

# Pictorial Communication – The Best Alternative to the Written Word?

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## Abstract

There is a universal consensus amongst visual communication researchers and primary health workers that in the face of the illiteracy and cross-cultural factors, pictorial communication often provides the best alternative to the written word in the design of health campaign messages. Pictures used in the design of these health messages for example for an Oral Rehydration therapy project should be explicit and not abstract, and the audience should understand it without difficulty. Images used are tested with representatives of the target audience to ensure that they are understandable, appropriate and attractive. Audience research is necessary for the design of health campaign messages as it provides proper dissemination of the message intended for the target audience. Pictorial literacy that is the ability to read pictures is the result of an informal educational process. This skill probably develops in proportion to the amount of visual stimulation to which the individual is exposed to his environment. Pictures used should be those familiar to the target audience. Pictorial communication helps to stimulate imagination, motivate action and give a clearer understanding of the campaign message. This paper looks at the significance of pictures as it relates to the dissemination of health campaign message to rural mothers and non – literate patients.

**Keywords:** Pictorial, Symbols, Village people

## 1. Introduction

*‘What do you see in this picture, Mulilo?’*

*Mulilo: ‘I see motoka.’*

*‘Have you seen many motorcars here in Mfue?’*

*Mulilo: ‘I have seen...I have seen in my head.’*

Andreas Fuglesang (1982)

A potter or a woodcarver in a town group in Africa knows it is said, more about pictures than a cutting edge photographic artist. Town individuals pick up their insight through taking care of, making or taking a look at objects or occasions. Along these lines when individuals see pictures, they anticipate that the photos will contain what they think about the items and events. As indicated by Fuglesang et al. (1982), individuals convey in their heads extremely clear and fantastic memory pictures. These memory-pictures are more practical to them. The points of interest of a photo shape a sort of pictorial dialect. Certain subtle elements fill the role of nominals or things (objects) while different points of interest speak to the predication or the verb (the activity). The relationship between the points of interest is the sentence structure (the entirety). We can say this dialect comprises of a progression of signs that individuals must know so as to have the capacity to process data from pictures as expected.

Pictures are regularly viewed as an ideal method for conveying to non – literates. The dialect of a photo can be extremely uncovering. An old saying – "words generally can't do a picture justice", applies to numerous printed pieces. According to Prust (2003), realistic images are an exceptionally robust method for passing on a message. They add another measurement to expand understanding and additionally enthusiasm for the item. Elliott and

Lester (2002) sees that words are repressive while pictures are entrancing comprehended inside of a particular culture and made individual mediums of expression.

### Study Questions

- i. Are pictorial pictures an ideal method for passing on a message?
- ii. If a non – literate is given a poster with pictures and one with just words, which would be favoured?

#### 1.1 Pictures: How it all began

There is the need to investigate the historical backdrop of images. According to Holmes and DeNeve (1985) fifty thousand years prior, man made his imprint – fundamental conceptual strokes cut into rock or bone. They were his arrangements of creatures seen or got and his notes of entry of time – early schedule. Over many years, the imprints formed into picture – images of the creatures and different items that he felt he expected to record and leave for future generations to see. By 4,000BC, the Sumerians were utilizing two thousand pictographs as a part of their tablet for compositions. Images no more remained for substantial questions however for word and sounds.

A photo is characterized in connection with the setting in which it is being utilized. Frutiger (1989) sees that what is for the most part implied by the expression "picture" is a record, as consistent with life as could be allowed, of that which the human eye sees or is accepted to see.

From the history expressed above, it is clear that pictures have been a method of communication from time immemorial.

### 2. Communicating with Non – literates

Pictures are unknowingly taken in. Other than the implications of these images are once in a while not appreciated by the viewers. As indicated by Epskamp (1995), visual lack of education is the failure to decipher basic visual messages or pictures. An audience must figure out how to search for a superior comprehension of shapes, hues, and examples. The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English characterizes a non – literate as who is unable to read and write. For the purpose of this study, the non – literates would be mothers in rural areas. The essence of using pictorial communication is to get more of them to use correctly and continue to use oral rehydration therapy, feed children properly during and after diarrhea episodes and seek further treatment when needed.

Also, the Pfizer Clear Health Communication Initiative: CHC Principles Fact Sheet (2008) state that most adults incline toward medical services data that is anything but difficult to peruse and understand regardless of their literacy level. Studies in the field of visual literacy as it relates to the development of health campaign messages indicates that messages are concerned with the practical implications of designing culturally appropriate visual materials for education, improvement, information and reading ability activities in various cultures.

Visual literacy programs are aimed at teaching rural mothers to comprehend visual messages more consciously. This applies both to the capacity to see and recognize details in a picture. It is, therefore, necessary that rural mothers and non – literate patients must first be able to read pictures before they can make use of the visual materials. If not, the relationship between content and form will not be understood. Therefore to avoid this challenge, it is necessary to create easy to read materials to improve health literacy.

The creation of these materials includes:

- Using simple pictures that are easy to understand

- Information wrote at an appropriate reading level
- Using diagrams and images, that communicates text
- Making information and images that are culturally relevant

### 3. Discussion

Glassner (1996) in his article titled "the dishonesty of visual culture" express that pictures are essential than words. This is because pictures are frequently viewed as more honest than content, which clearly requires clarification. Expressions like "the camera never lie" and "I'll trust it when I see it" express the quality we put on the apparently coordinate interpretation of pictures.

As indicated by Katz M.G. (2006), research in psychology and marketing suggests that people prefer messages with pictures than messages with text alone. Further evidence suggests that pictures help in mental development that also helps in problem-solving.

