Environmental Communication Strategies through the use of Posters: A
Comparative Analysis

A Senior Project Presented to
The Faculty of the Communication Studies Department
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Arts

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<u>Introduction</u>

In 2004, artist Alexis Rockman debuted his painting, *Manifest Destiny*, which featured a large ship in the foreground, submerged under water, and surrounded by sea life. However, upon closer examination of the picture, the background shows a large city skyline completely submerged under water, as well. Rockman's environmental shock art sends ominous messages about potential environmental calamities, admonishing that if we do not change, they are bound to become our realities. Rockman uses this same environmental demise theme in all of his art, with *The Field* being another piece that has been impactful and is very well known. This painting features a field with animals that are overfed and genetically modified, their bodies drawn in such a way to enhance the components useful to the human race. Pramod Nayar, a Professor at the University of Hyderabad, interpreted the painting by saying, "Rockman's *The Field* is about evolution: what form will these animals and plants take a few decades from now?" (Nayar, 2007). Although his renditions are bleak, Rockman uses his art to draw attention to destructive societal behavior.

Art is a useful tool to commute a message, as it does not require a large amount of audience participation. People simply have to witness to image to be affected and informed by its message. Posters use the same ideas more directly, urging for change. Whether displayed in a dormitory to remind college students to recycle their plastic bottles or plastered across a series of front lawns dictating whom the house owner believes should be voted into city council, posters can be an optimum medium when trying to effectively and efficiently spread an idea to a multitude of people. Environmentally themed posters have become a regularly seen pop culture artifact. There have been image events and campaigns dedicated to increasing recycling, saving Mother Nature and her planet Earth, and actively changing the way humans operate by

introducing the "green economy", an economy "that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities" (UNEP, Green Economy).

Contests are an effective way to crowd-source and observe what people are naturally drawn to without any outside factors available to alter opinions. In my study, I examined two different environmental poster contests that used Facebook as a forum for participation. Using these contests, I looked at the winning and losing posters in order to decipher what themes are employed, comparing them to determine if there are dissimilarities among the top and bottom posters. With this study, I kept two questions in mind: 1. Are there common elements in the winning posters that are not present in the losing posters? And 2. What type of message is more agreeable for the audience of an environmental poster? In search of the answers to these questions, I researched past studies on environmental rhetoric, visual rhetoric, and posters in general as background for my research. If there is a commonality that can be replicated, this information can be used for future environmental poster creation to promise more successful outcomes when a new topic or problem arises.

Environmental Posters and Visual Rhetoric

Environmental communication is defined as "the social and symbolic constructions of environment, public participation in environmental decisions, conflict resolution, environmental journalism, social media, environmental advocacy campaigns, science communication, environmental justice and climate justice movements, risk communication, green marketing, and corporate advocacy campaigns" (Cox, 2013). A newer media used to depict these environmental campaigns and ideas are environmental posters. Environmental poster campaigns are widely used to incite change in societal behavior. Comparing posters and the prevalence of the central

rhetorical themes may allow critics to identify strategies that result in successful outcomes within this visual medium. By analyzing environmental posters that have received meritorious judgment in a competitive venue, themes to inform this method of environmental communication may emerge that prove the effectiveness of using specific forms of rhetoric.

Environmental rhetoric can be very impactful in various forms of delivery. I chose to look at past works in the realm of environmental rhetoric to gain a better understanding of the discipline and, eventually, deduce how it applies to my research. A work of environmental rhetoric that features both an environmental advocacy campaign as well as risk communication is featured in Phaedra Pezzullo's book *Toxic Tourism: Rhetorics of Travel, Pollution, and Environmental Justice*. Pezzullo addresses toxic tours, which she had previously defined as "non-commercial expeditions organized and facilitated by people who reside in areas that are polluted by poisonous chemicals, places that Bullard has named 'human sacrifice zones'… Residents of these areas guide outsiders, or tourists, through where they [residents] live, work, and play in order to witness their struggle" (Pezzullo, 2003, pg. 227). In Jennifer Peeples' article, "Imaging Toxins", she similarly describes a catastrophe that happened in Vietnam due to America's use of Agent Orange and how photojournalism provides an important visual historical context to impact an audience's perception on an environmental disaster.

> The defoliants sprayed on the jungles and cropland of Vietnam would cause widespread deforestation, water contamination, poisoning of farmland, animal suffering and death, degradation of human health, and fetal deformity. Vietnam's indefensible attack by Agent Orange was 'the first declared war on the environment,' and 'the world's first planned ecocide, in which entire ecosystems were targeted and destroyed (Peeples, 2013).

Jon Lewis, in his analysis of the images of the environmental demise of the Republic of Kiribati, found that images of climate change should depict the negative impact on the people living in those environments. "All the imagery we have about climate change is about polar bears swimming to ice floes and glaciers tumbling into the water. That's our understanding of climate change. So I thought we need to show the people who are affected by climate change, especially the most vulnerable people, the people in the Pacific, and in Asia" (Lewis, 2010). Artists who experience areas stricken by environmental devastations leave with a greater awareness allowing for the capturing of unadulterated images of the devastation that may be used to inspire others.

