Communication Theories: An Infographics Development Project

A Capstone Project submitted to Southern Utah University

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Master of Arts in Professional Communication

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Approval Page

We certify that we have read this project and that, in our opinion, it is satisfactory in scope and

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Abstract

This project addresses the need for visual aids in Communication theories classes. Twelve original infographics were designed to help millennial-aged students better understand complex, intricate topics by explaining the theories in a primarily visual way. Due to the strong influence of technology in today's society, it is necessary to provide students with multi-faceted resources to learn new materials on both physical hard copy platforms, as well as electronic monitors. The finished infographics will be used in real, Communication theory classes to teach students the theories in a new and visually interesting way.

Keywords: Communication theories, infographics, visual learning, millennials

Communication Theories: An Infographics Development Project

Communication theories are a complex and complicated concept for college students. Theories include a plethora of information that must be quickly and efficiently presented during the timeframe of one or two semesters and often, these theories are explained using supplemental textbooks to portray intricate ideas. During my first Communication Theories class, I remember being overwhelmed by the number of theories and information covered in a short amount of time. Some theories were easy to understand, while others were much harder for me to grasp and I struggled to truly understand them throughout the rest of my schooling. After discussing possible project ideas with Dr. Matt Barton, he gave me the idea of portraying these complex theories in a new, visual context. Combined with my background in visual design, it seemed like a perfect match. Throughout this project I have had the opportunity to learn the theories in greater detail and understand them at a new level. These completed infographics will be a great tool for future, incoming Communication students who will benefit from using them in class. It will also help bridge the gap between the education system of the past and the millennial students, who desire primarily visual tools to learn.

According to a study published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2005), the attention span of today's students is changing. These "millennial" generation students (born between 1980 and 1994) are unable to concentrate for long periods of time and struggle with conventional forms of learning. Based on the influx of new technologies into the lives of college-aged students, recent studies have suggested that the regular use of technology-based items affects the way students are able to learn and process information. Lee & Breitenburg (2010) describe this shift; "it means that visual learning, spatial and holistic thinking, the need to work simultaneously in different media, and (most critically) the importance of active learning over

passive learning, are fundamental to the learning and cognitive processes of students today" (p. 55). Many educators are struggling to find solutions to the shifting needs of students. Research suggests that by incorporating more visual aids, such as videos or graphic representations into a lesson plan, millennial-aged students are better able to follow the material and grasp the concepts, regardless of the subject matter. Hammer & Kellner (1999) found that, "properly produced and used, new multimedia technology enables students to better visualize, empathize with, and understand historical events like the Holocaust, the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, or even more ordinary instances of racism and prejudice" (p. 522). Visual aids are especially helpful in the area of Communication. Although many of the topics covered in these classes are often written and orally presented to students, it would be highly beneficial to offer them a visual tool to pair with this information. Graphic elements would appeal to students on a variety of levels, based on their changing education preferences.

This information shows the need for visual-based learning tools for the millennial generation and younger students working their way through the education system. It is imperative that instructors provide graphic representations of their subject matter to fully gain their students attention and to help them learn. This idea is especially important for complex or abstract areas of education, like theories, which are difficult to explain using only text-based learning. An experiment conducted by Garside & Edwards (1996) found that, "Undergraduate students often do not understand the process of theory formation or the relationship between theory and empirical research" (p. 6). These researchers suggested using an experiential learning format, which allows students to have the ability to "experience, publish, process, generalize, and apply" the communication theories in the classroom (p. 1). Based on recent changes to the student population at large, it is suggested that this method should be combined with visual aids

to fully engage millennial-aged students. This will allow educators to further grasp student attention and efficiently teach them Communication theories.

To meet the needs of the transitioning learning styles of today's students, it is important to provide professors with tools that will help them teach effectively. The goal of this completed capstone project will be to provide Communication Theory instructors with 12 full-color, visual representations of common theories for undergraduate and graduate-level students. These visual aids will be available in both print and digital format to accommodate students learning in a face-to-face environment and in online classes. These visual aids, paired with scholarly, credible textbook sources will help students understand the complex theories in the field of Communication. These students (often taking introductory Communication theory classes) will have had little to moderate exposure to the theories and should be able to understand the Communication language used in the graphics. The completed visual aid packet will be available for purchase for Communication instructors and students through a second party website. Southern Utah University will be the first school offered the chance to test the visual aids in a classroom setting. This location fits the target audience due to the structure of a one semester, Communication theory class, offered to students during their freshman, sophomore, or junior year.

