Creating Persuasive Public Service Announcements for Civic Engagement

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Abstract:

Students in an upper-level Communication Studies course (Persuasion: Message Design and Interpretation) designed and developed brief Public Service Announcements (PSAs) around a social issue of their choice. Combining our respective areas of expertise, we engaged students in a creative assignment that promotes social awareness and civic engagement. Applying course content on designing effective persuasive messages for a target audience, students: identified and researched a social issue; accumulated different types of evidence; created a storyboard; and produced and edited a PSA. The social issues addressed included: Informed voting, Cyberbullying, Veterans' healthcare, Challenging discrimination, and Caffeine consumption. We will discuss how this specific assignment was developed and implemented, and also provide useful tips for similar assignments.

Conference themes: Innovative Pedagogy, Social Justice, and Blended Application.

The Assignment

In groups of three, create a brief public service announcement (PSA) on a social issue of your choice. Make sure that your message:

- contains cues to encourage central processing of the message
- contains cues to encourage peripheral processing of the message
- integrates at least 3 receiver characteristics (as outlined in the textbook)
- integrates at least 3 source characteristics (as outlined in the textbook)
- combines at least 2 types of persuasive evidence (e.g., statistics, facts, narrative, testimony, case study, etc.)
- utilizes a persuasive structure (as outlined in the textbook)
- reflects elements of visual persuasion (aesthetics and visual display)

Student-learning outcomes

- Understand and apply the distinction between central and peripheral persuasive cues
- Demonstrate and apply receiver and source factors to create a persuasive message
- Identify and evaluate credible sources of evidence to integrate into the message
- Understand and apply effective message structure and order features
- Understand and apply elements of effective visual presentation to create a persuasive message

The Process

- Students form groups and identify a social issue
- Research the issue: background & current impact, competing messages, evidence
- Identify target audience: demographics, psychographics, psychological factors
- Design message for optimal impact:
    o Credible message source
    o Structure and order
    o Logical and emotional appeals
    o Storyboard it
    o Refine
- Compete written assignment (see below)
- Create PSA using resources in the Center for Digital Learning
    o Record it
    o Edit content
    o Post online

Written assignment: This is submitted before the PSA is created and collects details on the following:

- Rationale for focusing on this particular social issue
- Describe the target audience (demographic, psychographic, and psychological profile)
- Describe cues that you will use to promote central processing
- Describe how your PSA will include peripheral processing cues
- Describe source attributes to promote credibility, likeability, and trustworthiness
- Describe which specific structure and/or order format your PSA will apply
- Explain how your PSA combines logical and emotional appeals in terms of (a) overall argument, and (b) evidence presented
- Describe how you will apply visual and/or audio persuasive cues in your PSA

Rubric

Course Content – Comprehension & Application of concept and its relevant sub-components	4=Excellent	3=Good	2=Satisfactory	1=Insufficient
Central processing				
Peripheral processing				
Receiver factors				
Source factors				
Message order & structure				
Logical vs. emotional appeals				
Persuasive evidence				
Visual persuasive cues				
Writing & Proofreading	3=excellent	2=good	1=average	.5=unsatisfactory
TOTAL points possible: 35				

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