Both toxic tours and photojournalism represent media through which audiences are presented with environmental issues with the purpose being to move them to act (Pezzulo, Peeples, Lewis). Much like shock art and environmental posters, toxic tours serve as a way to bring about an environmental consciousness with the intent to inspire change. Although the experience for those who partake in these tours may be very impactful and lasting, the medium is very limited because it does not allow the participation of a large audience. Photojournalism surrounding environmental issues invokes emotions, making audiences participate in an event that already happened; these photos live in the past. Not only are the pictures of an environmental problem useful in sending a message and raising awareness, but also by having the historical context of the image audiences are able to insert themselves into the environmental scenario. Environmental posters fill the gap to inspire action and change by taking the ideas and emotions put forth by photos and experiences.

The visual medium of advertisements can take something of environmental importance and put it in various advertising media, imbedding the issue in the central message. The message reaches mass audiences and can create a quicker change in behavior due to the frequency of

presentation, as advertisements are more abundant and widely used by a variety of outlets. Linda M. Scott's "Images in Advertising: The Need for a Theory of Visual Rhetoric" found an emerging form of visual rhetoric, focusing on the theoretical framework for the study of images. "The world of advertisements is peopled by fantastic images. A multitude of imaginary characters dance through situations ranging from sensual to playful, from threatening to mundane. The messages are reversed, boldfaced, and italicized - set in typefaces with names like Baby Teeth, Jiminy Cricket, and Park Avenue" (Scott, 1994). Advertisements are effective because of their frequency; however, they can possess a different ultimate motive. The environmental messages are often just a portion of the print, with their agenda being to sell. Advertisements with secondary environmental messages lack the exigency that exists in environmental posters.

Another large facet within visual rhetoric is image events, which are defined by Kevin Deluca and John Delicath as "staged acts of protest designed for media dissemination" (Deluca, Kevin & John Delicath, 2003). Both artists and environmental activists use these image events to put across a message and, often times, do result in promoting change. When people think of environmental and visual rhetoric together, they usually conjure up their own picture of the very active, some may say radical, environmental activist groups, such as Greenpeace. Kevin Deluca, Communication Professor at the University of Utah, wrote the book *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism,* which discusses Greenpeace's environmental activism coupled with the lengths they've gone in order to show environmental hardships that are being inflicted upon planet Earth (Deluca, 2012). Environmental activist groups like Greenpeace use media coverage to their advantage, allowing the messages within their image events to become widespread topics for a larger audience, rather than only reaching those who were direct

witnesses. Image events, due to their often-radical nature, can be polarizing when broadcasted on mainstream media. Although the audience of the image event's message becomes compounding, there is the risk that individuals not holding the same passion may shy away from the basic premise that may, in fact, be environmentally sound. Similar to those who create posters, image event creators should err on the side of caution when using radicalism to maximize their effectiveness.

Anders Hansen, a Senior Lecturer within the Department of Media and Communication for the University of Leicester, wrote *Communication, Media and Environment: Towards Reconnecting Research on the Production, Content and Social Implications of Environmental Communication,* within which he discusses the connection between media images and environmental messages (Hansen, 2011). Using media as a forum for environmental messages is a useful way to send a message faster. Similarly, in my study, the contests used Facebook as their forum. By using websites, advertisements, newspapers or television commercials, environmentalists can spread their ideas faster and wider, affecting a larger group of people and forcing viewers to form an immediate opinion. Fast and reactionary methods and behaviors will become more prevalent and desired as our world becomes more technologically advanced.

Some environmental activist groups have already caught on to the powers of simply using a poster to spark awareness. For example, the Canary Project created a campaign called the *Green Patriot Posters*, in which their objective was "to empirically analyze how visual meanings are constructed around such ideological views and perspectives" (Cozen, 2013). Along with Cozen, Scott Thill also researched the *Green Patriot Posters* on the website *wired.com*. This particular page on his website, entitled *Green Patriot Posters Reinvigorate Environmental Message,* provided a space where people could post images and he or the artist of the particular

image would comment in order to provide "a better connection to values that aren't simply about nature and conservation, which not everybody cares about, but also jobs and a better future" (Thill, 2010). As history is a great predictor for the future, in comparing modern environmental posters to a war campaign, one can see the incalculable attention of the poster featuring Rosie the Riveter. People, to this day, can recognize that iconic image, which represented the first major step in women becoming more respected and welcomed in the workforce. Environmental images have the same power, like the easily recognizable slogan "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle" accompanied by a cyclical pattern of the three green arrows.

Gaining an understanding through previous studies surrounding the discipline of environmental rhetoric informed this research. Thill's *Green Patriot Poster* segment offered insight of a conceptual understanding that multiple meanings and values can be derived from environmental posters. This knowledge led the presented research to the online realm, with the assumption that a wider assortment of posters from people of all different backgrounds, cultures, regions, and thus environmental understandings and perceptions would be identified, thus providing strategies in effective communicative characteristics to influence the intended audience.