For this project, the words "infographic" and "visual aid" will be used interchangeably to describe the completed project. According to Ross (2009), information graphics or "infographics" are described as, "visual representations of information, data or knowledge" (n.p.). Because this project will include both graphic information, as well as copy text, the finished product can be used as an infographic or can be used as a supplemental visual aid for Communication courses.

Literature Review

Communication Theory

Human beings have been communicating since the dawn of time. From cave drawings to drum sounds, the earliest humans discovered and developed ways to send messages to one another. Since then, a myriad of communication forms have been used including written, verbal, technological, and nonverbal communication. These types of communication have been thoroughly studied and commonalities have been revealed, which have helped Communication scholars to develop theories, or generalizations, about the way individuals communicate and the reasons they do so. According to Littlejohn & Foss (2011), scholastic interest in Communication was fueled by new forms of technology and increases in literacy during the early 20th Century. This era was especially important in the United States, as "the nation was 'on the move' in terms of efforts to advance technology, improve society, fight tyranny, and foster the spread of capitalism" (p. 5). Scholars began to study the various forms of propaganda and advertising that was used during the First World War and continued to study these formats, during the next World War as well. It was after this war that the study of Communication emerged as a recognized area of study. Scholars began to address concepts in communication that had been studied in other areas of social sciences including psychology, political science, and sociology. These concepts were labeled as "communication theories" and are now recognized as cornerstones in the field. Robert T. Craig (1999) proposed the idea that, "although there exist many theories of communication-indeed, way too many different theories to teach effectively in any one course-there is no consensus on communication theory as a field" (p. 120). Littlejohn & Foss (2005) continued this idea by stating that, "Theories are special forms of communication, so

theories constitute, or make, an experience of communication. Theories communicate about communication" (p. 8).

Communication Theory is typically a foundation class for Communication majors at both undergraduate and graduate levels. This class includes an overview of the most relevant theories in Communication, as well as insight into the reasons behind their importance in the field. These theories are found in all areas of communication including interpersonal (such as Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor's "Social Penetration Theory"), mass media (such as George Gerbner's "Cultivation Theory"), individual communication (such as Muzafer Sherif's "Social Judgment Theory") and organizational communication (such as Irving Janis's "Groupthink Theory"). The theories selected to teach in the class may be influenced by the age and level of the students, as well as the instructor's biases and subsequent worldview. Teaching theory can be difficult due to the complex and abstract nature of theory in general, because it is often challenging to illustrate the ideas in a way that students will understand.

The Visual Learner

In 1992, Neil Fleming defined four main types of learning styles, known as the "VARK" style of learning. The acronym stood for Visual, Auditory, Read / Write, and Kinesthetic (n.p.). He suggested that every individual has a tendency to learn better using one of these four functions, but each has the ability to use more than one style. When teaching in a classroom setting, it is important to be aware of these learning styles and teach accordingly to accommodate the needs of all students, regardless of their preferred learning style. Katsioloudis (2010) found that students from all varieties of learning styles respond well to detailed, high-quality visual aids, because this format interacts well with other styles. For instance, professors may pass out a physical copy of a visual aid to assist kinesthetic learners, while orally explaining the material

for auditory learners. The aid may also include space for students to write their own information for read / write learners. Visual aids are a powerful tool for students from all learning styles when used properly. George (2013) indicated, "…that people remember visual representations 'more accurately, more quickly, and for a longer period of time' than words alone" (p. 187). A research study conducted by Trapit Marketing (2013) found that "82% of respondents said they believe that content is more likely to be consumed if it's visual" (n.p.).

David Hyerle (2008) cited research that found, "The brain is capable of absorbing 36,000 images every minute," and "between 80 and 90 percent of the information received by the brain comes through the eyes" (pg. 153). Research has shown that when used effectively and correctly, technology can play an important role in a student's ability to process new information, especially when it is visual (Hammer & Kellner, 1999). Many of today's students actually seek visual learning tools, rather than the other forms of learning methods due to their interaction with visual technologies (i.e.: television, computers, etc.) from a young age (Cooper, 2014). Some of these visual technologies found in classroom settings include the use of interactive whiteboards, projectors, tablets, laptops, and printed infographics.

Visual aids must be created and used effectively or the device may distract students rather than assist in their learning. Doumount (2002) provided this explanation, "…effective illustrations are truly visual, not verbal. In other words, they do not rely on symbolic association and can thus be interpreted correctly without a verbal step" (p. 221). If a visual aid is unclear or hard for students to understand, it may divert from the learning process.

