

Student Name: Erin Smith

P Number: 2000855

Programme of Study: Graphic Design

Module: **ADAD5003**

Lecturer: Donna Williams

**Total words = 2557**

## Question 2: Can Graphic Design really save your life?

Explore the association of wellbeing and personal growth in Design in your discussion.

If you asked yourself the question, how do I know how to maintain my health and wellbeing? What is your answer? Your doctor? Your family? Your friends? Your teachers? No. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we are fed all our knowledge through the media. Be that the news channel, tv series or your social apps, all flooded full of information we must navigate through daily. The unfortunate reality, where the media is poisoned with misleading incorrect information, leads us to wonder how beneficial this source of information is. Graphic design is at the forefront of the medias attempt to communicate how to look after our health and wellbeing. A Graphic designers aim is to communicate intense, often complicated information in a simplistic memorable format, making topics such as at home self-checks for breast cancer easier to follow. Our lives are full of graphic design, and we do not even realize it. Some of the few ways information is provided to us include, posters, leaflets, websites, bus shelter advertisements, billboard and more. These are cleverly orchestrated by a graphic designer to meet a purpose. Graphic design is vital in the act to spread awareness to all ages of all backgrounds, in a mission to boost health and wellbeing around our world.

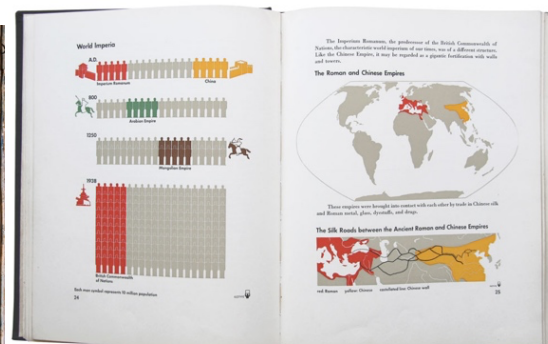
To understand the true affect that graphic design has on people's lives, we must look back at events over the past 100 years. It is interesting to reflect on the use of pictures as a form of communicating through time. Dating back to as late as the Egyptian era, Hieroglyphic writing was their form of communicating. This suggests how important graphic communication was even over 5000 years ago. (Kiger, 2021) Graphic design has shown tremendous growth through the years and has flourished into a tool we all might take for granted today. Many years later a man called Otto Neurath created the Isotype.

"The International System of Typographic Picture Education, a new visual language for capturing quantitative information in pictograms, sparking the golden age of infographics in print." (Burke, 2008) As shown in figure 1 and figure 2, There is clear inspiration this designer has taken from the ancient hieroglyphics to create isotype. The simplicity of the shapes in both concepts allows the designs to communicate information concisely and effectively. Isotypes were created for educational purposes, to inform the general public about important information during hard times of the war. (Burke, 2008) In times like these graphic design made a great impact in people lives, perhaps bringing accessibility to hard hitting information, such as death counts in the war. "Words divide, pictures unite," or so went the motto of Isotype's founder, the philosopher and sociologist, Otto Neurath. (Burke, 2008) Below are two posters Otto and his wife designed to communicate how to prevent the illnesses Tuberculosis and leprosy. This form of communication allows the public to visualise actions which they need to take rather than being told through tedious writing or figures. This possibly would have helped those with learning disabilities, illiterate or young children to understand important information and news easier. Graphic design has become much more complex as technology advanced. We must question whether this 'old fashioned' simplistic ideology is more effective due to its basic straightforward approach at communication. Or alternatively, has the development of the graphic design world pushed us into endless opportunity of fun eye-catching more impactful design.

Figure 1 (Kiger, 2021)



Figure 2 (Burke, 2008)



After further research into the history of Graphic designs use in health campaigns, I came across many impactful movements. Two of the most famous and successful designs were posters created for Venereal Disease and fever malaria, both in the 1940's. (See figure 3 and 4). The Fever malaria poster (figure 3) was created during the second world war, designed by Abram Games, made to warn British servicemen of commonplace threats to

their health and wellbeing (link). Publishing posters such as figure 3 would have helped efficiently inform society about the devastating disease, allowing them to put measures in place to prevent the spread, like our current circumstances with the ‘stay at home’ corona virus campaign material. As a young adult I refuse to watch the news as its full of repetitive depressing information, instead I keep up to date with the world through social pages. Today, Graphic posters like figure 3 help reach young individuals like me, and upon research graphic design has always had a trick of grabbing the youth’s attention when addressing serious matters. Malaria is rare in the UK in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, providing a suggestion that graphic design could have helped make this happen. When analyzing the Poster itself, I think the concept is very clever and creates a memorable campaign. The designer has used the shape of the mosquito to create a creepy face, impacting the viewer by using a scare tactic. This scare tactic and unique imagery would create a buzz within society and the word would spread quick boosting awareness. Figure 4 uses a bold red shadow on a monotone background to represent the bi-line, ‘a shadow on happiness’. It is easy for the audience to see that if you live a ‘clean’ sexual life, you will be happy. (IWM, 2021)

