

# BEYOND THE CROWN: THE ROLE OF MISS GRAND INTERNATIONAL IN DRIVING SOCIAL AND CULTURAL EVOLUTION

By

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## ABSTRACT

*The research aims to understand the perceptions of Miss Grand International contestants as agents of change, as well as to explore the means by which they convey the contest's slogan in the context of peace and cultural missions. This qualitative study employed data collection methods such as interviews and literature reviews, and the data were analyzed through thematic analysis. The study discovered that contestants leverage their platform not only to showcase aesthetics but also as an instrument to foster peace and propagate cultural understanding. The study recommends further empowerment of contestants as agents of change, engaging with local and international institutions, and directing contest promotions towards social and cultural engagement. These findings have implications in the fields of education and cultural diplomacy, highlighting the pivotal role of beauty contests in facilitating social and cultural change, as well as promoting peace and intercultural understanding*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Beauty pageants, often dismissed by some as mere spectacles, play a significant role in societal understanding of beauty, culture, and communication. Through the lens of communication studies, these events present a rich tapestry of cultural expressions, identity formation, and socio-political dynamics.

While various studies have examined beauty contests and their relationship with popular culture, there is a noticeable gap in the comprehensive understanding of how beauty pageants, specifically Miss Grand International, contribute to shaping the contestants' perceptions and interpretations of the pageant's slogan concerning cultural promotion and peace. Previous research has also scarcely addressed the potential role of beauty contests as avenues for substantial social change, as raised by De Windt (2019). The potency of popular culture as a driving force for substantial social change is a pivotal point raised by de Windt (2019). The creation of collective identities, as prior research suggests, finds its breeding ground in popular culture (Kos-Lajtman & Slunjski, 2017). Its ubiquity in media presentations, arts, fashion, sports, and notably social media platforms like Instagram makes it an integral part of our modern society. The manner in which popular culture rejuvenates diverse cultural forms implies that individual countries' cultural structures may be reshaped by this collective culture (de Windt, 2019).

Furthermore, within the realm of beauty contests, it is essential to distinguish between contest and pageant. While both claim to be avenues for cultural identity formation, Iskandar (2022) further delineate their unique roles in shaping and representing collective cultural identities. The debates, discussions, and collective anxieties about these events amplify the need to understand them beyond their surface value. One such event that has garnered international attention is the Miss Grand International, originating from Thailand. Celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2022, its clarion call Stop the Wars and Violence serves as a beacon of peace in a tumultuous world. However, the journey of

such pageants is fraught with challenges. Notably, the research by Sy, Martinez, & Twinley, (2021) raises questions about the genuine empowerment of the participants and the potential hazards they might face.

While various studies have examined beauty contests and their relationship with popular culture, there is a noticeable gap in the comprehensive understanding of how beauty pageants, specifically Miss Grand International, contribute to shaping the contestants' perceptions and interpretations of the pageant's slogan concerning cultural promotion and peace. Previous research has also scarcely addressed the potential role of beauty contests as avenues for substantial social change, as raised by De Windt (2019).

Given the significant influence of beauty contests on societal norms and values, this research paper, titled *Beyond the Crown: The Role Of Miss Grand International In Driving Social And Cultural Evolution*, this study aims to explore the perception of the contestants of Miss Grand International regarding themselves as 'agents of change'. It seeks to understand how these contestants articulate the pageant's slogan in relation to its peace mission and how they communicate this slogan concerning the promotion of culture.

Therefore, the study will focus on answering these research problems:

- a) How do the contestants of Miss Grand International view themselves as "agents of change"?
- b) What strategies do the contestants of Miss Grand International use to articulate the pageant's slogan in relation to its peace mission?
- c) What strategies do the contestants of Miss Grand International use to articulate the pageant's slogan in relation to its cultural mission?

This study will seek to understand interpretation of the pageant's slogan concerning the broader themes of cultural promotion and peace.

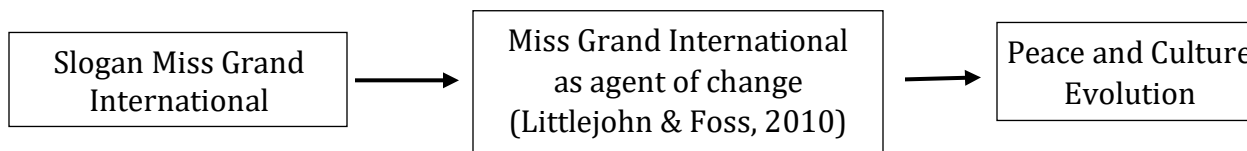


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

To holistically comprehend the communicative dynamics of this phenomenon, this research will employ Littlejohn's grand theory (2010) as it has been shown in figure 1, which offers a comprehensive framework for analysing intricate communication processes and structures. By integrating Littlejohn's theoretical perspectives, we aspire to derive a richer, more nuanced understanding of beauty pageants' societal implications and their role as agents of change.