McKendrick & Bowden (1999) studied the effects that audio-visual tools had on distance students and found, "that integration of audio- visual resources into the mainstream curriculum and active learning on the part of students are essential to ensure effective and sustainable

deployment of audio-visual technology" (p. 9). Visual aids can also help aid in functional

dialogue in the classroom setting and encourage "discussions through questions, observations,

and inferences about patterns and behaviors that they discover in the image data sets" (Smith &

Blankenship, 2000, p. 764). These visual resources encourage students to view information and

interact with it, as well. When the type of visual aid is available in a physical format for students

(such as a tablet or an infographic), it allows the student to use more than one type of learning,

thus increasing the chance of the information staying with the student. In a study conducted on

interactive white boards in a classroom, Beeland (2002) concluded, "…that interactive

whiteboards can be used in the classroom to increase student engagement during the learning

process…(p. 6)" as it can help "to attract and maintain student attention and to improve student

achievement" (p. 7).

Along with the technological forms of visual education aids, there is a growing interest in

"infographics," or graphics that display information. According to Toth (2013):

They attempt to educate an audience about a specific topic or issue in a visually

interesting and easily navigable manner through a combination of words and visuals.

Infographics often communicate complex quantitative and/or qualitative information

quickly for their audience. They typically combine data displays, lists, graphics, and other

visual elements to make a point; they intend to inform, and frequently persuade, their

intended audience about a focused topic (p. 448).

Infographics have been used in a variety of areas to convey complex information to their

audience. Davidson (2014) explained, "Infographics incorporate art into the normally staid world

of numerical information" (p. 35). These visual aids are a unique way to teach viewers in a quick

and straightforward manner that resonates well with modern audiences. Infographics are easily

shared when produced in digital formats and can be dispersed through social media or email

marketing platforms. Researcher Mastrianni (2014) found that almost 25% of emails are opened

for less than 3 seconds and only have a 50% open-rate when the subject line is short (n.p). In

contrast, one study found that transactional emails, including infographics have an average open

rate of over 100%, because people open them multiple times and share them with others

(Johnson, 2014). This type of response should be kept in mind when creating and developing

materials for a changing audience, including the millennial generation that boasts a primarily

visual learning style.

The Millennial Generation

The millennial generation is especially drawn to infographics and other forms of visual

technology information due to their almost constant interaction with technology. Iozzio (2013)

found that, "Devices can be friends or teachers, not just tools or entertainment" (p. 28). Students

are drawn to technology, because they interact with these devices throughout the day. From the

moment they wake up with their cell phone alarm clock to their final tweet of the day, they use

these resources to connect, learn, and function. Millennials are used to technology and expect it

everywhere, including the classroom. This age group can be especially hard to teach due to their

unique personality characteristics. Howe & Nadler (2009) explained, "Millennials have brought

with them a very different set of attitudes and behaviors than the youth who preceded them: a

confidence and conventionality, a preference for group consensus, an aversion to personal risk,

and a self-image as special and as worthy of protection" (p. 3). Millennials are also considered

"digital natives" or individuals who have grown up with technology (Edwards, et. al, p. 4). These

traits can have a great impact on the way these students interact in a classroom setting, as Benfer

& Shanahan (2013) discussed, "Oral communication can be extremely challenging for millennial

students, who are accustomed to communicating briefly and spontaneously via instant

messenger, e-mail or text message" (p. 33).

Based on this information, it is important to understand how to incorporate visual and

interactive illustrations into a classroom setting to meet the needs of millennial generation

students. Roehling, et al. (2011) conducted multiple focus groups with these students and

addressed many of the methods students were looking for in the classroom. "Millennial students

have been raised in an entertainment focused, multimedia environment in which they rapidly

shift their attention from one source of information or stimulation to another. As a result, these

students tend to have a low tolerance for boredom and require high levels of stimulation to

remain focused" (p. 2). Millennial-aged students have different customs and education

requirements than those of past generations and it is important to understand how these ideals

affect them in classroom settings.

Infographics & Success

With the influx of new technologies, there is an increasing emphasis on creating and

designing information to be viewed on digital screens (such as cell phones, computers, tablets,

televisions, etc.). According to Buck (2012), "The world's biggest social media properties have

quickly made visual content a huge priority, often designing or re-designing their entire

platforms to nurture such media" (n.p.). These technologies allow users to access information

anytime, anywhere, with the click of a button. This accessibility makes the job of designers and

marketers difficult, because they must create products that appeal to the correct audience, while

also holding their attention. Certain digital platforms have been historically more successful than

others.

