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PROMOTING EUROPE: THE ROLE OF ADVERTISING IN SUPRANATIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how modern nations use advertising to craft messages about national identity and to manage their reputations in a global, consumer environment. More specifically, it examines how the European Union, an emergent, transnational state consisting of 27 member-states and more than 500 million linguistically and culturally diverse citizens, uses advertising and public relations not just to promote its policies and agenda, but also to communicate ideas about what it means, or should mean, to be European. To this end, the thesis first examines how traditional narratives about nationhood have shifted during the past few centuries, from narratives that were targeted primarily at an internal audience of citizens and relied heavily on invented traditions and notions of inclusion and exclusion, to ones that now primarily target an international audience of global investors and that abandon invented traditions and overt nationalistic rhetoric. Following that, this thesis relates the shift in narrative to the European Union and, furthermore, examines some of the conflicts and divisions existing in Europe today that may hinder any moves towards future integration on the continent. The last half of the thesis then discusses a particular method of visual interpretation that can be commonly applied to advertisements and uses this method to analyze a set of ten poster ads commissioned by the European Union during the 2009 European Parliamentary Elections.
The research and writing of this thesis
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1.0 Introduction

National identity formation has been a subject of much discussion and debate, particularly so in today’s age of globalism and trans-nationalism. If the nation-state were a creation, or happenstance, of modernity, then perhaps it has no place in today’s postmodern, globalized environment, marked as it is by migration and multiculturalism.\(^a\) However, one thing is clear: in order to see themselves as part of a larger, national community, individuals must willingly come to identify with such a community. That is to say, to see themselves as part of a geographic, political and linguistic collective that spans well beyond the boundaries of their immediate surroundings and associations. This process, however, also depends largely on how the nation chooses to identify and express itself to individuals, for nations are very adept at creating and propagating a strong public image, if not externally then certainly internally for the sake of their citizens.

One explanation of how national communities emerge sees language as a critical component of identity formation, in which technologies such as the printing press and the subsequent emergence of print capitalism have fostered the standardization of vernaculars, resulting in a greater sense of community among previously culturally and linguistically divergent populations. This “gradual, unselfconscious, pragmatic…haphazard development” was in large part made possible by an “interaction between a system of production and productive

\(^a\) Billig, pp. 130-131.
relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print) and the fatality of human linguistic diversity.\textsuperscript{b}

Yet, what may have begun as an emergent “haphazard” phenomenon that contributed to the advent of the nation-state concept as early as the 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} centuries soon became a mechanism utilized by nation-states themselves for the express purpose of creating communal cohesiveness and manifesting national identity within a population. This mechanism enabled the creation and dissemination of an internal master narrative that depended heavily on nationalistic rhetoric and an image of the modern nation as both timeless and inextricably linked to a historical tradition. This narrative also depended heavily on the process of othering, by which the nation defined itself in terms of a communal bond that can only be strengthened by the existence of other communities that existed outside it. In other words, in order for there to be an \textit{us}, there must also be a \textit{them}.\textsuperscript{c}

Again, language and communication lie at the center of this phenomenon and a clear precedent exists in the formation of the United States more than two centuries ago. The young republic not only encouraged and allowed the dissemination of communication and education, but also took decisive steps to subsidize newspapers and create the infrastructure necessary for their production and distribution.\textsuperscript{d} The central question facing the founders was how education, the press, and communication would allow the nation to sustain and define itself across a vast territory and between isolated communities.\textsuperscript{e} To foster a sense of nationhood, the government

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{b} Anderson, pp. 42-43 \\
\textsuperscript{c} Brockmeier, pp. 220, 222 \\
\textsuperscript{d} Starr, p. 49 \\
\textsuperscript{e} \textit{Ibid.} p. 83
\end{flushright}
provided subsidies to newspapers, which reduced their production costs. The expansion of the postal service, furthermore, connected disparate communities and allowed for the dissemination of information and communication across vast stretches of territory.\(^f\)

This effort was deliberately designed to use communication networks, infrastructure and language, in particular, for the express purpose of nation-building, the same kind of nation-building we see happening today in regions across the globe, which are attempting to integrate traditionally diverse national entities into cohesive, supra-national states. Examples of this include the Central Asian Union (CAU), the South Asian Union (SA-U) and the African Union (AU). However, the best example by far is the European Union, as it has well transcended the conceptual stage to which the previously mentioned entities are still bound. And what worked for the United States two centuries ago may well work for the European Union today, as it attempts to express and reinvent itself as a cohesive and homogeneous political, economic and cultural organism.

While communication remains an important factor in identity formation, the nature and means of communicating have changed and multiplied. Where once print was a primary means to communicate ideas and to manage a nation’s public image, various other means of communicating that include visual as well as rhetorical forms, as well as a variety of media other than that of print, have emerged and come to be utilized as promotional tools for the nation-state. Whereas during the 18\(^{th}\) and 19\(^{th}\) centuries, the print medium was the primary technological tool

\(^f\) Starr, p. 87
available for structuring and disseminating narratives about the nation and national identity, public messages now pass through a variety of channels such as film, radio and digital media.\(^g\)

If the intent of European maximalists\(^h\) is to develop and sustain a more universal European identity among a linguistically and culturally diverse conglomerate of member-states and populations, then the most effective way to do so in the current global, consumerist environment would be to utilize this variety of media channels to promote notions about identity and nationhood within the context of advertising and PR strategies of the type used by firms and corporations.

The creation of the singular European currency in the form of the Euro provides an example of how advertising and promotional tools have already been used as a means of not only publicizing a particular policy or issue, but also as a means to attach a particular narrative about European identity to the project. While much debate still surrounds the question of whether a European identity is emerging or even possible, the case of the Euro provides a constant reminder for Europeans that they now belong to a larger community of states.\(^i\) In fact, the success of the Euro as a concrete symbol of European unity and identity is largely seen as one of its major advantages.\(^j\) Its launch more than ten years ago was accompanied by a widespread advertising campaign that sought not only to educate individuals about the new currency, but

\(^g\) Bolin and Ståhlberg, pp. 3-4
\(^h\) Andreas Staab explains the dueling viewpoints pertaining to the future direction of Europe following the Second World War. Minimalists favored a loose trade union of European states, with member states maintaining a substantial amount of their sovereignty. Maximalists envisioned a more politically integrated \textit{United States of Europe} governed by a centralized, federal structure.
\(^i\) Staab, p. 117
\(^j\) \textit{Ibid.} p. 119
also to drive home its place as a symbol of European unity and identity. More than 300 million Europeans from different nations adopted the Euro in a “highly symbolic effort of social engineering.”

But the shift to advertising and PR strategies has also changed the nature of the traditional narrative. Whereas once this narrative was primarily targeted at an internal audience of heterogeneous groups within the borders of the nation, advertising campaigns commissioned by national governments now focus on a wider, global audience of international investors and professionals. The strategy of othering has lost its value as more and more nations choose to turn their sights on attracting individuals and firms from outside their borders. This has also meant a shift in how the nation positions itself in time. Where invented traditions pertaining to a common historical origin and path were once a primary tool for creating cohesion among citizens, the desire to attract outsiders has meant that the nation must promote itself less in terms of its past, and more in terms of its future path and direction.

For the European Union, the challenge to manage its reputation and identity is a bit more complicated. Traditional nation-states can afford to direct their narrative at an external audience, for the identity of their citizenry may already be deeply rooted. For the EU, however, the internal and external audience is one and the same. It consists of 27-member states with a combined population of more than 500 million people, all from linguistically, politically, historically and culturally diverse backgrounds. The challenge for the EU will be to convince those 500 million

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k Marunowski, p. 53
l Bolin and Ståhlberg, pp. 2-3
individuals that they belong to a larger community of Europeans, apart from their respective national communities.

In order to do this, it must achieve several things. Firstly, it must adjust the traditional narrative to not just include invented traditions that link its citizens to a common past, but also merge this narrative with one that is strongly focused on the future and a common European destiny. Secondly, it must present the narrative such a way that it allows for the individual to see his or her desires as corresponding to those of the larger European community and that this community is capable of meeting and satisfying these desires and needs. And thirdly, though perhaps most importantly, it must abandon the strategy of othering such that the narrative shifts from one of us versus them to one of us and them. And in order for this narrative to take hold, the EU must utilize all the communication tools and various media channels available to them in order to reach as wide an audience as possible, across national, cultural, class and generational boundaries.

My thesis, therefore, will explore the following question: How are promotional strategies of advertising used to promote national identity and to formulate a new narrative about nationhood in the contemporary media environment?

It is, perhaps, important to note that the type of nation-building to which I refer runs counter to traditional notions of revolutionary or “hot nationalism” as a means to construct a nation. Promotional strategies employ a type of banal expression of nationalism, one that may fall well under the radar of the passive observer, but that nonetheless carries with it the same symbolic weight as any passionate, or ultimately violent, revolutionary movement. Passion and

\[^{m}\text{Billig, p. 39}\]
zealousness, one could argue, are temporary emotions that rarely serve to sustain feelings of nationalism. Nationalistic expressions, more often than not, come in the form of systematic and symbolic devices such as flags, which communicate very little but carry strong assumptions about the "sacred character of the nation."\textsuperscript{n}

Such commonplace expressions of nationalism serve to sustain the nation in times of peace, when crisis is not available to foster fervor and zeal. Nations are daily "reproduced as nations and their citizenry as nationals," and the concept of peaceful nation building is most important in the context of the European project, which emerged out of the ruins of a war-torn continent and whose proponents to this day champion peace and unification rather than conflict and division.\textsuperscript{o, p}

This type of nation building is achieved in an ordinary, less revolutionary manner through the use of visual communication in conjunction with the Internet and mass media. Just as the printing press helped create national communities by standardizing written language, leading individuals to see themselves as part of a larger linguistic, and ultimately national community, visual communication in conjunction with mass media, may have much of the same effect today. In order for such a campaign to be successful, it must involve the mass dissemination of symbols that come to epitomize regions like Europe as unitary, national entities. Already many major European cities prominently display the European flag alongside national flags, and news reports and journalistic images depict individuals using the European symbol at public events such as elections or even protests. Furthermore, a series of advertising campaigns over the past ten years

\textsuperscript{n} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{o} Ibid. p. 6
\textsuperscript{p} Staab, p. 7
have promoted anything from adopting the Euro currency to participating in European parliamentary elections by using heavy symbolism and nationalistic rhetoric of the more routine and covert form described above. Visual communication, while perhaps more dominant than it has been in the past, is still rarely unaccompanied by linguistic rhetoric. The same promotional strategies that utilize visuals and symbolism will use rhetorical tools in the form of common, often unnoticed, terms such as *we, this* and *here*, which draw out “nationalist assumptions within their conventional usage.”

In the case of the Euro campaign described earlier, advertisements utilized the slogan “The EURO. OUR Money.” alongside EU symbols to drive home their point.

