As noted before, posters are a means of mass communication, they are meant to reach many people at one particular period of time. In order

to make this objective possible, posters are always posted on strategic public areas so as to increase their chances of being seen and easily read by the target population. Posters require to be placed in open and strategic locations where they cannot be concealed from the audiences' vision by other objects. Posters would hence be posted on public notice boards in places like health centers, community centers, public and private office premises, schools and colleges; bars and departmental stores. Posters would as well be placed at bus stops and railway terminals, including street walls and pillars. The larger version of posters, the billboards, are normally posted on specially constructed frames and suspended high up above the eye level of pedestrians and motorists so as to maximize their visibility. Billboards, that mostly happen to carry commercial messages, are a popular scene all around Dar es Salaam city and other regional centers in Tanzania. A few billboards can also be seen suspended along major highways particularly in areas closer to city and regional centers. So as to reach a larger population of the target group, posters are always produced in large numbers, enough to be posted at every potentially strategic area that is much frequented by the target population. For longer exposure time a poster needs to be securely posted and whenever possible protected from being prematurely snatched away by poster lovers and collectors, or being blown away by wind. A poster should, as well, be sheltered from rain and other environmental hazards, other wise its effective lifetime can be adversely terminated.

(ix)   Triggering of social dialogue

A poster's effectiveness in mass communication is enhanced by its powers of triggering dialogue and discussion among society in which it is posted. Though the poster has to work in collaboration with other types of mass media such as the radio, television, and drama, its complementary potentials in sensitizing social dialogue is still remarkable for the following prime reasons. The poster is firstly able to stay at its posted location for a long time. Copies of a poster are also able to be posted at many places and hence being able to reach a larger number of the target population. To enhance active social discussion over an issue through the mass media, concerned people need to be repeatedly exposed and reminded over that issue. The poster's wide distribution and relatively long permanence at many places gives it an advantage of being an effective and reliable reminder. In the case of ethics promotion campaigns, the poster stood

to team up well with all the other information dissemination channels that were then in action.

The Ethics Promotion Poster Design Project

The Ethics Promotion Poster Design Project was initiated in January 2004 and successfully completed in February 2005. This project involved the creation, production, distribution and proper placement of Ethics Promotion advocacy posters through an organized competition. The Ethics Secretariat and the Ethics Department in the President's Office, Public Service Management, teamed up with the Department of Fine and Performing Arts of the University of Dar es Salaam in leading the process of initiating and implementing the entire project. Given below is an account of the project showing previously untrained (in design) students managing to produce high quality advocacy visual materials through proper on site guidance and mutual discussions.

Project Methodology

The project chose to use the young people in designing the posters. The aim of the undertaking was to hear the voices of young people concerning their views and attitudes regarding the state of misconduct and unethical behavior within some of the workforce in the public service. Since the youth will eventually take over public service in the future there involvement in promoting ethical behavior was seen to be crucial

Sampling and samples

The project involved 14 secondary schools from Dar es Salaam and Mbeya Regions. The nature of the project and financial constraints compelled the selection of only 14 secondary schools in Tanzania. Seven secondary schools were selected from each of the two regions. Effort was made, as far as possible, to include both boys' and girls' schools (and co-educational schools) in the sample. In the schools, the number of participating students was left open for all those who had interest in taking part. The project design required the entire project team to visit all selected secondary schools and talk to students, their respective heads of schools and whenever applicable, art teachers. So the number of participating schools and regions had to be kept to a manageable size. It was also decided that every participating student had to submit a maximum of three design entries. This was purposely done to make individual students concentrate in working on a few manageable possible attempts.

Pre-testing

The ethics promotion poster design process could not be complete in the absence of proper pre-testing with a sample population of the target audience. For purposes of this project, pre-testing referred to the assessment of the effectiveness of the posters designed for the campaign's information dissemination. This pre-testing was executed using a small sample of printed posters which were shown to a selected group of the target population, (Tuckwell, 1992: 239). The exercise was done at Kibaha, Coast Region, in Tanzania.

The central purpose of pre-testing the posters was to reduce the level of information communication errors and other design inconsistencies that might otherwise arise in the final printed product. There were some variables that guided the process of pre-testing. Visual appeal and meaningful message interpretation by the intended audience were key concerns that required close consideration. Pre-testing was inevitable since it helped to bridge possible gaps between the designers and the entire production team's views on what they considered to be effective poster designs and how these posters would actually works with the target population. Hence, the wining posters designed for the ethics promotion campaigns were carefully pre-tested among a selected group of the intended audience, before final prints were passed and produced for mass distribution.

Guiding poster design strategies

The poster designs were independently created by students with interest and some basic background knowledge in art. Experts in ethics studies and design made two study areas visits to all the participating schools during the process of the project. The first (fourteen day) visits involved professional seminar presentations and in-depth discussions with students and art teachers in Mbeya and Dar es Salaam. The second 20 day visits for Mbeya and Dar es Salaam were essentially consultative - giving comments and some guidance for the then ongoing design process. The students applied the knowledge gained through the discussions in implementing the project. Students were presented with poster design elements discussed above as guidance and reference for enhancing the entire communicative potentials of posters.