Infographics are one tool that has been highly effective at spreading information through Internet platforms, because it contains a large amount of information in a concise way. Toth (2013) explains, "…[an] important element of infographics is that they function as stand-alone communication: An audience should comprehend the information from simply looking at it without seeking additional sources to understand it" (p. 448). This simplicity allows the visual aid to be rapidly understood and forwarded to other audiences. One way of spreading this information is through the use of emails. ExactTarget (2014) states that, "Nine out of every 10 consumers say they check their email every day" (n.p.) and the shorter the subject line, the more likely, the email will be opened. This can be important for marketers looking to reach a broad audience quickly. By including "infographics" in emails, there is a higher chance the viewer will want to open it.

Another means of distributing infographics is through social media. With the influx of "sharing" social media sites, like Pinterest and Facebook, users can post and share infographics with their friends. By sharing infographics through social media platforms, up to 15 million viewers could potentially interact with the visual aid (Li, 2013). It is most likely that the majority of this number will be millennials. Taylor (2014) explains, "The average millennial spends 18 hours a day consuming media – often multiple forms at once…the average millennial checks his or her smartphone 43 times and spends 5.4 hours on social media per day" (n.p.) Infographics are an important addition to the online world and are a needed tool for millennial-aged students.

Infographics have been used in a variety of sectors including advertising, marketing, business, social media, and education. Combined with the changing needs of today's students, these aids help students to understand information in a way that communicates with them. Davis & Quinn (2013) found, "Infographics can support reading comprehension and writing while

strengthening critical thinking and synthesizing skills" (p. 16). By presenting information in a visual format, students can use the image to help them understand the corresponding text. Unlike standard text-heavy resources, infographics display information in layouts that often include white space, larger gaps between sentence lines, and boxes or graphs to separate information.

Infographics Best Practices

Infographics should provide viewers with a quick, easy to understand message about a particular topic. It is important to show information that is captivating, engaging, and visually clean to guide an audience to where they need to go. Kenner (2014) explains, "Determine the one thing you want to communicate, and what you want your audience to do with (or feel about) it" (n.p.). Infographics should only contain key details and should avoid clutter to share their message. According to Ross (2009), "the basic and key material of an information graphic is the data, information, or knowledge that the graphic presents with limited resources" (n.p.). These elements are typically created by the designer to match the flow of the article or the overall theme of the entity where the graphic will be presented. Infographics often contain three main parts, as explained by David (2012), "The Visual (…colors, graphics, and icons…), The Content (…text, statistics, time frames, and references) and The Knowledge (…the facts and conclusions to convey the overall message of a story) (n.p.). An infographic may also include a key, scale, and label to better explain the representations of the document.

It is important to note that as the name implies, infographics should represent the information as visually as possible without including a lot of text. In theory, an infographic should still make sense to the viewer without the inclusion of words or copy. In their "Email Design Checklist," emailmonks.com (2013) provides multiple relevant tips for the creation of body copy for infographics:

A. Use short sentences and paragraphs

B. Use design elements like spacing and dividing lines to distinguish the content sections from one another

C. Use bold typeface and sub-headers to make certain words stand out

D. Use bullet points to showcase benefits (p. 1).

The infographic should be organized in a way that makes sense to the viewer, while accurately portraying the information. It should lead the viewer's eye in the proper order to help them understand the data. Many designers will create a "wireframe" version of the layout to determine where the pertinent information will go. For the communication theories infographic project, the layout will be relatively similar for each theory, so that the reader will quickly find the necessary information. Each design should have a "hook," or a visual focal point that will draw the reader to the object. Balliette (2011) explained, "Give the most important information the most visual weight, so that viewers know what to take away" (n.p.). To show the information in an organized manner, a "grid" design will be used for the 8.5" x 11" page. Graphic designer Jennifer Kyrnin (2010) explained, "If you use a grid to design your web page layout, you'll create designs that look right and feel comfortable to most people…The point of a grid is not as a way to fill up space, but to help you organize the space you have" (n.p.). This grid will be shown by including 3 point lines between main segments and creating visual guides that help the reader to see where they should go next. Because the infographics will be viewed on both digital formats (tablets, computers, web pages, etc.) and hard copy formats (printed, inclusion in textbook), this grid will also aid in creating unity for the viewers, no matter which platform they are using.

