

Can Graphic Design really save your life?
Explore the association of wellbeing and
personal growth in Design in your
discussion.

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BA Graphic Design

Word count: 2536

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Can Graphic Design really save your life? Graphic Designers are not directly associated with the subject of wellbeing and personal growth. It is hard to fathom the idea that words and visuals could assist in preserving a life. 'Our life is a minefield of potential catastrophes' (GD&, 2017, p.039) and looking at the world around us there are thousands of subconscious means of communication that help keep us safe. We use road signs, read public health messages and medication packaging and so much more. These visual communications have been helping us understand meaning and keep us informed. Even cavemen from 50,000 years ago used ways to pass on valuable life-saving information to their families (Macdonald, 2015).

DK Holland (2001, p.IX) explains that if graphic design is done well it should guide and enlighten people. This essay will focus on the current Covid-19 pandemic and explore if the latest visual communication regarding safety measures and other campaigns has had a positive or negative effect on the wellbeing of people in the UK and assess if Graphic Design is important in the preservation of human life and if it has inspired growth within our communities.

"Good graphic design is a mirror of the world," DK Holland (2001, p.177). On January 31st 2020 Covid-19 arrived in the UK (BFPG, 2021) and is still present today, looking at the start of the pandemic, designers were challenged to relay fast changing information to help keep people safe and reflect the current world situation. The UK Government used the slogan "Stay home, protect the NHS, save lives" (Walker, 2021). It was described as the most memorable mantra and was inspired by other countries who had used simplified messages to encourage people to stay home and stop the spread. This will now be introduced:



Images: (department of health and social care, 2021) (knight, 2020)

Survey results regarding the mantra and campaign showed that 92% of people in the UK were aware of the campaign which resulted in 83% of people fully understanding how their behaviour spread covid (Lee and Spanier, 2020). The campaign developed very quickly from simple blue “save the NHS” to a hard hitting and memorable tricolon showing the urgency and danger of the Covid-19 virus. The colours used were yellow and red which signifies danger and toxicity. According to Colour Matters (2021), yellow is the colour of physical illness and caution and red is the international color for stop and danger. The red border is in a hazard pattern which is universally known as a diagonal stripes pattern. This type of pattern is usually used to alert people to danger (The Workplace Depot, 2021). Using the hazard pattern to frame the campaign was effective as it enhanced the point that this situation was a hazard and that the “rules” to stay at home was to avoid this hazard.

Just these colours alone made this campaign have more meaning than the blue calm save the nhs at the start of the pandemic. It made people stay at home and isolate to give time for specialists to come up with preventive measures and understand more about the virus. This campaign was effective, clear and eye opening. we would not have understood the seriousness of the virus without it and more lives would have been lost. It is a clear example of how graphic design can save lives and it helped in protecting the health of people in the UK.



Image: (NHS, 2020)

Alongside the previous campaign. There was more focus on informing the public on how to prevent spreading and catching the virus. The importance of hand hygiene was pushed in advertisements that were published online, on TV and radios (Owen, 2020). This advertisement by Mullenlowe Group was created to avoid an infodemic during the pandemic. The World Health organization (2021) describes an infodemic as large amounts of information including false or misleading information in digital and physical environments during a disease outbreak. It was important to make sure that forms of designed communication had detailed and correct information as an infodemic can lengthen outbreaks if people are unsure about what they need to do to protect their health. This advertisement was published to explain what you had to do and why you had to keep your hands clean.

Looking at the advertisement it clearly shows the most important information, in a clear font and in large sized text, which is to wash your hands for 20 seconds and also explains when

to wash your hands and directs people to a reliable source to get more information to avoid people getting their research from incorrect sources. With COVID-19 transmission mainly spreading between people through direct and indirect (through contaminated objects or surfaces) contact (WHO, 2020), this is very important information to convey. The advertisement encouraged a simple but vital action and illustrated the ease of catching the virus e.g just touching a door handle, something we do everyday. It also shows how we can't see the virus as the microbe is highlighted in a green colour under a filter or special light. Statistics show that after the release of hand washing campaigns more people were buying products to help with hand hygiene and follow the advice given. In February 2020 hand sanitiser sales rose 255% in that month alone and sales in hand soap increased by 10% (Rojas, 2020) indicating the effect of the advertisement and the successfulness of it.

