

H1 General Paper

Lecture topic: Image → *fleeting?*

does represent a narrative of who we are

Structure of Lecture

Part 1: Introduction

- Unpacking of definition and implications

Part 2: Enduring Understandings of Image

- Image represents a narrative of who we are
- Image is not static and may change overtime
- Image can be used as a tool to solidify power

Part 1: Unpacking of definition and implications

1.1 Definition of image

- a [redacted] of the [redacted] of a person, organisation or thing
- the [redacted] that a [redacted], [redacted], or [redacted] [redacted]

1.2 Creation of image

- The image **creator** can create its own image through:
 - Self-presentation: Relationships that you have with people, social media, language use, marketing strategies, technology, etc.
 - Work and achievements
 - Skills or talents
- The image perceived by an [redacted] [redacted] by the **creator**, due to:
 - **Differences in interpretation** of an image, e.g. A person who tries to exude an image of confidence may be perceived as arrogant
 - **Personal biases**, e.g. A young professional trying to project competence might be underestimated if the audience holds biases against younger individuals in authoritative roles
 - **Context** of the image, e.g. A jokester may be perceived as funny in a casual setting and inappropriate in a formal setting
 - **Misunderstanding**, e.g. A boss who intended to exude a professional image fell asleep in a meeting due to a lack of sleep while caring for his sick child, and was perceived as unprofessional

1.3 Importance of creating and upholding a positive image in the modern world

- Image holds high importance in the modern world as it deeply influences personal, professional, and organisational success.
- Reasons for importance:
 - 1) **First impressions** count, especially in the fast-paced world we live in today. In general, a stakeholder that presents a positive and memorable first impression could have more opportunities.
 - 2) A consistent positive image leads to **more trust, credibility** and a **stronger reputation**.
 - Good interpersonal relationships between people
 - Professional reliability in formal settings
 - Marketing effectiveness, Customer loyalty
 - Public confidence
 - 3) A **consistent positive image** results in **boosted morale**.
 - Personal fulfilment
 - Personal growth and fulfilment encompass the highest stage of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs – Self-Actualisation. This pinnacle represents the ultimate aspiration of realising one's true potential and achieving a deep sense of contentment.
 - Strong corporate culture
 - Individuals are more motivated to excel at work.
 - National/international prestige

1.4 Futility of image in the modern world

- An over-obsession with image can lead to **superficiality**, with a **focus on appearance over substance**. → Not all images are helpful → There is thus a need to strike a balance between valuing appearance and nurturing deeper qualities. Thus, **image is not everything**.
- Reasons for futility
 - 1) Image management often focuses on superficial aspects, such as:
 - Appearance
 - Social media presence
 - Public perception→ these can overshadow deeper qualities such as character, skills, and integrity, leading to judgments based on incomplete or shallow assessments.
 - 2) Misrepresentation: Today, the prevalence of fake news, altered images, and curated content can distort reality.
→ Individuals may struggle to maintain a genuine image amidst a sea of misinformation and exaggerated representations.
 - 3) Loss of sense of self: Constantly curating an image to meet external expectations can

lead to a disconnect from your true self, causing inner conflict and a lack of genuine fulfillment in life

1.5 Evaluation of image

- 3 factors to consider when evaluating the **power of image** (C.A.R. framework 🚗)

- How **clear** is the image portrayed?
 - Image is **clear**
- How **authentic** is the image portrayed?
 - Image **coheres with reality**
- How **relevant** is the image portrayed?
 - Image **is relevant**

Part 2: Enduring Understandings of Image

2.1 Image represents a narrative of who we are

- Image acts as a powerful medium to convey our personal identity and narratives about our lives. They capture facets of our lives, preferences, and aspirations.
- The images associated with our identity:
 - **Self-image**: At its core, image is how we perceive ourselves. It encompasses our sense of self, our internal beliefs, values, and impacts our choices. The individual typically has the most direct insight into their own self-image → they are privy to their thoughts, feelings, aspirations, and internal experiences that shape their self-concept, although they may have blind spots (e.g. influenced by emotions).
 - **Projected image**: Beyond self-perception, image also **involves the way we want to be perceived by others**. This is our projected image, the persona we construct through our behavior, choices, and interactions. Your projected image may not necessarily always be consistent and authentic to your true self-image. People may **engineer** their image through: Personal/corporate branding: showcasing unique qualities, skills, and interests Self-confidence Communication strategies

air of superficiality?

A) Image enables us to express our unique personality and characteristics. Whether through fashion, behavior, or social media profiles, we create a visual and behavioral narrative that showcases who we are and what we stand for.