It will be necessary to develop designs that easily translate to either platform by keeping relevant design elements in mind, including color, page layout/size, and interaction. For this reason, the colors will be limited to three or four per design. According to Balliette (2011), "A three-color palette is easy on the eyes." She also explains that this three-color palette includes the background, which should be the lightest of the three (n.p.). The background for each of the infographics will be white and each theory will be represented using one of five main colors (red, orange, green, purple, or blue). The graphics will be developed on 8.5" x 11" paper size for printing purposes, but the dpi will be 300 for clear web viewing or larger printing. It is also recommended that designs be created using a vertical format, rather than a horizontal format. Taei (2014) explains, "…design infographics vertically because of the natural flow of an internet user, which is from top to bottom, while browsing. The vertical infographics are also easier to view on most browsers and mobile devices, and tend to get much more social media shares as compared to the horizontal infographics" (n.p.). Although the finished infographics will not be interactive on web platforms (the links will not be clickable), this project leaves room for future work to include fully functional elements.

<div align="center">**Project Goals**</div>

The goal of this project is to present complex communication theories in a simplified, visual aid format, available both in print and online. Twelve of the most prominent theories in the field of Communication will be developed using original graphics and accurate theory information taken directly from a variety of text and online references. After the visual aids have been completed, the finalized packet will be given to Communication professors at Southern Utah University and will be available for purchase on a separate website.

These visual aids will be appealing to both the millennial-aged college students, as well as younger students who have similar educational needs. It is the intention of the graphic designer that the graphic representations will be easy to understand and organized in a strategic manner, following current standard practices for graphic designers.

All 12 of the visual aids and the accompanying theory information will be completely designed and created by the end of the fall semester. This will allow the designer to create $1-2$ visual aids per week and will leave enough time for edits, updates, or overhauls of the aids.

Method

To accomplish the goal of teaching today's students about complex communication theories, this project will include the creation of 12 original visual representations in both PDF and webpage format. These visual aids will be used in undergraduate Communication Theory classes to supply students with a graphic representation of the abstract theories that are presented in an accompanying textbook in order to provide students with a visual representation for the theory. This resource will allow students to quickly understand complex information simply by viewing it. It will also allow the instructor to develop accompanying in-class activities that coincide with the infographics. These supplemental visual aids could also be applied at a graduate level of teaching in combination with a higher level textbook. The 12 theories were selected based on the most commonly found in Communication Theory textbooks. Multiple indexes[1] were referenced to determine which theories are taught to college students. It is anticipated that additional visual aids could be developed in the future for theories used in other leading textbooks.

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[1] Griffen, E., et. al. (2014). *A First Look at Communication Theory (Conversations with Communication Theorists*). Boston: McGraw-Hill.
  Littlejohn, S.W. & Foss, K. A. (2011). *Theories of human communication*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.
  Miller, K. (2004). *Communication Theories: Perspectives, Processes, and Contexts*. (2nd ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.
  West, R. (2014). *Introducing communication theory analysis and application (Fifth ed.).* New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education.

Employing the use of a graphic designer, these visual aids will be created using original imagery developed in Adobe Illustrator, InDesign, and Photoshop. The aids will be structured to fit a standard 8.5" by 11" sized paper and will be saved in both JPG and PNG formats for printing and web viewing. The completed visual aid packet will be available for purchase on a separate website. A sample visual aid has been supplied in the Appendix section of this document (See Appendix Figure 1.1.).

The 12 theories that were selected for this project were chosen based on the availability of the information needed to create a visual aid, as well as the perceived relevancy of the topic to undergraduate students in Communication courses. The graphics were developed based on the primary source for the theory, developed by the original theorist. A secondary text, "Theories of Human Communication" by Littlejohn & Foss (2011) was also referenced. These sources helped the author to create a short explanation for each topic, as well as authenticate the information provided in each graphic. The explanations listed below are the same as included in the graphics:

- **Agenda-Setting Theory** (McCombs & Shaw, 1972): Agenda Setting Theory discusses how media portrayals of reality affect the viewers' perception of what reality is. Often these media groups will select hot topics, issues, and news story to convince an audience to feel or act a certain way. The media primes us for these stories by presenting the same information repetitively or only showing certain parts of a story.

- **Cognitive Dissonance Theory** (Festinger, 1962): Festinger's theory explains our need for internal consistency with our "cognitive elements" (including attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, etc.) When these elements contradict or new conflicting information is presented, individuals will feel stress or discomfort until consistency is achieved again.

- **Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) Theory** (Pearce & Cronen, 1980) (Pearce, 2005): CMM Theory suggests that we use communication to create and participate in social reality. We establish symbolic "meanings" in relationships that help us to understand each other. "Meanings" are negotiated and changed through communication. Many factors influence these meanings including background, personality, culture, and environment.