Hand washing is one of the most important things people can do and it is still something that is pushed today to prevent the spread. The advertisement helped relay these preventative behaviours and without it people wouldn't know how to avoid catching and spreading the virus. Without this advertisement It would have been difficult to protect health and save lives during the pandemic.

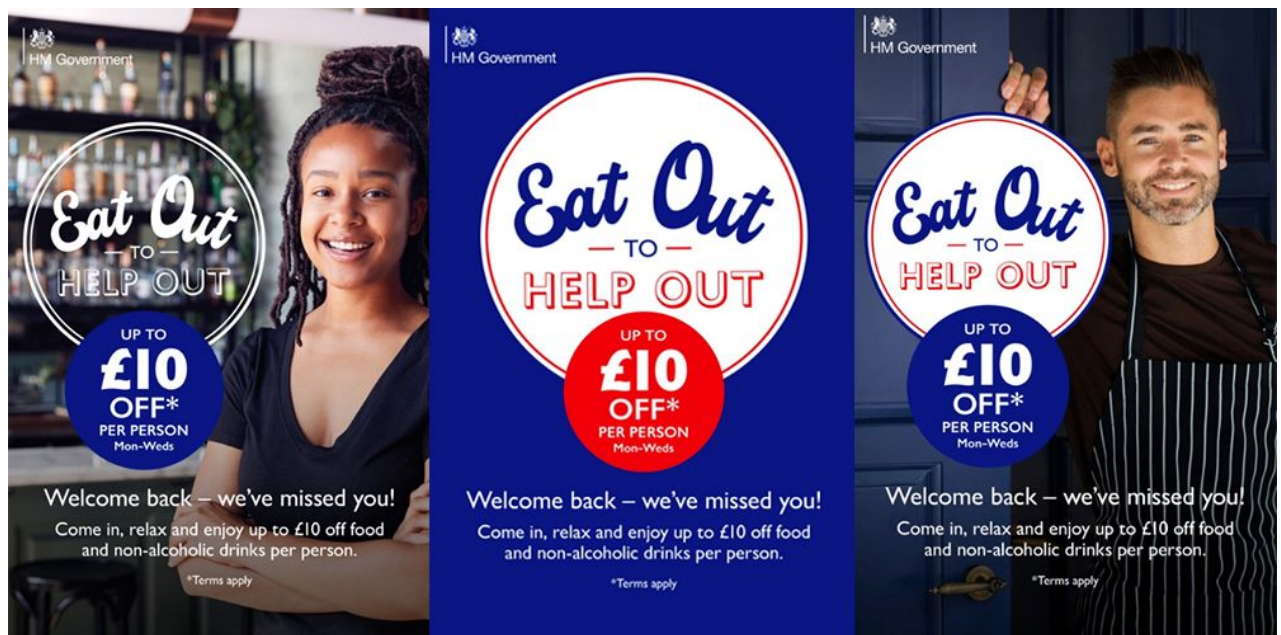


Image: (Delish, 2020)

Contrarily we have to assess graphic design that has put lives at risk and caused harm to human health. During the pandemic the Eat Out to Help Out scheme was a Government's policy measure to assist businesses reopening following the first lockdown, the scheme aimed to protect jobs in hospitality by encouraging people to eat out. The scheme subsidized 50% off the cost of meals for an unlimited number of visits in participating restaurants (Hutton, 2020). The welcoming calligraphy, calming colours and happy faces was a relief from the warning signs and alarming graphics being shared and consumed at the start of the pandemic. 'It could be argued that the scheme was as much about bringing a bit of normality back to our lives' (Roberts, 2021).