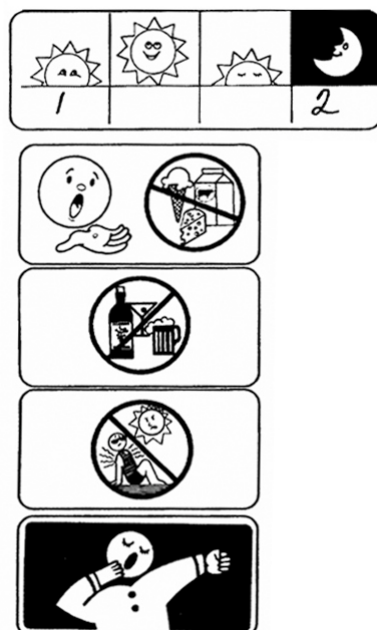
Pictures are vital to the non – literates and individuals of various social setting. These individuals can't read nor comprehend words easily thus they require visual guides as pictures to offer them some assistance with comprehending messages better. Pictorial communication helps to;

- i. Stimulate creative ability
- ii. Furnish data
- iii. Motivate activity
- iv. Give a clearer comprehension of the campaign message.
- v. They are an awesome memory help.

Pictorial communication regularly gives the best option for the composed word when utilized effectively;

- i. When accurate pictures are used
- ii. Using images or explicit images that are significant to the intended interest group
- iii. Not using abstract images
- iv. Pictures ought to be basic
- v. People who have not figured out how to peruse or compose don't as a matter, of course, take a look at images in the request expected. It regularly demonstrates accommodating, as messages are being tried, soliciting a few gatherings from individuals to organize the different messages into a succession that appears to be most intelligent to them
- vi. Limit the quantity of items and activities in every picture
- vii. Include just elements that are necessary for imparting the expected message.

(Zimmerman and Perkin 1982)



**Figure 1.** Examples of pictorials indicating medical instructions. (Zimmerman and Perkin 1982)

Figure 1 is a pictorial representation for low – literacy patients. The labels include simple black and white illustrations to depict the times for daily medication, warning, and instructions. Also according to Katz M.G. (ibid), participants were asked to complete an assessment to determine their level of comprehension 7-10 days after receiving their care and instructions. Research shows that the degree of understanding was high amongst the patients. From the discourse so far, it can be seen that for pictorial aids to be effective and communicate the intended message, it should be designed using simple illustrations.

Dowse and Ehlers (2003) have made the following suggestions for pictorial design:

- Relevant colors should be used
- Images should be drawn to scale
- Images should not be exaggerated
- Backgrounds should be less busy for easy comprehension of messages

According to Goldsmith (1984), pictures are easily understood when they are images that non-literates are familiar with such as images found in their culture. Goldsmith (ibid) explains further that the importance of pictures cannot be over emphasized. Therefore, many types of research are done to improve better the communication value of images. Where culture is involved, however, care must be taken in preparing the visual materials.

From the research conducted by World Health Organization (WHO Graphics), a public poster could be termed useful when;

- i. Visuals aid in the comprehension of the intended message.
- ii. A single idea is communicated, and messages are not clustered.

- iii. Information can be read, and target audience is attracted from at least ten meters away.
- iv. Easily remembered
- v. Images helps to display the right behavior when possible.
- vi. It highlights the importance of the product to the intended audience.

Neurath (1882 – 1945) firmly believes that with the aid of pictures, more knowledge, and new information are received than with words alone. As stated earlier, the role of images cannot be over emphasized and among non-literates, messages are understood quickly. However, for messages to be better understood, it is important to do an initial research and pre-testing or carry out a pilot test. Furthermore, it often proves helpful to ask several groups of the target audience to arrange the messages in a way that is most coherent to them. Therefore, if a designer intends to design a material, the culture, traditions and the perception of the community or target group must be considered. And as stated earlier in the discussion above, familiar objects and images in the environment of the intended audience must be utilized. Peter S.H. et al. (2005) further buttress that putting culture into consideration helps in better comprehension of messages. Hence, these cultures must be learned for effective dissemination of messages. This method is used by the first Executive Director of the Egypt ORT (Oral Rehydration Therapy) project. (See figure 2). Osborne H. (2008) infers that various people comprehend things in different ways. This information is placed in their minds and based on their experiences; they give meanings to the messages.

The first Executive Director of the Egypt ORT project examined more than one dozen logo ideas submitted to the project by different artists and designers. He liked one unique logo much more than the others and was tempted to adopt it for the ORT project without further deliberation. Even so, he agreed to withhold his final decision until all logos were thoroughly tested.



This was the Director's original choice

The logos were shown to a sample of mothers who were asked to choose their favorite. To the Director's surprise, the logo he preferred was the one least favored by the test respondents.



This was another test idea

The tests also showed that the logo chosen could be modified to make it more efficient. A large number of mothers felt that the logo colors should be changed and that the mother pictured in the logo should wear a wedding ring.

The Executive Director adopted the logo selected by the mothers for the ORT campaign. The experience so impressed him that he frequently recounted this story to emphasize the significance of audience research.



This was the mothers' favourite

Figure 2: Audience research (Oral Rehydration Therapy project)

#### 4. Conclusion

Pictures cannot be used as efficient means of communication unless the producer of the image knows and can apply the pictorial language and, above all, has an assessment of the language knowledge of his audience. Furthermore, how a picture appears is more important than what is said. Also, the culture, environment and perception of the target audience must be considered for health messages to be comprehended by non-literates.

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