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Conceptor: Creating the Value of Concept

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Hanyang University
KOREA



While teaching the students, I familiar that the students are generating a concept based on analyzing the researched information. But there is no practical method to characterize the value of a concept for connecting the receivers and the message. Therefore, I created this design methodology for formulating the value of a concept. The designers consciously create a tangible property with an appropriate concept and visual attributes so that ultimately its message can communicate clearly to the viewers and affect them either attribute their decision or remember the intention of a message. The visual information and the verbal information express the visual forms with a concept. If the concept is not related to the target's needs and desires, it is considered a weak concept. Therefore, this design methodology defines the values that the viewers respond to according to the visual message. The statement structures this design methodology, "The Dependant Variables are interchangeable variables that support the Inter-Dependant Variables, and the Inter-dependant Variables are co-dependable variables that closely relate to the topic and the concept." The Dependent Variable (DV) is a variable that describes the feeling or action. The Inter-Dependant Variable (IDV) is a variable that represents the qualified issues of a message. To create an appropriate concept, first, decide the target and subject matter for the design. Second, generate the IDV and DV, then correlate and learn various IDV and DV relationships. Third, based on the second step, determine possible concept directions. Fourth, define the purpose of design, design effects, and concept. Fifth, finalize a concept and design direction.

Introduction

As a Graphic & Package Design professor at the Hanyang University, I teach design theory and methodology associated with making an appropriate design for the target and client. Graphic design always explains in a physical property that images and words work together within a frame or boundary. Still, there is less opportunity to explain the development of the concept.

To understand the design theory means one can consciously control the visual language appropriately. The students can learn visual language through implicit and explicit design education.

I always strived to develop a teaching methodology that can help students understand how experimental design and practical design are related and how to utilize them in their creative juice. Based on my professional experience, I provided what doesn't work and what works for students during critiques. American designer Zuzana Licko says, "However new meanings must be linked to existing ones. Even that design which "pushes the envelope" must build upon existing preconception."¹ This design methodology examines links between a subject matter and other existing ones. But without my guideline, they will be lost due to their limited design experience and knowledge. I always try to formulate a design methodology and process so the students can have explicit instruction.

Design programs are the interface between the aspirant and the profession.² Students begin their university education with no knowledge about graphic design: All students are infants in our discipline, graphic design. Like infants need special care and direction, I nurture them until they become mature enough to make their own decisions. They dream of being professional designers, even great designers. First, they must achieve basic design and technology skills. Second, they should know how to find a strong concept and portray it in influential design work. To educate these students, I estimate their design skill level and compare them to the professional design standard. I never give them negative feedback first, but instead, I encourage them first then show them how they can improve their design skill. As always, I believe inspiring their creativity will benefit their design education.

This design methodology assisted their conceptual skill and how to translate it to the visual form. There are many ways to develop a concept. This methodology is one more effective way to create a concept, and I believe it is never enough to know more ways to solve it.

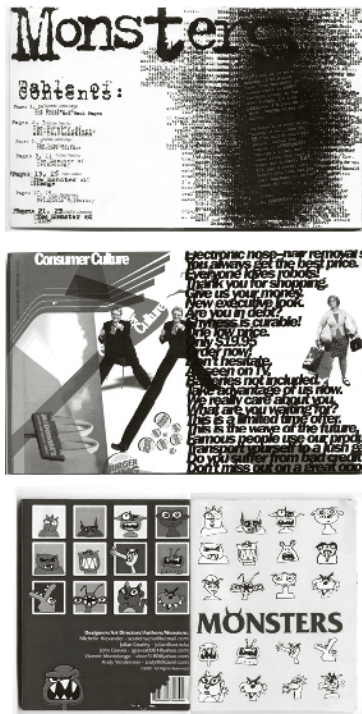


Fig 1. Students' works from UNT

Assignment Overview

The following assignment was given to senior-level graphic design students at the University of North Texas in summer 2001 and to graduate students at the Hanyang University in fall 2002. At the University of North Texas (UNT), I taught this design methodology in "Experimental Design." Figure 1 shows some of the students' works from UNT. It was a publication design assignment based on my design methodology, "Creating the Value of a Concept." The examples shown in this paper are to demonstrate the student process done by the graduate students from Hanyang University. The class is called the "Communication Design Workshop." It is a poster assignment based on the same design methodology. (Figure 2) This design shows the "Creating the Value of a Concept" design methodology on different types of design.