In contrast to what may be assumed about emerging nations and their use of overt displays of nationalism to cement their sovereignty, the European Union draws on well-established and long-standing notions of national identity to construct and maintain a sense of European identity. The new European citizen is sold on the idea of an integrated, united Europe as a means not only for entering into a larger community of Europeans, but also as a means to preserve, within the new framework, his or her respective national identity. The EU not only positions itself as the innovator of this new European identity, but also as the protector of a constructed ideal of peace and unification, as evidenced by their official slogan: *United in Diversity.*

In order to boost the emergence of a more universal European identity among traditionally heterogeneous, multi-national and multi-lingual populations, the EU has undertaken various promotional campaigns consisting of print, television and Web-based advertisements,

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\(^q\) Billig, p. 94
\(^r\) Marunowski, P. 54
\(^s\) *Ibid.* p. 53
and has created a presence in the social networking arena by joining sites like YouTube (eutube channel), Facebook, Twitter and the popular photo-sharing site Flickr. As such, what emerges stands in contrast to the older, 19th century model of nationhood that leans on sacred symbolism and overt, or even banal, nationalistic rhetoric. Nation building in the late 20th and early 21st centuries comes down to the use of promotional tools that run akin to the type branding and advertisement utilized by multi-national corporations. The nation, in today’s visually and consumerist oriented media environment, has become a product supported by a brand.

To address the issues raised in this introduction, I proceed as follows. First, in the following chapter, I conceptualize the problem, discussing how nations have come to promote themselves in much the same way that companies and corporations have and how this development has run parallel to the development of advertising throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century and has changed and reshaped more traditional narratives about nationhood. In chapter three I discuss the origins and evolution of the European Union from the end of the Second World War to today. The chapter lays out some basic information about the European project and the various conflicts that exist within it as well as the social and economic challenges that have often hindered its progress. Chapter four discusses my methodology. I will outline a specific visual strategy for image interpretation put forth by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen that uses parallels in written and verbal communication to draw meaning from images, particularly ones used in advertising campaigns. Chapter five applies this methodology to a set of ten poster ads commissioned by the European parliament to promote voter participation during the 2009 European Parliament election. Chapter six contains reflections and a conclusion to my thesis.
2.0 Conceptualizing the Issues

This thesis investigates the research question: What role does visual communication play in the formation and perpetuation of national identities in the contemporary media environment? This chapter provides a conceptual framework for answering this question, beginning with an examination of existing literature that has addressed aspects of the issue. From this literature, the chapter operationalizes ideas in the research question and brings them together so as to hypothesize about the sufficiency of Benedict Anderson’s concept of print-capitalism as a catalyst and vehicle for national identity formation in the contemporary environment, and the growing role of branding as a tool for national identity formation.

2.1 The Emergence of Nation-States and the National Master Narrative

Admitting to the many difficulties and complications that accompany attempts to define nations and nationality, Benedict Anderson offers three elements that comprise an understanding of the phenomenon of nations in modernity: nations consist of imagined communities, they are limited, and they are sovereign.¹

According to the first principle, a nation consists of an “imagined political community” given the simple fact that its members will never come to know the majority of their compatriots, but nevertheless imagine that all members of the nation share the same identity and participate in the same, or very similar, activities.² The limits of the nation indicate its “finite, if elastic, boundaries” in relation to other nations. In turn, the notion of sovereignty was borne of the Enlightenment and revolutionary movements that sought to undo the power of the monarchs and

¹ Anderson, p. 6
² Ibid.
to institute the idea of freedom, by which the extent of a state’s sovereignty came to be measured.\(^v\)

For our purposes, the most fundamental of these elements is the concept of the imagined community, for it is this aspect that requires the participation of the members of a nation—that is to say, the common individuals who must redefine time and again their place among ever-fluctuating boundaries, identities and communities. One could argue that the existence and success of the nation, despite the efforts of its architects, depends wholly on the participation of its subjects.

Jens Brockmeier refers to this willing participation as semiotic mediation.\(^w\) The term refers to a process of symbolic and semiotic integration, a deliberate, self-conscious effort on the part of individuals to integrate themselves into a larger national and cultural whole. This integration depends less, therefore, on a “master narrative” imposed upon the individual from on high, but rather on individuals themselves, who willingly “suture themselves into the story.”\(^x\) This phenomenon creates a feeling of belonging and participation that offers individuals a strong sense of personal agency, a means by which they are able to “interweave their individual sense of a self in the fabric of a collective community”.\(^y\) National identity, therefore, can be seen as the product of integration between the needs and desires of the individual and those of the larger community.

\(^v\) Ibid. p. 7
\(^w\) Brockmeier, p. 221
\(^x\) Ibid.
\(^y\) Ibid.
The master narrative, however, played, and still does play, an important role in defining what the priorities of the individual and the larger community ought to be. During the 19th century, the national narrative depended on two important ideas about the nation and nationhood. Firstly, the narrative relied on invented traditions, on the notion that the nation was the product of a long, often mythological. This rested largely on the idea that the nation, and its people, had followed a common path from the past to the present, and that whatever the nation and its people represented was deeply and firmly rooted in this tradition.\(^z\)

Secondly, the narrative relied heavily on the idea of we versus them. Brockmeier refers to this phenomenon as the “dialectic of inclusion and exclusion, a dialectic that plays a central role in the making of national identities.”\(^aa\) The notion of belonging that is inherent in communities on all levels, be they national or otherwise, and that is an integral reason for why individuals willingly enter into larger communities, also presupposes that there are still others who do not belong, who are excluded.\(^bb\)

Michael Billig examines this idea in terms of modernity versus postmodernity. The characterization of the nation-state as a product of modernity imposes various qualities on the notion of nationalism. These qualities express a certain “intolerance of difference” that typified nations as “centralized polities, which flattened traditional regional, cultural, linguistic and ethnic differences” as a means of unifying the “bordered territory.”\(^cc\) In other words, nations had to

\(^z\) Brockmeier, p. 220  
\(^aa\) Ibid. p. 222  
\(^bb\) Ibid.  
\(^cc\) Billig, p. 130
eradicate the linguistic, ethnic and cultural differences within their own borders to establish nationalistic cohesion among their citizens. In order to achieve this, nations implemented programs like common education, the use of common currencies and open channels of transportation, which sought to instill a sense of loyalty and uniformity in the citizenry. The world became one of boundaries.

Traditional narratives about the nation, therefore, involved the use of invented traditions and othering, two narratives that relied heavily on individuals and their acceptance of the narrative and their willing integration into the larger national community. One of the means by which individuals achieved this integration was through participation in common “mass-ceremonial” practices, such as reading. Reading, in turn, depended largely on the development of standardized languages and vernaculars. For Anderson, this historical milestone was achieved via the emergence of print-capitalism, which—accompanied by the declining use of Latin in liturgies and public administration—contributed to the rise of common languages in Europe.

Early book publishers initially printed their products in Latin and marketed to the very small segment of the population who understood this ancient language. This market became saturated over the period of about one hundred and fifty years, ultimately forcing printers to turn their attention to the vast majority of the population who did not understand Latin, and to “think more and more of peddling cheap editions in the vernaculars.”

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dd Ibid.
ee Anderson, pp.43-45
ff Ibid. p. 38
gg Ibid.
One of the first, and by far most popular, vernacular print products, for instance, appeared in conjunction with the Lutheran Reformation in Germany in 1517. These were the theses that the cleric Martin Luther nailed to the door of the Wittenberg chapel. These theses were reprinted in German and enjoyed vast distribution and readership among German-speaking populations. The years 1520 to 1540 saw a dramatic rise in the printing and distribution of German-language texts, a development driven by the success of Luther’s theses as well as his German-language version of the bible.\textsuperscript{hh} In the short term, this development contributed to the success of the Reformation as well as Protestantism because the movement was able to reach a much larger segment of the population due to its use of vernacular texts. Over the long term it led to the creation of mass “reading publics.”\textsuperscript{iii}

The above example prompts a larger question about the role of texts in the formation of national identities, and particularly, how individuals and groups of individuals have used texts to form strong communal bonds and collective identities. On the one hand, narrative texts are “cultural tools” that make it possible to transmit often-complex notions about the nature of a particular national identity.\textsuperscript{jj} As we have seen, nations define themselves in terms of long-rooted, often mythical, narratives about a shared, collective past. These narratives, which have served as the foundation of much debate and even warfare throughout the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, were falsehoods constructed during the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. They gave rise to strong notions about nationhood, such that,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{hh} \textit{Ibid.} p. 39
  \item \textsuperscript{ii} \textit{Ibid.} p. 40
  \item \textsuperscript{jj} Brockmeier, p. 224
\end{itemize}
in Brockmeier’s view, they show that nationalism, as expressed through narrative texts, creates
nations and not vice versa.\textsuperscript{kk}

On the other hand, while narrative historical texts offer the nation an important tool for
constructing national identity, the same texts serve to form strong communal bonds among
individuals, who form “interpretation communities” around a particular canon of texts.\textsuperscript{ll} Such
interpretation communities may organize around particular texts and give rise to groups (be they
political, religious, or otherwise) such as those that formed around Luther’s writings and
ultimately brought about the reformation.\textsuperscript{mm}

As Brockmeier has pointed out: “A textual community always is an interpretive
community…a cultural group who shares knowledge and a specific set of discursive practices
among members. It is a group who knows the same stories in the same ways and hopes to tell, or
more precisely, to indicate to each other what things mean to them.”\textsuperscript{nn}

Ultimately, what made the dissemination of such narratives possible, both for use by the
state and by individuals and groups of individuals, was the printing press. Notwithstanding the
many varied regional dialects existing in Europe at that time, individuals from different localities
were able to comprehend one another given the emergence of standard print languages.
Ultimately these standardized print languages, coupled with the wide distribution made possible
by the printing press, contributed to the development of an imagined community as readers

\textsuperscript{kk} Ibid. p. 220
\textsuperscript{ll} Ibid, p. 224
\textsuperscript{mm} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{nn} Ibid.
became increasingly aware of the millions of other “fellow-readers” of their language group and saw themselves as belonging to that particular community of readers.oo

Based on this history, Anderson claims that the primary element for the emergence of a national consciousness was the development of print-capitalism coupled with the invention of a specific technology of communication and distribution—in this case the printing press. These developments led in turn to the amalgamation of regional vernaculars into more standardized print languages, making it possible for individuals to read and interpret texts and narratives collectively.pp

Changing very little over the years, these print-languages were a constant; such that what was written in English three hundred years ago is easily accessible to English readers today. This consistency did not exist prior to print-capitalism when monastic scribes displayed “individualizing and ‘unconsciously modernizing’ habits” in carrying out their tasks.qq Before the printing press, few grammatical rules existed to impose uniform spellings, punctuation or ways of writing numbers. Moreover, despite the existence of alphabets, alphabetical order was generally adopted only with the onset of reference works.rr

While Anderson emphasizes that the development of standardized print-languages and their contribution to the rise of national consciousness amounts to an emergent, bottom-up phenomenon, he nonetheless stresses that once the mechanisms for communication were in

oo Anderson, p. 44
pp Ibid. pp. 43-44
qq Ibid.
rr Stephens, p. 29
place, language could easily be imitated and “consciously exploited.” Over time, nations came to use language, in all of its forms, to express and encourage their own particular, and unique, identities and characters.

2.2 Global Communication and the Shift in Narrative

Channels of communication have increased dramatically since the invention of the printing press. Whereas the printing press was the primary technology used during the 19th Century to express cultural and nationalistic ideas, and ultimately to construct imagined communities, people and institutions today are able to disseminate ideas at an accelerated rate, reaching audiences across the globe using a myriad of communication technologies like radio, television and the Internet. The emergence of global channels of communication has provided nations with the unique opportunity to articulate their characters and identities to large numbers of listeners, viewers and readers from across the world. These technologies afford many new ways in which nations might manipulate language for their purposes.

