



The Relevance of Words and Meaning in Students' Infographics Based on Sperber & Wilson

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Abstract

The use of relevant and concise wording in infographics is crucial to ensure that the information presented can be quickly and effectively understood by readers. However, existing infographics still need to strike a balance between information density and clarity of delivery. This study explores the relevance of words and meaning in student-created infographics, using Sperber & Wilson's Relevance Theory (1986, 1995) as a framework. By analyzing three student-created infographics, the study identified the main structural elements of infographics: description (general overview), details (specific information), and significance (practical value). It also examined audience intentions, categorized as either informative or communicative. The results revealed that the "significance" element dominated all the infographics, underscoring the importance of the practical value and relevance of the information presented. Audiences were more likely to engage with infographics they found informative, although a balance between informative and communicative aspects—such as seen in Infographic 1—yielded optimal impact on audience comprehension and engagement. This study highlighted the importance of infographic design that emphasized word and meaning relevance to create effective communication. Recommendations are provided for more strategically integrating communicative elements to enhance the appeal and effectiveness of infographics in various communication contexts.

Keywords: *Relevance, Infographics, Relevance Theory, Visual Writing, Audience Understanding.*

Introduction

In the rapidly evolving digital era, visual communication has become an integral part of various sectors, including education, marketing, and social advocacy. One of the most popular forms of visual communication is the infographic, a medium that combines visual elements and text to effectively convey information. Infographics are designed to help audiences quickly and efficiently understand complex information (Krum, 2014). This makes infographics a highly effective tool for delivering messages in today's fast-paced digital culture (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2018)(Nityantari & Dewi, 2024). In the academic world, infographics have become a favorite medium for students to present data, ideas, and research findings. Besides serving as a tool to simplify complex information, infographics are also used to capture audience attention, whether in academic seminars or presentation assignments. However, despite their widespread use, challenges in designing relevant and effective infographics are still frequently encountered.

One of the main issues in the creation of infographics by students is the lack of attention to the relevance between the words used and the intended meaning. Many student-designed infographics may appear visually appealing but lack strong substance. This issue can arise from a limited understanding of how to strategically integrate textual and visual elements to ensure that the message is optimally understood. Faizah (2023) revealed that infographics that fail to prioritize clarity in word usage often lead the audience to miss the core message being conveyed. In an academic context, such errors can diminish the effectiveness of student communication, especially when presenting scientific data or arguments that require a high degree of accuracy.

The primary challenge in designing infographics lies in how to convey dense information concisely and relevantly without sacrificing clarity or accuracy. Research by Harris et al. (2023) indicates that infographics designed with strong word and meaning relevance can enhance information retention by up to 30%. However, infographics that are overly technical or ambiguous in word choice can hinder audience understanding (N. Faizah, 2023). In an academic setting, students often face a dilemma between presenting information concisely and providing sufficient detail to support their arguments. As a result, many infographics either become overly text-heavy or, conversely, too simplistic, losing their substance (T. Lee, 2022).

On the other hand, this challenge is closely related to how students understand their audience. Liu et al. (2022) emphasize that effective infographics require content adjustment based on how the audience processes information. In this regard, students need to understand how their audience reads, visualizes, and processes information, especially in an academic context where the audience often consists of peers, lecturers, or expert panels. Without this understanding, the design of infographics may lack relevance, reducing their ability to convey information effectively.

The Relevance Theory developed by Sperber and Wilson (1986, 1995) provides a robust framework for understanding how human communication can be optimized. According to this theory, every act of communication carries an optimal expectation of relevance for its recipient. In the context of infographics, this means that the information presented must be sufficiently informative to justify the audience's cognitive effort, but not overly complex so as to require disproportionate effort to understand. In other words, a good infographic should be designed to deliver precise, relevant, and easily comprehensible information without overburdening the audience.