## 2. METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative approach, as defined by Creswell (2009), aiming to explore and comprehend the meanings individuals or groups assign to social or human problems. In this context, the interpretations given by the contestants of Miss Grand International to its slogan, Stop the war and the violence, are examined. Qualitative approaches are rooted in the philosophy of social constructivism, where individuals' understanding is socially constructed, and they develop varied, multifaceted subjective meanings from their experiences.

The participants for this study consist of three winners of the Miss Grand International and one contestant representative from Indonesia. The selection employed purposive sampling, as described by Sugiyono (2013), where research samples are chosen based on specific research goals. Participants were chosen based on criteria such as having participated in the Miss Grand International competition at least once and having undergone national-level selection at least once. This ensures depth in the participants' perspectives, giving them a comprehensive understanding of the event's slogan and its conveyance strategies.

Data collection was achieved through face-to-face interviews, a technique identified by Creswell (2009) as common in qualitative research. The interviews comprised open-ended questions, allowing participants to shape the meaning of a situation, typically through discussions or interactions. Further, interpretations were supplemented by a literature review, which analyzed perspectives from existing research, magazines, newspapers, and online articles.

The analysis technique employed was narrative analysis, focusing on the examination of interview transcripts and notes. To counteract potential bias, data analysis steps from Li & Seal (2007) were applied, which include connecting statements with actual data, distinguishing participant perspectives from research categories, identifying consistent features or differences, determining necessary data for an argument, and excluding irrelevant material.

The study was conducted between October 2022 and February 2023 in Jakarta, Indonesia. Despite its comprehensive approach, the research has limitations. Due to the nature of qualitative research, participants influence

the content of the collected data, challenging objective verification. Additionally, the research solely focuses on the perspectives of Miss Grand International winners in Indonesia, limiting its generalization capability.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### Findings

##### Miss Grand International Contestants as Agent of Change

Maria Jose Lora perceives herself as an agent of change. She emphasizes her continuity as an individual who values family and dreams, despite having undergone significant growth as Miss Grand International as it was stated in an interview:

*"A person who has also worked hard, who appreciates her family, who has many dreams... Right now I remain this same person. Obviously as Miss Grand International I have grown a great deal as a human being, but my essence is exactly the same... We have visited several countries and they all face some kind of challenge when it comes to violence and conflicts. For instance, Colombia, Indonesia, and even in the Netherlands we visited refugees from Africa and the Middle East. Violence is not only about wars and bombing, it comes in different shapes, unfortunately. In my native Peru we fight domestic violence, for example. I am also an ambassador for the fight against breast cancer, another type of violence which affects and kills so many women. I've done a lot related to that. It's all about using our voices as beauty queens to inspire and to take a message of hope to people wherever they are or whatever they are facing."*

Maria understands violence in various forms, ranging from inter-country conflicts to domestic violence and breast cancer in Peru. Utilizing an approach akin to the theory of change (Anderson, 2005), Maria leverages her platform to champion social change. Her approach also reflects the diffusion of innovations theory and the coalition advocacy framework. She outlines how soft power (Nye, 2004) can be wielded by beauty queens to inspire and influence positive change globally.

Stephanie Cecilia Munthe provides a different perspective. For her, the impact of beauty queens may be more palpable among pageant enthusiasts rather than the broader society in Indonesia as it was stated in the interview:

*"Kalau untuk masyarakat Indonesia sendiri menurut saya tidak terlalu berdampak, namun lebih kepada beauty queen yg bisa distandardkan dengan beauty queen dari kontes lain dan menjadi konsumsi para penggemar pageant atau pageant lovers. Namun untuk negara tertentu yang memang memiliki isu spesifik dan sensitif, contohnya seperti Myanmar, meskipun finalisnya kemarin tidak menang, namun bisa berdampak dan membawa perubahan bagi negaranya di mata global."*

*Translation: "For the Indonesian people themselves, I don't think it has too much impact, but more on the beauty queen who can be standardised with beauty queens from other contests and become the consumption of pageant fans or pageant lovers. But for certain countries that do have specific and sensitive issues, for example like Myanmar, even though the finalist yesterday did not win, it can have an impact and bring change to the country in the global eyes."*

Stephanie highlights how beauty queens can serve as a benchmark for other contests and capture the attention of pageant fans, in line with the Usages and Gratification Theory (Kasirye, 2021). Moreover, she speaks about the significant potential beauty queens possess in altering global narratives, especially in countries with sensitive issues like Myanmar. This echoes the concept of agenda-setting (Bali & Halpin, 2021) and showcases how collaboration with international bodies, akin to public diplomacy (Cull, 2008), can amplify the peace mission.

