

Persuasive Impacts of Imagery

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Leadership 102

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Unlike many other animals, humans rely disproportionately upon sight to interpret surroundings more than any other sense. Partiality toward the sense of sight explains the growing popularity of using visuals in the media to attract attention. Al Gore's "Our Choice: A Plan to Solve the Climate Crisis" is no exception to this trend, as the pages are filled with large spreads of vibrant photographs and diagrams which serve to enhance the argument that global warming exists. The publication cost of producing the book in color may have been significantly higher, but the persuasive power held in the pixels advanced the book's purpose of raising awareness about the climate crisis. Gore's role as a leader in the environmental movement is to generate a mass movement among the American citizens by using persuasive tactics, such as imagery, to pose a strong argument. Visuals, in addition to text, enhance Gore's argument because they improve retention and recollection, as well as appeal to both cognitive and emotional reasoning.

Visuals are essential to learning even when not part of an argument part of the dual coding theory which suggests that there are two systems of processing: verbal and nonverbal. The two are interconnected and together impact long-term retention. Text is interpreted solely through the verbal pathway, while visuals can be processed through both (Rosen, Fullwood, Henley, & King, 2012). For example, when a picture is processed through the non-verbal pathway, it is also given a label that then is processed through the verbal pathway. The repetition reinforces the concepts presented in the picture, making the visual more memorable. In addition to being encoded twice, information from the visual can be retrieved in either the verbal or nonverbal form, thus making it easier to recall (Rosen, Fullwood, Henley, & King, 2012). A study investigating how one engages with an issue, showed that when asked to write down or draw their first four thoughts about global warming, participants' responses reflected the pictures, not the text in the newspapers (Smith & Joffe, 2013). The results support the dual

coding theory, suggesting that visuals are easier to recall than text. According to the availability heuristic, people make decisions, not based on all of the data, but based on the information which is able to be recalled easily (Joffe, 2008). Therefore, the pictures used throughout “Our Choice” become extremely important because readers will compose their beliefs and actions around the images because they are easier to remember.

Not only do visuals improve memory, they also impact initial cognitions by providing metaphors. The persuasive power of pictures is rooted in their ability to communicate metaphors quickly and without extended analysis (DiFrancesco & Young). Because readers are not provoked to analyze the image, the information is absorbed less consciously and in an unmediated manner making a reader more likely to accept the visual without question (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011). Complex visual metaphors which provoke further analysis will not be absorbed in this fashion, and Markus Knauff suggests that they will not be comprehended at all because visual reasoning only occurs if the image is absorbed in the visual working memory (Knauff, 2009). Gore activates readers’ visual working memories with obvious metaphors and analogies. To open the eighteenth chapter, Gore displayed a picture of a river splitting into two, the stream on the left an opaque tan and the one on the right, a clear, vibrant teal (Gore, 2009). Across the top, the title of the chapter “Our Choice” was printed in bold, as if to say that the reader must choose between the two rivers. This metaphor of a fork in the road is common, and many readers would be familiar with the same concept used in a famous poem by Robert Frost entitled “The Road Not Taken.” Gore also used a powerful analogy when he placed a black and white picture of tobacco company representatives on the left page and a colored current picture of fossil fuel industry representatives standing in the same position (Gore, 2009). The tobacco industry produced products that are poor for human health for many years without making the health detriments clear to the public. Without explicitly stating this,

Gore implies it by drawing the visual comparison between the two pictures which are similar. Thus the reader associates the negative thoughts of the tobacco industry which damaged people's health with the fossil fuel industry which, Al Gore, argues is damaging the environment. The readers are more likely to absorb these metaphors about the environment without question when compared to verbal information, therefore, having a greater persuasive impact.

Images reduce the complexity of interpretation by blending fact and emotion (DiFrancesco & Young, 2011). A study performed in 1998 gave participants information about a trial and asked them to give a verdict. The only differences in information was that the control group received no picture of the autopsy, the second group received a black-and-white photo, and the third received a colored image. The results showed that 37% without a picture gave a guilty verdict, compared to 50% and 57% in the black-and-white and colored groups respectively. Furthermore, the participants felt that the photograph did not impact their verdict, unaware of the drastic differences in percentages of guilty verdicts. Subjects showed a color or black-and-white photograph rated themselves more anxious, stressed, anguished, disturbed, vengeful, and shocked. The color condition also revealed a higher tendency to admit to physical reactions, such as sweaty palms (Morrison & Vogel, 1998). These results show that visuals can impact emotions and decision making. Although Gore's facts may provide a rational argument, his pictures appeal an emotional argument which affects whether or not readers take action. A similar study focused specifically on feelings of fear and showed that when graphic photographs of a kidnapping were displayed, fear increased. The increase in fear correlated with a higher willingness to negotiate with the kidnapper (Iyer & Oldmeadow, 2006). Processing visual information as emotional allows viewers to be engaged and, as the study showed, feel a greater level of fear (Joffe, 2008). However, much like other forms of information, when visual information produces excessive fear, the audience may feel helpless or

