Localizing Graphic Design in a Global Media Environment:
A Visual Social Semiotic Analysis of Vogue

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The contemporary media landscape is characterized by a complex tension between global and local influences, more accurately labeled as glocalization. Although this broad topic has been discussed extensively, the current study more narrowly focused on the localization of printed graphic design within the international women's magazine *Vogue*. A visual social semiotic analysis was used to compare and analyze the design of four print editions of *Vogue* from the United States, China, Mexico, and France. This analysis served to describe the semiotic resources (the design elements of type, image, color, and layout) used throughout the magazines. It revealed a combination of global and local semiotic strategies that visually connected and also separated each local edition from the larger *Vogue* brand. Finally, the analysis helped to interrogate the relationship between cultural localization of graphic design and the global media environment.

Keywords: graphic design, magazine design, localization, globalization, glocalization, Vogue magazine, visual social semiotics

The contemporary world is characterized by a multifaceted tension between the forces of globalization and localization. We are undeniably living in a globalized world (Appadurai, 1996). Yet, efforts at localization remain in many aspects of that same world, particularly in the contemporary landscape of media. As Machin and Van Leeuwen (2007) stated, "It is not hard to see that the media are becoming increasingly global. The same films screen all over the world. The same television programmes and the same news footage are shown everywhere, albeit sometimes in 'localised' versions" (p. 1). This tension between the global and the local is complex, with both forces clearly influencing the other and no clear-cut answers about which is preferrable. This process may be more accurately described as one of "glocalization," in which globalization and localization function in tandem (Robertson, 1995).

Machin and Van Leeuwen (2007) conducted a comparative analysis of articles from eight international editions of the global fashion and entertainment magazine *Cosmo*. Their analysis revealed that although the magazine communicates an overarching message of the "fun, fearless female," it allows local editors around the globe to showcase the same message via different 'angles' that may be more culturally appropriate for each country of distribution. Thus, *Cosmo* relies on a top-down communication approach that is "localized" for each international edition although not always truly "local."

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The current research study proposes that the popular women's fashion magazine *Vogue* functions in much the same way. It is a successful global brand that succeeds in part because of its ability to be customized for local cultures while still maintaining its global communication goals. Machin and Van Leeuwen (2007) focused specifically on how the presentation of women in *Cosmo* was adapted for different local cultures. The current research study focused not on the topical content of international magazines, but on how the printed graphic design of these magazines was tailored for different locations. The goal of this research was to compare the designs of multiple international print editions of *Vogue* to better understand how graphic design can be localized within a global media environment. *Vogue* has 27 international print editions. The total global print readership of *Vogue* is about 22.5 million monthly readers, with 8 million monthly American readers (Condé Nast, 2021a). Although some of the international editions are produced in the main New York office of publisher Condé Nast, many of them are produced in their countries of distribution. Indeed, they sit at the crossroads between the demands of the global brand and the desires of the local audience.

Significantly, women's magazines like *Vogue* have been labeled as important "value-laden semiotic systems" ripe for analysis (McCracken, 1993, p. 1). The editorial content, advertisements, and visual design of these magazines must communicate together within a web of social and cultural demands (Chen & Machin, 2014). To explore this complex media landscape, a social semiotic approach to analyzing the visual design of *Vogue* magazine was undertaken. This approach seeks to identify semiotic resources (defined as "the actions, materials and artifacts we use for communicative purposes"), their meaning potentials (how those resources have been used to communicate), and semiotic strategies (or generally accepted rules of use for those resources) (Van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 285). Accordingly, this research sought to answer the following questions:

RQ1:   *How does the use of visual semiotic resources (including type, image, color, and layout) vary between the selected print editions of Vogue magazine?*

RQ2:   *What semiotic strategies are employed in these editions to differentiate themselves from each other and/or the global brand?*

This study begins with a review of the literature examining *Vogue* magazine as well as the influences of globalization on magazine design and advertising. It then describes the visual social semiotic analysis used to compare the graphic design of four print editions of *Vogue* from the United States, China, Mexico, and France. Finally, it details the study findings and discusses what the analysis suggests about the cultural localization of printed graphic design within a global media environment.

Literature Review

Vogue Magazine

As one of the most popular international women's magazines today, *Vogue* is fundamentally defined by its transcendence of national boundaries. To understand the global nature of *Vogue*, it is important to consider both the past and the present of the brand. *Vogue* "began in New York in 1892 as a social gazette

for a Eurocentric elite" (David, 2006, p. 13). It catered toward an upper-class American audience. Although its offices were located in New York, for the first few decades of its publication, it remained closely linked to European (especially Parisian) fashion trends. Condé Nast purchased the magazine in 1909 and slowly "began to embrace more populist understandings of 'authentic' American taste and style in dress" (David, 2006, p. 14). *Vogue* became synonymous with fashion in the United States throughout the 20th century. Yet, its early international mind set remained influential and "*Vogue* embarked upon an era of cultural imperialism which exported American fashion writing through British (1916), French (1920), and even Argentinean (1924) editions" (David, 2006, p. 14). It became an international exporter of fashion trends rather than an importer of European ideas.