Figure 3 (IWM, 2021)

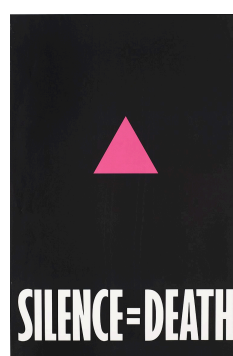
Figure 4 (IWM, 2021)



Scare tactics are often used by graphic designers as a tool to grab an audience attention. In 1981- 1987 the aid phenomenon was at the forefront of the media. (Jonze, 2017) Famously the campaign ‘Aids don’t die of ignorance’ was created leaving people gob smacked. The gay community was humiliated, being a target from haters in fear of aids. This advert encouraged the hate and discrimination that took place against the gay community. When analyzing the design, it is apparent that each component was deliberate in the hope to get people talking. The more people scared would result in people keeping their distance and stopping the spread. In fact, soon after the campaign release a decrease in HIV cases began, suggesting this use of scare tactics to be a success. Although this is a controversial time that caused much distress, the fact is, it possibly saved thousands of lives from one campaign. I question whether it is inhumane to create such a discriminative campaign with the knowledge that many people would suffer from hate. Or alternatively is this outcome necessary, collateral damage in order to save the lives of many in the bigger picture.

(Jonze, 2017) Figure 5

(Museum, 2021) Figure 6



This campaign sparked an anger in the gay community. To fight back against the intense hate, received from the “aids don’t die of ignorance” campaign, the Silence = Death poster was created. As seen in figure 6, the poster’s focal point is a vibrant pink triangle. This holds reference to the Nazi persecution of LGBTQ prisoners who were made to wear uniform with an upside-down triangle on as a negative consultation. The choice of symbol suggests that the community are taking back their power and pride. The poster design is effective because its bold and simple, therefore grabbing viewers’ attention and ensuring they don’t forget it. Unfortunately, all problems were not resolved there and those in the LGBTQ communities still are fighting for acceptance today. In fact, HIV and AIDS remain a global health issue, with nearly 40 million people living with HIV at the end of 2017. (UNAIDS, 2021) Further Communities of colour continue to face disproportionate effects of the disease as well as barriers to treatment.

Fast forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are using graphic design techniques learnt throughout history to strengthen our health campaigns. Smoker or not, we are all familiar with the horrific imagery plastered on packets of cigarettes and on campaigns in the fight to stop people smoking. As seen in the “Every cigarette rots you from the inside out” poster (figure 8), graphic designers use shocking graphic imagery in hope to persuade the viewer to quit smoking. From a young age today, we are taught that smoking would kill us and are aware of the health risks smoking causes, but many ignore this knowledge or in fact just do not care. Therefore, unfortunately graphic design in this instance may not be powerful enough to save lives. When involving addictive habits such as alcohol, drugs or smoking, the want to stop is the most important thing which comes from within, not from a poster or advert. A different approach to deterring people from smoking is the NHS ‘quit smoking and breathe’ campaign seen in figure 7. Opposite to the harsh imagery in figure 8, this poster is suitable for all ages and reflect the damage of smoking on the lungs in a more subtle but clear way. I think this could really help teach young children the impact smoking directly has on your breathing, helping them understand it leads to death without scaring the children. I enjoy the contrast between the pretty vibrant flowers and the depressive brown dead flowers. I think the lively flowers draw your attention with the eye-catching fun colours, hopefully attracting the children to aspire for a healthy lifestyle. Although both graphic design methods are very different, they help cover all audiences of all ages, perhaps working together to help inform and even prevent smoking. Spreading awareness is a small push in the fight to encourage people to quit smoking, these posters achieve this. Although smoking is a horrible habit, we are surrounded by every day we are gradually improving. The proportion of current smokers in the UK has fallen significantly from 14.7% in 2018 to 14.1% in 2019. (Windsor-Shellard, 2020)

Figure 7 (Assosiation, 2014)