The Relevance Theory is particularly applicable in infographic design because infographics aim to convey information quickly and engagingly, utilizing visual elements such as charts, diagrams, and concise text. In the context of students, applying this theory becomes crucial as many lack the understanding of how to strategically integrate these elements. Studies by Brown et al. (2024) and Johnson & Lee (2024) highlight that the relevance between visual elements and text in infographics plays a vital role in determining the effectiveness of communication. Students who successfully apply this principle of relevance tend to create more effective infographics that are not only aesthetically appealing but also impactful in delivering messages.

The use of relevant words and meanings in infographics is essential to ensure that the information presented can be easily processed by the audience. A study by Smith & Jones (2023) found that infographics with carefully chosen words help enhance reader comprehension, whereas the use of overly technical or ambiguous terminology can hinder the communication process. This finding is particularly relevant in the student context, where infographics are often used to present ideas or research findings to academic audiences.

Moreover, the relevance of words and meanings also influences how the audience interprets the presented information. White et al. (2023) revealed that infographics designed with meaningful relevance in mind can enhance information retention by up to 40%. These findings indicate that the use of appropriate words and relevant meanings not only aids audience understanding but also strengthens their memory of the information. This is especially critical for students when infographics are used to present scientific data or academic arguments that require a high level of accuracy and clarity.

Despite extensive research on infographic design, there remains a gap in understanding how students can utilize Relevance Theory to improve their infographic designs. Most previous studies have focused on visual or aesthetic aspects, with little exploration of how the relevance of words and meanings can affect communication effectiveness. This study aimed to address this gap by exploring how students can integrate Relevance Theory into their infographic designs to create more effective communication.

This study also aimed to provide practical guidelines for students on using the principles of relevance to enhance the quality of their infographics. By leveraging Relevance Theory as a foundation, the research explored how the structure of infographic content can be optimized to improve audience comprehension. Additionally, it discussed how elements such as description, details, and significance can be designed to create infographics that are not only informative but also communicative.

The research seemed to bridge the gap in student infographic design by emphasizing the importance of word and meaning relevance based on Sperber & Wilson's Relevance Theory (1986, 1995). Specifically, it aimed to analyse how the content structure and communicative intent within infographics can be optimized to enhance audience understanding in academic contexts. Thus, this research did not only contribute to theoretical understanding but it also offered practical solutions for students to improve their ability to convey information visually. The findings were expected to help students produce infographics that are more relevant, effective, and impactful across various academic and professional contexts.

Method

This study employed a case study approach, enabling an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of word and meaning relevance in student infographics. This method was chosen because case studies provide a framework for analysing infographic design elements within a specific context, specifically based on the principles of relevance theory by Sperber & Wilson (1986, 1995). The case study involved the analysis of three student-created infographics, selected based on specific criteria to ensure variation and relevance to the applied theory.

The three infographics used in this study were purposively selected based on several criteria to ensure varied and relevant representation. First, the infographics were chosen for their diversity in design styles, reflecting variations in visual elements and narrative structure. This is crucial for exploring the application of relevance principles in different design contexts. Second, the analysed infographics were derived from coursework by Business Administration students, ensuring that the data were relevant to the academic context of the study. Third, the infographics were selected based on their degree of success in integrating elements of relevance theory, such as descriptive elements (description), details, and the significance of the information. Using these criteria, the study explored how these elements contribute to communication effectiveness. This approach aligns with the recommendations of Miles and Huberman (1994), who emphasize the importance of case selection in providing maximum insights in qualitative studies.

This study utilized two main types of data: student infographics and in-depth interviews. The infographics were analysed to identify key elements based on relevance theory, including message clarity, information density, contextual

relevance, and contextual effects. In-depth interviews were conducted with two groups of participants. First, the creators of the infographics were interviewed to understand their intentions in choosing visual and textual elements and how they balanced informative and communicative aspects. Second, interviews were conducted with 17 students who were the intended audience for these infographics to evaluate their perceptions of the infographics' effectiveness and relevance. These semi-structured interviews ensured flexibility in exploring participant perspectives while maintaining focus on the research topic. This technique aligns with the interactive and focused qualitative data collection approach suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994).