Fig 2. Students' works from Hanyang University

During an intense 16-week semester, students will learn to explore concepts and design. First five weeks, they researched information for the related topic and formulated design directions. Week 6 thru 10, they translated the concept to an appropriate design solution. Week 11 thru 15, they organized a poster exhibition and finalized the poster design.

The format for this assignment is 594mm x 841mm (A1 size). We printed the final posters using the CMYK inkjet output method, mounted them on a panel, and framed them with aluminum frames. The final poster design should be ready to be hung in the exhibition. We showed 22 posters in the collection, "22 Conscious Poster Designs."

Assignment Objectives

The following assignment has two pedagogic objectives.

1. The study of the concept as a significant, influential element within a design process that the students understand relating other human qualities.
2. The study of selecting and controlling the visual elements and words within the frame of a concept that the students understand the individual visual element should convey the intended message.

Methodology

Years of teaching experience, I found that students have more fun doing experimental designs, and joy can lead to knowledge. But they must know the rules, practical design before this. Therefore, I introduce this methodology to upper-level students only.

This statement structures this design methodology, “The Dependant Variables are interchangeable variables that support the Inter-Dependant Variables, and the Inter-dependant Variables are co-dependable variables that closely relate to the topic and the concept.” There is no single design element, verbal and non-verbal, that works by itself in the given layout system. Therefore this methodology does not include Independent Variables. All variables should contain the intended message, and Independent Variables interrupt transmitting the message to the target.

The methodology of this assignment is divided into two primary levels. The first level, called “Connection,” has two phases, “The Dependent Variables (DV) are Interchangeable Variables that support the Inter-Dependant Variables (IDV)” and “The Inter-dependant Variables (IDV) are Co-Dependable Variables that closely relate to the Topic and the Concept.” The second level, “Design Direction,” has one phase. (Figure 3)

In the first level of this assignment, I established the definitions that the students should closely acknowledge the keywords for the design methodology. I overviewed class requirements and assignment objectives to have a clear understanding of what they will achieve by the end of the semester. Also, I showed a guideline about the assignment. In the second level of this assignment, formulate ingredients for the design and create a strategic plan. It leads to analyzing own work with semiotic means.

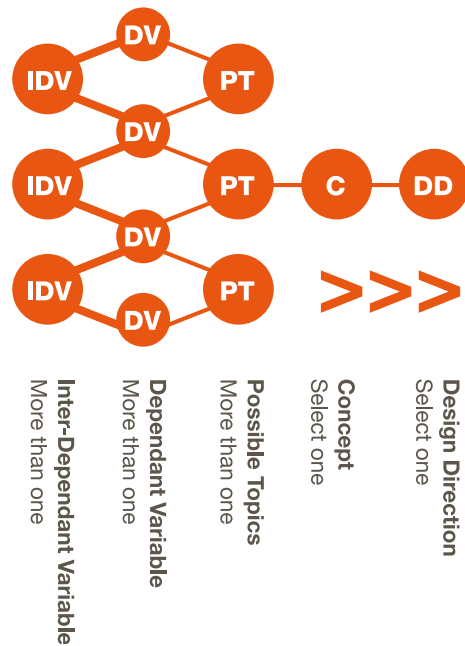


Fig 3. Conceptor: Design Methodology Procedure

Level 1: Connection

The design theory is a formula that helps to layout visuals in a meaningful and intelligent manner. A most effective way to utilize how one can layout the visuals is Gestalt theory in Europe in the early 1900s, led by Swiss psychologist Max Wertheimer. There are four aspects of Gestalt that explain how we perceive visual form: Closure, Continuance, Proximity, and Similarity.

If Gestalt theory introduced how we create visual to relate whole parts within a frame; then Semiotic theory introduced how we understand visuals. The Semiotic theory by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) suggested any sign has the Signified (mental concept) and the Signifier (material aspect) that leads to transferring a mental concept. But Charles Morris (1901-1979) first outlined Semiotic theory that he believed effective communication is based on analyzing visual and verbal signs. Morris had divided semiotics into three discrete areas: Syntactic, Semantic, and Pragmatic.

Both Gestalt theory and Semiotic theory are associated with forms. This methodology is not about making a form but rather about finding the message's meaning. If you spend enough time analyzing, questioning, clarifying, and researching the message and objectives, the ideas flow without effort.³ To be able to connect human qualities and issues will lead to finding an appropriate visual expression.

