

Lauren Boucher
Student 1902263 – Graphic Design

Influence, Responsibility and Authenticity
Student Number: 1902263
BA Hons Graphic Design
2459 Words
Donna Williams

Research into Practice

Introduction

During this essay I aim to explore three topics that relate in various ways my field as a designer. Within the exploration of these key words, I intend to discuss their relevance and appearances within the scope of graphic design and the role of a designer as a concept. Upon the completion of this essay I aim to create complex and thoughtful inquiries into not only my personal role as a designer but industry wide.

Influence

A designer's role in the world is too often overlooked and underestimated, dismissed by those outside of the field as easy and unimportant. Despite the fact design determines a vast number of factors in the everyday person's life that they are often unaware of. Design can be found within everything, and it is therefore everywhere; 'Design is thus ubiquitous.' (Etokhana, 2019). From the accessibility of their apps to their traffic signs, a designer has methodically dissected what influence that design will ideally have on their perceived audience. Many designers may not even understand the extent their designs impact the audiences themselves. The role of the designer being all powerful over the consumer as it 'determines the quality of their life, which the designer has the power to transform.' (Caruso and Frankel, 2010).

Good design has consistently been a known key commercial asset, but the extent of its value is being increasingly recognised as time goes on. When presented to audiences, high design aesthetics can inspire 'positive emotions' and even 'improve product value from a neural science perspective.' (Shi, Huo and Hou, 2021). Consumer behaviour as a whole is manipulated by companies through various means that often rely on designers to be executed. Each and every company has their own individual brand image, which is regarded as 'the key driver of brand equity,' which 'has an influence on consumer behavior.' (Hrablik Chovanová, Ivanovich Korshunov and Babčanová, 2015). When you consider that brand image is often curated from brand content such as advertisements, media and products, you realise this responsibility again falls into the hands of the designer. Packaging is considered one of the 'most valuable tool in today's marketing communications' (M. Deliya and J. Parmar, 2012) for influencing consumer behaviour as they control elements such as colour, wrapper design and innovation that 'have the ultimate effect on consumer choice' (M. Deliya and J. Parmar, 2012). This mass influence when implemented successfully can lead to the development of entire new societal norms. De Beers Diamond Corporation are pioneers of this social manipulation. Their famed advertisement campaigns that began circulating just after World War Two, created the entire notion that an engagement ring must equate to one month's salary. After 'establishing the salary calculation, years of De Beers marketing inextricably linked the diamond to the concept of an engagement ring.' Which astronomically impacted the diamond market and influenced western ideologies surrounding engagement for the rest of history.

Proving design influences people beyond their role as consumers and can go as far to have fundamental societal impacts. Historically, design has been used as one of the most effective tools in shaping societal behaviours. Famously during World War Two, painters throughout Europe and America were commissioned to create poster campaigns by governments, with hopes of convincing those at home to help with the war efforts. One of the most prevalent examples being America's Rosie the Riveter poster featuring the slogan "We can do it", spoken from the empowering imagery of Rosie; a strong working woman. With the intentions of persuading women to join the aircraft and munitions industries, this campaign significantly impacted the war with its success, seeing figures of women 'making up 65 percent of the industry's total workforce (compared to just 1 percent in the pre-war years).' (Rosie the Riveter, 2021) Further than that, Rosie became a symbol of female empowerment that is still relevant and recognisable in society to this day. Underpinning the importance of design as it has crucial influence on history, politics and social movements.

This influence can be exploited when used by those with selfish or malicious intentions of course and the influence of a designer's work can only go as far as the intentions behind it. The beauty industry and alcohol industries have been manipulating audiences through these means for countless years. There are a whole variety of factors that mean a designer's work may have unintended or unfortunate consequences that lead people to question where a designers responsibilities begin and end.

Responsibility

The extent of influence of a designers' work has, leads us to question whether there is a moral responsibility as a designer to ensure their message creates good within the world. As we begin to understand the real lasting impact design has on the earth and what factors need to be examined for design to be considered ethical?