The study applied an interactive data analysis technique, as proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which involves three main stages. The first stage is data reduction, where data collected from infographic analysis and interviews are filtered to focus on information relevant to relevance theory. For example, descriptive, detailed, and significant elements in the infographics were identified and categorized based on their effectiveness. The second stage is data presentation, where the reduced data were organized into tables and charts to visualize the relationships between infographic design elements and audience perceptions. An example includes a table showing the distribution of descriptive, detailed, and significant elements in each infographic. The third stage is verification and conclusion drawing. Initial findings were validated through data triangulation among infographic analyses, creator interviews, and audience interviews. For instance, audience feedback on message clarity was compared with the infographic creators' intentions to evaluate the application of relevance principles. This analysis process was iterative, ensuring the accuracy and consistency of conclusions, and included reflective note-taking to reduce potential biases in data interpretation.

Each type of data collected in this study was directly linked to criteria from relevance theory. The infographic analysis focused on three main elements of relevance theory: message clarity was assessed through the analysis of descriptive elements in the infographics, contextual relevance was examined through detailed information elements, and contextual effects were evaluated based on the dominance of significant information elements. Interviews with infographic creators were used to understand their intentions in selecting textual and visual elements and how they adapted the design to audience needs. Interviews with the audience aimed to evaluate their perceptions of the effectiveness of the design elements, including the extent to which the infographics helped them understand the information. This alignment ensured that the methodology is not only in-depth but also theoretically and practically relevant, adhering to the principles of relevance theory.

Results

In general, the content structure of the infographics is divided into three sections: description, details, and benefits. The research findings indicate a consistent dominance across all the infographics in emphasizing the benefits. This can be observed in the following table:

Table 1. Percentage of Audience Understanding of Infographic Messages

	Structure of Infographic	Percentage
Infographic 1	Description	25%
	Details	12.5%
	Significance	68.75%
Infographic 2	Description	43.75%
	Details	-
	Significance	68.75%
Infographic 3	Description	43.75%
	Details	6.25%
	Significance	68.75%

The table above illustrates the structure and percentage composition of three infographics based on the elements of description, detail, and significance. Infographic 1 is distributed as follows: descriptive elements account for 25% of the total content, details make up only 12.5%, while elements of significance dominate at 68.75%. Infographic 2 shows a similar dominance of significance, also at 68.75%, with descriptive elements contributing 43.75%, and no details present in this infographic. Infographic 3 follows a pattern similar to Infographic 2, with descriptive elements comprising 43.75%, details at just 6.25%, and significance continuing to dominate at 68.75%. The table highlights that the element of significance constitutes the largest portion across all three infographics, emphasizing the primary focus on the benefits or importance of the information presented, while details often take up the smallest share or are entirely absent.

Furthermore, the relevance of words and meanings is also related to the writer's intention as perceived by the audience. The research findings indicate two types of intentions identified in the audience's understanding: informative and communicative.

Table 2. Percentage of Audience Intentions Toward Infographics

	Intense Infographic	Percentage
Infographic 1	Informative	43.75%
	Communicative	50%
Infographic 2	Informative	81.25%
	Communicative	18.75%
Infographic 3	Informative	68.75%
	Communicative	31.25%

The table above presents the audience's perception of the three infographics based on the categories "informative" and "communicative," expressed as percentages. Infographic 1 shows a relatively balanced perception, with 43.75% of the audience considering it informative and 50% viewing it as communicative. Infographic 2, on the other hand, is predominantly seen as informative, with 81.25% of the audience rating it as such, while only 18.75% consider it communicative. For Infographic 3, the majority of the audience (68.75%) perceive it as informative, while 31.25% view it as communicative. From this data, it can be concluded that the audience tends to perceive all three infographics as more informative than communicative, although Infographic 1 demonstrates a better balance between the two categories.