Phase 1: The Dependant Variables are interchangeable variables that support the Inter-Dependant Variables

In this phase, understanding the definitions of Inter-Dependant Variable and Dependent Variable then writing possible topics is essential. The message is established and maintained throughout the process; therefore, one must determine the subject matter and the target audience at the beginning of the process. A subject matter is a content of a design that the target audience must need to know. Throughout the creative process, one should find and design what information the target audience needs to be informed and persuade them. If a design enlightens the target audience's needs and desires, then it will influence their action. The needs of the people are satisfied if a design can help the audience's life and goal. Designers can achieve the needs and desires of the audience by triggering what the audience likes to be.



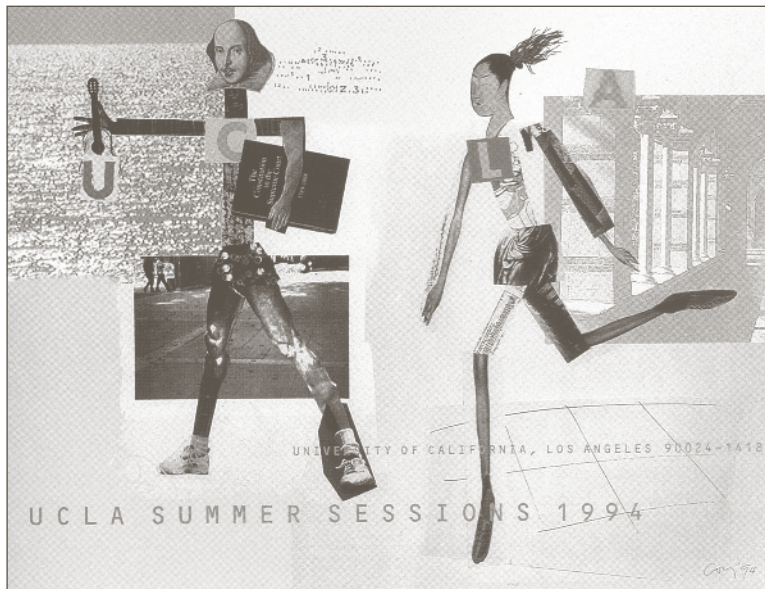


Fig 4. UCLA Summer Sessions 1994 Poster

Inter-dependant Variable (IDV) is mutually interacting with the subject matter and topic. The subject matter is an underlying matter that the design must consider. The topic is how to implement the subject matter in the design. For example, the “UCLA Summer Sessions 1994” poster shows the subject matter is “UCLA Summer Session,” and the topic is “The UCLA Summer Sessions is a fun place for the education.” (See Fig.4) I use this poster design to demonstrate this design methodology, and John Coy and Albert Young Choi design it. The IDVs are selected to realize the value of the subject matter. In this design example, the IDVs are a social issue, cultural issue, educational issue, and historical issue. The IDVd will further invest by finding words related to the IDV. The possible IDVs are ethical issues, social issues, cultural issues, educational issues, philosophical issues, business issues, scientific issues, traditional issues, political issues, historical issues, international issues, psychological issues, and personal experience. One IDV cannot function as a significant issue, but two or more IDVs function as a unity because one IDV cannot define the subject matter. It is hard to comprehend more than two IDVs at same time. One ball is easy to catch, two balls are easy to handle, but three balls are hard to juggle. Not everyone can juggle three balls. I recommend trying to comprehend two IDVs first. One should utilize three IDV when utilizing two IDV in a design as a compliment.

A dependent variable (DV) is a variable restricted to one or more sets of inter-dependent variables for the topic. Words that associate with DV are expressible: for example, strain, tension, control, life, action, impact, confusion, disorder, nebulosity, happiness, fortune, despair, hopelessness, disappointment, aid, relief, support, touch, revolution, growth, expansion, prosperity, logic, emotion, sentiment, and passion. Add DV according to the IDV. There is no limitation on how many DVs for an IDV. But some DVs are overlapped with more than two IDVs. “UCLA Summer Sessions 1994” poster has a social issue, cultural issue, educational issue, and historical issue as IDVs. They associate with DVs such as life, impact, happiness, support, growth, logic, and emotion. (Figure 5) Some of these words are shared by more than one IDVs. This incidence is acceptable. It shows that the word is essential.