Firstly, what even is considered good design? Often in this context, good design 'promotes ethical and cultural values, such education, sustainability, democracy and so on' (J. Thompson and Kumar, 2022). These developments have not gone unnoticed by the design community and those who are morally inclined have begun to introduce ethics into their work as a result. New age designers are 'using their knowledge and skills to encourage healthier lifestyles, increase accessibility to resources, and improve the Earth and human welfare' (Gruden, 2016) Adrian Shaughnessy in his 2005 book 'How to be a Graphic Designer, Without Losing Your Soul' introduces the idea there are two approaches a designer could take when handling this dilemma. Firstly, those who view graphic design's role in the world simply as a 'problem serving business tool' (Shaughnessy, 2005) and therefore a designer's emotions have no value or relevance. Secondly, those who believe graphic design 'has cultural and social dimension, and its effectiveness is enhanced not diminished by personal expression' (Shaughnessy, 2005) whilst still withholding the responsibility to communicate information.

Many new approaches to the second viewpoint have come about as a result of this newfound awareness and the prioritisation of sustainable design has seen more economic, social and cultural considerations since. 'Social Design' was the name given one of these new design philosophies. Social Design believes the 'principal objective is to meet the needs of underserved or marginalized populations.' (V. Margolin and S. Margolin, 2002). A popular ideology that prioritised leaving a positive impression on the world through a designer's craft and assuring no one is disadvantaged as a result of their work. Another theory originating for the need for ethical design is Human-centered design, which 'brings empathy into the equation.' A similar ideology to social design, where 'The goal is to focus first on finding a problem that needs to be solved and building a solution from the empathetic perspective of the user affected by the problem.' (S. Brenchley, 2021). This time, actively seeking those that design may positively influence the lives of. If designers accept this as this design philosophy, they must then go forth accept responsibility for their designs and the required research to implement this understanding into their design. Effective social design can 'only be achieved by understanding the user (and their needs) within their social and economic context.' (Gruden, 2016) Sufficient research on those they intent to positively influence goes beyond the information readily available to them and may go as far to 'consider the active involvement of the user in the design process'. Elevating the role of the designer beyond its usual requirements to ensure a positive result. Society is often seen holding designers responsible for the clients they choose themselves and how that is therefore a direct reflection of their personal ideologies and opinions.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, approaching design from a completely communication-based perspective will obviously allow for advantages in the already saturated design market against those who do not. It is pointed out by Shaughnessy, how those who choose the first design philosophy immediately are put at an advantage, as they are willing to fulfil design jobs that the second designer would have turned down for ethical or personal reasons. (Shaughnessy, 2005) It is often argued this viewpoint is justified for various reasons that are beyond that of the designer's personal opinions. Graphic designers hold responsibilities 'towards employers, towards clients or peers.' (Mietkiewicz, 2016) That the role is ultimately a paid service that has required deliverables. It may even be considered 'arduous to fulfil all of them, and at the same time consider society as a whole' (Mietkiewicz, 2016). Furthermore, as a paid service many designers rely on as a liveable income,

Shaughnessy and other designers point out it is a luxury to be able to turn down clients and some people may not financially have a choice. (Shaughnessy, 2005). To add to the list of downfalls, missing design opportunities 'limits the chances of personal development and gaining the skills through meeting and working with wide range of people.' (J. Thompson and Kumar, 2022). Seemingly making the argument that social design only hurts the designer and benefits those with looser morals.

Although design and morality for some people may be two considered two separate elements, more and more designers are looking at the impact they have on the world whether that be positive or negative. As many designers do have a moral compass, the responsibility to support socially beneficial clients falls on their hands. Although that is often easier said than done in today's climate.

Authenticity

Benefitting society is the goal for many designers when they set their work out into the world, so the developments of social design and human based design are no surprise. Although many designers have this desire in mind when choosing clients, another burden that must be considered is the authenticity behind the positive messages they being paid to communicate. Perceived social awareness from corporations is valued at an all-time high and this is relevant as designers are the ones hired to communicate this. Designers who want to contribute more to society could be asked to go further and their work from clients who may be riding the wave of social conscious advertising.

Forbes actively encouraged this method of marketing this year alone, claiming that 'Companies looking to build brand loyalty and establish a trusting relationship with their customers can benefit from being transparent and empathetic in their advertising.' (Kowalewicz, 2022) as well as helping them to 'stand out and become more recognizable among consumers against their competition' (Kowalewicz, 2022). These of course are valuable pieces of advice as they go onto stress the importance of authenticity when executing this style of advertising. 'Conscious Capitalism' is the phrase coined for these brands 'who signal to consumers that they actively engage in furthering important progressive causes' (J. Thompson and Kumar, 2022) without actively aiding the causes in any or significant enough means.