Valentina Figuera too, sees herself as an agent of change, emphasizing how her role as Miss Grand International has enabled her to partake in social activities and influence change. She operationalizes transformational agency (Dewey, 2008) in her actions, and her influence mirrors the concept of Soft Power (Nye, 2004). Valentina values her learning opportunities, aligning with the notion of cultural intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2003).

In conclusion, the Miss Grand Internationals interviewed believe that as beauty queens, they have a platform that they can use to inspire others and promote positive change. They recognise that they are agents of change and are committed to using their roles to affect positive change.

##### Contest Slogan Delivery Strategy in Relation to Peace Mission

In investigating the strategies employed by participants of the Miss Grand International pageant to convey the contest's slogan in relation to its peace mission, the study discerned several intriguing approaches based on interview transcripts.

Maria Jose Lora commented as follows.

*"We have visited several countries and they all face some kind of challenge when it comes to violence and conflicts. For instance, Colombia, Indonesia, and even in the Netherlands we visited refugees from Africa and*

*the Middle East. Violence is not only about wars and bombing, it comes in different shapes, unfortunately. In my native Peru, we fight domestic violence, for example. I am also an ambassador for the fight against breast cancer, another type of violence which affects and kills so many women. I've done a lot related to that. It's all about using our voices as beauty queens to inspire and to take a message of hope to people wherever they are or whatever they are facing."*

From her statement, Maria emphasizes direct engagement with communities as a primary method to disseminate the Miss Grand International's peace mission. This approach resonates with Tkalc Verčič, Verčič & Laco (2019) co-orientational communication theory, emphasizing understanding other perspectives and reaching a consensus in communication. Maria's broader perspective on violence, encompassing breast cancer, domestic violence, and wars, aligns with Johan Galtung's (1969) structural violence theory. Finally, her use of her platform as a beauty queen to inspire change connects with Papacharissi's (2002) Platform Theory.

Stephanie Cecilia Munthe suggested as follows:

*"Perlu bekerjasama dengan lembaga2 internasional yang terakreditasi, misalnya dengan UN atau Unicef, supaya lebih dinilai memaknai misinya."*

Translation: *"It's essential to collaborate with accredited international institutions, such as the UN or UNICEF, to make the mission more meaningful."*

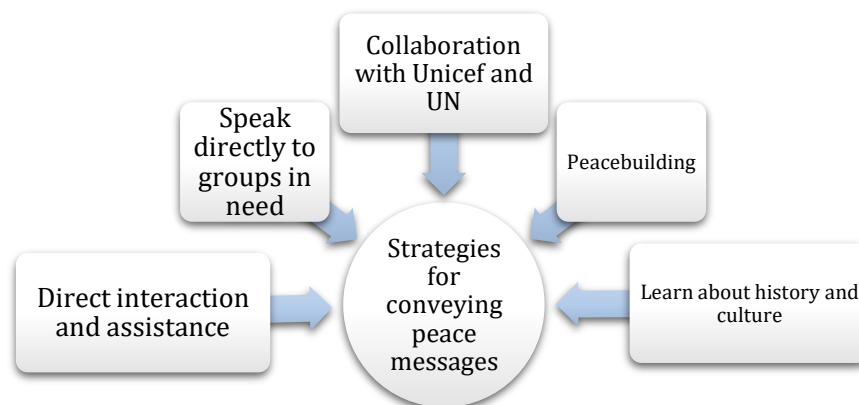
Interpreting Stephanie's views, partnering with accredited international organizations like the UN or UNICEF emerges as crucial in communicating the Miss Grand International's peace mission. This mirrors Anne-Marie Slaughter's (2004) notion of networked governance, where multiple entities collaborate for a common goal.

Ariska Putri Pertiwi conveyed as follows.

*"The mission of Miss Grand International is 'Stop The war and violence', where we advocate peace and harmony among living beings. I visited refugees in Jordan; even our minimal actions, like providing them with donations, life motivation, and their necessities, meant so much to them."*

Ariska highlights a direct approach in fostering change and promoting the pageant's peace mission. This reflects the principles of public diplomacy and direct action (Cull, 2008), whereby she directly interacts and offers support to communities like the Jordanian refugees.