- You may project different aspects of yourself:
 - Personal / social identity → This refers to how you see yourself and are seen by others in your personal and social contexts, including your relationships, personality, values, and social roles.

- Career identity → This identity relates to how you see yourself and present yourself in a professional context, including your skills, professional demeanor, achievements, and career goals.
- Group identity → This identity pertains to your association with and representation of particular groups, including cultural, ethnic, religious, or other collective identities.
- Example: A unique twist on corporate image

→ RyanAir's 'savage' social media marketing strategy

- Description:
 - In today's competitive market, where companies battle for people's attention, RyanAir has found an unconventional strategy to outshine others: **self-deprecation.**
- Implications:
 - Rather than **projecting an image of invincibility**, RyanAir **openly acknowledges** and even **embraces their flaws and quirks**, while keeping their prices affordable, endearing themselves to customers in the process.
- Evaluation:
 - [Application of C.A.R. framework] When a company like RyanAir **openly acknowledges** its shortcomings, it creates **a sense of trust** due to its **authenticity**. This creates a stronger emotional connection with consumers who are able to **relate** to flight experiences. By playfully mocking itself, RyanAir positions itself as a **relatable**.

B) However, image creators can fabricate and manipulate their image to achieve a specific goal. This could lead to negative consequences such as hyperfocus on superficiality and deceit. We have a right to the truth, so hiding the truth is anathema to most.

- Example: Fabricating and manipulating one's image in attempt to achieve self-actualisation or social acceptance

→ Looksmaxxing

- Description:
 - Looksmaxxing attaches "scores" to aspects of male appearance, focusing particularly on jawline, muscularity and skin.
 - Looksmaxxers aim to increase their scores via "softmaxxing" (such as using a gua sha, burning more calories than consumed, or moisturising) and "hardmaxxing" (such as steroid use, hair transplants, or cosmetic surgery).
- Implications:

- Constantly striving to achieve higher appearance scores can lead to decreased self-esteem, as individuals may become excessively critical of their looks and overly dependent on external validation.
- The obsessive pursuit of physical perfection can **exacerbate** or **contribute to body dysmorphia**, where **individuals fixate on perceived flaws**.
- Evaluation:
 - [Application of C.A.R. framework] Thus, although the pursuit of looksmaxxing may be **appealing** to an audience as the **creator**, it is not **authentic** to the person's true self, and could even be very physically and mentally dangerous if a person attempts to **keep up with the trend**, to both the creator and perceiver.

2.2 Image is not static and may change overtime

desire to appeal to existing audience while attracting new ones.

- Creating a *lasting* image?
 - a. Building an image
 - b. Maintaining and preserving an image
 - c. Refreshing and redefining an image
- Image changes according to the social context and time.
 - The image must be adapted to the specific local context as well as global trends in order to reach the target audience and achieve desired goals.
 - However, even while adaptation may occur, the image creator maintains the essence and the core values to maintain the integrity of the person/ entity/ organisation/ nation.
- Trends that have implications on image:
 - Social media and the 'woke culture'
 - Image **creators**
 - have direct access to the target audience to shape perception due to the affordances of social media
 - need to take into account ethics highlighted in 'wokeism'
 - Some issues that are part of the 'woke' agenda now:
 - Inequality/ Marginalisation/ Discrimination
 - Globalisation
 - Migration issues
 - Geopolitics (conflict /w countries/ people)
 - Climate change
 - may capitalise on issues of the moment to gain favour with the 'woke' movement and perceivers be none the wiser
 - Image **perceivers**
 - can **audit** the image put up through **crowd sourcing of info**

- have the power to give feedback and reviews via social media, and therefore influence the image creator
 - can galvanise netizens to 'cancel'/ boycott
 - bad actors can use social media to undermine one's image
- Consider the perspective of corporations:
 - The image of a company is important as profit is the raison d'être for businesses. Given that the marketplace can be intensely competitive, branding can make a substantial difference to buyers' perception and thus their purchasing decisions. Thus companies adapt their image to feed on major trends to create
 - The 'feel good' factor
 - The differentiating factor
 - Consumer loyalty
 - However, companies will be cautious about making substantial changes to their image as a cost-benefit analysis may conclude for them that the gains from change are limited and not worth the effort.
- Example: Changing standards of beauty

→ Fashion companies: Model Ashley Graham changing the face of fashion

- Description:
 - Ashley Graham is a plus-sized model unusual in an industry that traditionally featured models with ectomorphic bodies, and advocates body positivity.
- Implications:
 - Companies tap into wokeism issues, such as body positivity, to remain relevant. However, cynics believe these superficial efforts do not percolate through the entire industry and may not be genuine and permanent.
- Evaluation:
 - It is applaudable that fashion powerhouses embrace the current 'woke' agenda of DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) to be inclusive to more people of different looks, body shapes and sizes, races and disabilities and to do right by their companies and society. Most visible are efforts to hire talent that are not traditionally used, such as plus-sized models. However, many corporations are inauthentic – merely paying lip service to a worthy cause. Most models today are still predominantly the classic ectomorphs, making the image created of the company simply and only that – an image.