This faux representation specifically of minority groups has become so increasingly apparent it too, has its own word, tokenism. Dictionary.com defines tokenism as 'the practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort to do a particular thing, especially by recruiting a small number of people from under-represented groups in order to give the appearance of sexual or racial equality within a workforce.'. A surge of the use of this word often appears in June, also known as Pride Month. Where brands can fall victim to 'Rainbow Washing', as a result their designers and advertisers are taken down with them. Commercialism and tokenism go hand in hand and there have been many famous advertising campaigns to support this notion.

Dove's 2004 'Real Beauty' campaign is a great example when analysing brand authenticity. A notable advertising campaign that caused much controversy amongst feminist and social groups, with the supposed aim being to poke back at the unrealistic beauty standards that have been idolised over the last few decades.

Featuring 'real' women, the campaign modelled much more everyday looking people in their underwear to promote a new trend of 'real beauty'. However, it was found 'Participants in both experimental groups reported more negative body-focused anxiety and body weight dissatisfaction after watching the programs.' (Celebre, 2014) Despite mixed audience reviews, the campaign was still hailed as a pinnacle success for women's empowerment by many media outlets as one of the first of its kind. The authenticity of the campaign was brought into question when Dove's sister brand 'Fair & Lovely, a popular brand marketed primarily to dark-skinned women, promotes a desire for "lighter skin".' Which of course, heavily goes against Dove's message of 'real beauty'. (Celebre, 2014) These campaigns have detrimental real world impacts on those they are supposedly aiming to help, damaging people's lives through misinformation or misrepresentation to the public.

Campaigns much like this are still happening today and navigating the advertising world as a designer is only going to become more tedious to navigate as brands get wiser to these tricks. It could be

When you consider the common elements of all three topics, consider the role of the designer in society. The responsibilities vary greatly depending on the perspective of the person you are considering. A designer has a responsibility to themselves first and foremost, as a creative individual. A designer has their own opinion of their place in the world and what they hope their work will achieve. Then to the client, as an employee hired to carry out design-based job. Without clients the design industry would simply not exist and thus the role of the designer would be null and void. Finally, the influence design has on the it's intended audience and beyond means the designer holds a level of responsibility as a human being. it's fair to say the designer position in the 21st century has much more responsibility than in years previous. With developments such as the internet and social media, the scope of influence design has on people is larger than ever and so is the field as a result. Inspiring some designers to surround their entire profession around the ethically and morality of their design. Social consciousness has been steadily growing amongst audiences and businesses alike and the case has been argued it's the responsibility of designers to navigate this peacefully. Unfortunately, despite the efforts some make to sustain ethical design, businesses are exploiting marginalised groups at such an alarming rate identifying authenticity amongst brands is almost impossible. The complexities as to what defines the responsibilities given to a designer often vary from person to person, as do their morals and ethics. This leads me to the question of this essay – Who is responsible for ethical design?

Caruso, C. and Frankel, L., 2010. *Everyday People: Enabling User Expertise in Socially Responsible Design*. [online] Montreal, Canada: Design Research Society. Available at: <<https://dl.designresearchsociety.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1805&context=drs-conference-papers>> [Accessed 17 June 2022].

Etokhana, J., 2019. *Everything is Design. Everything!*. [online] Medium. Available at: <<https://medium.com/korapay-content/everything-is-design-everything-ec5bf5d5c3a5>> [Accessed 17 June 2022].

Etokhana, J., 2019. *Everything is Design. Everything!*. [online] Medium. Available at: <<https://medium.com/korapay-content/everything-is-design-everything-ec5bf5d5c3a5>> [Accessed 17 June 2022].

Gruden, M., 2016. *Social responsibility of designers as a necessary component of the curricula of the Faculty of Design*. [online] Faculty of Design, Associated Member of University of Primorska Department for Design Management, pp.3,4. Available at: <<http://www.irdo.si/irdo2016/referati/veronika-gruden.pdf>> [Accessed 17 June 2022].