There are many reasons why nations manipulate language and technologies of communication. For example, they might employ language to manage their reputations at home and abroad. Managing reputations is especially important in a globalized marketplace, where economic motivations—such as efforts to attract tourists, stimulate investment and boost

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5 Anderson, p. 45
6 Bolin and Ståhlberg, pp. 3-4
exports—have come to define how nations represent themselves.\textsuperscript{uu} Thus, with advances in communication technologies, communication has become exceedingly important for disseminating ideas about the character and identity of the nation. As importantly, a nation must now target its message not only to its own citizenry, but also to a global mass audience that is characterized evermore by multiculturalism and patterns of travel and migration, as well as by the ability to access information from virtually anywhere in the world with the click of a mouse.\textsuperscript{vv} Thus, the reach of global communication technologies vastly increases Anderson’s “mass reading public” from one bound by linguistic and nationalistic affiliations, to one that reaches across the planet and across cultural and linguistic boundaries.

The modern mass-reading public, in Anderson’s view, was characterized by the daily “mass-ceremonial” activity of reading newspapers, or “one-day best-sellers”—a practice that serves as a key component of his concept of the imagined community.\textsuperscript{ww} However, in today’s global, digitized communications environment, individuals no longer depend solely on the newspaper for their daily intake of information; nor are they likely to access one or two news sources that pertain primarily to their country- or language-of-origin.

A 2008 Pew Research study highlights this phenomenon by demonstrating that today more Americans depend on the Internet for their information about world events, rather than print-news. The study notes that between 2006 and 2008, the number of participants reading print-only news decreased by roughly one-quarter, with the increase in online news readership

\textsuperscript{uu} Dinnie, p. 17
\textsuperscript{vv} Kress and van Leeuwen, p. 36
\textsuperscript{ww} Anderson, p. 35
being spearheaded primarily by younger people.\textsuperscript{xx} To witness this phenomenon, one need only conduct a brief Google search on “foreign newspapers” to see how easily one can access news from outside one’s country-of-origin or country-of-residence. A large number of foreign news sites also issue English-language versions of their websites in order to reach a wider audience.

In light of this development, it is increasingly important for any entity, be it public or private, to utilize global channels of communication in order to disseminate its message. Global corporations are not unfamiliar with marketing strategies or methods of mass-communication, but as the nation-state seeks to increase its economic and cultural influence around the world, it must take a lesson from the private sector. These days, nations are not judged as much for their political contributions to the world, but rather for their market value.\textsuperscript{yy} For this reason, nations who seek to promote themselves on a global scale, will commission campaigns designed by traditional marketing consultancies.

Economic factors aside, the nation must also turn to promotional communication strategies to define and advocate its identity among citizens and on the global stage. The nation—once a byproduct of the emergence of print-capitalism and the standardization of language—now depends evermore on strategies of communication to manage its reputation at home and abroad.\textsuperscript{zz} As Peter van Ham states, a nation that has “a bad reputation or none at all” faces serious obstacles if it wants to “remain competitive in the international arena.”\textsuperscript{aaa}

\textsuperscript{xx} http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1133/decline-print-newspapers-increased-online-news
\textsuperscript{yy} Bolin, p. 18
\textsuperscript{zz} Dinnie, p. 22
\textsuperscript{aaa} van Ham, p. 2
Thus, while Anderson’s model serves to explain how nations emerged in modernity through the emergence of print-capitalism, the print phenomenon does little to explain how national identities emerge and are maintained in today’s global environment, particularly in lieu of the rise of supranational entities such as the European Union, which must truly reach across borders and language boundaries to stimulate cohesion and to cement its identity.

The need for nations to promote themselves on a larger, global scale and for more economic reasons, has also brought about a shift in the traditional master narrative. Goran Bolin and Per Ståhlberg, tend to agree that a new model is fast supplanting the Anderson model of limited and sovereign imagined communities and the traditional national narrative. By their estimation, advertising and Public Relations strategies have “become a historically specific form of producing images of the nation.” They cite the cases of Estonia and India, which in the past decade have radically redefined their image through branding strategies.

The authors base their line of argument on three crucial points that differentiate the current character of the nation from that depicted in the previous model. To begin with, they argue that nations are behaving more and more like commercial enterprises, engaging in relationships with corporate actors and utilizing advertising and public relations strategies that manifest themselves in the form of branding. Secondly, national rhetoric, once directed solely towards an internal audience of citizens, is directed increasingly at an international audience of investors and global actors. And lastly, whereas nations have previously depended on the

\[bbb \text{Bolin and Ståhlberg, pp. 2-3}\]

\[ccc \text{Ibid.}\]

\[ddd \text{Ibid.}\]
creation of what Michael Billig has termed “invented permanencies,” or more specifically, linking the nation to the distant past to construct an image of tradition and continuity that traces the nation’s roots back to antiquity, they now rely to a greater extent on strategies of reimaging that focus on paths towards the future, rather than links to history.  

2.3 Advertising and Globalization

The way nations now promote themselves ties closely into the development of the advertising industry and its rapid growth during the early part of the 20th Century. Advertisers then focused primarily on selling consumer goods and commodities. Over time, however, advertisements utilized signs that became increasingly unrelated to the products they attempted to sell, such that the signs themselves took on characteristics of their own, separate from the actual product. This, in turn, led to the development of the brand, which became a commodity in its own right.

Eventually, as the tourist industry expanded in the later part of the 20th Century, advertising came to include not just material goods, but also places. This led to the development of destination branding and ultimately, place branding. Destination branding deals primarily with tourist destinations and their competitiveness in terms of which is more attractive to the average tourist. Place branding expands the tourism-oriented objectives of destination branding to include

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Bolin and Ståhlberg, p. 2
Billig, p. 29
Bolin and Ståhlberg, p. 4
the promotion of cities and whole regions. Ultimately, both destination and place branding have
developed into nation branding, “by which governments engage in self-conscious activities
aimed at producing a certain image of the nation-state.”

What we see today, therefore, is the traditional nation-state model of invented
permanencies and internal nationalistic rhetoric fading and giving way to a new model that
characterizes the nation as a corporate entity seeking customer satisfaction and using advertising
methods as a means to promote and manage its image abroad, increasingly targeting international
audiences.

Michael Billig expands on this development even further, explaining how national
economies came to be integrated into larger, global economies. Political and economic
independence among traditionally bounded nations gave way to the “vast internationalization of
capital.” Whereas during the days of modernity nations enjoyed great independence and
influence over their internal political and economic systems, the shift to increasingly
internationalized and “globally interrelated” economies marked a transition to a more
postmodern (i.e. less boundary-oriented) consciousness. This shift resulted in a change of
sensibility that saw the world as a collection of bounded territories to one that has come to
emphasize boundaries and borders less and less. As Billig contends, whereas once a citizen who
traveled between two nations could immediately tell by his surroundings that he or she had

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888 Ibid.
888 Billig, p. 130
888 Ibid.
888 Ibid. p. 131
arrived somewhere new and foreign, today’s traveler “is likely to land at an international airport resembling the one just left”: “The cafeterias will sell ‘continental lager’; the advertisements will proclaim their international products; and the coinage has shrunk to standardized dimensions…McDonald’s and Coca-Cola are internationally available; so are Nintendo games and the iconic representations of international stars. Across the ‘global village’, there is a similarity of experience.”

According to the prevailing view, therefore, the postmodern situation, as described by Billig, will undermine the national state and give rise to the emergence of supranational politics, as exemplified by the European Union. At the same time, Billig asserts that the bounded nation-state mentality has not faded, despite globalization. The old we/them paradigm persists even in the postmodern world of nations. Thus, for example, the European Union, rather than replacing nationalism, seems to be embracing some of the very characteristics that define the old model of nationhood. It has a flag, an anthem, a currency and a parliament. This situation seems to indicate that the EU seeks not to redefine itself as a supranational entity so much as it seeks to create a new identity that encompasses the whole of Europe into a new federal nation with its own identity distinct from those of its member-states.

Yet, the message that the EU disseminates about itself seems more in step with the views of Bolin and Ståhlberg as well as those of van Ham. The new European nation, if one wants to call it that, rejects the invented permanencies and bounded nationalism of the modernist nation-state, seeking instead to refashion, or rebrand, its image in terms of progress and the future,

KKK Ibid.

III Ibid. p. 141
something that is apparent through its official slogan: *United in Diversity*. The implication here is that the goals of the new Europe, to unite the continent under the banner of tolerance, peace and prosperity, clash with the image of the old Europe, which is associated with war and discord.

The dissemination of this message falls under the realm of mass, global communication strategies of advertising and marketing that utilize rhetorical as well as visual means of identifying the nation. The old model that identifies print-capitalism as a driving force behind the emergence of national consciousness no longer suffices when attempting to explain how national and supranational projects are undertaken today. Print language may have united heterogeneous linguistic groups under the banner of the modern nation-state, but today’s increasingly visually-oriented media environment, driven by massive global marketing campaigns, requires a new approach to examining how national identities not only emerge, but are fashioned and refashioned to fit the image the nation wishes to express.

This thesis, therefore, makes the claim that though print-capitalism once gave rise to national identity via the standardization of languages and the creation of mass reading publics, today’s global, consumer culture requires a different understanding of how nations communicate publicly. Though the print medium was once a primary means to communicate nationalistic ideals, both by states and by individuals like artists, writers and intellectuals, nations today must use various channels of public communication to carry their messages. Often these messages move through the context of advertising.

*Marunowski, p. 53*
The nature of the message has also changed. The old narratives of invented traditions and othering, messages that were primarily targeted at an internal audience of citizens, have changed. Invented traditions no longer carry the value they did in times past, and overtly nationalistic rhetoric about *we* versus *them* have become less and less desirable.

The European project provides the perfect model for examining this development, as the EU has commissioned marketing campaigns that not only target both citizens of member-states and potential member-states but also seek to promote the image and notion of a totalizing, all-encompassing identity to a global audience. In other words, for the EU, its internal and external audiences are the same. While it fits well into the new narrative described by Bolin and Ståhlberg, it also incorporates elements of the old narrative. It may well have to rest on an invented tradition to allow for individuals from the various member-states to see themselves as Europeans, but must do so within the context of a conversation about the future direction of the continent and the promises this future holds for the more than 500 million of its transnational citizens. Furthermore, while it also seeks to downplay the linguistic, political and cultural differences within its Union—the *we/them* paradigm—it must also tailor its message to acknowledge these differences. Perhaps a *we and them* paradigm, or rather one that claims ‘we *are* them’ or ‘we are *you*’ will characterize the new supranational narrative more in future.

Chapter five analyses a specific advertising campaign commissioned by the European Parliament to promote voter participation in Europe-wide elections. As we will see, the European Union and Parliament used these campaign posters not only to highlight the advantages of voting, but also to tie the European project to more universal issues like food production, energy
consumption and education. In this way, the posters seek to create a common ground among the politically, linguistically and culturally diverse populations of the EU’s various member-states. Because these posters communicate visually, the thesis examines them using a methodology of visual interpretation, which is laid out in Chapter 4.
3.0 European Union: Background and Tensions

The following chapter chronicles various important developments on the formation and evolution of the European Union and the European integration project. Following that, a short discussion on the tension between pro- and anti-EU sentiments explores how the EU evolved from a project largely defined by political elites to one that involved the public at large, requiring the need to win hearts and minds in the public arena though campaigning and mass-media promotional tools.