Today, Condé Nast is a global media company headquartered in New York and London, but operating in 31 markets around the world (Condé Nast, 2021a). According to the Condé Nast (2021b) corporate website,

> One of Condé Nast's greatest strengths is that we have teams around the world informing the way culture shapes and moves. And now, as an interconnected team of journalists and content makers, we want to bring those ideas and that passion to a global audience. Each of [our] brands has a new distinct vision, with in-country teams playing a central and critical role in their future. "Local" remains at the heart of everything we do. (para. 2)

Throughout its pages, *Vogue* tells fashion and lifestyle stories catered toward local audiences but with a sense of global connection. As a brand, it is much more than any single edition (or even country) can encompass.

Consequently, given its ability to be a barometer of current global issues and cultural trends, *Vogue* represents an important media text for analysis. McCracken (1993) examined an extensive range of women's magazines, including *Vogue*, to understand their popularity, production, and impact on broader views of women around the world. She found that these magazines almost uniformly served to highlight women's insecurities by marketing products to them, creating an inseparable connection between editorial and advertising content (McCracken, 1993). The messages about women's insecurities were localized, drawing on the life experiences of women from different cultural backgrounds, while still aiming to offer a profitable business plan in the form of promotions for global beauty products, fashion accessories, perfumes, and more. Following McCracken's (1993) work, *Vogue* has also been studied from a number of other perspectives and disciplines, but mainly with an emphasis on representational issues. Most noticeably, scholars have analyzed *Vogue's* portrayal of women across its pages (Alexandersson & Matlak, 2017; David, 2006; Lindner, 2004; Moeran, 2015; Twigg, 2010). However, while previous research has often taken a content-based approach, the current study focused on the visual design of *Vogue.*

Globalization and Magazine Design

Visual communication scholars have examined the effects of globalization on images and visual messages via various formats, focusing "predominantly on 'traditional' media (e.g., film, advertising,

television, journalism) and more recently on digital and social media" (Aiello & Pauwels, 2014, p. 276). A key theme weaving through these past studies is an assumption that globalization means an increase in cultural homogenization and thus a loss of cultural differences around the world. Yet, there are both challenges and benefits of globalization. In the introduction to a special issue addressing visual communication and globalization, Aiello and Pauwels (2014) suggested three themes: the recontextualization, stylization, and texturization of differences. All of these represent processes of transformation (both positive and negative) that have resulted from modern globalizing forces confronting local cultures.

There are two overarching beliefs about the effects of globalization. On one side is a fear of global corporations and brands. As cited in Thompson and Arsel (2004), "For proponents of the homogenization thesis, global brands are Trojan horses through which transnational corporations colonize local cultures (e.g., Falk, 1999; Ritzer, 1993)" (p. 631). These types of concerns have been leveraged against numerous global corporations. On the other side is a more nuanced understanding of the issue: "the interjection of global brands into local cultures paradoxically produces heterogeneity as global brands take on a variety of localized meanings (Ger & Belk, 1996; Miller, 1998a)" (as cited in Thompson & Arsel, 2004, p. 631). Indeed, Thompson and Arsel (2004) explored the brandscape of coffee shops in an effort to understand the influences of Starbucks on the local scale, noting a symbiotic relationship between global and local forces. Sociologist Roland Robertson (1995) defined "glocalization" as a set of intertwined social, economic, and political processes. Its principles have been used in marketing for promoting global goods through differentiating them for local markets. When applied to the visual branding of transnational corporations, glocalization offers a means of describing how both the global and local work in tandem to simultaneously connect and differentiate products or services.

Machin and Van Leeuwen (2007) discussed the complex interactions of global and local media products, using the fashion and entertainment magazine *Cosmo* as an example. They compared articles from eight international issues of *Cosmo* to understand how media representations of women (particularly in relation to work and sex) varied between cultures. Though they found that local editions of the magazine presented women's issues in unique ways compared with the global brand, "The 'local' [was] reduced to a kind of adornment or decoration embedded in a basic architecture of the global, and in the process it [was] transformed" (Machin & Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 123). Thus, *Cosmo* was global and local simultaneously, but broadly indicative of the multifaceted nature of the contemporary media landscape.

Machin and Van Leeuwen's (2007) book (as well as related articles, including Machin & Thornborrow, 2003; Machin & Van Leeuwen, 2004) focused heavily on issues of representation within a magazine's editorial content. However, Aiello (2012) made an important analytical distinction between studies of representational versus design resources, "with the former corresponding to 'raw' visual material or content (e.g., the people, objects and places included in an image) and the latter being the abstract principles used to 'style' basic blocks of visual content" (as cited in Chen & Machin, 2014, p. 295). Accordingly, past research on globalization's effects on magazines has examined both issues of representation (as in the *Vogue* studies cited in the previous section) and also design resources. In particular, Chen and Machin (2014) analyzed changes in *both* representation and design styling across 17 years in the popular Chinese women's magazine *Rayli*. They examined the changing representations of

women, noting differences that emerged in both the content and type of images used throughout the years. Additionally, they considered the design elements of typeface, color, and composition used throughout the magazine, noting more sophisticated uses of typefaces and colors in more recent years. These changes happened at the local level, but were in response to cultural changes on a global scale to propel the magazine to an international level.