Lastly, an excerpt about Valentina Figuera revealed as follows. Valentina visited the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Cambodia, enhancing her understanding of the country's history and culture. She also participated in charitable work at a children's hospital. Valentina's strategy suggests a commitment to cultural immersion and learning to promote peace. This aligns with Joseph Nye's (2010) soft power theory, wherein influence arises from attraction and cultural appeal. By engaging in cultural immersion, Valentina not only deepens her understanding but fosters intercultural relationships, promoting peace and mutual understanding (Peterson, 2003).



**Figure 2 Strategies for conveying peace messages**

In conclusion, there are some strategies used by the respondents to deliver peace mission as it is summarized in this figure 2.

#### **Contest Slogan Delivery Strategy in Relation to Cultural Mission**

The research aimed at uncovering the strategies implemented in aligning contest slogans with the cultural mission. The findings revealed two primary strategies: promotion and cultural education, evident from the subsequent interview excerpts. Stephanie Cecilia Munthe expressed.

*"Bisa saja di sesi national costume, tapi tidak dominan ke budaya. Ketika sesi national costume, instead of telling the participant's country, bisa diberikan deskripsi atau katalog or ecatalog bagi penonton terkait makna national costume setiap peserta."*

*Translation: "For the national costume session, instead of merely mentioning the participant's country, a description or catalogue or e-catalogue could be provided to the audience explaining the significance of each participant's national costume."*

From the interview, Munthe emphasizes the importance of platforms like beauty pageants, including Miss Grand International, in promoting and educating people about culture via visual representations such as national costumes. She believes that these outfits carry a cultural and historical significance beyond just aesthetics. Drawing on semiotics, introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Peirce, every sign (in this context, the national costume) comprises a signifier (the physical form) and a signified (the represented concept or meaning) (Chandler, 2007). Additionally, Munthe stressed the significance of cultural education. As per Banks (2008), cultural education holds the potential to boost understanding and appreciation for cultural diversity while aiding the formation of individual and group cultural identities. Beauty contests can act as a reservoir of cultural education, promoting intercultural understanding through explanations about national costumes' meanings.

Ariska Putri Pertiwi stated as follows.

*"Apart from that, we are also involved in many other projects like cultural promotion, including promoting Indonesian culture in different countries. In Thailand, I visited numerous provinces to participate in charitable activities with Miss Grand Thailand, while also promoting Indonesian culture."*

Pertiwi's interview displays a hands-on approach to cultural promotion. Her involvement in charity events as a means to directly promote Indonesian culture aligns with the idea that first-hand experience and active involvement in a cultural setting are often needed for an authentic and profound cultural understanding. Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) describes those increased experiences and understanding of other cultures can elevate intercultural sensitivity and competency. According to this model, individuals with direct and deep experiences with other cultures, as demonstrated by Pertiwi, tend to exhibit heightened empathy and understanding. She also portrays a desire to share cultural values, resonating with intercultural communication theories (Khukhlaev, Gritsenko, Pavlova, Tkachenko, Usubian & Shorokhova (2020), emphasizing the importance of interaction for understanding and valuing cultural diversity. Pertiwi's efforts showcase the promotion and sharing of Indonesian cultural values through personal and impactful visits and charity.

Valentina Figuera shared her experiences saying she traveled to various nations, immersing herself in their culture. For example, in Thailand, she participated in the Loi Krathong festival, and in Indonesia, she savored the food, learned to make a local sauce, and engaged in dialogues about the nation. From her interview, Figuera accentuates a practical approach for understanding and promoting cultural principles of visited countries. Not only did she participate in local cultural activities, but she also sought theoretical knowledge. This emphasis on learning through direct experience has been a research subject in fields like anthropology and cultural studies (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020). Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory suggests that involvement in processes incorporating direct experience, reflection, abstract thinking, and action allows students to learn most effectively. Participating actively in local cultural activities enables a deeper understanding of that culture, which can then be authentically and comprehensively conveyed to audiences.



**Figure 3 Strategy for cultural missions** In conclusion, there are some strategies used by the participants to deliver the cultural missions.



## Discussion

### Miss Grand International Contestants as Agent of Change

Upon analyzing interview data of three winners and one runner-up from Indonesia's beauty pageant, it's evident that Maria Jose Lora, Stephanie Cecilia Munthe, and Valentina Figuera view themselves as agents of change, albeit in varying capacities and contexts. The social sciences and psychology literature introduce the idea of change agents, which pertains to individuals or groups that facilitate, guide, or instigate change within organizations or societies (Blustein, Kenny, Autin & Duffy, 2019). Maria Jose Lora emphasizes her role in combating various forms of violence and conflict, utilizing her Miss Grand International platform to inspire and instill hope. This aligns with Li, Lu, Ma & Wang (2021) who found that influential individuals with platforms can serve as effective change agents by inspiring others and modeling desired behaviors.