3.1 The Formation and Evolution of the European Union

The concept of a united Europe is not new in the annals of history. From the time of the Roman Empire up until the Second World War, kings, emperors and despots have attempted to bring the many different states of Europe, with their divergent languages and cultures, under a single rule even if they differed with respect to the amount of autonomy and sovereignty each state would have. Thus, the current European project is only the latest attempt at integrating Europe, and perhaps the most successful thus far.\textsuperscript{nnn}

The success of this shift from imperialism and military conflict resolution towards more peaceable cooperation comes as a result of the deep economic integration and cooperation implemented since the end of the Second World War. Firms, once much more deeply rooted in national economies, have come to integrate themselves in a larger, Europe-wide marketplace. They have invested all over the continent and frequently hire employees from across national borders. Nonprofits, social groups and various interest groups have likewise pushed forward transnational cooperation in such areas as trade organizations, charities and hobby and sports clubs. Social and charity groups at the national level have reached out to their international

\textsuperscript{nnn} Staab, p. 4
counterparts, effectively driving integration on a social level and contributing to what is shaping up to be a European society.\textsuperscript{ooo}

The contemporary model for European integration can be traced back to the end to the Second World War, when the task of rebuilding a ravaged continent depended greatly on peace and stability. The primary objective was to avoid the type of cross-border and civil conflicts that had afflicted Europe during the difficult economic times after World War One, as well as to prevent the rise of antagonistic regimes such as that of the National Socialists. Projects like the Marshall Plan, which provided $13 billion in American aid to war-torn European countries, were not only meant to tie European nations as a group closer to the American economic model, but also to stave off the growing threat of Soviet influence in the eastern part of the European continent.\textsuperscript{ppp} In order to ensure that aid money was distributed fairly and in an organized fashion, the US, determined to play a more significant role in European affairs. To this end, it set up the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which provided European states with the incentive to build cross-border economic partnerships, and gave Europe its first taste of non-military “supranational integration”.\textsuperscript{qqq}

Continued efforts towards European integration culminated in March 1957 in the Treaties of Rome. These Treaties established the European Economic Community (EEC). Although the EEC was perceived as a rather loose economic network, several of the core principles established in the Rome Treaties laid the groundwork for the Community to extend its powers in the future. Most important was the concept of economic freedom, which—embodied in the Treaty—

\textsuperscript{ooo} Fligstein, pp. 1-2
\textsuperscript{ppp} Staab, p. 7
\textsuperscript{qqq} Ibid.
established the “free movement of goods, capital, services and persons across borders and beyond national regulations.”

It was this move to establish the free flow of goods and movement across borders that ultimately led to not just to the present economic integration of European markets, but also to the type of professional and social integration described earlier. The fact that individuals may now move more easily across national borders both to seek work and pleasure has created more stable social interactions between individuals and groups from different nations and societies. This development has caused a shift in thinking among many of Europe’s citizens. As more and more people from different backgrounds came into contact with one another, they have developed an appreciation for each other and an understanding that, beyond their respective national identities, they share a common bond as Europeans.

It is important to note, however, that this trend towards social integration and cross-border cooperation strikes an almost overly positive note, one that can be deceptive. Those individuals who have benefited most from the economic and social integration, who have been most able to move easily across borders for professional or personal reasons, tend to comprise a small, elite portion of European society. They are, more often than not, well-educated and well-established members of the middle and upper classes of European society who have strong daily contact with other Europeans. As such, the vast majority of the European population still does not benefit from integration in any professional or social sense, and therefore their national identities is far more dominant than a European identity. With the exception of those from more

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Staab, p. 11
Fligstein, p. 2
affluent social spheres, most Europeans simply do not enjoy the same frequent contact with other Europeans.\textsuperscript{ttt}

The implications of this situation become apparent when one looks at the data. In 2004 only 13 percent of the population saw themselves as primarily European, while 43 percent think of themselves only sometimes as European. The rest never think of themselves as European at all. These numbers reflect the social and economic differences in the population. The smaller number of people who see themselves as European hail from rather affluent backgrounds and social strata and are most likely to have regular, daily contact with other Europeans.\textsuperscript{uuu}

This situation had generated the sentiment that “being part of Europe” is reserved for those with the most resources to establish regular social and professional contact with their cross-border counterparts. Citizens who do not enjoy regular contact with other Europeans, who do not travel frequently, are more educated or speak second languages, may easily think that the European project amounts to nothing more than a project of elites, or a means for those who are already well-off to become even more so. This has had wide-reaching implications for the EU as many of its projects have met resistance over the last decade, culminating in internal political conflicts that have often stalled the implementation of Europe-wide policies.\textsuperscript{vvv}

Between the end of the Second World War, when the European project first emerged in the form of an economic alliance, and in the subsequent decades leading up to the late 1970s, notions about the EU fluctuated between support and opposition. Often they reflected internal political struggles. As a matter of fact, during this time, European integration \textit{was} exclusively a

\begin{tabular}{l}
\textsuperscript{ttt} Fligstein, p. 4 \\
\textsuperscript{uuu} \textit{Ibid.} \\
\textsuperscript{vvv} \textit{Ibid.}
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project of the elite and of individual governments all vying to benefit from economic integration and attempting to one-up each other for economic dominance.\textsuperscript{w}

The events of 1979, however, marked a dramatic shift in the European project. It was in this year that the first ever direct European parliamentary elections took place. Prior to 1979, members of parliament were not elected directly by citizens, but rather appointed by national governments. For the first time, Europeans had a say in how the integration project would play out and who should represent them at the table. The 1979 elections not only lent the European Community a greater deal of legitimacy as a democratic undertaking, but also indicated that the European project would enter the political mainstream, where it would become necessary to win over the hearts and minds of average voters.\textsuperscript{x}

This became particularly important as calls for an economic and monetary union increased, a move that ultimately came to have a much greater affect on the lives of individuals than any other previous European-wide undertaking.\textsuperscript{y}

3.2 Engaging the Public

The goal of a unified European currency signaled a shift in the European project, from one that was widely regarded as a project of the elites, to one that would directly affect the lives of Europe’s citizens. In order for the treaty to be approved, each member state had to approve it. Although the issue might have been determined by each government’s parliament and governing bodies, France’s Francoise Mitterrand decided to hold a national referendum on the treaty,

\textsuperscript{w} Staab, pp. 4, 11, 15
\textsuperscript{x} Staab p. 16
\textsuperscript{y} Ibid. p. 20
believing popular approval would lend the project more legitimacy and encourage other countries to ratify the treaty.\textsuperscript{zzz}

The \textit{1979 European parliamentary elections, and the referenda on the Maastricht treaty of 1991, which laid the foundation for a singular currency, therefore, indicated a shift in the nature of European integration. What had been seen as an “elitist undertaking driven by individual political leaders”\textsuperscript{aaaa} entered the political mainstream. The future direction of European integration could no longer be decided without input from the public, which was often skeptical as to the whole notion of integration.\textsuperscript{bbbb} The Maastricht Treaty barely passed in a 1992 French referendum, and was rejected outright by Denmark’s citizens in a similar election that same year.\textsuperscript{cccc} In the UK, the issue created deep divisions within the ruling conservative party as well as the public, and German citizens expressed grave concerns about giving up their strong national currency for a unitary European coinage. Hence, the response by Europe’s citizens placed great limits on the progress of integration.\textsuperscript{dddd}

Much of this conflict goes back to the issue of national versus European identity discussed in the last section. Though European integration entered the political mainstream, and individuals were able to decide on Europe-wide issues at the ballot box, the sense that the EU amounted to an elite project never faded. As we have seen, identifying with one’s nation or Europe at large is very closely tied to people’s economic and social status. Much of the mistrust for the EU, therefore, comes from those individuals and groups on the lower rungs of society.

\textsuperscript{zzz} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{aaaa} Staab p. 23
\textsuperscript{bbbb} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{cccc} \textit{Ibid}, p. 20
\textsuperscript{dddd} \textit{Ibid}, p. 23
Furthermore, although the implementation of the Euro currency suffered many early
defeats at the polls, voters ultimately adopted the project. Part of the reason for this stems from
the fact that Europeans are much more likely to favor undertakings that affect Europe at large,
and less so those issues that affect primarily their respective nations and sovereignty. Thus, the
public is much more likely to approve of single markets, loosened border controls or a common
environmental or foreign and security policy because these are issues that relate to Europe as a
whole. Europeans are, on the other hand, much more hesitant to allow the politicians in Brussels
to decide on national welfare systems or national labor policies.\footnote{Fligstein, p. 5} Thus conflicts over how far
to take European integration often amount to concerns over the sovereignty of individual
member-nations, and these conflicts at the level of the population often affect decisions made at
the top by leaders and politicians.

3.3 Winning Over the Public

One of the primary challenges for the supporters and architects of European integration has been
to win over the public to the policies of the EU and the whole notion of creating an integrated
European society. If citizens can be prompted to identify as Europeans, they are more likely to
support the implementation of Europe-wide policies and solutions to problems. This has made it
important for politicians and pro-Europe groups to win over the so-called swing voters, the 43
percent of the European population who only sometimes identify as Europeans.
When one adds this population to the 13 percent who do think of themselves as Europeans, then one has a majority of people who are more likely to support Europe-wide policies and the furthering of European integration.\textsuperscript{f}

We see, therefore, how important it has become for the EU and its supporters to communicate more effectively with the public by turning to promotional strategies and advertising. This has prompted pro-European interest groups to attempt to ‘sell’ the idea of a more integrated European Union. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, various national referenda on the adoption of the Euro to replace national currency systems lead pro-Europe groups like The European Movement, for instance, to seek out advertisers to inform and win over the public on the Euro debate.\textsuperscript{g}

The desire to campaign on EU issues was not confined to the currency question, either. Latvia faced a referendum in 2003 on whether to join the European Union and become a member-state. Pro-EU groups within the country worried that the general public was not in favor of joining, and sought to implement advertising measures to win “hearts and minds” for the Union. Thus, the country’s European Integration Bureau asked the government to set aside close to 1.6 million Euros for a nation-wide media blitz prior to the referendum.\textsuperscript{h}

Anti-EU groups likewise turned their attention to winning over the public in their respective countries. In 2008, British opponents of the Euro found their cause bolstered by

\textsuperscript{f} Fligstein, pp. 4-5
\textsuperscript{g} http://www.marketingweek.co.uk/home/pro-euro-movement-hunts-for-ad-agency/2024242.article
\textsuperscript{h} Lyons
Denmark’s rejection of the single currency in a referendum of the same year.iii And a 2008 parliamentary election in Austria showed increased support for anti-EU parties, many of which also stood on a very far-right, anti-immigration platform.iii These debates and questions over the future course of European integration, and its challenge to national sovereignty, led to a rise in far right-wing movements in many countries.kkkk

Not only did individual political groups use media campaigns; so too did the EU institutions themselves, the Euro 2002 Information Campaign, initiated by the European Central Bank, laid out strategies not only to inform the public about the imminent transition away from national currencies and toward the unitary Euro currency, but also to broaden the appeal of a unified Europe and the concept of Europe as an integrated entity. Strategies for Euro promotion laid out at the European level were also carried out by national central banks at the member-state level.iii

Thus the campaign, which presented itself as a strictly informational effort, preparing the general public for currency transition and how the new coins and bills were to be used, was also an attempt at social engineering. It was designed, essentially, as a promotional tool for the purposes of defining not just what the Euro meant for people, but also to convince the public of the promises and benefits of integration and to allay their fears that integration would mean the

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iii Goodenough
jiii PancEvski
kkkk [http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,719842,00.html](http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,719842,00.html)
iii Valentini, p. 17
loss of national autonomy and sovereignty. For, while the EU had enjoyed some successes with
the public, the issue of integration has remained hotly contested.