Design Outcomes

Selected secondary schools, 7 each from Dar es Salaam and Mbeya regions were involved in designing posters portraying a wide range of

unethical and corrupt behaviors practiced by some of Tanzania's public service personnel. The posters were aimed at delineating, speaking out and revealing these bad and unbecoming workplace behaviors hence joining up the fight (with other media) in improving transparency and accountability. Specifically, the posters were aimed at contributing towards

(1) Sensitization of employees and employers, youths and the public on the importance of ethical behavior
(2) Making ethical behavior the culture of Tanzanians.
(3) Making the youth appreciate and grow into ethical culture observers.

Description of outcomes

The Project chose to involve youths in Secondary Schools so as to hear the voices of this younger generation which will in actual fact grow to become future's public service personnel and political leaders. The students were given chance to portray their views and point fingers at what they see and consider being bad and unbecoming public servants' behavior and practices. The response was very positive. A total of 362 posters were designed through the competition. Each of the 362 posters has some useful and informing message for the target audience – who in this case are the public service employees; the youths themselves and the general public. Many of these posters do contain very moving and touching messages. The scope of the project was to organize the creation and production of the posters in the best professional manner at the level of secondary school students. This was successfully achieved. Some competitors produced design works that meet the highest level of professional standards. The list of poster entries per participating school is as shown below:

Table 1: Number of posters by schools from Mbeya Region

• Rungwe Secondary School	- 8 posters
• Ileje Secondary School	- 6 posters
• Rujewa Secondary School	- 11 posters
• Iyunga Secondary School	- 14 posters
• Sangu Secondary School	- 28 posters
• Mbalizi Secondary School	- 27 posters
• Mbeya Secondary School	- 51 posters
Total	-145 posters

Table 2: Number of posters by schools from Dar es Salaam Region

- Pugu Secondary School   - 14 posters
- Kibasila Secondary School   - 12 posters
- Jitegemee Secondary School   - 29 posters
- Jangwani Secondary School   - 6 posters
- Makongo Secondary School   - 26 posters
- Zanaki Secondary School   - 28 posters
- Azania Secondary School   - 100 posters

                           Total   - <u>217 posters</u>

The Winning entries

The judging of the winning entries was done by design experts from the University of Dar es Salaam in collaboration with ethics experts form the President's Office, Public service management. In judging the competition entries, the 362 posters were first short listed to 20 best. The 20 best posters were scrutinized further to get 10 winning entries of which their designers and the winning schools were awarded prizes. The awarding of prizes took place in the presence Honorable National Parliamentarians in the National Assembly in Dodoma in February 2005. The then Prime Minister Honorable Fredrick Sumaye was the guest of honor.

The ten winning posters were printed in color and exhibited during the prize giving ceremony. The invited guests got the chance to view and learn many things from the poster messages. The posters covered a wide range of subjects regarding public service ethics. Among these topics were Traffic police receiving bribes from drivers; nurses and doctors not giving proper service to patients; rape advances in public offices; and teachers having love affairs with their students. Other themes covered were using public vehicles after working hours; having love affairs in public offices; drinking alcohol during working hours; giving and receiving bribes in exchange for supposedly free public service and many others.

At the end of the ceremony, all guests were given a copy of every printed poster to go and post them in their work places. The Ethics Secretariat and the Ethics Department in the President's Office, Public Service Management did further distribution of the printed posters to reach the rest of the intended target groups. The distribution went on well and the posters have reached many of their intended destinations.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Public education for sensitizing people to change their attitudes, behavior and practices is an endless and collaborative process. The process is a relentless fight that calls for the use of a wide range of ammunitions and tactics. Likewise, the process to make public servants change their attitude and practices towards appreciating and observing ethical behavior calls for collaborative well thought of plans and tactics. Many of such public service Ethics Promotion programs are taking place through television and the radio media, workshops, seminars and public lectures. The Ethics Promotion Posters Project is another channel in helping transform Tanzania's Public Servants into keen observers of ethical behavior. To make the project contribute more towards its objectives it requires to reach as many targeted people as possible. It is thus recommended that a traveling exhibition be mounted and shown all over Tanzania to emphasize and broaden the project's impact. This proposed exhibition should include all designs done by all students who participated in the project. This will enable the voices of all the students to be heard. It is recommended that the traveling exhibition be accompanied with ethics promotion seminars and workshops that will be conducted by relevant experts.

The project has also shown that students with interest, especially in secondary schools, are able to create and produce high quality advocacy visual materials. This is possible, when the students are given the relevant guidance regarding design techniques and procedures of the visual media materials to be worked on. Student designers in the project were facilitated to work and produce quality designs with the help of the theoretical design procedures information discussed above. A thorough discussion, on the themes of subject matter of the intended visual materials, did show to help students do better designs. Monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the project is yet to be undertaken. In this regard it is recommended that a deliberate and thorough monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the project be done.

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