The scheme made people feel like the pandemic was under control and some felt it was a celebration of the end of the, thought to be, one and only lockdown. Looking at research from Dr Thiemo Fetzer (2020) it was found that around one week after the scheme launched areas that had a high number of participating restaurants saw a rising increase in the emergence of new Covid-19 infection clusters and a week after the scheme ended there was a decline of covid clusters, indicating that the scheme exposed people to the virus causing it to spread quickly.

Professor Parvez Haris (2021) also noted that the Eat Out to Help Out scheme was responsible for a huge rise in deaths among the Bangladeshi and Pakistani community. The Office for National Statistics shows that more than 30 percent of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi population in the UK works in the hospitality industry. He explains that the scheme led to the opening of many small food outlets but this was prior to any vaccine being available. Professor Haris finishes his point by explaining that the Eat Out to Help Out scheme created the ideal environment for Covid-19 to spread and large communities saw the brunt of this. Evidence from both Fetzer and

Haris suggest the scheme affected the health of human lives and lengthened the pandemic. The nature and visuals of the scheme was a green light to people in the UK to go outside again. They trusted the information that it was safe to go out and eat in groups and it shows the importance and reliance on visual communication. However, this example shows that graphic design can have a negative effect on human health if the content is not considered thoroughly.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on well-being regarding health but having good well-being also integrates mental health. Mental health can be defined as a positive concept related to the social and emotional wellbeing of individuals (Everymind, 2021). The pandemic made it hard for people to connect and reach out for help to look after their mental well-being. Bereavement, isolation, loss of income and fear has triggered a rise in mental-illnesses during the pandemic (WHO, 2020).

During the first lockdown the risk of harm and isolation for those experiencing domestic abuse was highlighted. Domestic violence can have a massive effect on a person's mental health as domestic violence is associated with depression, anxiety, PTSD and substance abuse (Mental Health Foundation, 2020) and being stuck at home can make it hard for victims to escape or get help.

After this problem was brought to light, the Home Secretary launched a new public awareness raising campaign highlighting that if anyone is at risk of, or experiencing domestic abuse, help is still available. This will now be introduced:



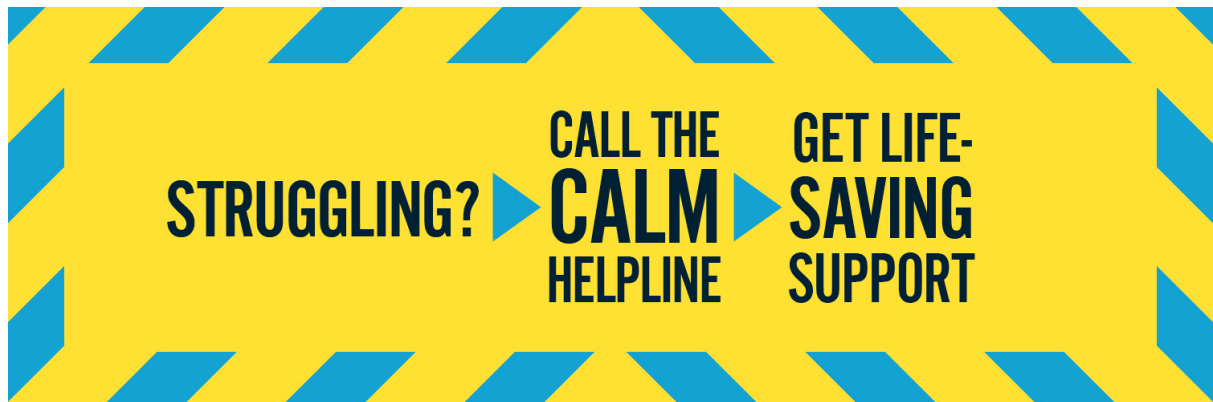
Image: (Home Secretary, 2020)