In contrast to the broader analyses offered in most studies, some articles explore a single design resource such as images (Machin, 2004), materials (Aiello & Dickinson, 2014), or color (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2002). In particular, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002) sought to understand whether color was a mode of communication with its own grammatical structure. They argued that, "signifiers, and therefore also colours, carry a set of affordances from which sign-makers and interpreters select according to their communicative needs and interests in a given context" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2002, p. 355). Thus, graphic designers can choose from various design resources, including colors, to best communicate within the given cultural context. There can be no universal, global agreement on the meaning of an individual design resource; this depends greatly on the local cultural environment. Yet, it is clear that when combined with other modes of communication, each resource plays an important role in suggesting meaning. Consequently, the current study examined multiple design resources used throughout the different local editions of *Vogue*.

Globalization and Magazine Advertising

Advertisements, like editorial content, are also important components of magazines. In international women's magazines like *Cosmo* and *Vogue*, advertisements feed into the overall visual aesthetic of the magazine, becoming almost inseparable from one another (McCracken, 1993). They are clear indicators of the powerful reach of global companies today; while some ads are produced by local companies, many are produced by global companies. These visual messages represent another point of contact between local and global forces. Indeed, the importance of analyzing advertisements has been clearly acknowledged: "International advertising is recognised as a driving force of the transitioning global culture and an important means for studying cultural change" (Akaka & Alden, 2010, p. 38). Thus, ample past research has analyzed cross-cultural magazine advertisements (see the citation analysis from Okazaki & Mueller, 2007). Most of these studies used cultural variables to help explain advertising differences, predominantly citing Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions. Additional studies have considered issues of standardization, comparing the ethnicities of depicted models in global versus domestic advertisements (Morimoto & Chang, 2009; Nelson & Paek, 2007) and also the representation of women across advertisements (Frith, Shaw, & Cheng, 2005; Jung & Lee, 2009).

Although the current study did not analyze the advertisements present in *Vogue*, this literature is still important to note here for two reasons. First, cross-cultural advertisements represent a significant area of exploration closely connected to the lesser explored area of cross-cultural magazine design. Second, because of the related nature of this research, it can provide guidance on appropriate research methods for cross-cultural analysis. Overall, the most used method of analysis in these studies was quantitative content analysis. Lerman and Callow (2004) argued for the inclusion of more interpretive analyses in cross-cultural advertising research, yet the trend of content analysis appears to continue. Thus, it seems appropriate that

the current study included both content analysis as well as interpretive cross-cultural analysis, as will be described in the next section.

Research Methodology

Data Collection

Four print editions of *Vogue* magazine were selected for analysis. These editions came from the United States, China, Mexico, and France. There are several frameworks that can be used to demonstrate cultural variability between these countries (e.g., Hofstede, 1980; Lewis, 2006; Nisbett, 2003). Indeed, in terms of Hofstede's (1980) cultural values, these four countries are very dissimilar (with the largest differences occurring between the United States and China). However, for the current study, these specific countries were selected because they have the highest number of monthly print readers out of the 27 different *Vogue* editions (see Table 1). The February/March 2020 editions were selected based on timeliness and availability from all four countries.

Table 1. Top Four Editions of Vogue Based on Monthly Print Readership.

	Monthly print readership	Initial year of publication	Location
United States	8 million	1892	New York, United States
China	3 million	2005	Shanghai, China
Mexico and Latin America	1 million	1999	Mexico City, Mexico
France	1 million	1920	Paris, France

Source: Condé Nast (2021a)

Visual Social Semiotic Analysis

Semiotics is rooted in the study of signs pioneered by Charles Sanders Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure in the late 1800s and early 1900s. As a field of inquiry, semiotics was heavily influenced by the work of linguist Michael Halliday (1978). However, its focus shifted away from examining only verbal language to also study visual language via the work of Roland Barthes (1977, 1990). Later, Hodge and Kress (1998), as well as Van Leeuwen (2005), paved the way for a more holistic analysis of multimodal signs. This began the development of social semiotics, seeking to understand the signification of signs (termed semiotic resources) within larger cultural and social contexts (see Aiello, 2020, for a detailed history). In this context, Van Leeuwen (2005) defined a semiotic resource as,

> the actions, materials and artifacts we use for communicative purposes, whether produced physiologically—for example, with our vocal apparatus, the muscles we use to make facial expressions and gestures—or technologically—for example, with pen and ink, or computer hardware and software—together with the ways in which these resources can be organized. Semiotic resources have a meaning potential, based on their past uses, and a

set of affordances based on their possible uses, and these will be actualized in concrete
social contexts where their use is subject to some form of semiotic regime. (p. 285)

Semiotic resources, such as the graphic design elements analyzed in the current study, all have existing meaning potentials. As Van Leeuwen (2005) explained, "studying the semiotic potential of a given semiotic resource is studying how that resource has been, is, and can be used for purposes of communication" (p. 5). Graphic design elements, including type, image, color, and layout, all have the ability to suggest meaning in various ways based on their past use, organization, and combination with each other. This is a key concept in the current study, which seeks to document the semiotic resources used in the four editions of *Vogue* magazine and determine how their meaning potentials vary.

The magazine editions in the current study were analyzed in three stages, drawing inspiration from the visual social semiotic approach used by Thurlow and Aiello (2007) to analyze airplane tailfin designs as a form of localized design within a global industry. This three-part, systematic means of analysis allowed for the semiotic meanings of visual images to be described, interpreted, and analyzed within larger cultural and social contexts, following the steps of: (1) Descriptive analysis, (2) Interpretive analysis, and (3) Critical analysis.