- **Cultivation Theory** (Gerbner, 1976): Gerbner's Cultivation Theory analyzes the influence that television watching has on its viewers. He suggests that "heavy" viewers (or those that watch 4 or more hours each day) are more likely to accept what they see on television as reality. This perspective is often a skewed and misinformed analysis that may affect the viewer's actions and emotions.

- **Elaboration Likelihood Model** (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986): The Elaboration Likelihood Model discusses two main routes that help us to process persuasive messages. The "central processing" route relies on logic and the characteristics of the message itself. The "peripheral processing" route includes analyzing the message based on the presenter, method, and cues in the persuasion context.

- **Expectancy Violation Theory** (Burgoon & Jones, 1972): Burgoon & Jones' theory analyzes how violations of our expectations about non-verbal and communication behaviors affect our corresponding actions. No matter if the violation is positive or negative; we become more aware of the interaction and react accordingly. (These expectations can include proximity, non-verbal gestures, and communication behavior.)

- **Relational Dialectics Theory** (Baxter, 1988): Relational Dialectics analyzes the balance of tensions that exist in relationships. We use communication to manage these "ying" and

"yang" opposing values. Every relationship has a different balance of the dialectics. There are multiple ways to manage the different relational dialectics to help us feel balanced.

- **Spiral of Silence Theory** (Noelle-Neumann, 1984): Noelle-Neumann's theory explains that when people hold the minority opinion in a situation where the major opinion is dominant, they will be less likely to share their opinion. This is in part due to a fear of separation or isolation from the group and is thus labeled the "Spiral of Silence."

- **Social Exchange Theory** (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959): Although often associated with the field of psychology, this theory suggests that we develop relationships through a cost-reward analysis. These costs and rewards can include time, money, support, and other resources. This system is highly subjective, as it is up to the individual to decide what costs and rewards they are willing to accept or reject in a relationship.

- **Social Penetration Theory** (Altman & Taylor, 1973): Altman & Taylor's theory explains how self-disclosure influences the progression of a relationship toward intimacy. An onion metaphor is used to portray the different layers of information that we share in various relationships. The superficial layer is biographical information we share in new relationships, while the core layer contains information about our self-identity.

- **Standpoint Theory** (Wood, 1982) (Harding, 2004): Standpoint Theory discusses the various perspectives that influence our ability to communicate. Wood defined the way communication was affected by relationships, while Harding studied the role that gender plays in our experiences. This theory suggests that we are better at communicating with people who have similar viewpoints to our own, because they help us create our social realities together.

- **Uncertainty Reduction** (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) (Berger, 1998): Uncertainty

  Reduction Theory explains how unknown information, or "uncertainties" in relationships

  affect our communication. Often, when we enter new relationships, we have a strong

  desire to reduce and eliminate uncertainties about the other person. During this process,

  we anticipate and predict the other person's behavior in the relationship.

Infographics Layout

This capstone project will assist with these needs by providing Communication Theory

instructors with a visual, interactive packet of illustrations that can be used to enhance learning

and teach complex ideas. To create a standardized, cohesive look between the communication

theories, each individual theory will be designed in a similar layout template (See Appendix

Figure 2.1). This structure will follow many of the best practice principles outlined above. Both

the text and visual information will be displayed in a grid format with every element in this same

place on the individual designs. The title will be displayed in the largest text at the top of the

page to help readers quickly identify the theory they will be studying. The largest visual element

will be the basic explanation of the theory, as displayed by an infographic. These graphics will

include the least amount of text possible. Also seen on the left hand column is the "sources list"

section (including the relevant references used to find the information) and the basic information

key. This key will include a barcode listing the year the theory was developed, the theorist(s)

name and the theorist's country of origin. The final graphic in the information key shows the

communication emphasis. For instance, a radio tower symbol represents the "Broadcasting" field

of communication.

On the right hand side of the infographic, viewers will find the second key, called the

"Application Key." Using symbolic graphics, this box displays the relevant applications for the

theory. For instance, the "Spiral of Silence" theory can be applied to politics (see "flag" symbol), interpersonal (see "people" symbol), and new media (see "computer" symbol). Below this box, viewers will find an explanation box, briefly explaining the theory. The final two right hand boxes will display infographics or other relevant graphics, representing further information about the theory. If the theory contains an accompanying model, this graphic will be found in the final box at the bottom of the page.

This organization structure was selected due to the visual path of progression for the viewer. It is hypothesized that the student will immediately view the largest graphic and therefore, develop their personal interpretation of the theory before reading the actual explanation and accompanying graphics. Lastly, the student can find the sources to find further information if necessary. Both key boxes can be used as a reference source for an accompanying textbook in the future, where the chapters could be labeled with the symbols, based on their relevance to the theory or topic.

