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In this essay, I will be discussing my three key terms: Trend, Design and Social Media. Using guidance from my research on the 'Diffusion of Innovation' model by Everett Rogers, 'Graphic Design School' book by David Dabner, Sandra Stewart and Abbie Vickress, and speaker Steven Bartlett, I will deconstruct and investigate deeply into my keywords, with the aim to focus on the relationship between the new generation of social media and the design world. I will also touch upon designers Virgil Abloh and Banksy to help contextualise this.

Firstly, I will discuss the word "Trend". The reason for choosing this as one of my keywords was that as a designer and a social media user, it's very rare a day passes where I do not hear it in some context. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the term suggests 'a general development or change in a situation or in the way that people are behaving'. It also explains it as 'a new development in clothing, make-up, etc.' or to be 'one of the words, subjects, or names that is being mentioned most often on a social media website or a news website at a particular time'. (Trend, *Cambridge Dictionary* 2023).

Many trend development models exist but one that made the most sense to me was the 'Diffusion of Innovation' model by Everett Rogers (E.M. Rogers 1962) which can be seen below.

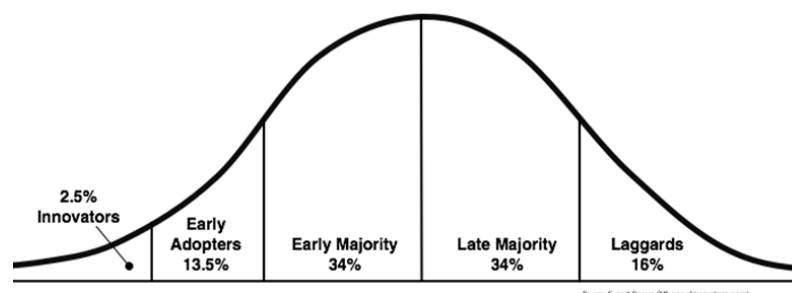


Figure 1 (E.M. Rogers 1962)

As the model shows, Rogers suggests that trends are fuelled by a very small group of 'Innovators' which allows 'Early adopters' to further grow the presence of the trend. He shows that it is the 'Early Majority' that begin the peak of a trend, the 'Late majority' that gradually accepts the trend but don't act on it, and the 'Laggards' that do not experience the trend or are simply not interested.

As there are now a huge number of social media platforms being used for sharing designs and gathering design inspiration, many professional designers and studios are experiencing tons of new waves of trends hitting them constantly which they must adapt to. In an article with NeoCon, 'Designing Under The Influence', (*Designing Under the Influence – The Impact of Media on Design 2021*) presenter Tom Polucci, Firmwide Director of Interiors, HOK, is asked 'Is there a viable way to work around what is trending, yet provide inspiring design solutions that meet the unique needs of the client?' to which he responds "We have to recognize that what comes around goes around... sometimes we need to make some choices that might be on trend because we're designing for something that is in the moment, and important to a client" (Tom Polucci, 2021). He also adds "But we should be directive in terms of where to use those resources in an effective way and say, 'we hear you, you want millennial pink,' if it makes sense to the client for the overall design concept. But let us tell you that this will go out of style. And it should be on something that's changeable" (Tom Polucci, 2021).

Reading Polucci's response opened my eyes to how many trends I subconsciously follow, especially when it comes to design. When beginning a new

project, gaining inspiration from others and looking for ideas is very beneficial. I usually scroll endlessly through Pinterest and Instagram, which are ideal platforms for designers because they are extremely visually driven. However, I automatically gravitate towards the trending designs, the most stylish typefaces, and the most fashionable colour palettes, all of which do not work well with my given project, and sometimes are not even that well designed. An example of this is this trendy design package available to purchase on Pinterest, which can be seen below.



Figure 2 (Lee, Abi Lee Designs 2020)

My brain strives to find a small way to make the trendy design fit in with what I am doing, even though it doesn't at all. Doing so would make me, according to the

‘Diffusion of Innovation’ model by Everett Rogers, a part of the ‘Early Majority’, fuelling the trend.