Discussion

Infographics are a key component of visual writing, combining text and visuals in their creation. Visual writing is a literary technique that uses descriptive language and figurative imagery to create vivid mental pictures in the reader's mind (Friedmann, 2012; (Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, 1996)). From a cognitive perspective, visual writing has significant potential to evoke deep interpretations among audiences. This technique leverages the power of mental representation through detailed descriptions and figurative imagery, allowing readers to derive meaning based on their own experiences and knowledge. This process involves not only visual processing in the brain but also the activation of emotional connections and complex semantic associations. Friedmann (2012) states that visual writing enables readers to "see" a story through a sequence of words, offering a richer reading experience. Additionally, a study by Zhang & Ho (2021) revealed that this writing style enhances cognitive engagement by sparking readers' imagination to visualize specific scenes or concepts. Thus, visual writing serves not only as a tool for conveying information but also as a means of strengthening the emotional connection between the writer and the audience, creating a more interactive narrative. Consequently, visual writing is both an effective and strategic technique that blends aesthetic value and practicality in contemporary creative communication and literacy.

Furthermore, audiences interpret infographics with diverse perspectives influenced by the structure of the content presentation. Generally, an infographic's content structure that is easily understood by the audience consists of three main elements: **overview (descriptive)**, which provides initial context or an introduction to the topic; **details**, which include more specific data or explanations; and **significance**, which highlights the relevance or practical impact of the information. These elements work synergistically to help the audience grasp the core message being conveyed.

The analysis of the three infographics revealed a pattern of dominance by the *significance* element, or the informational benefits. For instance, in all the infographics, the *significance* element accounts for over 68% of the content, indicating that the students primarily focus on emphasizing the relevance and benefits of the information presented. Meanwhile, the *description* element (general overview) tends to contribute between 25–43%, and the *details* element (information specifics) is the least used, ranging from 0–12%. This pattern suggests that students prioritize presenting information that is directly relevant to the audience over providing detailed or in-depth explanations.

Recent research finding from Zhang, J. & Ho (2021) showed that the informational benefit (significance) element is the most dominant aspect of infographic content structure. Emphasizing this benefit indicates that audiences are more likely to focus on information perceived as having practical value and high relevance to their lives or specific contexts (Zhang, J. & Ho, 2021). This aligns with findings by Chang et al. (2023), which state that elements highlighting benefits have greater appeal compared to descriptive or detailed elements, as audiences tend to seek information that can be immediately implemented or contribute to decision-making. Thus, the benefit element not only serves as the core of an infographic but also determines how effectively the message influences the audience cognitively and emotionally.

These findings are further supported by other research showing that the informational benefit (significance) element plays a crucial role in shaping audience attention and interpretation of infographics. According to a study by Kim et al. (2022), infographics that emphasize the relevance of information have a higher level of cognitive appeal compared to those that focus solely on general overviews or details. The study found that audiences are more likely to retain information they perceive as relevant to their needs or personal context, especially in educational and marketing infographics. Additionally, research by Nguyen and Sun (2022) revealed that the benefit element not only enhances audience engagement but also encourages real action. For example, in infographics designed for social campaigns, audiences were more likely to take action when the benefit element was presented clearly and compellingly. This study also indicated that the effect is amplified when the benefit element is combined with simple and straightforward data visualization, reducing the cognitive load on readers.

Furthermore, a study by Hartley et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of balancing descriptive elements, details, and benefits within infographic structures. The study showed that while the benefit element tends to dominate, strong descriptive elements as introductions and supporting details remain necessary to create a cohesive and complete narrative. Audiences are more likely to trust infographics that present comprehensive information while still prioritizing the value of its benefits

These studies make it increasingly clear that effective infographics are those that can highlight the informational benefit as the core element while maintaining a balance with other supporting elements, such as overviews and detailed information. The benefit element acts as the center of gravity, capturing the audience's attention by emphasizing the relevance and practical value of the information presented, while descriptive and detailed elements provide context and clarity that enhance the audience's trust in the accuracy of the message.