First, a visual content analysis is a quantitative method used to describe, categorize, and compare the content of cultural texts such as photographs or images (Bell, 2001). Thurlow and Aiello (2007) used a visual content analysis to describe the elements found in airplane tailfin designs (e.g., colors, national emblems, animals). The current study used a visual content analysis to describe the design elements used across the pages of *Vogue* magazine. The author coded the design elements of type, image, color, and layout visible on *each* page of editorial content from *each* magazine edition. Editorial content included the table of contents, letter from the editor, front sections, feature stories, and back sections. It was essential to code the use of design elements visible on each individual page of editorial content to provide an accurate description of the range of uses of the design elements. For example, some stories featured all black-and-white photos. Thus, if only that single story had been coded, it would falsely appear that the entire magazine used black-and-white photos. Consequently, the author coded all of the pages of editorial content rather than attempting to generalize a few pages to the entire magazine. This yielded a total of 601 pages that were coded (see Table 2 for a breakdown of pages per edition). This represented the semiotic inventory for analysis (Van Leeuwen, 2005). This inventory did *not* include advertisements, which made up an additional 477 pages across all four editions.

The coding categories were based off of the author's previous research (McMullen, 2019), but were modified to focus specifically on design features relevant to magazine design. A total of 60 coding categories were used covering aspects of type design (type classification, alignment, and column structure of headings, body text, and pull quotes), images (quantity, size, photograph/illustration, and color mode), dominant colors (both primary and secondary hues), and page layout (symmetry and overall negative space). Intracoder reliability was established by coding 20 pages of each edition at two different points in time approximately one week apart (Neuendorf, 2017). A few adjustments were then made to the codebooks to correct for inconsistencies. Each category was coded using a binary system of 1 for yes (the design element was visible on the page) and 0 for no (the design element was not visible on the page).

Second, an interpretive textual analysis was used to qualitatively explore the meanings created by the use and combination of these design elements. Thurlow and Aiello (2007) used an interpretive analysis to reveal the semiotic strategies used by airlines to market to both local as well as global audiences. The current study used an interpretive analysis to determine the semiotic strategies that were used to localize each magazine edition and enhance local visual appeal. Though the study's content analysis revealed a number of differences between the use of design elements from each edition, the interpretive textual analysis more holistically explored how the design elements were manipulated and what meanings were suggested by these alterations.

Third, a critical textual analysis helped to evaluate the larger cultural and social contexts within which *Vogue* magazine is viewed and understood. Much like any form of global media, an individual text does not exist in isolation. It is never viewed in a vacuum, removed from context. Rather, it exists in conjunction with other global messages. It is also the product of both local forces exerting their influence on the global as well as the global exerting its influence on the local. Thurlow and Aiello (2007) demonstrated how airplane tailfin designs simultaneously incorporated both local/national emblems and figures as well as culturally universal representations of flight and motion. The editions of *Vogue* magazine incorporated both local as well as global design considerations to yield a product that was neither entirely global nor local, but both simultaneously.

Findings and Discussion

Describing Semiotic Resources

The visual content analysis revealed various semiotic resources used in numerous variations throughout the four editions of *Vogue* magazine. See Table 2 for a summary of the key findings from the content analysis. Note that the results shown in Table 2 reflect only the most frequently seen design elements based on the coding results. The table is divided into the semiotic resources of type, image, color, and layout. However, as described previously, each of these four resources was further subdivided to focus on 60 total coding categories relevant to magazine design.

Overall, the inventory of semiotic resources helped to describe, categorize, and compare the four editions of *Vogue*. It revealed that there were numerous differences in the use of the design elements across the magazine editions. Arguably, some of these differences may stem from differing personal preferences of the graphic designers and art directors creating the magazine editions. Nevertheless, these individuals were working from the same set of global brand standards, working to apply those standards (and communicate the same overarching messages) in a manner relevant to their own, local design context. As previously stated, Condé Nast (2021b) explained that, "Each of [our] brands has a new distinct vision, with in-country teams playing a central and critical role in their future. 'Local' remains at the heart of everything we do" (para. 2). Thus, although it is clear that a single issue cannot be representative of the design trends of an entire nation, the selection of four editions of the same magazine from the same month allowed for a quick snapshot of how a global brand can be depicted at a local level.

In particular, the U.S. edition of *Vogue* most frequently used serif typefaces for both headings and body text. Headings tended to be centered, whereas body text was generally left-aligned. Most (90%) of the pages contained images, with 83% of those pages having "large" (4–6 inches wide) and/or "extra-large" images (filling the full page width). These images were predominantly full color photographs. Just five of the pages had illustrations/drawings and 14 had black/white images. The most commonly seen colors were blue and green, followed by red, yellow, and brown. The overall page layouts were mostly asymmetrical (62%) with very minimal negative space (67%). Just 2% had "ample negative space." This indicates a busy overall aesthetic.