Participation in European parliamentary elections also got media attention, particularly
after the 2004 elections. According to the data, voter participation in parliamentary elections had
steadily decreased since the first public vote for members of parliament in 1979. Each
subsequent election saw a drop in voter turnout, even as they were marked by an increase in
member states. For example, from nine member states in 1979, the EU had grown to 27 by 2009.
This increase in member states might have led to an increase in the diversity of the voting
population as well as of the various mass media markets to which they belonged. Some
speculated, therefore, that the low turnout during the 2004 elections was related to the lack of
Europe-wide media coverage. Thus, many thought that the 2009 elections needed a strong media
presence in order to stoke the interest of voters.

In devising the public campaigns both for the Euro campaign and the 2009 parliamentary
elections, particular importance was assigned to utilizing visual devices to entice the public and
streamline the message of integration and participation. Hence, for the Euro 2002 Informational
Campaign, visuals played an important role in offering the public clear symbols with which to
identify. The 2004 parliamentary elections, likewise, were thought to have too little media
coverage, and low turnout was blamed on the fact that there was “‘nothing to see’.”

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Marunowski, p. 53
Spongenberg
Valentini, p. 41
Spongenberg
Therefore logo design and visual devices disseminated through various media channels such as the web, print and television were seen to hold the key to not just increasing public participation and swaying opinion in favor of integration in general, but also to disseminating certain ideas about what the European Union would mean for the average citizen and to help foment a clear identification with Europe at large. The next chapter will discuss how nations in general have come to rely more heavily on the use of branding as well as promotional and visual devices to project a certain image of themselves onto not just media-savvy citizens within their borders, but also to a larger global audience.
4.0 Methodology

This chapter describes a methodology for visual interpretation created by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. While not a comprehensive summary, the chapter touches on some of the fundamental elements of the methodology, as they might apply to this thesis.

4.1 The Case Study Approach

This thesis argues that the notion that written and spoken forms of communication alone determine national identity outcomes is not sufficient to explain how the phenomenon occurs in a supranational context within the contemporary media environment. We must look to visual promotional tools of the type used in advertising and branding to discover how nations brand and promote themselves, and communicate ideals, values, and meaning across time and space among culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

For the purpose of pursuing this argument, my thesis will use a case study approach. Such an approach provides the proper depth and scope necessary for understanding the dynamics of visual mass-media communication within a transnational context. The case study approach is furthermore appropriate because it lends itself well to examining relatively novel topics and concepts, as is the case for national brand-building and visual mass-communication in a national identity context. Case studies are “particularly well-suited to new research areas or research areas for which existing theory seems inadequate.”

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Eisenhardt, p.548
The European Union provides the most prominent example of a supranational project and lends itself well to a case study method within the particular context of the topic of this thesis. As described in Chapter 2, the EU faces great challenges in seeking to evolve an identity of its own. One of these challenges is defined by the lack of participation and interest in Europe’s parliamentary elections and the fact that the EU must communicate its ideals and values to a trans-European population long divergent in language, culture and politics.

As we shall see, one of the means by which the EU and its proponents have attempted to meet these challenges is through mass-communication and media campaigns that are designed to disseminate its message to the population of its member-states. The EU has, in the past, commissioned advertising campaigns that span various media such as print, television, radio and Internet. These campaigns were designed, for example, to promote the transition to the Euro currency in 2002 and to promote participation in various elections. Whether or not these campaigns, and the larger Supranational European project is successful at legitimizing itself as a national polity, not just administratively but also culturally and linguistically, remains to be seen. Nevertheless, the EU will provide a template for analyzing such projects in other parts of the world.

http://www.idea.int/elections/charting_voting_patterns.cfm
http://www.marketingweek.co.uk/home/pro-euro-movement-hunts-for-ad-agency/2024242.article
4.2 A Strategy for Visual Interpretation

This chapter describes strategies for visual interpretation developed by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. The following chapter applies these methods to an examination of Europe-wide posters commissioned by the EU to promote participation in the 2009 European parliament elections. The visual grammar approach represents a method for interpreting various visual elements within an image and how these elements relate to one another, the viewer, and various other visual and non-visual elements such as text, color and composition to form an integrated whole.\textsuperscript{tttt}

Kress and van Leeuwen take the position that written and visual forms of communication fundamentally express the same culturally structured meanings, but do so in a very different way, independent of each other. Subjectivity and objectivity, for instance, can be expressed in both written and visual ways. While written forms express subjectivity and objectivity via the use or absence of “mental process verbs” like \textit{believe}, visual forms may use angle and perspective to express mental processes. Both forms, however, have their limitations and neither can ever fully express everything the other is capable of expressing. Often they can compliment each other.\textsuperscript{uuuu}

Kress and van Leeuwen also stress that meaning is culturally and socially assigned. Since societies and cultures are heterogeneous, the written and visual components of multimodal texts will each carry their respective burden of meaning.\textsuperscript{vvvv} It should be noted, therefore, that one of

\textsuperscript{tttt} Kress and van Leeuwen, p. 177
\textsuperscript{uuuu} Ibid. p. 18
\textsuperscript{vvvv} Ibid. pp. 18-19
the potential weaknesses of the visual grammar method lies in the fact that reading images, much like reading text, is culturally specific and may not be applied universally. The authors note that their study limits itself to Western semiotic modes, yet emphasize that it “applies to all forms of visual communication” within the Western cultural context.

In order for images to become fully functioning systems of communication, they must meet certain representational and communicational requirements, much as text. Kress and van Leeuwen describe three major elements of visual design, based on Michael Halliday’s *ideational*, *interpersonal* and *textual* metafunctions. The ideational metafunction relates to patterns of representation that depict interactions and relationships between the people, places, objects or abstract things (also called participants) represented *within* the image. The Interpersonal metafunction determines the relationships and interaction between the producer of the image, the viewer of the image, and the various participants within the image. The third, textual metafunction, relates to how the various participants and other semiotic modes cohere with each other and their external context. That is to say, it draws all of the visual elements present *within* the image, as well as those *outside* and surrounding the image such as page layout, framing or placement within a social or public setting together as an integrated whole.

**Ideational Metafunction**

The ideational metafunction itself contains various sub-categories that include the narrative, classificational [sic] and analytical processes.

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*ibid. p. 4*

*ibid. p. 42*
Narrative processes concern various participants, be they people, places, objects, or abstract things, and describe how these interact to create a narrative flow. One type of interaction involves the action process, in which one participant plays the role of actor, doing something to a second participant, called the goal. The action itself is often indicated by an oblique line, or vector, which equates linguistically to an action verb.

The action process also contains several sub-categories that fall under the terms transactional, non-transactional and event. Transactional images contain an actor, a goal, and a vector. Non-transactional images, on the other hand, depict only one participant, the actor. This type of image contains no clear goal; or rather the goal is left to the imagination of the viewer. Non-transactional processes can be compared to intransitive verbs in language, a verb that takes no object. An image of a river provides a good example. The river moves, it engages in an action, but it does not move something, it simply moves. An event image contains a vector (oblique line equivalent to an action-verb) and a goal, but no actor. Figure 4.1 helps to illustrate some of these relationships.

The mother, baby and bottle each represent participants. The bottle represents a vector in relation to the baby, which acts as the goal. The visual here is very simple to read: the bottle is given to the baby. If we eliminated the mother from the image, this would be an event process, because we would see only the goal (baby) and the vector (bottle) but no clear actor, other than the slightest indication of a hand holding the bottle in the very lower left corner of the image. In other words, we would not be able to determine who is nudging the bottle towards the baby, or

\[ \text{Ibid., p. } 63 \]
\[ \text{Ibid., pp. } 63-64 \]
else the actor’s role of actor would be left to our imaginations (more than likely we are being asked to place ourselves into the actor role).

Taken as is, however, the image can be interpreted as a transactional process. The mother is the actor and the (happy) baby is the goal. The bottle acts as the vector between the mother and the child. The baby and mother together are, likewise, goals for the bottle vector. Taken together, the image can be interpreted as saying: The bottle is given to the mother to give to the child, which will make the child healthy and happy, which is what the mother wants. If the viewer engages more directly with the image, since it lacks a clear actor for the bottle, then she places herself into the role of the actor, in which case the interpretation becomes more personal: I (the viewer and the good mother who wants a happy, healthy child) am giving the bottle to my baby.

Other narrative processes relate to reaction, speech/mental and conversion relationships. A reaction process very simply depicts one participant reacting to another participant. In figure 4.1, the mother and baby by themselves are engaged in a reaction process. The mother reacts to the baby. This type of narrative also contains a vector, though not necessarily oblique or visible. The vector in this scenario is located between the mother’s gaze and the child’s face, as an invisible eye-line. A speech or mental process is most commonly found in comics and cartoons, in which the vector points to a speech or thought bubble meant to indicate the participant’s internal or external dialogue. A conversion process suggests a third participant who

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Ibid. p. 67
is actor with respect to one participant and goal with respect to another. In figure 4.1, the mother is both goal to the bottle and actor to the baby, indicating a conversion narrative.  

The second of the ideational processes, the classificational process, pertains to how participants relate not through vectors, but rather taxonomies such as tree structures. In a classificational scenario, participants are either subordinates or superordinates. Subordinate participants represent sub-categories that belong to a larger, overarching category—the superordinate participant. In this type of depiction, subordinates are represented equally in relation to each other, a staging which is achieved through symmetrical composition that places them at equal distance from each other and having the same size and the same vertical/horizontal orientation.

Kress and van Leeuwen indicate two types of taxonomies that fall under the classificational process. The first type is a covert taxonomy, which infers the existence of a superordinate by way of arranging subordinates in a manner that indicates they are equal to each other through symmetrical composition. Overt taxonomies, on the other hand, are usually “chained” to form a tree structure. They tend to indicate the existence of a hierarchy.

Covert taxonomies are often found in advertisements that depict product lines or varieties of products sold under a specific brand name. Figure 4.2 illustrates a covert taxonomy. In this

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Ibid. p. 68
Ibid. p. 79
Ibid.
Ibid. p. 79
case the subordinates are the various flavors of Vitamin Water, and the inferred superordinate is the Vitamin Water brand itself.

The third of the ideational processes, the analytical process, determines how participants relate to each other in a part-whole structure. The various parts, or possessive attributes, comprise an overarching whole, or carrier. This type of process is often seen in maps. If one were to look at a map of the United States, for example, one could say that the various demarcated territories known as states represent possessive attributes, which, when combined, make up the entirety of the carrier, or, in this case, the entirety of the United States.

**Interpersonal Metafunction**

The second, interpersonal, metafunction refers primarily to relationships between participants not represented in the image, namely the producers and viewers of the image. Kress and van Leeuwen refer to these as interactive participants, those involved in the act of communication, whereas those participants represented within the image are called represented participants.

Producers and viewers will often know each other personally, as when someone takes a photograph of a friend or family member or when somebody draws a map in order to provide another person with directions. In such scenarios the act of visual communication is private and interpersonal. In other cases, however, producers and viewers will never meet. The viewer of a

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*fff Ibid. p. 88*
*ggggg Ibid. p. 48*
commercial film, for instance, may never meet that film’s producer, and, likewise, the producer will never meet all of the members of his or her audience. 

The common sense idea is that producers tend to know more than viewers, are more specialized and can therefore both send and receive messages, whereas the viewer may only be capable of receiving them. Yet, the authors stress that this is only true to a point and that both producer and viewer share competencies for visual coding and meaning making. Reading underlying social meanings into images relates to an inherent function of how human beings interact face-to-face in the everyday world. Viewers will naturally understand how they are being addressed by an image because they possess an understanding of body language, facial expressions, and other physical social cues.