Stephanie Cecilia Munthe, while recognizing herself as an agent of change, is primarily interested in the beauty pageant fan community and nations with specific issues rather than the broader Indonesian society. This suggests that change agents often operate within specific contexts and might have more profound impacts on certain groups over others (Rogers, 2003). Valentina Figuera's frequent travels and social activism amplify her role as a change agent. Her physical presence and engagement in various activities suggest that change can be influenced in diverse ways, including through direct participation.

Looking from the perspective of Theories of Human Communication, communication is a complex and multidimensional process that involves various factors and dynamics, including message, channel, feedback, and context. Miss Grand International contestants as "Agents of Change" can be seen through the lens of symbolic-interactionism communication theory. According to symbolic-interactionism theory, social reality is constructed through social interactions that take place through the use of symbols, including words, gestures, and other objects (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010).

Beauty contestants, with their large platforms, have the ability to create new symbols or give new meanings to existing symbols in society. As such, the pageants have the ability to alter social reality and drive change. Maria Jose Lora, Stephanie Cecilia Munthe, and Valentina Figuera, in their capacity as beauty contestants, understand the symbolic power of their status. They utilise the symbols associated with that status to convey their message and drive change. As Littlejohn (2010) explains, the meanings of symbols are not fixed; they are always in the process of negotiation and redefinition. The three contestants, through their actions and words, endeavour to negotiate the meaning of the beauty contestant symbol to be more in line with the social and cultural mission they support.

These three women not only communicate through words, but also through their actions and behaviour. From the perspective of nonverbal communication theory, their behaviours—such as social trips, involvement in campaigns, or discussions on certain issues—serve as powerful messages that drive change.

In conclusion, when viewed through the lens of Stephen W. Littlejohn's Theories of Human Communication, this research sheds light on the intricate and sophisticated ways in which beauty contestants employ communication theory, encompassing both verbal and nonverbal channels, to drive social and cultural change. These contestants, as evident from the findings, are far more than mere performers; they are strategic communicators who understand the nuanced power of communication and how to leverage this power to enact meaningful change. They are adept at crafting and delivering messages that resonate with diverse audiences, utilizing the platform that the pageant provides to advocate for peace, cultural understanding, and positive social transformation. Recognizing the potent influence of their words and actions, they strategically navigate the complex landscape of global communication. They are acutely aware of how different forms of communication — be it a spoken statement, a symbolic gesture, or an expressive performance — can translate into impactful messages that contribute to broader societal narratives. In this capacity, they emerge not simply as beauty queens, but as influential agents of change who employ communication as a tool to inspire, challenge, and engage with society on both a local and global scale. In a world where communication is so central to our shared human experience, this research underscores the vital role that such public figures can play in shaping the course of social and cultural evolution.

### Contest Slogan Delivery Strategy in Relation to Peace Mission

Contestants like Maria Jose Lora, Stephanie Cecilia Munthe, Ariska Putri Pertiwi, and Valentina Figuera demonstrate various approaches to convey the peace mission of the Miss Grand International. These methodologies encompass a wide spectrum of theories and practices that advocate for peace and conflict resolution. Maria Jose Lora taps into her international travel experiences, fostering direct relationships with locals. Intriguingly, she interlinks her role as an ambassador in the fight against breast cancer with the broader peace mission. This mirrors the peacebuilding from below or grassroots peacebuilding approach (Trajano, 2020), emphasizing community involvement in peace processes. Stephanie Cecilia Munthe recognizes the potency of organizational collaboration to realize peace objectives. She envisions partnerships with globally recognized institutions, such as the UN or UNICEF, renowned for their dedication to global peace and human welfare. Ariska Putri Pertiwi adopts a direct communication strategy with groups

in need, like the refugees in Jordan. This aligns with the theory suggesting that fostering direct interactions with communities affected by conflicts can enhance understanding and empathy, two critical components for peacebuilding (Ali Al-Hassani, 2021). Valentina Figuera integrates social work participation with learning about the histories and cultures of the nations she visits. This approach underpins the belief that understanding history and culture can facilitate mediation and conflict resolution.

These findings unveil the application of peace theories and actions in real-world scenarios. Contestants in beauty contests, such as Miss Grand International, utilize diverse means to champion peace. Each leverages their unique strategy, enriching the multifaceted avenues for advocating peace.