The Chinese edition of *Vogue* most frequently used sans serif typefaces for both headings and body text. Both headings and body text tended to be fully justified. These type choices were notably different from the type choices in the U.S. edition. The vast majority (92%) of the pages contained images with 61% of those pages having "large" (4–6 inches wide) and/or "extra-large" images (filling the full page width). This was lower than the U.S. edition. All of the images in the Chinese edition (100%) were photographs with no illustrations/drawings seen. 87% of the pages had images in full color rather than black/white. The most commonly seen colors were red and blue, followed by yellow and pink. The overall page layouts were mostly asymmetrical (73%) with minimal negative space being noted in just 43% of the pages. Interestingly, 28% of the page layouts had "ample negative space." Thus, the Chinese page layouts more frequently had negative space around and between the page elements than did the U.S. edition.

The Mexican edition of *Vogue*, distributed in both Mexico and the broader region of Latin America, most frequently used serif typefaces for both headings and body text just like the U.S. and French editions. However, the design of the headings was unique in that it was often split between two lines that were staggered in alignment. Body text was mostly fully justified (55%), but sometimes left-aligned (35%). Most (95%) of the pages contained images, but just 56% of those pages had "large" (4–6 inches wide) and/or "extra-large" images (filling the full page width). This is a lower percentage than any of the other editions. These images were predominantly full color photographs. Just three of the pages had illustrations/drawings, and 21 pages had images in black/white. The most commonly seen colors overall were blue, red, and yellow. The overall page layouts were overwhelmingly asymmetrical (95%) with minimal negative space being noted in 58% of the pages.

The French edition of *Vogue*, known as *Vogue Paris*, most frequently used serif typefaces for both headings and body text just like the U.S. and Mexican editions. Headings were fairly evenly split between left-aligned (37%), right-aligned (34%), and centered (28%). This gave the headings more visual variation than either the U.S. or Chinese editions. Body text was mostly left-aligned (76%). Most (88%) of the pages contained images, with 86% of those pages having "large" (4–6 inches wide) and/or "extra-large" images (filling the full page width). The most commonly seen colors were black and brown, followed by blue, yellow, and red. Additionally, 35% of the pages had black/white images, compared with just 13% of the U.S. and also Chinese editions. The overall page layouts were mostly asymmetrical (84%), with minimal negative space being noted in 50% of the pages. It was interesting to note that *Vogue Paris* had two pages that were almost entirely white, showing just the feature story name and photographer. This was not seen in any of the other editions that had less overall negative space.

Table 2. Key Findings From the Visual Content Analysis of Vogue.

	U.S. edition	Chinese edition	Mexican edition	French edition
	116 pages of editorial content and 246 pages of ads	220 pages of editorial content and 54 pages of ads	129 pages of editorial content and 15 pages of ads	136 pages of editorial content and 162 pages of ads
Type	**Heading type** • 69% serif • 74% centered **Body type** • 82% serif • 59% left-aligned	**Heading type** • 74% sans serif • 49% fully justified **Body type** • 100% sans serif • 95% fully justified	**Heading type** • 100% serif • Staggered alignment **Body type** • 100% serif • 55% fully justified	**Heading type** • 86% serif • Split between left- and right-aligned **Body type** • 100% serif • 76% left-aligned
Image	• 90% of pages contained images • 83% of these pages contained large or extra-large images	• 92% of pages contained images • 61% of these pages contained large or extra-large images	• 95% of pages contained images • 56% of these pages contained large or extra-large images	• 88% of pages contained images • 86% of these pages contained large or extra-large images
Color	• The most commonly used colors were blue (48%) and green (44%)	• The most commonly used colors were red (36%) and blue (34%)	• The most commonly used colors were blue (41%), red (40%), and yellow (35%)	• The most commonly used colors were black (27%) and brown (21%)
Layout	• 62% of page layouts were asymmetrical • 67% of pages had minimal negative space	• 73% of page layouts were asymmetrical • 43% of pages had minimal negative space	• 95% of page layouts were asymmetrical • 58% of pages had minimal negative space	• 84% of page layouts were asymmetrical • 50% of pages had minimal negative space

Interpreting Semiotic Strategies

Although the quantitative differences revealed via the content analysis above were a useful starting point, the inclusion of qualitative analysis helped to explore the connections between (and the reasons behind) these differences. Since semiotic resources can have various meaning potentials, an interpretive

textual analysis aided in understanding how each resource "has been, is, and can be used for purposes of communication" (Van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 5). This analysis (described below) suggested that both global and local semiotic strategies (referred to by Van Leeuwen, 2005, as semiotic rules) were used to manipulate type, color, image, and layout. This created a connection with the larger *Vogue* brand while still being relevant for each local audience.

Global strategies are defined here as those tactics used throughout multiple editions of *Vogue* magazine. These strategies provided consistency across various *Vogue* products and allowed them to be recognizably connected to each other. Unsurprisingly, the overarching goals of *Vogue* appeared universally consistent—it strives to be an authoritative voice on fashion, beauty, and lifestyle around the world (Condé Nast, 2021a). Throughout the pages of *Vogue*, there was an obvious focus on women, fashion, and all aspects of pop culture. All four editions consisted of short front-matter articles followed by longer feature stories. The front-matter articles focused on fashion and makeup trends, often connected to popular celebrities. The feature stories varied between lengthy editorial articles about influential people (such as actors or musicians) and multipage photo collections frequently depicting fashion trends.