This approach elevates infographics beyond being mere tools for conveying information; they also become strategic media for fostering emotional engagement and deep cognitive connections with the audience. When the informational benefits are communicated effectively, audiences not only understand the intended message but are also inspired to take action, whether in decision-making, behavior change, or forming more informed opinions. In the context of marketing, for instance, infographics designed to highlight the benefits of a product or service have a higher likelihood of influencing purchasing decisions. Similarly, in educational settings, infographics that emphasize the value of learning can enhance students' retention and understanding of the material.

Based on cognitive theory, audience perceptions of the three infographics can be grouped into two main categories: informative and communicative. The informative category refers to an infographic's ability to deliver factual, clear, and well-structured information, aiding the audience in gaining a deeper understanding of the material. Meanwhile, the communicative category reflects the extent to which an infographic can create interaction or emotional engagement between the presented information and its audience. From the analysis, audiences tended to view the three infographics as more informative than communicative. This suggests that the primary value of infographics lies in the clarity and completeness of the information they convey

Here, an interesting difference emerges in the balance of informative and communicative intentions across the infographics. Infographic 1 demonstrates a more balanced distribution, with 43.75% informative and 50% communicative intentions. In contrast, Infographic 2 is predominantly informative (81.25%), while Infographic 3 displays a combination of 68.75% informative and 31.25% communicative intentions. This pattern suggests that infographics with a more balanced integration of informative and communicative elements tend to capture the audience's attention more effectively.

However, Infographic 1 demonstrates a better balance between the two categories compared to the others. This indicates that elements supporting communication, such as engaging visuals, compelling narratives, or persuasive language, also play a crucial role in enhancing the effectiveness of infographics (Kim, S., & Park, 2024). Other research by Nguyen and Sun (2022) supports this finding, noting that infographics combining informative and communicative elements in a balanced manner tend to be more effective in capturing audience attention and improving their understanding. Furthermore, a study by Zhang & Ho (2021) highlights that communicative infographics can create an emotional connection with the audience, ultimately reinforcing the impact of the information presented. Therefore, while informative elements remain the primary focus, it is essential for infographic designers to integrate communicative elements to achieve an optimal balance between delivering facts and fostering meaningful interaction.

Further research supports the finding that balancing informative and communicative elements in infographics plays a crucial role in influencing audience engagement. For example, a study by Hartley et al. (2023) revealed that audiences are more engaged with infographics that not only convey factual information but also create an immersive and communicative visual experience. The study found that communicative elements—such as engaging visual design, strategic use of color, and interactive layouts—can enhance information retention. Communicative infographics often leverage visual metaphors or analogies to help audiences connect new information to their existing knowledge, thereby improving both understanding and memory retention.

Additionally, research by Liao and Peng (2022) highlights the importance of visual storytelling in infographics to enhance audience engagement. Communicative elements, such as visually structured narratives, can foster an emotional connection with the audience, making the information more engaging and relevant. These findings are particularly applicable in the context of Infographic 1, which demonstrates a balance between informative and communicative categories, providing evidence that the combination of these elements can create a more meaningful experience for the audience.

Furthermore, a study by Chung and Park (2023) reinforces the idea that audiences not only seek clear and easily understandable information but also prioritize a visual experience that motivates them to take action. Infographics that effectively integrate communicative elements, such as persuasive text and innovative visual illustrations, have been shown to be more successful in encouraging audiences to act or make decisions based on the provided information. Thus, infographic designs that balance informative and communicative elements not only enhance understanding but also amplify their impact on audience behavior.

Regarding feedback from the audience, which consisted of 17 students, it provided qualitative insights into the effectiveness of the infographics. Most of the audience appreciated the clarity of the *significance* element. One participant noted, "*Infografis ini sangat membantu karena langsung menunjukkan manfaat informasi tanpa terlalu banyak detail yang membingungkan.*" However, some audience members expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of *details*. As one student commented, "*Saya merasa ada beberapa informasi yang seharusnya dijelaskan lebih mendalam untuk mendukung klaim yang disajikan.*"

Infographic 1 received the most positive feedback due to its successful balance between informative and communicative elements. One student remarked, "*Desainnya menarik dan komunikatif, sehingga mudah dipahami meskipun informasinya cukup padat.*" In contrast, Infographic 2 was considered overly focused on informative elements, with minimal visual appeal and communicative narrative. Meanwhile, Infographic 3 was seen as needing further improvement in integrating these elements effectively.