- How an image is viewed (by perceivers) changes according to the social context and time:
 - With time, assumptions, beliefs and values change. The perceiver reading the image through his lens will interpret the same object differently, putting paid to the idea that an image/ brand can be preserved, as if in situ in time/ space.

- However, even while interpretations of image may change as frames of reference shift, it is fair to say that we should consider the social context (the ‘where and when’) of the image when making judgments, to achieve proper understanding/ historical accuracy.
- Example: Perceptions of historical figures

→ Confederate statues in the USA

- Description:
 - Wokeism in the form of the #BlackLivesMatter movement galvanized people to speak up and protest against racial inequality in America. Many now see the Confederate generals as racist slave owners who should not be honored. Confederate statues in many states have been removed since then.
- Implications:
 - While many celebrated the honest confrontation with the nation’s racist past, others saw this as a tarnishing of the image of past heroes who were simply acting according to the norms of their time, which to them was unfair. However, a concern that comes with keeping the statues/ images so prominent is that far-right extremists may capitalise on Confederate imagery as a rallying cry for their racist agenda.
- Evaluation:
 - The Confederate generals’ images have been interpreted and re-interpreted, positively and negatively by various groups over time. Wokeism has made clear that the Confederate generals’ values are different from modern values, so many could no longer look up to these figures of the past and the efforts to remove these images from their pedestal would continue apace.

be aware of your own biases when viewing historical events.

2.3 Image can be used as a tool to solidify power

what you see → what you believe as truth

- ‘PERCEPTION IS REALITY’ – Lee Atwater, political strategist
- Image creators can:
 - engineer an image to appeal and gain/ maintain support
 - spin something negative into something positive to maintain image and correspondingly, position
 - discredit critics and opponents through negative advertising in order to gain supporters
- Image perceivers may:
 - obtain the wrong perception rather than the truth, which makes them vulnerable to manipulation
 - audit and the image put forth, gives them power to ensure accountability of those in power
- Consider the government’s perspective
 - Used strategically, image can be used to

- shape the relationship between the government and the people,
 - Build public confidence/ trust in the government
 - Influence public opinion
 - Achieve buy-in especially for unpopular or contentious policies
 - Attain goals important to the government/ society
- However, the government must also be cognizant that it must be seen as authentic and transparent by the people; an image without substance will not be well received.
- Additionally, image creators can fabricate and manipulate their image to result in misjudgement. This is an increasingly common occurrence due to the prevalence of fake news, altered images, and curated content which can distort reality.
 - Example: Fake AI images

→ Fake images of Trump created to garner more support for Trump among the African-American community (2024)

- Description:
 - The co-founder of Black Voters Matter, a group which encourages Black people to vote, said the manipulated images were pushing a "strategic narrative" designed to show Trump as popular in the Black community.
 - The fake images of Black Trump supporters, generated by artificial intelligence (AI), are one of the emerging disinformation trends ahead of the US presidential election in November 2024.
 - Mark Kaye and his team at a conservative radio show in Florida created an image of Mr Trump smiling with his arms around a group of black women at a party and shared it on Facebook, where Mr Kaye has more than one million followers.
- Implications:
 - Mixed reactions: Some believed the image, while others inspected more closely to find everyone's skin is too shiny and missing fingers on people's hands. These fake images were ultimately exposed in the media.
- Evaluation:
 - While images of Trump may appear [redacted] to some who desire the Black community to receive more recognition, such tactics to garner support for Trump ultimately **backfired** due to the **inauthenticity**, [redacted] as well as exposure on the media.

- Example: Deceiving the public

→ Partygate Scandal (2020-2021)

- Description:
 - UK's then-Prime Minister- Boris Johnson- implemented a lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic in Mar 2020, supposedly to protect and save lives. However, he and his subordinates broke the rules by having parties. Thereafter,

he lied and attempted to hide the misdeed. The resulting scandal, named Partygate, was one of the reasons for him stepping down.