In particular, three global semiotic strategies became evident. First, while the text is often an important semiotic resource in printed graphic design, the prominence, as well as the styling of text, was visually minimized throughout the pages of *Vogue*. The example spreads shown in Figure 1 demonstrate commonly found layouts from the feature stories of *Vogue*. They include extra-large images across all pages with small image captions tucked in the page corners. With 69% of all of the editorial pages containing large or extra-large images, *Vogue* clearly prioritizes the visual over the textual message. The text of the front-matter articles was frequently lost among the copious image-heavy advertisements. The feature stories were generally dominated by multiple full-page images. Type was either pushed to one side of the page or completely nonexistent. Additionally, several longer editorial articles were broken up, with the written story continuing on the final pages of the magazine. Thus, the main story had even more room for images, further deemphasizing the textual message. Finally, the text that was displayed generally lacked variation of styling or color. For example, in the U.S. edition, the body text was consistently set in a left-justified, serif typeface, and the titles were generally a large modern serif typeface (consistent with the nameplate on the front cover). With rare exceptions, all of the text was set in either black or white.
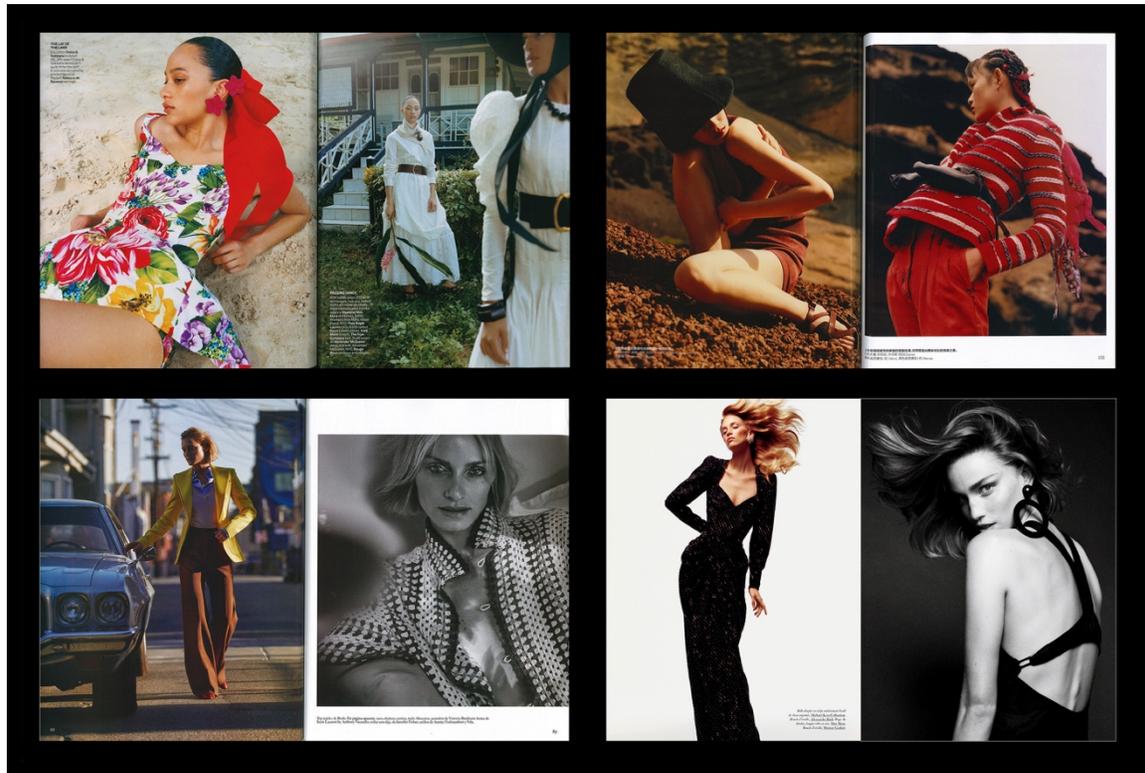
Figure 1. Example feature spreads from Vogue: United States (top left; Wintour, 2020),
China (top right; Cheung, 2020), Mexico (bottom left; Martinez De Salas, 2020), and
France (bottom right; Alt, 2020).

Second, another global semiotic strategy found throughout the four editions of *Vogue* was a blurring of the lines between editorial content and advertising content. Indeed, in many magazines, there is a lack of distinction between what's paid content and what's not (McCracken, 1993). In *Vogue*, the advertisements commonly included a single, full-page photograph showcasing 1–2 models. These models displayed clothes, accessories, jewelry, or makeup products. These colorful and often artistic photographs looked strikingly similar to the full-page photographs produced by *Vogue.* The editorial images also tended to feature 1–2 models displaying various popular fashion trends (see Figure 1). Coupled with the fact that 44% of the magazine's pages across all four editions consisted of advertisements, these visual similarities may prompt viewers to read the paid content alongside the editorial content. Together, they created a visual spectacle of color, energy, and texture. It is interesting to consider if the advertisements were meant to reference *Vogue's* photographs or, conversely, if *Vogue's* photographs were meant to reference the advertisements. It seems more likely that advertisers sought to reference *Vogue's* photographs to gain viewers' attention and lend the ads more credibility.