**Textual Metafunction**

The last metafunction, the textual, concerns how participants and various other elements inside and outside an image, including verbal or written components, cohere to form an integrated text. This integration is achieved in three ways:

- **Information value**—Elements are placed within zones that endow them with specific informational values. These zones function according to left-right, top-bottom and center-margin compositions.

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iiii *Ibid.* p. 115
• **Salience**—Visual elements attract a viewer’s attention in differing degrees by using such methods as foregrounding/backgrounding, differing tonal contrasts and varying degrees of focus and sharpness.

• **Framing**—The presence or absence of framing devices indicates whether elements are connected or disconnected, whether or not they are to be viewed as belonging together.

A left-right composition generally imparts various informational values on the reader. Usually, what is depicted on the left side of a composition (i.e. a newspaper or magazine page layout) indicates a given, something the reader is expected to know beforehand. Those elements on the right, by contrast, impart something new and indicate to the reader that he/she should pay particular close attention.

Vertical top/bottom orientations are frequently used in advertising. The top part of the image indicates the promise of the product, while the bottom provides much more factual information about that product. In such a composition the top tends to indicate the ideal, while what is placed at the bottom represents the real.

We can apply these two types of orientation to the Coca-Cola ad in Figure 4.3. The baby and mother are placed at the top of the image and depict happiness and health. This represents an ideal for the viewer of the image. The promise of the product, which is explained in more detail towards the bottom of the ad, is that of a healthy and happy baby, and therefore a happy mother. The left/right orientation likewise works in this image. The image of the Coke bottle represents a

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\[\text{Ibid. p. 180}\]

\[\text{Ibid. p. 186}\]
given, a popular and iconic product with which the reader is expected to be familiar. The textual information on the right, by contrast, seeks to impart new information about the product: Feeding your baby Coca-Cola early on will help him or her achieve greater acceptance later in life.

4.3 A Precedent

It should be noted that Kress and van Leeuwen’s work has been previously applied to a similar study, one that also focuses on how the European Union has used visual communication methods to promote its various programs. In 2006, Kenneth Marunowski used the visual grammar method to examine a series of print ads commissioned by the European Central Bank and distributed Europe-wide as part of the 2002 Euro Information Campaign. As mentioned in Chapter 2, these ads were designed to inform the public about the imminent transition to a single European currency, as well as to drum up public support for the project.

Though Marunowski’s study focuses more on the various signs and symbols contained in the campaign’s print ads, television spots and on the Euro notes and coins themselves, his work is worth mentioning not just because he employs a similar methodology, but also because he discusses how such visual devices can be used for the purpose of persuasion. The author explains that the ads served three functions: to inform users about the new currency and its features, to

\[\text{Valentini, p. 17}\]
instill confidence in the new currency, and to use the Euro as a device to emphasize European identity.

The soccer stadium ad (figure 4.4), for example, seeks to associate the transition to the Euro with a celebratory and participatory spirit and Marunowski applies certain methods discussed in this chapter to examine how the ad communicates this idea to the viewer. The men’s extended arms, for instance, represent vectors that connect the group to the crowd in the background, linking them together in a celebratory spirit. The subtext for celebration is the Euro. The vectors extend further to the “the EURO. OUR money” slogan in the top left corner of the ad, which Marunowski suggests “contributes to the participatory sentiment through the use of the collective, possessive adjective ‘OUR.’” The slogan itself appears inside a box resembling a speech bubble (think Kress and van Leeuwen’s speech/mental narrative process) and seems to reflect the central figure’s thoughts.

Though Marunowski does not touch on the layout of the ad, one could ultimately utilize that part of the previous discussion. The layout, for instance, corresponds closely to the textual metafunction, particularly the informational value imposed by the top/bottom composition. The top of the ad contains the image of the celebrating men and the cheering crowd in the background. This represents an ideal, a celebration surrounding the introduction of the Euro and closely tied to the participatory spirit of team sports. The bottom part of the ad is much more informational. It describes in plain language what the new currency (or the new product, if one

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Marunowski, p. 5
Ibid. p. 83
Ibid.
wants to take it that extra step) promises and how the bank notes will look. The language itself
does not shy from seeming flowery and overly optimistic. Adjectives such as “colorful” and
“shiny” further the notion of the notes and coins as products for sensory consumption.

I will apply the same type of interpretation to a different set of print ads in the next
chapter. The ads I examine are similar in their connection to the European Union, albeit from a
different campaign—the 2009 European Parliament Elections.
5.0 Analysis and Discussion

This chapter examines ten print ads used to promote voter participation in the 2009 European Parliament elections. I apply Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen’s methods for visual interpretation described in the previous chapter to determine what messages the ads impart on their viewers with regard to European identity and citizen agency.

5.1 Background to Ad Campaign

This chapter analyses ten poster ads designed to promote the 2009 European Parliament elections according to the visual grammar guidelines of Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen.

In 2009, the European Parliament spent €18 million (aprox. $25 million US), or €0.05 (7 cents US) per eligible EU voter, on a set of ten poster ads meant to highlight the role of the European Parliament in shaping policy and deciding on issues that affect the citizens of Europe’s 27 member states. The posters were distributed across all member countries and translated into 23 different languages. According to the parliament’s official website, the posters are based on ten main themes centered around the campaign’s official slogan of “It’s your Choice!” The themes include security, energy, fuel and climate change, food and agriculture, borders and migration, standardization, consumer protection, budget, equal opportunities and financial markets.

While the ads were spread across all member states, parliament distributed a larger number of posters in countries where voter turnout had been particularly low in previous elections. The campaign was, furthermore, only a small part of a much larger campaign that

included television and radio ads, a strong presence on social networking and media sites like Facebook and YouTube, “choice boxes” located in cities throughout Europe where people could stop and record their opinions on the various issues with which they felt the EU should deal, and a strong mainstream media presence that included press kits and live election coverage.

The ten posters discussed in this chapter were distributed around the UK. In London alone, 500 of the posters adorned the city’s bus shelters and underground stations. The posters were also distributed throughout Edinburgh, Glasgow and Birmingham.

5.2 Discussion of Campaign Posters

Security

Figure 5.1 deals with the theme of security. The poster depicts three triangular signs of equal size lined up in a row. Each sign depicts a different symbol relating to the theme of security. The first sign depicts a security camera; the second a fingerprint such as those used in criminology and the third sign bears the image of a law enforcement officer. The image is set against a minimalist blue background, indicating one of the colors of the European standard. The top right corner contains the official logo design for the European parliament, while the bottom left corner depicts the logo design specific to the 2009 parliament elections. The text across the bottom reads “How much security is too much” along with an indication to use one’s vote in the June 4 elections.

Ibid.

The depiction of the three signs as equal in shape and size to one another corresponds to a taxonomical depiction that falls under the classificational process of the ideational metafunction. To recall from chapter 4, the classificational process does not usually contain vectors, which indicate transaction and narrative, but rather uses taxonomical depictions to create relationships between an image’s various elements, or participants. In such a scenario participants are subordinates or superordinates. In a covert taxonomy, subordinates are depicted as having equal status to one another. They are usually the same size, have equal distance from one another and possess the same horizontal or vertical arrangement. Overt taxonomies, on the other hand, tend to be chained together in a tree structure. Covert taxonomies are most often used in Advertisements. In such an arrangement, the various subordinates are subject to larger superordinates, which in the case of an advertisement tends to come in the form of the products brand name or logo.

This type of covert taxonomical composition indicates to the viewer a general uniformity between the visual elements of an image. It suggests stability and timelessness, and also often features a plain, neutral background, with minimal or no depth and an objective, frontal angle. The depicted participants, or elements, were thus judged to be “members of the same class” and meant to read thusly.

In the case of the ten posters discussed in this chapter, composition takes center stage. Composition, according to Kress and van Leeuwen, “relates the representational and interactive

Kress and van Leeuwen, p. 79
Ibid.
meanings of the image to each other through three interrelated systems”. The three systems are information value, salience and framing.

The placement of the various participants in relation to one another lends them certain informational values that are attached to various zones within the image. These zones tend to fall along left/right, top/bottom or center/margin alignments. As discussed in the previous chapter, top/bottom layouts relate to ideal vs. real. What is depicted at the top tends to indicate the product’s promise or ideal qualities while what is depicted on the bottom offers more grounded, factual information about the product (this is usually done in the form of text). Left/right compositions, meanwhile, relate to what is given versus what is new. What is depicted on the left side of the composition is usually something the viewer is expected to know, while that on the right injects some new piece of information into the equation. Center/margin layouts are much less common in western culture, however they do occur and usually indicate much more of a hierarchy. The center element of the image usually acts as its nucleus, as the most important aspect of the image, and those participants around it act as its subordinates.

Figure 5.1 appears to incorporate all three types of composition. One can, therefore, read the image as a whole, that incorporates not just visual elements, but also textual ones to create its meaning. The three signs depicted in the center of the image are the most eye-catching for the viewer. They stand out above all the other elements, be they visual or textual. When we apply the

uuuuu Ibid. p. 177
vvvv Ibid. p. 186
wwww Ibid. p. 180
xxxx Ibid. pp. 194-200
types of composition that impart informational value for the viewer, we see that the three signs together can be viewed as a top and a center element.

The signs act as the top elements to the text contained underneath. In this case, the signs indicate an ideal that relates to the more obvious, textual message about security that runs along the bottom of the poster: “How much security is too much? Use your vote in the European Parliament Election on 4 June.” The text becomes much more informational at the very bottom of the composition, which contains a Web address for the viewer to visit. The signs, therefore, do most of the work when it comes to driving home a message about security. Right away the viewer is confronted with the visual impact of a security camera, a fingerprint and a police officer depicted on triangular road signs, which in traffic situations always indicate a warning to the driver. The text then completes the message. One is to believe that the overarching service that the EU, and the citizen’s vote, is able to offer is that of security. Not only is the issue here about security from crime, but also the security that comes with participating in elections and therefore lending parliament both legitimacy and the powers of protection for the citizens it represents.

The left/right composition also applies here, specifically in relation to the bottom text and the elections logo to the right of it. Security relates to an age-old issue, a given. The logo on the right imparts something new. It says that security can now be obtained by voting for parliament, not just any parliament, not your national parliament, but the European parliament. Europe, here, is the new ingredient, the new catalyst for security on the continent.

http://www.travel-island.com/road.traffic.signs/world.road.signs.b.html
Perhaps the most prominent of the three compositions, as they relate to this particular image, is that of center/margin. This composition pulls the image together as a whole. While the top/bottom and left/right alignments related to various zones within the image when isolated, the center alignment of the three traffic signs in relation to their marginal subordinates, the text and the two logos, offers the overall promise of the European parliament and participation in its election as relative to the notion of security. The three signs, therefore, act as the poster’s nucleus, and all of the other elements subservient to it. The vote and the parliament and the whole concept of an integrated, democratic Europe all act in service to the dominant principle of security. The three signs in the center, therefore, contain the most salience of all of the other elements, meaning they do the most to both attract the viewer’s attention and drive home the intended message.

Framing must also be addressed, as the third of the three interrelated systems that impart meaning. Framing here does not refer to the physical framing of the poster itself, but rather to potential devices within the image that disconnect the various elements, or to the lack of such devices. In this particular case, no framing, or separating devices occur. As such, the elements are meant to be read in clear relation to one another, as belonging together, rather than apart.