This campaign's main visual was a hand with a heart, it was to represent that there are love and supportive hands out there. It also was used to create awareness on social media. People could upload a picture of a heart on their hands with the hashtag #youarenotalone to show their support and encourage victims to reach out. This was a good part of the campaign as it was online so that awareness and support could spread quickly and also keep people safe from any exposure to the virus. The campaign used the colour purple as purple symbolizes survivors who were hurt by physical and emotional abuse but still go on to live a life free of violence (Domestic Shelters, 2016). The colour purple is also unique and combines wisdom and power with sensitivity so it is the colour used in charities for the less fortunate (Phil, 2019). It makes the campaign stand out and be more recognisable. When the campaign was released during lockdown, we now know that there was a 65% increase in calls to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline (Harvard, 2021). Between

1st of April and the 30th of June 2020, the number of arrests for domestic abuse-related crimes had increased by 14% (ONS, 2020). Indicating that there was an acceleration in the number of people reaching out to help to better their circumstances. Research also shows that men who experience domestic violence and abuse often don't seek help until the problem becomes a crisis and also don't know that services for them exist (Mathias, 2019). However, when the campaign was released. Statistics from the ManKind Initiative (2021) showed that over the lockdown period, the charity saw an increase of calls to its helpline by one quarter and visits to its website by 75%. It was also noted that 61% of the men who called the ManKind Initiative helpline over lockdown had never spoken to anyone before about the abuse they were suffering indicating that the campaign and support may have pushed them to reach out for help. The #youarenotalone campaign helped people who felt stuck and scared to feel safe and improve their lives, it helped to remove the stigma around male victims and created more support in the UK. It is a prime example how graphic design can help people and communities grow so that we can have better overall welfare.

Feeling isolated and alone can generate feelings of anxiety and depression. These feelings can make people feel helpless and the unpredictableness of the pandemic could worsen these feelings. Jo Bibby (2021) from the health foundation revealed that depression rates had doubled in the UK since the pandemic started and raises awareness of the concern of a mental health crisis. There were 1,603 suicides that occurred between April and July 2020 in England and Wales (ONS, 2021) charities have to work harder than ever to support peoples mental health and to raise awareness of the issues and help bring comfort to those in need. Charities like

CALM created an effective campaign to promote people calling the helpline. This will now be introduced:



(CALM, 2020)

CALM had used the popular pandemic visuals and made their own version to “flatten the curve of mental health.” It effectively communicated the link between the pandemic and rising rates of mental illness. It was simple, effective and made it clear what people could do to get help. They used a blue instead of a harsh red to be less intimidating and more welcoming. CALM’s campaign was spread through social media and because people knew where to go for help calm was able to prevent 100 suicides in the first two months of lockdown (CALM, 2020, 01:06-01:11). CALM’s campaign opened a conversation around a sensitive subject and encouraged people to get talking, educate themselves and get involved. It helped push for better support which saw an affect as the Government set up a £4 million suicide prevention grant fund to support suicide prevention services to accelerate more 24/7 crisis services (Department of health and social care, 2021). CALM helped remove a stigma and helped people struggling through the services and by educating and raising awareness. The positive effect of the campaign will be seen throughout the pandemic and after and it has, statistically, helped to save lives and assist in improving personal welfare.

The Covid-19 pandemic shows how designers can quickly adapt to change and how different mediums have their own possibilities and limitations (Kress and Leeuwen p.19, 2006). After analysing different graphic design contexts that were released during the pandemic there has been a clear indication that graphic design has a massive influence in the way we live our lives and how we rely on effective communication to stay safe. Without graphic design the effects of the pandemic would be catastrophic and many more lives would have been lost. Graphic design had a lot of power during the pandemic as people were actively looking for information and guidance.

Even though graphic design over the pandemic held risks of creating infodemics and releasing misleading information that could put people at unknowing risk. The outcome from graphic designers has been the opposite of this, we have seen professional and positive outcomes coming from specialists and designers that has made a massive impact on the improvement of the overall welfare of people in the UK. It has brought communities together to start making changes that will be seen long after the pandemic is over. To summarise, statistics show that when an important campaign was released that there were clear effects that took place during/after it was shared. The effects were regarding a person's welfare indicating that graphic design does affect lives and has an involvement in saving and protecting lives.

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