Context

Contest #1

The first contest I used for the analysis was put on by Florida State University, with the motto "Learning Green, Living Green". On Facebook, they set up the contest entitled: "2012 Reduce, Reuse, Recycle Online Poster Contest!" with the purpose being "to help communicate environmental awareness, as part of FSU's celebration of Earth Week" (Herzfeld, 2012). Thirty posters were submitted and put online on April 18, 2012, with voting opportunities lasting until 8

p.m. on April 22. The rules were to "like" the best poster and the students were allowed to "share" the image, making it available to their friends outside the campus. This extended outreach allowed for a broader audience and took away the possible influences from the artists and those actually attending FSU. The winner of the poster with the most "likes" from Facebook viewers would win $100, with second place getting $50 and third $25. The results from this contest varied greatly. The ability to spread the photo to a larger audience allowed for more diverse results yet may have possibly skewed the results in favor of someone with more friends. If someone was more popular than another contestant, his or her photo may be more bombarded with "likes" than the other simply due to audience size. The first place image had 141 "likes" while the last place only had three.

Contest #2

The second contest I observed on Facebook was put on by Organic BPS, a branding, design, and advertising firm run out of India. They created a poster contest entitled "World Environment Day Poster Design Contest" to which they had 350 entrees. A jury of employees for the company selected the top thirty entrees and then displayed them on their Facebook page on June 12, 2012, giving voters a week before they "closed voting" to select a winner. Similar to the first contest, the way to win was by having the most "likes", but also considered those that had the most "shares" and "comments" due to the fact that these two communication channels showed interest in the images, as well. Organic BPS posted the results on the same website, allowing me to know the actual results at the time the contest had ended. They also gave credit to the actual author of the images by supplying the name of who submitted the image, giving them necessary recognition for the work.

<u>Methods</u>

Scholars often utilize close reading as their method of analysis when conducting research on a text. To provide a very basic definition, close reading is looking at a text in a more precise way, in that the researcher is studying minute details, spanning from word choice to the literary devices chosen. When performing this close reading, the researcher is reading between the lines, interpreting why the author chose to write in a particular way or chose to use a specific instance of imagery, rather than just interpreting the overall message to be taken from the piece. Not only should the researcher ask "why" when analyzing a specific word choice, but he/she also should ask in what way that decision affects the overall meaning or message the creator was trying convey to their audience. A close reading, or close textual analysis "can be applied to any kind of source, fictional or factual, imaginative or historical, literary or scientific… Might be a poem, essay, novel, a speech, or historical document… Might include a painting or visual text, a movie, or a piece of music, a piece of architecture or a public space" (Volpe, Harvard.edu). The employment of close reading informs the researcher of the efficacy of an environmental poster and the message.

Use of this methodology can be seen in Carol Poster's, Professor of English at York University, essay, "The Task of the Bow: Heraclitus' Rhetorical Critique of Epic Language". Within her writing, Poster analyzes Heraclitus' "rhetorical and hermeneutic theories by [doing a] close reading of [his] DK22b48 and related fragments" (Poster, 2006). Poster makes the argument that Heraclitus' purpose in his writings is to make his "audience, if intent on understanding his meaning, engage in a complex and iterative hermeneutic process of both literal and allegorical reading" (Poster, 2006). Abhik Roy, author of "Marion Barry's Road to Redemption: A Textual Analysis of ABC's News Story Aired on 14 September 1994," utilized a

close textual analysis methodology by looking at this visual media, making the argument that the story uses "visual, verbal, and tonal codes in this news segment [to] not only paint Barry in a negative way, but also covey a stereotypical image of African Americans" (Roy, 1996). Based on this research (Poster, Roy), it can be theorized that central rhetorical themes in environmental posters can be identified through methods of close reading. In my study, I looked at condensed messaging within environmental posters, collectively analyzing the presentation of the message rather than its diction.

Two different close textual analyses have been done on Steven Spielberg's film, *Saving Private Ryan.* The first by Peter Ehrenhaus claimed in "Why We Fought: Holocaust Memory in Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*" that critics argue it provides a type of glorified image of war and omits depicting the true rationale behind the war in the first place, only honoring the sacrificial soldiers and not the cause. He goes on to explain how, "a close reading of key scenes, including description of their technical composition reveals how the semiotic structure of these scenes supports these contentions" (Ehrenhaus, 2001). Through close textual analysis, he determined the center of the film's moral compass: "the continuing resonances of America's Vietnam syndrome and the need to acknowledge its presence, the problematic of Christian foundations in the mythic story of America; and the perpetual need to construct an ethically usable past" (Ehrenhaus, 2001). In Susan Owen's, "Memory, War, and American Identity: *Saving Private Ryan* as Cinematic Jeremiad," she uses close textual analysis to interpret Spielberg's intention: to use *Saving Private Ryan* to help American regain its sense of pride and personal identity. Performing close readings on movies allows for a researcher to interpret a filmmaker's underlying purpose. To analyze the environmental posters, close textual analysis affords a closer look at the creator's choices when choosing to use specific colors, words, or

images. Using this methodology for visual rhetoric informs the interpretation about the presentation of the material, rather than just the delivery in the posters of each contest.

In my research, I used close reading to analyze winning and losing posters in the two contests in order to determine whether there was a common element in the winning posters and, in contrast, if that thread was either missing or directly opposed in the losing posters. My research also identified the possible presence of a symbiotic relationship between the words, colors, and images chosen for the winning posters. Between the two groups of posters, I looked for more dichotomous relationships, color schemes that inspired opposing emotions, and positive versus negative language. However, I also looked at elements that either did or did not exist between the two, such as a call for action and pertinent, useful and inspiring imagery or words. As the poster contests were held on Facebook, the winning posters chosen from within the contests were determined based on the number of "likes" the poster received, choosing the first, second and third place winners. Using the same methodology in the case of the first contest, I looked at those who came in the bottom places, possessing the fewest number of "likes", in order to determine their dissimilarities.