One of the useful approaches in Theories of Human Communication by Stephen W. Littlejohn (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010) is understanding how individuals and groups interact and interpret each other. Central to this theory is the interpretation process, where communicated messages are deciphered not just in their literal essence but also within broader cultural and social contexts. In the Miss Grand International context, peace slogans' communication isn't solely reliant on words but also actions and interactions between contestants, communities, and organizations. As emphasized by Littlejohn, communication meanings are dynamic, shaped by the continual sender-receiver interaction. For instance, Maria Jose Lora, by intertwining her breast cancer ambassador role with the peace mission, conveys more than just peace – she symbolizes solidarity, empathy, and cross-cultural cooperation. Littlejohn's perspective would illustrate how diverse audiences might perceive this message based on their cultural and social contexts.

Similarly, while Stephanie Cecilia Munthe speaks of collaboration with entities like the UN or UNICEF, from Littlejohn's perspective, the focus would be on how varied audiences perceive this message. For instance, global perceptions of these organizations might differ significantly from specific local contexts. The community-centric and history/culture-based approaches of Ariska Putri Pertiwi and Valentina Figuera also relay intricate messages, potentially bearing different meanings for varied audiences.

Drawing from the framework of Littlejohn's theory, it is essential to recognize that the communication process extends far beyond the mere transmission of a message. According to Littlejohn and Foss (2010), the reception, interpretation, and application of a message in various contexts are equally paramount. This perspective emphasizes the significance of grasping and deeply considering the cultural and social contexts in which communication occurs. For initiatives like Miss Grand International, which aim for a global impact, this theoretical approach is particularly relevant. It suggests that effective communication isn't just about crafting and delivering a message; it is about understanding how that message will be received and interpreted by different audiences around the world. In this sense, the Miss Grand International pageant isn't just broadcasting a message of peace and cultural unity; it is engaging in a complex, multifaceted dialogue with international audiences, where cultural nuances and social contexts play a crucial role in how that message is understood and applied.

The participants in the Miss Grand International pageant exhibit a proactive approach in promoting peace by employing various strategies. They utilise their visibility to draw attention to significant matters and engage in discourse related to peacebuilding. Additionally, they advocate for collaboration and action at both local and global levels. The level of participation demonstrated in this context is not only superficial, but rather signifies a profound and authentic dedication to actively participating in peace missions. It is quite probable that the individuals involved will continue to uphold this commitment in their future endeavours and obligations, regardless of whether they are in the public or private sphere.

The implications of this premise are extensive. Firstly, it serves to strengthen the potential of beauty pageants such as Miss Grand International as distinctive and influential platforms for the advancement of peace, thereby challenging the frequently superficial perception associated with these occasions. Furthermore, it proposes the possibility of contestants being acknowledged and employed as official peace ambassadors, engaging in long-term collaborations with international organisations that are committed to promoting peace and resolving conflicts. This has the potential to bolster the credibility and extend the reach of their messages and actions, so enhancing the effectiveness and impact of the peace advocacy component of these pageants on a worldwide level.

#### **Contest Slogan Delivery Strategy in Relation to Cultural Mission**

The study revealed that representatives like Maria Jose Lora, Stephanie Cecilia Munthe, Ariska Putri Pertiwi, and Valentina Figuera employed distinct strategies to promote cultural missions in the Miss Grand International contest. Stephanie Cecilia Munthe emphasized refining the significance and history of national costumes in beauty competitions. Her strategy on cultural education aligns with Gay's (2002) assertion that cultural education can crucially enhance the understanding and appreciation of cultures.

On the other hand, Ariska Putri Pertiwi opted for a more direct approach by engaging in activities across different countries to promote Indonesian culture. Such an approach resonates with the notion of cultural diplomacy, suggesting that cultural dissemination can be a tool for communication and influence (Cummings, 2003). Notably,

Ariska's endeavors not only promoted Indonesian culture but also fostered relations between Indonesia and other nations.

Conversely, Valentina Figuera chose to immerse herself directly in the local cultures of every nation she visited. This reflects the theory of cultural immersion, which proposes that direct experiences with other cultures can enrich understanding and appreciation (Deardorff, 2006). By participating in local traditions, foods, and dialogues, Valentina bolstered cultural understanding and appreciation, a core component of Miss Grand International's cultural mission.

The study underscores how methods of cultural communication influence the ways individuals establish and promote cultural objectives. It highlights the significance of cultural adaptation and sensitivity in bolstering intercultural understanding and appreciation—a core tenet in the cultural mission of Miss Grand International. The four examined Miss Grand International representatives utilized varying approaches to endorse the cultural mission, underlining the role each person plays in crafting and expressing both their own and others' cultural identities. This research might offer insights for professionals in cultural diplomacy and education on diverse methods to enhance cultural understanding and appreciation.