The possible topics are related to a set of IDV and DV. One determines IDV and DV sets according to the subject matter. Again, utilize two sets for the beginners. Once sets are established, write out words and phrases closely related to each IDV and DV set. The students will use these words and phrases for writing the concept and choosing visual elements. “UCLA Summer Sessions 1994” poster established two possible topics: “The UCLA Summer Sessions is a fun place for the education,” and “The UCLA Summer Sessions is where you can have outstanding educational experience.” (Figure 5)

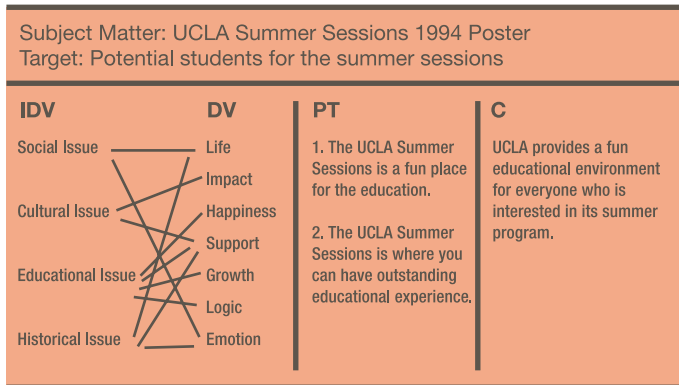


Fig 5. Design Concept Building Process for the UCLA Poster

Phase 2: The Inter-dependant Variables (IDV) are Co-Dependable Variables that closely relate to the Topic and the Concept

The purpose of design explains how design affects the target. Write a sentence about how a student's design affects people. As always, the purpose of design is human; we cannot separate design from the human. We design objects and concepts to comfort our lives. I stress that you know how your design affects on own lives. Does it make people understand better? Does it make people participate more? Does it make people happy? And more questions. These are the questions one should ask why one designs that. Without purpose, there is no life; it becomes eye candy. For example, the "UCLA Summer Sessions 1994" poster's target audience is potential students from all over the world. With this in mind, the designer chooses the topic "The UCLA Summer Session is a fun place for the education" from two possible issues because the target would look for an educational environment where they can have fun. The reputation of UCLA is well accomplished, so emphasizing the outstanding educational experience is not new to the target, and it will get boring.

The design concept delivers the purpose of design with a particular and appropriate message by recognizing the topic. At this phase, write a design concept realizing the meaning of design, topic, IDV, and DVs. The design concept for the "UCLA Summer Sessions 1994" poster is "UCLA provides a fun educational environment for everyone interested in its summer program." It would be challenging to write a concept from scratch, but it becomes a straightforward process with this method.

Level 2: Design Direction

Design direction is a method used to express the design concept with visual forms based on the verbal and visual language. Other than writing an explanation on the purpose of design, it utilized a visual element. People tend to like things they familiar with and new things, so they intrigue by their function. There are two ways to select visual elements: select recognizable or/and unrecognizable visual elements. These elements are supporting the topic chosen. In this phase, one should consciously decide a topic from a list of possible topics then relate IDV to the topic.

When we cook for dinner for special guests, first we decide what kind of food I like to cook. Then we buy the best ingredients for the selected food and prepare them carefully. Design is the same way. There is a target, and designers design for the target. The designers gather information and think about an appropriate concept. At this level, one should gather all ingredients for the design. The ingredients are verbal and visual elements. Words, images, type, color, composition, and minor graphic elements are needed to prepare for the design. For example, the "UCLA Summer Sessions 1994" poster's running figures were collaged to portray the school's spirit, and painted effects and colors show the summer season. The figures suggested different disciplines and races. The background of the figures shows the environment of UCLA. (Figure 4)

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The real american hero. Come on down to furniture mart. If you are here, you're burning money. Have you been injured on the job? Just do it. Yo soy **monsters in society is television.** It can alter peoples' perception of events, misinform and convert your cerebrum into a misinform and convert your cerebrum into a slushee. Caution should be exercised when viewing television. It has been shown that facts are greatly distorted due to television filtration systems.

We never landed on the moon. Bovine growth hormones are injected with J.F.K DNA to produce a neutralizing flouride additive. Each generation of humans is slightly altered genetically to require more and more Pepsi. Jim Adler, the texas tough hammer. Pop pop, fizz fizz oh what a relief it is. What are you gonna have? To help you get your Zs, I don't need clinical research to prove it works on my headachies.

More Pepsi. Jim Adler, the texas tough hammer. Pop pop, fizz fizz oh what a relief it is. What are you gonna have? To help you get your Zs, I don't need clinical research to prove it works on my headachies.