<u>Analysis</u>

For my study, I chose to utilize close reading as my methodology in analyzing the two environmental poster contests hosted on Facebook. The goal of my research was to decipher whether or not there was an existing central theme prevalent in the successful posters that was absent from the ineffective. I also sought to answer two questions: 1. Are there common elements in the winning posters that are not present in the losing posters? And 2. What type of message is more agreeable for the audience of an environmental poster? Three key dichotomies were found during the analysis: 1. Positive versus negative messaging, 2. Language that inspires

versus indecisive, confusing language, and 3. Complex versus simplistic imagery. As a secondary method of analysis, I included the number of words present in order to determine whether or not the word count affected the likability of the poster to the audience. I determined that the number of words did not influence the success of the poster as much as the actual content of the words.

In terms of my definitions, I consider a positive message as one that is looking to the future, empowering, and referencing what is possible and can be done. By contrast, negative messaging would feature "blaming language", looking at what has happened or what we have done to our planet. Posters that feature more negative language may impose a sense of guilt in consumers of the image, making the audience feel personally responsible. Negative language can also come across as very deterministic. In terms of an environmental campaign, giving the audience a feeling of hopelessness about the current environmental situation may not make for an inspiring nor persuasive poster.

The second dichotomy I identified is whether or not a poster's message featured a call to action or was indecisive in its overall intention. My definition of "inspiring" is a message that is motivational and stimulates the drive to take action. The poster's message would convince audiences to take part in the change depicted. Posters with a message that was unclear or left audiences uninspired and unsure about what part they are to play were considered indecisive. With this notion in mind, my analyses of the posters made an assumption suggesting that the posters' messages needed to be inspiring and call audiences to action in order to be considered successful and effective.

Finally, the third dichotomy I used in my analysis was the level of complexity of the imagery. I considered a poster's imagery complex when it inspired a deeper view or

interpretation, or featured multiple variations and layers and permitted several different perspectives. The opposite reflections were those that contained simple imagery, meaning there were limitations in detail and had no specificity to one central environmental theme or idea. A poster with simple imagery can also be understood as those with the images and their meanings appearing at face value requiring little interpretation. I used this dichotomy to determine whether or not complex imagery was necessary in order for a poster to be successful.

*Message Constructs*

The analysis included the top and bottom three posters in each contest based on the number of "likes" or votes it earned. Starting with the six posters with the lowest number of likes, I began by assessing the messaging on the posters, evaluating the level of positivity and the level of inspiration. I chose to analyze the first and second binaries simultaneously as they both are in reference to the language, beginning with the posters that ranked third to last and continued down to the last place finalists. (Table 1.)

The poster that ranked third to last in the first contest (Figure 4) includes a background that features the message, "If we don't change our habits, pretty soon we can spend our summer vacations in the North Pole." The language is very deterministic and pessimistic, focusing on what has happened and the detriment we have caused rather than expressing what we can do to fix the problem. Based on the assumption that a positive message is more effective, the poster may have been more effective and less indecisive had it said, "Carpool to work to reduce your carbon footprint and keep our North Pole looking like a winter wonderland." Although conveying the same idea that our habits are contributing to the ever increasing global warming, thus melting the snow caps in the North Pole, this restated message has a much more positive tone and provides hope rather than despair to the audience. Ranking the same in the second

contest (Figure 10), this poster only includes two words: "Green Economy." I concluded that this message was neither positive nor negative, lacking inspiration and imagery.

Finishing second to last in the first contest (Figure 5), the poster reads, "As the ice melts, the oceans are THAT much closer". Inherently, this message has a negative connotation, however, it also makes me speculate about the artist's point. The message is factual in nature, but is very general and nondescript, as it lacks specificity in terms of the impact of the rising sea levels. Adding emphasis to words, by means of capitalization, is most often only useful when the message is explicit. However, given the implied nature of the wording, capitalizing "that" only adds more confusion about what exactly the artist was referencing. Someone reading the message might be left with the question, "THAT much closer to what?" If an audience member had made the decision to get involved in becoming more environmentally conscious, but wasn't clear on the issues being presented, viewing this poster would not inform, as it does not depict a cause or preventative measures. The purpose of any poster is to inform and inspire; yet this poster hardly satisfies the first qualification and does nothing to call audiences to action by being so vague.

From the second contest, the same positioned poster's (Figure 11) message qualified as neither negative nor positive in my interpretation: "Sometimes, the best way to make a difference is doing nothing. Like not driving your car every day. Or not turning on your AC for 30 minutes. Or not using hot water for bath. There are many simpler-than-you-imagine ways to reduce carbon emissions. And contribute to a Green Economy. So, what would you do today? Or rather, what would you NOT do today?" As specific as it is, this message left me confused and uninspired. Although they are technical calls to action, the examples of ways to reduce emissions were uninspiring. It discusses not doing certain things in order to reduce emissions, but the

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examples it gives reflect minimally limiting an action rather than completely stopping an action, activity, or habit. Although simplistic, these examples reflect losses that are less inconvenient and may make a greater impact towards reducing emissions.