Moreover, the study also elaborates on how strategies of cultural education, cultural diplomacy, and cultural immersion can be practically implemented. For instance, Stephanie Cecilia Munthe's approach illuminates how cultural education can be integrated into popular events like beauty contests. Meanwhile, the strategies adopted by Ariska Putri Pertiwi and Valentina Figuera illustrate how cultural diplomacy and immersion can be achieved through direct engagements and participating in local traditions. Broadly, the research suggests that popular events, like beauty contests, can serve as pivotal platforms for augmenting intercultural understanding and appreciation. This may pave the way for further research on the role of other popular events in supporting cultural missions.

In the framework of Littlejohn's theory (2010), understanding communication processes encompasses how individuals and groups create, interpret, and negotiate meanings. To grasp the communication strategies employed by the Miss Grand International contestants in conveying their cultural missions, one can examine several key concepts from Littlejohn's perspective. Firstly, the constructivist concept stresses that meanings are forged through social interactions. Stephanie Cecilia Munthe, by focusing on cultural education via national costumes, aims to craft new meanings or expand existing cultural symbols. In this context, cultural education isn't just about conveying information but shaping how individuals perceive and value other cultures. Secondly, Littlejohn also delves into intercultural communication, which explores the interplay between culture and communication. Ariska Putri Pertiwi, through her promotion of Indonesian culture abroad, acts as an intercultural intermediary. She employs communication methods to negotiate and foster understanding between differing cultures, reflecting Littlejohn's understanding of communication as a dynamic, continuous process. Thirdly, the participative or direct experience communication approach, championed by Valentina Figuera, highlights the importance of context and firsthand experiences in shaping meaning. From Littlejohn's perspective, communication isn't solely through words but also via actions, interactions, and shared experiences.

The emphasis on cultural adaptation and sensitivity in this study aligns with Littlejohn's communication approach, where intercultural understanding and empathy are accentuated. Each contestant, through their distinct approaches, mirrors the communication principles advocated by Littlejohn: meaning formation through interaction, the mediator's role in intercultural communication, and the significance of direct experiences in cultural comprehension.

This study demonstrates the deliberate and planned methods employed by representatives participating in the Miss Grand International pageant, such as Maria Jose Lora, Stephanie Cecilia Munthe, Ariska Putri Pertiwi, and Valentina Figuera, in order to advance cultural missions. The approaches discussed encompass a variety of strategies, including cultural education, shown by Stephanie Cecilia Munthe's emphasis on the historical and cultural importance of national costumes. Additionally, cultural diplomacy and direct contact with diverse cultures are demonstrated by the efforts of Ariska Putri Pertiwi and Valentina Figuera. The individuals involved in the beauty contest are not just serving as participants, but rather actively undertaking the responsibilities of cultural ambassadors. The contestants are utilising the platform offered by the pageant to facilitate education, foster cultural diplomacy, and actively participate in diverse cultural experiences. By engaging in such behaviours, individuals are actively participating in a more comprehensive and intricate discourse surrounding cultural values and comprehensions. This aligns with Littlejohn's viewpoint on the significance of communication in forming meanings through social interactions and firsthand encounters.

The implications of this understanding are varied and complex. Firstly, it posits the notion of a transforming capacity inherent in beauty pageants, wherein they can be viewed as platforms that extend beyond the display of physical attractiveness. Instead, they serve as vehicles for the advancement of cultural enlightenment, diplomatic endeavours, and immersive experiences. The act of reframing situates pageants such as Miss Grand International as



culturally relevant occurrences that actively contribute to the global discourse and foster mutual comprehension. Furthermore, it can be inferred that participants in these pageants has the capacity to serve as influential cultural envoys, capable of cultivating favourable international connections. The research emphasises that their work goes beyond mere performance and possesses the necessary substance and depth to actively contribute to the advancement of intercultural understanding.

Moreover, the research findings demonstrate the possibility of incorporating cultural education into widely popular and extensively disseminated events, so proposing a novel and influential approach to cultural diplomacy. The contenders' utilisation of many methodologies may offer valuable insights and inspiration for practitioners in the fields of cultural diplomacy and education. These approaches have the potential to serve as effective models for promoting widespread intercultural understanding and fostering appreciation. In essence, this has the potential to precipitate a more extensive societal transformation, wherein widely attended events are progressively perceived and structured as platforms for substantive cultural interchange and enlightenment, thus contributing to the cultivation of worldwide cohesion and concord.