Hrablík Chovanová, H., Ivanovich Korshunov, A. and Babčanová, D., 2015. *Impact of Brand on Consumer Behavior*. [online] Prociedia Economics and Finance, p.2. Available at: <<https://pdf.sciencedirectassets.com/282136/1-s2.0-S2212567115X00177/1-s2.0-S2212567115016767/main.pdf?X-Amz-Security-Token=IQoJb3JpZ2luX2VjEKT%2F%2F%2F%2F%2F%2F%2F%2F%2F%2F%2FwEaCXVzLWVhc3QtMSJIMEYCIQC0qoRmhbeRiVWH9SZZ3iW4dTI9PwkT9SV83ZVxYT>>

QyIwIhAL63pgjGcHOKPTRH1psdpZT6Ej6K8cHxDcR5PlxVH93CKtsECN3%2F%2F%2F%2F%2F%2F%2F%2F%2FwEQBBOMMDU5MDAazNTQ2ODY1IgxXYZ70cjrWdtdlI4IqrwQuIkTgyjBklDOMiZB4tkvULGbOngCCGN0q3r%2BTtPw4Or68XcDZfNm6RonlbK%2FmTwANUHNXrvzDqA5Jh%2FUB9L5EU149FJVhWvsUpWICbeyi%2F642cZTEYsRycSejVVmYfqdUXEE%2BFIDsgf%2FwFoO6KJCPdThxP%2FmezgVN%2BeRH6Qnek8QB8Wfp7%2B7bMPzsz0FfDFtg2dBQIwiH7oknzLdKNlxFIRl6Jv1AKmcgOQzm5TbDHvtYdJe10cFmK31EyB%2FxttB2eK9IVFQkM4Ik%2FXb7CscvUOYg18SxMND08AC2i6e9YXfKzSbgjQFQ4blftJlSvDm3co012sSONaukNHZx37K%2B824ysK46vS5NpF6hHZ0a0%2BKOfyoVZ3FdyTvl6X7D0a1TCbRF6294GhcfX0ZUFxMOM9DMycVyzdybfRuqGkF9ZNqSdoXQ1KkgJdFG2qtYtamJ4lxb37rpdPdHmsOVuScgLLhkm%2BN887bVjl25entYZabjcTjPlrcVNndB%2FaGy79Lb6rQzRTO03e3%2BuMZotdCmn7%2BNSaTtuEmHP61BBCaP0nSiw8g0KAukrh%2BunRNmlZrMT0puLWBlAsFd8bzzWPF7NwXFxcxqqt9HHNFOj7n9AJI2N9PNBMTmohvFfb%2BKqIhor8G1MBg0udMKcvS%2FOZ6y0APXTzBLiRB2f4scent6boWcDxKpkZpInVl6rgd4OoKjVYeqcBtV8ifXRMMRSR2%2F03TrS7S%2BnD33%2Fyq3hq%2BMKTP0ZYGOqgBsWqxNJulGvCEtbihFBzPidKRB7HFaC2P6EWMODnbmfd29pd9UbJbA1ncrZMq9%2Bldi6kg16I6Ebbvbp%2BwkiYSjujXIM7jgQ0p2oul57GrJAEXZl%2FmvsiiDlvXVPFTHmK2BIJvld47NP9%2FCvnj8I8hbsbS5%2F6G0SH0OYtdn6pHplbAY5cv%2FN9MIXY%2Baiq4NSyNp0BoAH1%2BNZNWg3jvPCJKKXaJZ3HfXeEH&X-Amz-Algorithm=AWS4-HMAC-SHA256&X-Amz-Date=20220717T203137Z&X-Amz-SignedHeaders=host&X-Amz-Expires=300&X-Amz-Credential=ASIAQ3PHCVTYSRTW2V6R%2F20220717%2Fus-east-1%2Fs3%2Faws4_request&X-Amz-Signature=0aa8266b751c106023fe2c4caee3545325caa7ebd8688f2a687f1e9eeb837f47&hash=cd55f39eaa6d8a9abb86400fb96872b7bfc1baca2a8d1791746b6f1b07c15107&host=68042c943591013ac2b2430a89b270f6af2c76d8dfd086a07176afe7c76c2c61&pii=S2212567115016767&tid=spdf-070eebfe-53e3-4fbc-8515-8cef46769e93&sid=0f4ac09c30fe464696082d5102f075f617c1gxrbq&type=client&ua=5950035a0406555454&rr=72c5be026f7276b9> [Accessed 17 June 2022].