"We sure can!" is scrawled across the top of the last place poster of the first contest (Figure 6). The artist attempted to utilize the positive messaging from the slogan of the Smokey the Bear campaign, "Only YOU can prevent forest fires". However, given the overall lack in proper context and its direct opposition to the devastating background, the poster may be construed as sending the wrong message. Although obviously not the artist's intention, it appears that their message is saying, "We sure can!" burn down the forests. In complete contrast, the poster that earned last place in the second contest (Figure 12) contained very negative, cynical, almost accusatory language. "COUNT ON IT! Exploit the Fuels & Pollute the Planet. Then your supercar will be shelved and the bicycle will find its way back to roads soon. Less exploitation or count the days…" The passive aggressive notion that everyone using a "supercar" does it for the purpose of "exploiting the fuels and [polluting] the planet" is uninspiring and may make audiences feel shame, as if being scolded by a parent or authority figure. The artist might have made the message more effective had they referenced a method audiences can adopt to avoid such exploitation, rather than making a statement surrounded by inevitability by saying what will happen. Given the collection of negative, confusing, or useless language in the mentioned messages, it did not come as a surprise that these posters ranked so low in their respective contests.

In terms of the victors, I analyzed their messaging in the same fashion, from third to first. (Table 2) After analyzing the "losers", I started my examination with the assumption that the winners will present positive language and inspire, telling the audience what they can do to help

better our planet. In contest number one, the third place finalist (Figure 3) contained the message, "Protect what your mother gave ya!!!!" Given the lack of a direct reference to any environmental issue, the notion of care associated with the word "protect" in the message covers both positive and inspiring qualities. I felt it qualified as neither call to action nor indecisive because it tells audiences to protect, but it does not include how one should do so. To succeed in both categories, the message needed to go on, starting with the word "by" and ending with an example. Similarly, the third place poster from the second contest's (Figure 9) message can be interpreted as neither a call to action nor indecisive when considering just the words by themselves: "Be a part to save earth." However, the artist did used imagery to show examples for how to play a part. The level of inclusivity in the message makes it very positive, providing a reminder that we are all responsible and capable of saving the Earth.

"Preserve the beauty" is written across the top of the second place poster from the first contest (Figure 2). Matching the colorful, "hippy theme" of the imagery, this short, to the point message is both encouraging and inspiring. It gives the reminder that Earth's beauty is not necessarily permanent and thus actions of preservation are needed. It can be argued that many see our planet as predominantly utilitarian, with ever-growing suburbia infringing on forests. The poster's use of beauty plays to society's desire to surround ourselves with beautiful things, people, and places. To continue the beauty of the planet, this poster suggests that we strive to preserve. The second place poster of the second contest (Figure 8) follows the same theme as the previous, emphasizing the greenery and nature of the earth by stating, "Nourish Earth with green to enrich global economy." This poster adds further inspiration and motivation by putting preservation in monetary terms. Using a bit of a play on words, not only will the planet as well as

the human race benefit by our efforts in preserving the greenery, but the economy will see more "greenery", as well.

In both contests, the first place posters had neither positive nor negative messages. Below the first contest's first place poster's (Figure 1) image, the artist quotes Gandhi: "earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs but not every man's greed" and has "conserve defend" written across the bottom. The quote may have helped in the poster's popularity by luring in supporters with the use of a quote by a world icon that is always associated with peace. Gandhi's notion of peace is then repeated in using the word "defend", as in war, we defend our land for the purpose of protection and peace. From a strictly environmental standpoint, this poster inspires by expressing that it is not enough to just conserve the resources; we also need to defend against selfish actions against environmental conservations.

The second contest's first place poster (Figure 7) states, "Our green card to the future," in reference to the green leaf displayed in the image. I concluded that the level of positivity of this message is based on interpretation. Although trying to utilize a well-known phrase by applying it environmentally, consumers of this image might be slightly confused or insulted by the language and innuendo. Green cards represent an access to a healthy, free world with endless possibilities. Because green is the primary color of a healthy environment, the artist used this notion to argue that green leaves and greenery is society's access card into a healthier planet, ultimately providing us with a sense of timeless possibilities on this planet. It inspires the idea that we need to achieve this identification in order to reach our dreams of a thriving future.

*Imagery*

After analyzing the messaging, I used the third dichotomy and determined the impact of the imagery. It was assumed that the more successful posters utilized more complex imagery that

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relates directly to the message being sent by the language associated with it. Posters that provoke deeper thought and interpretation should lead to greater success as their ideas may create a longer lasting impression on audiences.

The poster that placed third to last in the first contest (Figure 4) has imagery that I considered confusing and amateur. The artist used a simple beach scene as the background with an image of a polar bear inserted onto the foreground using Photoshop. This image and message are trying to convey that by continuing at our current environmental consumption rate, our north pole will change from cold, snowy tundra to vacation destination. The image was classified as simple due to the obvious lack in variety of interpretation. The message of both the language and the image can be taken at face value whereby the audience can likely understand immediately the choices made by the artist. For the second contest, the third to last place (Figure 11) image simply does not make sense. It looks more like a coupon than a poster. The image consists of a coded scan in varying shades of green acting as the top to a tree, a brown tree trunk, and a ground made of a barcode. This poster left me with more questions than answers as it does not encourage any action nor does it depict any actual environmental situation or scenery.