This study demonstrates the deliberate and planned methods employed by representatives participating in the Miss Grand International pageant, such as Maria Jose Lora, Stephanie Cecilia Munthe, Ariska Putri Pertiwi, and Valentina Figuera, in order to advance cultural missions. The approaches discussed encompass a variety of strategies, including cultural education, shown by Stephanie Cecilia Munthe's emphasis on the historical and cultural importance of national costumes. Additionally, cultural diplomacy and direct contact with diverse cultures are demonstrated by the efforts of Ariska Putri Pertiwi and Valentina Figuera. The individuals involved in the beauty contest are not just serving as participants, but rather actively undertaking the responsibilities of cultural ambassadors. The contestants are utilising the platform offered by the pageant to facilitate education, foster cultural diplomacy, and actively participate in diverse cultural experiences. By engaging in such behaviours, individuals are actively participating in a more comprehensive and intricate discourse surrounding cultural values and comprehensions. This aligns with Littlejohn's viewpoint on the significance of communication in forming meanings through social interactions and firsthand encounters.

**Implication:** The implications of this understanding are varied and complex. Firstly, it posits the notion of a transforming capacity inherent in beauty pageants, wherein they can be viewed as platforms that extend beyond the display of physical attractiveness. Instead, they serve as vehicles for the advancement of cultural enlightenment, diplomatic endeavours, and immersive experiences. The act of reframing situates pageants such as Miss Grand International as culturally relevant occurrences that actively contribute to the global discourse and foster mutual comprehension. Furthermore, it can be inferred that participants in these pageants has the capacity to serve as influential cultural envoys, capable of cultivating favourable international connections. The research emphasises that their work goes beyond mere performance and possesses the necessary substance and depth to actively contribute to the advancement of intercultural understanding.

Moreover, the research findings demonstrate the possibility of incorporating cultural education into widely popular and extensively disseminated events, so proposing a novel and influential approach to cultural diplomacy. The contenders' utilisation of many methodologies may offer valuable insights and inspiration for practitioners in the fields of cultural diplomacy and education. These approaches have the potential to serve as effective models for promoting widespread intercultural understanding and fostering appreciation. In essence, this has the potential to precipitate a more extensive societal transformation, wherein widely attended events are progressively perceived and structured as platforms for substantive cultural interchange and enlightenment, thus contributing to the cultivation of worldwide cohesion and concord.

The study into the roles of Miss Grand International contestants underscores their potential not merely as beauty symbols but as agents of change and platforms advocating peace and culture on a global scale. Beauty pageants, often primarily perceived as platforms emphasizing aesthetics, can also serve as impactful vehicles for fostering peace and cultural goals.

Distinct strategies were employed by various contestants, each tailoring their approach to their own strengths, beliefs, and objectives. Maria Jose Lora leveraged direct interaction, offering a broader perspective on violence issues and utilizing her position to amplify messages of peace. Meanwhile, Stephanie Cecilia Munthe's strategy revolved around collaboration, particularly showcasing national costumes in the Miss Grand International. This approach served dual purposes: emphasizing the beauty and intricacy of the costumes, and educating audiences on their historical and cultural significance. Ariska Putri Pertiwi's strategy veered more towards a directive assistance approach, intertwining personal interaction and charitable endeavors. She opted for philanthropic efforts to promote Indonesian culture in various nations, illustrating how culture and charity can interlink to produce positive global perceptions. Lastly, Valentina Figuera adopted a holistic approach that encompassed understanding local cultures and engaging in social

work. Her emphasis on immersing herself in local cultural activities in each country she visited, such as participating in festivals and sampling local cuisines, showcased a genuine interest in cultural exchange and appreciation.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The findings illuminate that contestant of Miss Grand International see themselves not merely as beauty queens but as catalysts for global change. Their participation transcends physical beauty, making them spokespersons for peace and cultural advocates. Their roles as agents of change manifest in their direct interactions, broader perspectives on pressing issues, and use of their prominent positions to emphasize messages of peace and cultural understanding. In relation to the peace mission, different contestants showcased varied strategies. Maria Jose Lora chose direct interaction and broadened views on violence, leveraging her position to vocalize peace messages. Stephanie Cecilia Munthe leaned on collaboration as her strategy, while Ariska Putri Pertiwi combined directive assistance with personal interaction to champion her message of peace. On the front of cultural mission, Stephanie Cecilia Munthe accentuated the importance and history of national costumes, transforming the Miss Grand International stage into an educational platform. Ariska Putri Pertiwi, meanwhile, utilized a charitable approach, promoting Indonesian culture through philanthropic activities in diverse nations. Valentina Figuera's strategy was immersion, diving deep into the cultural activities of every country she visited – whether that was participating in local festivals or tasting regional delicacies.

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