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**Energy**

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Kress and van Leeuwen, p. 177

Figure 5.2 is somewhat unique when compared to the rest of the nine posters, as these tend to have pretty much the same type of composition. This particular image contains a hierarchy within a hierarchy. The center image of the knob and the various symbols indicating different sources of energy, functions as a center/margin composition, as does the poster as a whole, much like Figure 5.1. The knob in the center acts as the nucleus to the various subservient elements that connect to it via small white vectors, or oblique lines that correspond to action verbs in language. The graphical element as a whole, furthermore acts as a nucleus to the text and logos.

The message within the graphical element is clear. The knob represents the central issue of energy as well as the various energy choices available to the viewer: coal, nuclear, solar or turbine. But the choice takes on a more complex nature when compared to the various other elements in the poster, namely the text and logos, that relate the choice to the much larger issue of choosing members of parliament and, ultimately, choosing Europe.

The most salient element in the poster is clearly the knob, and it very effectively transmits the notion of agency to the hands of the viewer. The viewer here is meant to be the one to turn the knob. The hand that casts a vote for parliament is the same hand that will ultimately decide the kind of energy to be used and that, even further, will play a decisive part in an integrated, democratic continent. Conversely, one could go so far as to say that the poster, in fact, lends the viewer no choice at all. The choice between different sources of energy, and the choice one makes in the voting booth all come down to but one option: participating as a citizen.

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Ibid. p. 63
in the new Europe. Therefore, one really only has choices if one chooses the European project. The message offers no real alternatives.

**Fuel**

Figure 5.3 brings us back to the more covert type of taxonomy, which is the standard for most of the ten campaign posters. Once again the visual elements in the center of the image are depicted as having equal size, equal distance and therefore equal value to each other. The overarching theme is once again that of choice. The poster offers the viewer three options for their potential to fuel cars. The first, a gasoline can, relates to the traditional, standard way cars are fueled. The middle option represents battery power, while the third depicts a plant that could potentially be used in making biofuel.

While the taxonomy here indicates that each fuel option is to be given equal weight, a further examination seems to indicate a rather stealthy subtext. One could argue that in reality, the three depictions do not, in fact, have equal value. When one reads into them further one notices that they tell a certain story. Since we naturally read from left to right in western culture, we may automatically view the gasoline can first, moving along gradually to the battery and the plant. Gasoline here indicates a standard, something given of which the viewer is well aware. It represents, in fact, the norm as compared to the other two more revolutionary and innovative options for fueling cars. As such, the three visuals impart informational value through their left-right orientation apart from the text and the logos also contained in the poster. But when one does relate this particular left/right reading to the other elements in the poster, one could potentially translate this as a natural progression from the old to the new, from the standard norm
to the innovative and revolutionary. The poster may, in fact, not be about the choices of fuel at all, but the natural progression or evolution that the European project represents in the world.

**Food and Agriculture**

Figure 5.4 functions similarly, though in a slightly different manner than the previous image. Here we come back to a more center/margin-oriented composition. The center apple is very clearly labeled “conventional” and takes a prominent position among the three apples as a whole, with “Bio” (organic) and “Gen” (genetically manipulated) acting subservient to, while also branching out from, it.

This particular composition has various layers of meaning attached to it. The center apple, representing the conventional, almost serves to indicate a starting point from which the other two apples sprout. It acts as the seed or the catalyst for new and innovative ways of growing apples. It could be argued, very obviously, that an organic apple is rather more conventional than anything since apples have probably grown organically for most of history. The concept of conventional, furthermore, is not very well defined. In fact, it’s not defined at all. What is a conventional apple if it is not organic? And how does it differ from a genetically altered apple?

The most rational answer seems to be that, once again, the poster has very little to do with apples or food in general. The subtext once again draws us back to the European project and its characteristic as something that offers new and innovative alternatives to the conventional options of the past. The viewer’s task is not to determine what makes an apple conventional, but to understand that the European parliament, and the larger integration project, offer new and
innovative alternatives to the conventional way of doing things, all the while resting on the conventional for balance and stability. In other words, the EU is to be seen as something organic, something natural that springs from the stable seed of the past, but also integrates it into something new, something altered, a different genetic make-up that distinguishes it from history.

**Borders and Migration**

Figure 5.5 appears to be more about symbolism, which highlights cultural and traditional heritage and sets it apart from the messages about the future and forward thinking contained in the previous posters. Hedges, in particular, represent a more British tradition. They point to a long British cultural heritage and were historically used for a variety of purposes that included the demarcation of land, containing animals and livestock and managing soil erosion.

The image on left of an old fortress wall also points to a fundamental feature of European history. Though it is difficult to be certain as to the origin of the image, it does appear to resemble landmarks found frequently in southern Spain, particularly the Castillo de Santa Bárbara, which dates back to the Arab occupation of southern Spain in the 9th century.

It is unclear whether the resemblance of the fortress wall to one of Arab origin is intended to impart any particular effect on the viewer, though if it is then the message becomes much more concretely one about multiculturalism and the issue of migration, particularly from the Muslim world, into Europe. As such, the image appears to pit two systems of cultural heritage against one another. When one applies the taxonomy and classification processes, however, one

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sees that the two parts of the image are given equal value in terms of their size and relative distance from one another. The poster, therefore, avoids placing judgment or favoring one particular heritage (British) over another (Arab/Muslim).

One notices right away that the two visual participants, the fortress wall and the hedge, are positioned at a slight angle and appear to mirror each other, such that when viewed together they form a gate that appears to be opening. This idea of an open gate that would welcome in multiple cultures and heritages becomes more profound when one sees that the ‘gate’ opens into the blue background signifying one of the colors of Europe. The subtext, therefore, becomes one of openness. Once again the poster has given the viewer his or her answer to the question lingering at the bottom. Europe’s borders are already open, and open to all.

**Standardization**

Figure 5.6 also takes a slight departure from a straight classificational taxonomy. The visual elements in the center of the poster would appear to fit into the taxonomical category, though they deviate slightly from being strictly so. We are confronted here with the issue of standardization, which on the surface would appear to be about technological standardization across the various EU member states. In this case, power plugs and outlets are used to communicate the concept visually.

The image on the very right depicts a power outlet/plug combination that represents the various different power plugs used throughout the EU. The outlet/plug combination itself forms a star, similar to the stars used in the European Standard. It also resembles the star in the elections logo in the bottom right corner of the poster. To the left of this element we see another outlet,
which depicts the EU and election star much more succinctly. The power chord on the far left does not fit into the taxonomy sequence. It much more closely resembles a vector. Much like the knob in figure 5.2, the chord acts as a go-between for the image and the viewer’s own hand, indicating agency. The message is again about choice, and the choice the viewer will make not only in deciding into which outlet to plug the chord, but the choices made on election day. Yet again, however, a choice does not exist at all. The plug clearly fits into only one of the outlets, the one that represents the star, and thus, in turn, represents Europe and the election. Standardization is less about standardizing technology and much more about the standardization that the European project brings with it, the only clear and logical choice for anyone to make.

**Consumer Protection**

Figure 5.7 is a little more difficult to interpret at first glance. It very simply depicts two chickens wrapped in packaging most commonly found in a supermarket’s meat section. The chicken on the left contains no labeling, while that on the right is peppered with labels that read, “Chicken raw” and “Danger of suffocation”. The implication here is very simple. One of the choices faced at the polls will be to decide how much food labeling is enough to protect consumers. But again, the subtext may say something different. When one reads further into the image, it could likely be associated with questions of identity associated with being labeled one thing or another. This ties closely in with the message in the previous image depicting power outlets. The desire to label runs counter to the type of standardization of identity the EU would seek to impart on its citizens.
Budget

Figure 5.8 deals with the theme of budget. The poster asks where the EU might best invest its money. The image in the center, once again, offers an array of choices depicted in a taxonomical fashion. The choice is between books (representing education), tractors (agriculture) and a satellite dish (technology sector, innovation, space program). If one reads the image from left to right, as one might do with text, then education seems to be the starting point that leads into a discussion about agriculture and technology. In fact, education would appear to be the anchor, the very thing that leads into the technological advances and promises the future may hold. The books in general depict something quite different from the two elements to the right, which are both about some form of technology; a tractor and a satellite dish. Consequently, the composition forms a type of formula. Education equals advances in technologies that pertain to production, science and innovation. But much more so, the images direct one to certain states of being or locations. Books relate to mental processes, internal and private interactions with the world. The tractor is a much more grounded element that conjures up thoughts of the earth and the land. The satellite dish, meanwhile, is the only visual element that contains a vector, an oblique line corresponding to an action verb that, in this case, emanates from the center of the dish in the form of the metal bars that come together to form a point. This is much more reminiscent of a transactional process. The dish in this case is the actor, the material emanating from its center forms the vector, which points directly to what one might think, is the sky, or, in this case, what resembles a sky, the poster’s blue background.

The poster offers us a narrative that pertains to the nature of the European Union and the nature of what parliament can offer. It moves from an idea, a concept, which eventually applies
to practical, real-world solutions such as feeding people and acts as a catalyst that points the way to the future through technology and innovation. The satellite dish is also positioned directly above the elections logo, which depicts a star. These two graphical elements are, therefore, locked into their own transaction. The image of the dish pointing to towards the sky, and therefore the future, lies not only in the promise and the excitement of what one might discover among the stars, but also the promises offered by Europe and the election.

**Equal Opportunities**

Figure 5.9 deals with the theme of equal opportunities. “How should we help balance family and career?” the poster asks, while showing us an image of a laptop computer next to a baby bottle. The image falls into a clear taxonomy, in which equal status is given to the computer, meant to represent career, and the bottle, meant to represent family and child rearing. The poster is quite simply about choice, but also drives home the point of equal opportunity as one of the fundamental qualities offered by the concept of an integrated and democratic Europe. As such, the poster once again offers no choice. The only way one can have the luxury of choosing between family and career is by choosing to participate in the European project. The fact that the bottle and computer are given equal visual status here drives this point home much more effectively. One is not judged to be better than the other, and the viewer may even have the option of choosing both.

**Financial Markets**
The final poster, Figure 5.10, depicts a lion and a housecat, once again, in equal visual status to one another. The poster asks to what extend parliament should “tame financial markets.” This particular poster seems to depict a more political question that has stood at the center of European integration from the onset and still carries much weight when it comes to political discussion about how much influence the EU should have over the sovereign markets of its member-states. One article decries the poster as depicting a balance that does not exist. It claims that Members of the European Parliament have traditionally been much more in favor of turning markets into domesticated house cats that are “spayed and declawed.”

5.3 Summary

This chapter demonstrated how one can apply Kress and van Leeuwen’s principles of visual grammar to a real-world advertising campaign intended to impart notions about national identity and nationhood with respect to an emergent, supranational entity such as the European Union. The 2009 European parliament election posters attempted to communicate various principles surrounding the notion of European integration and to connect these principles to the visual representation of the EU in the form of its official logo and standard. The campaign itself, as well as the official EU parliament website offered ten overt themes that served as subjects of the posters and meant to impart very basic ideas to viewers and voters about the potential political influence that parliament might exercise over their lives. But, as we have seen, the overt themes only serve to point to covert principles about how the EU at large is to be viewed by the average citizen.

http://www.economist.com/node/13610228
We saw, for instance, that the idea of security, while rather straightforward and banal in nature, connected to a deeper meaning about the concept of security in general. Relating this concept to the oft violent and chaotic history of Europe, and the fact that the European project sprang, in part, from a desire to contain such conflict in the future, the viewer may be able to draw a sub-conscious connection between security in the everyday, practical sense and security about the future in terms of peace and stability on the continent.