Kumar, J., 2017. *The Psychology of Colour Influences Consumers' Buying Behaviour – A Diagnostic Study*. [online] USHUS - Journal of Business Management, p.11. Available at: <<https://journals.christuniversity.in/index.php/ushus/article/view/1761/1508>> [Accessed 16 June 2022].

M. Deliya, M. and J. Parmar, B., 2012. *Global Journal of Management and Business Research Role of Packaging on Consumer Buying Behavior– Patan District*. 1st ed. [ebook] Global Journals Inc. (USA), p.18. Available at: <https://dlwqtxts1xle7.cloudfront.net/48946994/Deliya_Parmar_-_2012_-_Role_of_Packaging_on_Consumer_Buying_Behavior-Patan_District-with-cover-page-v2.pdf?Expires=1658011698&Signature=ELu9Jc5dP9hlQn4byd-diJ2rHgHFJzmNo9K7oalqyVKwLy~ww9exG8UQRZa56XLwCoRMkHA3RO0sxp0Vd0nPaOim2DmrJLawvOj16PfdSSUfLR5AbP81LAcg4UVHplcZMslhVhhuvdtbV-ZYreGH36yf9Pcyek61kLYxQXzH27EH0Jf04Z47xtj4GtK8yM~E6It16Zil6tyACEbI-FfCHkfjnaRcoln1~gptoUfuoDr~gKHlg6X7zTkfoAWaW~zKrWxQOr7yPV4-M4xiz6RSPw0rQwTff-GVBzzWNsVIRMib3AJa8gR~rv7MSU~gViFF57vc~Qz~KXsAltquxnBQ~g__&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJLOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA> [Accessed 16 June 2022].

Lauren Boucher
Student 1902263 – Graphic Design

- Medium. 2022. *Everything is Design. Everything!*. [online] Available at: <<https://medium.com/korapay-content/everything-is-design-everything-ec5bf5d5c3a5>> [Accessed 17 June 2022].
- Rambabu, L. and Porika, R., 2020. *Packaging strategies: knowledge outlook on consumer buying behaviour*. [online] Emerald Publishing Limited, p.11. Available at: <<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JIUC-10-2019-0017/full/pdf?title=packaging-strategies-knowledge-outlook-on-consumer-buying-behaviour>> [Accessed 16 June 2022].
- S. Brenchley, E., 2021. *The Role of Empathy in Design and the Responsibility of Designers to Create With Their User in Mind*. Honours project. Seattle Pacific University.
- Shi, A., Huo, F. and Hou, G., 2021. *Effects of Design Aesthetics on the Perceived Value of a Product*. [online] National Library of Medicine. Available at: <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8359925/>> [Accessed 17 June 2022].
- V. Margolin and S. Margolin, 2002. *A 'social model' of design: issues of practice and research*. [online] London, United Kingdom: Design Research Society, pp.5,6. Available at: <<https://dl.designresearchsociety.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2729&context=drs-conference-papers>> [Accessed 17 June 2022].
- Celebre, A. (2014). *The good, the bad, and the ugly of the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty | Magazine issue 2/2014 - Issue 19 | In-Mind*. [online] In-mind.org. Available at: <https://www.in-mind.org/article/the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly-of-the-dove-campaign-for-real-beauty>.
- J. Thompson, C. and Kumar, A. (2022). *Analyzing the Cultural Contradictions of Authenticity*. [online] American Marketing Association. Available at: <https://www.ama.org/2022/04/06/analyzing-the-cultural-contradictions-of-authenticity-theoretical-and-managerial-insights-from-the-market-logic-of-conscious-capitalism/> [Accessed 21 June. 2022].
- Kowalewicz, R. (2022). *Council Post: Socially Conscious Advertising And Your Brand*. [online] Forbes. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2022/03/21/socially-conscious-advertising-and-your-brand/?sh=39750baf7600> [Accessed 21 June. 2022].
- Mietkiewicz (2016). *Graphic Design + Ethics + Capitalism*. [online] London: University of Greenwich, pp.1–26. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/28848387/Graphic_Design_Ethics_Capitalism?from=cover_page.
- Shaughnessy, A. (2005). *How to be a graphic designer, without losing your soul*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press.