Here, the success of an infographic depends on how well the structure of elements such as description, details, and significance align with the audience's intent, which falls into the categories of informative and communicative. **Description** serves as an initial introduction that helps the audience understand the context and topic in a general sense. This element is particularly relevant to audiences with an **informative intent**, who seek clarity and a structured foundation to build their basic understanding. **Details**, on the other hand, enhance the informative appeal by providing specific facts, data, or evidence, although its portion is often smaller because audiences tend to seek efficiency in information within a visual context. **Significance** emerges as the most dominant element in infographic structure due to its focus on the relevance and tangible benefits of the information for the audience. This element not only attracts audiences with an **informative intent** but also plays a crucial role in bridging emotional communication, especially for audiences with a **communicative intent**. Infographics that emphasize **significance** can inspire audiences to take action, making the presented information not only understood but also deeply felt.

In conclusion, the dominance of the *significance* element in the three infographics reflects the application of the optimal contextual effect principle from Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory (1986). This element illustrates the efforts of students to ensure that the information presented is sufficiently informative and relevant to the audience without requiring excessive processing effort. This principle aligns with the findings of Liu et al. (2022), who stated that audiences are more likely to respond to information that offers direct benefits and is relevant to their needs. However, the minimal presence of the *details* element in some infographics indicates a lack of balance between informative and communicative aspects. According to Smith and Jones (2023), a combination of descriptive and detailed elements can enhance the credibility of information and provide

additional context that helps the audience better understand the message. Such balance is exemplified in Infographic 1, which successfully integrates the principles of relevance with engaging visual and narrative elements.

The findings of this study confirmed that the principle of relevance plays a crucial role in infographic design. The dominance of the *significance* element arises because it is perceived as most relevant to the audience's needs, in line with the principle that information should be sufficiently informative without overburdening the audience's cognitive process. However, the results also highlighted that strong communicative elements can enhance the appeal of infographics, as demonstrated by Infographic 1. This supports the findings of Chung and Park (2023), Kim, S., & Park (2024), and Liao & Peng, (2022), who noted that communicative visual design can increase emotional engagement and information retention. Thus, this study emphasized that the elements within an infographic's structure must be strategically designed to balance clear information delivery with effective communication, thereby addressing audience needs and maximizing the impact of the conveyed message. A well-designed infographic serves not only as a medium for presenting information but also as a tool to build connections and motivate the audience to take action.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the structure of infographics, comprising the elements of *description*, *details*, and *significance*, significantly influences the effectiveness of visual communication. The *significance* element consistently emerges as the most dominant, indicating that students tend to prioritize the relevance and benefits of the information for the audience. These findings align with the principles of relevance theory by Sperber and Wilson (1986), which state that effective communication must be sufficiently informative and relevant to the audience's needs without overburdening their cognitive processes. However, the minimal presence of the *details* element in some infographics highlights a lack of balance between informative and communicative aspects, which can undermine the audience's trust in the accuracy and completeness of the information presented. Audiences tend to respond positively to infographics that balance informative and communicative elements, as seen in Infographic 1. This infographic not only provides relevant information but also captures the audience's attention through engaging visuals and narrative. The study underscores the importance of integrating communicative elements to enhance the appeal of infographics, strengthen information retention, and foster emotional engagement with the audience.

As a recommendation, future research could expand its focus on the impact of communicative elements across various contexts, such as marketing, education, or social campaigns. Additionally, deeper analysis is needed to explore the relationships between visual elements, text, and audience perceptions to identify

more effective design strategies. This study also encourages the development of practical guidelines for students to utilize relevance theory in creating infographics that balance informative and communicative aspects, thereby optimally meeting audience needs.

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