Mommy, my throat hurts. The real american hero. Come on down to furniture mart. If you are here, you're burning money. Have you been injured on the job? Just do it. Yo soy

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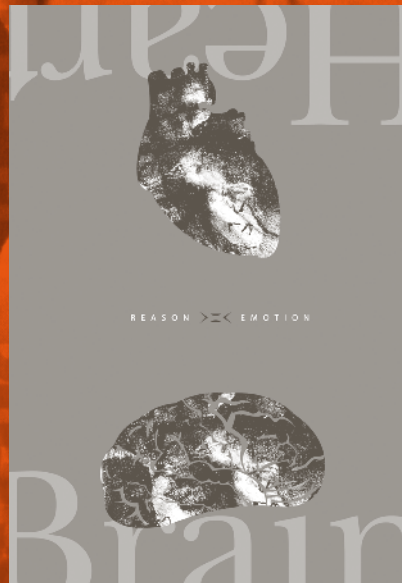
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Student Process

The creative process is the process of change, development, and evolution in the organization of subjective. The inventive minds through whose activity that evolution has been initiated and largely accomplished have usually been the only ones much concerned with it.⁴ This section of the paper demonstrates how students create the value of a concept through formulating the Inter-Dependant Variables (IDV) and the Dependent Variables (DV). There are many phases in the creative process. Still, this design methodology concentrates on developing a concept, so I will emphasize how students develop a concept and less stress on forming a form.

Student Process: Level 1. Connection

I say “order to break the law; you must understand the law” to students often. It means students must learn the basic design rules then breaking the rules by experimenting with possibilities. If more experiences are required, one can store more knowledge in the storage (the brain). When one works on a particular project, one opens storage to utilize the knowledge for the specific project. Therefore, I always show the rules then demonstrate how to break them, even let them go free. At the beginning of the class, I introduce the framework of this poster design assignment. They decide the target and subject matter for the poster design by their personal preference. The example I show in this section is done by Jaehee Yang, a graduate student from Hanyang University. Her work demonstrates the student process. She decided on “Beauty” as her subject matter, and the target is “contemporary people.”

Next, generate the IDV and DV, then correlate and learn various IDV and DV relationships. She picked a cultural issue and traditional issue as IDV from a long list of the issues. These two IDVs are needed to evaluate the beauty that the target, contemporary Korean, needs to aware of Korean spirituality in the modern setting. Within cultural issue and traditional issue framework, she decided “comfort,” “harmony,” “strong,” “bright,” and “growth” as DV. “Harmony,” “Strong,” and “Growth” are shared DVs for the cultural issue and the traditional issue. These IDV and DV relationships led to finding words to describe the possible topics: “white space and music,” “past and present,” “Taeguk, tiger, and map of Korea,” “happy face, Hahee Mask, and smile,” “Taeguk and flower patterns,” and “energy, palace, succession, and maintaining.” Utilizing these words, she developed three possible topics: “The Harmony of Modern Beauty: Architecture,” “The beauty of White Space and the Traditional Patterns,” and “The Music and Beauty of Korea.” Finally, she decided the title of the poster will be “Harmonization.” (Figure 6)

Based on the last step, define the purpose of design, design effect, and concept. The purpose of poster is “to feel Korean sentiments in promoting life and life abundance.” The design effect is reminding modern Koreans that the meaning of tradition is within us to have calmness in our lives. The concept is “Harmonization is about harmony, unity, and peace. Utilizing traditional Korean images (such as Taeguk, Hahee Mask, and Palace), white space, and pattern to manifest traditional value to those who are needed personal growth.” (Figure 6)