Third, the final global semiotic strategy was the creation of energy across the pages via carefully arranged asymmetrical layouts. In fact, 78% of the editorial pages across all four editions were asymmetrical

in overall page layout. While the Mexican and the French editions had the highest percentages of asymmetrical pages (95% and 84% respectively), all of the editions had more asymmetry overall. Many times, this asymmetry was visible in the full-page photographs, with the model(s) being placed off-center on the page. Coupled with the large images, bright colors, and minimal negative space seen throughout the *Vogue* editions, asymmetrical layouts helped to create an energetic and dynamic visual experience.

In addition to these global strategies, *Vogue* also used various local strategies. Local strategies are defined here as the tactics used by individual editions of *Vogue* magazine to create a product that is relevant for a narrower, local audience. These strategies resulted in visual variation between the different international editions. As Jewitt and Oyama (2001) wrote, "visual meaning is best thought of as the manipulation or exploitation of [semiotic] resources" (as cited in Thurlow & Aiello, 2007, p. 317). Thus, the design resources of type, image, color, and layout were carefully manipulated by each edition to shift visual emphasis and meaning depending on local preferences.

First, the content of the photographs, while generally focusing on fashion, beauty, and lifestyle, varied in terms of the ethnicities of the models featured. This is, perhaps, the least surprising finding since altering model ethnicity is an incredibly easy way to "localize" a magazine edition (Morimoto & Chang, 2009; Nelson & Paek, 2007). The editorial photographs in the Chinese edition overwhelmingly showcased Asian models, thus helping to localize the magazine. However, many of the advertisements in the Chinese edition included Caucasian models, thus employing tactics of global standardization as well. In contrast, the U.S. edition featured the widest range of ethnicities overall, showcasing predominantly Caucasian but also a wide range of Asian, African, and Latino models in both editorial and advertising images.

Second, while all of the editions had front matter and feature stories, the section headings and number of articles in each section varied. Significantly, the type design of the section headings varied as well. In the Chinese edition, the section headings were run vertically down the left-hand edge of the page, with the baseline facing outward (see Figure 2 for an example). This design decision may simply be a stylistic choice, or it may be indicative of language differences. For instance, English, French, and Spanish are always written left to right, whereas Chinese can be set left to right or top to bottom. Thus, the choice to run the headings vertically down the left-hand edge of the page may be a localized design strategy. In the U.S., French, and Mexican editions, the section headings were run horizontally at the top of the page. However, the French edition consistently used an italic typeface, and the Mexican edition minimized the size of the section headings to deemphasize them.

Third, noticeable differences were found in the type design of the local editions. This is most easily visible in the front matter where the shorter stories often included more text on a single page. An example left-hand page from each edition is shown in Figure 2. Each page includes a section heading (Nostalgia, Culture, and so on), the story title, and body text design choices common to each edition. The U.S. edition used a traditional serif for the body text and a modern serif for the story title. This is the only edition that did not use all capital letters in the story heading. The Chinese edition used a sans serif for the body text (as is more typical for Chinese text) and combined both serif and sans serif for the story title. Furthermore, the layout of the headings was quite different between these two editions. The U.S. edition featured centered story titles and subtitles. In contrast, the Chinese edition featured left-aligned story titles and subtitles that

were tucked together, with the lines of type running right up against other. A possible explanation for these design differences is that the Chinese edition frequently used both Chinese and English titles whereas the other editions were printed in just one language. Thus, the same idea was duplicated in two languages, making the close proximity of the heading text useful for individuals who can read both languages. The Mexican edition used a serif for the body text and story title, with the text being split across two lines that were right-justified. The French edition also used a serif for the body text (like the U.S. and Mexican editions), but incorporated a larger, italic font for the story title. In Figure 2, this title is right-aligned, although this varied between left- and right-alignment throughout the edition. The French edition also treated pull quotes uniquely, using a large, serif, italic text that was always right-aligned.

Figure 2. Example left-hand pages from Vogue: United States (top left; Wintour, 2020), China (top right; Cheung, 2020), Mexico (bottom left; Martinez De Salas, 202), and France (bottom right; Alt, 2020).

Finally, there also appeared to be different preferences for colors between the editions. In *Vogue U.S.*, the most commonly used colors were blue and green. In *Vogue China*, the most commonly used colors were red and blue. In *Vogue Mexico*, the most used colors were blue, red, and yellow. In *Vogue Paris*, the colors that were present the most were black and brown with black/white images being more common. The color blue was prominent in three of the four editions. These colors were mainly visible in the photographs since almost all of the type was set exclusively in black or white. As Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002) described, color has various meaning potentials that graphic designers can tap into to suggest a specific message. Thus, the color appeared to play an important role in communicating culturally localized messages.

Critiquing Context

With 27 international print editions and more than 22.5 million monthly print readers, *Vogue* is a global force that drives fashion standards and cultural norms around the world (Condé Nast, 2021a). Thus, studying *Vogue* allowed for the examination of a popular and influential global brand. It helped to gauge overarching trends in the print design of *Vogue*. Nevertheless, there was also considerable variation between the designs of the four different editions. Machin and Thornborrow (2003) emphasized the global similarities they found between local editions of *Cosmo* magazine, yet it was the design differences between the local editions of *Vogue* that appeared most intriguing in the current study. Indeed, at a broader level, these design differences suggest a heterogenization of media messages that stands in contrast to the cultural homogenization most often associated with globalization (Aiello & Pauwels, 2014).