The energy theme, likewise, offered a deeper message about the concept of choice. While energy relates to an ongoing conversation about pollution and efficiency, the poster extends this conversation to the notion of choice within a democratic Europe. Ultimately, though, the subtext insists that democracy can only truly be achieved through acceptance of, and participation in, the EU as a vehicle for the future direction of the continent. As we saw, furthermore, the various other themes of the campaign—agriculture, migration, opportunity, etc.—relate in their subtexts to various dominating principles that indicate the promises that the European Union might hold for the citizens of its member states. These promises are less about the practical, everyday issues discussed overtly through the campaign, but rather about loftier, less tangible concepts such as equality, tolerance and innovation.

When read in this way, the posters offer striking similarities to the way a private company, or multinational corporation, peddles its products, or rather, associates various principles to its brand. As discussed in chapter two, advertisers during the early to middle part of the 20th century began to associate certain symbols less with the products they represented, but rather with certain characteristics and values that stood apart from the product, such that the brand, or symbol, stood as a product in its own right. One particularly apt definition of a brand
posits that brands represent unique combinations of certain values, “both functional and non-functional, which have taken on a relevant meaning that is inextricably linked to the brand, awareness of which might be conscious or intuitive.” Even further still, a brand may represent “clusters of functional and emotional values that promise a unique and welcome experience between a buyer and a seller.”

The notion of nation branding applies more aptly to nations that already possess long-established cultural and traditional values, to which their respective subjects and citizens adhere. A nation such as India, for example, will not necessarily need to communicate elements of national or cultural identity to its citizens, as these values are already well established. Russia, likewise, may not find it necessary to commission an ad campaign to inform its citizens of what it means to be Russian. They already know, they have been Russians for a very long time. These nations will benefit much more from branding and promotional campaigns that communicate to an external, international audience for the various reasons described above.

Europe, on the other hand, is unique and its task complicated and multi-layered. In establishing itself as a cohesive political, cultural and, ultimately, national unit, Europe must do much more to communicate certain values internally. Many of the EU’s most prominent member-states already have long-standing, well-established economies and relationships with foreign investors, as well as thriving tourist industries. There is less of a need to attract an international audience. The task at hand, for those who want to see Europe move further in the

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Dinnie, P. 30

Ibid.
direction of integration and nationhood, is to establish cohesiveness and uniformity among the various citizens of its member-states, who also become citizens of Europe at large.

The fact, that the internal European audience simultaneously comprises an external, international audience may further complicate the issue. In other words, the various member-states and their populations are international with respect to one another, but cumulatively comprise the population of the EU as a whole. As such, whatever European values the EU seeks to instill in this population, will inevitably clash with those national values already associated with being French or British or Polish, for instance. The EU, therefore, must establish notions of identity that transcend those of its various member populations.

The poster campaign discussed in this thesis attempts to do just that. It tries to introduce certain values and characteristics that potentially hold meaning for any population be it French, German or otherwise. Whereas previous campaigns, such as the Euro information campaign of 2002, focused on a very specific aspect of European integration like the introduction of the Euro currency, the 2009 posters expand the notion of European identity to larger ideas that have, in fact, little to do with their more overt, practical and rather narrow subject matter: democracy, opportunity, efficiency, prosperity, innovation, forward-thinking.

In this way, the poster campaign may ultimately prove to be more successful than the elections themselves. With this campaign, the EU may have taken the first steps at establishing itself as a product supported by a larger, all-encompassing brand. Like most products, it promises to do certain things for the buyer. A more quantitative study might successfully establish how Europeans themselves feel about the EU and their place in it, and whether the European project is proving to be successful among the population. For my purposes, this would have been
impossible to achieve given the time frame and limited resources available for this project. Instead, I felt a more qualitative and interpretive approach was necessary to examine, first and foremost, how the EU would like to be seen. Ultimately, though, only time will tell and whole generations may have to pass from the scene before we are able to determine whether the European project is successful at establishing identities that encompass the whole of Europe, not just its various elements.
6.0 Conclusion

This thesis addressed the question of how nations, in the contemporary global, consumer, and media environment, attempt to disseminate messages about identity and the nation’s character and ideals using tools such as advertising. To approach this question I focused on a set of posters commissioned by the European Union to encourage voter participation in the European parliamentary elections. Regardless of its impact on voter turnout, the poster campaign had a profound significance. As discussed in chapter five, the campaign, while making overt declarations about the importance of the European Parliament as a democratically elected body capable of tackling real world problems like energy and food production, contained many layered subtexts about the nature of European integration and the notion that the EU embodies such principles as prosperity, tolerance, stability and a natural progression towards the future.

To explore nation branding and advertising in the context of the European Union, I built upon existing literature relating to how national identities had emerged, or been constructed, prior to globalization and then asked how the nature of national public communication had changed. To this end, I turned to the foremost authority on the subject, Benedict Anderson and his seminal work *Imagined Communities*. Anderson’s book addresses many aspects of national identity formation. Chief among them, and perhaps most relevant to my discussion, was the concept of public communication through technology, and how the technology of the printing press, in particular, served to standardize language such that individuals saw themselves as part of a larger community of readers and, thus, a larger political and national community. But, as
Anderson makes clear, the printing press alone does not suffice to explain how national communities developed. As we saw in Chapter two, it was print-capitalism that drove the development of vernaculars and ultimately led to the formation of mass reading publics.

To pursue this line of argument, I turned to Jens Brockmeier’s work on texts, and how they nation states, as well as individuals and groups of individuals, had employed them for their purposes. As we saw, the formation of national identity through the consumption of texts is a two-way process. Not only does the nation make strong assertions about its character and its place in the historical universe; individuals also play a role. They must willingly adopt and accept these assertions, while contributing their own interpretations of nationhood and national identity. The thesis draws a parallel to consumer culture. As described in chapter two, advertisement make strong blanket statements about their products, while consumers either accept, reject or adjust these ideals to suit their own needs.

The EU offered a unique case study in which to apply these ideas. Comprised of nation state with very divergent linguistic and cultural backgrounds, this regard, in that the principle of creating a mass-reading public united around a common written language would not apply to the European project, as it encompasses nation-states with very divergent linguistic backgrounds and must therefore create an all-encompassing message tailored to the needs of a diverse citizenry. Print-language would simply not suffice to explain how a larger European identity might emerge from among so many culturally, politically and linguistically different nation-states.

I therefore decided to turn to a different form of public communication, that of the visual. Visuals have come to dominate our media environment, perhaps even more so than language and print, though this is arguable. It would seem, however, that the most dominant form of visual
communication across the globe is that of advertising and, ultimately, branding. Through my research it became obvious that the subject of nation branding has enjoyed quite a bit of attention in recent years and that other scholars had attempted to draw parallels between nationhood and branding as achieved through the advertising vehicle. As we saw in chapter two, destination and place branding merged to involve into nation branding, by which nations attempt to communicate certain values and characteristics to both internal, but primarily external, audiences for the purposes of establishing or repairing reputations and attracting international investors.

Before I could proceed with my analysis, I needed to find a suitable methodology and a means to measure how nations use advertising and branding in contemporary public communication. Once again, the EU provided the perfect platform, as it has spent enormous amounts of money on advertising campaigns meant to encourage anything from adopting the Euro currency to determine membership and participating in Europe-wide elections. The ten posters analyzed in chapter five seemed apt to this purpose.

It may not be possible to determine whether the election posters were successful in terms of linking certain values to the Europe brand, or whether they succeeded at merging function and emotion or offered a welcome experience between the buyer and seller. One way to determine this may be to simply look at the number of people who actually showed up to vote in the election. If that alone serves as an indication, then one might well argue that the campaign failed. Despite being the biggest trans-national election in history, with 736 members elected to
represent a population of roughly 500 million people, actual turnout proved to be the lowest since 1979, when members were first directly elected to the European parliament.

Since for my purposes, and given the limited time and resources available, it would have been virtually impossible to conduct a successful quantitative study as to the posters’ affect on the public, I needed to find a different approach. I decided that what was necessary was an in-depth analysis of the posters from the viewpoint of their creators as well as from the viewpoint of a potential viewer. In other words, how might one determine, as a viewer, what the overt and covert messages of the ads implied about the nature of their “product” or brand, in this case the European Union and Parliament. This would not be a measure of the campaign’s success, per se, but rather an approach to analyzing how institutions craft visual messages through advertising. For this approach I felt it was best to use a method for visual analysis, which was discussed in chapter four, and to apply this approach to a possible interpretation of the posters, as done in chapter five.

It remains to be seen just how successful the EU will be in establishing universal ideals and characteristics that can appeal to a broad range of individuals from different nations. It may be that several generations will have to pass before the notion of a united, integrated Europe is adopted. Ultimately, if the EU manages to survive and develop further into nationhood, it will be because those children yet to be born into it will have made the decision to indentify with Europe at-large in a patriotic and nationalistic sense on an individual basis. Either way, this topic

definitely requires further discussion and analysis. This thesis will hopefully have contributed something meaningful to the larger conversation.
APPENDIX A. CHAPTER 4 IMAGES

FIGURE 4.1
FIGURE 4.2
For a better start in life
start COLA earlier!

How soon is too soon?
Not soon enough. Laboratory tests over the last few years have proven that babies who start drinking soda during that early formative period have a much higher chance of gaining acceptance and "fitting in" during those awkward pre-teen and teen years. So, do yourself a favor. Do your child a favor. Start them on a strict regimen of sodas and other sugary carbonated beverages right now, for a lifetime of guaranteed happiness.

The Soda Pop Board of America
1515 W. Halst Ave. - Chicago, ILL.
Join the team! Starting 1 January 2002, not only are the rules the same in Europe’s soccer stadiums, but the currency too. The euro. That’s seven colourful banknotes and eight shiny coins. Thanks to features like a watermark, a security thread and a hologram stripe, you’ll easily be able to check your money. Banknotes of €50 and higher even have a special hologram patch. You can use the euro in all 12 euro area countries, making it easy for fans visiting us, and when we visit them.

For more information, visit the official euro website at www.ecb.int.
APPENDIX B. CHAPTER 5 IMAGES

How much security is too much?
Use your vote in the European Parliament Election on 4 June.

www.elections2009.eu

FIGURE 5.1
What kind of energy do we want?
Use your vote in the European Parliament Election on 4 June.

www.elections2009.eu
What should cars run on?
Use your vote in the European Parliament Election on 4 June.
www.elections2009.eu
How should our food be grown?

Use your vote in the European Parliament Election on 4 June.

www.elections2009.eu
How open should our borders be?
Use your vote in the European Parliament Election on 4 June.

www.elections2009.eu
How far should standardisation go?
Use your vote in the European Parliament Election on 4 June.

www.elections2009.eu

FIGURE 5.6
How much labelling do we need?
Use your vote in the European Parliament Election on 4 June.

www.elections2009.eu

FIGURE 5.7
Where should we invest our money?
Use your vote in the European Parliament Election on 4 June.

www.elections2009.eu
How should we help balance family and career?

Use your vote in the European Parliament Election on 4 June.

www.elections2009.eu

FIGURE 5.9
How much should we tame financial markets?

Use your vote in the European Parliament Election on 4 June.

www.elections2009.eu
BIBLIOGRAPHY