- Implications:
 - Widespread condemnation of his behavior as the people abided by the law and he acted as if he was above the law.
- Evaluation:
 - He put up an image of being one with the people and caring for their lives. However, it was not true, proving that his image was a front, **inauthentic**.

- Consider the challenges faced by image perceivers:
 - Those in power have the resources to shape their image to gain and consolidate power. The expectation is that it should be done ethically, with a sense of respect for the truth and people's right to it.
 - The counterclaim is that the onus is on those on the receiving end to do due diligence and ensure that they are not manipulated; they should not blindly trust the image creators to be responsible in how they use their power to shape perception.
 - However, it is unreasonable to expect people to run through this process for every single thing floating on the Internet, especially when there is so much fake news that look so real. Furthermore, social media's algorithms help create echo chambers where one's assumptions/ prejudices are reinforced.
 - Thus, **regulation** (even in a country like the U.S., the bastion for individual freedoms) or some **mechanism for accountability** (a free media as a watchdog or independent bodies, e.g. NGOs) may be needed to help people avoid being manipulated.
 - However, what if there are **no such regulations** and **no mechanism for accountability**?
- Example: Lies in Trump's political campaign

eg.
POFMA in
SC

→ Preying on fear through the use of lies and stereotypes in Trump's campaign (2024)

- Description:
 - Trump recently **highlighted a few cases of women killed by immigrants as proof of the need to support his efforts to close down the border with Mexico**. This is a replay of his playbook of triggering people's fears to gain support in a bid to win the election. He said in 2015, Mexican immigrants are "bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists".
- Implications:
 - He **perpetuates stereotypes**—prejudice against people solely based on their ethnicity and country of origin. This **encourages hatred and division** in America—**an unethical and cynical move**—in order to enter the White House. **xenophobia → fuel his own agenda**
- Evaluation:
 - He creates an image of himself as a protector of Americans. This is **inauthentic**, as he is no protector when he 'preys' on these victims of crime to benefit himself by using them to gain power. By sowing hatred and division, he

is also laying the seeds for more violence. However, he is not punished for lying in the echo chambers of social media and even lies blatantly on national television, such as during the recent debate. In this case, the **image perceiver**, i.e. the people, are **vulnerable** to being manipulated by false images.

- Image of a country created and maintained by its government can affect
 - **the country's standing** on the world stage
 - **the relationship with other countries**
 - A country is understood by outsiders using a matrix of different criteria, e.g. size, economy, social and cultural makeup, political structures.
 - Still, image matters.
 - It can affect the country's ability to gain the upper hand during bilateral negotiations or international forums or treaties,
 - Or the ability to form alliances
- Example: In geopolitics, image matters to quite a large extent.

→ manipulating Ukraine's image online

→ Russia's virtual war on Ukraine (2023-present)

- Description:
 - Russia seeks to portray its army as all-powerful and Ukraine as losing the war. This allows Russia to draw more supporters from the Global South and other allies such as Vietnam, and weaken the morale of the Ukrainians and soften USA and Europe's stance of support for Ukraine. All manners of tools are used, even online games such as Minecraft. The far-right extremists also portray Russia as a defender of Christian and family values.
- Implications:
 - More in the U.S. are questioning the efforts to support Ukraine in a war that they see is not going to end soon and will need a lot of resources and money. The far-right extremist groups in USA are supporting the portrayal of Russia as a defender of values, which is a blatant falsehood. Spreading such information
- Evaluation:
 - The image of a powerful Russian army is not authentic, but it is nevertheless formidable enough compared to the much smaller one of Ukraine's.

Important for us to understand image

- not static, may change according to times
- can be used as a tool to solidify power.
- ↓
representation
narrative of who
we are

Related Essay Questions (2023)

1) 'A' Levels 2023

- People who undertake voluntary work do so more for their own benefit than for the benefit of others.' Discuss.
- The quality of human interaction is diminished by modern communication devices.' How far do you agree?
- Evaluate the claim that sports personalities make good role models for young people.

2) CJC Promos 2023

- Can social media teach us anything meaningful?
- 'Honesty is overrated today.' Discuss.

3) EJC Promos 2023

- Should the private lives of politicians be open to public scrutiny?

4) HCI Promos 2023

- 'It is not worth the trouble for countries to host major sporting events.' To what extent is this good advice?

5) TJC Promos 2023

- 'New media has made governments more effective.' How far do you agree?

6) TMJC Promos 2023

- 'Censorship is neither desirable nor realistic.' How far is this true of your society?