overwhelmed (DiFrancesco & Young, 2011). This may lead to unintended consequences, such as Iyer and Oldmeadow observed when graphic photographs correlated with participants wanting to negotiate rather than taking action. The study shows that Gore's sole goal in using photographs could not be to produce fear, but to produce fear in an effective way so as to leave the reader feeling that he or she can contribute to the environmental movement. DiFrancesco and Young suggest that positive images of successful green technology will engage the reader without fear, so that the reader remains motivated to help the environment. Gore uses this tactic balances fearful and positive images by starting out many chapters with negative images, such as an unappealing coal power plant that looms over homes that marks the beginning of chapter fifteen, but then ending with a positive image of people contributing to a healthy environment, thereby restoring the viewers' efficacy (Gore, 2009). Gore acts as an environmental leader throughout the book by using images to appeal to readers on an emotional level and empowering them to take action against global warming.

Images may be more able to emotionally engage the reader, but because global warming is slowly developing, there are few images that convey the urgency of the issue. To motivate readers to take immediate action, pictures must therefore be supplemented with text that expresses pressing concern. When investigating the images used to represent global warming in three British publications, researchers found that 50% of photographs attempted to illustrate immediate effects of global warming, for example, with pictures of melting icebergs (Smith & Joffe, 2009). Photographs of struggling survivors after a natural disaster thought to be caused by pollution may instigate an initial reaction, however, these photographs are often swept away after a few weeks as the media directs its attention upon more immediate drama (DiFrancesco & Young, 2011). Therefore, the picture Gore uses of a worker holding up a dead fish while standing in an oil spill cannot stand alone, but must be reinforced through the urgency

in the tone of writing, in this case a quote from Jonathan Lash, "Nature does not do bailouts." The reader would feel disgust while looking at this image, but the text reinforces the fact that something must be done because these oil spills will not naturally fade away. "Our Choice" exceeds the news media in its ability to combine text and visual so its message is clear and Gore contributes greatly to the environmental movement by motivating the public to take action.

In order to generate a successful emotional impact, the feelings visuals evoke must coincide with those communicated throughout the text. A study analyzing articles that about global warming across several newspapers in Canada showed that newspapers often neglected to match up the tone conveyed in the text with the visual, thus leaving the reader with the responsibility to interpret the conflicting messages. For example, an article from *The Globe and Mail* discussed possible benefits of a carbon market, but the photograph accompanying the article showed the press ambushing a stone-faced politician with questions (DiFrancesco & Young, 2011). The researchers suggested this occurred because there is a vast array of images that represent the environment compared to other issues. With a myriad of photographs from which to choose, it is easy to pick a picture that conveys a different message (DiFrancesco & Young, 2011). Composing "Our Choice" escalated the challenge of aligning the feelings because every picture needed to correlate to the text. As formerly explained, the structure of each chapter is relatively similar, starting with a negative image and ending with a positive image. The text mirrors this pattern by first emphasizing the urgency and sincerity of the issue, saying, future generations "Will live with the consequences of what we do or fail to do in the present," but then reinforcing efficacy throughout by reminding readers, "We had done it before--lots of times" (Gore, 2009, p.394, 399). Thus, Gore combines the images and text to create a harmonious feeling which leaves the reader with no doubt as to how he or she should feel towards the environmental crisis.

The images used in Al Gore's "Our Choice" were not placed on a whim, but organized strategically in order to enhance the persuasive argument that global warming is a pressing issue. Gore's abundant use of images reflects the increased use of visuals in the media as modern times progress from radio and newspapers to the television and internet. Images are used so often by all different kinds of media because they reinforce information, allow readers to draw conclusions without activating central processing, and enhance the emotional appeal. Although images may be more memorable and may use emotions to persuade readers, textual information cannot be overlooked. On the pages before and after each picture, Gore argues factually, supporting the photographs with evidence. Without text, the images would have no context and, therefore, no meaning. Gore's use of images strengthens his argument, but his success in mobilizing the public against global warming should be attributed to the combination of both text and visuals.

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