The poster finishing second to last in the first contest (Figure 5) depicts a country scene with a long green field, blue skies, a big healthy tree, hill range, and a few sheep. However, in an attempt to depict an environmental disturbance, the artist colored a small bottom portion of the grass blue to seemingly illustrate rising sea levels but this rendition of encroaching sea levels is poorly portrayed. In the same rank in the second contest (Figure 11), this artist's poster only consists of words. There is no imagery to provide any kind of example or visual depiction of what the artist means by the message, "Sometimes, the best way to make a difference is doing nothing." I concluded that not including any type of art is ineffective.

Smokey the Bear is a well-known face to an environmental campaign, acting as a reminder to put out campfires and deposit cigarettes and matches in appropriate areas in order to defend and prevent destruction to our wildlife. The last place poster in the first contest (Figure 6) uses the face of Smokey the Bear as the forefront for the poster with a burning forest in the background. Categorically simple, this poster does not at all depict a solution to the resounding problem and utilizes an already successful campaign without any unique, creative, or correlated elements. For the second contest, the last place poster (Figure 12), already described as having passive aggressive and accusatory language, features very simplistic imagery with a cream colored background, a simple road along the bottom, a logo type automobile drawing on the top, and an outlined drawing of a man on a bicycle. The artist may be trying to convey that we play a part in protecting the planet by riding a bike rather than driving a vehicle. However, at face value, this poster could pass for an advertisement for a bike shop rather than for an environmental campaign. The confusion of the poster's purpose makes the message inherently ineffective.

Of the six posters placing first through third, only the first contest's third place finalist (Figure 3) contained simple imagery. Following the "hippy theme" of the rainbow colored message, "Protect what your mother gave ya!!!!" with a green background, the image featured a silhouette of a woman with a large afro who was colored to look like Earth. With wording that can derive so many different interpretations, the simplicity of the imagery does not at all match the complexity of the messaging. In complete opposition, the third place poster from the second contest (Figure 9) is highly visually stimulating. From top to bottom, the poster begins by displaying a small scene of what could happen to our planet if we do not continue to nurture and strive for a greener, healthier planet. It includes deforestation and a small diagram of how leaves

act as a barrier to protect the Earth from the direct impact of sunrays. Moving down to the bottom of the poster, audiences see three people playing their part in saving the planet by participating in planting and nurturing greenery. The very center of the poster features an image of the healthy Earth, including an abundance of water, greenery, and happy, healthy wildlife. The complexity of the image is represented by the depictions of what could happen with no effort, what we can do to prevent it, and what the outcome will be by playing a part to save our planet. Although this poster's message, "Be a part to save earth", is simple and lacks true inspiration, the art provides a visual example to support the message.

Holographic in nature, the imagery of the runner-up from the first contest (Figure 2) is very layered, drawing audiences' eyes further into the heart of the magenta colored poster. Starting in the middle, we see a man who looks like Bob Marley looking up into the sunlight. Bob Marley conjures up a sense of peaceful coexistence, so including him in this image speaks directly to the poster's message, "Preserve the Beauty." Surrounding Marley there are both holographs and silhouettes of fish, plants, bare footprints, birds, rocks, and butterflies all in different colors, sizes, and shapes. I discovered that the longer I looked at the imagery of the poster, the more things I saw and interpretations I developed.

Emerging out of the center of a green, healthy cabbage head in the second place poster in the second contest (Figure 8) is planet Earth. The image portrays the idea that vegetation hold and protects the plant. By "Nourishing earth with green" and a reference to the economy in the message, we create an enriched planet, both environmentally and economically. Although it is dissimilar to the previous poster in terms of lack of numerous colors, pieces of nature, and holographic nature, the imagery of this poster is subtle, complex, and compels a deeper thought process.

Surrounded by black, swirling vines is a circle filled with a cloudy sky of various shades of blue. In the forefront of the circle is a large tree with numerous branches and a deep, extensive root system. This poster took first place in the first contest (Figure 1), likely due to the intricate, beautiful, and thought provoking artistry. It only includes shades of blue, black, and white while most environmental causes and posters revolve around the color green, and it does not include any recycling or gardening themes. The intricate root system the artist depicted can be representative of many things and speak to audiences in different ways. For example, it can represent the very literal meaning of strong nature and plant life, the strong foundation of a family, or the healthy and strong base for our planet.

In expected fashion, the first place poster of the second contest (Figure 7) includes a human hand holding a vibrant green leaf as the main focal point of the image. Playing with the term "green card," this artist used a green leaf to represent our gateway to a stronger environmental future. For contrast, the background of the poster depicts a lone road in the middle of a dead nature wasteland. By choosing to take this green leaf, an audience chooses to actively prevent continued destruction of the environment leading to a brighter, healthier future. Given the layered back and foregrounds, the imagery is very complex, but I also concluded that the play on words is what made this poster stand out from the rest as it required deeper thought not only in the literal but also in the metaphorical messaging.

Conclusion

The realm of environmental communication is growing, encompassing things from toxic tours of environmentally distraught regions to artwork displaying a city completely overlain with water. Scholars are utilizing the tools within environmental rhetoric to work through the ever-present trauma our environment has faced over the past several years, sometimes for concepts as

simple as what to call the environmental struggle. For my research, I wanted to use this genre of communications to discover if there was more behind the powerful nature of environmental posters than just what is accepted at face value. The "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle" poster is one of the most well-known and successful posters, but does the success have more to do with the design of the poster, the message, or both?