Another recent example I have on this subject is when “A black oversized leather jacket has gone viral on social media after influencer Molly Mae wore it last year. After a successful sell-out, the retailer Zara has only just restocked it and shoppers are going wild. People are calling it the 'Molly Mae effect' as so many people have been spotted wearing the stylish jacket” according to the Bristol Post. (Simpson, *Bristol Post*, 2023).

I found myself being a part of the ‘Early Majority’ following this trend, even though there was nothing very special about this jacket, it wasn’t well made and wasn’t well designed. This leads me to ask, is it great design, or is it just trending?



Figure 3 (Hague, *Molly Mae Instagram Post*)

Moving on to my second keyword; Design. I think design is a way of communicating and expressing feelings and emotions, a creative art form that allows us to let our creativity flow and to be innovative. It lets us reveal our uniqueness and originality and shows off our personality. I believe the art of design is very powerful, so I think the term deserved to be discussed in this essay.

The Cambridge Dictionary describes the word as ‘to make or draw plans for something, for example, clothes or buildings’ and ‘the way in which something is planned and made’. (Design, *Cambridge Dictionary* 2023). Although technically design has no strict rules and we are free to create anything, according to the ‘Graphic Design School’ book written by David Dabner, Sandra Stewart and Abbie Vickress, great design is based on the fundamentals (Dabner, D., Vickress, A. and Stewart, S., *Graphic design School* 2020).

They focus a lot on ‘Design Theory’ in this book, they explain that there are five design principles that should be used in every design project you work on. Each principle works in cooperation with another to create a harmonious design. These principles are Alignment, Repetition, Contrast, Hierarchy and Balance. Together they create a design that is visually appealing and structured to create a comforting piece for viewers. I always look for these principles within new designs I see but admire those who do not follow the rules and expand the limits.

In my opinion, the definition of design varies depending on who is describing it, there are multiple different ways to interpret the word and so many avenues to go down. For example, graphic design, fashion design, architecture, sound design, interior design, prototyping, textile design, building and so many more.

One designer that I value is Virgil Abloh, an American fashion designer and entrepreneur. Virgil was one of the most influential and respected fashion designers of his generation, he was extremely passionate about his designs, some of which can be seen in the image below.



Figure 4 ("DESIGN": The Spectacular Rise of Virgil Abloh in 25 Objects 2019)

He challenged what was said to be the 'norm' and used his originality to create new design trends that pushed the boundaries within the design industry. "I am all about championing this new era of designers becoming the new rock stars," wrote Virgil Abloh on the blog *The Brilliance* in 2007 (*The Brilliance, Virgil Abloh* 2007). Virgil was exceptionally good at using his design as a tool to evoke people's emotions, getting a message across and communicating with people was something he thrived at, especially through digital design mainly seen on social media. He stated "I now have a platform to change the industry... We're designers,

so we can start a trend, we can highlight issues, we can make a lot of people focus on something or we can cause a lot of people to focus on ourselves”. (*Virgil Abloh* 2018).

Another artist that does a great job of highlighting issues with his work is Banksy, a pseudonymous street artist and political activist based in England. Banksy uses his artwork as a weapon against war and is typically known for his honest and transparent views on governmental, financial, and political subjects, all of which are portrayed through his artwork. One of his most famous pieces, ‘Keep your coins, I want change’ depicts a homeless man who does not want physical money but seeks real, lasting social change. This image can be seen below.



Figure 5 (BANKSY, *Keep Your Coins, I Want Change* 2015)

Designers have the greatest ability to get a message across to others. Design gives us the platform to create and communicate ideas, views, information and opinions that inform, inspire and captivate people worldwide.

The final keyword I will be talking about is 'Social Media'. The Cambridge Dictionary states the definition as 'websites and computer programs that allow people to communicate and share information on the internet using a computer or mobile phone'. (Social Media, *Cambridge Dictionary* 2023). There are a huge number of social media platforms that I and millions of people use every single day. According to DataReportal's article 'DIGITAL 2023: THE UNITED KINGDOM' there were 66.11 million UK internet users in January 2023, 57.1 million of those were social media users, equating to 84.4 percent of the total population (Kemp, *DIGITAL 2023: THE UNITED KINGDOM* 2023).