Vogue, as a global brand, did not displace the local design differences with a singular, international design aesthetic. The global influences of *Vogue* did not appear to dominate over local design choices. In fact, this study found that there were numerous differences in the graphic design of the different local editions. This was especially significant given that the four countries included in this study are actually quite culturally distinctive (Hofstede, 1980; Lewis, 2006; Nisbett, 2003). These cultural differences can still be seen across the local pages of *Vogue*, suggesting a recognition (and inclusion) of local cultural preferences.

While the global brand can adapt to local influences, this flow of influence does go the other direction too. The design of local magazine editions often changes over time in response to the global brand, creating a "glocal" experience. Chen and Machin (2014) noted changes in the Chinese women's magazine *Rayli* specifically in terms of the styling of the design elements of image, color, typeface, and composition. In the case of *Rayli*, these changes were the result of cultural shifts at the local level but also the influence of global forces such as the adoption of western journalism practices and the influences of Japanese culture. Chen and Machin (2014) concluded, "What we find in *Rayli* is clearly, to some extent 'local', but . . . is something that has been hijacked and transformed for the purposes of consumer capitalism" (p. 299).

As Machin and Van Leeuwen (2007) wrote, "Two worlds coexist uneasily: the world of nation states, with their national languages and cultures, and the global world with its emerging global language and culture carried, not by nation states, but by global corporations and international organisations" (p. 2). *Vogue* is one such global corporation that balances between the demands of national cultures and the international world. Yet, *Vogue* does not appear to represent an imperialistic, homogenizing force. It does have central global goals such as exporting fashion and lifestyle trends around the world and also selling

international beauty products to women (McCracken, 1993). However, the current study's comparison of the four editions highlighted local adaptations such as unique type treatments, localized images, different color preferences, varied layouts, and so on. Furthermore, the very presence of 27 international editions suggests that the global corporation of Condé Nast recognizes the importance of giving voice to local demands. Certainly, the American edition of *Vogue* has the highest monthly print readership of all the editions, but in coexistence with other local editions, it is clearly not forcing the world at large to consume a singular *Vogue* brand. This appears in line with the early international mind set from which *Vogue* developed, although it is important to note that cultural imperialism was an ambition of the magazine during the 20th century (David, 2006). The *Vogue* of today seems more accommodating of the important role of local preferences.

In line with Robertson's (1995) assertions about glocalization, there is not a simple global versus local binary. Instead, global and local forces are working together, informing and influencing each other simultaneously, producing the universal and also the particular. Similarly, in the international airline industry, Thurlow and Aiello (2007) demonstrated how airplane tailfin designs simultaneously incorporated local emblems and figures as well as culturally universal symbols. Machin and Van Leeuwen (2007) suggested that local strategies may just be a veneer masking over the central global strategies. They concluded that local editions of *Cosmo* were "reduced to a kind of adornment or decoration embedded in a basic architecture of the global, and in the process it [was] transformed" (Machin & Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 123). This appears true in *Vogue* as well.

Overall, the *Vogue* brand is highly regarded and iconic in the fashion industry. Working in tandem, the global and local strategies outlined in this article served as means of broadening the communicative reach of *Vogue* by appealing to diverse audiences around the world. The global brand can become more popular via its efforts at local diversification. Yet, there must inherently be a balance struck between these two forces. If too many local factors are allowed to dominate a single edition, then that magazine can lose brand recognizability. Conversely, if not enough local influences are allowed in, then the magazine might be perceived as "too global" or even "too American" and not locally relevant. This seems to be an organically achieved balance since each local edition incorporated its local flavor in unique ways. Furthermore, this balance may continue to change over time as a result of the evolving global media landscape.

Conclusion

Vogue is a successful global brand that has expanded throughout multiple countries around the world. It effectively communicates its central messages about popular fashion, beauty, and lifestyle trends. It is successful because of its ability to be both a global voice and because of its adaptability for local voices. It simultaneously maintains its central communication goals while localizing those messages for smaller, culturally varied audiences. This process of glocalization is certainly not new in the broader media landscape. However, the current study analyzed an underexplored area of media—it explored the glocalization of printed graphic design.

Overall, the aim of this research study was to compare the designs of four international editions of *Vogue* to better understand how printed graphic design can be localized within the current global media

environment. The study findings helped to document how multiple global and local semiotic strategies worked together, altering the use of design elements including type, image, color, and layout. The comparison provided a means to analyze cultural variability in printed graphic design while keeping the same industry and design genre (fashion magazine design). This was meant to reduce the number of outside factors influencing what the designs looked like. It also allowed for the narrower examination of differences in the design elements due to country of origin, although it is not possible to determine national design tendencies based on a limited sample of design work. Thus, this study was meant to be a narrow and specific examination of localized designs. It is not intended to provide generalizations about all design from the United States, China, Mexico, or France. This study also cannot make claims about all international editions of *Vogue*. Consequently, future research might usefully examine a larger selection of magazine editions from additional countries. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to address cultural variability in other magazine genres (such as sports or news) and other design genres (such as poster or brochure designs). Continued research in this area can allow for a more thorough understanding of how glocalization affects the work of contemporary graphic designers.

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