Although not completely conclusive, the results supported my initial assumption that there are elements within a winning poster decided through public judgment that are either juxtaposed or completely missing from the losing poster. As noted below in Tables 1 and 2, very distinct patterns and commonalities were present among the winning posters that were not always present in the losing posters. For the first dichotomy, positive versus negative messaging, four of the six winning posters exhibited positive messaging, while only one of the losing posters had the same factor. It can be concluded that there is a strong relationship between positive messaging and the success of environmental posters. Similarly, five of the six winners had inspiring messaging while, again, only one of the losing participants offered this messaging. The correlation between inspirational messaging and success deserves strong consideration for effective poster creation. The second research question was to determine the presence of a message that is more agreeable to audiences of environmental posters. Both those that inspired the viewer and that were more positive and uplifting was more successful to the audience.

Winning posters shared a commonality in their imagery. Five out of the six winners featured very complex imagery, drawing multiple interpretations likely appealing to varied levels of the viewer's opinions and imagination while all of the losing posters had very simplistic, "face-value" imagery. For this specific dichotomy, the element of complex imagery only occurs in the winners and does not in the losers, affirming the presumption of the first research question.

Word count within the messaging of the posters may be another influencing factor. I sought to find whether the number of words played a part in message and poster popularity. As noted in the Tables 1 and 2, the numbers greatly varied. I started the analysis with the assumption that the winning posters would likely have fewer words, as short, succinct language may make for a more powerful and memorable messaging, similar to that found in the "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle". Although the number of words among the winning posters were of a lower average, one of the successors had 16 words while a poster from the losing category only had two. This variance made the results inclusive and did not support the premise that shorter messages hold greater appeal.

Color and the use of influential and iconic images or quotes are possible criteria to be assessed in future research when deciphering the reason for the success of a poster. The top two winning posters from the first contest (Figures 1& 2) each featured an iconic symbol: the first utilizing a quote from Gandhi and the second having a holographic image of Bob Marley as the background of their poster. Because both of these figures were widely known as strong believers in peace and love for any and all things, featuring these elements in the respective posters may have influenced their success. Evaluating the color schemes employed in each poster may also provide interesting insight and findings regarding the poster appeal. However, for these particular contests, the color schemes followed no common trend or pattern, making such analysis not possible.

For future research, one might utilize poster contests that are not conducted solely through social media (Facebook). Although convenient, by having all the posters available for public view and allowing for different personal ways to judge popularity, either by likes, shares, or comments, utilizing this media made assessing poster popularity based on the presented

criterion questionable. Contests held through avenues that provide the voter critical criterion by which to judge may increase the range and variety of participating themes or ideas. Research to determine whether or not the factors I used as qualifications for successful posters, positive and inspiring messaging and complex imagery, are universal among a greater sample of environmental poster contests is needed. Moreover, rather than only comparing the top and bottom three posters, further research might compare all contest poster entrants, creating a rankings and justifying public opinion based on finer criteria. The research presented is important in that we cannot underestimate the influence posters have on public opinion with respect to environmental concerns, causes and the need to act. Determining those attributes of the environmental message through the medium that is most desired by the consumer is vital in their effectiveness.

Table 1.

| LOSERS Contest 1 | Positive Message | Negative Message | Inspiring | Indecisive | Complex Imagery | Simple Imagery | Word Count |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3rd to Last | | X | | X | NEITHER | | 18 |
| 2nd to Last | | X | | X | | X | 10 |
| Last Place | X | | | X | | X | 4 |
| **Contest 2** | | | | | | | |
| 3rd to Last | NEITHER | | | X | | X | 2 |
| 2nd to Last | NEITHER | | X | | | X | 65 |
| Last Place | | X | | X | | X | 32 |

Table 2.

| WINNERS Contest 1 | Positive Message | Negative Message | Inspiring | Indecisive | Complex Imagery | Simple Imagery | Word Count |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1st Place | NEITHER | | X | | X | | 16 |
| 2nd Place | X | | X | | X | | 6 |
| 3rd Place | X | | X | | | X | 11 |
| **Contest 2** | | | | | | | |
| 1st Place | NEITHER | | NEITHER | | X | | 6 |
| 2nd Place | X | | X | | X | | 8 |
| 3rd Place | X | | X | | X | | 6 |

First Contest:

Figure 1. First Place                Figure 2. Second Place          Figure 3. Third Place
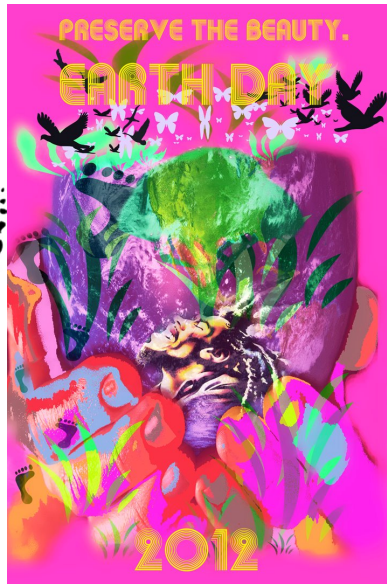