The most popular social media platform is Instagram, which currently has over 2.35 billion monthly active users. It's an amazing place for graphic designers like myself as it is very visually driven and can act like a portfolio for your work, whilst also gaining followers who may be interested in working with you. Social media depends on graphic design, graphic design is central to the user's experience, which is what social media is all about. Designers play a huge role in this as users demand a lot more real-time experiences and interactive content to stay satisfied. Great design helps the social media profiles of brands and businesses stand out from the crowd, helping their business grow. Having consumers that interact with the brand's social media matters a great deal in having a successful business today.

As stated by HelpGuide in their article 'Social Media and Mental Health', "While many of us enjoy staying connected on social media, excessive use can fuel feelings of addiction, anxiety, depression, isolation, and FOMO". They explain how multiple studies have seen a strong link between social media use and an increased

risk of all the negative experiences mentioned above. (Robinson & Smith, HelpGuide 2023 Social Media and Mental Health)

One of the main concerns about social media is the effect it has on people's body image and the standards it creates for beauty. Most images seen on social media platforms such as Instagram and are manipulated with tools like Photoshop and Facetune, an example can be seen below.



Figure 6 (Cockerill, Hollie Cockerill Selfie 2022)

This leads the way for unrealistic beauty standards and can make the viewer feel some inadequacy about their appearance and creates insecurities. They are partly responsible for the body and mental health issues among younger generations today.

Personally, I love being a social media user. It allows me to connect with my friends and family whenever I need, it's a reassurance that I can reach out to them even if we aren't able to psychically. It's a great way of promoting my business and my design work. I wouldn't be where I am today without it. However, I do understand the negative effects it has too. One speaker who has a similar view to me is Steven Bartlett, speaker, investor, author, content creator and the host of Europe's No.1 podcast, 'The Diary of a CEO'. Although he uses social media greatly to expand his business, promote his podcast and sell his products, he explains how "Social media has made PERFECT look achievable, so now REAL has become undesirable" (Bartlett, *Steven Bartlett Tweet* 2019). Understanding both the positive and negative consequences of social media and finding the balance is crucial in this generation.

Throughout writing my essay, I found some clear links between each of my three keywords: Trend, Design, and Social Media. The most distinctive link I noticed was between Trend and Social Media, in both research areas I discussed how the opinions and views of others can influence us into doing something we shouldn't or don't necessarily need to do. One of the examples I used for 'Trend', the article on the "perfect" Molly Mae leather jacket, perfectly relates to how this generation can be influenced by the things we see on social media and will believe what we see when a celebrity makes a post on Instagram. Within the research area for the keyword 'Trend', I touched upon the accessible branding packages I found whilst scrolling through the Social Media platform Pinterest. I showed how easy it is to find and be influenced by trendy appealing designs, which goes hand in hand with the opinion of Tom Polucci in his 'Designing Under the Influence' article with NeoCon.

Another link that stood out to me was the link between Design and Social Media. When talking about my keyword 'Design', I referenced designer Virgil Abloh who spoke very passionately about using design as his platform to get a message across and communicate issues and his views with others. This closely resembles sharing an image on Instagram or sending a tweet on Twitter to inform the audience about something.

Adding to this point, when researching the positive impacts of social media, I discussed how design, specifically graphic design, has a huge role in creating great interactive content for brands and businesses on social media. Without this link between Design and Social Media, there wouldn't be as much consumer interaction for businesses, which would stunt their growth. Design is central to the user's experience, which is what social media is all about.

I think the research areas I chose for each keyword were great examples to contextualise the words, specifically the words of Virgil Abloh within my "Design" research area, and the views of Tom Polucci within my 'Trend' research area. I think they relate to the words perfectly and help put the words into an understandable context. As well as this, I believe the research I did on the 'Diffusion of Innovation' model by Everett Rogers also perfectly aligns with the definition of my keyword 'Trend'. It shows a scientifically accurate definition of the word which helped me use the word in other contexts.

Considering all links, similarities and indistinguishable points between my keywords and research areas throughout this essay, I have outlined my research question to be "How Important is Graphic Design in Social Media and Business Growth?". I think this question brings all of my areas of research together. A possible

option for a practice-based project linked to my question could be to start up, develop, brand and promote a new business using graphic design for social media. I look forward to deepening my understanding of the subject even further on this topic.

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