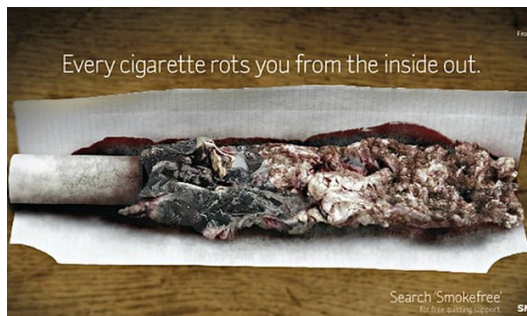
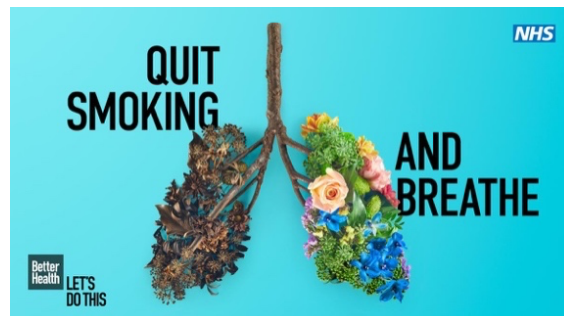


Figure 8 (foundation, 2021)



Applying this graphic design strategies to the recent global pandemic that shook everyone’s lives upside down allows us to understand the true effect graphic design has on people’s lives. As seen in the quit smoking campaigns above and the stay-at-home campaigning below, both uses varied techniques to reach the public in hope to cause awareness of the separate matters. Figure 9 shows a campaign that left the public conflicted, the new idea introduced to the world to stay home in order to keep safe was strange and scary. The captions on figure 9, guilt trip the audience into obeying the rules. Specifically, the ‘look him in the eyes and tell him the risk isn’t real.’ pulls my attention as the image of the man used looks like he is staring directly into my soul. The direct eye contact has cleverly been used to help create a personable connection between the audience and the patients. After viewing this poster, it leaves the audience questioning the health risk covid may have to loved ones, friends or even themselves. Furthermore, the designer has added the patient’s names, perhaps to inform the audience that they are real everyday people, reflecting how no one is safe. Another poster design which was released during the recent pandemic was the infographic seen below in figure 10. We are all familiar with the NHS slogan ‘stay safe, save lives.’ This slogan is used as a header to this infographic. The benefits to this choice of header are the recognisability, as the well-known slogan informs the audience that the information on the poster has value to them to read. This infographic layout helps break down the knowledge making it easy to

read and understand, suitable for a wide audience of ages. The corona virus pandemic is just one of the recent events where graphic designers played a vital part in helping save lives by spreading awareness and informing the public.

Figure 9 (Magee, 2021)

Figure 10 ( (Agency, 2020)



As a woman, a campaign which stands out to me is the Breast cancer poster seen below in figure 11. The vibrant colour choices, modern typography and overall fun design helps bring light to the experience of at home self-checks. Further, the witty cleverly written captions help normalise the whole concept of self-examining our breasts daily. I appreciate how the designer has placed the information in a small sized font in the corner of the page. This strategy allows the design of the poster to draw the audience attention, letting them read the boring but necessary information last. Being the last information, the audience takes in, this technique could lead them to looking into further research after seeing the poster. (uk, 2021)

Figure 11



A recent event that the media has been flooded with is the spiking crisis. Concerns over an increase in the number of drink-spiking and injection cases during nights out in the UK have been on the rise this month, with students in several university towns reporting attacks. (Thompson, 2021) It was interesting to see the quick action designers took to produce posters that helped the younger generation learn how to protect themselves on nights out in bars and clubs. The poster below (figure 12) went viral on Instagram, spreading like wildfire across the UK. A benefit of Instagram, is the ability to repost news on your story, helping spread awareness of any information fast! The plain colour scheme, basic typography and doodle drawings caters to the young audience who seem to be the target of spiking. Some may say the poster is 'Instagram able', boosting its likability meaning more people would repost the design, therefore helping spread awareness. Another successful situation which proves graphic design to be a crutch in helping save lives and boost people health and wellbeing.

Figure 12 (Thompson, 2021)



Through my journey of researching the history and current support graphic design has in helping save lives across the world, I can confirm that graphic design plays a huge part. The imagery chosen, can have a huge impact on how it is interpreted by the audience, the Aids poster (Figure5) gave the public a powerful message on the danger to life linked to Aids. This, however, was misinterpreted by the public and helped fuel hate to against the LGBTQ and isolated them at a time when they needed support. The images I have chosen to represent how graphic design can work towards saving lives, each target a specific group of people. The graphic designer by using imagery and limited text can give the public warning messages which are easy to understand no matter your educational background. From this research it is important to take the time to reflect and become attuned to my personal beliefs and understanding, when tackling tasks. This will ensure authenticity and awareness of the big picture. By following this moral it will ensure that my work is focused not only on completing the task but also on taking the time to reflect before moving onto the next project. Graphic design has been a key communicator in health and wellbeing, whether it be through disease, illness or addiction. The images over the last 100 years that I have chosen to use have saved lives and helped the public to make an informed choice. This research has helped my understanding of the importance of graphic communication in our everyday lives and more importantly how it can save the lives of many.