Figure 4. Third to Last          Figure 5. Second to Last          Figure 6. Last Place
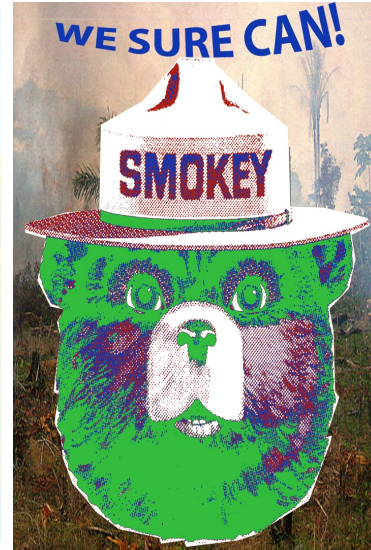
Second Contest:

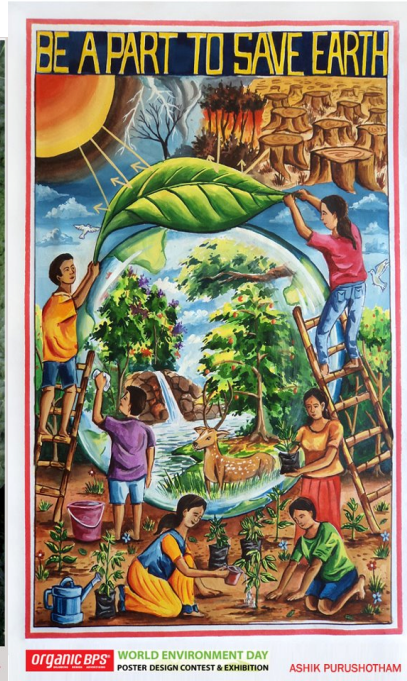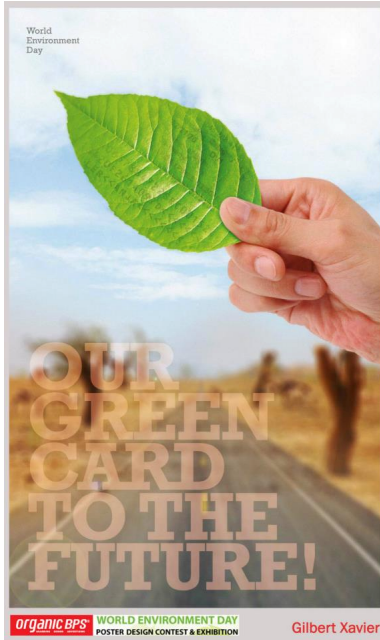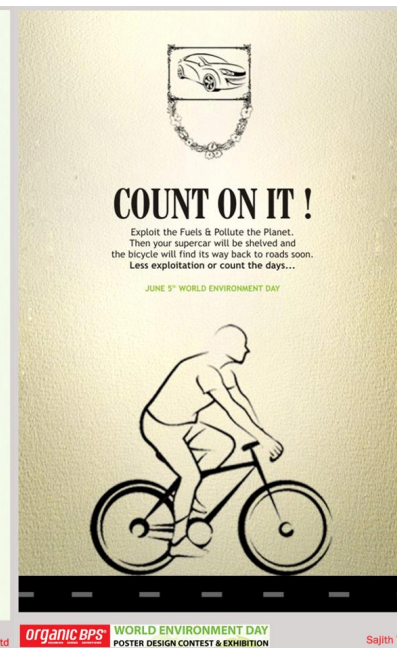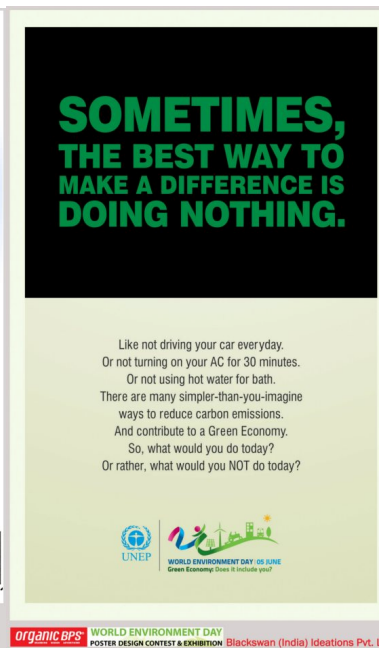Figure 7. First Place          Figure 8. Second Place          Figure 9. Third Place
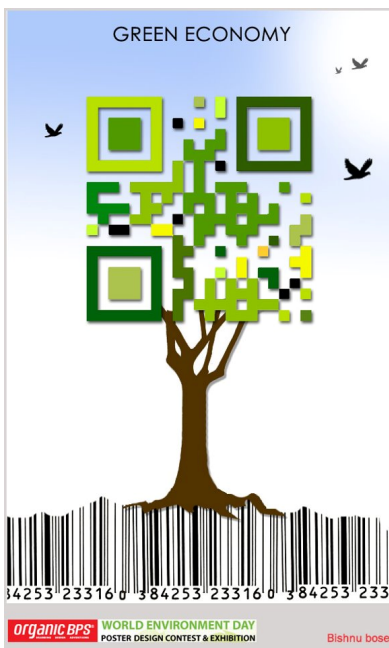


Figure 10. Third to Last          Figure 11. Second to Last          Figure 12. Last Place

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