The visual elements of the page were also developed to help students understand the theory without graphic clutter. Five total colors were used to represent the 12 theories. These colors were chosen at random and were used to emphasize information on the page. The colors can be viewed on both digital and hard copy. If color is not available, the grayscale format will also show differences between the graphics, but it is recommended that the final product be displayed in color.

Anticipated Results

In order to accurately gauge the results of the implementation of the visual aids in a classroom setting, Communication Theory professors will have to use the visual aids for an entire school year and survey the students to determine whether they felt like the aids assisted in

their learning process. For this reason, results will not influence the overall project and will be used as a means to edit, update, or fix the necessary components of the visual aids. It is anticipated that small changes will need to be made for some of the theories, but students will respond positively to the use of a new teaching aid.

Conclusion

After completing the 12 infographics in this project, I have a new, deeper understanding of both the theories themselves and my ability to design. This project has been monumental in expanding my knowledge of Communication and it was a great opportunity for me to learn more about the field of Communication. These finished visual aids will be an excellent tool for Communication Theory classes looking to appeal to a changing, millennial-aged demographic. Overall, I am excited to see how these resources work for students and I hope that they will be a great tool for future generations of Communication students.

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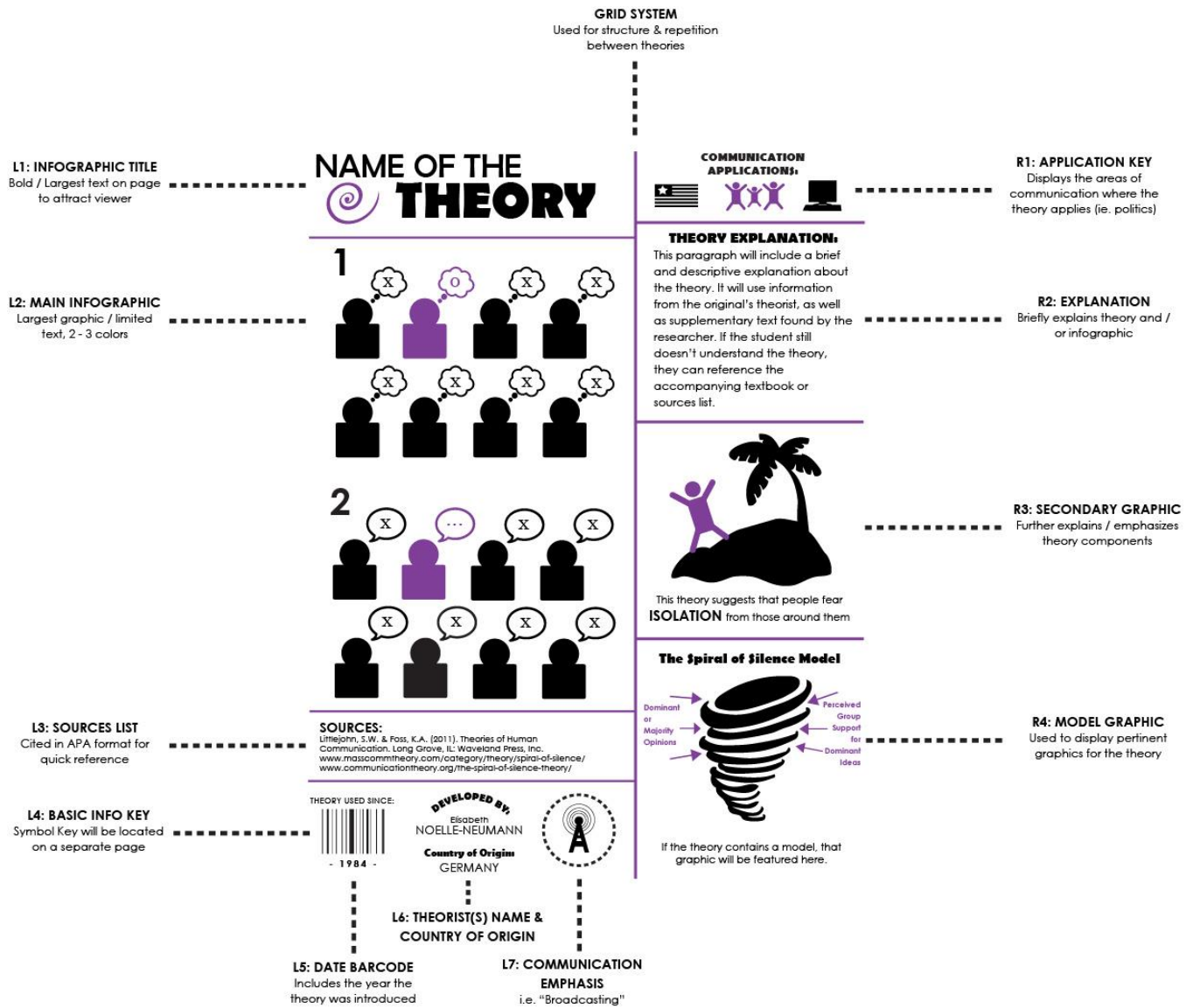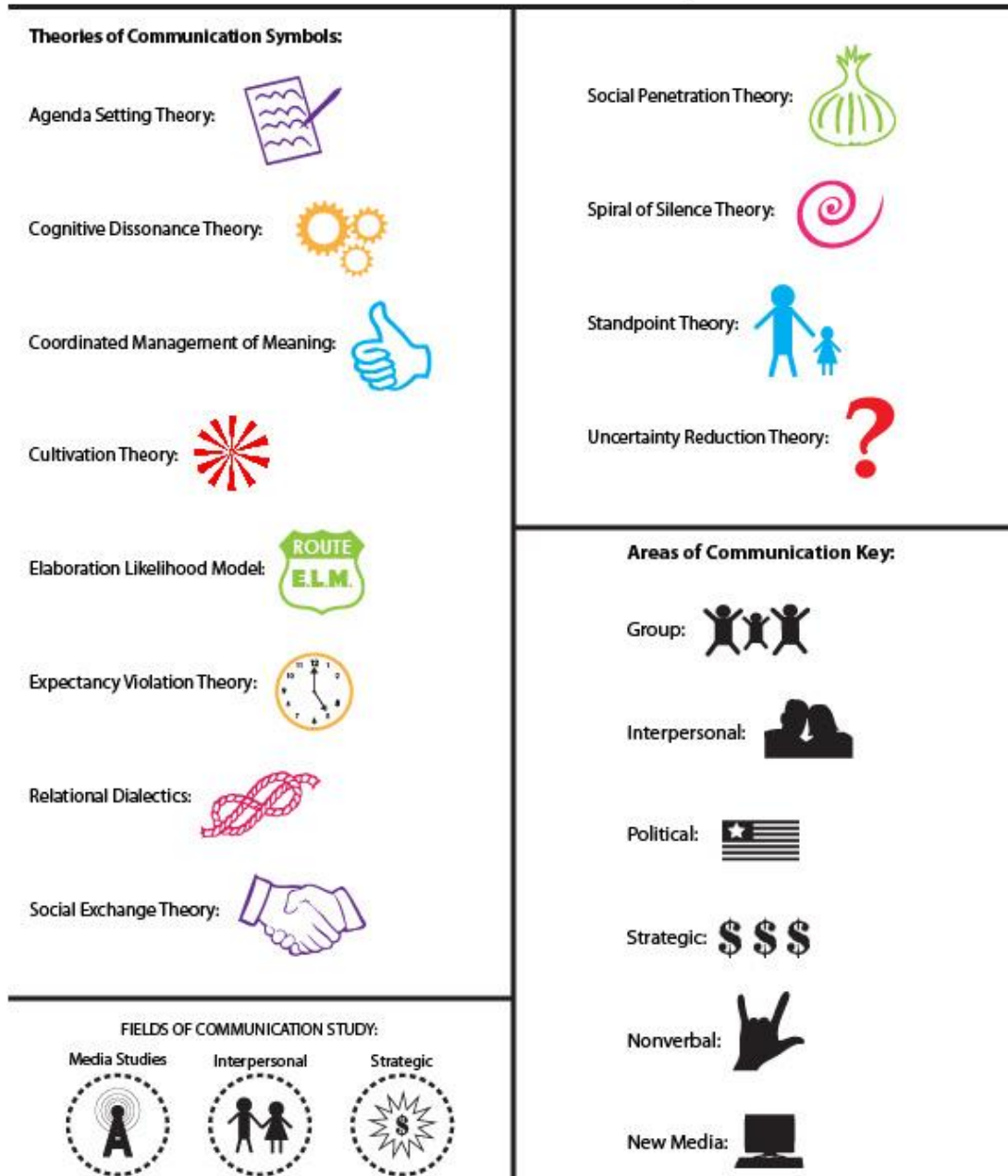
Appendix

Figure 1.1: Infographic Layout 1

Figure 2.1: Sample Infographic 1