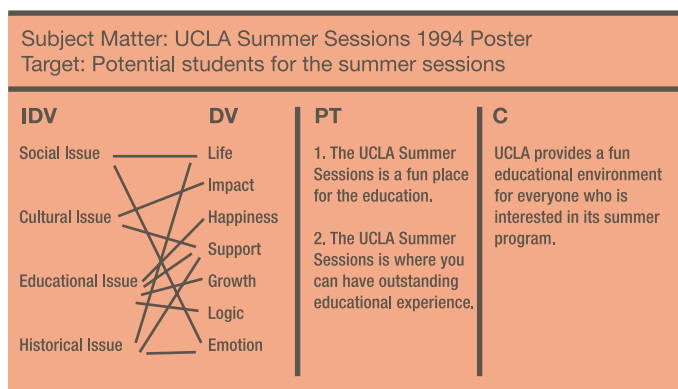


Fig 6. Design Concept Building Process for the student’s work

Student Process: Level 2. Design Direction

She planned design elements in the design direction level: typeface selections, appropriate images (both patterns and photography), color composition, layout composition, and minor graphic elements. (See Fig.7) She decided that the typeface should be modern but classic, and the typography should not be a significant, influential visual element within the poster layout. She chose the “Garamond” typeface is perfect for the design because “Garamond” is one of the “Old typeface” families that widely used today. The images are traditional patterns and brush strokes to communicate the conventional cultural issue. She utilized some of the geometric patterns because its simple form seems like a contemporary pattern design; she chooses a more ornate design. Color should portrait harmony between past and present. She selected three warm colors and four cool colors for the poster design. Minor graphic elements are brushstrokes and traditional roof tiles. Minor graphic elements are additional visual elements that are not functioning as dominant parts of the design, but they are supportive visual elements for the other dominant visual elements.

Her final poster design shows the traditional Korean colors randomly build vertical rectangle-like building columns to portrait barcodes. At the bottom of the poster, the Korean landscape and the geometric form symbolizes the modern entity, a machine. An organic form of traditional Korean architecture is placed in the background in the distance to portrait our past. She organized these symbolic visual elements asymmetrically, and the size of the color bars and the color density give perspective dimension to the design. “Harmonization: Jo-Hwa refers to harmony with nature, mankind, and machine; north, south, east, and west; and past, present, and future.” is placed on the upper right-hand corner to explain the intention of the poster. (See Fig.8)

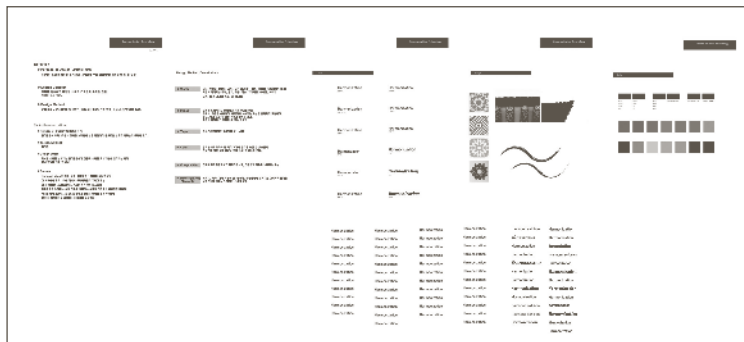
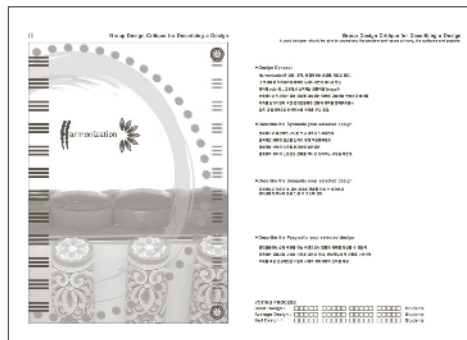


Fig 7. Design Elements



Conclusions

This educational methodology can benefit teaching the process of concept. To create the value of concept using Inter-Dependant Variables (IDV) and Dependent Variables (DV) relationship, the students understand every form has its intent, message. And through the process, the students realized that the concept is not just a flash idea, but instead, this methodology is about how the concept must closely related to the other areas of human quality that fortify the needs and desires of the target audience. Most important of all, design is about the human being, not used as a personal expression.

Also, I established definitions such as Inter-Dependant Variable (IDV), Dependent Variable (DV), Topic, Design Direction (DD), and Minor Graphic Element in this research to add academic terms for the design discipline. The students and designers can utilize these terms in many different design applications without following this methodology. For example, if a design's intention deals with cultural issues, we now have a name for the "cultural issue," an Inter-Dependant Variable (IDV). If you want to know the Inter-Dependant Variables for a particular design, we can distinguish it from social issues and religious issues.

Endnotes

- 1 Steven Heller, *Looking Closer 2: Critical Writings on Graphic Design* (New York: Allworth Press, 1997), 47.
- 2 Steven Heller, Marie Finamore, *Design Culture: An Anthology of Writing from the AIGA Journal of Graphic Design* (New York: Allworth Press, 1997), 186.
- 3 Mark Oldach, *Creativity for Graphic Designers*, (Cincinnati, Ohio: North Light Books, 1995), 3.
- 4 Brewster Ghiselin, *The Creative Process* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1985), 2.



Fig 8. Final Poster Design